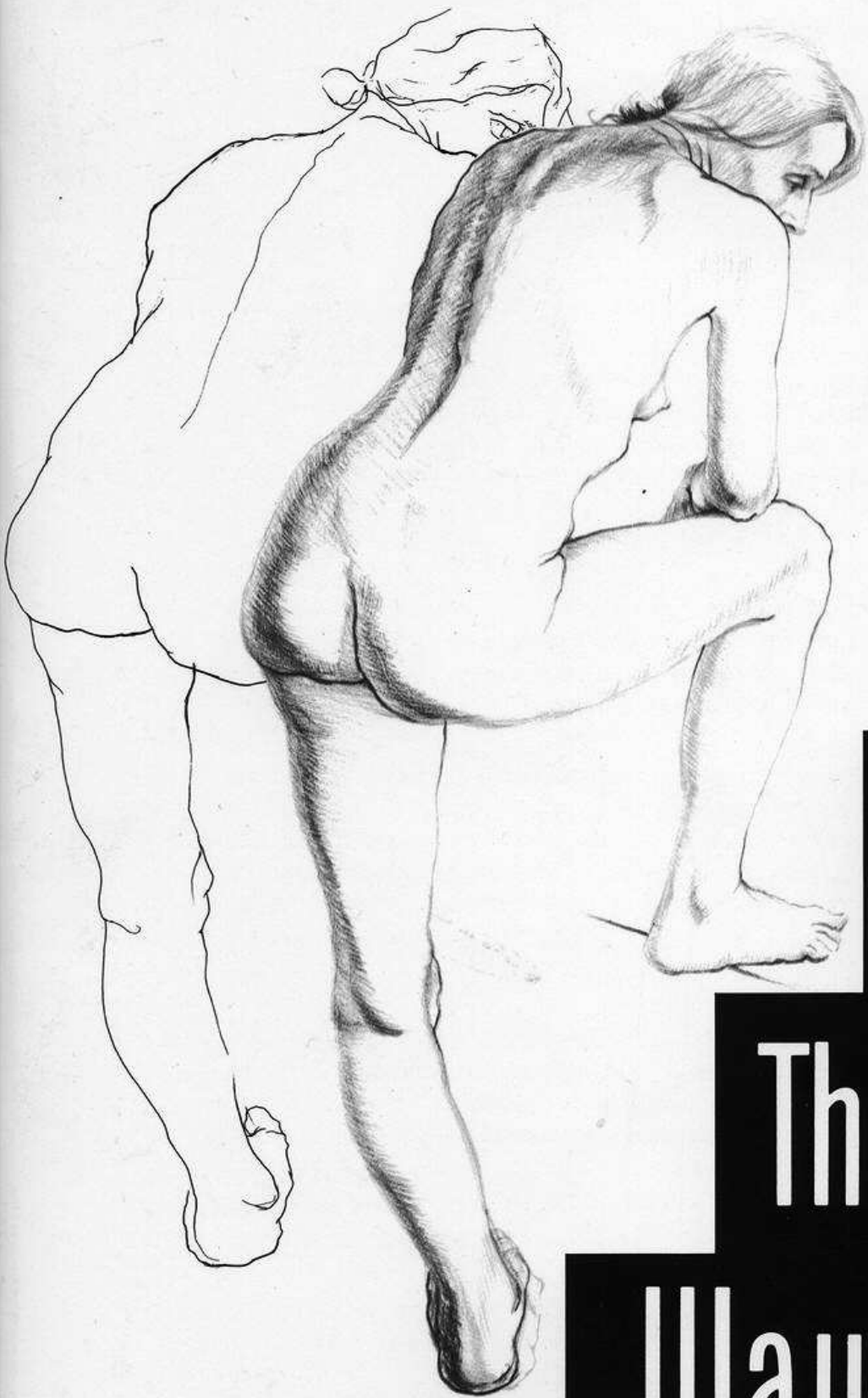


“... not only the best how-to book on drawing,
it is the best how-to book we've seen on
any subject.”—*Whole Earth Catalog*



Nicolaides

The Natural Way to Draw

More than 250,000 hardcover copies sold

ence of touch without ever having seen it. If you go into a dark room to get a book, you will not bring back a vase by mistake even though the two are side by side.

I read recently of a girl whose sight was suddenly gained after a lifetime of blindness. As long as she was blind, she was able to move about the house with ease. When she began to see, she could not walk across the room without stumbling over furniture. Her difficulty lay in the fact that she could not yet coordinate her new sense of sight with what she had previously learned through the sense of touch.

The first exercise, which you are about to attempt, is planned consciously to bring into play your sense of touch and to coordinate it with your sense of sight for the purpose of drawing.

Look at the edge of your chair. Then rub your finger against it many times, sometimes slowly and sometimes quickly. Compare the idea of the edge which the touch of your finger gives with the idea you had from merely looking at it. In this exercise you will try to combine both those experiences — that of touching with that of simply looking.

EXERCISE 1: CONTOUR DRAWING

Materials: Use a 3B (medium soft) drawing pencil with a very fine point (sharpened on sandpaper) and a piece of cream-colored manila wrapping paper about fifteen by twenty inches in size. Manila paper usually comes in large sheets which may be cut into four pieces of that size. You may use, also, the kind sold as 'shelf paper' provided it is not glazed. Fasten the paper with large paper clips to a piece of prestwood or a stiff piece of cardboard. Wear an eyeshade. Do not use an eraser until you come to Exercise 28.

Sit close to the model or object which you intend to draw and lean forward in your chair. Focus your eyes on some point — any point will do — along the contour of the model. (The contour approximates what is usually spoken of as the outline or edge.) Place the point of your pencil on the paper. Imagine that your pencil point is touching the model instead of the paper. Without taking your eyes off the model, *wait* until you are *convinced* that the pencil is touching that point on the model upon which your eyes are fastened.

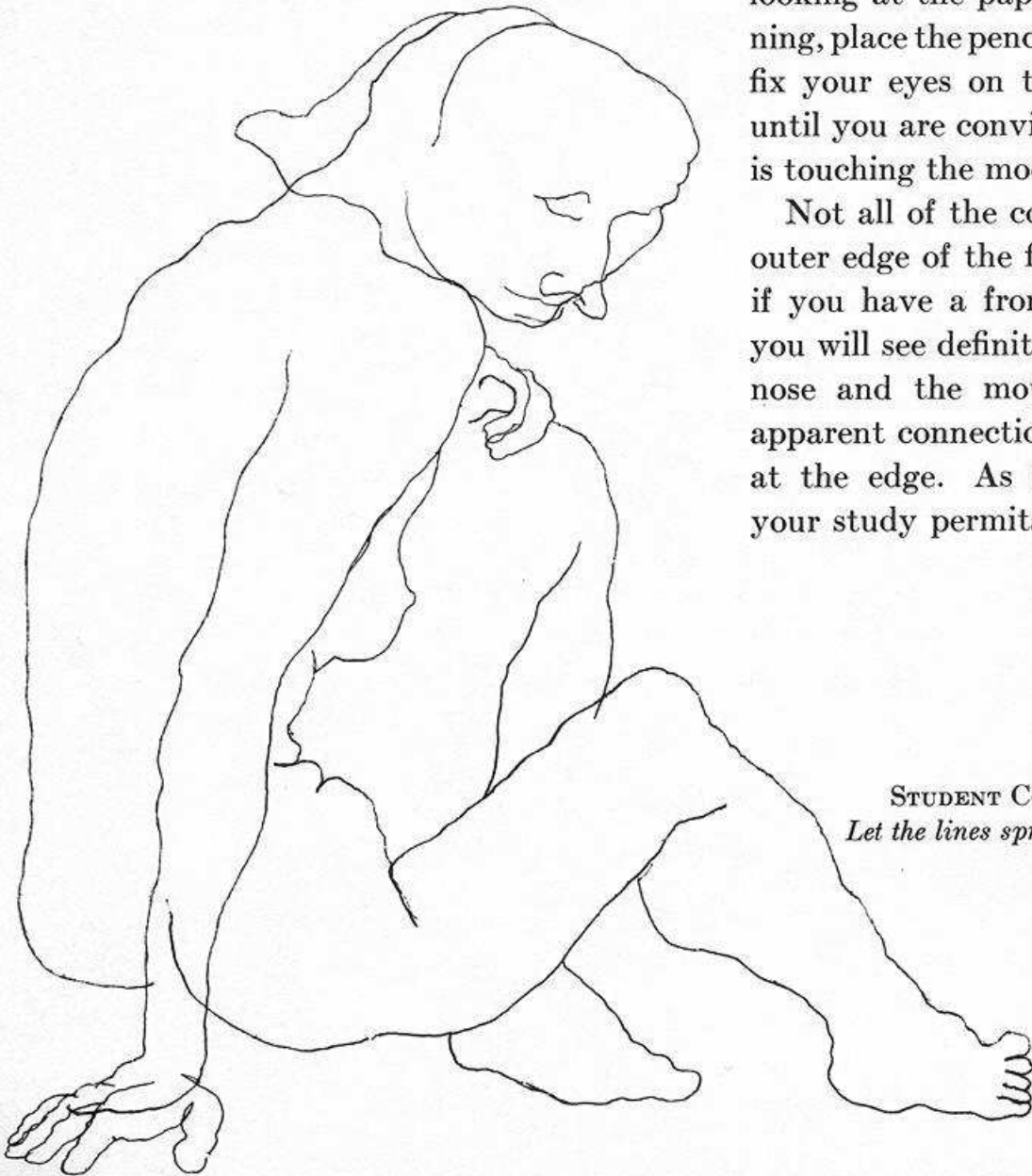
Then move your eye *slowly* along the contour of the model and move the pencil *slowly* along the paper. As you do this, keep the conviction that the pencil point is actually touching the contour. Be guided more by the sense of touch than by sight. **THIS MEANS THAT YOU MUST DRAW WITHOUT LOOKING AT THE PAPER, continuously looking at the model.**

Exactly coordinate the pencil with the eye. Your eye may be tempted at first to move faster than your pencil, but do not let it get ahead. Consider only the point that you are working on at the moment with no regard for any other part of the figure.

Often you will find that the contour you are drawing will leave the edge of the figure and turn inside, coming eventually to an apparent end. When this happens, glance down at the paper in order to locate a new starting point. This new starting point should pick up at that point on the edge where the contour turned inward. Thus, you will glance down at the paper several times during the course of one study, but do not draw while you are

looking at the paper. As in the beginning, place the pencil point on the paper, fix your eyes on the model, and wait until you are convinced that the pencil is touching the model before you draw.

Not all of the contours lie along the outer edge of the figure. For example, if you have a front view of the face, you will see definite contours along the nose and the mouth which have no apparent connection with the contours at the edge. As far as the time for your study permits, draw these 'inside



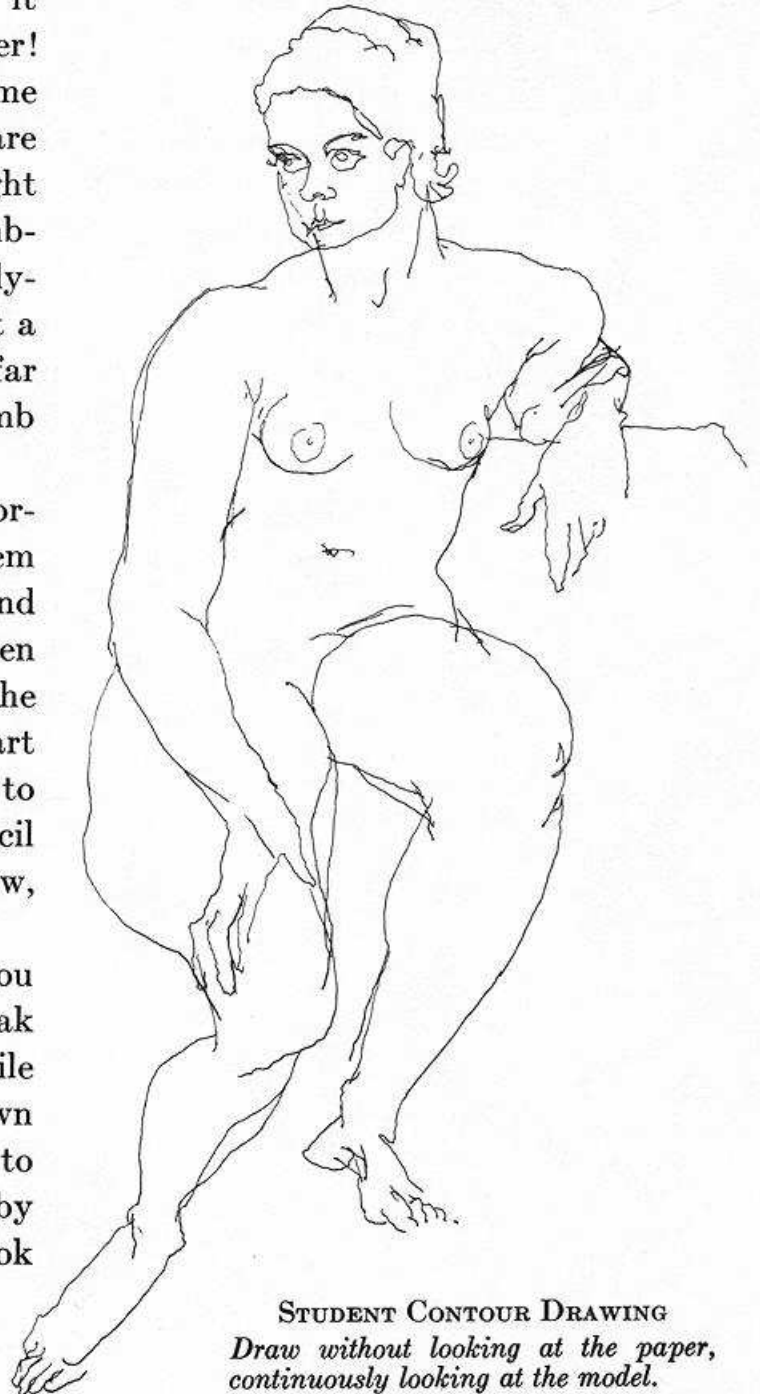
STUDENT CONTOUR DRAWING
Let the lines sprawl all over the paper.

contours' exactly as you draw the outside ones. Draw anything that your pencil can rest on and be guided along. DEVELOP THE ABSOLUTE CONVICTON THAT YOU ARE TOUCHING THE MODEL.

This exercise should be done slowly, searchingly, sensitively. Take your time. Do not be too impatient or too quick. There is no point in finishing any one contour study. In fact, a contour study is not a thing that can be 'finished.' It is having a particular type of experience, which can continue as long as you have the patience to look. If in the time allowed you get only halfway around the figure, it doesn't matter. So much the better! But if you finish long before the time is up, the chances are that you are not approaching the study in the right way. A contour drawing is like climbing a mountain as contrasted with flying over it in an airplane. It is not a quick glance at the mountain from far away, but a slow, painstaking climb over it, step by step.

Do not worry about the 'proportions' of the figure. That problem will take care of itself in time. And do not be misled by shadows. When you touch the figure, it will feel the same to your hand whether the part you touch happens at the moment to be light or in shadow. Your pencil moves, not on the edge of a shadow, but on the edge of the actual form.

At first, no matter how hard you try, you may find it difficult to break the habit of looking at the paper while you draw. You may even look down without knowing it. Ask a friend to check up on you for a few minutes by calling out to you every time you look



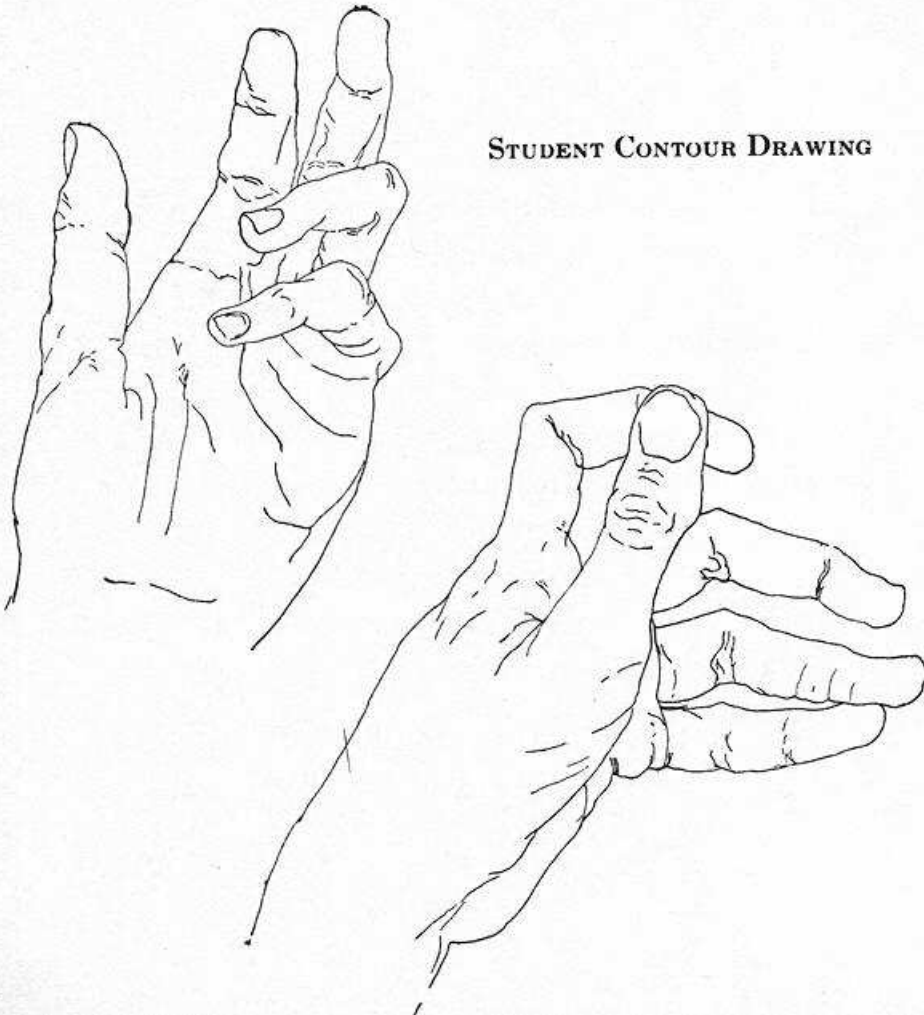
STUDENT CONTOUR DRAWING
*Draw without looking at the paper,
continuously looking at the model.*

at the paper. Then you will find out whether you looked too often and whether you made the mistake of drawing while you were looking.

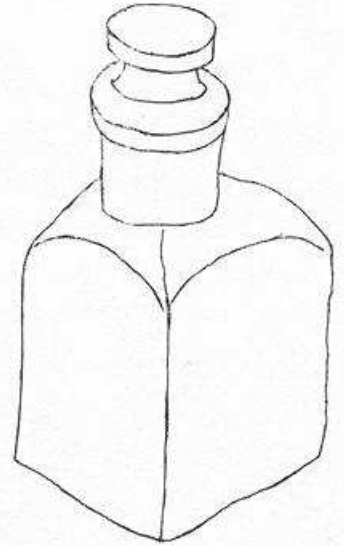
This exercise should be used in drawing subjects of all sorts. At first, choose the contours of the landscape which seem most tangible, as the curve of a hill or the edge of a tree-trunk. Any objects may be used, although those which have been formed by nature or affected by long use will offer the greatest amount of variation, as a flower, a stone, a piece of fruit, or an old shoe. Draw yourself by looking in the mirror. your own hand or foot, a piece of material. It is the experience, not the subject, that is important.

CONTOUR VERSUS OUTLINE. 'Contour' is commonly defined as 'the outline of a figure or body,' but for the purposes of this study we are making a definite, if perhaps arbitrary, distinction between 'contour' and 'outline.'

We think of an outline as a diagram or silhouette, flat and two-dimensional. It is the sort of thing you make when you place your hand flat on a piece of paper and trace around the fingers with a pencil — you cannot even tell from the drawing whether the palm or the back of the hand faced downward.



STUDENT CONTOUR DRAWING



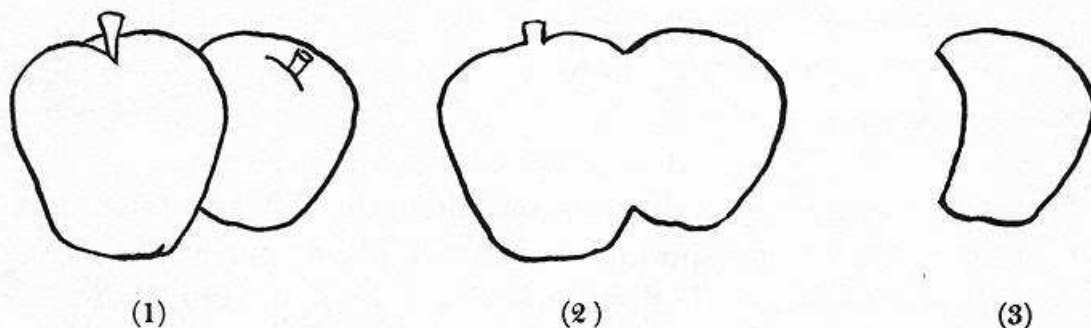
Draw anything.

Contour has a three-dimensional quality; that is, it indicates the thickness as well as the length and width of the form it surrounds.

We do not think of a line as a contour unless it follows the sense of touch, whereas an outline may follow the eye alone. Place two apples on a table, one slightly in front of the other but not touching it, as in Figure 1. Figure 2 shows the visual outline of both apples. Figure 3 shows the visual outline of the second apple. Neither Figure 2 nor Figure 3 could possibly be a

contour drawing because, in both, the line follows the eye and not the sense of touch. If you feel that you are touching the edge, you will not jump from the edge of the first apple to the edge of the second without lifting your pencil, as in Figure 2, just as you cannot actually touch the second apple with your finger at that place until you have lifted your finger from the first apple. As an outline, Figure 3 shows what you *see* of the second apple only, but if you think in terms of contour or touch, part of that line belongs to the first apple and not to the second. The outlines in both Figure 2 and Figure 3 are visual illusions. A contour can never be an illusion because it touches the actual thing.

*Draw for three hours as directed in Schedule 1 A.
If you have not read the section on How to Use This Book, read it now.*



TWO TYPES OF STUDY. The way to learn to draw is by drawing. People who make art must not merely know about it. For an artist, the important thing is not how much he knows, but how much he can do. A scientist may know all about aeronautics without being able to handle an airplane. It is only by flying that he can develop the senses for flying. If I were asked what one thing more than any other would teach a student how to draw, I should answer, 'Drawing — incessantly, furiously, painstakingly drawing.'

Probably you realize already that contour drawing is of the type which is to be done 'painstakingly.' On the other hand, gesture drawing, which you will begin today, is to be done 'furiously.' In order to concentrate, one can act furiously over a short space of time or one can work with calm determination, quietly, over a long extended period. In learning to draw, both kinds of effort are necessary and the one makes a precise balance for the other. In long studies you will develop an understanding of the structure of the model, how it is made — by which I mean something more fundamental than anatomy alone. In quick studies you will consider the function of action, life, or expression — I call it *gesture*.

The quick sketches made by most students are exactly what they are called — quick sketches — which to my way of thinking is very bad practice. In fact, anything that is sketchy is bad practice. The word 'sketch' suggests something that is not completed. Quick studies, on the contrary, should indicate that there has been real study and a completion of the thing studied, representing a certain kind of concentration even though the study is quick. The way to concentrate in a short space of time is to concentrate on only one phase of the model. Naturally, I try to select an important phase and I have chosen the gesture.

Quick sketches are often used simply to 'loosen up' the student and not as a means of penetrating study. Often students do them well and are quite surprised at the results, which are far beyond any knowledge they have. The reason is that by working quickly they accidentally find the gesture. The gesture is a feeler which reaches out and guides them to knowledge.

EXERCISE 2: GESTURE DRAWING

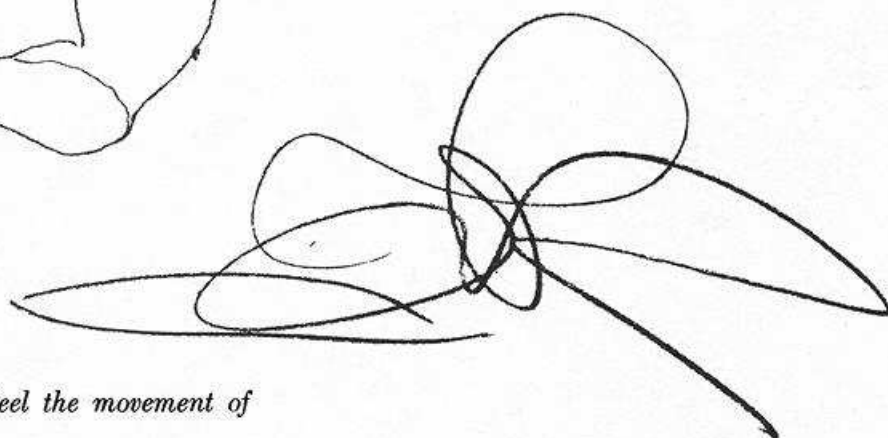
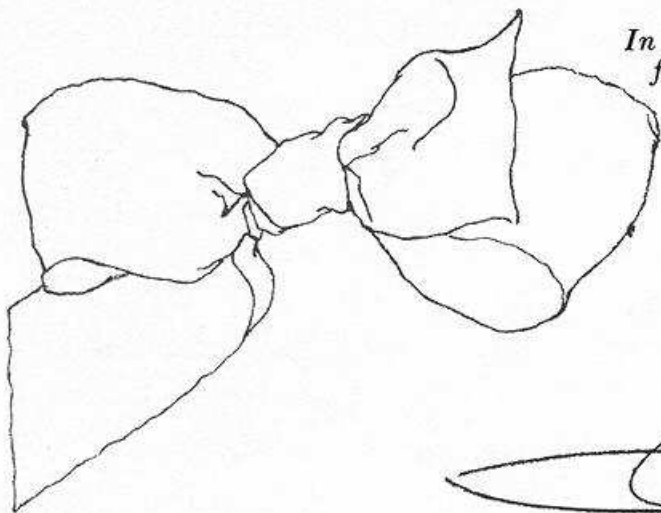
Materials: Use a 3B or 4B pencil (keeping the point blunt and thick) and sheets of cream manila paper about ten by fifteen inches in size. (This is half the size used for contour drawing.) Use both sides of the paper, but put only one drawing on each side. Since you will make a great many gesture drawings, you may substitute for manila an even cheaper paper known as newsprint. Keep an ample supply of paper on hand.

The model is asked to take a very active pose for a minute or less and to change without pause from one pose to the next. If you have no model — or, frequently, even if you do — you should go to some place where you are likely to see people actively moving about. A playground, a football game, a bargain basement, a busy street, a lumber mill, a swimming hole, a building under construction, will give you excellent opportunities to study gesture.

As the model takes the pose, or as the people you watch move, you are to draw, letting your pencil swing around the paper almost at will, being impelled by the sense of the action you feel. Draw rapidly and continuously in a ceaseless line, from top to bottom, around and around, *without taking your pencil off the paper*. Let the pencil roam, reporting the gesture.

YOU SHOULD DRAW, NOT WHAT THE THING LOOKS LIKE, NOT EVEN WHAT IT IS, BUT WHAT IT IS *DOING*. Feel how the figure lifts or droops — pushes forward here — pulls back there — pushes out here — drops down easily there. Suppose that the model takes the pose of a fighter with fists clenched and jaw thrust forward angrily. Try to draw the actual *thrust* of the jaw, the *clenching* of the hand. A drawing of prize fighters should show the *push*, from foot to fist, behind their blows that makes them hurt.

In contour drawing you touch the edge of the form.



In gesture drawing you feel the movement of the whole.

If the model leans over to pick up an object, you will draw the actual bend and twist of the torso, the reaching downward of the arm, the grasping of the hand. The drawing may be meaningless to a person who looks at it, or to you yourself after you have forgotten the pose. There may be nothing in it to suggest the shape of the figure, or the figure may be somewhat apparent. That does not matter.

As the pencil roams, it will sometimes strike the edge of the form, but more often it will travel through the center of forms and often it will run outside of the figure, even out of the paper altogether. Do not hinder it. Let it move at will. Above all, do not *try* to follow edges.

It is only the action, the gesture, that you are trying to respond to here, not the details of the structure. You must discover — and feel — that the gesture is dynamic, moving, not static. Gesture has no precise edges, no exact shape, no jelled form. The forms are in the act of changing. Gesture is movement in space.

To be able to see the gesture, you must be able to feel it in your own body,

You should feel that you are doing whatever the model is doing. If the model stoops or reaches, pushes or relaxes, you should feel that your own muscles likewise stoop or reach, push or relax. IF YOU DO NOT RESPOND IN LIKE MANNER TO WHAT THE MODEL IS DOING, YOU CANNOT UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU SEE. If you do not feel as the model feels, your drawing is only a map or a plan.

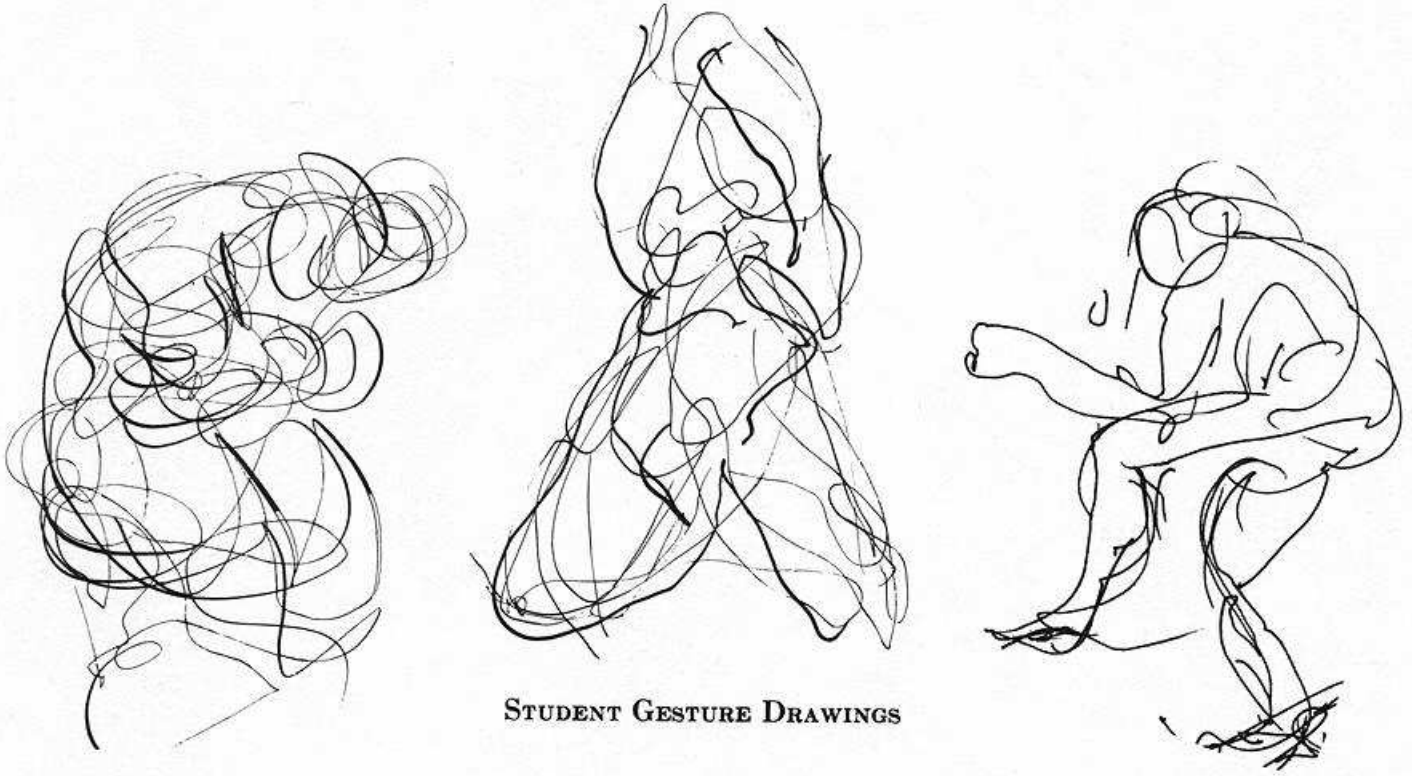
Like contour, gesture is closely related to the tactile experience. In contour drawing you feel that you are touching the edge of the form with your finger (or pencil). In gesture drawing you feel the movement of the whole form in your whole body.

The focus should be on the entire figure and you should *keep the whole thing going at once*. Try to feel the entire thing as a unit — a unit of energy, a unit of movement. Sometimes I let new students begin to draw on a five-minute pose and then, after one minute, ask the model to step down from the stand. The students stop drawing with surprise. I tell them to go ahead and draw, that they had started to draw and must have had something in



STUDENT GESTURE DRAWINGS

Draw not what the thing looks like, not even what it is, but WHAT IT IS DOING.



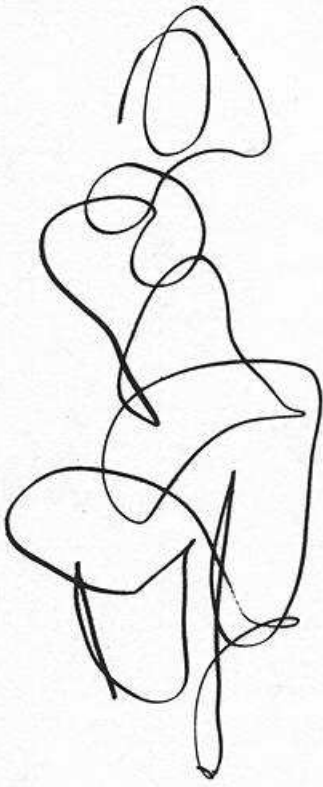
STUDENT GESTURE DRAWINGS

mind; but usually they are unable to continue. The truth is that they had started with some little thing, such as the hair, and had not even looked at the pose as a whole. In the first five seconds you should put something down that indicates every part of the body in the pose. Remind yourself of this once in a while by limiting a group of gesture studies to five or ten seconds each.

It doesn't matter where you begin to draw, with what part of the figure, because immediately you are drawing the whole thing, and during the minute that you draw you will be constantly passing from one end of the body to the other and from one part to another. In general, do not start with the head. Offhand, the only times I can think of when the head would be the natural starting place for an action would be when a man is standing on his head or hanging on the gallows.

Sometimes students ask whether they should think of gesture in this or that or the other way. My answer to that is that you should rely on sensation rather than thought. Simply respond with your muscles to what the model is doing as you watch, and let your pencil record that response automatically, without deliberation. Loosen up. Relax. Most of the time your instinct will guide you, sometimes guide you the better, if you can learn to let it act swiftly and directly without questioning it. Let yourself learn to reason with the pencil, with the impulses that are set up between you and the model. In short, listen to yourself think; do not always insist on forcing yourself to think. There are many things in life that you cannot get by a brutal approach. You must invite them.

If your model complains that he or she 'can't think of any more



In the first five seconds put something down that indicates every part of the body in the pose.

poses,' suggest the following: typical poses from all sports such as boxing, tennis, fencing; positions used in dancing; ordinary daily acts such as putting on one's clothes; typical movements in various kinds of work such as those of a farmer, a mechanic, a builder, a ditchdigger; poses expressive of different emotions such as fear, joy, weariness. The model should use all sorts of positions — standing, sitting, stooping, kneeling, lying down, leaning on something — and you should draw all sorts of views, front, back, and side. The poses should be natural and vigorous rather than artificial. Some of them should be quite twisted up and contorted.

SCRIBBLING. My students eventually began to call these studies 'scribble drawings.' They are like scribbling rather than like printing or writing carefully, as if one were trying to write very fast and were thinking more of the meaning than of the way the thing looks, paying no attention to penmanship or spelling, punctuation or grammar.

One student said of his first gesture drawings that they looked like 'nothing but a tangle of fishing line.' The drawing may look meaningless, but the benefits that you have at the moment of reacting to the gesture will pay large dividends eventually. Before your studies from this book are over, you will have made hundreds of these scribble drawings. You will never exhibit one of them — they are considered purely as an exercise — yet they will give you an understanding and power which will eventually find its way into all your work. No matter what path you pursue, you keep going back to gesture.

Feel free to use a great deal of paper and do not ever worry about 'spoiling' it — that is one of our reasons for using cheap paper. I notice that students working at their best, thinking only of the gesture and not of making pictures, often throw their drawings into the trash-can without even looking at them. A few should be kept and dated as a record of your progress, but the rest may be tossed aside as carelessly as yesterday's newspaper. Results are best when they come from the right kind of un-self-conscious effort.

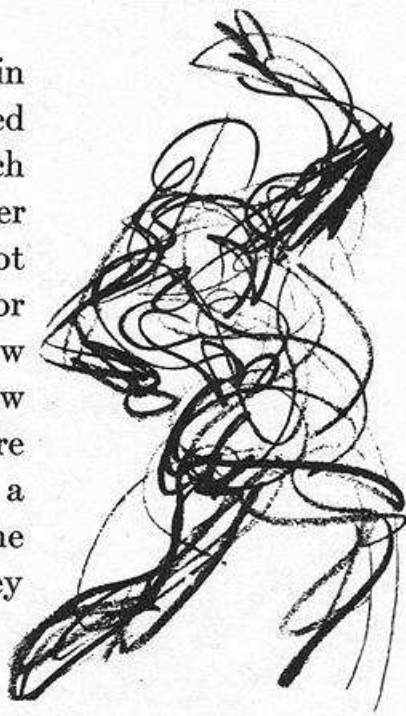
MORE ABOUT CONTOUR. Like many other students, you may have trouble drawing slowly enough in the contour exercise. Try making your next contour study with the left hand instead of the right (or the reverse if you are naturally left-handed). This should have the effect of slowing you up and, since your left hand is less trained, you will find it less easy to relapse into some way of drawing which you had already mastered.

This is a suggestion which may be applied to other exercises that we shall take up. Each exercise is meant to constitute in some way a new experience even if you have been drawing for twenty years. The use of your untrained hand may give you something of the advantage that a beginner always has — the advantage of a fresh approach.

When you looked at your first completed contour drawing, you probably laughed. No doubt the lines sprawled all over the paper, the ends did not meet in places, and one leg or arm may have been much bigger than the other. That should not worry you at all. In fact, you will really have cause for worry only if your drawing looks too 'correct,' for that will probably mean either that you have looked at the paper too often or have tried too hard to keep the proportions in your mind.

The time you spend counts only if you are having the correct experience, and in this exercise that experience is a physical one through the sense of touch. After you have drawn the contour of the model's arm, pass your fingers slowly along the contour of your own arm. If the sensation of touch is just as strong in the first act as in the second, you have made a good start regardless of what the drawing looks like.

Contour drawing allows for concentrated effort in looking at the model rather than the usual divided effort of looking alternately at paper and model, which exercises mainly the muscles of the neck. In other words, the act of putting marks on the paper does not interrupt the experience of looking at the model. For that reason, you are able most effectively to follow forms to their logical conclusion, to learn where and how they relate to other forms. The parts of the figure are fairly simple in themselves — an arm, a finger, or a foot. But the way they fit together, the arm into the shoulder, the foot into the leg, is very difficult. They



A gesture drawing is like scribbling rather than like printing carefully — think more of the meaning than of the way the thing looks.

fit, not in a static way, but always in motion. Most students never settle down and follow out a form with all its nuances of movement, all the delicate transitions from one part to another. This exercise enables you to perceive those transitions because you follow closely the living form without taking your eyes off it.

Because the experience of looking at the model is not interrupted by looking at the paper, the drawing becomes a more truthful record of that one experience. If you made one leg longer than the other, it is probably because you spent more time looking at it. You may have done that simply because you had more patience than when you were drawing the other leg. Or you may have done it because the leg was closer to you, because more weight was on it, or because the position or turn of the leg attracted your interest. If you are drawing a model with very long arms, you may make the arms even longer than they are because your attention is attracted to their unusual length and you keep looking at them.

You need not think of these things. They happen subconsciously or, perhaps, accidentally. But, whether you know it or not, you are developing a sense of proportion, which may be a very different thing from a knowledge of proportion but is equally important — for the creative artist, more important.

Draw for three hours as directed in Schedule 1 C.

THE CONTOUR IN SPACE. The contour of any form in nature is never on one plane, but, as you follow it, is constantly turning in space. Assume that the model's arm hangs straight down at his side and that you are drawing the outer contour downward from the shoulder to the wrist. You will find, if you really are looking closely at the contour, that neither your eye nor the pencil can move straight down. Because the arm goes around as well as down, the contour seems sometimes to turn back away from you and then forward again toward you. Thus you will feel that you are sometimes drawing back into the paper and sometimes forward, as well as downward.

Draw for three hours as directed in Schedule 1 D.

EXERCISE 3: CROSS CONTOURS

This exercise calls for the same materials as the previous contour study, which it supplements. Like many of the exercises in this book, it grew out