

LESSON 4 – VALUES (Lights and Darks)

Right-Brain Warm-Up Exercise

Before we start Lesson 4 on Values, here is another exercise to help you transition into your right-brain mode. I did this in college and think it really helped me to start to “see” like an artist.

Blind Contour Drawing Exercise

Kimon Nicolaïdes, who taught at the Art Student’s League in New York, published “The Natural Way to Draw” in 1941. In one of the chapters he demonstrates the concept of Contour Drawing, which is sketching the contour of a subject by drawing in continuous lines without lifting the pencil from the paper. The



Fig. 4 - 1 Contour Drawing by Egon Schiele

purpose is to develop hand-eye coordination. A contour line is an edge where two forms meet to form a shared boundary. Students’ eyes should move continually along the contour of the image as their pencil moves along the paper, both working simultaneously. It’s harder than you think (thanks to your left brain)!

Similar to the previous lesson’s Upside-Down Drawing, this exercise also integrates well with the right-brain mode. Although the finished drawing often looks contorted or abstract and doesn’t produce a beautiful finished drawing by art standards, it is a perfect exercise for students because it causes the left brain to drop out through frustration and boredom. In doing so, it allows a cognitive shift into the right-brain mode of seeing.

The purpose of the exercise is to improve observation skills such as emphasizing the

whole configuration, discerning the underlying mass, and capturing the volume and shape of a subject, which is made up of smaller details. In doing so, it conveys a three-dimensional aspect since not all contour lines continue along the outlines of a subject. This process helps artists be able to draw any subject quickly. “Contour drawing is an essential technique in the field of art because it is a strong foundation for any drawing or painting. It is widely accepted among schools, art institutions, and colleges as an effective training aid and discipline for beginner artists.”¹

Nicolaïdes recommended students practice “Blind Contour” drawing where the student does not look at their drawing until they are finished. This is the type we will be doing. For this version, you will be drawing your non-dominant hand.

- Complete this exercise in total silence or while listening to music which can help you transition into right-brain mode, a practice that is beneficial in any drawing exercise. Television or conversation can pull you back into verbal left-brain mode.
- It is important to use masking tape to adhere a piece of paper to your drawing board and put it on your lap under the table so you can't peek at your work. If you do, you will slip out of right-brain mode of thinking. Don't worry about how it will look. It will look odd but, again, the purpose is to train your eye to really “see.”
- Set your timer for 5 minutes. Rest your other hand on some kind of support. Don't open your hand. You want as many lines to draw as possible, so bring your thumb and fingers together so your palm will show wrinkles, which is what you will be drawing.
- Focus on one single wrinkle and slowly start drawing just its undulation. As your eyes move, they should match the movement of your pencil. Keep the same pace. Remember, don't lift your pencil! If the edge intersects with another edge, follow that new formation, carefully drawing only what you see. Your pencil should keep pace with your eyes; they should work simultaneously.
- Your left brain will complain loudly saying, “This is stupid,” “I can't see what I am doing!” etc. But be patient and this mental chatter will quiet soon and

¹ “Contour Drawing.” Wikipedia. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Contour_drawing (2010).

you will start to see the beauty of each wrinkle and curve. That is when you have shifted into right-brain mode.

- Remember, don't look at your drawing until the timer rings. You will at first think your drawing looks like a jumble of lines, but your eyes are becoming trained to really notice the lines that are in front of you, even if your untrained eye didn't used to perceive them. The more you do this exercise, the better trained your eye will become and you'll find it easier to draw the lines of any composition you are attempting. When you transition into the right-brain mode, even a boring, rusty lamppost will present new artistic possibilities for your pencil. When you transition again to this state will you recognize it.

Now for our lesson

What are values?

This lesson covers **values** which are the gradations of light to dark in an image. It is very important to see the shading variations in a subject and be able to render them accurately to give a realistic three-dimensional image. We learned about pencil grips in the first lesson which is important for this tutorial. You also practiced drawing basic shapes and blocking in. Now you will learn how to shade by recognizing accurate values or tones.

The human eye sees more in terms of value (dark and light) than it does in terms of color. You look at a landscape and think you know they are trees by their color, but if it was photographed in black and white, you'd still understand that they are trees because of their shape, which is defined by values.

Understanding values is one of the most important things you can do to render a realistic drawing rather than an amateurish one. I can always tell when an artist hasn't learned their value scale because they inevitably render the values too dark or too light in their drawings.

Sometimes color can confuse an artist who is trying to grasp what values the image encompasses. So squinting helps to reduce the details into blocks of value. In fact, squinting is something you will want to do often when looking at your subject.

Values can play tricks on the human eye because one value may look very dark next to a light background, but the same value may look light compared to a dark background. So holding up a value scale to a particular shade is a real eye-opener.

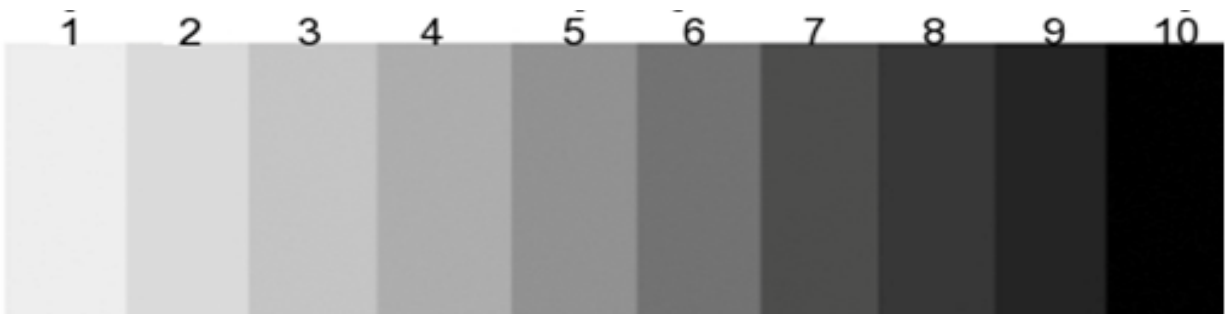
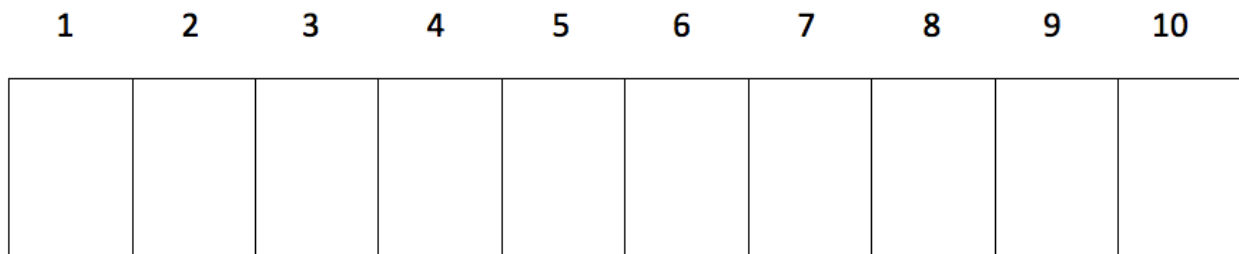


Fig. 4 - 2

A value (or gray) scale is a rectangular card with a series of tones (usually 10) ranging from the very darkest to the very lightest (see Fig. 4-2). Creating your own on a sheet of white cardstock is a valuable exercise and one every art student has to do in college; this familiarizes you with how to achieve those gradations in your drawings with your pencils, which won't be accomplished by simply using a premade scale. (I did a 10-value scale and a 20-value scale with paint as well, so it's critical to understand values if you are going to paint someday.) If you continue with your art instruction, you will undoubtedly hear a teacher refer to, say, a value 5 or value 8. You'll know what they are referring to.

It's actually fun to create. Here's how:

Draw ten 1" boxes next to each other in a line and number them 1 through 10. You can also use the template I provide below this lesson's video.



With the basic tripod grip of your pencil, use an H pencil and very lightly shade the first box for the lightest, almost white value (1) and an 8B for the darkest value (10). Then take a 2B and shade in box 5 with a mid-tone range that you

would estimate is between 1 and 10. Then fill in the rest of the boxes to show a gradation in tone, using Fig. 4-2 as a model. When you're finished, cut it out. You can also use a hole punch to create a hole in the center of each box. This can make comparing values easier.

Once you've made your value scale, you can use it any time you're ready to begin shading. What you do is hold your value scale up to a scene to judge the values as you draw and move it up and down until you find the best match. Squinting will help you compare the value in your subject and the value on your value scale.

When you're using only pencil and not paints, you may wonder how a value scale can help you with a composition that is in color. Even with color, squinting and comparing areas with the value scale can help you determine the relationship between the light and dark areas or see the wide range of values that make up the subject you are studying. While squinting is important any time you're comparing values, it's absolutely crucial when you're looking at color. It helps reduce colors down to their values.

If you are drawing from a photo, you can use a hole-punch or pointed scissors to make a small hole in the middle of each box of your value scale as I mentioned before. If you'd like a hole-punch that will give you a larger hole (which is a little easier to compare, much like larger paint swatches are easier to use than tiny ones), you can purchase one at <http://www.1stopsquare.com/longpunc.html>. Once you've made holes in the value scale, lay the card over the reference photo, with the problem area showing through the hole so you can more clearly see which value is the correct one.

After you have completed one of your own value scales, the pencil will smear with use so you should laminate it or just use the one I have provided below this video's lesson. (The reason I encourage you to make your own, however, is so you learn how to achieve these values with your pencils in your drawing.) It is important to keep a good, clean value scale with you whenever you draw.

Here are some secrets for achieving realistic values in your drawings:

If photorealism is your aspiration, try not to use dark outlines, because there are no lines in nature – only dark and light values butting up next to each other in contrast. You want your drawing to have three-dimensionality, like nature itself. Use light lines to get the basic outline, then define shapes by building up the shading. Your tonal values should be closely observed and drawn well. The background needs to be shaded in fairly early in your drawing to provide contrast so you can accurately judge the proper values for the foreground. Shading is fun, but many amateur artists tend to overdo their values by darkening them too much, which does not render a realistic drawing.

Values Demonstration

Pencil Grips

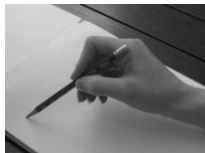


Fig. 4 - 3

Remember in the first lesson I demonstrated the four pencil grips. So far you have probably been using the **extended tripod grip** (Fig. 4-3), as well as the **overhand grip** (Fig. 4-4) and the **underhand grip** (Fig. 4-5), for the beginning stages of drawing.



Fig. 4 - 4



Fig. 4 - 6

However, for shading and deepening your values, you will want to shift to the **basic tripod grip** (Fig. 4-6), where your fingers are tighter and closer to the tip.



Fig. 4 - 5

Iris – Recap from the Block-In



Fig. 4 - 7



Fig. 4 - 8



Fig. 4 - 9

Remember the last lesson on block-in where we started a drawing of an iris (Fig. 4-7)? We practiced doing a basic block-in as the first step using an H pencil to draw light vertical and horizontal axis lines which also gave us our center point. We used the axis lines and frame lines to get the placement of the object correctly on the page and to get the proportions right (Fig. 4-8). Gradually we refined that block-in using more curved lines to define the outline of the image (Fig. 4-9).

Now, in this lesson, I am continuing the drawing of that same iris by focusing on the value and shading.

Iris – Incorporating Values

I will go to the next stage of drawing to show you what steps I take past the initial phase and to illustrate how to build on top of a strong block-in. At this point in the drawing, I would change my pencil to a 2B.

Remember this tip: If you look back and forth many times quickly between your drawing and the subject, somehow any problems in perspective or placement always makes themselves known. You will want to compare often. If you find you are spending more time shading your drawing than observing your subject, when you stand back and look at your drawing, you will see problems in perspective, proportion, or value. Of course, you can also use a mirror as I demonstrated in Lesson 1.



Fig. 4 - 10

When you think your blocked-in sketch is accurate (again, don't rush that initial phase; take your time), you can erase your frame lines. Then squint and you can start to lightly sketch in the large blocks of values, those main areas of lights and darks that are immediately obvious (see Fig. 4-10). After this step you can erase your axis lines.

NOTE: These values probably won't be permanent until you get the dark background in. That area will influence how dark or light you shade the iris. Remember what I said earlier in the lesson: Values can play tricks on the human eye because one value may look very dark next to a light background, but the same value may look light compared to a dark background.

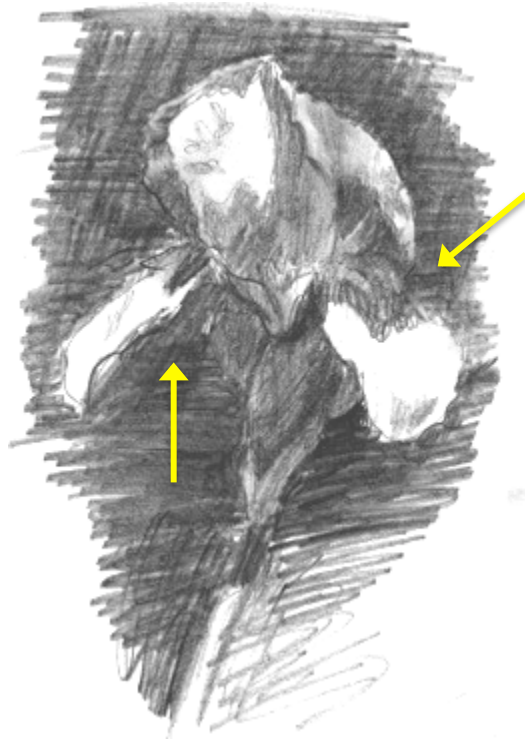


Fig. 4 - 11

I shade in the background with a 6B which gives a nice dark value. As you can see, this difference in value will help you determine how light or dark to make the image. Notice that I have left the pencil strokes unblended. Instead of blending everything in the picture with your finger or tortillon, you may leave some pencil strokes as I did which can add a certain style to your drawing. That is totally your personal preference.

If you squint, you will see that the value difference is not that great between the background and some places on the foreground (like the underside of the iris, see Fig. 4-11). As I continue shading, I am squinting often to make sure the values are not too dark or light.

Now we are returning to the flower arrangement that we blocked-in in the last lesson. If you remember, a loose block-in will entail lightly marking the top, bottom, and sides to keep the image within the frame of the paper, which I call the “frame lines” (see Fig. 4-13), following the same procedure we used for the iris.

Bouquet – Recap from the Block-In



Fig. 4 - 12

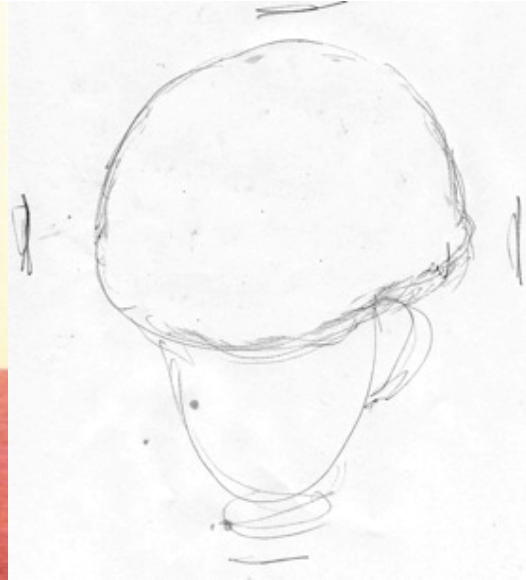


Fig. 4 - 13



Fig. 4 - 14



Fig. 4 - 15

Bouquet – Incorporating Values

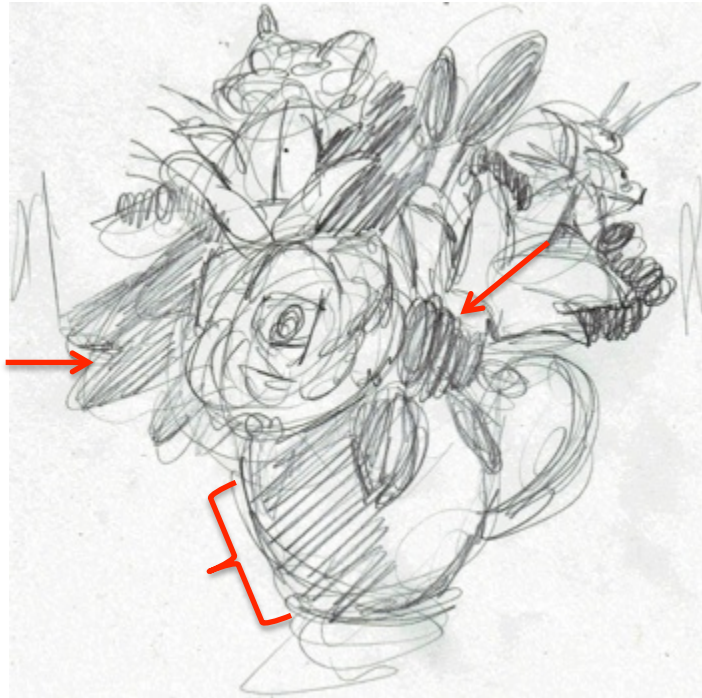


Fig. 4 - 16

I have completed the basic sketch with a light hand, erasing many times to achieve the proper placement while comparing it constantly with the subject. I will then start to lightly shade the shadow areas with hatching marks (see Fig. 4-16). Squinting at the subject helps to reduce the shading to basic shapes. I will not start to shade darkly until I feel everything looks good.



Fig. 4 - 17

Continue to darken values where needed. If necessary, use your value scale. Again, caution: do not over-darken values and make sure you constantly squint at your subject while you finish your drawing. Squinting also helps to reduce unnecessary detail so you can really hone in blocks of value you are trying to represent.

Conclusion

I've emphasized over and over again that if you get in the habit of squinting at the subject and comparing your drawing with the subject often, you will be able to notice where your drawing is "off" and you can make the appropriate adjustments, thus taking your drawing to a more sophisticated level.

There is a certain discipline artists must acquire to keep from delving into dark shading too quickly. The sooner you learn to take your time with each of these preliminary stages and make sure the composition is correct before you start heavy shading, the happier you will be with your drawing.

Another important tip: It's okay to lose some outline where the background is close in value to the foreground or to let the background shading form the outline of the image without a pencil line. See Fig. 4-11 for an example. Note how some of the outline is very faint and the iris seems to fade into the background at these points. These are called "lost lines" and they are integral to many sophisticated drawings because they can make your rendering appear very natural.

Also, if you're drawing on white or very light-colored paper, you can use that to achieve your lightest tones, not even using pencil to shade those light areas. Many amateur artists feel they need to shade every area of a drawing to make it sophisticated and realistic when, in fact, "leaving well enough alone" is a valuable concept to grasp. (It's also one of the hardest to grasp.) If you find you have shaded an area more darkly than it should be, you can always erase to show the white.

Practice Before Next Lesson

- Print out the value scale I have provided to use as a model while you create your own on white cardstock. Cardstock provides durability and strength when you are holding it up to a subject, and it's also thick enough that backlight won't interfere with the values you are looking at.
- Create your own value scale to improve your muscle memory. Even though you may be able to recognize a particular value, you need to practice the right angle and pressure of your pencil grip to achieve it in your own drawing. If you don't have H or 8B pencils for the lightest and darkest

tones, you can use a regular 2B for all of them; you will just have to press lighter or harder to achieve the varying values.

- Take the block-ins you created from the previous lesson (the iris, figurative, bouquet, and lily pond) and follow through on each of them with the principles covered in this lesson.