

ADULT DRAWING CLASS

Nature and Minimalism: Ellsworth Kelly

with artist Paul Arden

Friday, July 23, 2010

6:30 - 8:30 p.m.

In the exhibition, “Plants, Flowers and Fruits: Ellsworth Kelly”, the artist has depicted close-up views of small, singular plants that are massively enlarged in size. Each image is composed of only a few bold, black lines on stark white paper-- no color, nor shading, nor detail. Kelly has concentrated his observations purely on the shapes. This approach to drawing is often referred to as Minimal Art.

While the shapes in these lithographs represent leaves, petals, fruit and stems, they are drawn with such extraordinary simplicity, their abstract qualities are readily apparent: carefully proportioned spaces are delineated and arranged like architectural structures, sinuous curves move to elegant rhythms as in a virtuoso musical performance.

Ellsworth Kelly has envisioned humble botanical forms in a way that magnifies the mysteries of nature, sheds light on the process of making art and examines the experience of perception itself.

Exercise #1: Gesture to Contour

- 1) Select one of Kelly’s lithographs to draw a copy from. Spend a full minute just looking closely and consider: what are the positions of the larger shapes and longer lines in relation to the shorter ones?
- 2) Using any “H” pencil, very lightly and rapidly encircle the entire area of the paper that your image will occupy. Then, draw loose, oval shapes that approximate the positions and sizes of the largest shapes first. Also, pay close attention to the size of the “negative”, open spaces between the shapes.
- 3) Directly on top of this “gesture” or sketch, use a very dark “B” pencil to draw the lines just as they appear in the lithograph: slow, continuous, even, black lines (some might be a bit lighter.)

Exercise #2: Direct Contour

1) Select a different lithograph to copy on the back of your first one. Spend a minute to imagine making a gesture sketch, without actually touching the paper.

2) Using a black, oil-based pencil, start from the center and draw slow, continuous lines as they appear in the lithograph. Look very closely, observing every subtle change in direction. Always consider the height, width and spacing of the shapes and how they abut or overlap one another.

Exercise #3: Blind Silhouette

1) Look very carefully at a live, large-leaved plant. Imagine how its shape can fit on a blank sheet of paper. Starting at the bottom of the paper, draw one, single, continuous line that follows all the outside edges of only the outermost leaves and separates the entire plant shape from the surrounding background. Take your time, and **DO NOT LOOK AT THE PAPER WHILE YOU ARE DRAWING THIS LINE.**

2) While looking at the paper, draw the negative shapes of the open holes between the leaves, also using slow, single lines.

3) Draw several individual leaves near the center of the plant in the same way.

Exercise #4: Minimal Art Style

1) Choose another plant, then on the back of your last drawing, make a fast, light, gestural sketch of a portion that contains only a few large leaves. On top of your sketch, contour the simple shapes, emulating the style of Ellsworth Kelly.

Variation #1: Surface and Volumetric Form

1) Develop one drawing with more detail and different varieties of line, in order to emphasize three dimensional depth.

Variation #2: Value Contrast

1) Add smooth passages of darker tone to portions of a plant and/or the background. Notice the powerful effect this has, changing the overall impression of the image.

ADULT DRAWING

Landscape and Abstraction: A Cubist's Approach

Friday, August 20, 6:30 - 8:30 pm

with artist Paul Arden

Cubism was the most distinctive, radical and influential of movements in the history of Modern Art. From its inception, around 1907, in the work of Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque, Cubism abruptly departed from the illusionistic traditions that had always prevailed in the visual arts.

At the dawn of the twentieth century, revolutionary new theories by Einstein, Marconi, Freud, Schoenberg and many more, brought sweeping changes to science, politics and communication, as well as literature, music and art. The pre-eminent, cultural capital, Paris, with its ubiquitous entertainments, modern transportation, commercial marketing, and also its social conflicts, was host to the world's largest community of avant garde artists and thinkers. In the galleries and salons, Picasso, Henri Matisse, and many other young artists were exposed to exotic influences, such as African sculpture and Japanese prints, and also to the groundbreaking work of Paul Cezanne.

Cezanne's late paintings of landscape, still life and bathers are unusual, in revealing individual moments of perception which remain distinct, as they are juxtaposed alongside one another. The elements of line, shape, mass and color are articulated like separate components that tend to flatten the appearance of the image, rather than depict depth and space. The younger generation of artists saw in Cezanne's paintings, a means of questioning the traditional process of pictorial representation. These artists were eager to abandon academic, realist conventions and to push beyond what they saw as the bourgeois sentimentality of the Impressionists.

Picasso's monumental canvas, *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R.)* (1907) shocked viewers with its violent distortions of form and its compressed, angular space. The first use of the term "Cubism", however, was in reference to Braque's landscape paintings done in Estaque, in the French countryside. In these works, small houses are portrayed, literally, as simplified cubes; trees are depicted as cylinders and cones; no horizon line is shown and the shading appears illogical and arbitrary.

Braque and Picasso, working closely together in the style of Analytical Cubism, ventured toward nearly total abstraction. Still life and figures feature prominently during this period, but the subjects are virtually unrecognizable, being portrayed from all angles simultaneously, and often enmeshed in a grid of interlocking diagonals. Sharp corners and circular arcs echo in staccato rhythm and cast strong, ambiguously fading shadows.

Ephemeral surfaces seem to merge with solidified space; only mere traces of objects' contours survive as icons of representational likeness, even color is left out.

By 1911, a Cubist movement had developed, including such artists as Juan Gris, Fernand Leger, Lyonel Feininger and Robert and Sonia Delaunay. Another phase, called Synthetic Cubism subsequently evolved, further emphasizing the flatness of the picture plane by introducing surface textures, such as wood grain, and by adding elements of collage, like newspaper and printed labels.

As Cubism's popularity increased, several closely related art movements developed throughout Europe: Futurism, Constructivism, Expressionism, Synchronism and Dada. Many aspects of these movements persisted through two world wars and continue to inform the Abstraction, Conceptualism and multiplicity of styles in art today.

EXERCISES

- 1) Using an "H" pencil and a ruler, draw a very light diagonal line from the top left corner of your paper, down to the bottom right corner. Draw the opposite diagonal to form a large "X". Next, draw a long vertical and a long horizontal that also intersect at the center point of the "X".
- 2) Choose one of the Cubist paintings and sit close enough to study the shapes and lines of its composition. Orient your paper to the same format as the painting: vertical or horizontal. Imagine that the grid you drew is projected onto the painting. Now, look for the longest, straightest lines that are actually in the painting; how are they positioned in relation to the imaginary grid?
- 3) Draw the long lines of the painting onto your grid paper, somewhat darker, observing where the lines begin and how they frequently continue in the same direction through various shapes and colors. Use a ruler for straight lines and freehand the curves. If necessary, use a kneaded eraser to soften the lines, or a regular eraser to eliminate them.
- 4) Draw some of the shorter lines, to approximate portions of the painting's geometric structure. Do not draw any of the objects that are represented, only draw abstract shapes.
- 5) In the Sculpture Garden, select portions of trees and/or smaller plants to integrate within the Cubist framework on your paper. Use color pencil to draw elements of branches and foliage that can be simplified or rearranged to coincide with the Cubist shapes. Look very closely at the negative spaces between and within the plants and trees; try to emphasize these spaces as important and distinctive forms in the composition.

6) Use harder pressure with the color pencils next to some of the lines, to make dark edges, then shade away from the edge, using less pressure for gradually lighter tones.

7) Use your imagination and let images overlap one another as if transparent in some places and opaque in others. Include portions of sculptures into your drawing as well, letting them overlap or merge with the landscape forms.

ADULT DRAWING

The Graphic Landscape: Utagawa Hiroshige

Friday, July 30, 2010, 6:30 - 8:30 p.m.

with artist Paul Arden

Utagawa Hiroshige (1797-1858) is widely acknowledged as one of the most important and influential masters of the woodblock print. His prints and paintings, numbering in the thousands, provide fascinating insights into life in Japan during the end of the Tokugawa period (1600-1868).

The development of woodblock printing, pioneered in the late 18th century by such artists as Hokusai and Utamaro, provided colorful editions inexpensively enough to be acquired by ordinary people. These prints often featured portrayals of famous actors, historical and religious figures, scenes of everyday life and sumptuous images of nature.

Hiroshige depicted numerous views of Edo (present day Tokyo) and of travelers along the Tokaido road, which extended from Edo for over 200 miles, to Kyoto, the ancient imperial capital. An astonishing variety of subjects are presented in several large series of prints: urban festivals with fashionably dressed women in the moonlight; Mount Fuji, rising with the sun, above rustic villages and mist-covered farms; a sudden downpour or falling snow over a forested mountain pass; fishing boats off rugged coastlines with crashing waves.

Japan's rich natural topography and changing seasons have been celebrated in poetry and painting since ancient times. Hiroshige frequently focused on landscape and his work was highly acclaimed in his day, especially for his ability to capture the varying qualities of light and atmosphere. His lyrical and dynamic compositions portray the power and beauty of nature, as well as the social aspects and aesthetic achievements of his culture. They continue to enchant and enlighten viewers in the present time.

DRAWING INSTRUCTIONS

MEDIA:

Graphite (lead) pencils, charcoal pencils and pastel pencils (rust red) are all erasable and can be blended, using a paper towel.

Oil-based pencils (scribe-All, PITT), color pencils and Tombo pens can not be erased or blended, but they will make lighter or finer marks, depending on the angle at which they are held and the amount of pressure you apply.

When using the Tombo pen, ALWAYS snap the loose cap onto the closed cap!

EXERCISE:

- 1) Select a Hiroshige print that features a large image of a tree. The prints on the bottom row are easier to see, as you sit down and draw.
- 2) Sketch one large tree in graphite pencil, using long lines for the trunk and branches and scribbly ovals for the foliage.
- 3) On top of your sketch, draw the contour lines of the trunk and branches as they appear in the print; use the fine tip of the Tombo pen. Look closely at the various curves, angles and wiggles in the marks and lines; they are often tapered and sharp-ended. To make finer lines, hold the pen perpendicular to the paper; for bolder lines, use the side of the fine point.
- 4) Draw the foliage with the wide, brush-tip. For small leaves, just touch the paper with the tip or side of the brush-pen, For bunches of leaves, make thick, chunky strokes with the side of the brush-pen; add fine marks that radiate outward (for rougher texture on the edges of leaf bunches.)
- 5) Select another print, if you wish, and draw some smaller, simpler, background trees, on the same page.

LANDSCAPE SCENE

For the first steps of your drawing, work outside at the cafe tables.

BORDER

- 1) Place a quarter (25 cents) over a corner of your paper and trace $\frac{2}{3}$ of a circle around it with pencil; repeat on each corner.
- 2) Place a ruler about $\frac{1}{4}$ inch inside one edge of your paper and draw a long, ruled line with fine point Tombo pen (between the pencilled curves); repeat on all sides, then ink in the curves.

SKY

- 1) Choose a location, rather high on your paper, to place the full moon; hold a quarter down and trace around it with fine-point Tombo.

2) Use long strokes with the side of a charcoal pencil to blacken the area immediately below the top border line; use long, parallel strokes with a folded paper towel to blend the black to gray, moving side-to-side and lower down the page. Excess gray, on the moon and over the border, should be removed with an eraser.

3) Measure 5 inches up from the bottom edge of your paper, making a small mark on the left side, then on the right. Use pencil to draw a horizon line across the entire page (connecting the marks.)

4) Apply rust red pastel pencil directly ABOVE the horizon line; blend with a clean area of the paper towel, side-to-side, UP towards the center of the sky.

TREES

1) Move to another location and select a tree in the Sculpture Garden to include in the foreground of your composition. Make a large drawing of the tree, following the steps listed in the previous exercises.

2) Also include background trees, smaller and closer to the horizon.

COMPLETION

The following items may be added in the time remaining, or for homework, or in class on August 13:

- meandering horizontals and curves for coast line and clouds
 - tapering, pen strokes to indicate rippling surface texture of water
 - rectangular, red cartouche with Japanese calligraphy
 - light and dark blue color pencil on sky and water
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ADULT DRAWING

Polychrome “Pictures of the Floating World”: Ukiyo-e Woodblock Prints

Friday, August 13, 2010, 6:30 - 8:30 pm

with artist Paul Arden

Japanese woodblock prints by Hiroshige and his fellow artists of the ukiyo-e genre, arrived in Europe accidentally, yet they provided a crucial impetus for the development of modern art.

Trade with the west opened in 1854, ending Japan's two hundred year span of national seclusion. While photography and modern printing techniques were introduced to Japan, interest in Japanese culture (Japonism) garnered widespread popularity in Europe. Japanese-themed operas, such as “The Mikado” by Gilbert and Sullivan, and “Madame Butterfly”, by Puccini, were produced; several European galleries attracted art collectors with Japanese ceramics, bronzes and textiles.

Parisian gallery owners first discovered the ukiyo-e prints included among the packing materials within crates containing porcelain. Artists and collectors were astounded by the prints' asymmetric compositions of bold, contrasting shapes and vibrant color harmonies. The flattening out of the picture plane and the absence of chiaroscuro shading inspired artists to adopt a new set of formal concerns and abandon the prevailing Realist and academic styles of painting.

Impressionists, such as Monet and Pissarro, admired the Japanese artists emphasis on delicate, linear contours as well as the spiritual qualities conveyed in depictions of light and water. The Postimpressionists, including Gauguin, Degas, Cassatt and Toulouse-Lautrec, were influenced by the use of simple shapes that were separated by heavy black lines; the patterned surfaces contrasting with open voids; the unusual, off-center vantage points.

Van Gogh was so enamored of Japanese prints that he collected them by the hundreds and even copied a few. He wrote about his admiration for the clarity of the Japanese images, of how they were drawn so easily and naturally with only a few strokes, tending to symbolize nature, rather than imitate it directly. Van Gogh developed a strong interest in Buddhism and even shaved his head, in order to look like a Japanese monk.

The influence of Hiroshige and other ukiyo-e masters continued to effect subsequent movements in painting, including Art Nouveau, Fauvism and Cubism, as well as Modernist styles in sculpture, architecture and design.

REVIEW

1) During the first class of the Drawing from Nature series, we studied the lithographs of Ellsworth Kelly and considered his use of bold, black lines to elegantly define simplified shapes from the plants he observed. Participants practiced making a preliminary sketch, or “gesture”, with light graphite, in order to work out the general sizes and shapes of the composition and facilitate “performing” the refined, flowing line-work in darker media.

2) In the next class, we continued making initial sketches, lightly in graphite, from woodblock prints by Hiroshige. Participants drew over the sketches with both the point and the side of Tombo pens and oil-based, black pencils, achieving a variety of lines and marks similar to those in the prints. Charcoal and pastel pencils were also used, to apply large tonal areas that were smoothly blended with a paper towel, from a dark edge to a pale, atmospheric “wash”.

CLASS WORK

1) While looking at paintings by Postimpressionist artists, consider the overall, flat appearance of the canvas, or picture plane. Notice the arrangement of bold shapes in the composition and how they are frequently segmented from one another with strong lines. Also observe the interaction of warm and cool colors, the use of complementaries and the varying degrees of brightness or intensity.

2) In the Sculpture Garden, choose a vantage point which you feel could be developed into a composition similar to the Postimpressionists or the ukiyo-e style. You might consider including some vertical elements in the foreground, such as plants, flowers or a tree. The middle ground could feature an open area of water or grass and could include a sculpture, if you like. The background might have distant shrubs or trees, mountains, a sky with Japanese style clouds or a full moon.

3) Sketch your scene lightly, with graphite pencil only. Develop the large, general shapes first, then add the details of more carefully observed forms and textures.

4) For the final portion of this class meeting, we will work downstairs, in the Hiroshige: Visions of Japan exhibit. Sit close to prints that inspire you, adding linear and textural elements to your pencil sketch, using both tips of the Tombo pen and oil-based black pencils.

5) Add coloration to your drawing, inspired by the woodblock prints, or your recollections of the Postimpressionist paintings. Side-to-side blends may be applied broadly with charcoal or pastel pencils and a paper towel (and erased, where necessary.) Color pencil can be applied with varying amounts of pressure, depending on the degree of darkness desired. Similar colors may be layered, one over another, to obtain richness of hue.