

Botanical Illustration I: Basic Drawing Techniques

Distance Course offered January 22 – March 8, 2019

Instructor: Marcia Eames-Sheavly

Limited to 20 students

Cost: \$675

Course will close at the end of this course, March 10. The on-line site and its contents will no longer can be accessed after this date.

Purpose:

To observe the plant world through botanical drawing techniques, and to engage in self-expression through this process.

Course Objectives:

Upon completion of this course, you will have the skills to:

- Observe nature through both a scientific (structural) and an artistic (aesthetic) lens.
- Perceive botanical art in the world around you.
- Articulate a personal aesthetic -- what appeals to you, and what you enjoy.
- Gain some proficiency in basic methods of botanical illustration using media such as graphite and pen & ink.

Course Philosophy:

This course is designed to encourage your discovery of plants as the subject of art and to express your interest in the plant world with basic botanical illustration techniques. We will not introduce color in this course, and will not "garden" or focus on growing plants.

It is a drawing course for the beginner.

There are optional exercises. The more you practice, the more your proficiency will grow!

Our approach

This course teaches a less traditional form of botanical illustration. Often, instructors employ a scientific approach, which can be an advantage for plant identification and description. At times this has been essential, particularly before the advent of photography. This course promotes drawing to experience the plant world in a creative way and to express yourself during the process. Although you can become as proficient as you wish, the course instruction will focus on the basics in a supportive environment of self discovery.

My Philosophy as an Instructor

This is an on-line course that you are likely taking for your own personal enrichment and proficiency. As such, I hope that you are intrinsically motivated to complete readings and all assignments, including optional assignments, to devote considerable time to drawing, and to communicate with your colleagues freely and often in an effort to get the most from this course. I will assign readings, and I will assume you read them; I will not "test" you on content because I do not believe that should be your motivation. You will get from the course what you put into it.

Our communication will be positive and will focus on course content. Rude or offensive language, and overly critical commentary will not be tolerated. It is a course taken for enrichment, and the way we communicate with one another will be constructive.

Please be open with your feedback and feel free to contact us with any questions. Open dialogue is encouraged.

Expectations

We ask that you begin without demanding expectations of your artistic abilities for each lesson or upon completion of the course. Keep an open mind, and please remember that it can take a lifetime of drawing every day to develop the kind of skill that you see in the text! Learning to observe and draw is like learning to play the piano: you would never expect yourself to be playing symphonies at the end of your first lesson, and yet often, it seems the people have this expectation with art techniques.

Please take the time to enjoy yourself and get lost in the process, particularly since it offers the additional benefits of providing an experience that gives you a break from the rush and stress of daily life.

The text we have chosen will provide you with a reference for the terms and techniques introduced, while providing you with supplemental exercises that will help you to sharpen your skills on your own. You can locate this text on-line very affordably.

Your illustrations will not likely be as well developed as the course text author's and it would be unwise to have that expectation from the course onset. Use the exercises for inspiration.

Location and setting

It is important that you choose a comfortable, quiet place to practice drawing and complete your assignments. All of the numerous, everyday distractions can disrupt creative flow, limit your focus, and hinder a careful understanding of the plant material you will choose as your subject. So, shut off the cell phone and enjoy the break in the action.

We recommend that you set up your art supplies in a place where they can be readily accessed, rather than have to bring them out each time you use them. This will encourage you to practice more. If you don't have a place where you can leave your supplies uninterrupted, keep them close at hand, in a box underneath your desk or table to eliminate the chore of searching for supplies when you feel inspired.

Working from life

You will need to have some access to plant materials for drawing: houseplants, gardens, stems from the grocery store or florist, produce, collected leaves or twigs, etc. They need not be expensive, and can be very simple, but it is critical that you work from life. There will be times when working with a photograph or other image is tempting, appropriate, or perhaps necessary. For the requirements of this course, however, unless we ask you to use an image or a photograph, please work from the 'real thing.'

Lessons

Our lessons are set up so that you will work through one lesson each week, completing assignments for that week. There will be some combination of warm ups, exercises, and optional assignments or additional challenges for each lesson. Often, you will be scanning your work and sending it to the instructor. Some weeks may contain more lessons than others.

Modifying lessons

You may find some of the lessons to be very straightforward in their approach. Although you need to submit the basic requirements each week, you certainly may embellish and add to them if you wish.

Reflective journals

Your reflective journals will allow you to develop new observational skills as well as a dialogue with the course instructor and your peers. Reflection is something that you can do at home, at work, or during a stroll through the garden. It is a very important part of developing the creative and observational components of your brain, something we expect to improve not just your drawing ability, but your full range of activities around creativity and the plant world. It will encourage you to make connections between the course and your life experience, in addition to reflecting on course content.

Reflective writing can include/focus on:

- Issues/concepts of observing and illustrating as you perceive them; personal opinion and experience; or statements of belief – “I believe that this week's effort was especially well done because....”
- How your thinking, opinions, and beliefs about art are changing/may change through experience, as well as what factors are influencing those changes.
- What have you come to understand about art, and how did you come to know it?
- Problems, areas of ambiguity, and how you resolve problem(s).
- Observations about artists, art works, art techniques, gardeners, gardens, landscapes, etc. ...what you admire, what you dislike.
- Something you are learning, discovering, uncovering, and how you are learning it as an on-going process; what factors contributed to your successful learning? Unsuccessful learning?

Criteria:

- Reflective – not just descriptive!
- Submitted once each week in a timely manner, a page in length, at the least, with a developed idea (if we need to continually remind you to send your journals, it will impact your grade).
- Evidence of thoughtful weighing of course concepts & their meanings.
- What have you learned from this experience?

Required Readings

Beautiful Botanicals: Painting and drawing flowers and plants by Bente Starcke King
North Light Books. Cincinnati, Ohio. Chapter pdf's are embedded into the site; there is no need to purchase the book, which, since it is out of print, is increasingly difficult to access.

Optional Reading

A list of optional books to be used with this course can be found in the 'Additional Resources' topic at the end of the course. To access the list, simply click the 'Materials for Further Exploration' resource.

<http://dev.cce.cornell.edu/moodle/mod/resource/view.php?id=107>

These books can be found in your local bookstore or library. If you have trouble finding them, try online book vendors.

Supplies

Graphite pencils. These drawing pencils can be purchased at any craft store or local art supplier. I suggest purchasing wood-encased graphite pencils that require sharpening, rather than buying mechanical pencils that can carry leads of different hardness for reasons that will be clarified when we learn line and shading techniques.

Hardness. Drawing pencils come in several degrees of hardness which will produce lines of varying darkness. The softest pencil is the 6B, which will produce the darkest line. The hardest is 6H, providing a finer, sharper line. Between these is a continuum of hardness:

6H 5H 4H 3H 2H HB 2B 3B 4B 5B 6B

hardest mid-range softest

You can buy a set of pencils which will contain all or a selection of these, or you can purchase them individually. If purchasing individually, make sure to span the range with your selections. Another excellent drawing pencil is the Sanford Ebony Jet Black pencil #14420.



Erasers. You will need two of these. A Kneaded eraser is made of pliable gum rubber; when kneaded, it will resemble a large, chewed piece of gum. This can be pulled to a point to reach inside small spaces for erasure. A Plastic eraser or White Vinyl eraser is somewhat flexible and excellent for cleanly erasing larger parts of a drawing.



Sharpener. A good sharpener produces a long, sharp tip. You may consider sharpening your pencils with a craft knife since it will allow the pencil to last longer.



Crow Quill or Nib-tipped Pen. The text suggests purchasing two crow quills, the Gillot no. 290 (flexible) and the Hunt no. 103 (harder). A crow quill pen (see page 14 of the text for illustrations) has a metal nib and a holder into which it is inserted. The nib is the piece that holds ink and the holder will allow you to use the pen as you would any other. The nibs are shown below the left and are firmly inserted into the holder, right. Some pens will come with several nibs, others with only one. Be careful not to buy a calligraphy pen, which comes with a flat-point nib for writing that it is difficult, at best, to draw with.

Admittedly, students seem to either love the crow quills, or not, and increasingly, students are finding it difficult to locate these. Please use the crow quill of your choice. If you have a different pen you prefer to use, that is fine!

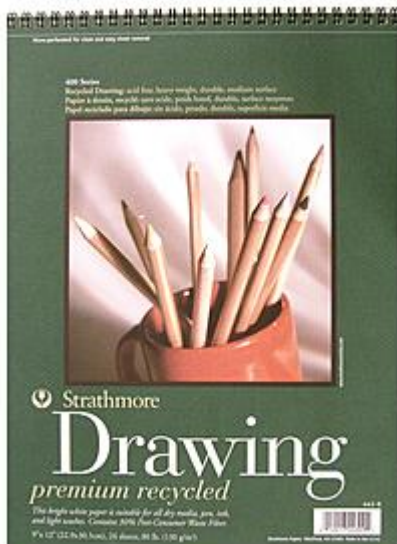




Waterproof Ink, sometimes labeled as **India ink**. You can choose between black or sepia (brown) for these exercises.



Sketch Pad. I suggest that you buy a pad from the Strathmore 400 series in a large size such as **11 x 14**. The pad should contain paper that has some texture (or tooth), but not as much as watercolor paper, which will interrupt a smooth pencil line. A paper that is too smooth will not hold onto the graphite powder and you may lose detail. I suggest a paper that is not bright white, but slightly off-white with a slight warm tone (brown, yellow, orange) and made from rag, rather than the more acidic wood pulp which will yellow and degrade over time.



***** Inexpensive Watercolor Paper or Watercolor pad or block.** This is not necessary if cost is an issue!! Watercolor paper, however, will hold the moisture of ink without buckling and can also support ink wash techniques with much greater ease than can sketch paper. It can be purchased in loose sheets or on a pad or book at you art supply store. Hot-press would be the suitable paper for pen.

Viewfinder. The easiest way to create one of these is by cutting a rectangular hole in an index card. It is best to preserve the proportions of your sketchbook when creating the hole, which can be about 1" x 1 1/4" or 2" x 2 1/2". A small pre-cut mat may also suffice. You'll be using this to narrow your view and experience how a part of the scene stands alone before drawing it, as shown below.



Final Drawing

Please include a description with your piece that discusses your approach (no more than one page): what you have attempted to do, why you chose the topic, what it demonstrates, what you learned, any challenges encountered, and how you overcame them.

Open dialogue with the instructor about the final project is encouraged as your ideas materialize. It is important that you discuss ideas with other students in the Final Project Forum found in Unit 6. It is often helpful to know that everyone may struggle with a project of this nature; the thoughts of your instructor and peers may help to narrow your focus or clarify your goals.

Sample project ideas include, (but are certainly not limited to) a pencil, pen and ink or charcoal rendering of:

- a detailed plant, or portion of a plant
- an element of a landscape
- a still life you have created

Less may be more! A small, well rendered piece is preferable to “biting off more than you can chew.”

Criteria for review:

- Reflects a culmination of all the previous weeks' assignments.
- Use of plant material in the final project.
- The description, as outlined above, is included when submitting the drawing.
- Submitted by the date required.
- Originality and creativity!

The final drawing can be submitted under the assignment "Final Drawing", which can be found in Unit 6 of the Course. Please have your piece or pieces submitted by the final date of the course.

The final project will be piece of original work that is not due for submission until the end of the course. It will reflect your evolving experience and all that you have learned during these six weeks. It doesn't need to be complex to pull together all of the elements. In fact, a simply executed composition may be more manageable, and more beautiful, than attempting too much.

Grading

All work will be evaluated and assigned outstanding, satisfactory, or unsatisfactory as a grade for the effort. You must receive a grade of satisfactory or outstanding for all required assignments to receive a certificate of completion.

Botanical Illustration – Course Timetable at a Glance

All assignments are due at the end of each week, unless otherwise indicated.

Course Introductions

Become familiar with Moodle; read through entire set of resources, readings in the introduction

Introduce yourself

Read through the entire course to see whether you have questions!

Understand final drawing requirements.

Practice uploading and sending a file.

Lesson 1: Observation of Art in Nature

Lesson 2: The Use of Line in Drawing

Lesson 3: The Use of Shape and Space in Drawing

Lesson 4: Depicting Perspective and Foreshortening in Illustration

Lesson 5: Using Light to Add Dimension to Botanical Illustrations

Lesson 6: Composition and a Creative Approach to Drawing