



# PLAYING WITH SKETCHES

50 creative exercises for designers and artists

ROCKPORT

WHITNEY SHERMAN

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50 CREATIVE EXERCISES FOR DESIGNERS AND ARTISTS

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**Rockport Publishers**

100 Cummings Center, Suite 406L  
Beverly, MA 01915

rockpub.com • rockpaperink.com

# CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION ..... 6

ANATOMY OF YOUR TOOLS ..... 8

**DRAWING CALISTHENICS: 50 EXERCISES ..... 19**

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ..... 184

CONTRIBUTORS ..... 186

ABOUT THE AUTHOR ..... 190



# DRAWING CALISTHENICS / 50 EXERCISES

## 1 | BACK TO BASICS /

### MATERIALS, SHAPES, AND PATTERNS

|  |    |
|--|----|
| 1   Parallel Lines . . . . .                                 | 20 |
| 2   Random Textures . . . . .                                | 24 |
| 3   Frottage (Rubbings) . . . . .                            | 28 |
| 4   Dry Brush . . . . .                                      | 30 |
| 5   Fumage (Smoke Drawing) . . . . .                         | 32 |
| 6   Étrécissement (Reductive Drawing with Erasure) . . . . . | 34 |
| 7   Étrécissement (Reductive Drawing with Paper) . . . . .   | 38 |
| 8   Collage (Additive Drawing) . . . . .                     | 40 |
| 9   Entopic Graphomania . . . . .                            | 44 |
| 10   Tracings . . . . .                                      | 46 |
| 11   Doodling and Mini Drawings . . . . .                    | 50 |
| 12   Sticky Notes Quilt . . . . .                            | 54 |
| 13   Make a Pattern . . . . .                                | 56 |

## 2 | APPLYING THE BASICS /

### MATERIALS, SHAPES, AND PATTERNS

|   |    |
|---|----|
| 14   Make Some Marks . . . . .          | 60 |
| 15   Bundled Tools . . . . .            | 62 |
| 16   Found Objects . . . . .            | 64 |
| 17   Nondominant Hand . . . . .         | 68 |
| 18   Character Silhouettes . . . . .    | 70 |
| 19   Image Harvesting . . . . .         | 74 |
| 20   Draw on Your Walk Home . . . . .   | 76 |
| 21   Collaborative Patterning . . . . . | 78 |
| 22   Cubomania . . . . .                | 80 |
| 23   Möbius Strip Drawing . . . . .     | 82 |
| 24   Draw a Process . . . . .           | 84 |
| 25   Diagram an Object . . . . .        | 88 |

## 3 | SETTING GOALS

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| 26   Five-Minute Drawings . . . . .     | 92  |
| 27   One Day, One Theme . . . . .       | 96  |
| 28   Map Your Day . . . . .             | 100 |
| 29   Cultivating Your Culture . . . . . | 102 |
| 30   100 Monsters . . . . .             | 106 |
| 31   365 Days of Drawings . . . . .     | 110 |

## 4 | CONCEPTUAL BASICS / WORDS AND LETTERS

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| 32   Construct/Deconstruct (Letter) . . . . . | 114 |
| 33   Blind Drawing (Word) . . . . .           | 116 |
| 34   Channeling Matisse (Text) . . . . .      | 118 |

## 5 | CONCEPTUAL APPLICATIONS / WORDS AND LETTERS

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| 35   Digital Collage (Letter/Word/Text) . . . . . | 120 |
| 36   Letter as Object . . . . .                   | 126 |
| 37   Word Chain . . . . .                         | 132 |
| 38   Word Stacks . . . . .                        | 134 |
| 39   Ludicrous Lists . . . . .                    | 136 |
| 40   Everyday Lists . . . . .                     | 138 |
| 41   Dream Résumé . . . . .                       | 142 |

## 6 | SKETCHBOOKS /

### CHALLENGE YOURSELF AND COLLABORATING WITH OTHERS

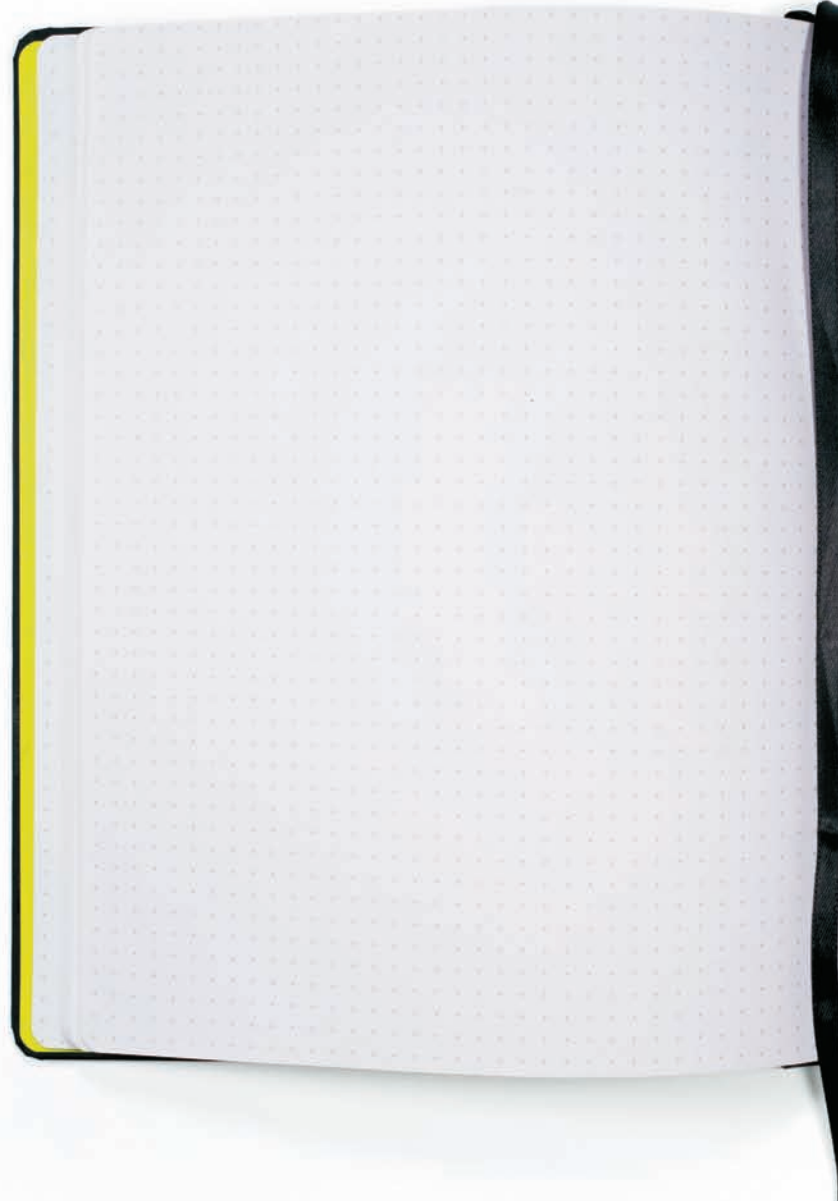
|   |     |
|---|-----|
| 42   Sketch Share . . . . .               | 144 |
| 43   Collaborative Sketchbook . . . . .   | 150 |
| 44   Used Book Sketchbook . . . . .       | 152 |
| 45   Alphabet-a-Week Sketchbook . . . . . | 156 |
| 46   Nature's Alphabet . . . . .          | 162 |
| 47   Sketching Covers . . . . .           | 166 |
| 48   Sketching from the Masters . . . . . | 168 |
| 49   Sketching from Film . . . . .        | 174 |
| 50   Giving Back . . . . .                | 178 |

# INTRODUCTION

I do love to draw and I'm sure you must, too; otherwise, why crack the spine of this book? Being an illustrator gives me good reason to say I love to draw, yet I also love design. Let me draw on graph paper, let me draw the label on this package or the cover of that book. I never questioned the melding of drawing and design, so it is no surprise that this book is for me to write and for you to read and use!

As a child, I always drew. During college, I took a lot of drawing courses. Although I had planned to major in graphic design, and had applied to schools for this—and been accepted—I was not a design student in the strictest academic sense, and I ultimately majored in photography. Soon after graduating, I found myself regretting my decision because I was now meeting many new people excited about and involved in design. And it was through them that I ultimately had my first education in design. They were my tutors, my mentors. Alongside this occurrence, and without a darkroom of my own, I turned away from photography and went back to drawing as a way to get ideas in real form. It was cheaper to draw on paper than to shoot and process film.

In my early professional years I held several positions integrating both graphic design and my drawing skills: greeting card artist, advertising art director, packaging designer, graphic designer for public television, and publications designer. Starting out professionally in a pre-digital world, it helped to be able to draw. Most design comps were made by hand. There was no output on a nice color printer. I could articulate concepts with marks that conveyed my ideas. These skills were assets to my job quests as well as to my personal, creative well-being.





Over time, I also became interested in teaching—that thing where you take what you know, analyze the “how” and “why,” and synthesize the information into something transferrable, understandable, and inspiring. I’ve taught both design and illustration subjects for long enough that I have my own ideas about drawing—what it represents as an activity, what form(s) it can take, and what it means as a vehicle for communication.

I have taught design students who would say, “I can’t draw,” when what they meant was, “I can’t draw like an Italian, French, or Flemish master!” This is probably true, and frankly it is not the real issue when it comes to the world of design. What is needed is good visual communication. Idea building through drawing can do this, especially if you accept a broad, maybe even different definition of drawing.

Please don’t confuse this book with one that is meant to teach you rules. This book doesn’t teach rules. It is calisthenics for your hands and mind, to help you break away from your norm to create a new way of thinking and mark making, and to give you permission to explore and make mistakes. Like the title of this book says, if you use this book, you will be playing while expanding your creativity and concept development through drawing.

In addition to the exercises, this book starts with a section on some artists and their resources. This section gives inspirational and practical information on their drawing tools, and insight into how they blend materials with their concept-making skills, augmenting the work by contributors to the book.

**WHITNEY SHERMAN**  
Baltimore, MD

# ANATOMY OF YOUR TOOLS

When it comes to drawing tools, your choices range from varying grades of hard to soft pencils; pens that require dipping or have ink encapsulated in them; brushes of all shapes and sizes; inks that have the sensuality of Sumi or the lacquer hardness of India; and a wide assortment of papers, from hot press to cold press, either loose or bound in a sketchbook. And that doesn't even begin to scratch the surface of nontraditional tools of found materials, the digital world, and more!

The tool you choose has a lot to do with the type of work you do and the temperament of your hand. After years of practice, you discover intuitively which tool feels right in your hand and which makes the marks that suit you best.

No one knows this better than Bill Turner, the Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, web applications developer who loves to sketch and calls himself "a bit of a pen and notebook nerd." Turner has been fascinated by the weblog *Comic Tools*, where various comic artists were asked about the tools they used to create their artwork. He was disappointed when the interviews stopped, but later he was spurred on by Danny Gregory's book *An Illustrated Life*, where the same types of questions were being asked. "It showed me how many ways artists can express themselves with a wide variety of tools," says Turner, and so he started his own blog called *The Tools Artists Use*. The beauty of this site is Turner's interest in linking information about drawing tools. Within each interview, he tags specific tools mentioned by the interviewee, then adds a hot-linked chart at the end of the interview that links you to any other interview on his site mentioning the same tool as well as to providers when possible.

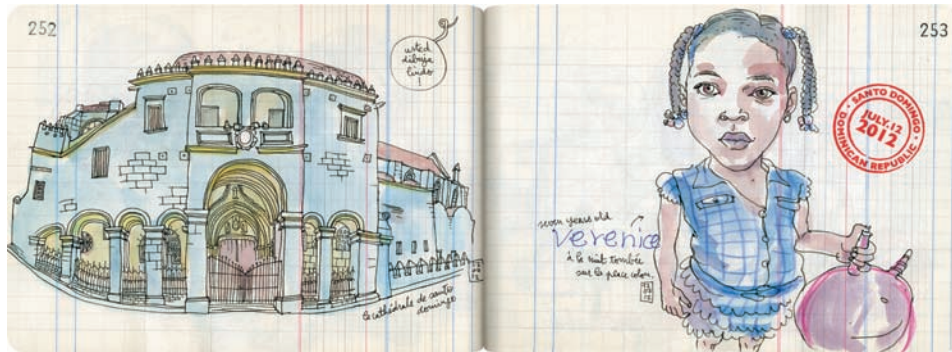
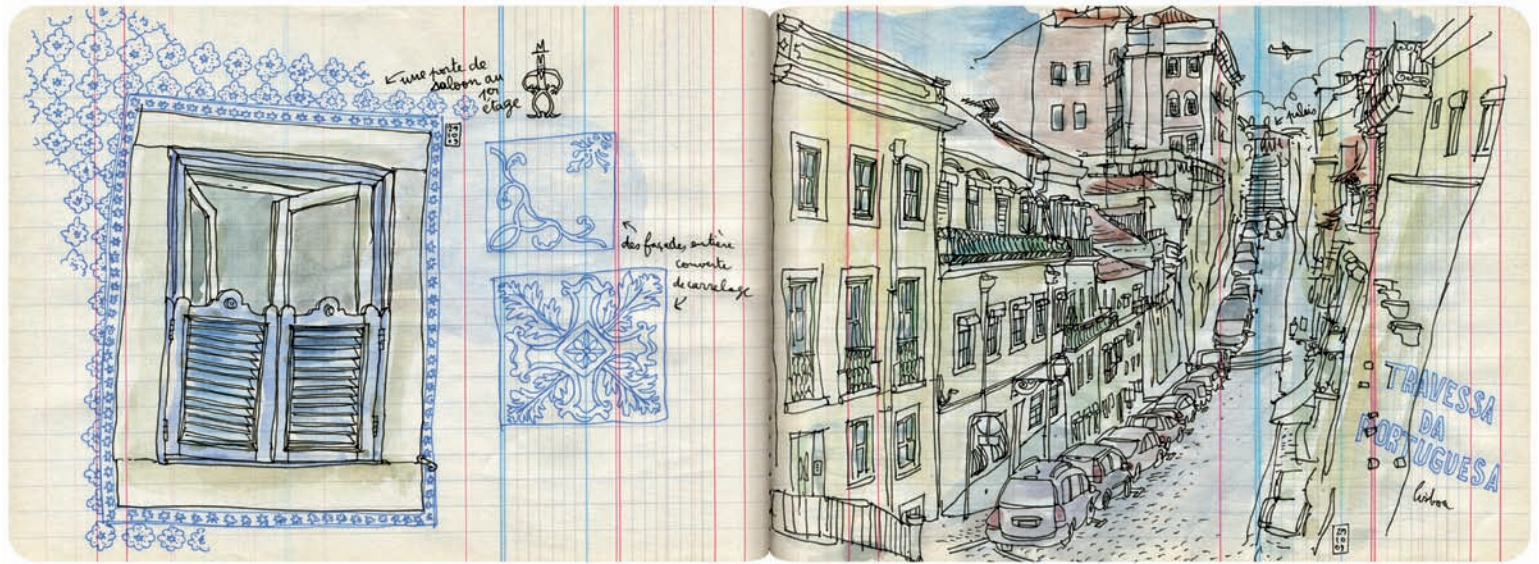
Here are four artists that Turner interviewed talking about the anatomy of their tools, followed by examples of five other artists whose work reveals something about their material and tool choices.

## LAPIN

For this French illustrator, artist, and urban sketcher who alternately lives in Barcelona and Paris, a black ink pen has become his principle drawing tool. He has tried many brands, but he finds the Uni Pin 0.1mm is his favorite. It's indelible. He also uses red and blue Edding 1800 ink pens for drawing logo-

types or lettering, and a gray Copic Multiliner. When it comes to liquid media, he uses a tiny, travel-size box of Daler Rowney fine watercolors (eighteen quarter pans) and Pentel or Kuretake water brushes. He carries two water brushes "to give enough autonomy for an intense sketchy day!" and four water brushes filled with liquid watercolors: yellow, blue, magenta, and orange. Lapin finds this arrangement useful, especially for night sketches. He occasionally adds colored pencils or some colored wax for emphasis.





## LAPIN

**01** These two sketches from Lapin's daily blog show the tools he used to create his urban sketchbook imagery.

**02** Lapin's drawings move between an emphasis on line and an emphasis on color, as seen in these drawings from Lisbon, Portugal, and Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic.

**03** The structured page designs of Lapin's vintage accounting books impart a distinct contrast to his loose ink and watercolor drawings. The covers are also beautiful to look at.

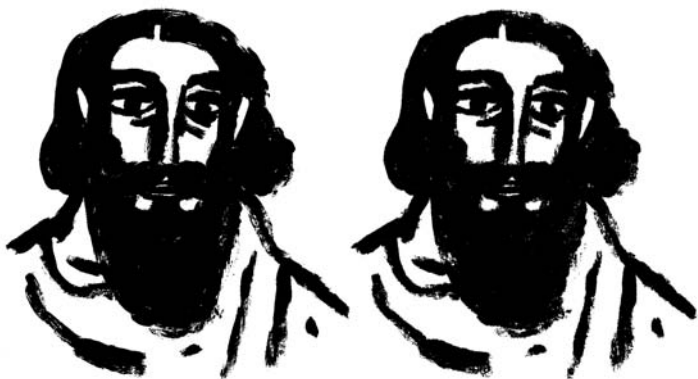


**03**

## ANATOMY OF YOUR TOOLS

### MIKKEL SOMMER

The Danish illustrator Mikkel Sommer is spartan when it comes to drawing tools and materials. Now living and working in Berlin, he makes his drawing philosophy and use of tools all about efficiency. To get the immediacy of line he prefers, he uses H2 or Prismacolor Col-Erase pencil for sketching, and B2 or B4 leads, usually in a mechanical pencil, for more accuracy during cleanup. “I can draw fast and dynamically with that,” he explains. He also makes sure that his tools don’t require much pressure—his wrist is on the weak side at times. Sommer also employs a cheap retractable Bic pen. “They have a nice, soft feel to them, but they run out of ink pretty fast,” he notes. Although not adverse to pens, Sommer is very selective about what type of pen he uses. “Microns really cripple my lines, so those don’t work for me at all; I’ve always liked the look of nib pens, but (they are) something I really need patience for,” he says. All in all, Sommer is looking for speed and freedom.



01

A close look at Sommer’s line work shows a vitality one can only achieve through tools that have tool-to-paper flexibility and allow him to work “as freely and as wildly” as he can with pencils and brushes. Currently, he is using a synthetic Da Vinci brush and thick ink to get the lines he wants. In Sommer’s world, the deadline and type of project dictate how much digital finessing is done. To make adjustments to his line work, Sommer uses a Wacom tablet and Adobe Photoshop. Most of the values and textures in his work are made

during the drawing process, giving him less to add during his coloring process. “Right now, doing comics, it’s all about efficiency, producing pages fast that I’m still for the most part satisfied with,” he says.



02

## MIKKEL SOMMER

**01** Mikkel Sommer's sketch titled *Jesus Look Alike* is an example of the speed and freedom so important to his work.

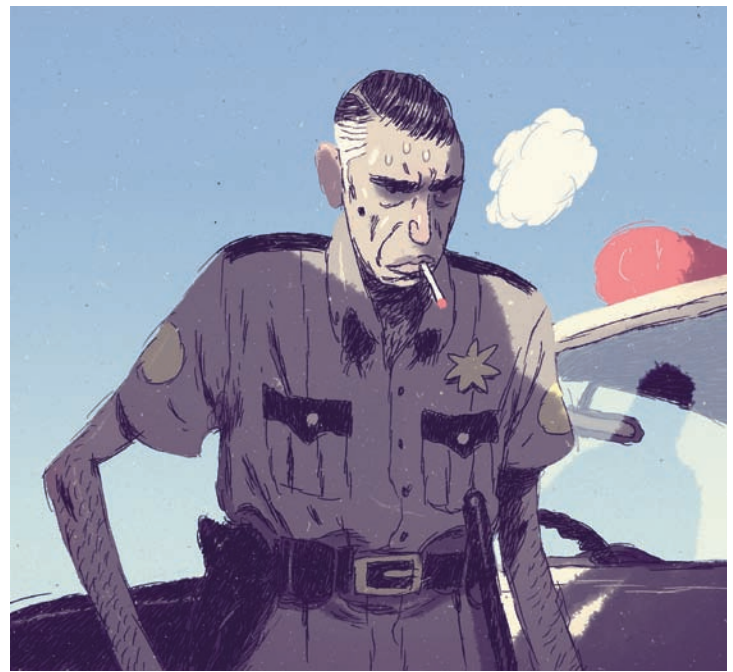
**02** In this single page from Sommer's artwork for John Tierney's comic *Spera Volume II*, notice how he has colored his line work a reddish brown. This helps it sit back in the composition and blend into the color fields of the figures and background objects. The line work in this piece was drawn digitally.

**03** These two examples of Mikkel Sommer's work titled *Katamari* and *Dog* show both his use of brush and ink and his digital coloring.

**04** This side-by-side comparison of Sommer's illustration *One Cop* shows how retractable ballpoint pens are the right choice for line work that will eventually be colored. Sommer also strategically uses texture within his digital painting and pays special attention to not overworking his line work.



03

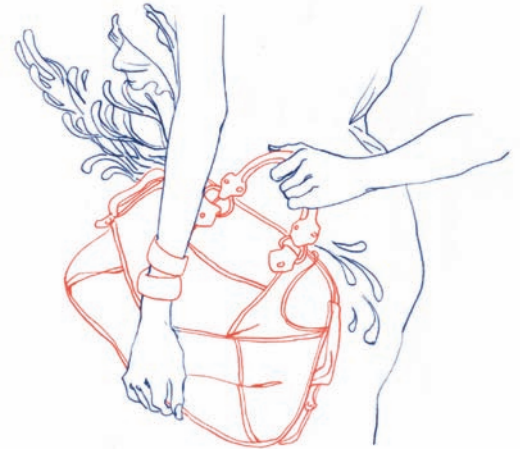


04

## ANATOMY OF YOUR TOOLS

### MARGUERITE SAUVAGE

Artist/illustrator Marguerite Sauvage is originally from Paris and now lives in Sydney, Australia. Her two favorite drawing tools are a 2B 3mm thin pencil and a 21-inch (53.3 cm) UX Wacom Cintiq display. She recently discovered the pleasure of working on a Cintiq screen, finding it to be a natural and fluid tool far surpassing any other graphic tablet given its direct-to-screen capabilities. The adjustable armature allows for many different positions of the display, from 10 to 65 degrees tilt, and rotates a full 180 degrees in either direction to enable drawing on different sections from different angles. Sauvage says, “Like my 2B pencil, my Cintiq is just an extension of my body now!” That said, she wants to emphasize that her drawings are never purely digital. Sketches and line work are always done in pencil and/or pen.



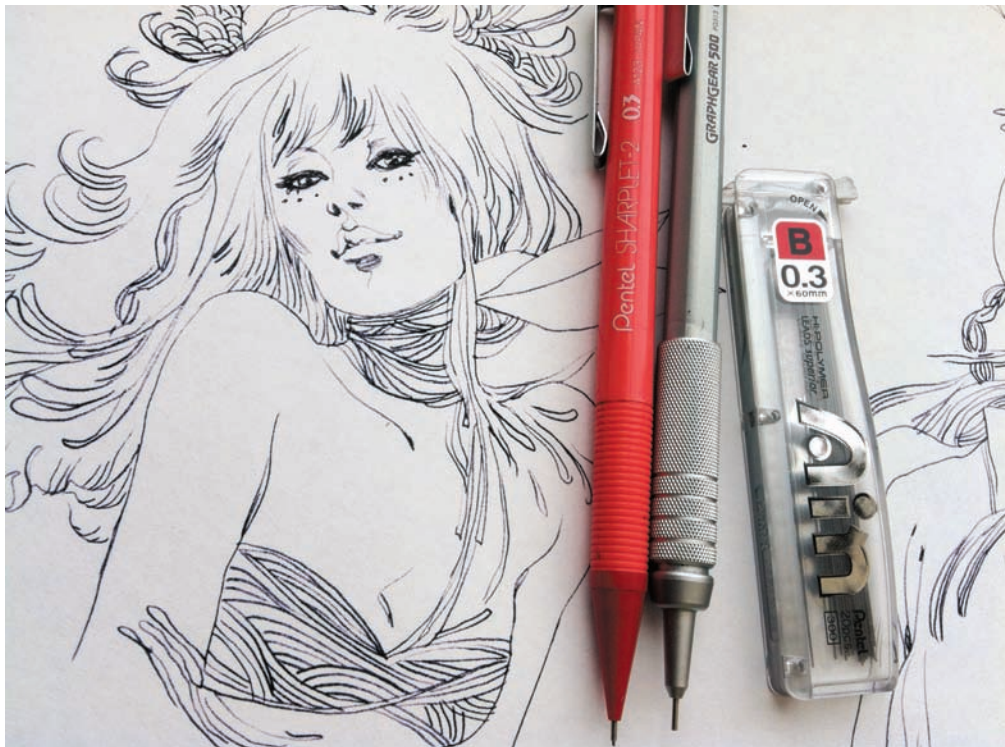
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## MARGUERITE SAUVAGE

- 01** These three examples of Marguerite Sauvage's line work show how she uses her sketchbook for traditional drawing practice: the intelligence of selective line work in the work produced in partnership with the pen manufacturer Bic; in her personal piece titled *Sonia*, printed for sale by Arte Limited; and on objects such as cushions by ClickforArt.
- 02** This digitally colored image, for the Grimes concert poster at the Rock en Seine Festival featured in the Paris Métro, shows how Sauvage's well-planned line work and use of selective color make this image graphically powerful, yet full of descriptive detail that comes to the viewer's eye on second glance.
- 03** These photographs give an up-close view of Sauvage's handwork as well as her tools. The works were produced in partnership with an artistic website sponsored by the pen manufacturer Bic. It's worth noting how confident her line is and how well her tools help control the quality and consistency of her lines. Colors from markers maintain vibrancy in her illustrations.



03

## ANATOMY OF YOUR TOOLS

### LUCIANO LOZANO

Luciano Lozano, a graphic artist and illustrator living in Barcelona, Spain, loves a simple black pencil. He also uses acrylics, pen and ink, watercolor pencils, and sometimes watercolor crayons. Lozano's palette is minimal except for a few colors that accent his muted palette. Although in the past he utilized digital techniques to create work, these days he is feeling a pull back to traditional media, to mark making and the evidence of the hand.



01



02



## LUCIANO LOZANO

- 01** Luciano Lozano's sketchbook and quick drawing show an eye for sparse but well-designed compositions. This shows his use of a simple black pencil. It is playful, yet examines the relationship of figures within space.
- 02** *March* is a calendar poster created using Adobe Photoshop, but made to look like paint. The blend of texture in the background and flat colors for the smaller figurative details are harmonious in large part because of Lozano's use of a limited palette.
- 03** *September in Barcelona* has all of the immediacy of Lozano's sketchbook pages shown earlier.
- 04** In this image titled *Lhasa*, you can see evidence of Lozano's hand in the lines and textures. Tones, smudging, textures, and transparency are key elements of this emotionally charged image.

03



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## GUIDO SCARABOTTOLO

01 Guido Scarabottolo's charming and curious mixed-media painting, a calendar illustration, shows how fluid brushwork and a freedom of imagination are the best tools to have. "I always use very simple tools: a pencil, a pen, or a brush. In this case, I used a brush pen with ink cartridge for the main figure," Scarabottolo notes. The small ducks at the bottom are made by pencil, and the birds placed between the figure's horns are scans from a color painting by Cristina Piccioli, "a longtime friend and charming artist."



01



02

## ANDRÉ DA LOBA

02 Illustrator André da Loba calls himself an artist and a reluctant poet. This exhibition installation, titled *Cabinet*, contains works on wood, papier-mâché, metal, and cardboard. The materials were salvaged and were selected to reference his relationship with his adopted city of New York. "I would go out on recycling day and find cool pieces of wood, metal, and lots of cardboard. I found real treasures," says da Loba.

## MARTIN HAAKE

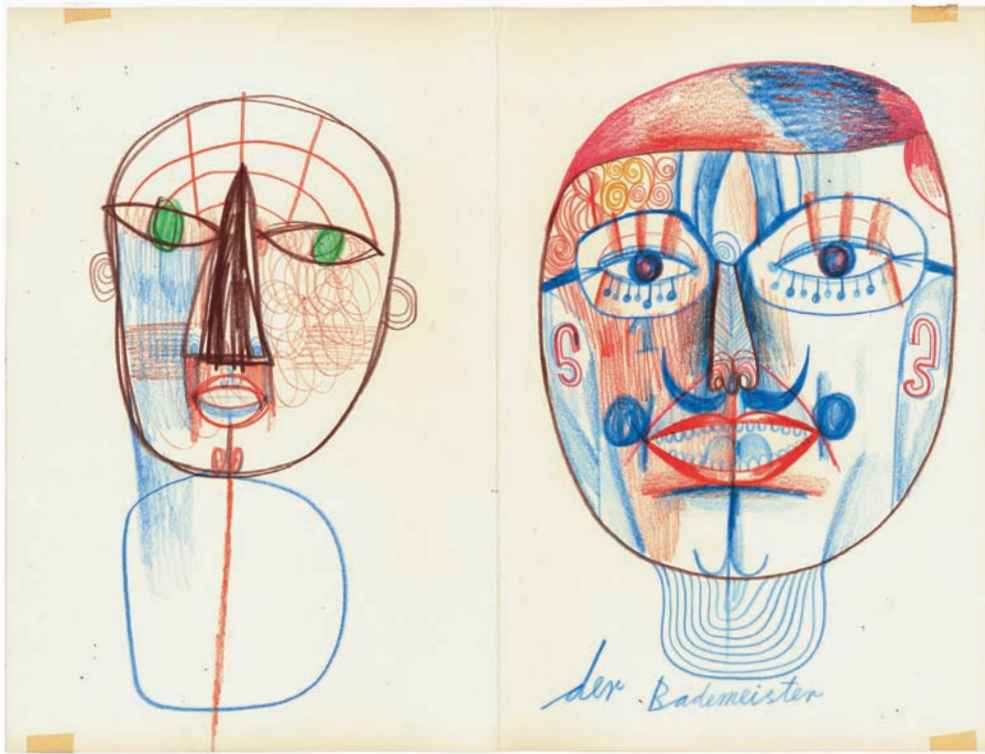
03 Martin Haake's sketchbook reveals high-energy use of colored pencils. Although Haake doesn't use colored pencils as his primary material for his illustrations, they are excellent tools for making quick, expressive marks.

## MATT LYON

04 Illustrator Matt Lyon created this piece titled *DeSalvo* as a self-portrait originally made in 1993. It contains a layering of materials and line work. Lyon's graphically driven white acrylic paint line work mimics fog or clouds, and obscures his face. His use of graphite on paper, a black-and-white photocopy, tracing paper, and tape achieves an ethereal effect. Pen and ink line work helps set the shoulders of the figure on the ground.

## CAROLINE TOMLINSON

05 This collage by British illustrator Caroline Tomlinson, titled *Prom*, was created digitally. She used vintage photographs and postcards for the key elements, including the beautiful handwriting that is used as a texture. Hand-painted and hand-drawn marks are made, then collaged into the piece. Tomlinson tries to make sure her images don't look too digital. Adding just enough hand-painted elements helps prevent that.



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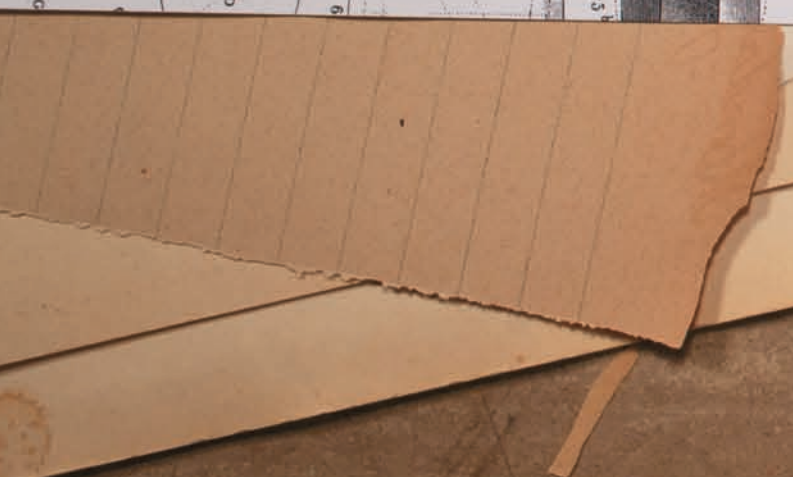
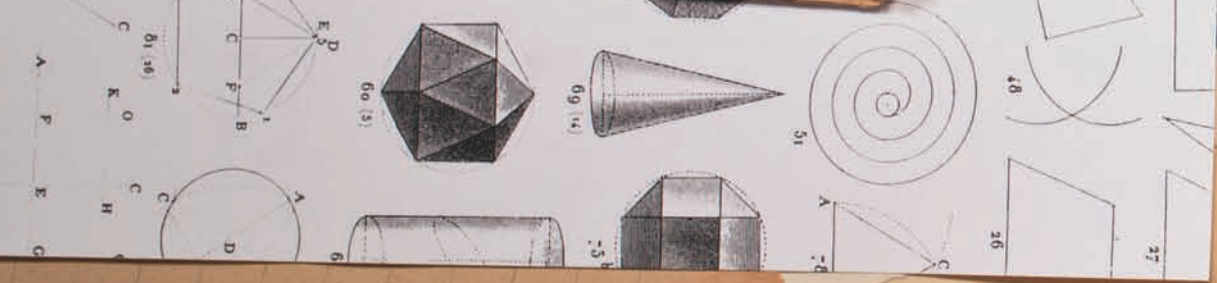
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# DRAWING CALISTHENICS

50 EXERCISES



# 01. PARALLEL LINES

When I started art school, I had a Yale-trained drawing teacher, Michael Economos, who was persistent and demanding. Even before entering the class, I knew what I was in for. His reputation for hard work and relentless exercises preceded him. And so here is his first exercise—the one that we did for almost four weeks, the one that made us mentally salivate for an organic shape to draw, the one that made me a better drawer!

## MATERIALS

18 x 24 inches (45.7 x 61 cm) pad of high-quality drawing paper

Sharp #2 pencil

## STEPS

- 1 Starting at the top of the page, carefully draw a single line from left to right. Make the line as straight as you possibly can. If it's not straight, don't worry; this will improve over time.
- 2 Next, directly below it, draw a line parallel to it. Make the space between the lines about the same size as the thickness of a pencil line. Third, draw another line parallel again, but make the space between line two and line three slightly larger than that between line one and line two.
- 3 You can see the pattern emerging. You will now draw line four, then five, and so on until the entire page is covered top to bottom.
- 4 Concentrate on the spacing between the lines as well as the straightness of the lines. This exercise can be taxing and you can soon feel bored, but if you break through that wall, stick with this exercise, and practice it for a long time. The improvement in your hand control will be noticeable, and mastering this is a precursor to mastering tonality.

## VARIATIONS

- Scale the paper sheet size down to 9 x 12 inches (23 x 30.5 cm), then move up to a larger size paper.
- Do this exercise using a coil rather than a straight line, and rather than increase the space between the lines, increase the height of the coil.
- Use your sketchbook to make mini versions of this exercise.
- Do the exercise as a daily calisthenic before starting work.

The following are examples of work that utilize parallel lines as a visual device.