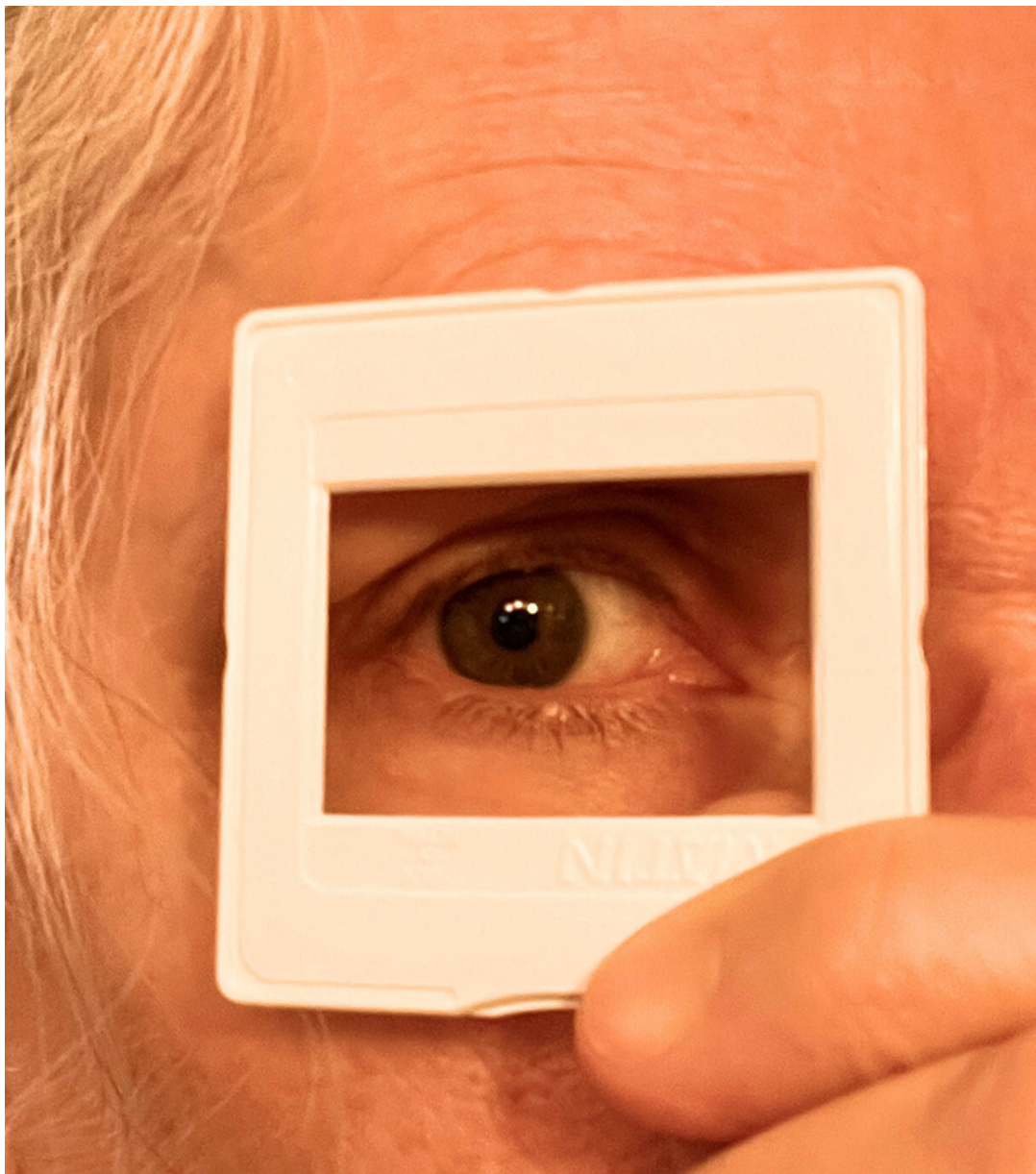


LINDA CHIDO ART Learn

How To See Like An Artist

one tool and three simple exercises to improve your drawing skills



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Drawing is 90% learning to see and 10% making your hand do what you want it to do.

Looking is a physical act; seeing is a mental process of perception. As an artist, seeing involves recognizing the information the eyes take in and then translating that information into an artwork. This requires time and attention. As Georgia O’Keeffe once said, “to see takes time”.

There is a difference in how artists and non-artists see, which accounts for the difference in artistic ability. Artists focus on the whole visual field rather than individual objects. This allows them to see details that non-artists would miss. With enough training though, anyone can develop this ability.

As an artist, developing your ability to see is just the first step in creating visual art. The next step is learning how to translate what you see into drawings or paintings, which requires a certain language. Art has its own unique language that you must become proficient in to become a visually literate artist. Learning the vocabulary of seeing involves training your eye to observe specific details such as lines, shapes, and the interplay of colors and shades. By doing so, you can effectively communicate your artistic vision to your audience and create works of art that are both visually striking and meaningful.

To start on the path to achieving that objective, we begin with a simple tool – the picture frame.

The Picture Frame

We've all seen artist and photographers do this:



What are they doing? They are framing what they see. Framing is a composition technique that allows us to focus our attention on a smaller part of what we are seeing and block out other parts of the scene that may be distracting.

Once we have chosen what will be in our picture frame, we begin to break down that image into its component parts: lines, shapes, values, color, texture, space and form. These seven elements are considered the foundational components of any piece of artwork. We are going to concentrate on four of those elements in the following exercises.

First, we need a picture framer. You can use an old slide mount, or you can make your own.

How to Make a Picture Framer

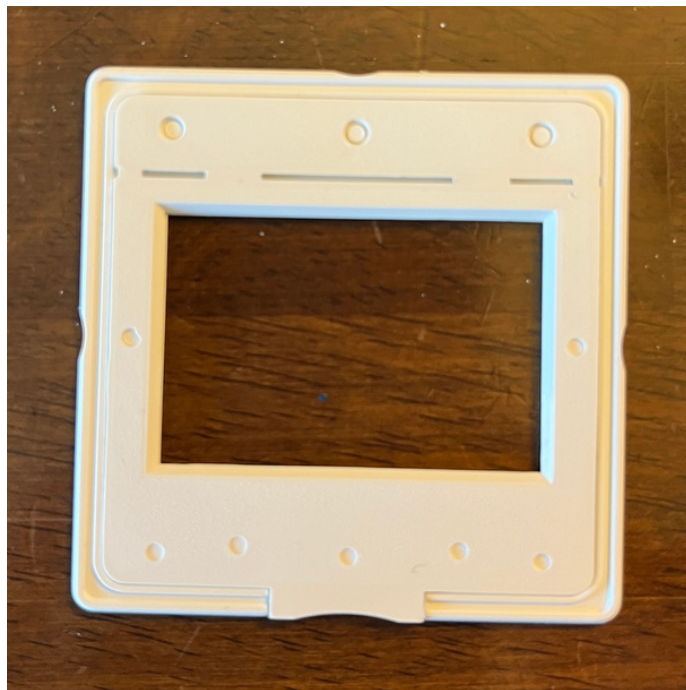
Supplies:

- paperboard (like a cereal box or a file folder)
- scissors or an x-acto knife
- ruler
- pencil

*I'm using an old slide mount.

Instructions:

1. Cut a square out of the paperboard approximately 3 inches by 3 inches
2. On your 3x3 inch square, measure a $\frac{1}{2}$ inch border on all four sides
3. Cut out the inside square



Line & Shape

Most artworks begin with a line. **A line is simply a mark that spans a distance.** A line denotes the path of a point moving through space, or as Paul Klee says, “a line is a dot that went for a walk”.

There are many types of lines in art. A line can be a mark drawn on paper, it can be three dimensional like wire or string, or it can be implied, like a dotted line to show the flight of a bumble bee.

A line has width, length, and direction. It can also have emotion, depending on how it is made. Lines can be described in many ways: thick, thin, short, irregular, curving, broken, bold, delicate, graceful, jagged, etc. And even though we have all of these words to describe lines, technically, there are only two types: straight and curved.

Lines are essential to depicting and defining shapes. **A shape is simply an area enclosed by a line.** Shapes define objects in space and have two dimensions, height and width.

Shapes also only have two types, geometric and organic. Geometric shapes are squares, circles, and triangles. Organic shapes are free-flowing and typically irregular or asymmetrical. Organic shapes are typically found in nature.

It is important to remember that shapes also have positive and negative aspects. Positive shapes are the actual object you are attempting to draw – house, dog, tree. Negative shapes are shapes that form around the positive shapes. When drawing, it is important to be able to see both types of shapes. The better you can see all of the shapes in your composition, the more accurate you will be able to render that composition.

Exercise One: Line & Shape

Supplies:

- Pencil
- Paper
- Your picture framer

Find a scene you find pleasing. It can be outdoors or indoors. I chose a scene in my backyard:



Once you've decided on your scene, take your picture framer and hold it up in front of your eyes. Look at your scene through the framer. Find a composition that you find pleasing. This is what you are going to draw. **Make a mental note of what you are looking at because you are going to be referring back to it often.**

Looking through your finder at your scene. Note all of the different shapes you see.

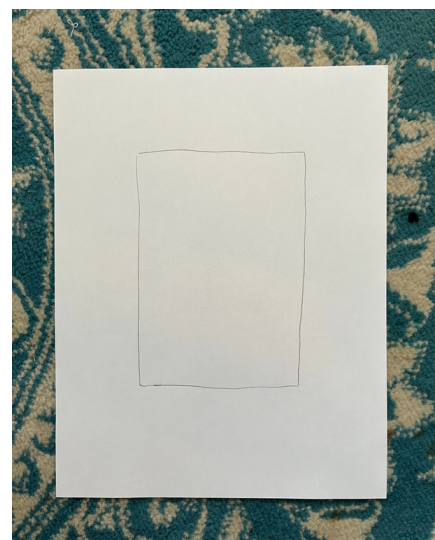
We're just looking for the major shapes right now, no details yet. The major shapes are the ones that really stand out – the big shapes.

Once you feel you've studied your scene thoroughly, it's time to prepare your paper for your drawing.

Important: if the inside square of your picture viewer is actually rectangular, note if you are holding it in landscape orientation or portrait orientation. This will be important for the next step.

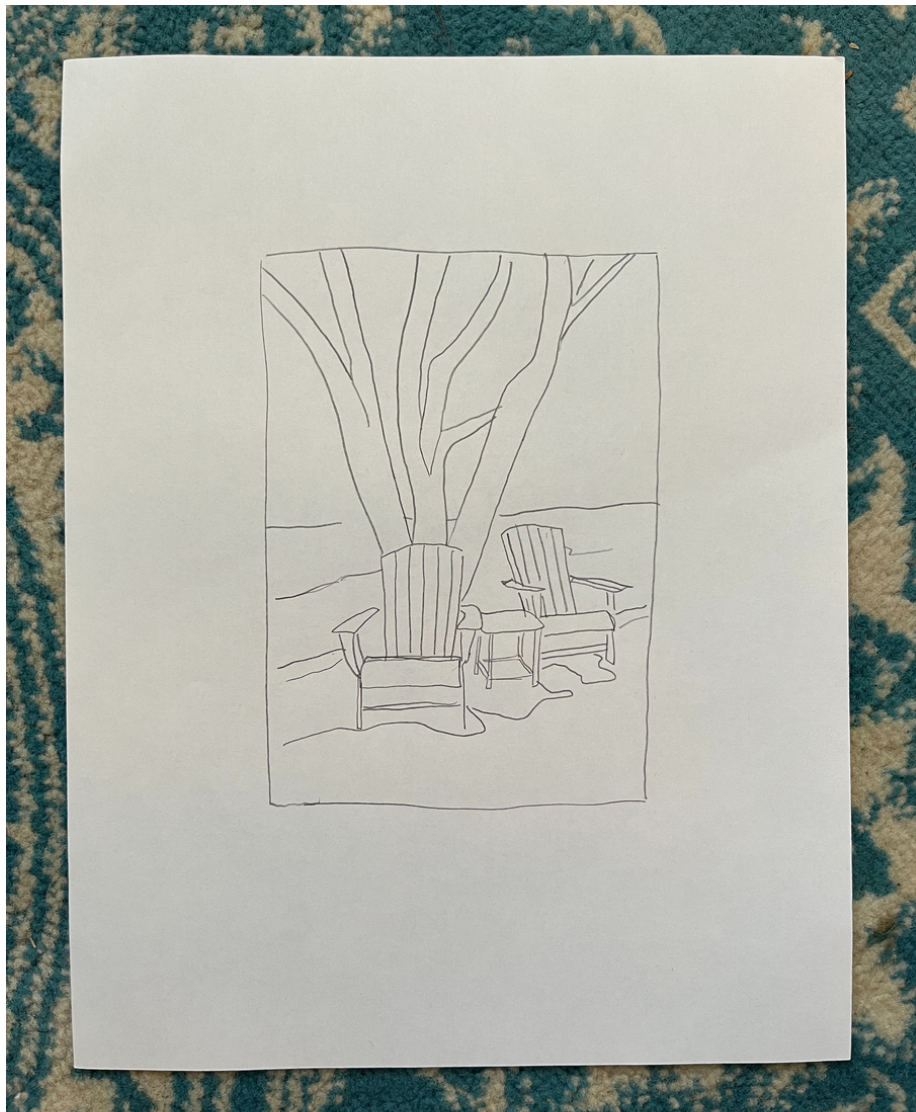
Prepare Your Paper for Drawing

1. Orientate your paper the same orientation as you were holding your picture framer.
2. You are now going to draw a rectangle (or square if your picture viewer has a square hole) on your paper. You don't want to copy the tiny square of your picture viewer. You want your drawn square to take up most of your paper with an approximate 2 to 3 inch border all around. Your paper should look something like this:



Start Your Drawing

1. While looking through your picture framer, draw on your paper the major shapes you see.
2. Keep referring back to the scene in your picture framer while you continue to draw the shapes you are seeing until you feel you are done. You now have the basic composition of your drawing.



Form and Value

Let's take a moment to think about what we are looking at through our picture viewer. Whether you are inside or outside, you are looking at a three-dimensional scene. The basic drawing you just finished is flat, two-dimensional. An abstraction of what you are seeing. In order to make your drawing look more like what you are actually seeing through your picture viewer, we have to create the illusion of a third dimensional on your two-dimensional paper. We need to give your basic composition of shapes, form.

A form is a three dimensional object. It has length and width, and also depth. When a shape gets the third dimension of depth, it becomes a form.

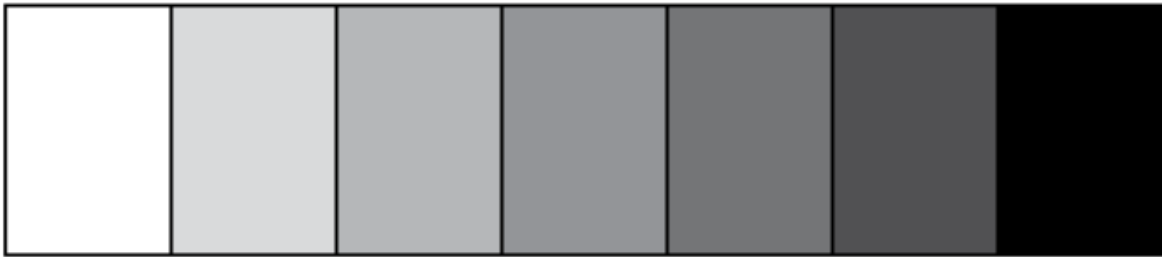
In drawing and painting, the form is implied because it is an illusion of the third-dimension created on a two-dimensional surface. Using light and shadow effects, we can create this illusion in our drawings and paintings.

There are many techniques to accomplish this: hatching, cross hatching, scribbling, stippling, and pointillism, just to name a few. For the purposes of our drawing, we are going to use blending, or shading, to render the values.

What are values?

The term value in the context of art refers to the lightness or darkness of a color. Every color has a value. Some colors are lighter, closer to white, and some colors are darker, closer to black. The value of a form changes depending on the light that affects that form.

The value scale (or sometimes called the gray scale) is a tool artist's use to be able to see the value range from lightest to darkest. The value scale consists of five, seven, nine, or sometimes more squares – with one end white, the other end black, and several shades of grey in the middle.

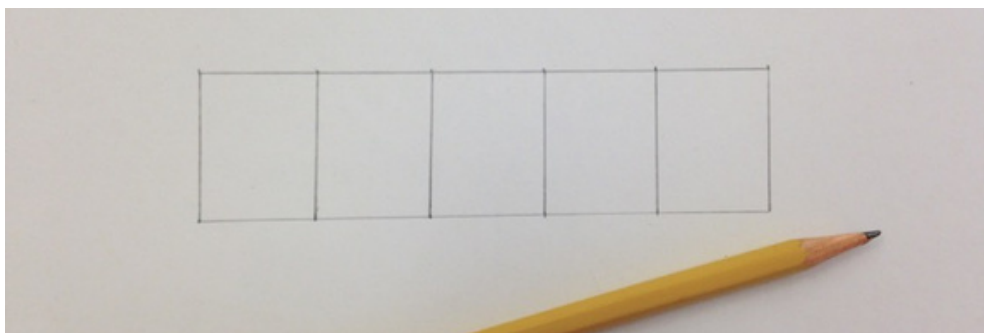


Value is very important to the success of your drawing or painting. It allows you to create that illusion of form and also allows you to create a point of interest depending on how you render the lightness and darkness in your artwork.

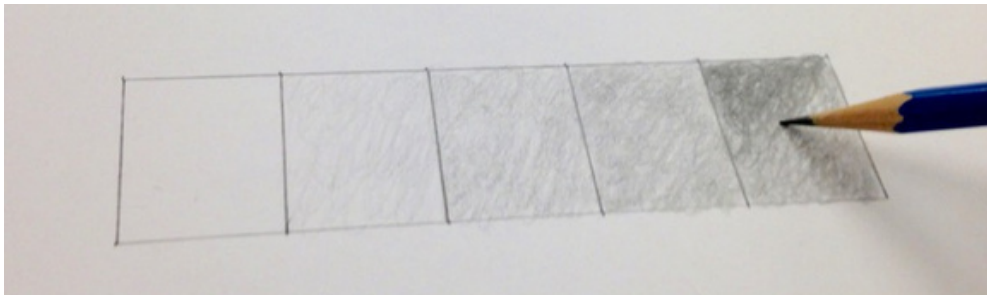
Exercise Two: Value scale

Before you continue with your drawing, you are going to make a value scale. This will give you a lot of confidence when you go back into your drawing to create that three dimensional-illusion of form.

You are going to create a value scale using 5 boxes.



1. Draw a rectangle 2 inches high by 5 inches long.
2. Divide the length of your 5-inch rectangle into 5, 1-inch boxes.
3. Starting in the left side box (the 5th box), begin shading but don't get too heavy handed and make it completely black yet.
Practicing grayscale is a push and pull practice. You'll get better results if you start with this square being lighter than you think it should be.
4. After you've shaded the 5th box, move to the 4th box and shade it slightly lighter than the 5th box.
5. Repeat this process for the next two boxes. Remember box #1 is white and will have no shading in it.



Once you have shaded all four boxes (the first one is white and therefore empty), look at what you have. Are all the values different? Do the values evenly move from one to the next? Did you get a mid-tone in the center?

6. Go back into the boxes, adding shading, until you get a nice even grayscale that moves evenly from white to black (or as dark as your pencil will make). Use the seven square value scale above as a reference.

Don't worry if you don't get it the first time. Drawing a value scale is hard and it takes practice to master. Try the grayscale drawing a few more times. When you feel you've mastered the five boxes, try a grayscale drawing with seven boxes, then try with nine boxes!

Exercise Three: Adding Value to your Drawing

Pick up your view finder and look at your scene again. With fresh eyes, notice any new shapes you may have missed the first time. Do you see any new value shapes?

For example, you may have noticed a shadow shape in the first exercise and put that in your drawing. With a second look, is that shadow shape still one shape or is it actually several shapes of different values?

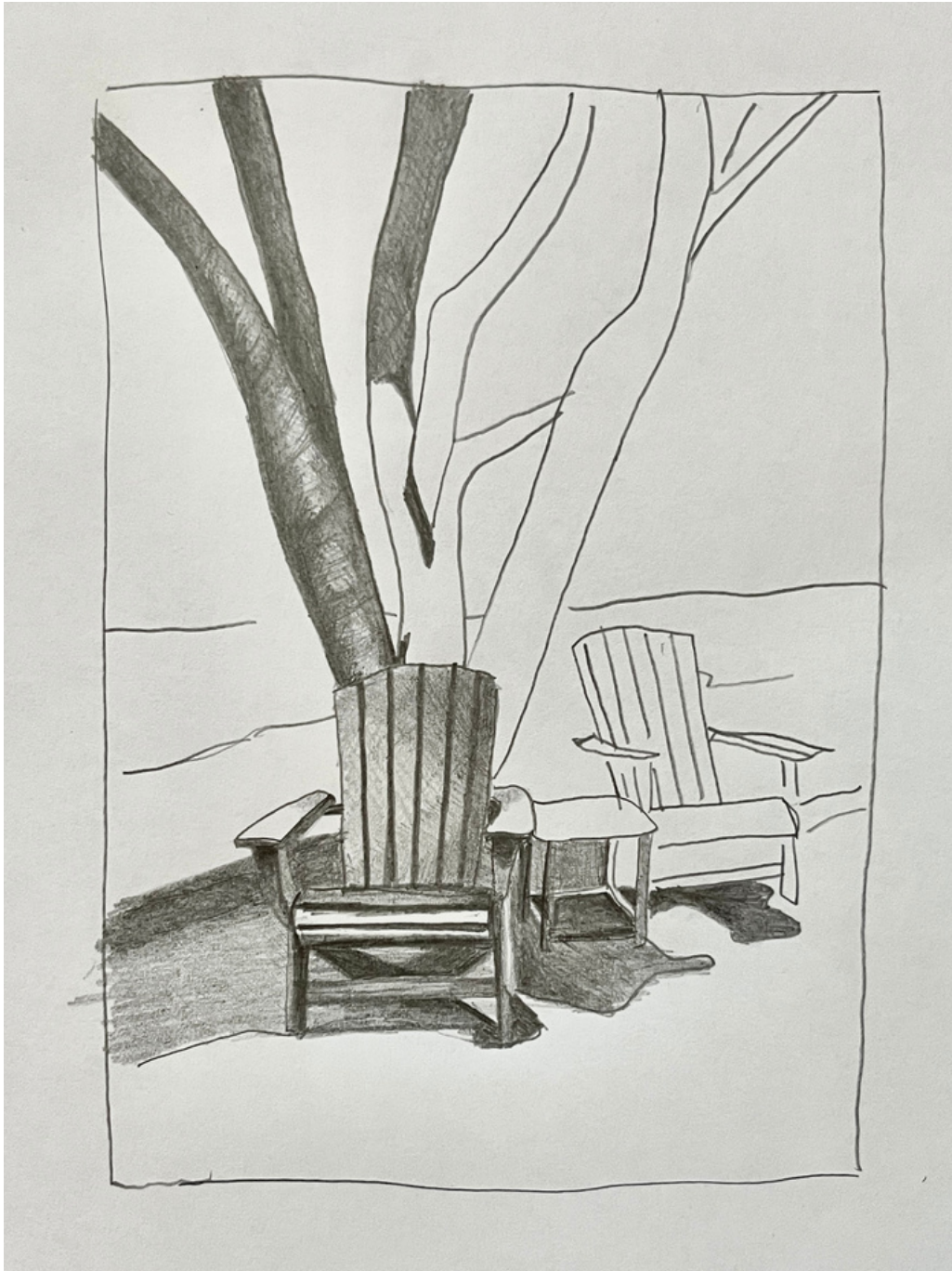
In my scene, the tree trunks are one shape but when I look more closely, I can see that the tree trunks have three value shapes running their lengths.

Noticing the slight variation in value and defining the shape they make, is foundational to being able to draw just about anything, including hands and faces, which are very complex.

When you break down what you are trying to draw into shapes, you see them more clearly and they are much easier to draw. The key is to take your time. Don't freak out over how complex something is. Just follow these steps:

1. Break down what you are looking at into shapes
2. Notice the value shapes. The lights, the darks, the grays in-between
3. Look at what you are drawing many, many, many times while you are drawing

Keep practicing and pretty soon you'll be seeing AND drawing like an artist. Bravo!



I left my drawing unfinished so you can see how I started working the value shading into my drawing. Notice the value shapes in my drawing. Can you see the triangle in the back of the chair?

Share you're drawing progress with me. I would love to see how you're doing.

Tap Into the Power of Art

Other art projects:

- How to Draw a Celtic Knot - Video Tutorial
- How to Draw a Tessellation - Video Tutorial
- How to make a kite paper window star - Instructions with Pictures
- Watercolor Paper Orb - Instructions and Template

Art courses:

- Wet on Wet Watercolor Painting Course

Free resources:

- First three Wet on Wet Watercolor Painting classes in Series One - The Primary Colors
- Supply List - Wet on Wet Watercolor Painting
- Celtic Art - A History & A Few Recommendations
- A Brief History of Islamic Art / Tessellation & Arabesque

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