

Line Drawing: A Guide for Art Students

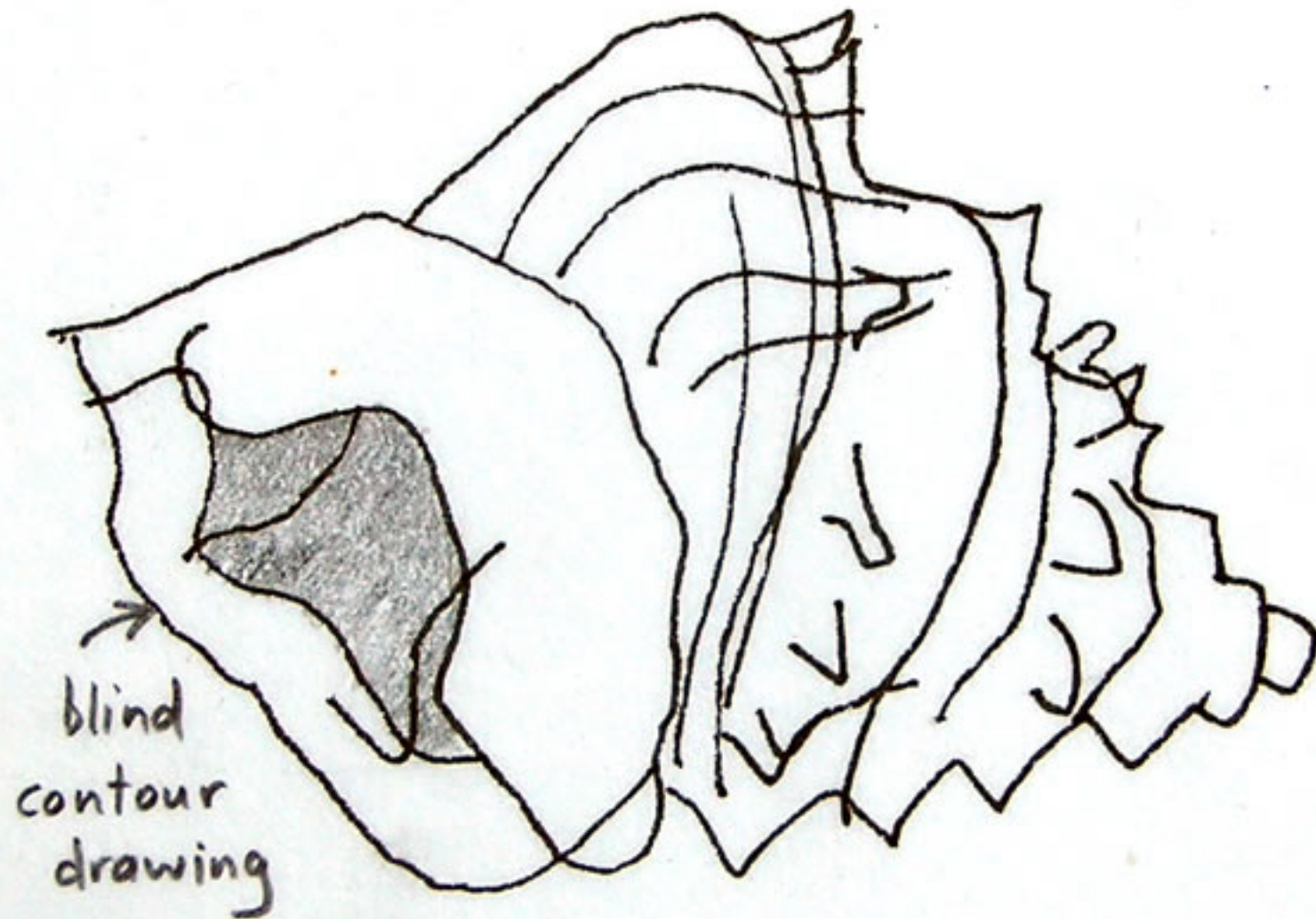
It all begins with lines. It's usually the first marks we make on paper. Understanding all its uses will teach you how line **defines form, creates structure, divides a frame, traces contour, creates tonal variation** (cross-hatching, for example) and **leads the eye from one part of a work to another**. Line can be so much more than outlines on paper that show the edges of an object...whether a quiet flick of charcoal on paper or a streak of graphite.

This document contains exercises for Art students who wish to produce contour line drawings, cross contour drawings, blind drawings and other types of line drawings. It is a teaching aid for students and includes a few activities and printable worksheets..

Blind Contour Drawing

Definition: A blind contour drawing contains lines that are drawn without ever looking at the piece of paper. This forces you to study a scene closely, observing every shape and edge with your eyes, as your hand mimics these on paper. The aim is not to produce a realistic artwork, but rather to strengthen the connection between eyes, hand and brain: a reminder that, when drawing, you must first learn to see.

Blind Drawing Exercises: Drawing wobbly lines that bear little resemblance to the chosen object is relaxing and stress-free. Often, a classroom bubbles with laughter at the unexpected results. Blind drawing stretches the arms and soul; eases you into observational drawing without fear.



A warm-up activity in which students were asked to create blind contour line drawings of shell.

Gesture Drawing / Timed Drawing / Movement Drawing

Definition: A gesture drawing is completed quickly – often in short timed durations, such as 20, 30, 60 or 90 seconds – using fast, expressive lines. Gesture drawings capture basic forms and proportions – the emotion and essence of a subject – without focusing on detail. Due to their rapid completion, they are a great way to record movement and action, as well as increase your drawing speed, confidence and intuitive mark-making skill. Gesture drawings are best completed with smooth, easily applied mediums (chunky graphite pencils, charcoal sticks, pastels, soft brushes dipped in Indian ink, for example), without the use of an eraser. They are often completed on large, inexpensive sheets of paper, where you can move your arm fluidly, be bold with mark-making, and not worry about mistakes. As with blind drawings, gesture drawing is an ideal warm-up activity.

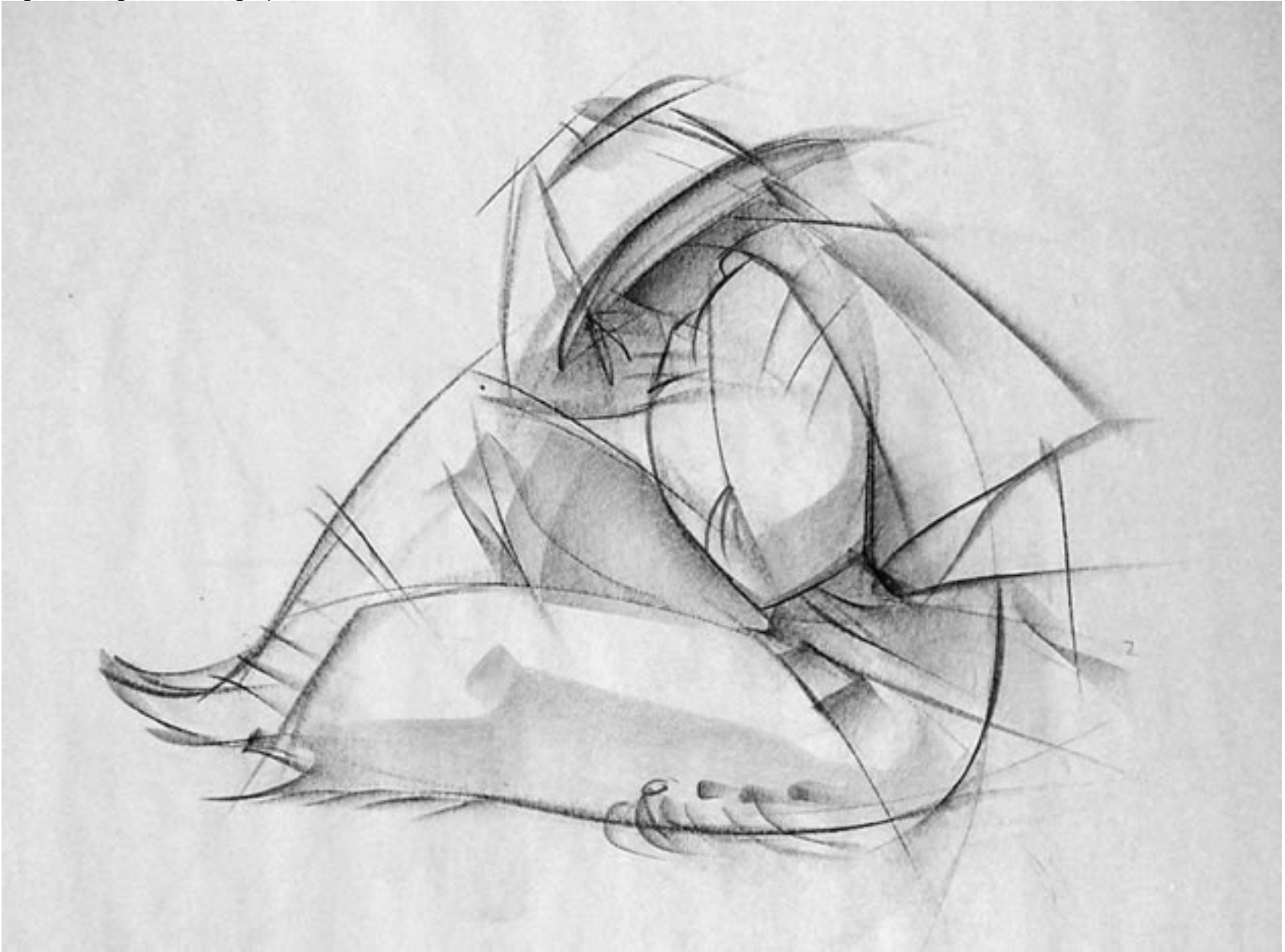
Gesture Drawing Exercises: When you begin investigating your subject matter in the initial phase of a high school Art program, it can be helpful to make several first-hand gestural drawings. The best of these can be selected for your final portfolio (taking advantage of a photocopier or digital camera to reduce in size, if necessary). A small still life scene can be depicted just as easily as a large moving form.

A gesture drawing by Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn:



This gestural drawing by Rembrandt is completed using red chalk on rough, textured paper. With just a few expressive lines, we instantly recognize the scene: two women teaching a child to walk.

A gestural figure drawing by Chelsea Stebar:



Completed while studying Animation, this gesture drawing captures a clothed figure. Note the variation in line weight: light lines applied initially, with darker lines and hints of detail all that are needed.

Continuous Line Drawing

Definition: A continuous line drawing is produced without ever lifting the drawing instrument from the page. This means that, in addition to outlines and internal shapes, the pencil must move back and forth across the surface of the paper, with lines doubling back on each other, so that the drawing is one free-flowing, unbroken line. To avoid the temptation to erase lines, it can be helpful to complete a continuous line drawing with an ink pen, varying the line weight, as needed, to indicate perspective and areas of light and shadow. Like the drawing methods described above, this drawing method develops confidence and drawing speed, and encourages your eyes and hand and brain to work together. Continuous line drawings work best with in-depth observation of your subject, without interference from your thinking mind. According to Smithsonian Studio Arts:

...continuous line drawing is actually a very powerful way to create a piece that is both hard edged and fluid, representational and abstract, rational and emotional all in one.

Continuous Line Drawing Exercises: This drawing method is great for sketchbooks and drawing from life. It can be an excellent starter activity, with drawings completed on large, inexpensive paper that can be scanned / edited / cropped and used in other ways within your projects.

An A Level Art sketchbook page:



This sketchbook page contains several continuous line drawings, drawn from first-hand observation.

Contour drawing

Definition: A contour drawing shows the outlines, shapes and edges of a scene, but omits fine detail, surface texture, color and tone ('contour' is French for 'outline').

According to Wikipedia:

The purpose of contour drawing is to emphasize the mass and volume of the subject rather than the detail; the focus is on the outlined shape of the subject and not the minor details.

The illusion of three-dimensional form, space and distance can be conveyed in a contour drawing through the use of varied line-weight (darker lines in the foreground / paler lines in the distance) and perspective.

Contour Drawing Exercises: Using line alone eliminates the challenge of applying tone, color and mediums; and instead focuses attention solely upon shape and proportion. After completing warm-up activities such as blind and gesture drawings, slower, more formal contour drawings can be an excellent way to begin more realistic representations of your subject matter. Used intermittently throughout projects, contour drawings can also be helpful for the student who needs to work faster.

A contour drawing by Ultima Thule:



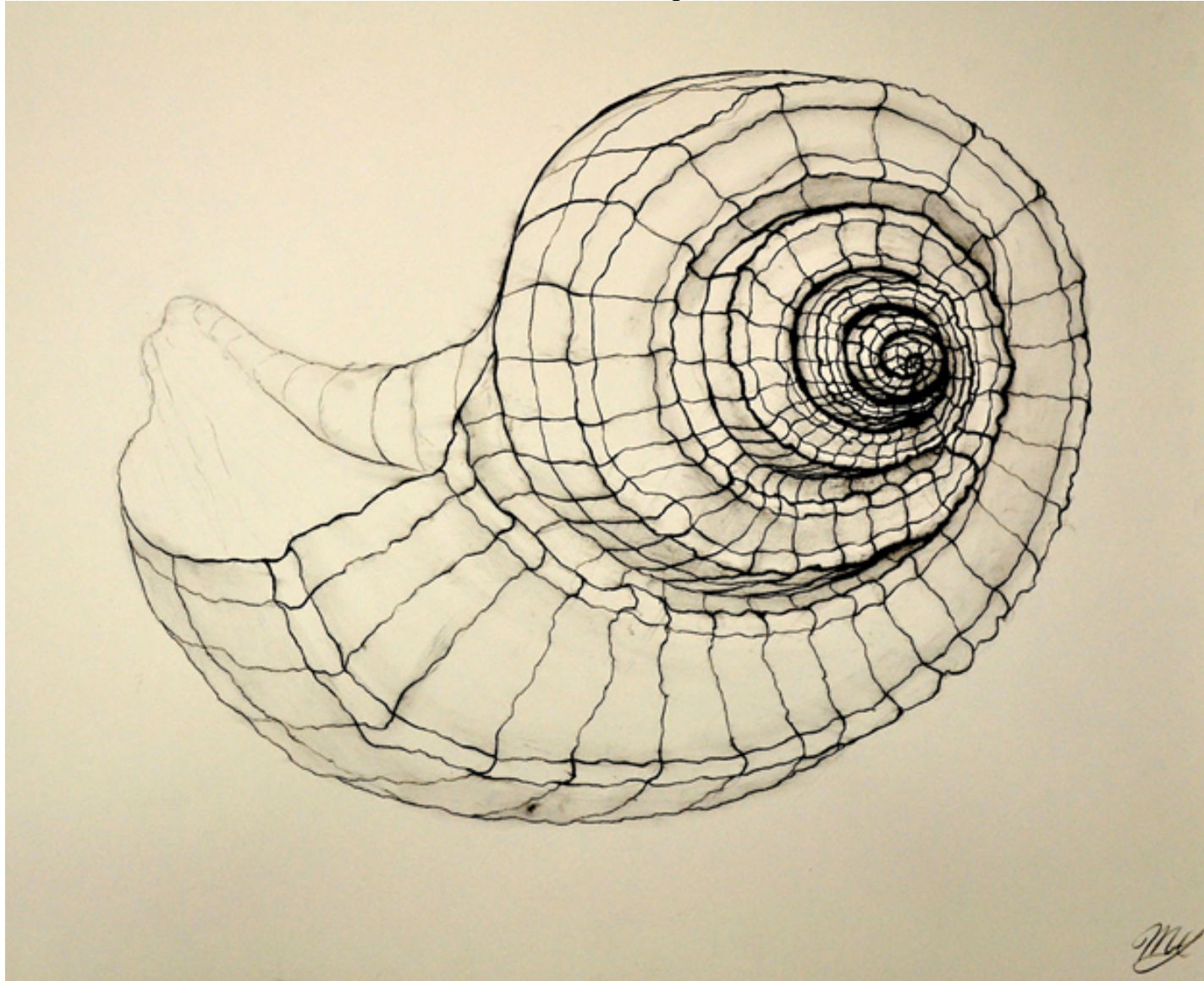
Modern line drawings by Ultima Thule: there is a slick contrast in this drawing between the sharp black lines and the dripping green. The application of color to one area creates a dramatic focal point.

Cross contour drawing

Definition: A cross contour drawing contains parallel lines that run across the surface of an object (or radiate from a central point), such as those that appear on a topographical map or a digital wireframe. The lines can run at any appropriate angle (sometimes at multiple angles) and may continue across objects and into the background. Cross contour drawings typically follow the rules of perspective, with lines drawn closer together in the distance and further apart in the foreground. In this type of drawing, the illusion of three-dimensional volume is created entirely with line.

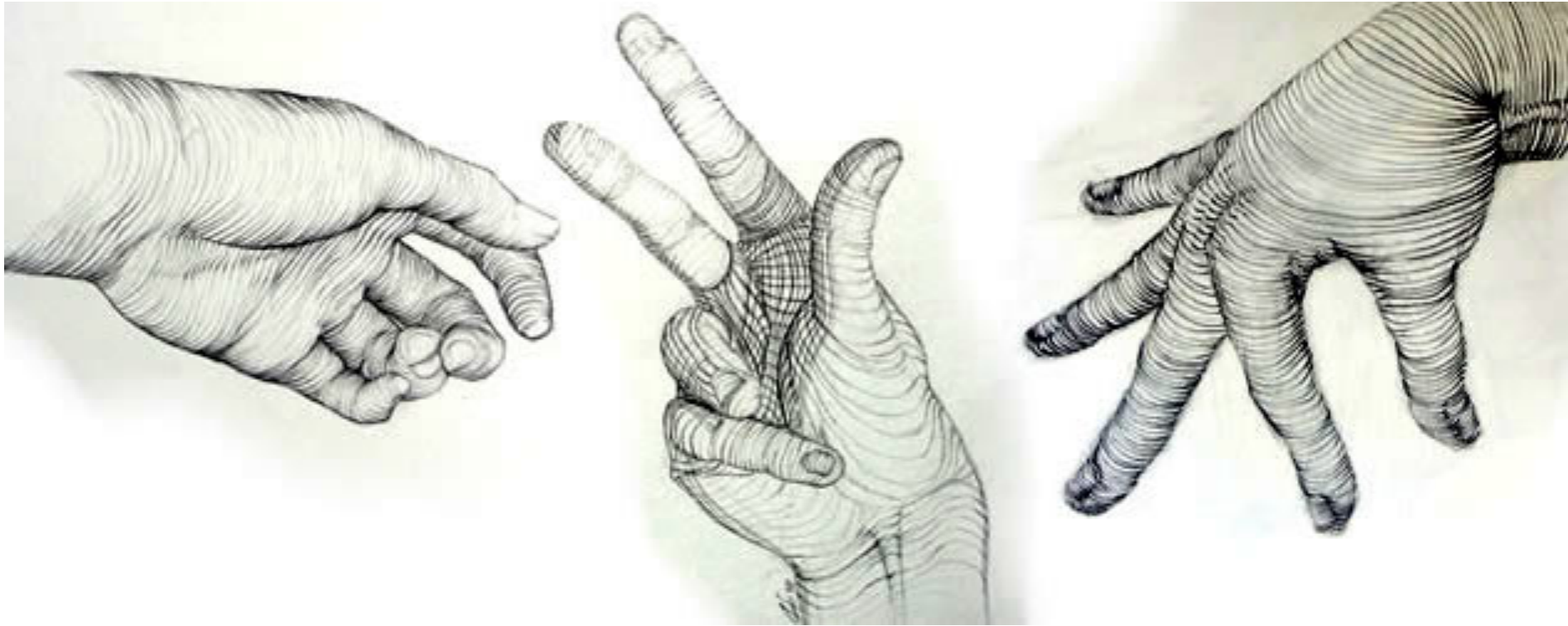
Cross Contour Drawing Exercises: This is an excellent way to gain familiarity with the volumes and three-dimensional forms in your project, producing analytical cross contour drawings that are suitable for sketchbooks or early preparatory sheets.

Cross contour drawing of a shell:



This cross contour drawing helps to communicate the bumpy surface of the shell. Note how the shell pieces that are furthest away from the viewer are thin and light, whereas those that are closest are darker and thicker. Note also how the direction of the contour lines relates to the shape of object that is drawn, with lines projecting outwards from the center of the shell.

Cross contour hand draw



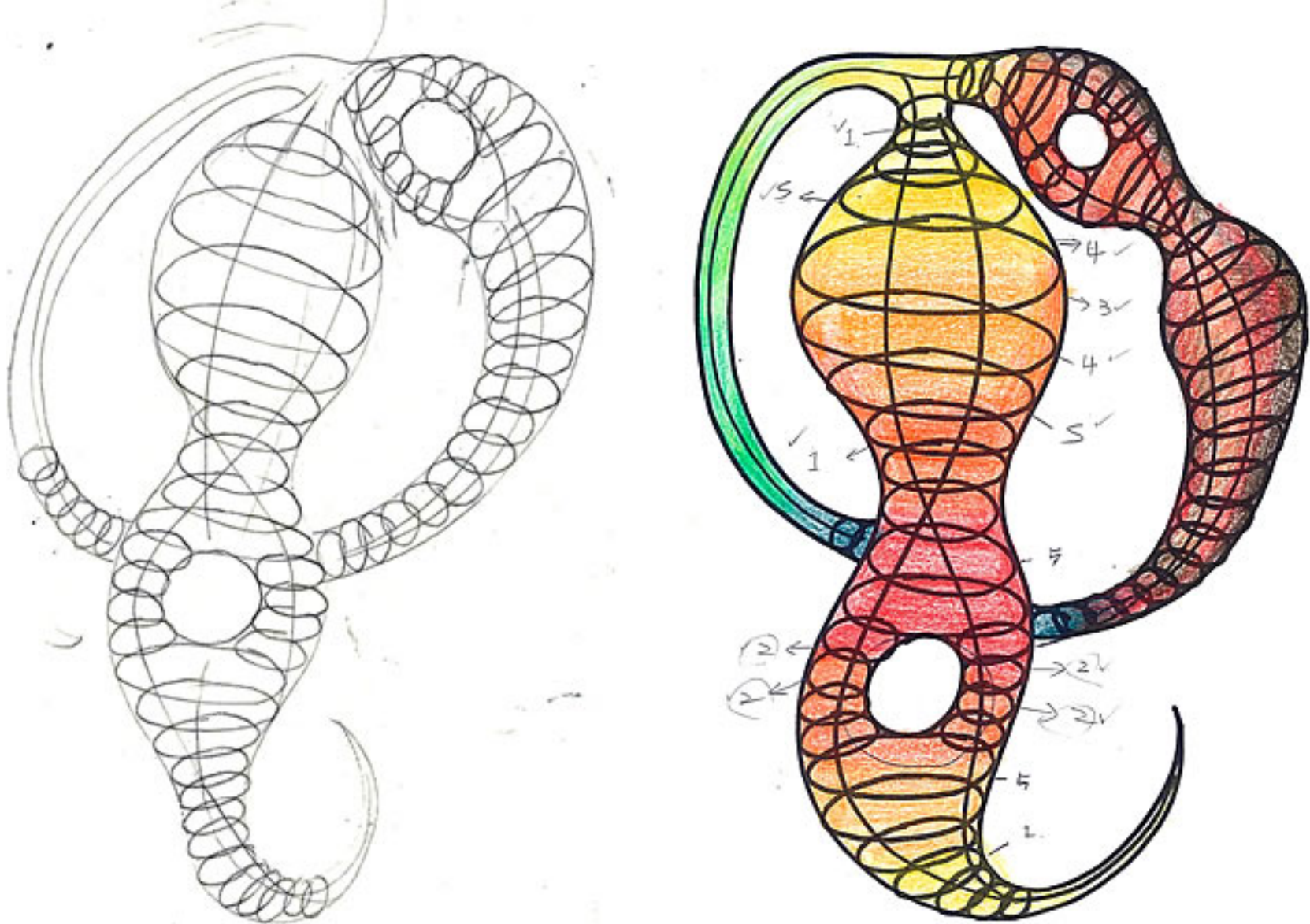
The human hand is a good subject for a cross contour line drawing exercise. Hands can create interesting, complex, curving shapes, as in the examples above, and easy for first-hand observation. Note how the density and weight of the line also helps to communicate areas of light and shadow.

Cross contour drawings by a student completed while studying AP Studio Art:



These drawings show good use of line thickness, with the line-weight varying in order to create the illusion of tone and to show three-dimensional form.

A wireframe contour drawing exercise by Year 9 student



Contour lines can also be a great way for students to design three-dimensional forms. These drawings were completed as part of a papier mache sculpture project, with the contour lines representing the supporting cane structure.

Planar analysis drawing

Definition: A planar analysis drawing simplifies complex curved surfaces into flat planes, using straight lines. This process helps students to think about the underlying structure of objects and results in an analytical drawing, that is rather mechanical in appearance.

Planar Analysis Drawing Activity: This can be a great introductory drawing exercise, especially if you are moving towards Cubism or abstracting scenes into geometric form.

A planar analysis portrait completed by a student of Cat Normoyle:



The symmetry and familiarity of the human face makes portraiture a great subject for planar analysis, as the task is to convert three-dimensional form into flat surfaces. Note the careful attention given to the nose and lips in this example.

Wire sculpture drawings

Definition: Wire can be cut and bent into shapes with pliers to create three-dimensional 'drawings', often resulting in a work filled with flowing, curved lines. These wire sculptures can be attached to a two-dimensional frame or a flat surface, hung in the air, or be left free-standing, changing in appearance as a viewer moves around the room. Due to their flexible nature, wire sculptures often move slightly in the wind, adding an extra interactive element to the work.

Wire Sculpture Line Drawing Exercise: This is an excellent activity for middle school students and for high school students, if it relates specifically to your project (and does not interfere with postage requirements, for those who need to post work away for assessment). Small wire experiments, using light weight wire, can also be mounted to sketchbook pages.

Wire sculptures completed by the students of Amy Bonner Oliveri from Allendale Columbia School, Rochester, New York, USA.



This wire drawing exercise 'using line to create space' is completed by students within a 3D Art class, working over photographic portraits. Having a base image to work from (this could also be an earlier observational drawing) makes the process of transferring from two-dimensional to three-dimensional much easier.

Hatching, cross hatching, and other line techniques..

As well as representing contours, line can also be used to apply tone (light and shadow) to a drawing. This can be done by altering the:

- Gap between the lines
- Lightness / darkness of the line
- Thickness of the line

There are many line techniques can be used to create tone, as illustrated in the worksheet below. Common techniques include:

- Small dashes
- Hatching (long, parallel lines on an angle)
- Cross-hatching (parallel lines at right angles)
- Stippling (dots)
- Scribbles
- Small crosses
- Small circles

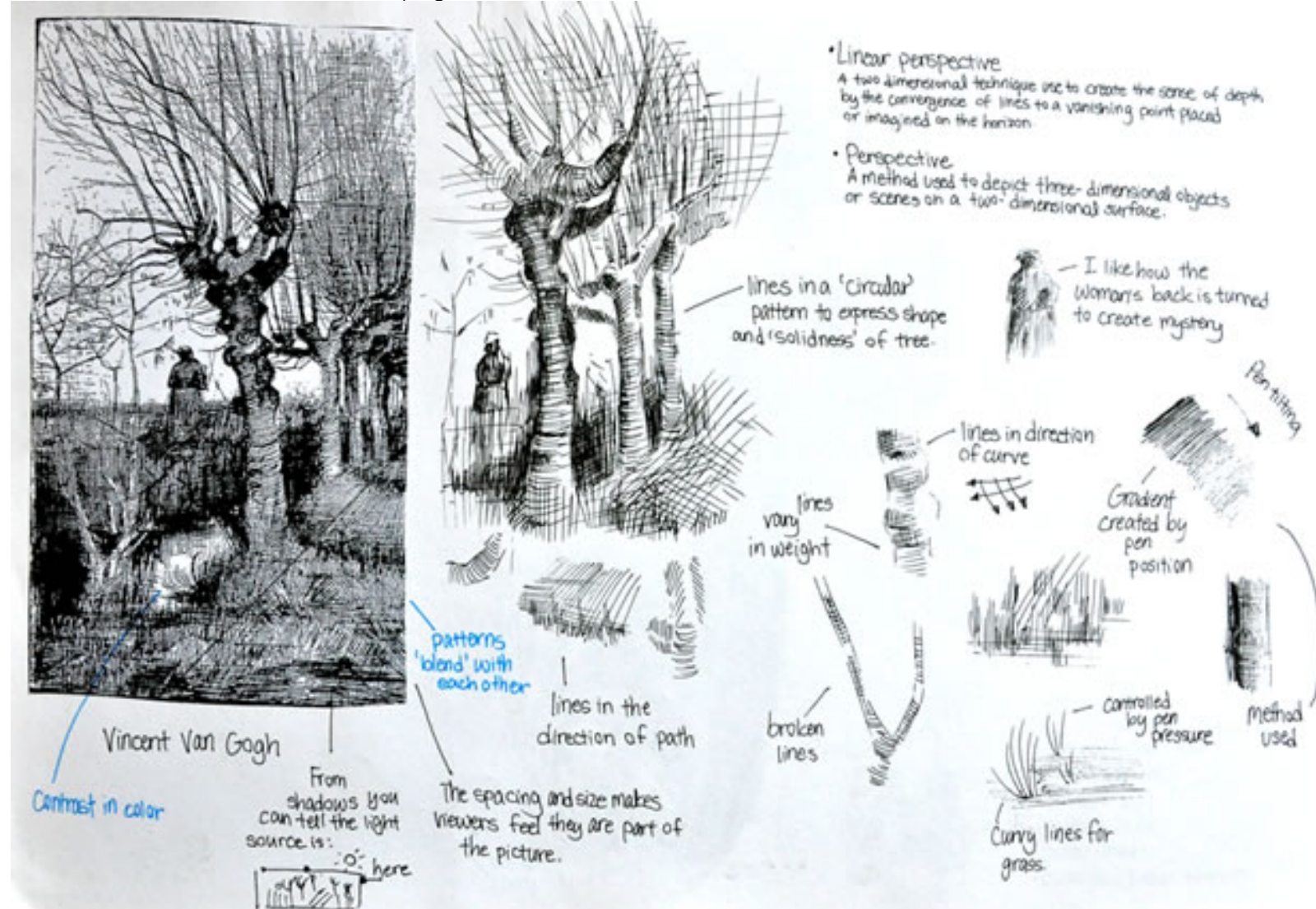
The angle that these techniques are applied may remain constant within a drawing, or it may change in response to the angle and direction of the forms. For example, cross-hatching may flow around the surface of an object in a similar direction as cross contour lines. These techniques are also a great way to create the illusion of texture

An Indian Ink still life drawing completed by a Year 10 student:



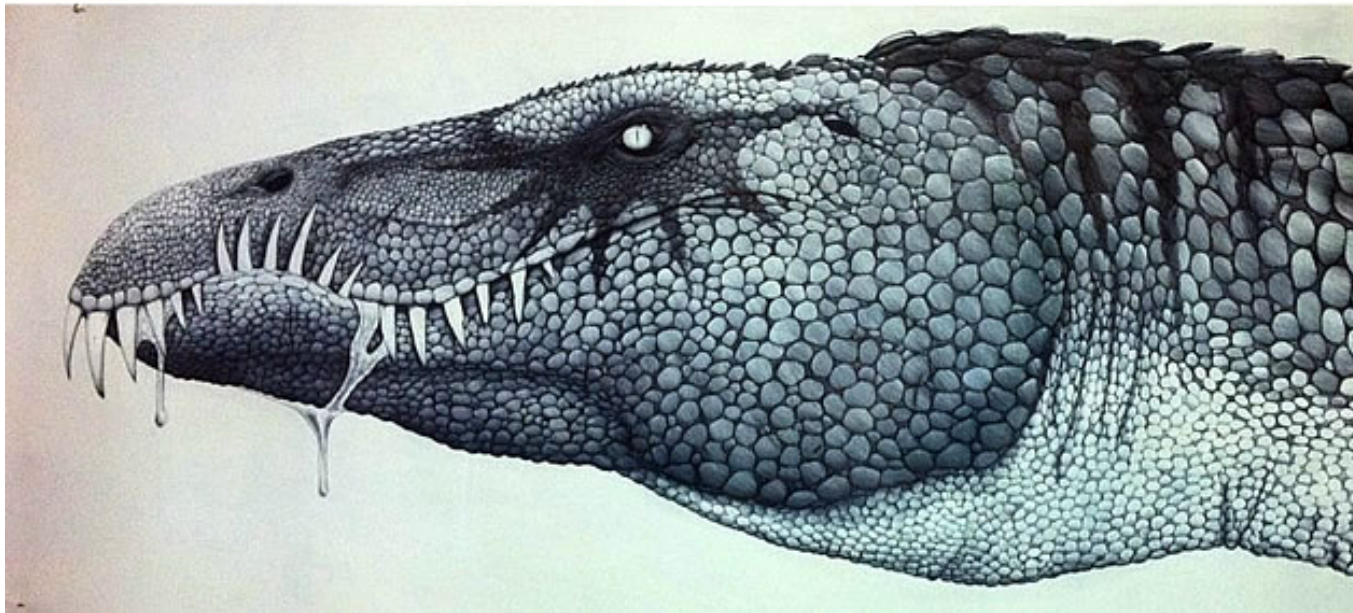
In this ink drawing, a small grid experimenting with different line techniques has been included in the top left of the work. Some of these have been selected to apply tone to the work, carefully replicating reflection and shadow. This image was completed using a sharpened bamboo stick dipped in black ink.

An A* GCSE Art students sketchbook page:



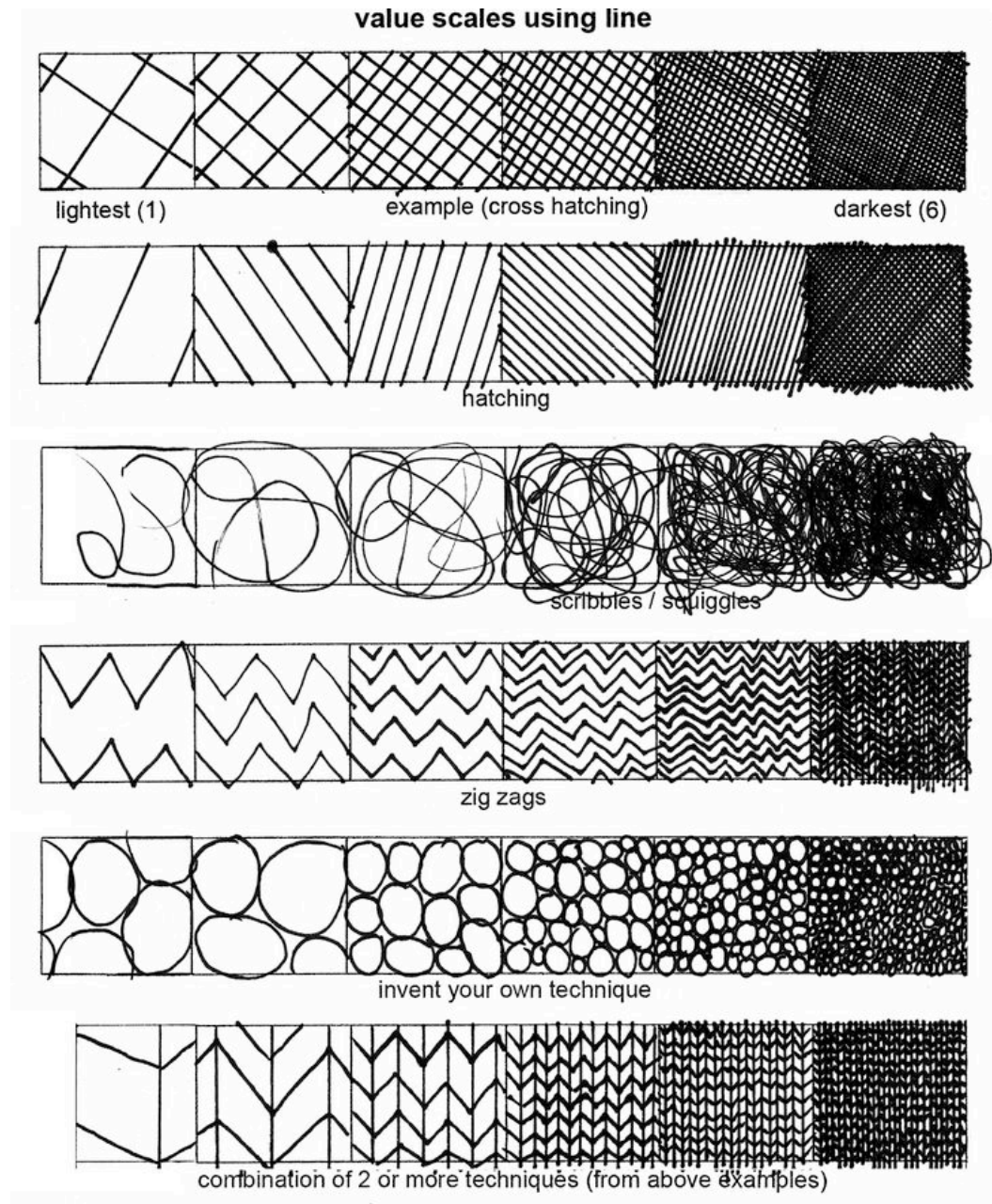
In this sketchbook page the student imitates and analyses a line drawing by Vincent van Gogh, discussing the suitability and appropriateness of each technique. Note that when learning from artists, it is rarely necessary to copy an entire work; replicating small pieces (as in this example) is often all that is needed.

A final GCSE Art piece:



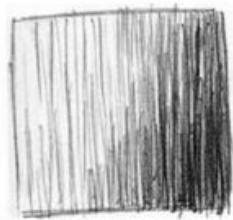
This pen drawing of a Baryonyx dinosaur measures 1.2 x 2.1 metres, It took over 70 hrs to complete. It was the conclusion to a Year 11 high school Art project.

Creating value with line..



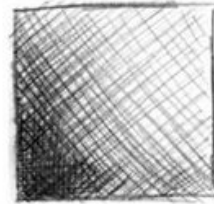
Creating value with line..

Hatching



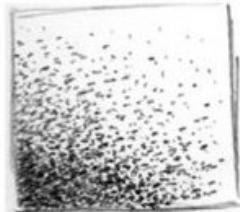
Vertical lines
Vary space of lines to shade

Cross-Hatching



Diagonal lines going in opposite directions
Can add vertical + horizontal lines
Less lines as it gets lighter

Pointillism/Stippling



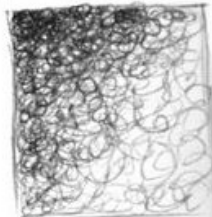
Make dots with your pencil/pen
More dots = darker
Dots close together = darker

Wood Grain



Organic (curvy) shapes
Lines loop around each other
but DO NOT TOUCH
Add lines in between, closer together
to make dark

Scribbles/Curly



Circular motions with pencil
Tighter/smaller the curl, darker it is

Scumbling



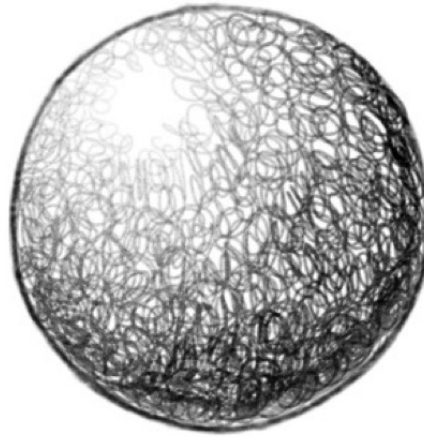
Short, random curvy marks
More angular (pointy) than scribbles

Creating value with line..

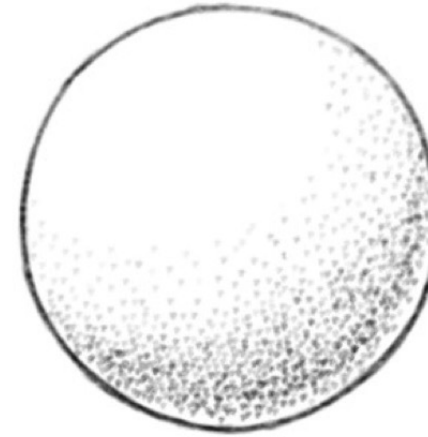
hatching



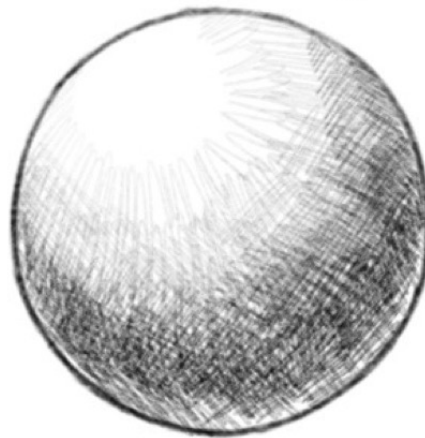
scumbling



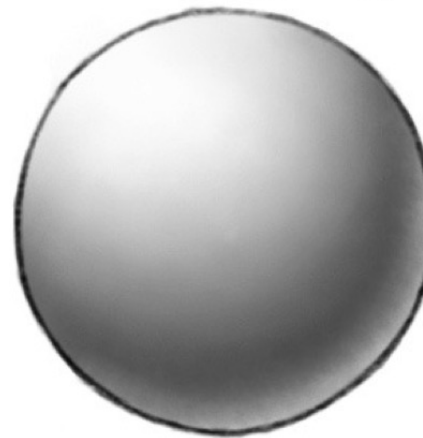
stippling



cross-hatching



blending/
smudging



*although blending and smudging are not qualities of line, we've included it here for comparison.

Value scales: the first box will be the lightest tone; the last box the darkest. Fill in each box with even value.

Shading

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Hatching

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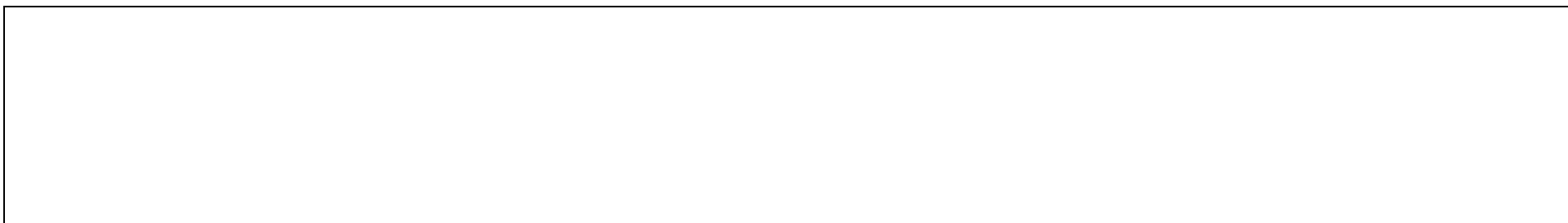
Crosshatching

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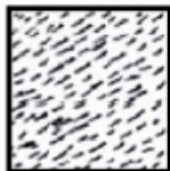
Stippling

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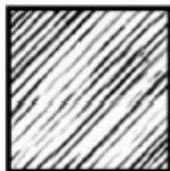
Practice a continuous value from light to dark with a smooth and gradual transition.



Line Drawing Techniques



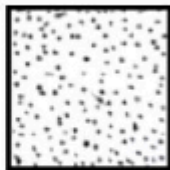
short dashes



hatching



cross-hatching



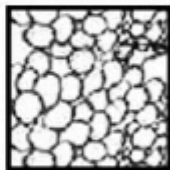
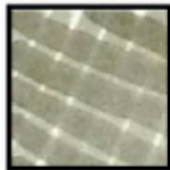
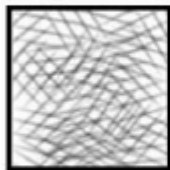
stippling (dots)



wavy lines



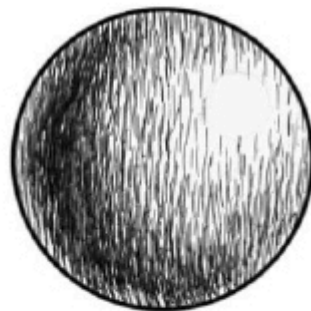
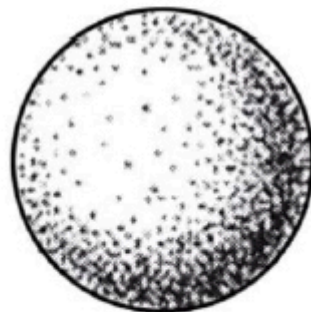
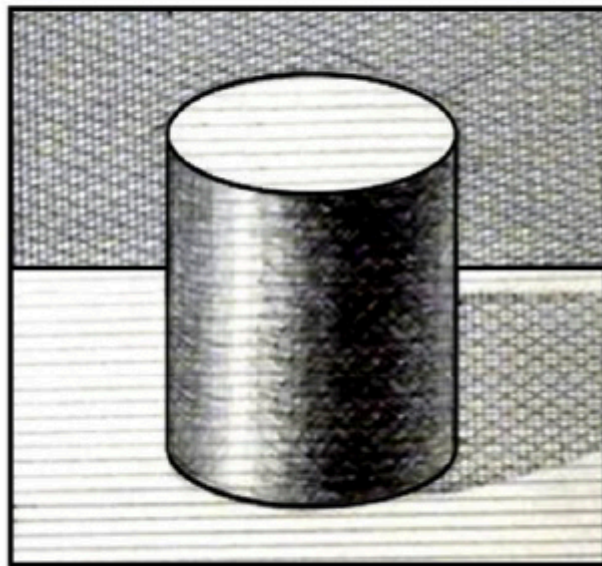
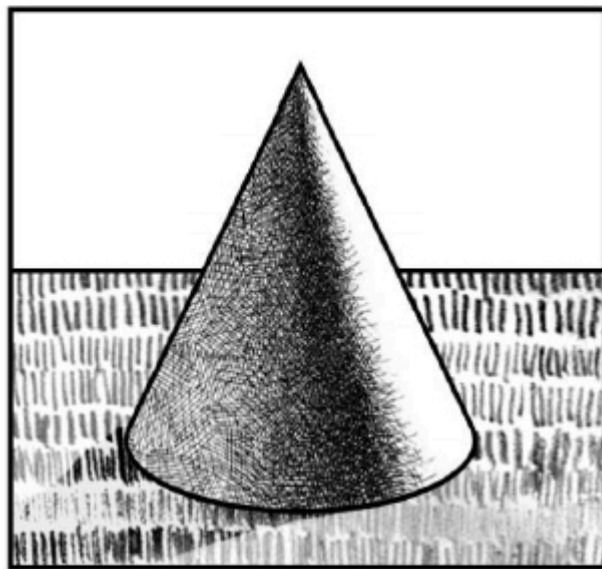
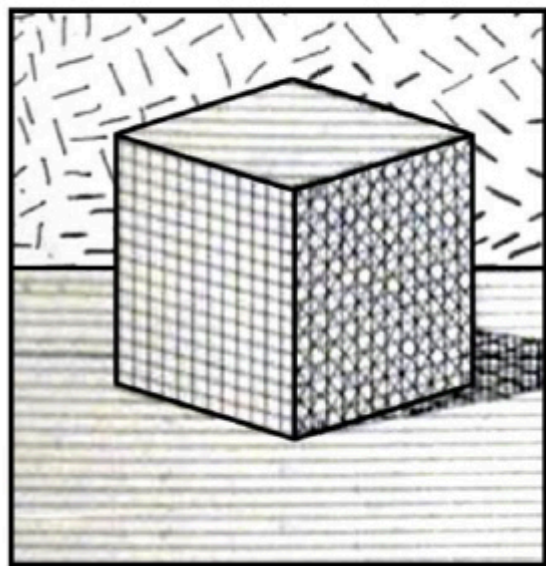
scribbles



1. Use a different line technique to fill each of the 12 small boxes. Invent your own techniques to fill the last 6 boxes.

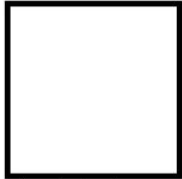
2. Use these techniques to apply tone to the geometric objects drawn to the right. Select your own light source.

3. Connect the dots below with three straight lines: one very light, one mid-tone, and one very dark.

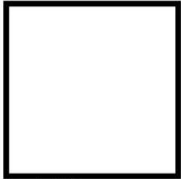


Line Drawing Techniques

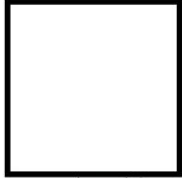
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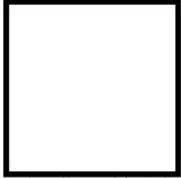
short dashes



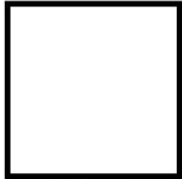
hatching



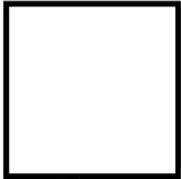
cross-hatching



stippling (dots)



wavy lines



scribbles

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