Experimental Drawing Exercises

Drawing is a really important activity in helping you to understand the world around you. It is a type of primary research, a method of recording information as well as an expressive outlet. What is traditionally considered as a ‘good’ drawing is often a drawing that looks like the object.

At art school, this traditional idea of ‘good’ drawing does not exist.

At art school, a ‘good’ drawing can be one that may not look anything like the object – indeed it may not look like any object! However what makes a drawing good at art school is that you learned something from it. And usually, learning happens through trying new things and making mistakes. This is the first thing you need to embrace before embarking on experimental drawing exercises – your drawings may not look perfect! You might think that your drawings look like childish scribbles, but trust us – these are valid and important drawings that you need to be producing if you want to study at art school.

With that in mind, we want you to pick one object that is meaningful to you in some way. Please do not pick iphones/ipods/mp3 players etc. We want to see an object that is significant and unique to you – perhaps it is a memento from a holiday or loved one, a lamp in your house that is older than you are that you really don’t like, or a lucky stone that you found at a pebble beach when you were young. Don’t just pick the first thing you see – you should spend a good hour thinking about which object to pick and why it is meaningful to you. When you’ve picked your object, find a good place to situate it so you can draw it comfortably.

The next thing you should do is have a range of materials available to use. Where possible, don’t use a pencil – the line is too soft and often people feel too safe with a pencil and don’t take risks with them. The whole point of this exercise is to experiment and take risks! So no pencils, but maybe a really chunky ink marker, some charcoal, a rubber, a fine liner pen, some really brightly coloured chalk/oil pastels and a piece of graphite. Think carefully about the size of paper you choose. If you usually work on A4, try to get your hands on something much bigger, A2 maybe! Alternatively if you usually work on A1, let’s trying scaling right down to A5. You also need a stop watch or clock to hand. Okay we’re pretty much all set.

Try to set aside 40 minutes to complete all of the activities below. Be strict with the timings!

1. Do a line drawing of your object in any material you like. [3 minutes]
2. Do a tonal drawing of your object in charcoal. [3 minutes]
3. Do a line drawing of your object using a chunky ink marker and with your opposite hand [3 minutes]
4. Do a tonal drawing of your object using charcoal and with your opposite hand. [3 minutes]
5. Do a line drawing of your object using any material you like with your strong hand but making the line continuous (i.e. never lifting the pen off the paper at any point in the drawing) [3 minutes]
6. Do a continuous line drawing using your opposite hand [3 minutes]
7. Do a blind line drawing of your object using any material you like (a blind drawing is where you stare at the object solidly and never look at the paper while you are drawing) [3 minutes]
8. Do a blind tonal drawing of your object using charcoal or chalk pastel [3 minutes]
9. Do a blind line drawing of your object using any material you like with your opposite hand [3 minutes]
10. Take an implement in each hand and draw your object using both hands at the same time. You need to keep both hands moving at all times! [3 minutes]
11. Cover your page completely in charcoal. Use your rubber to draw the object. [5 minutes]
12. Draw the negative space (everything else around the object except the object itself) of the object using chalk/oil pastel [3 minutes]