

22 Sketching

Don't be afraid to sketch in public places such as museums, parks, restaurants, etc. And don't let wind, rain, cold, or heat deter you — those conditions sometimes yield the best sketching. Let someone else drive when traveling so you can draw. Capturing a scene while moving at high speed will sharpen your eye. But also take time to do a more detailed sketch. First draw a rectangle and work within that to force yourself to make a composition — relating one thing to another and to the borders. If you feel a need for toning the sketches, use cross hatch or carry a couple of gray felt tip pens. Get in the habit of using a pen. It is much more direct and does not rub off like a soft pencil. Sketch at home too. Never sit in front of the TV without a sketchpad on your lap. Sketch faces, figures, and stage settings. If your dog or cat is lying on the floor nearby, sketch them. Sports events are especially fun to sketch — boxing matches, football games, etc.

You may shun landscapes — saying that you are interested only in figures or cartoons, but trees, mountains, rivers, and clouds have gestures that can be beneficial for analyzing action. Mountains stand erect, lean, lie down, sprawl, and spill out onto valleys in alluvial forms. Trees loom, twist in agonized or humorous gestures; they stand erect, stretch, and lean; some are tired, some perky; some bear fruit or flower, which in itself is a gesture. Even the atmosphere of a landscape has a (spatial) gesture.

Vehicles have gestures of their own. Some cars seem to slink along, some move proudly. Some are raised way up on springs — like they're holding up their skirts so they can cross a stream. Special equipment like skip-loaders, semis, derricks, and delivery trucks all seem to be doing their own thing. They're as different from each other as a farmer is from an office worker or a military man is from a hobo. Don't sketch vehicles as if you were doing a Ford ad — go for their personalities, their gesture. Sketching isn't only fun, but it will also help you master those blank sheets of paper you are going to be spending the rest of your life battling.

People usually do what they are in the habit of doing. That may seem like an obvious thing to say, but it is significant in a number of ways. Arguing in its favor, it is a comfortable way of living. There are a minimum of decisions that require attention, and hopefully the things you are in the habit of doing and the manner in which you do them are compatible with your idea of the "ideal" life. And if you're studying to be a concert pianist or a rock band drummer or a pro tennis player, you had better submit to some rigorous habit forming — such as hours and hours of practice.

Arguments against forming daily habits that guide you through life without having to make any new choices are quite numerous. The old adage "use it or lose it" is applicable here. If one has formed pretty solid days worth of habits that carry him through the days and months and years — he is going to grow smaller and smaller as age sets and the more habitual he is the sooner age will set in.

Someone said, "Change will help keep the balance sheets in order," or something like that. We are not talking change for the sake of change — but for improvement — for expanding the consciousness, for an ever fresh and open-minded attitude to your piece of the universe. Habits are a blessing when they relieve us of the burden of having to relearn everything we do every day. But if they lead us down the narrowing road of complacency, they become a drag.

That great teacher and the great guy, T. Hee, told his students to be like a sponge — soak up all the knowledge and information you can. Never allow yourself to get into a self-satisfied or complacent state. He advised never to drive home from work by the same streets twice. Take alternate routes — observe the new houses, trees, gardens, etc., and do not just drive by them — look at them, see them. When walking along a sidewalk, look into the store windows, not just a glance, but a good look, to see what's there — the set up, the merchandise, the signs. Sketch it in the mind's eye. Observe passersby. Notice their walks, their postures, their rhythms, look for their history on their faces. Observe,

observe, observe. And of course there is no better way to observe than to carry a sketchbook with you wherever you go.

Whether your heart is set on the fine arts or on animation, quick sketching is the shortest route to training yourself for capturing those spontaneous gestures and poses that are so essential to good drawing. Break one of your bad habits today. Which one? The habit of not sketching.

Also relative to drawing is the sharpening of your sense of dramatics and humor and of science and psychology. What are your reading habits? If they are narrow and limited, make a determined effort to expand them. Read a book on acting. Read a mystery; read a book on the life of Pissarro. Have a few books of *The New Yorker* cartoons in your library. Read Van Gogh's *Dear Theo*. Read a few self-improvement books. Call 244-2816 once in a while.

Listen to some jazz, some symphony, a string quintet, and some country music. Stop everything and just listen. There are some delightful Irish and Scottish recordings. Feel the leaves of a sycamore tree, a wad of cotton, a piece of sandpaper. Pick up a stone from the beach or from the mountains and fondle it. See if it has a message for you. Notice its color and texture — imagine doing an abstract painting of it, or actually do it. Sharpen your senses in all ways. Life will open up its vistas of adventure and courage and venturesomeness. Then when you make a sketch you will feel an authoritative confidence flow into it. It will have the rhythms of the music you have heard, the drama of the books you have read, and the tactile influence of all the things you have touched.

Sounds like a dream? No way! You have been given all these things, these possibilities, and for the small price of a few new habits ... who knows?

