“Keys to Drawing with Imagination” by Bert Dodson

- **Patches**: Straight, parallel, evenly spaced lines laid down at different angles.

- **Concentric**: Lines are parallel to the outer edge of the doodle, creating progressively smaller concentric shapes.

- **Undulating**: Semi-parallel lines are drawn widely spaced initially, in graceful curves, then they grow closer together as they turn sharply, creating a 3-D effect.

- **Dots**: Dots with variable spacing are laid out in rows or other patterns.

- **Pinwheel**: Stripes radiate from a point on the edge of each shape; alternate stripes are filled in.

- **Cactus**: A prickly series of parallel short strokes and dashes grows along every line, both inside and out.
noodling to transform a doodle

The word transformation implies a significant change, a caterpillar-to-butterfly kind of change. This is the sort of change so aspirational when noodling. The key here is recognizing the two-step process. You begin with a doodle (the original marks, squiggles, lines or motifs), then come back and add the algorithms, procedures and happy accidents of noodling to transform the doodle into a more developed drawing.

THE DOODLE
Let's call this original doodle—which is all straight lines and angular shapes—M毡.

THE NOODLE
Give the shapes some thickness and fill in all the spaces on one side to indicate shading. Also add some cast shadows. Now we have M毡 in the Whiz.

Doodling and noodling are separate two steps—doodles are spontaneous and largely noodles, while noodling are deliberate and planned. When you begin noodling, it's not necessary to know how you're going to noodle it. In fact, it's better if you don't know.

exercise 1

Take a Line on a Walk
Do any of these "line on a walk" doodles, making sure that your pencil winds up at the starting point. Then decorate each doodle with a different noodling connection. You can try your own version of the examples shown here, or you can invent your own algorithms—completely different from those shown here.
noodling ideas: mixing and matching

Creating is, in part, about finding relationships between seemingly unrelated things. It's about putting things together that don't seem to belong with each other—at least not until you do it. The more unexpected and improbable the pairing, the bigger the creative leap.

We will discuss this idea at length in later chapters, but for now, let's begin by simply taking an iconic character and combining it with another object. For example, we might first trace the character on the right table, and then trace another object around it as a background. That was the method I used with Flowerdancer.

Sometimes you'll want to integrate the two images in a more intricate way. Notice how in Lost at Sea the waves are both behind and in front of the floating people. To do this sort of thing you need to align both original doodles on your light table with a fresh sheet of paper on top. Even then it may take several tries to get it the way you want it.

In the course of combining images, you may need to alter them. In Stone Arch and Arctic I was simply going to place the main face partly behind the arch. As I drew, it occurred to me to make the face out of stone as well.

exercise 7

Combining

Pick any two of your doodles and trace or redraw to combine them. The new image may be a simple figure on a background like Flowerdancer on page 12, or a more complicated interwoven image, like one of these other examples. You could also try drawing altogether different way to put your doodles together.
doodling ideas: geometrics and waves

Even though we’ve characterized doodles as “mindless,” a doodle is often drawn in a sequence of simple steps. Sometimes these steps are so simple they’re performed unconsciously. The doodles on this page require a bit of hand control but after you’ve done one a few times, you’ll be able to do it in your sleep. It’s at this point that you’re ready to move on to something different, maybe even variation.

There is a creative sequence here: (1) learn a new doodle, (2) practice it until it’s easy, and (3) improvise your own variations. You’ll notice that the doodles on these and subsequent pages are grouped in categories: geometrics, waves, tangents, shapes, clusters, building blocks, etc. Try the ones that appeal to you and even some that don’t. Inspiration is often found in the untried and the unfamiliar, and sometimes in the uncomfortable.

SEEING THE PATTERN
This doodle, Starburst, is executed in a series of triangular patches advancing outward from the center. Each patch is made of straight lines. Imagine the center and gradually more and more layers of triangles. Like many algorithms, it’s actually easier to do than it is to describe.

CONTINUOUS LINE
Without lifting your pen, make a zigzagging line that attempts to maintain an even spacing between lines.

DUCTWORK
Make parallel lines that grow progressively closer together to suggest depth.

CITISCAPE
Close a cluster of closely packed rectangular shapes. Then apply a three-dimensional thickness algorithm (see page 14).

Geometrics

Making Complexity Easy
The beauty of algorithms lies in the way they produce complex results by very simple means.

Creating the Illusion of Complexity
This doodle, Fractal, looks as if it were an uninterrupted series of waves. In fact, it was made by repeating a single curve in clusters.

Waves

CURLING WAVES
(Starting with the first curve) draw in elements and continuous—out and back again. Make sure the rates line up.

FORMY WAVES
Try this variation on the doodle above, giving each wave this stylized treatment.

RHYTHMIC WAVES
Here make the waves irregular and the shapes and colors staggered.

ROOTS
Some parallel lines widen across the top and converge along the sides. With practice, you can make the sections narrow to make smaller Kenny that grows in new directions.
inventing iconic characters

Doodlers often invent little characters to inhabit their work. I call these characters "iconic" because they're usually simple, stylized and easy to draw. For those of you who feel inhibited about drawing figures from imagination, doodling is the perfect place to challenge that fear. After all, the idea is not accuracy, but simplicity and imaginative charm.

Adding a character to a doodled landscape immediately suggests a story of some sort. Repeating one over and over allows you to doodle crowded scenes, parades and dances. Once you're able to represent a figure with a few lines, you can branch out—change the action, viewpoint, anything you'd like your characters to do.

A creative sequence for characters

1. Develop a shorthand way of doodling a figure.
2. Practice drawing that figure in action until you can do it easily.
3. Move on to another way of representing the figure.

The much-maligned stick figure

If you've never drawn and have never drawn a figure in your life, you can always start with stick figures. Increase even with simple figures like these, because action and variety.

The modified stick figure

Giving the body a little dimension allows more flexibility. Those "rubber band people" have a more naturalistic look than stick figures do.

Simplified figures in action

The best way to think of a figure in action is to think of an action, and then execute it with exaggeration.
• Ideas to Explore for your Doodles
doodling ideas: tangles and shape clusters

Strings, ropes, spaghetti, worms and meandering roads all belong to a class of doodles I call "tangles." The algorithm for producing them involves drawing a small section, stopping, drawing another overlapping section, stopping, etc. The sections should twist and loop in various ways, but the real key is stopping often.

Shape Clusters

The idea behind "shape clusters" is keeping an even spacing between the shapes you draw. Begin with any kind of shape. Draw the next one as close as you can to the first, and so on. Then you should end up with a more or less uniform area between the shapes. Each shape you add is influenced by the shapes already there. This means you have to invent a shape to get a tight fit.

The fit you achieve is not exact. Like pieces in a jigsaw puzzle, but more like chocolates in a box with dividers. Doodles like these help your sense of design—they make you aware of the overall pattern.

exercise

Doodling Algorithms

Pick one of these categories—geometric, wires, tangles or shape clusters—and do a series of or ten doodles using that algorithm. Make each one different from the others. Look at your doodles. Pick the one that seems the most different from the rest. What makes it different? Do a new doodle that emphasizes and exaggerates this difference.
doodling ideas: building blocks

Building shapes out of strokes is both a very simple idea and a good one. It can be as easy as dot dot dot dot — and with a little directed luck, an image emerges. It’s best to do these without much planning and just let the image appear.

The type of nib you use will affect the look of your shapes. Markers make dots that are crude and funky. As the strokes (or dots) get smaller, the results get more subtle. Stippling can yield incredibly soft effects if you use a very fine nib. When you try this technique, practice gradation — change the strokes seemingly from densely packed to widely dispersed.

MARKER DOTS
These two doodles were made with the nib of a sharp, fine-tip marker.

STIPPLE
This was done with short dashes, like wiggles.

STIPPLE
Stroke was built up with repeated pen marks. Spacing is close for the darks and wider apart for lighter areas.

Building Blocks

Building With Recognizable Shapes.
The building blocks on this page are just blocks; they’re shapes in their own right: bricks, stones, and strips. Fantastic, improbable but still-believable structures can emerge from this kind of doodling.

When you begin one of these, you may have a vague vision of your complete structure, but you don’t need to sketch it all out ahead of time. Just keep adding bricks until you have something. This helps you appreciate a fundamental paradox about creativity: You don’t always know what you’re doing until you’ve done it. This is why we place so much emphasis on process.

1. Make a page or two of building block doodles using each of these techniques: marker dots, stipple, and stipple. Try at least some strokes without a nib. Just start making dots and see where they lead.
2. Draw a few imaginary and improbable structures made of bricks, stones or curvy blocks. Again, let at least some of these just happen. Start at the bottom and build as if you were laying actual stones or bricks — but imaginatively.

Bridge

Stone Arch

Brick Wall

Stone “S”

A certain precision and spacing makes these structures work ideally.

These building blocks of different sizes that bend and curve create an organic, natural-looking tension.
Creating Three Dimensions

Exercise 5

Shading
Copy the six doodles you made for Exercise 5 on page 17. Add light and shade to them, as well as cast shadows. Be sure to imagine the direction of your light source and shade it with an arrow. Make your cast shadows darker than your form shadows. On rounded forms, soften the shadow edge where light meets dark.

noodling ideas: multiplying

A surprising range of creative possibilities opens up when you make multiple copies of an image. I don’t mean simply repeating the exact same image over and over, but repetition with variation. Repetition gives an overall pattern, while variation provides individual detail. The natural tension between these two opposites will frequently produce satisfying results.

Arch, Early Morning

Shiny Gator

“E.T.” Shaded

Softly Shaded Snake

Potato Chips

Shaded Pushpins

In this example, I drew the joints from many different angles.

Suspicion

Suspicion Multiplied

Suspicion Multiplied

Toothbrush and Toothpaste

Said by: "There's no need to jump to conclusions, mix the parts in a solution, then add the solution in an equal amount to each of the parts."
noodling ideas: shading

Nothing imparts a sense of three-dimensionality to a drawing like light and shadow. And after some practice, it's very easy to do. Simply imagine a light source, and logic will tell you where to put the shadows.

An object will have a light side and a shadow side. It will also cast a shadow where the light is blocked. The cast shadow is usually darker than the shadow side. The closer the light source, the longer the cast shadow. It helps to place objects—particularly cubes, cylinders and spheres—under a strong light and observe how the light and shadow falls.

3-D CLUNKERED WITH SHADING

ROCK COLUMN AT MOON
The flatting light from directly above leaves a thin edge of light along the upper edge of each stone. The other areas are shadowed; the shadow edges are somewhat irregular.

SUNLIT GRAVY
Columns create the shadows of grays. Notice the definite light and shadow pattern, and use the shade of each to define the light source. Finally, shade the nooks, and use a gray wash to provide a sense of depth.

reversing, inverting and mirror imaging

This algorithm is about opposites. If something is white, make it black. If it's right side up, make it upside down—or backwards. I know artists who look upside down at their subjects and/or hold a mirror up to their work to get a fresh view. Creativity begins when we can look at something familiar in an entirely new way.

All of the examples require retracing the objects on a light table—in some cases, multiple times. The drawings Due-works multiplied involved tracing the original five times, including flipped and upside-down.

TREET AND REFLECTION

1. START WITH A CHARACTER
   Draw a little character.

2. TRACE, FLIP AND TRACE AGAIN
   Trace it on a light table, then flip it over and retrace it facing the other way.

3. REPEAT AND FILL IN THE BACKGROUND
   Turn the way upside down and trace it again, then place them inside a circle and fill in the background.

MULTIPLYING

1. Trace multiple copies of a previous drawing, arranging them into a radial or otherwise symmetrical pattern.
2. Do a mirror-imaged tracing, placing one image right side up and the other its duplicate upside down. The two images should touch in the middle.

DUCTWORK MULTIPLIED

Redrawing and repeating the blackwork elements create a drawing array of three-dimensional space in Ductwork Multiplied.
Winsor McCay (1867–1934) depicts not just a walking bed, but a bed that ambles, climbs, float and clings. It's a bed with a mind of its own. This graceful sequence comes from McCay's weekly comics feature, *Little Nemo in Slumberland*.

*Neino's Walking Bed Episode*
Winsor McCay
From *Winsor McCay—His Life and Art* by John Canemaker, Abbeville Press
gets easy again.

The creative storyteller learns to move fluidly from words to images and back again. Each of these two irredeemably presents its own inner vocabulary—different, but overlapping and mutually supportive.

“Of course, the boy thought, his cobra was still dangerous.”

“To make matters worse, even the dog was rude to him.”

“One of the sheep snuffed the air and smelled something cooking. ‘Mmm! Looks like cake!’”

“It can’t be even!” he thought.
"Some thought the trip was fun, but most were still worried."

"To all their soft around the galaxy they had never seen this kind."

"It seemed that all the hair left were memories."

"The land moved in the fear that these mountains would one day wake up again."

"Try as he might, he could not get her attention."

"They were so busy they didn’t notice the image in the mirror."

"They were so busy they didn’t notice the image in the mirror."
making it vivid

A picture might tell a story, but rarely can it tell the whole story. In fact, the level of curiosity your drawing arouses is one measure of its effectiveness. If your picture provokes the question “What is going on here?”, you have actually enlisted your audience to help tell the story.

To this end, I like to find ways of intensifying the drama. Sometimes I redo an image just to make it more vivid. This could mean making any number of alterations and transformations, such as strengthening the image, adding an element of mystery, creating an exotic background or getting more movement in the picture.

A ROGUE’S WARNING
The idea behind drawing is the kind of classic encounters you might find in any number of tales of sword fights.

WIND-BLOWN APPARITION
Here the beggar is changed into a specter — perhaps a image of death. Equally important is the spooky wind blowing his hair and garments. Not good for the knight.

THE GLOWING MESSENGER
A figure in focus action might suggest a spiritual presence, or perhaps someone enchanted. Note how the effect is subtly achieved by the strong lighting around the edges of the knight and horse.
THE ENCOUNTER
I began this drawing with the cacti, not knowing where I was headed, then I added the little centipede (don’t ask me where he came from). Finally, I drew the large head, using a mirror for the hand positions. Although the sketch has no intended meaning, it does seem to convey a little drama — perhaps an encounter on a journey.

THE ENTRANCE
I reversed the image and made some modifications. The berries have become trees and the face has a sense of a decisive shadow. The picture of a mountainous area is the face of a forest spirit? A beheaded centipede? A dream to another world?

PASSING ACROSS TIME
Shrinks can usually be enhanced by strong contrasts. Below, I darkened the image near the boy and kept it lighter at the stern emphasized in the diagram at left. This allowed me to play dark against light and light against dark.

Authentic details, drawn from observation, help impart a sense of reality to fantasy scenes. This church steeple is the one I see from my studio window.
intensifying the action

The way you arrange the shapes in a drawing speaks an abstract language. For example, verticals and horizontals tend to suggest stability, while diagonals generally suggest instability or movement. Likewise, smooth flowing lines suggest tranquility and grace, while sharp angles indicate action and violence.

These interpretations are not simply artistic conventions. They take advantage, at a near unconscious level, of the way we "read" the world. Clouds, trees, and even buildings can be made to look ominous or cheery simply by the way the shapes are handled. This points to the value of first seeing things in terms of their silhouettes, and only then adding the details.

One other technique in visual storytelling involves the use of shapes to direct the viewer's eye. A shape can point like an arrow, leading the eye along a desired path, or surround, frame or frame, giving added importance to some key element. And then there is what we might call the law of contrast—one passive shape in a frenzied sea of activity or vice versa, calls attention to the lone observer.

TORSO/TURVY
This setting-up picture is all diagonals, indicating that every element is off balance and out of context.

SHIP OR FOOLS
Here, chaos is conveyed by all conflicting lines of force. The size disparity between the ship and the waves only makes you glad you're not aboard.
Here, I drew from the undiluted profile of the clay woman and then drew two versions of the clay man, using different angles and light effects. Attention to detail imbues a sense of believability to a scene like this.
recycling your doodles

If you spend enough time doodling, you'll never run out of story ideas. Because they're spontaneous doodles with nothing particular in mind, they often offer the most freedom as story subjects. I go through my doodles periodically and pick out the ones that already look like story ideas. They make no real sense on their own but have some spark of strangeness or sharing that appeals to me. Sometimes I make photocopy blowups and work directly on them. I may also use the doodle as a jumping-off point, perhaps redeveloping the characters in a totally different context, and sometimes I'll begin a doodling fragment on a larger sheet of paper and add to it a little at a time so that it eventually builds into some sort of story.

THE GENIE'S MASK

After making the building block doodle on left, I got the idea of putting someone behind it who looked like the mask. I was thinking of a character somewhat like the genie from an old movie, The Thief of Bagdad. I made a photocopy of the doodle and then did the rest of the drawing directly on the copy.

FINDING THE STORY

Save doodles that seem to tell a story and rework them with a more complete idea in mind.
MY OCTOPUS.
I took this doodle of men hanging by wires, intending to have something hanging off wires. When I asked the octopus, I hoped them here to hang too, as if it was a rescue. It looked so friendly. I began to think of the octopus as a pet and started to imagine a tale of their adventures together.

GULLIVER’S MOUSE
When I sketched the four figures at left, I had no idea what they were reaching for. I imagined it was something that provoked curiosity and amusement more than fear. I decided on a giant mouse. Then I imagined galleys and pirates, a few at a time. On a whim, I decided to make each person an individual from different places and different eras.

Making a Story From One of Your Doodles
Go through your doodles and select one—any that seems to tell a story—to serve as a key element in a new picture. The doodle can be used either as the background or a foreground object. If you need a central subject, use one of your character drawings.
illustrating dreams

From a creative standpoint, the most thing about dreams is that they don't bother to explain themselves—they simply present us with a rich stream of images. Psychologically, it may be useful to understand the meaning of these images, but creatively, it's liberating to draw from that stream without any need to understand. For most of us, our waking life is spent sorting things into logical categories. But when we sleep, unlike, unexpected and unresented images and combinations of images flow in abundance. We can tap this resource.

So much of dreaming is about mood and feeling. These are above qualities, conveyed mostly by suggestion rather than by direct representation. Manipulating contrasts, exaggerating body postures and emphasizing symbolic elements are a few ways of communicating mood in pictorial language.

You may have your own reasons for illustrating your dreams, but for me, dreams are simply source material for imaginative pictures. And because dreams often come to us as fragments, we need to assemble them into a unified whole. This means creating a perspective, moving and rearranging elements, and adding enriching details. You also might need to find reference pictures. In the Catching a Train studies on the facing page, I used some old locomotive photos to get a more authentic feel.

For the Lonely in Paris drawing, for night, the cats in the window were taken from a sketch I did of my own cat. I always admired and envied their utter bliss when they curled up together instead of. In a dream, I watched them through a window while indiffent, elegantly dressed people passed by.
Illustrating a Dream

Keep a notebook by your bedside so that you can write down your dreams as soon as you wake up. After you have recorded up to ten of these, choose one to illustrate. Spend some time working out the composition. You might need to make several compositional sketches before settling on the final one.

Make your illustration vividly capture the salient qualities of the dream. Draw from photographs or actual objects when necessary to make it more real. Use a pencil for an overall detailed mood.
A sequence is a series of drawings linked by time or logic. Each drawing flows from the preceding one and sets the stage for the next. The transition from one drawing to the next can be extremely simple and obvious or subtle and complex.

Sequence drawing is much like storyboarding a movie scene: break the action down into discrete steps, often employing "movie thinking" - zooms, close-ups, pans and the like.

Drawing sequences shift the question of "What shall I draw?" to "What happens next?" In the sequence on the facing page which I call Cat and a Boll, I had no idea where I was going when I did the first drawing. Once I started making the ball bigger, the story began to evolve. I relied on a limited repertoire of film devices and noodling tricks (which are labeled) to move the story along.

Exercise 30

Drawing in Sequence
1. Make a set of four panels about 3 inches (7.6 cm) square. Draw an object or person in the first box. In the next three panels, trace some progressive change — make something happen. Here are just a few possibilities: collision, determination, walk-down, transformation, growth. Notice how the changes usually proceed from panel to panel.

2. Divide a large sheet of paper into twelve discrete 3-inch wide panels. Leave a little space between each panel and a margin all around. This is your storyboard. Use it to sketch a tale in a sequence of drawings. Think of your story as if it were a movie with the action advancing from left to right. Continue using film-making techniques as well as the doodling tricks labeled in chapter one.
Marsolo’s free-associative method is very much in the spirit of the surrealist artists of the last century.
VALLEY
The drawing at left was done from a photograph. I just wanted to capture the character of the shapes in black and white. I used a stipple for the intermediate tones.

SHAPE STUDY
Here are some of the shapes used in Valley, drawn close up with a 3B pencil. Note how some edges are sharp and others soft. Isolated in this way, they look almost like birds in flight.
MOUNTAINS
Here I have turned valley upside down and added a lot of enrichment shapes (I'm a great believer in the upside-down method for pattern drawing). As I drew, I was thinking much more about shape than I was about landscape. A surprising feature of this drawing is that, in the inverted state, the valleys become mountains and vice versa.
PUSH PINS

This large piece (18" × 24" [46cm × 61cm]) was done in black, white and gray poster paint. I liked the variety of reflected shapes, especially the bright whites.
ROOTS

I made this drawing of bean roots from a biology textbook. The pattern is enriched by a contrast of two kinds of forms: the curving tendrils and the bean-shaped nodules.
MASS STRUGGLE
I like to draw seething, turbulent crowd scenes, mostly because of the interesting and varied patterns they make. In this one, the shapes are all merged together into a single, writhing mass.
CELL MACHINERY
This is a fantasy drawing of the inner workings of a cell.
There are about seven different kinds of shapes, repeated in different positions.
interacting nature

When you seek to draw a patterned landscape, it’s useful to ask yourself questions about the translation from eye to hand. Are the patterns linear or in aggregates? Are they rhythmic or chaotic? What stroke or strokes that will capture the feeling efficiently?

These questions are often answered by trial and error. As you begin to make marks, your hand generally takes over. Your stroke is a little algorithm, repeated many times with different variations.

Pattern is a byproduct of transforming an observational drawing into something different and unexpected. Once you have found a way to express the character of your subject, ask yourself what you can do with it or what next creative step you might take. For such a transformation, you might do well to look not at your subject but at your drawing—you’re more apt to see new possibilities. Perhaps you can create a spin-off piece where you intensify the stroke, use more pressure or employ a broader tool. You might turn the work upside down and rework the scene into an abstract. You may see metaphorical possibilities—rocks that look like creatures or clouds, or the branched structure of a river that resembles the veins of a leaf or the back of a hand.

**VOLCANIC ROCKS**
I liked the texture of these rocks I saw on a beach.

**CRAGGY**
These rocks with a few vertical strokes and black shadows. There’s turned the drawing and rework it to two matching halves, below, left.

**exercise 31**

A Patterned Landscape

Observe a lovely subject and make several sketches. Pay particular attention to the type of stroke you use to capture the character of the rocks. Now, zoom off. Choose a side of your sketch and base or divide it to achieve a more dramatic effect. Try one or more of the following:

- Turn the drawing upside down or mirror image.
- Make a mirror-image drawing.
- Choose a different brush.
- Emphasize the metaphorical quality; if your rock looks reminiscent of something, give it a little, bring those qualities out in your drawing.
SERRATED MOUNTAIN
This drawing of the mountains of Montserrat was done with a crow quill pen and ink. The serrations were made by putting increased pressure on each stroke of the pen as it moved from left to right.

SURREAL FORMS
This drawing was made the same way but with a chisel-point calligraphy pen. I turned the drawing upside down to add the black shadows.

WALNUT
Like drawing walnuts, because they look so much like other things—beams, rocks, landscapes. After I drew this way, I noticed that the white veins looked like veins. I decided to remake the drawing, darkening all but the outer vein.

ISLAND IN THE STREAM
Here, the walnut is transformed into a strange landscape. As this drawing developed, I began adding little touches like thinly splattered, reflections, and a blossom.
interparing nature

Drawing nature requires a kind of shorthand: we need to find ways of working that summarize, and actually stand in for, the overwhelming layers of detail arrayed in front of us. Our strokes need to represent what we see, but in the most economical way.

We do this, as I have suggested, by shifting from drawing things to drawing patterns. Instead of asking "What kind of bark is that?", ask "What are the rhythms here? How do the lines and shapes move, twist and flow?" Answer these sorts of questions not with your head, but with your hand and your kinaesthetic sense. Your drawing is apt to become fresher and more expressive. And when you choose to spin off or intensify, the fluidity of your strokes can often suggest the new direction.

Trees are a bounty to artists. They offer an endless feast of shape and pattern and can express youth, age, serenity, tenacity, majesty and just about anything else. Anytime you can't think of something to draw, there's always a tree.

These trees, from my sketchbooks, were all made with a conscious shift to drawing shape and pattern.

**MIXED MEDIA**
Most of the drawing below was done with a heavy black marker. But for the oak hair, I added some little cross-hatch strokes.

**JOSHUA TREE**
This limb and its branches began to look very oriental to me. I made it less a shape study, adding ever-finer connected branches.

**BIRCH AND OAK**
When I observe the contrast, I need to push it further in my drawing. Here, I used the difference between the smooth bole and gnarled oak.
**Exercise 32**

**Textural Patterns**

Assemble exercise 32 using a tree trunk or branches from your studio. Make several sketches, emphasizing the character of the trunks. Then make a spin-off drawing that furthers emphasizes and strengthens the patterns. The spin-off seed won't look like a tree. Rather, it should show how tree trunks give rise to the uppermost branches and leaves of the tree, with the trunk at the bottom. Then move to a spin-off drawing and the second drawing.
describing form with line

With practice, you can make linear drawings that fool the eye into believing that the image is three-dimensional. Besides being aesthetically interesting, this method of drawing will teach you a lot about form. In directing your line around contours and up and over bumps, you understand form at the neuromuscular level. This technique employs a couple of visual tricks:

1. Draw the lines so that they appear to curve around the object.
2. Make the lines wider apart in some areas and closer together in others.

**VARY THE SPACING AND FOLLOW THE FORM**

Within the spacing variations—lines grow closer together as they travel over a bump or around a form. Also, draw lines so they appear to curve around the contours of an object.

**CREATE THREE DIMENSIONS**

The illusion of three-dimensional forms can be produced by undulating parallel lines, sometimes apart, other times close together.

**WORK IN PATCHES**

Change the direction of your strokes for each separate patch.

**AVOID USING OUTLINES**

Although it may look like it, these interwoven forms were done entirely without outlines. The illusion is produced by the way the lines change direction or gather together at the edges.

**PATTERNS GRASSHOPPER**

I sketched the grasshopper from page 58 and put it on a light table to make a transfer. The diagram of the eye area shows how I changed the direction of the strokes for each little patch.

**CRACKED NUT**

Here is another example of working in patches, but in contrast to the relatively straight lines of the grasshopper, these lines are more undulating and rhythmic.
Finding the Unique in Conformity

There's a tendency to think of drawings like these—or any work employing a controlled technique—as rigidly mechanical, leaving little room for individual creativity. But you cannot help being yourself even when executing a strict algorithm, as evidenced by the drawings below.

Rhythmic Lines

1. Take one of your previous drawings and redraw it in rhythmic lines. Do not use straight, but look for writing patterns that describe the forms by bending around them. Your lines should converge near the edges and widen apart in the central regions.

2. Do a second rhythmic line drawing of an object, but try this one from direct observation.
RICKER'S TOOLS
A brush, a palette of ink washes and a few pens, made from a reed called "phragmite."

SELF-PORTRAIT
This drawing was done with ink and white poster paint. As well as a likeness, it's a study of light and dark. The shadow side of the face all but disappears into the background.

STILL LIFE WITH HOUSEPLANT.

TURBULENT PATH

ARTICHOKE, RADISHES AND SQUASH
THE WOODS NEAR BRADFORD

Rilke uses a variety of bold strokes to convey trees, ground, mountains, etc.
Shape Play

In each of these drawings I took a small idea, like shiny surfaces or wobbly shapes, then pushed it to the extreme. This sometimes involved retracing, literally tearing and cutting apart the drawing, redrawing the shapes as geometric patterns or radically cropping to bring out the abstract qualities of the subject.
merging shapes

Shapes describe things, but sometimes indirectly. Often an image that seems immediately recognizable is actually made up of surprisingly abstract shapes. Observed up close, the pieces are little shards and blobs, while at a distance they suddenly fuse into a distinguishable picture.

Shape mergers occur when two or more shapes of the same value blend together as a single image. The dancer’s black leotard and the black doorway (right) have no separating boundary. In our mind’s eye we have little trouble seeing them as distinct, but this visual ambiguity tends to flatten and unify the image. It activates our sense of design.

Consciously creating shape mergers helps you transition from drawing things to drawing shapes. And it helps you make pictures in which the parts all lock together into an integrated whole. This is a pretty good definition of design.
THE MIND "FILLS IN" WHAT ISN'T THERE

As left is a portion of a drawing from an old movie still. The full image, below, clearly shows how little information is needed to make a picture understandable by the viewer.

**exercise 34**

Shape Mergers

1. Do a shape breakdown of a news photo using only black, white, and two shades of gray. Merge shapes of the same or similar shade.
2. Set up a still life with a strong, single light source in an otherwise dark room. Make a drawing which emphasizes the patterns. Merge shapes of the same or similar shade. Make at least one of these mergers between an object and the background.

PANIC

The drawing above was made from a number of different views photos. I broke the figure up into a grid by repeating a little algorithm that crosswise folds of clothing. As you can see from the two details, the patterns are very abstract.
mapping and coloring

I am a strong believer in mapping—making a basic outline of important shapes to guide your drawing. I see it as an effective strategy for analyzing and clarifying what you observe. In fact, it is the best way I know to organize the design of your picture. Maps have unequivocal shapes; the boundaries are clear and distinct.

The reality we observe is not always so clear. Shadows, movement, dim light and other factors tend to fuzz and blur things. It takes imagination to override the ambiguities and map everything in your picture as a defined shape and then—as a further imaginative step—to assign a flat, bright color to each shape and fill it.

There are lots of ways of mapping and coloring. I generally like to keep the colors bright and flat with very little shading. Markers provide the brightest colors, but they sometimes seem a bit too acid or concentrated, so I tone them down by adding colored pencil on top.

You can think of this work as akin to stained glass—work in which your lines are like the leaded mullions. They may or may not correspond to the outlines of the forms, as some of these examples demonstrate.

**CIRCUS**

I took my sketchbook to the circus, but due to the dim lighting and constant motion of the performers, it was impossible to draw with accuracy. But it didn’t matter. I later traced the circus images I made, above, combined them with some background shapes and colored them in. Below, with bright watercolor, markers and colored pencils.

**PURPLE SHADES**

In spite of this title, I was sitting outside my office in the sun. I looked at my soft reflection on the screen of my darkened TV. I just drew the shapes and then added these bright colors afterwards.
HARLEQUIN

I drew this figure with no particular thought in mind. Sometime later — when I had partially colored it in — the idea of a jigsaw puzzle came to me. The color sometimes conforms to the shape of the image and sometimes to the shapes of the jigsaw pieces.

Map and Color

1. Choose one of your previous drawings or doodles and reuse it as if it were a map. Enclose every shape and color them with bright and occasionally arbitrary colors.
2. Create a new and more complex map. This can be from a previous drawing. Add numerous environment shapes (e.g., smaller, interweaves shapes like jigsaw puzzle pieces or sections of a stained glass window). Color in the shapes with bright and occasionally arbitrary colors.

PHOTOS TO FANTASY

These are two colored drawings by Ted Chafee. Ted likes to work from photographs, but in the process of mapping and coloring, he transforms them to the point where they bear no resemblance to the original. Some become quite abstract. The little landscape figure can be turned on either side and it still looks right side up.
escher tiling

The object of this technique is to make a drawing that has no background spaces, every shape is an object that fits into every other shape. I call this Escher tiling, after the Dutch artist M.C. Escher who created complex and beautiful variations on this theme.

My version is less profound than his was. I simply draw an object, usually from imagination, and then see what other object, person or animal might fit snugly against it. In this way, I build my drawing one shape at a time.

1. Draw an object, then study the negative shapes around it. Look for a fit with another object.

2. Draw a second object (the main head) so that it exactly fits the adjacent space. Continue with a third object.

3. Keep doing this for as long as you have the energy or room on your paper.

THE TIME OF ELEPHANTS AND POLAR BEARS
ANYTHING GOES
This kind of work is just a fancy form of doodling and should be messed
with the same irreverence. I like to put quirky, cartoonish figures
with semi-transparent ones, as I did with a connected people at right. And I
think a mote about the role. Every so often, when I can't see a fly, I make
one dozen I go behind my selfish. I did this with the upside-down kid in the
6-shirt, below in School Dreams.

SCHOOL DREAMS.

CONNECTED PEOPLE

NATURAL HARMONY
I started the drawing below
with a sketch of a grizzly at
the zoo. The two large
heads were done
from photographs
and the eye was
made up.

SLIGHTLY SHADED
ZELMA LOSEKE
Weaving a Drawing

Some of the most original work comes from self-taught artists.
Zelma Loseke was one of these when she was making a doll's
house for her young daughter. This incident inspired her to try
larger sculptural pieces in willow using a technique that she
developed herself; today she is a well-established basket maker.

When she turned to drawing, Zelma brought a weaver's
sensibility along with her. Using ballpoint pen lines instead
of willow branches, she patiently builds up images with a
regular repeated stroke. Just as with her baskets, she begins
with no preconceived idea of how the piece will turn out—
she simply draws lines until certain shapes begin to emerge.
When this happens, she reinforces the shapes and builds
variations on them.

ONE OF ZELMA'S WILLOW WOVEN BASKETS

MAKING THE ABSTRACT REALISTIC
Zelma sculpts her simple stroke into the
illusion of three-dimensional form—quite
abstract shapes begin to look like pieces
of nature.

NATURE FORM #17
NATURE FORM #23
NATURE FORM #39
NATURE FORM #45
Spin-Offs

HIDDEN
Here I took the "sweat-out-some-idea" idea a step further, using cloth instead of stone, and also playing with the idea of having insufficient room for the head. The torso was drawn from a photograph.

BOUND
In Italy I saw some marble sculptures being prepared for moving. I saw partially covered with ropes, cloth and soft foam. They reminded me of the Captives. This figure grew out of this memory.

FALLING
The idea of a figure that falls into cloth grew out of my previous drawing. Hold as if it is a spin-off of a spin-off. You can have quick spin-offs take you away like the source, and into some unexplainable direction.

TRAPPED
Here’s a straightforward spin-off, again pushing the "figure imprisoned in cloth" idea, to "figure partly shown" to get a creepy novel like feature. I copied the rock pattern from page 124.

IMAGINARY FOSSILS
The Captives around me at the way some fossils look trapped and tough going. Eating at our right, craters and exaggerate their idea. Archeological ideal as he right is drawn from one of the famous fossils. Found in the quarry of Beaulieu Sarre, I drew it with added more and its see how it would look.
**Exercise 24**

**Intensifying**

Make a drawing of two silhouetted figures in extreme action (running, fighting, jumping, falling, etc.). Make sure that the silhouette of each figure is active, angular and placed on a diagonal.

**Exercise 25**

**Framing**

Make a drawing of a small, central figure surrounded by large background shapes (clouds, trees or man-made structures). Arrange the background shapes so that they either frame or point to the figure.
SPAN-OFFS

When I call a "spin-off" is a new drawing that uses a previous one to be created. The original is often generated out of straightforward observation. This gives you familiarity and confidence with the subject. The spin-off then takes the subject, as parts pick up a new and more imaginative direction. The process links, in frequency, two distinct topographical modes: observation and imagination, eye and mind's eye.

The pencil drawing is useful as well as helpful in both direct observation. You can make "spin-offs" pencil with brush and ink or watercolor and useful contours of the hand, face and hair.
Drawing a Crowd

1 START WITH ONE
   Draw one person.

2 QUICKLY ADD MORE
   Add people as they move in and out of your scene. (Sketch quickly.)

3 KEEP ADDING
   Keep adding people. The ones you started with will be long gone by the time you finish.

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Exercise

Adding On

Make a line drawing of three or more unrelated objects, each drawn at a different size and in a different place. Place the first object in the foreground and the others partly behind it. Overlap the line drawing. Don’t worry about keeping the objects in scale, but draw them accurately. Work in the medium of your choice and allow at least ten minutes per object.
crumpled, dented, crushed

Georges Clemenceau, the President of France during World War I, was once standing motionless on a hill overlooking the great city of Istanbul. After a long silence, one of his aides asked, "What are you thinking, Mr. President?" He replied solemnly, "I was thinking what beautiful ruins this place would make."

Indeed, there is something aesthetically pleasing about the partially destroyed—especially for a drafterman. Junkyards, weathered barns, broken hulls and ripped billboards all suggest the images of time and hard use. Things become more abstract (and often more interesting) as they deteriorate, offering the artist rich opportunities for line, tone and texture and a great opportunity for mastering shapes.

Crumpled paper, put under a strong light, reveals dozens of small planes and edges. You can capture these in a drawing by carefully observing the shapes: first the overall shape of the paper, then the shapes of the creases and facets. Squint often to distinguish the strong from the subtle.

MAPPING YOUR SUBJECT
Mapping the major shapes of your subject is a key first step in drawing complex damaged objects. This makes fitting in the smaller planes and shadow a manageable problem.

DENTED METAL
Drawing shiny reflective objects like these crumpled cans requires a patient rendering of shapes, as well as a clear distinction between hard and soft edges.

DRAWING A SPIN-OFF
After making a fine crumpled-metal drawings, you get a feel for the touch of shapes and edges intermixed. This familiarity allows you to invent your own forms, as did in this drawing.
exercise 10

Drawing Melted Plastic

Heat and soften several plastic objects (such as soldiers, toy cars or plastic utensils) and fuse them together. Make a tonal drawing of the aggregate, paying particular attention to the overall shape of the mass. Notice the small, trapped shapes (negative spaces) and draw them accurately. Put direct light on your subject to create strong light and shadow shapes. Use a 2B pencil and allow one to two hours.
Macro drawing

Macro drawing is the act of rendering something in great detail, often using magnification. It reveals levels of structure and detail that are otherwise invisible to us. This type of drawing requires good lighting and careful, patient work. I've found that the mechanics of holding the magnifying glass and drawing sometimes require a fair amount of practice, which is why I usually use a smooth-finish sketch paper for this type of drawing. Such paper takes care well and allows for more fine detail. Take your time with a drawing like this—even if it means completing it over several sessions.

Exercise 11

Macro Drawing

Make an enlarged image of a very small object in nature. Use a good magnifying glass and a strong light for lighting. Take your time, as much as you need it. Take an overall approach. A drawing like this will show you normal structures. Be sure to show the head, legs, antennae, and other details. Be careful, be neat, and stay focused.
distorted reflections

All drawing is distorted. The eye/mind/brain process invariably and unconsciously emphasizes some things at the expense of others. Rather than correct such distortions, we, as imaginative artists, should find ways of emphasizing them.

Here's a good way to start: Draw your own reflection in a fun-house mirror. If you can't get a fun-house mirror, a sheet of flexible, mirrored Mylar (available at many art stores) will do. The drawings on these pages were made by bending Mylar in various ways. You'll need to tape or clamp the Mylar so that the desired bend is held in place.

What's interesting about this exercise is that no matter how extreme the distortion, your image is still recognizable. The parts are garbled, sometimes wildly, but the relationships between them are held constant. If you draw the strange reflection accurately, it stil looks like you. (It's equally interesting that sometimes you can look in a regular mirror and hardly recognize yourself. Well, at least do that.)

A project like this one can make you comfortable with distortion. Once you've done a few of these, you can elongate, compress or otherwise torture any image you see without the help of Mylar or mirrors.

OLD HAT

This piece of distorted self-portraiture was done by looking into a sheet of mirrored Mylar. No, I say, pin or tape the Mylar so that it bends in various ways, and hold your eye still as you stand. At least of these were done in a large compressed mirror with the help of a knocked-over mirror.

FLAT HAT

This drawing below was done from reflections in a small mirror. It's easy to lose your place and forget which square you're working on in a composite image like this. I put a little dot on the mirror so I can see where that reflected tip of my nose is. Also kept one eye closed most of the time.

COMPRSSED

ASYMMETRICAL

MOSAIC COWBOY

This drawing below was done from reflections in a small mirror. It's easy to lose your place and forget which square you're working on in a composite image like this. I put a little dot on the mirror so I can see where that reflected tip of my nose is. Also kept one eye closed most of the time.
mirror imaging

There is something satisfying in symmetry. When you hold a slightly tilted mirror alongside an object or a person, you see the object and its reflection as a single merged shape—a shape connected into identical halves. Your mind shifts to a pattern sensing mode. With an ease that borders on magical, symmetry transforms a random fragment into an ordered design.

1. SKETCH
Sketch a subject.

2. COPY AND FLOP
Copy and flop the subject vertically by tracing it on a light table.

3. COPY AND FLOP AGAIN
Copy and repeat the pair, this time horizontally. Notice how at each stage the image becomes more of an abstract design.

SWITCHED SHIRT, BELOW

I first did this while doing a shirt on a table and wanted to show it. I like to do cloth in full and not because the clothes are not really about the stuff. They are about the stuff.

SYMmetry, Above

I made a photograph of the original drawing, flipped it, and flipped it back on the original on a light table. I then traced the mirror image, more or less sticky for sticks. But if you hold it closely, you will notice differences in between the two halves. Turning one of these directions differently, as Jon knows, can radically alter the effect. This almost looks like an abstract butterfly.

exercise 12

Mirror Imaging

On the upper half of a 9 x 12” (23 x 30.5 cm) sheet of paper, make a detailed drawing of an object that has an irregular or otherwise interesting shape. In the lower half of the sheet, make a photocopy of the drawing, then place it on a light table with the photocopy underneath. The photocopy should be flipped and reversed so it looks like a mirror image of the original. It should also be flipped so that the two images are matching. Then the photocopied image sits on the original so that they make a single symmetric shape. Use a 2B pencil and allow one hour.
In most pictures—just as in real life—the eye quickly settles on the center of interest and neglects everything else to the background. So what happens when you deliberately thwart this convention by placing elements in front of the center of interest to obscure or obstruct it? Challenging convention is often a starting place for imaginative work.

It just so happens that if you choose interesting foreground elements and draw them accurately, you will often create a tantalizing frame for your subject. The effect will be one of peering through the foreground. This often makes the subject intriguing, appealing.

You can also obscure your subject with a dramatic light and shadow pattern. Dim light often conveys mystery. Strong cast shadows reveal the forms that they fall on. The shadow side of an object often merges with the dark of the background.

**exercise 13**

**Obscured**

Make a line drawing of a crumpled piece of cloth. Add a few flowers and plants. Make three photocopies, and on each draw a picture, pet or object behind the cloth. Photocopying, though inexpensive, is not the same experience. If you’re doing a lesson like this, use a 9x12 sheet and allow 20 minutes per drawing.
obscurig with dramatic light and shadow

1. Take some photographs of your subject under a strong light.
2. Create a simple map by tracing the photo on a light table.
3. Add a second element in front of the face—in this case, a pair of hands.
4. Fill in and darken the tones. Try several variations.
5. Posterior: keep details to a minimum...
6. ...but capture the difference between hard and soft edges.
7. Here’s a different effect, using a tangled piece of clothesline rope.
8. Positioned so as to cast strong shadows on the face.
9. With only selected background shapes filled in, the drawing appears more abstract.
4 Fill in and darken the tones. Try several variations.

5 Posterize: keep details to a minimum…

6 … but capture the difference between hard and soft edges.

7 Here’s a different effect, using a tangled piece of clothesline rope…

8 … positioned so as to cast strong shadows on the face.

9 With only selected background shapes filled in, the drawing appears more abstract.
sketching the unusual

Any subject that catches your eye is a good subject for your sketchbook—but it may be time to get bolder in your range of choices. We are trying to build neural bridges between the eye and the mind's eye—perhaps more accurately, between the visual centers of the brain and the visual imagination, which happen to share much of the same equipment. For this work, a good subject is one that jolts you out of your habitual way of seeing. These are subjects that in some way appear compelling, vivid or strange.

Sketching your dental X-rays, a tray of plastic utensils, or a dead fly under a magnifying glass could trigger a shift in your seeing habits. Like the images in your dreams, the "new reality" you draw should include the odd, the illogical, the ambiguous and the absurd.

ARRESTING PATTERN
I liked the shape produced by the black of this young woman’s hair meeting the black of her shawl.

COMPPELLING STRANGENESS
Early American art often combines the grotesque with a wild, dreamy mood. Copying work from other cultures can be fascinating—you can feel their oddness and difference. This Maya solar god was sketched from a relief in Mexico's National Art Museum.

INMRINABLE SOURCES
This was drawn from a photograph of a medical textbook depicting how a baby’s head passes through the birth canal. I liked the abstract qualities and the odd anatomical feeling.
EXTREME FORSHORNING

Sofia vera, especially of people. Since you no longer go by your name. Almost love to hear a person laugh and to close only what your eye tells you. This is an ordinary drawing of these young men on a beach, but I like to view it upside down. It gives the drawing a futurist, art deco.

UNEXPECTED COMBINATIONS

I put this rubbing thing on a finished essay because I like the reflection. Sometimes it looks like an illustration for a fairy tale.

DRAWINGS OF FOUR DRAWINGS

Occasionally I make little sketches on a blank page of my sketchbook drawings. One made simplicity of the pattern sometimes gives the new idea. The two little drawings in the middle are so simple that I no longer remember the original, but I can make something new out of them.
TIME ON YOUR HANDS AND NOTHING TO DRAW

I did this drawing of my feet while on a long plane trip. It became an
obvious abstract exercise in drawing shapes and textures.

SO UGLY IT'S BEAUTIFUL

It's interesting how people and objects get more attractive when you begin
drawing them. This prehistoric fish in London's Museum of Natural History
looked awful andKyloren, initially I felt sorry for him. But as I drew I came
to appreciate his slightly handsome face.

COMPLEX TANGLES

An old apple tree offers excellent practice in
observational drawing because you have to
keep adding new pieces when you look from one
part of the subject. I took care to draw every
small branch as shapes, not simply lines.
PROGRESSIVE STRETCHING

For many of us, the best way to learn an essence is to exaggerate. We make several drawings of the same subject, each one a little more exaggerated than the previous. By degrees, we get closer to that final drawing in which our idea of what is possible.

Here I made three drawings inspired by the figure in Jean Antoine Watteau’s “Salle des Fêtes.” The first one on the far left is closest; at the other end I exaggerated the figure. I’ve found that distortion begins where the knees go up near the exaggerated arrangement in the middle drawing marks the extreme version around.

PROGRESSIVE CHANGE

Here’s another demonstration of how distortion gets easier when you do it in stages. I like to do it in groups of three: Here, the first urnine was drawn from a magazine photograph. The middle stage exaggerated the action and altered the proportions. This emboldened me to make more radical changes in the last drawing.
Exaggerating proportions

We recognize differences by comparing and contrasting. If you want to make something look big in your drawing, put it next to something small. If you have only one object, the parts should contrast with each other. Enlarging some parts of your subject while reducing others is a way of intensifying the drawing. It creates an exaggerated emphasis, excessively calling attention to certain aspects of a person or an animal. The result may be amusing or disturbing, but almost always attention-getting.

In the animal drawings on these pages I've simply shrunk or expanded a certain part in relation to the others. Care was taken to represent the parts accurately, though not in proper proportion.

All horns
It's interesting how exaggeration begins to look surreal as you draw. By the time I finished this sketch, the rhinoceros felt quite believable to me.

Small head, big body
Reducing the head size usually makes an animal look bigger—more physical.

Long legs, big feet
These seem to look like they were born to run. The dog's small head makes it appear far away, as if his body were really long.

Stretching and squashing the horse
The horse represents a variety of things from power, freedom, speed, beauty, currency, or, in certain symbolic aspects.
emphasizing differences

Difference is information. We are aware of things because they stand out from their background. We are aware of qualities by contrasting and comparing. One way to make the familiar strange is to emphasize differences. That is, put two elements in a drawing and push the differences between them to extremes.

1

2

3

EXAGGERATING DIFFERENCES
The first drawing is a sketch I made of two guys waiting in an airport. Something about the difference between their poses and body types caught my eye.

Later, I made a second sketch from the original. I exaggerated the differences between these two figures, making the heavier man much larger and the thinner guy more angular and technical. The exoticism they began to look like monuments to me. I imagined them as stone sculptures in a park.

I drew them again the time in pencil. By using soft shading and eliminating details, I attempted to show them as if they were made of granite. And I added pigeons.

Progressive Distortion
Make a series of three drawings: one natural; the second distorts them; the last. Draw just one figure either from life or from a photograph. First, make each of these three drawings from the previous drawing. For the third, the last drawing should be greatly exaggerated.

exercises

playing with scale

Sometimes it’s fun to make a composite drawing from different sources and to wildly exaggerate size differences. Here I’ve put the artist Gustave Courbet in the driver’s seat of an old car. Gaby Deynès’ Tireline. The drawing is arresting because it almost takes a moment for the viewer to realize that Courbet is a giant.

Gustave Courbet—from a photograph

Gabry Deynès and her Tireline—from a photograph

Scale Play
Make a composite drawing by combining elements from two different photographs. Make some of the elements out of scale—distant and exaggerate the size differences between them so that small things appear huge and vice versa. In all other ways, see if you can make the scene convincing and realistic.
forced distortion

Many artists—even experienced professionals—find it difficult to deliberately distort their drawings. Paradoxically, good training in observation can inhibit the ability to draw expressively. Here's a two-step process that can help you break out of that constraint. It almost guarantees a more intense and often striking image. In the first step, drawing blind, map the basic outlines of your subject with a bold, black marker. As you do, keep your eyes on the subject (or photograph) and not on your drawing. You may need to cheat a little by glancing at your paper from time to time to keep your place.

When you have completed your contour map, shift to a ball-point pen and begin carefully filling in shading and details, now freely looking back and forth between subject and paper. The natural distortion that occurs when you draw blindly ensures that no amount of realistic shading will make your drawing look exact.

1. Keeping your eyes on the photo and your paper off to the side, draw the outlines of your subject in bold black marker.
2. Move the paper directly in front of you. Add shadows, tones and details with a ball-point pen.
3. In this blind drawing of singer Frank Sinatra, I did the features as well as the overall contours.

SKETCHING QUICKLY

Quick studies, like this one of a North African man, can have the same slight, natural distortions as drawing blind.

Exercise 16

Forced Distortion

Make a blind contour drawing of a person using a bold felt-tip marker—glance at your paper only occasionally to find your place. Keep your marker in contact with your paper as much as possible. When you have completed the contours, switch to a ballpoint pen and complete the details of the drawing as realistically as possible, this time looking at your work.

COMBINING AND EXAGGERATING PHOTOS

This drawing was made from two separate photographs. I drew the Syrian girl first, and then added the Lebanese woman from another photograph behind her. I like the exaggerated difference in the sizes of their heads.
distortion grids

One interesting way of making the familiar strange is using grids. This method involves dividing a photograph or one of your drawings into even squares. Then you make a second, distorted grid (with the same number of squares) to guide you in creating a new drawing.

Make the second grid on tracing paper, then slip it under a fresh sheet of tracing paper and place it on a light table. Make your distorted drawing simply by following the original, translated for square. For some people this kind of work is too mechanistic, but I find it relaxing, and the results are often surprising.

REFERENCE GRID

Invert your grid and draw on it. Label the horizontal and vertical, a, b, c, etc.

DISTORTED GRID

Grids can be distorted in as many ways as you have the same number of squares and they're numbered in the same way as your reference grid. Do this grid on tracing paper, then slip it under a fresh sheet of tracing paper and place it on a light table. Make your distorted drawing following the grid. You can reuse the grid for other drawings.

DRAWING SHAPES, NOT THINGS

These drawings, made from a model still, illustrate the stretching and warping potential of distorted grids. The image develops in a predictable, often amazing way.

This way of working has a side benefit: it allows a vivid demonstration of the power of drawing shapes rather than things. You mostly look at the drawing as a model, one square at a time. You pick a square in the original, find the matching square on the distorted grid and translate the lines, shapes and tones of the original. Out of this abstract process, the overall image seems to emerge almost magically.
perspective grids

Here's another grid idea that yields interesting results. This method takes a photograph or drawing and puts it into perspective. As before, this requires making two grids. The first is the reference grid—a rectangular grid that divides your photograph into squares. The next step, making a grid in perspective, is a bit trickier; so follow the steps on the facing page carefully. Be sure you have the same number of squares labeled in the same way in each grid.

It's possible to do these grids without a T-square and triangle; but having these tools makes it easier.

The effect of distortion grids and perspective grids is to stretch and bend the image while keeping the relationships constant. These drawings of Mark Twain are hugely distorted, yet they're still recognizable.

Gridwork

Choose a photograph of a face at least 8½ x 11 or 22cm x 29.7cm. Make a reference grid on a sheet of tracing paper over the head. Number each row and column from 1 to 10. Label each row and each column with numbers. Draw a horizontal line through the center of the grid. Draw a second horizontal line, then a diagonal line through the bottom left corner to the top right corner of the grid. Notice how the diagonal intersects each of the other converging lines.

Exercise 17

Draw additional horizontal lines through each point of intersection. Notice how the horizontal lines get closer together as they approach the top of the grid. This grid can be used on tracing paper, and then taped to the back of a photograph or paper and placed on a light table for the final drawing.
I took this photo of a towel draped on a chair. The folds and shadows suggested the face of a primate to me, so I made this drawing. Gorilla.

A little shift in perspective can transform the image you see. I altered the photo slightly to reveal a hooded wraith.

Further visual tinkering reveals a three-figure composition. Interestingly, the three photos look quite similar at first glance.
Making Metaphors

The point of metaphoric seeing is that it presents images you would never think of drawing. It offers not only unusual subjects, but subjects in unique positions, angles and proportions. It takes you beyond the conventional. There is a kind of acciden-tal and random quality to it that’s so often essential in creating interesting new.

CRUMPLED PAPER

HEAD FROM ABOVE

UNKNOWN

WADDED-UP T-SHIRT

BATHROOM FAUCET

WEARY SOLDIER

MONSTAH!

The colored coffee stain, with paper added.
inspiration in the clouds

Subtle, ever-changing and complex, clouds offer the richest possibilities for metaphoric seeing. You can find in them not only strange objects, but unusual combinations of strange objects. Because clouds are in continual motion, I find it best to photograph them first and draw from the photographs.

Pick a sunny day when there are lots of fully formed clouds, and shoot lots of pictures that can be sorted through later. Accept right away that a cloud image will not likely be distinct and obvious. The metaphoric eye works by hints and clues; the image needs to be colored in.

When making drawings like these, feel free to depart from the photographs. The actual clouds are a starting point—a useful guide, not a precise template. See if you can capture some of the soft, puffy cloud texture while you develop the metaphoric image. Draw as if you had one foot in the metaphor and one foot in the clouds to speak.

SEARCH FOR THE IMAGE

When I first looked at this cloud formation, I couldn’t see anything in it. Now I can’t look at the photo without seeing fun.

A GUIDE, NOT A TEMPLATE

Initially I thought this looked vaguely like an animal’s face—but there was just enough detail in the upper area to suggest two figures.

exercise

Metaphoric Drawings

Arrange a piece of cloth in various ways under a strong light. With each arrangement, see if you find a face, figure or animal. If you see one that looks promising, make a sketch of it. After you have made a few sketches, pick one and put it on the light table and make a more complete drawing. Your finished piece should look partly like the cloth and partly like your metaphors.

Take a few photographs of clouds and draw an image you see in one of the formations. Use a soft pencil and a kneaded eraser to pick out light areas, and keep the shading soft and subtle.

SUN KATES

I wanted these two figures to look cold but not miserable, so I created the light pattern and kept the details to a minimum.

FOODLE AND SQUAWKING PARROT

This one externalizes the shape of the common duck face and the open beak of the parrot were to clearly formed in the clouds. Well, it’s just a parrot.

THE SORCERESS AND THE OWL

This doesn’t look like much, but it’s a bit kinda rather surreal.

TWIST MONKS ON A KNEELING, CHASING A KNIGHT

This kind of thing is just too funny to make up without the help of clouds.
odd juxtapositions

Imagine walking down a quiet country road and stumbling upon a huge object standing some thirty feet high. As you stare up at it, you realize you’re looking at a high-heeled shoe. What would you do? Laugh? Look around suspiciously? Conclude that you’re in a dream? Whatever you do, your first reaction is likely to be disorientation. People tend to make sense out of what they see, and when they don’t, it provokes a vaguely off-kilter feeling that something’s not quite right.

Artists—particularly the surrealists—like to evoke this feeling in their audience and play with it. Drawing things out of scale and putting things together that don’t belong are two classic ways of doing this. There are endless possibilities for provocatively recombining familiar objects. One secret to achieving this effect is drawing accurately. Render each element to look perfectly normal and conventional, no matter how absurd the whole is.
Familiar But Strange

Combine two objects that you don’t normally associate with each other into a single drawing. Or, if you choose a more conventional pairing, draw them wildly out of scale with each other.

Take your time set this drawing. Work from direct observation as much as possible. Make your objects both convincing using a consistent light source, realistic shadows and spots are details. Map out your arrangement prior to proceeding to the final drawing.

In this drawing, an odd juxtaposition—most unlikely objects that are often out of scale with each other—interestingly, when you render this sort of thing in a realistic technique, the scene becomes almost believable. Here I have combined toy trucks with peanuts. And further down are sketches of each before making a final drawing. I did a planning and then I could see just how things fit together.
The sequence was inspired by a quote by the surrealist poet Andre Breton: "Anyone who can't imagine a fast galloping across a tomato on a horse is a fool!" Maybe so, but these drawings made me think of an alternative quote: "Galloping across a tomato on a horse is a tricky business." Liquefying metabolism is one of the steps of making the familiar strange.
the evolution of an idea

Creating could be summed up as having a plan accompanied by a willingness to depart from it. Most people think that an artist's vision must be clear and fully formed before he or she begins to draw. Not only is this rarely the case, it is actually based on a misunderstanding about how creativity works. Creativity is an open dialogue between you, the artist, and the particular piece you are executing. The lines you put down on paper often tell you what to do next. Each stage feeds the one that follows.

You start with an idea—some sort of thought or vision about what you're going to do. It can be something quite simple. Once you've drawn a few lines, your image begins to speak back to you. You get new ideas. You may begin to modify your original vision, or you may think of a more vivid way to capture it. In either case, the original concept is only a starting place. You surrender to the process, and therefore you never know exactly what you're going to draw until you draw it.

So what qualifies as an idea? In its broadest meaning, an idea is any thought that gets your pencil moving. Another definition is combining two elements in a novel way. This definition gets to the real power of ideas. Ideas are about creating relationships—about linking things in a fresh way. Your idea can be about anything, but it seems to work best when it's about two things. As the dancer Twyla Tharp puts it, "you don't have a really good idea until you combine two little ideas."

I started this drawing with just the airplane and chorus line. Then I added the guy on the trapeze, then the cowboys, then the horse. I might have gone further, but I ran out of paper.
1. I like to start with loose, tangled sketches or little iconic figures. If it's a subject I've drawn a lot, like these monkeys, I make an effort to draw them in some new way—some new angle or position. If I can think of something I like to add some new element, such as the bicycle.

2. The first sketch leads to a simple idea—a monkey on a bicycle.

3. Continuing to play with the idea, I silhouette the figure.

4. Next, I think about adding a background. I place clouds, a road and... perhaps something precarious, like a cliff.

5. I notice that the cliff looks a little bit like fabric hanging on a rack. I draw the pointed ends and fill in the patterns. This is how an image evolves. A silhouetted monkey on a bicycle, headed for a cliff of decorative patterns was not my original vision. Such ideas may occur now and then, but they're generally too complex, too elaborate to visualize all at once. More often, drawings like this evolve in stages.
joining two bags

Here's another way to think about connecting different things and building fresh ideas. Imagine that you have one bag containing $x$, and another containing $y$. Let's assume that these two items don't really go together, at least not in any obvious way. You need to go beyond logic and into the world of strange, creative associations. What if $y$ was huge and $x$ was tiny? What if $y$ was swallowing $x$? What if $x$ were combined into a single shape? What if $x$ was background and $y$ was foreground? Joining two bags is simply a metaphor for evolving an idea out of two things that seem incompatible using experimentation and creative play.

These two different subjects might be labeled "people" and "face," but you could also call them "persons" (the subject) and "context" (the framework or environment).

I made this drawing for a book I co-authored with distinguished artist Yoshiki Hoagland. Its purpose was to metaphorically show that simple living creatures are themselves made of smaller living creatures (cells) and that, accordingly, each individual cell has a role to play.

In a symbolic drawing such as this, I like to make the elements distinctive. Instead of showing generic people, I put them in recognizable attire and poses. The face is the well-known profile of the late Robert Fisk (doveWheneverNeedHelp).
Making the Familiar New
One of my favorite words is context. I like it because it can never
quite grasp it. It means something like "how the parts fit together
to make a whole." Drawing a strange idiom often means present-
ing familiar content in some new and unexpected context.
That is, the drawing has realistic parts, but they are put together
in an unexpected way. This fresh look stretches the viewer's
imagination.

Unlikely Mixing
Make a list of five objects (including people or animals), such as clock,
expensive, clown, etc. Then make a list of five locations or events,
such as junkyard, circus, theater, etc. Choose one item from
each list and combine them into a simple drawing in some unusual
way. You may want to make some preparatory sketches to work out
your idea. Strive for some believability in your final drawing. Make it
look convincing, no matter how absurd the combination of elements.
Optional, for the adventurous: Make a list of adjectives—such as soft,
ominous, deserted, etc. Choose one from this list and one
each from the other two. Combine all three elements in one drawing
(i.e., just three items).
THE ORIGINAL IDEA
This was my original sketch, done years ago. I kept it because I liked its energetic quality and something appealed to me about birds getting revenge.

CHANGING VIEWPOINTS
A simple way to create a variant is shifting the viewpoint. Picturing how things might look from another viewpoint stretches the imagination.
In this variant, the drama is intensified with a stronger, bolder image.

Bad Company
Pencil

This is what I call a reversal. Logic gets flipped, and elements take on opposite characteristics.

Wind
Pencil

Radical cropping, reflections, and an exotic background combine to suggest an interesting story.

Reflections
Pencil on paperboard

exercise 21

Variations
Do four different variations of a previous doodle or drawing. As you move from one drawing to the next, consider changing one or more of the following: viewpoint, scale, mood, or context. See if you can make each drawing progressively more strange.

Does the man flee something real, or just his own imagination? The birdlike clouds put this story into a new context.

Killer Clouds
Pencil on paperboard
Gidon Staff
Variations on the Face

Gidon Staff draws almost exclusively from his imagination.
One of his major themes is the human face—a subject with
endless possibilities. He has made hundreds if not thousands
of drawings like the ones shown here. Where others might see
sameness, even repetition, Gidon sees subtle and significant,
sometimes even radical differences. True to the spirit of making
variations on a theme, he uses each drawing as a springboard to
try something new on the next. “I look at one of my face draw-
ings and it gives me ideas, such as a new shading pattern, a
stronger expression or even a different kind of hair.”

“Gidon has a poetic fascination with his theme: “A face has
a completeness to it,” he says. “It stands by itself unadorned.
When I draw one, I have a feeling of wholeness.”
can recognize the transition points where one theme slips into another.

THINGS ON FEET...

THINGS ON WHEELS...

YIN/YANG...

HANDS AS SYMBOLS...
Eerie, sinister and beautiful, these sci-fi canines were drawn by combining dog images with motorcycle parts.

Mechanical Dogs
R.J. Smith
Lighting Effects
Clay modeling helps you appreciate the powerful effects of lighting on the mood of a picture. The photographs below of the head show how different lighting can change a piece from comforting to frightening.

The strongly underlit drawing at right conveys a sense of sorcery and magic. To create the mirror image, I made a tracing of the man’s head and then redrew it, flopped, using a light table.
Paradox arises when logic resists what the eye sees. Guy Billout leaves us with a puzzle in this beautifully evocative work. And he adds a sinister touch — a large knife, stuck in the table.
Heinrich Kley (1863–1945) combined brilliant and fluid draftsmanship with a very playful spirit. Here, he offers a metaphorical variation on the novelty of his day, hot air balloons.

A Well-Rounded View
Heinrich Kley
styilizing and symbolizing

Symbolizing seems to involve several types of skills—careful observation, understanding the constraints of the materials, and a sense of the essence, to name a few. The ancient Mexicans had a genius for this, especially in their depictions of animals. The finely carved figures of the rain forests and deserts—lizards, tarantulas, and, especially, snakes—are all elevated to respected status in this art. The remarkable rattle-snak column, below, right, from Chichen Itza in Mexico, is an inspiring case in point. One normally thinks of snakes as curving forms, undulating, rounded and/or coiled. How can these qualities be conveyed in a stack of rectangular blocks? The Mayans solved this by placing the head on the ground and stacking the blocks directly behind it. Then they balanced an overhanging lintel (the cattle) on top of the sketch. From a photograph, inspired the fanciful spin-off drawings on the facing page.

Constraints

This work reminds us of the important role that constraints play on creativity. Constraints often dictate structure. They set boundaries for creative play. The Mayans had to work within size and shapes of the stones they used. In your case, it might be the drawing tool, the time available, or certain choices you make regarding what is being drawn. For example, if I were to draw an arch, the facing page, I tried to imagine everything as made of carved stone.
graceful linearity

Artists have always been interested in the graceful curving forms of nature. The artists of the Art Nouveau style in the late 19th century took this interest to new heights. Influenced by Japanese wood block prints, they translated the world around them into flat patterns with fluid, undulating lines and radical cropping. Art Nouveau was a short-lived but richly creative movement that influenced painting, posters, jewelry design, architecture, furniture and typography.

Here I have focused mainly on the linear qualities of the style. When you draw objects in pure line—especially objects that have soft, blurry edges, like clouds, mist, water or fabric—they are transformed into almost abstract designs. This opens up new opportunities for playful inventions.

As before, I start with simple invention sketches, shown below. As I begin to get a feeling for the style, ideas emerge.

"POSTERIZING"
The Nouveau artists found that poster art was a perfect medium for expressing their interest in flat design, arresting composition and experimental typography.

ROMANTIC IMAGES
Art Nouveau focused on the female. Its themes were romantic, and its compositions were sensuous and graceful, seen in a poster by Louis Hérod.

STYLISTED LINE
Almost every element is drawn in a controlled, graceful line. Here we see decorative possibilities even in steam. From an advertisement for a glove by Alphonse Mucha.

FROZEN ACTION
The careful, linear qualities of this style tend to make the subjects appear "frozen" in mid-action. From a drawing for a cigar box by Carl Otto Czeschka.

NOT-WHOLE SYMMETRY
The Nouveau artists liked to play with symmetry, often approaching and then veering away from it, seen in a drawing, plate by Adolfo Fado.

TANGLES AND OUTLINES
One linear trick employed in this style is drawing the mate lines while eliminating the overlapping lines. This emphasizes the design qualities. Note a similar observation by Alphonse Mucha.
LINEAR MOVEMENT
These Spins or sleighers began to look like human figures, and I began to play with this, merging this with the Louis XIV character at right.

NOT-QUiTE-SYMMETRY
The previous exercises led me to the idea of making a decorative banner. I simply drew the shapes, connecting them as if they were a single piece of cloth. Symmetry has a way of making otherwise chaotic elements look orderly. I used the light table method on pages 68-69 to duplicate the figures, but as you can see, I made the second half slightly different.

EXTREMES NOUVEAU
I drew this Art Nouveau doorways, at left, from a photograph. (Once again, I drew only half of it and then flipped the drawing for the other half.) Then I decided to make a not-quite symmetrical version, at right. Here, I used as much distortion between the two sides, exaggerating and distorting as I drew. For me, this version captured the runaway extensions sometimes found in the Nouveau style.
flattening and posterizing

Many of the Nouveau artists liked to adopt their decorative style to drawing flowers and insects. Even though they executed these subjects in sinuous lines and flat patterns, they prided themselves on careful and accurate observation. This is fertile ground for abstraction: Draw things as in the natural world accurately, but at the same time, emphasize the abstract design. Draw your flowers and insects as if they were posters. Eliminate or subdue the modeling and shading, keeping your forms within well-defined outlines, then try cropping radically—that is, zoom in close, boldly clipping off important objects in your picture.

When you adopt certain features of a style, you can stretch these features over different kinds of subject matter. Try drawing people and animals with these constraints in mind. Then make spin-offs of these drawings. Your results may look nothing like Art Nouveau—which is just as it should be. The style is just a starting point. Creativity then feeds on itself, ideas generate ideas.

In the photograph, the background grate is nearly invisible. In the drawing it almost becomes part of the flowers. This has a flattening effect set against the simple black background.

Here's an example of radical cropping. We see only the center of the flower. And the butterfly is partially out of the picture. Everything looks suspended in time and space.

Strong black outlines create a "cut-out" effect, as if the flowers were two-dimensional. This makes us as aware of the background (the "in between" shapes) as well as the flower shapes.
**FROZEN ACTION**

The lines of Art Nouveau tend to curve and flow. This creates movement by directing the eye around the picture. But this movement is often interrupted by a process known as an occasional line that tends to flatten and halt the image, as you can see at right in the drawing for Tree. Compared with the original preliminary sketch above these cats were almost glued to the tree. This is partly due to the way the cat and branch shapes are fused together with a single outline (see detail). The effect is like a piece of hand-rolled jewelry, as if cats and tree were all made of the same stuff.

**TANGLES**

Here are some spin-off drawings in which I kept the line weight even and eliminated as much confusing detail as possible. It’s fun to draw — in pure line — all of the Nouveau inspired elements, such as cloth, ribbons, maids, tails and legs. Drawings like these take patience — first to make an active flowing sketch, as left, and then to constantly trace it onto a fresh sheet. Some of these took four stes.
Much of the Nouveau style is about keeping the eye busy. These artists gravitated to subjects that offered graceful, flowing lines and intricate, ornate shapes.

It’s fascinating how a change in what you draw automatically shifts what you notice in the world. When I began thinking about Art Nouveau, I began noticing decorative railings and ornate architectural details. I paid attention to hair patterns and growing vines. I stopped to pick up dead insects. I’ve had a studio in an old school building for twenty-five years, and—for the first time—I really looked at the floor grate just inside the entrance, shown at right. I even photographed and then traced it in the small drawing at right, below.

FLOOR GRATE

DECORATIVE HEAD

SWIRLING
This is a phone doodle. I was thinking of shapes like water reflections, or possibly flames. It just happened to turn into a face.

CLEOPATRA
A critic once described Art Nouveau as “spaghetti hair.” I like to do this kind of delicate patterning. Another Nouveau feature is making a distinct contrast between the soft tonality of the face and the linearity of the hair and ornaments. (This face was drawn from the clay model on page 177.)

DRAGONFLY WING

FADING
This tattered dragonfly wing that I found seemed to fit well with a life drawing I had done years ago. This is another example of not-quite symmetry.
SWIRLING SHAPES
A popular Nureyev device is to overlap figures with a cape or fabric to enhance the feeling of movement. I did this first drawing to render a feeling of intensity and passion. In the second spin-off drawing, I emphasized the abstract flow of quality of the shapes.

WAKEN FIGURES
I drew this methodically, slowly, because I liked the strange block of shapes and strong sharp lines. Only later did I notice the resemblance to human figures, and I made the metaphoric drawing on the right.

STYLIZING AND DECORATING

FIGURES THAT MOVE
These drawings by Nureyev are about movement. The line is strong, fluid and direct; the figures curve, bend, and swing. While these were not consciously done in the Nureyev style, they embody its spirit.
simplifying and abstracting

It is not always clear what inspires us. Sometimes it’s something entirely new. Sometimes it’s seeing something that has been in the background for many years suddenly come forward, as if you are seeing it for the first time. This happened for me on a trip to Morocco when I happened to visit an oriental rug makes. Here are a few of the ideas I got from that visit:

1. Symmetry can be beautiful.
2. What appears to be purely decorative can also be spiritual. Within a somewhat rigid format, a tremendous range of creative solutions can emerge.
3. Symbolic meaning can be hidden inside an abstract design.
4. Over time, designs tend to cross-pollinate. Indigenous motifs migrate from one region to another, like a story passed from one teller to another.
5. By simplifying and making objects geometric, the artist can make them disappear into a larger pattern.

On these pages I illustrate how naturalistic objects can evolve into pure decorative designs.
REVERSING AND MIRROR-IMAGING

FRAGMENTING

Detaching elements and spreading them apart tends to flatten the design.

Here I've combined the various "pieces" shown on these pages into a single, integrated design. I recommend this sort of playing with pattern. And I especially recommend it for those who prefer working symbolically. It's a good way to appreciate the role that shape plays in picture organization.

The design was first drawn with a fine-point marker and then filled in with colored pencils.

Symmetry enhances the abstract qualities of a design. Here we have symmetry in four directions. Notice how the motif on the upper-left is nearly "left" in the design.

Much of this kind of work can be done with a computer. Just drawing it by hand turns the art of a light tablet in stone in the spirit of the carpet weavers. And it's always good to develop those few motor skills in your drawing hand.
making the familiar strange

Shortly after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the tribal weavers of the region began turning out carpets with a new kind of imagery. In the place of floral patterns and abstract designs, they wove armored personnel carriers, tanks and helicopters. The first time I saw one of these, I was amazed. A timeless art form was suddenly converted into a current events medium.

Leaving aside the tragedy of this particular war, and of wars in general, the idea that a traditional form might be so freely separated from its roots took me completely out of my box.

The notion that content (the subject of a work of art) and context (in this case, the medium and method of execution) can be detached and removed in unexpected combinations might challenge our sense of appropriateness. The artist wants to be respectful of venerable traditions. And we also want to create. These Afghan war rugs offer a kind of permission to use the carpet format in experimental ways.

I began making "carpet" drawings, abducting from some of my previous work, I drew the subjects, but this time using an Oriental rug template. This usually meant creating a center element, called a medallion, adding corner elements, called sponges, and finishing with a decorative border.

**CUTTING A RUG**

A tribute to the music and dance of the 1930s. A tip to Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers in the medallion.
Panic in the Abstract

I made this design from my drawing Panic on page 135. I simply made the shapes geometric and filled them in with flat colors. Adding color is always interesting because you never know just how it will turn out.

These little secondary shapes are drawn geometrically.

This half outline and frame to the corner in several places.

These abstract border shapes are actually outlined figures.

The source of the design below, Candy Mountain, is a drawing in Chapter 5, Semito-Mountain (Israel and page 129). Here is another example of symmetry in four directions.
decorating

Years ago I made a series of drawings illustrating the verses of The Rubaiyat by Omar Khayyam, translated by Edward Fitzgerald. While they do not directly use the carpet form, they are clearly inspired by oriental rugs and other Middle Eastern decorative elements, such as tiles, calligraphy, and fabrics. I wanted to retain the patient, ornamental quality of carpets or tapestry but with a free, more spontaneous line. To get the right quality, I found some turkey feathers which I turned into drawing quills. The ink line seems to almost draw itself. In a little more than a week, I made several dozen of these drawings. I still like to draw this way occasionally—first creating big, loose shapes, then patient filling them in with decoration.

I can’t say that I fully understand The Rubaiyat; but I have always been attracted to its positive affirmation of life and its stoic acceptance of death. It seems a paradox that as we embrace either of these, the other becomes more available to us.

Ah, make the most of what we yet may spend,
Before we lose unto the Dust ascend—
Dust are Dust, and under Dust, to lie—
Suns Wane, ages Sing, and ages drivel—sigh—

Come, fill the Cup, and in the Fire of Spring
The Waste Emblem of Repentance ring.
The Bird of Time has but a little way,
To fly— and at the hee hee is on the wing.

For want of a broach about, below,
No shadow but a Magic Shadow show,
Play the Axe whose name is the Sun,
Round which we phrenos Figure capel and go.

With them the Seed of Wisdom did me lose,
And with my own hand labour’d it to grow.
And this was all the harvest that I reap’d—
I come like water, and the Water goes.

mining culture

This project has three stages:

1. Immersion: Choose a distinct art style or an art movement that interests you. Visit, if possible, a museum that has a collection of works in that style. Make a series of sketches of, and notes about certain pieces you like.

2. Sketch Off-Drawings: Make a series of free association drawings from your museum drawings. These should add something new and different, subtracting parts and putting them in other contexts. Make them personal and playful—and increasingly radical.

3. Final Drawings: Take three or four of your sketch-off drawings and transform them in a way that gives them a family resemblance. They should be visually related to each other in subject and style. Allow yourself weeks in every month to complete this project. Put a date from time to time and just think about it. Your final drawings should not look anything like the work that originally inspired them. In fact, the degree of difference is actually a good measure of the project’s success.
SIMPLE THEMES ARE OFTEN THE BEST

Rick Bettendorf enjoys sketching everyday objects and architectural subjects. He organizes his arts by inventing themes for himself. Each day for a month, for example, he drew a simple tool or mail from his garage or kitchen. He made the drawings on index cards and mailed them as daily cards to a friend. Each one has a title, such as “The Real Jaws” (pliers) or “Wash Day” (watercolor set), along with a note about the drawing medium used and sometimes a literary quotation.

DRAW WHAT INTERESTS YOU

John Joline indulges two of his central passions, drawing and rock climbing, in his fantasy landscapes. Meticulous and patient, these drawings are rooted in real places, but something about them seems otherworldly. The stones seem cut a little too square, the overhangs are a little too extreme, and the angles are too regular. For most of us rocks are rocks, but Joline is aware of the subtle differences between granite, schist, gneiss and quartzite conglomerate rock. And he is interested in details.

“I have long been intrigued by the fact that when we look out at a scene—if we use our eyes well—we see not [just] a set ofoord, generalized shapes but rather the particulars of a scene with astonishing clarity and in all their overwhelming multiplicity. When we look out from a cliff face at the forest below, we see thousands and thousands of individual trees—not just a few paint-like swatches of color. So in these cliff fantasy drawings, that aspect of vision is also something I am trying to capture—in a sense going back to an earlier, more Renaissance-like awareness and pictorial approach.”
choosing a theme

The best themes are the ones that interest you. This is what the writer Joanna Field refers to as "drawing what the eye likes." There will be some subjects—no matter how strange or eccentric—they may appear to others—that just light you up.

The cartoonist Basil Wolverton (1909–1976) was fascinated by the theme of ugliness. His goofy, macabre drawings of distorted faces are so grotesque they're almost beautiful. Henry Darger (1892–1973) was a self-taught artist and a recluse. As a result of a painful, institutionalized childhood, Darger devoted most of his life to writing and illustrating a fantasy novel about a war between a group of children and adults. Alone in his room, he wrote over 20,000 pages and made hundreds of intricate drawings and murals.

Sometimes the subject itself is less important than the manner in which it is handled. Think of the drawings of Georges Pierre Seurat, in which the edges are all soft and grainy, or the blown-up faces of Chuck Close, in which the grid he uses becomes a tool for abstract exploration.

Some years ago I did an odd, idiosyncratic comic strip featuring a brain on two legs. I was interested in capturing the way various parts of our brain are in dialogue and sometimes in conflict. It was a strange idea, and the results often made little sense even to me. But I enjoyed it—and I learned something about myself in the process.
image-rich themes

I like themes that offer lots of possibilities for imagery. For many years I have made drawings of technology and its effects. I draw images of laboratories, space, war and medical technology, sometimes combined with mythology. I make lots of drawings of people and machines juxtaposed in tension. Because technology impacts almost every aspect of our lives, I am depicting a struggle that is not entirely conscious. Nor is it easy to summarize.

I even did some of these in terra cotta (bottom left). I don’t always know what the drawings are about. But the series—the theme—has a certain coherence. When I look at them as a group, they seem to convey a unified idea.
self-portraits

If you think you have no compelling idea to explore, you can never go wrong with self-portraits. There are many reasons why self-portraits make a great theme, not the least of which is that the model is always available. Some of the greatest painters turned to self-portraits when they couldn’t afford models. Rembrandt painted himself over fifty times during his career. Van Gogh painted himself bandaged shortly after he mutilated his ear. Velázquez, Rubens, El Greco, Goya and others gave themselves cameo roles in large multi-figure works.

Drawing yourself sometimes brings up awkward feelings. Initially you may feel self-conscious and a little intimidated, but once you set up a mirror and start drawing you’ll be amazed at how quickly that self-consciousness disappears. And after you have drawn yourself over and over—in different ways, in different poses, with different expressions—your face begins to seem less like you. It becomes more like a map upon which you can create, which marks the point when you can get imaginative.

How can you stretch and bend this image? Are there costumes, hats or even masks you can wear? What about fantasy backgrounds and exotic settings? How about introducing stark and unusual lighting? What kind of story can you tell about yourself?

And self-portraits can be about more than just your own image. Think of the things that reflect you, like an old car that you have kept for years, your cluttered desk or some objects you have collected.

MAKE UNIQUE BACKGROUNDS

These self-portraits by Alex Pinkerton were made to look like tapestries or Persian Miniatures. The exquisite backgrounds are hand-drawn.

ROMANTICIZE

When George Clugston did these self-portraits, he strongly identified with the hero of Kurt Vonnegut’s novel Slaughterhouse Five. He depicted himself as Billy Pilgrim, an innocent in a dangerous world.
MAKE UNIQUE BACKGROUNDs
These self-portraits by Alex Pinkerson were made to look like tapestries or Persian Miniatures. The exquisite backgrounds are hand-drawn.

ROMANTICIZE
When George Dugan did these self-portraits, he strongly identified with the hero of Kurt Vonnegut’s novel Slaughterhouse Five. He depicted himself as Billy Pilgrim, an innocent in a dangerous world.
EXAGGERATE AND DISTORT

Most of us have strong feelings about turning ugly into ridiculous. It's time to challenge those fears by deliberately drawing yourself in ways you hate. This helps you get some separation between yourself and your work. It will free you up and allow you to take risks.

Here I've drawn an exaggeratedly prune-like me, being attacked by rubber-stamped ants, and in a meditative moment.

THE AMIGOS OF 16TH AVE

USE IMAGES FROM YOUR CHILDHOOD

Old photographs of yourself—particularly those taken of you as a child—offer rich possibilities for drawing. The snapshots from my own childhood are often grainy and out of focus. I like to capture this quality in my drawings. I also like to dramatize these photos by turning them into movie posters. I gave them titles, using the type faces from the posters of the 1950s and 1960s. In some way this captures the larger-than-life factory world that I lived in. Much of my childhood. That's me on the left.
One measure of an artist's daring is overcoming the desire to look good in order to express something personal and vivid. Few artists of any genre are as unflinching about doing this as Robert Crumb, the underground comics icon. Crumb has found a special way—a kind of fantasy autobiography—to creatively express ideas about the absurdity of life.

Most of us think that our lives are too humdrum to use as material for art, but Crumb demonstrates the world of creative possibilities which opens up when such inhibitions are ignored. His work is interesting because it depicts a self-doubting person living the mundane life. This could be any of us. It also reflects the secret need for the spotlight that exists in all of us—even though we really don’t think we deserve it.

Crumb makes no attempt to make himself appear attractive or noble. He often draws his image as a homely caricature, with obsessive thought balloons or neurasthenic musings. He’s quite willing to depict himself in this way to make a point. And it’s not always clear that he knows what that point is.

“I don’t work in terms of conscious messages,” Crumb has said. “It has to be something that I reveal to myself while I’m doing it. Which means that while I’m doing it I don’t know exactly how it’s going to come out. I just have to have the courage to take that chance just to see what’s going to come out.”

**WHY I'M NEURITIS ABOUT MY RECORD COLLECTION—BY R. CRUMB**

1. **I'm fed up with any old naivete. I know why I'm interested in old records.**
2. **I'm not the only one.**
3. **I'm not the only one.**
4. **I'm not the only one.**
5. **I'm not the only one.**
6. **I'm not the only one.**
7. **I'm not the only one.**
8. **I'm not the only one.**
9. **I'm not the only one.**
10. **I'm not the only one.**
VOT YOU LOOKING AT ME? STOP STARING AT ME. LOOK AT SOMETHING ELSE. LOOK AT DER SCENERY!!!
ELIZABETH LAYTON
Drawing the Self and Describing the World

It would be difficult to find a more inspiring story than Elizabeth Layton's. Having endured a thirty-five-year struggle with depression, she took a drawing class at age sixty-eight and learned the technique of blind drawing—drawing without looking at the paper. She credited this process with curing her depression and saving her life. She made over 1,000 self-portraits before she died in the spring of 1993—but they are not ordinary self-portraits. These are statements about life, death, love, fear, hunger, race, war and the numerous other issues that mattered to her.

Increasingly, she used her image as a vehicle for expressing these larger themes. As she put it, "The personal is the universal; the universal is the personal. It goes both ways."

In her short fourteen-year career one can trace the complete evolution of the creative artist: discovering a passion, gaining mastery through practice, and then using both mastery and passion to express an ever-expanding vision. Elizabeth Layton's work is in over 200 galleries and museums. Her own words accompany these examples.

"Her strength is in her principles."

Bottom: November 22, 1966

"People see you on the street and they're used to you being there, and one woman came up behind me and said, 'You're too fat!' and I came home weeping. It really gets to you. ... But this drawing is just watering the flowers... I missed the flowers."

Elois Whitcher September 11, 1977

"It is told that an old Indian, as his time to die drew near, went out, or was put out, from the tepee to the mercy of the elements. Society tends to overlook the productivity that can continue until a person's death. At the same time, it is the responsibility of the old people to be at peace now as they can in whatever ways, for as long as they can. Even a smoke in a smoke. The lessened colors, so are, mean hope. Hope and wisdom go hand-in-hand. Death comes in on the old people. Not something black and ugly but a silver crystallized softness. The name, Hulon Pippins, comes from the clutter of herbs, center foreground, which feed on dead or decaying matter. Each pipe is a ghostlike, very-white, leafless plant. Each stem bears one long, forgetful flower. The plant looks like the stem and bloom of a true pipe. They are helpful in that they are nature's way of clearing up dead or decaying organic matter."

Indian Pipes April 12, 1966
Lewis Carroll's Alice in Wonderland has inspired a host of visual interpretations. Dave Creek drew these unorthodox versions during an intensive one-month period, as a student at Cal Arts. Working primarily from models, Dave made over 200 drawings of the Alice characters and settings. He wanted to convey the strangeness of the original story, which was darker and spookier than the Disney version he grew up with. These drawings mirror the bizarre dream world that Alice tumbles into.

"My drawing is very spontaneous and improvisational. Although I pay close attention to the model, my work often leans toward the abstract. I incorporate shapes and elements that enrich and extend what I'm observing."

![Image of a whimsical scene from Dave Creek's Alice in Wonderland drawings.](image.png)

**DOWN A STRANGE RABBIT HOLE**

This very untypical underground tunnel, complete with stairs and lighting, shown here for the imagination can take an unsuspecting Alice.
DOWN A STRANGE RABBIT HOLE
This very untypical underground tunnel, complete with stairs and lighting.
ALICE
In a pensive mood.

THE NOT-SO-WHITE RABBIT
Like most of us, disillusioning at the time.

THE ROYAL CHAIR
A throne with barely a leg to stand on.

THE QUEEN OF HEARTS
Not the loud, shrieking type of the John Tenniel and Disney versions, but a more cunning and sinister type.
OMAR RUIZ
Creatures From Mars

Omar Ruiz sees drawing as an extension of thinking—perhaps even a form of thinking. So when he chose to visualize the creatures for Ray Bradbury’s sci-fi collection of stories The Martian Chronicles, his first challenge was to eliminate all of his preconceptions about warty, tentacled, bug-eyed Martians and think up something totally new. Fortunately, Bradbury’s descriptions are sparse and mostly implied, so Ruiz felt free to create his own visions.

After collecting a good number of animal photos, he started with feather and hair patterns. From there the creatures just seemed to grow and evolve. He turned the paper frequently, watching the result that new fauna appear when many of the drawings are viewed upside down. In the end he made over 300 drawings. They were exhibited at a major Ray Bradbury retrospective in 2005.
ALAN E. COBER
A Compassionate Witness

Alan E. Cober (1919–1998) was an extraordinary draftsman who won hundreds of awards in both illustration and fine arts. His distinctive pen and ink style was firmly grounded in observation. The drawings on these pages were part of a series he did on old age homes and in the Willowbrook State School for the mentally retarded in New York State. He did them in the 1970s, when people were commonly warehoused in underfunded and sometimes shockingly unsanitary state facilities.

Imagine the level of commitment necessary to take on a project like this—getting permission, establishing trust and rapport with the staff and the residents, overcoming squeamishness about the sights and smells, and most importantly, sustaining the requisite compassion that allows for truthful work. In portraying his subjects with such unflinching honesty, Cober honored and dignified them. He celebrated them as individuals.

In his drawings of the elderly, Cober often added handwritten commentary or snippets of their dialogue. Some of these are poignant; some amusing. The subject at bottom left says, "I traveled to many places but when my wife caught me I was tripped. I never traveled again."

On the drawing below, Cober wrote, "This is one of the drawings that comes to life. I have it so I can see the old man in ..."

Cober went on to illustrate an assignment from The New York Times. They published these drawings...
STEVE COSENTINO
Making a Big Statement

When New York artist Steve Cosentino was offered studio space in the rooftop apartment of a homeless shelter in exchange for painting some murals in the building, he jumped at the opportunity. He spent several years decorating the building with city street scenes and large portraits of the residents—a total of fifteen murals in all. Cosentino got to know many of the residents personally, teaching some of them to draw and employing others as assistants on his projects. When Cosentino learned that the building was being torn down and the homeless were being evicted, he decided to make a statement.

Cosentino used the grid system to transfer and expand a small portrait image onto the 65' x 35' (20m x 11m) rooftop. He created a grid of five-foot squares to scale up his original photograph. For his color palette, Cosentino collected and sorted hundreds of pieces of discarded clothing from the shelter's clothing room. Then he nailed them in place with roofing nails. What emerged—visible from the taller surrounding buildings in midtown Manhattan—was a massive portrait of a homeless man. He titled it in large letters, Human Being.

USING THE GRID
Cosentino used a grid system to transfer and expand a small portrait image onto the rooftop. He created a grid of five-foot squares to scale up his original photograph. For his color palette, Cosentino collected and sorted hundreds of pieces of discarded clothing from the shelter's clothing room. Then he nailed them in place with roofing nails. What emerged—visible from the taller surrounding buildings in midtown Manhattan—was a massive portrait of a homeless man. He titled it in large letters, Human Being.

ADDING THE COLOR
Finally he began putting the clothing in place, tacking them down with roofing nails. This was a time-consuming process, as he had no way of stepping back and looking at his work. Notice how the air conditioners, which look so prominent in this view, all then disappear when viewed from above.

TRANSFERRING THE DRAWING
Cosentino used the grid system to transfer and expand a small portrait image onto the rooftop. He created a grid of five-foot squares to scale up his original photograph. For his color palette, Cosentino collected and sorted hundreds of pieces of discarded clothing from the shelter's clothing room. Then he nailed them in place with roofing nails. What emerged—visible from the taller surrounding buildings in midtown Manhattan—was a massive portrait of a homeless man. He titled it in large letters, Human Being.

THE FINAL PRODUCT
The final piece took about one week to complete. By that time his project had attracted quite a bit of attention from the people in the taller buildings nearby. Someone contacted The New York Times, which did a feature story, and the homeless were evicted, but the building was torn down.

But Cosentino's piece brought considerable attention to the problems of homelessness—and to the power of creativity.
MAYA LIN
Envisioning a Memorial

Maya Lin was a twenty-year-old Yale architecture student when she learned of a competition to design a Vietnam War Memorial to be located in Washington, D.C. She and a small group of graduate students had been studying funerary architecture — monuments erected to honor the dead. So when the competition was announced, she was immersed in the history of the subject. She understood at a deep level the purpose and power of such memorials, knew the desecration moment her conception occurred to her.

“It was while I was at the site that I designed it. I just sort of visualized it. It just popped into my head. Some people were playing Frisbee. It was a beautiful park. I didn’t want to destroy a living park. You use the landscape. You don’t fight with it. You absorb the landscape. . . . When I looked at the site, I just knew I wanted something horizontal that took you in, that made you feel safe within the park, yet at the same time reminding you of the dead . . . . I thought about what death is, what a loss is. A sharp pain that lasts with time, but can never quite heal over. A scar. The idea occurred to me there on the site. Take a knife and cut open the earth, and with time the grass would heal it. As if you cut open the rock and polished it.”

Lin’s drawings for the project are as remarkable in their simplicity as the design itself. The shape, widest at the center and tapered at either end, acts as a visual record of the war. Her idea was to display the names of the dead in chronological order, but in her sketches, she makes no attempt to show the inscriptions or any of the trees, people and background elements commonly included in architectural renderings. Just the black shape of the memorial wall, surrounded by the muted color of the pastels — striking, daring and simple.

Photo: The National Park Service

Yuppe, 1992, Memorial Wall Processions, Joyce Kozloff (Sculptor) & Liam W. Nelson (Artist), located at the Ian University Art Gallery, University Mass. on Boston

A LITERAL AND METAPHORICAL TRIBUTE

The red clouds are reflected in the black water, showing some of the 58,209 engraved names of the dead; the typewriter keys and letters that stand at right mean nothing. The names are arranged chronologically, starting with 1965 — the year of the first draft. The final name appears at the bottom of the wall near the June 1975

Photo: Maya Lin Studio
According to the poet David Whyte, "At the end of your life, the only thing your soul wants to know is not whether you were good, or successful, but whether the life you led was your life. Were the choices you made your choices... were they your failures." And, we could add, "Were they your drawings?"

Who are you? What are you here? What really matters? If there are answers to such questions, I doubt they are found in language. More likely, the answers will reveal themselves in the experience of being fully engaged. This is what "you (that is, all of your ideas about who you and disappear) This is when you are most yourself, most alive.

This is why you and I love to draw. We discover ourselves this way—by doing things we didn’t know we could do, expressing what we don’t fully understand. Begin without knowing the ending. Fail—and exploit the failure. These are the keys to drawing with imagination. And, one suspects, they are also keys to the experience of aliveness."
the power of themes

The examples in this chapter should make clear to you the beautiful, kinetic and reciprocal relationship between the artist and the theme. The artist chooses and executes the theme. The theme inspires and energizes the artist.

A good theme is resonant—one drawing gives you ideas that lead to another. When you work in a series, the perennial question “What shall I do next?” has a ready answer: a variation on the last drawing. Make it alike, but different.

As we have seen from the examples in this chapter, everyone has a unique combination of interests—a unique point of view. (You might say that’s what we are: a unique point of view.) We bring this point of view to life in the themes we choose and the way we execute them.

Exploring a Theme

Do a dozen drawings on a single theme, make them relate visually as well as conceptually. In other words, create a unified look to this work, so that if you displayed the pictures, they would appear to belong together. Choose a theme that you can generate some passion about—something that will hold your interest over time. It affairs some thought, a theme doesn’t occur to you, use the list below to prime the pump. You can take a theme directly from the list, or you can spin off from it. You’ll notice that the list contains not only different kinds of subjects (nude, circus, etc.), but also different kinds of approaches and methods (imagery, shape mergers, etc.). These latter are meta-categories. They could apply just as easily to any subject. Things can get interesting when you combine categories—for example, a subject (musician) and an approach (puzzle pieces). So as you scan this list, look for possible combinations. As you work, display the drawings, and leave them up a while. You can learn a lot by studying your work over time.