



JANUARY 2013

“Draw the Giraffe”

We're here!

We'll begin the year by drawing the giraffe, as many times as you choose, in as many styles or media that feel comfortable for you. You will be free to interpret this assignment however you like, the only guideline: I suggest that at least 50% of your drawing be done from either life (a real giraffe) or photo references.

But before I get to the particulars, I wanted to begin by introducing you to steps of the creative process as conceived by Tony Schwartz, founder of The Energy Project:

“[According](#) to Tony Schwartz, there are four stages in the creative process. First, you study the problem you're trying to solve. Secondly, you do nothing. Your brain needs time to marinate. Then, with any luck, you'll have some kind of a eureka moment. These tend to happen when you least expect them – when you're in bed, or on a walk, or in the shower. That's because the left side of your brain isn't engaged at that time, it's not eclipsing your right side. Once you've had the idea, there's just the small fourth step of bringing it into the real world.”

— From <http://blurgroup.com/blurgroup/blog/can-you-teach-creativity/>

Of course any creative idea or act will come about differently — you might have a eureka moment first, for example (or, some months, not at all) — but, in general, I've found this sequence to hold true for me.

Schwartz's steps might be summed up with the acronym, "W.R.A.P.":

W - Wrestle

R - Rest

A - Aha!

P - Produce

We are embarking today on a year-long class. Each month you have a new problem/project to tackle, and the WRAP steps will most likely occur on a monthly basis.

We are starting the year drawing the giraffe, even if some of you "can't" draw. Why? Because I've found drawing — an activity that really forces you to pay attention to your subject — to be one of the best ways I know of to really study something (the "W" step of our WRAP acronym). So, it might be helpful to think of January's drawing emphasis as part of the "W" step in the YEAR-LONG PROJECT that is "Year of the Giraffe."

Milton Glaser says, "The great benefit of drawing is not to replicate reality but to understand what is real."

Drawing the giraffe will help us understand the giraffe!

Whether you are new to drawing or have tons of experience, I want to emphasize that the drawings you create this month DO NOT HAVE TO BE GOOD... honestly! In fact, at the end of the month you can toss them all in the trash if you like. The point is to spend time "researching" and "studying" the giraffe by drawing it. Feel free to think of them as practice drawings only.

You can interpret “Draw the Giraffe” in any way you like. I suggest, though, that you create a goal or an “assignment” for yourself. In my case I plan to fill a sketchbook with drawings. I’m not going to restrict myself to media or styles, but just try and draw as many different giraffes in as many poses and styles as I can. I will work from photo references and my imagination, and I hope to squeeze in a visit to the Woodland Park Zoo in Seattle, too.

If filling a sketchbook full of drawings sounds fun to you, I encourage you to make that your goal. However, you are free to create a different drawing goal for January. The only “rule” is that at least half of the drawings should be done while looking at a real or photographed giraffe.

Here are some drawing assignment ideas to get you started:

- Fill a sketchbook full of giraffe drawings.
- Do 10 realistic drawings of the giraffe.
- Do one quick sketch per day.
- Go to the zoo and draw from a live giraffe.
- Do one giraffe drawing this month.
- Pick a characteristic and focus on that (such as eyes, heads, or legs).

The point is, create a goal for yourself that sounds fun and doable. Then, get to it!

DRAWING EXERCISES

Here are some of my favorite drawing exercises that help to get me moving.

Blind Contour Drawings

Best done from photographs

Speed: extra slowly

Suggested media: pen or pencil



I love doing these drawings. They are never perfect, frequently silly, but always fun and somehow "real."

Find a photo reference and then fix your eyes on that reference and put pen to paper. Then, VERY SLOWLY, move the pen and your eyes down the outer edge of the giraffe, at the same speed. You will not look at your paper, but only the reference. Don't forget to breathe (it's common to hold your breath).

When you get to the face, go ahead and draw the lines indicating eyes, nostrils, etc. You can glance at your paper briefly here to make sure you are drawing these facial features near the giraffe's head, but don't move your pen while looking at the paper (think of it as drawing "freeze tag"). Then move to spots if you like.

Blind contour drawings work on many levels, but the most surprising one for me is illustrated in the following example.

When I began drawing giraffes, I was intimidated, as they seemed so complicated! So I decided to focus my energies on doing blind contours, as it was non-threatening to me... the pressure was off... the drawings didn't have to be "good." I think I did about 10 or 12 blind contours during that session.

The next day, I was waiting for an appointment and opened my sketchbook. I didn't have access to a giraffe photo reference, so decided to try my hand at drawing the giraffe from "memory," or imagination.

And look what I drew (next page):



Even though they may not be perfectly proportioned, they're close enough for me. The blind contours from the day before had done their job; I suddenly "knew" how to draw a giraffe!

Wrong-Handed Drawings

Best drawn from life or photographs

Speed: slow-medium

Suggested media: Pen, so you aren't tempted to erase.



Drawn from a photograph by Len Kurzweil

Wrong-handed drawings are just drawings made with your non-dominant hand. Like blind contours, this tends to not be very threatening to do because we typically reserve harsh judgments when drawing with our wrong hands. This “break” from the left-brain critical part of you allows the right side of your brain take over a little bit, so you to just focus on your attention on the subject.

When drawing with your non-dominant hand, spend about 60% of your time looking at your reference and about 40% looking at your paper. Just concentrate on making a line,

and then making the next line in response to the first line, always checking back and forth from drawing to reference to checking the angles, length of lines, etc.

Go slowly — there is no rush — and remember to breathe. Observe and welcome your unsteady lines.

Wrong-handed drawings are also useful as they underscore the beauty of imperfection.

Try this: Find a photo reference and do one wrong-handed drawing. Now, do a second drawing with your dominant hand and compare the two drawings. Which do you like better?

In my experience about 80% of students like the non-dominant drawings better.

Why? Somehow they are more “real,” possibly because students’ right brains were more engaged and so they drew what they *saw* rather than what they *thought* they saw. Another reason, I think, is that using your wrong hand causes you to slow down a bit, thereby giving more time to really draw accurately. Finally, people also find they like the tentative line quality often found in wrong-handed drawings.

Gesture Drawings

Best drawn from life or photographs

Speed: extra fast

Suggested media: pen, pencil, or charcoal



This is a classic drawing exercise and seems like it makes no sense at all. And if you are only going for product, you might be right. However, these quick drawings, where you try to capture the “essence” or personality of the giraffe, work on a subconscious level to increase your understanding of the spirit of the giraffe.

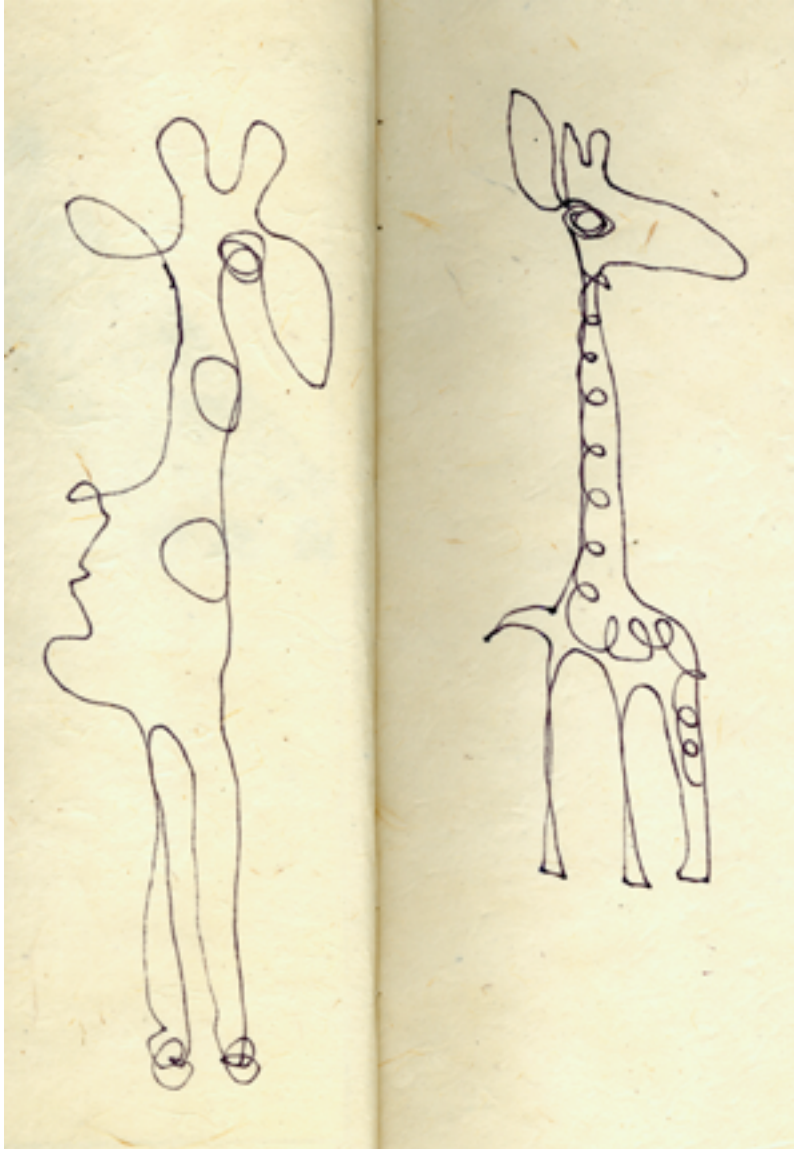
They are done by putting pen to paper and then basically scribbling, or making quick marks. There is no need to look often at the paper; in fact, you might not look at the paper at all. They should take less than 30 seconds each. I try to do a minimum of 10 in each sitting (only five minutes total).

One-liners

Can be drawn from life, photographs, or imagination

Speed: medium-quick

Suggested media: pen or pencil

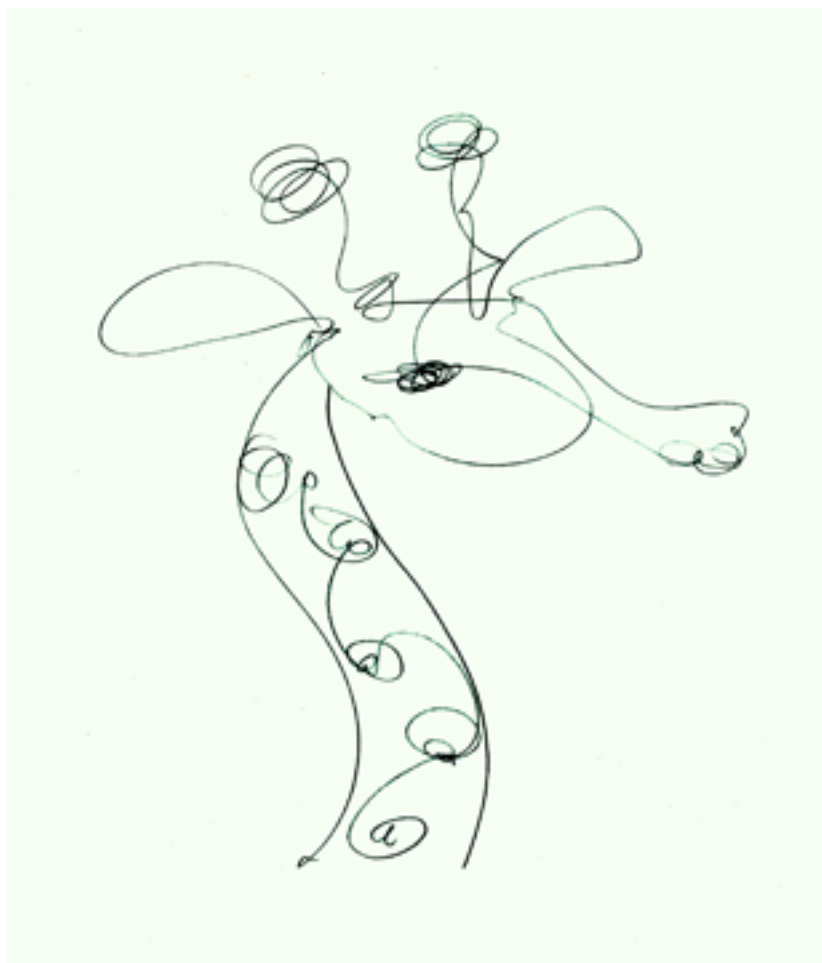


I have a lot of fun with this exercise, and it never fails to get me moving. I got the idea from early 20th century artists such as Picasso, Calder, Klee, and others.

Basically, put pen to paper, think “giraffe,” and go, not lifting your pen from the paper until the animal is complete. Work at a medium speed, not too fast, not too slow. If it feels uncomfortable, try slowing down or speeding up; each person will need to find their own personal “sweet spot,” or speed.

Think loops and allow lines to cross-over each other. Don’t forget the eyes and spots.

This exercise not only gets me moving, but it also allows my subconscious to be in the driver’s seat, creating interesting drawings I might never have thought of without the one-line restriction. (And, which I might refer to later as inspiration for a painting or sculpture.)



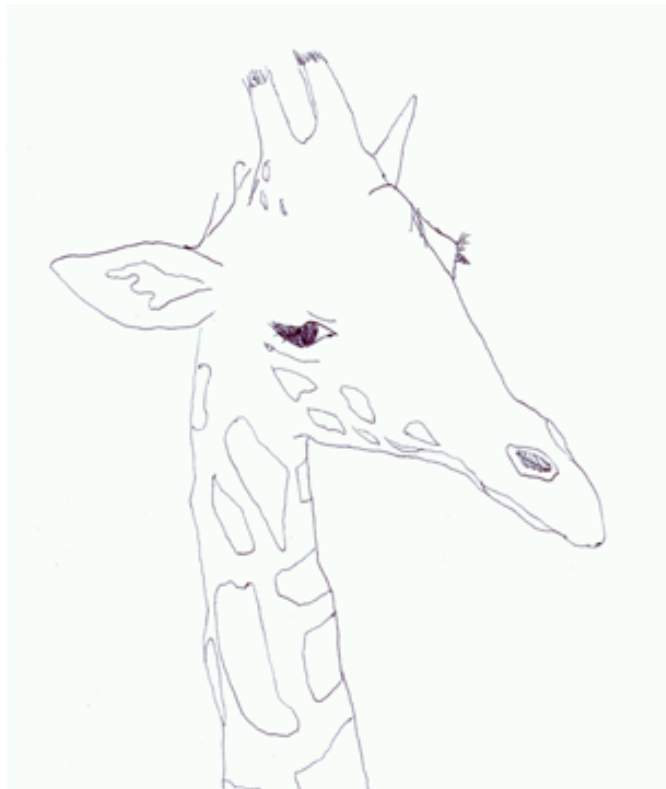
DRAWING REALISTICALLY

Sometimes I'll need to start a drawing session with one or two of the previous exercises to help segue into drawing realistically, which is always a little intimidating for me. (But once I start, I really enjoy it!)

Contour Drawings

Best done from photographs

Speed: extra slowly



I usually use a felt-tip or ballpoint pen for these, as it allows me to focus on the **looking** part, and not the finished product part. Contour drawings are just like blind contour drawings (fix your eyes on an edge, put pen to paper, very slowly move your eyes and pen

along the contour lines, or “edges”), but here you look back and forth continuously from the reference and the paper.

Since these are in pen and not erasable, I personally need to constantly remind myself to reserve judgment on the outcome and proportions. If I make an errant line and I notice it, I just lift my pen and place it where things went wonky, and try again.

This is a time to be gentle with myself, and remember that the point is to get to know my subject, and not to get a great drawing.

“Regular” Realistic Drawings

Best done from life or photographs

Speed: medium



Drawn from a photo by Len Kurzweil.

My favorite drawing tools for this are charcoal or a simple mechanical pencil. In either case, I will sketch it out lightly first to get the proportions as close as possible. I erase often. Soon, I'll begin darkening lines that I feel are correct, always referring back to my reference.

Note: Lines never get erased completely. I learned when taking figure drawing 20 years ago that these erasures or tentative lines are par for the course, and can actually add movement and “life” to a drawing. Most Old Masters’ drawings revealed these errant starts. For example, study this drawing by Leonardo Da Vinci:



Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Study_of_horse.jpg

Notice how many back legs he sketched in, trying to draw it as accurately as possible. Also notice the multiple lines he laid down trying to get the top of the head, neck, and chest right. (So embrace those errant lines as evidence of being human!)

Back to drawing: Generally I will kind of work my way around the drawing in a circular way, revisiting areas of the drawing many times. At any time if I notice that I've mis-drawn the angle of the neck, for example, or made the nose too long, I will go ahead and erase and re-draw.

I never get it perfect. Some days I do better than others, but the one consistency is that there are always little things that could be more accurate. But usually after about 10 or 15 minutes, I call it good and finish what I've started. There's always next time!



SUPPLIES

No doubt you have lots of mark-making supplies on hand already -- crayons, ballpoint pens, pencils, etc. I suggest starting with what you have and not buy anything new. Concentrate first on just the drawing; using inexpensive supplies also often has the benefit of taking the pressure off, which can free you up to draw more boldly and confidently.

If you have art supplies such as colored pencils, markers, etc., go ahead and use them!

These are the main supplies I use personally:

- mechanical pencil
- kneaded rubber eraser
- Ultra Fine Point Black Sharpie pen
- colored pencils
- markers (all kinds)
- 5"x5" sketchbook
- stack of 8.5"x11" white cover stock

The orange sketchbook you saw in the video was gifted to me by my then 17-year-old son, Christer, when he came home from a semester abroad in France. I never could quite think of a fitting use for it until now!

Have a wonderful month, and I'll "see" you at flickr, yahoo, and the blog.

Carla