

THE PRACTICE & SCIENCE OF DRAWING

BY

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With 93 Illustrations & Diagrams

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Plate I.

**FOUR PHOTOGRAPHS OF SAME MONOCHROME PAINTING IN
DIFFERENT STAGES ILLUSTRATING A METHOD OF STUDYING
MASS DRAWING WITH THE BRUSH**

PREFACE

Permit me in the first place to anticipate the disappointment of any student who opens this book with the idea of finding "wrinkles" on how to draw faces, trees, clouds, or what not, short cuts to excellence in drawing, or any of the tricks so popular with the drawing masters of our grandmothers and still dearly loved by a large number of people. No good can come of such methods, for there are no short cuts to excellence. But help of a very practical kind it is the aim of the following pages to give; although it may be necessary to make a greater call upon the intelligence of the student than these Victorian methods attempted.

It was not until some time after having passed through the course of training in two of our chief schools of art that the author got any idea of what drawing really meant. What was taught was the faithful copying of a series of objects, beginning with the simplest forms, such as cubes, cones, cylinders, &c. (an excellent system to begin with at present in danger of some neglect), after which more complicated objects in plaster of Paris were attempted, and finally copies of the human head and figure posed in suspended animation and supported by blocks, &c. In so far as this was accurately done, all this mechanical training of eye and hand was excellent; but it was not enough. And when with an eye trained to the closest mechanical

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accuracy the author visited the galleries of the Continent and studied the drawings of the old masters, it soon became apparent that either his or their ideas of drawing were all wrong. Very few drawings could be found sufficiently "like the model" to obtain the prize at either of the great schools he had attended. Luckily there

was just enough modesty left for him to realise that possibly they were in some mysterious way right and his own training in some way lacking. And so he set to work to try and climb the long uphill road that separates mechanically accurate drawing from artistically accurate drawing.

Now this journey should have been commenced much earlier, and perhaps it was due to his own stupidity that it was not; but it was with a vague idea of saving some students from such wrong-headedness, and possibly straightening out some of the path, that he accepted the invitation to write this book.

In writing upon any matter of experience, such as art, the possibilities of misunderstanding are enormous, and one shudders to think of the things that may be put down to one's credit, owing to such misunderstandings. It is like writing about the taste of sugar, you are only likely to be understood by those who have already experienced the flavour; by those who have not, the wildest interpretation will be put upon your words. The written word is necessarily confined to the things of the understanding because only the understanding has written language; whereas art deals with ideas of a different mental texture, which words can only vaguely suggest. However, there are a large number of people who, although they cannot

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be said to have experienced in a full sense any works of art, have undoubtedly the impelling desire which a little direction may lead on to a fuller appreciation. And it is to such that books on art are useful. So that although this book is primarily addressed to working students, it is hoped that it may be of interest to that increasing number of people who, tired with the rush and struggle of modern existence, seek refreshment in artistic things. To many such in this country modern art is still a closed book; its point of view is so different from that of the art they have been brought up

with, that they refuse to have anything to do with it. Whereas, if they only took the trouble to find out something of the point of view of the modern artist, they would discover new beauties they little suspected.

If anybody looks at a picture by Claude Monet from the point of view of a Raphael, he will see nothing but a meaningless jargon of wild paint-strokes. And if anybody looks at a Raphael from the point of view of a Claude Monet, he will, no doubt, only see hard, tinny figures in a setting devoid of any of the lovely atmosphere that always envelops form seen in nature. So wide apart are some of the points of view in painting. In the treatment of form these differences in point of view make for enormous variety in the work. So that no apology need be made for the large amount of space occupied in the following pages by what is usually dismissed as mere theory; but what is in reality the first essential of any good practice in drawing. To have a clear idea of what it is you wish to do, is the first necessity of any successful performance. But our exhibitions are

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full of works that show how seldom this is the case in art. Works showing much ingenuity and ability, but no artistic brains; pictures that are little more than school studies, exercises in the representation of carefully or carelessly arranged objects, but cold to any artistic intention.

At this time particularly some principles, and a clear intellectual understanding of what it is you are trying to do, are needed. We have no set traditions to guide us. The times when the student accepted the style and traditions of his master and blindly followed them until he found himself, are gone. Such conditions belonged to an age when intercommunication was difficult, and when the artistic horizon was restricted to a single town or province. Science has altered all that, and we may regret the loss of local colour and

singleness of aim this growth of art in separate compartments produced; but it is unlikely that such conditions will occur again. Quick means of transit and cheap methods of reproduction have brought the art of the whole world to our doors. Where formerly the artistic food at the disposal of the student was restricted to the few pictures in his vicinity and some prints of others, now there is scarcely a picture of note in the world that is not known to the average student, either from personal inspection at our museums and loan exhibitions, or from excellent photographic reproductions. Not only European art, but the art of the East, China and Japan, is part of the formative influence by which he is surrounded; not to mention the modern science of light and colour that has had such an influence on technique. It is no wonder that a period of artistic indigestion is upon us. Hence the student has need

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of sound principles and a clear understanding of the science of his art, if he would select from this mass of material those things which answer to his own inner need for artistic expression.

The position of art to-day is like that of a river where many tributaries meeting at one point, suddenly turn the steady flow to turbulence, the many streams jostling each other and the different currents pulling hither and thither. After a time these newly-met forces will adjust themselves to the altered condition, and a larger, finer stream be the result. Something analogous to this would seem to be happening in art at the present time, when all nations and all schools are acting and reacting upon each other, and art is losing its national characteristics. The hope of the future is that a larger and deeper art, answering to the altered conditions of humanity, will result.

There are those who would leave this scene of struggling influences and away up on some bare primitive mountain-top start a new stream, begin all over again. But however necessary it may

be to give the primitive mountain waters that were the start of all the streams a more prominent place in the new flow onwards, it is unlikely that much can come of any attempt to leave the turbulent waters, go backwards, and start again; they can only flow onwards. To speak more plainly, the complexity of modern art influences may make it necessary to call attention to the primitive principles of expression that should never be lost sight of in any work, but hardly justifies the attitude of those anarchists in art who would flout the heritage of culture we possess and attempt a new start. Such attempts however when sincere are interesting

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and may be productive of some new vitality, adding to the weight of the main stream. But it must be along the main stream, along lines in harmony with tradition that the chief advance must be looked for.

Although it has been felt necessary to devote much space to an attempt to find principles that may be said to be at the basis of the art of all nations, the executive side of the question has not been neglected. And it is hoped that the logical method for the study of drawing from the two opposite points of view of line and mass here advocated may be useful, and help students to avoid some of the confusion that results from attempting simultaneously the study of these different qualities of form expression.

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THE PRACTICE AND SCIENCE OF DRAWING

I INTRODUCTION

The best things in an artist's work are so much a matter of intuition, that there is much to be said for the point of view that would altogether discourage intellectual inquiry into artistic phenomena on the part of the artist. Intuitions are shy things and apt to disappear if looked into too closely. And there is undoubtedly a danger that too much knowledge and training may supplant the natural intuitive feeling of a student, leaving only a cold knowledge of the means of expression in its place. For the artist, if he has the right stuff in him, has a consciousness, in doing his best work, of something, as Ruskin has said, "not in him but through him." He has been, as it were, but the agent through which it has found expression.

Talent can be described as "that which we have," and Genius as "that which has us." Now, although we may have little control over this power that "has us," and although it may be as well to abandon oneself unreservedly to its influence, there can be little doubt as to its being the business of the artist to see to it that his talent be so developed, that he

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may prove a fit instrument for the expression of whatever it may be given him to express; while it must be left to his individual temperament to decide how far it is advisable to pursue any intellectual analysis of the elusive things that are the true matter of art.

Provided the student realises this, and that art training can only deal with the perfecting of a means of expression and that the real matter of art lies above this and is beyond the scope of teaching, he cannot have too much of it. For although he must ever be a child before the influence that moves him, if it is not with the knowledge of the grown man that he takes off his coat and approaches the craft of painting or drawing, he will be poorly equipped to make them a means of conveying to others in adequate form the things

he may wish to express. Great things are only done in art when the creative instinct of the artist has a well-organised executive faculty at its disposal.

Of the two divisions into which the technical study of painting can be divided, namely Form and Colour, we are concerned in this book with Form alone. But before proceeding to our immediate subject something should be said as to the nature of art generally, not with the ambition of arriving at any final result in a short chapter, but merely in order to give an idea of the point of view from which the following pages are written, so that misunderstandings may be avoided.

The variety of definitions that exist justifies some inquiry. The following are a few that come to mind:

"Art is nature expressed through a personality."

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But what of architecture? Or music? Then there is Morris's

"Art is the expression of pleasure in work."

But this does not apply to music and poetry. Andrew Lang's

"Everything which we distinguish from nature"

seems too broad to catch hold of, while Tolstoy's

"An action by means of which one man, having experienced a feeling, intentionally transmits it to others"

is nearer the truth, and covers all the arts, but seems, from its omitting any mention of **rhythm**, very inadequate.

Now the facts of life are conveyed by our senses to the consciousness within us, and stimulate the world of thought and feeling that constitutes our real life. Thought and feeling are very intimately connected, few of our mental perceptions, particularly when they first dawn upon us, being unaccompanied by some feeling. But there is this general division to be made, on one extreme of which is what we call pure intellect, and on the other pure feeling or emotion. The arts, I take it, are a means of giving expression to the emotional side of this mental activity, intimately related as it often is to the more purely intellectual side. The more sensual side of this feeling is perhaps its lowest, while the feelings associated with the intelligence, the little sensitivenesses of perception that escape pure intellect, are possibly its noblest experiences.

Pure intellect seeks to construct from the facts brought to our consciousness by the senses, an accurately

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measured world of phenomena, uncoloured by the human equation in each of us. It seeks to create a point of view outside the human standpoint, one more stable and accurate, unaffected by the ever-changing current of human life. It therefore invents mechanical instruments to do the measuring of our sense perceptions, as their records are more accurate than human observation unaided.

But while in science observation is made much more effective by the use of mechanical instruments in registering facts, the facts with which art deals, being those of feeling, can only be recorded by the feeling instrument—man, and are entirely missed by any mechanically devised substitutes.

The artistic intelligence is not interested in things from this standpoint of mechanical accuracy, but in the effect of observation on the living consciousness—the sentient individual in each of us. The same fact accurately portrayed by a number of artistic

intelligences should be different in each case, whereas the same fact accurately expressed by a number of scientific intelligences should be the same.

But besides the feelings connected with a wide range of experience, each art has certain emotions belonging to the particular sense perceptions connected with it. That is to say, there are some that only music can convey: those connected with sound; others that only painting, sculpture, or architecture can convey: those connected with the form and colour that they severally deal with.

In abstract form and colour—that is, form and colour unconnected with natural appearances—there is an emotional power, such as there is in music, the sounds of which have no direct connection with

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anything in nature, but only with that mysterious sense we have, the sense of Harmony, Beauty, or Rhythm (all three but different aspects of the same thing).

This inner sense is a very remarkable fact, and will be found to some extent in all, certainly all civilised, races. And when the art of a remote people like the Chinese and Japanese is understood, our senses of harmony are found to be wonderfully in agreement. Despite the fact that their art has developed on lines widely different from our own, none the less, when the surprise at its newness has worn off and we begin to understand it, we find it conforms to very much the same sense of harmony.

But apart from the feelings connected directly with the means of expression, there appears to be much in common between all the arts in their most profound expression; there seems to be a common centre in our inner life that they all appeal to. Possibly at this centre are the great primitive emotions common to all men.

The religious group, the deep awe and reverence men feel when contemplating the great mystery of the Universe and their own littleness in the face of its vastness—the desire to correspond and develop relationship with the something outside themselves that is felt to be behind and through all things. Then there are those connected with the joy of life, the throbbing of the great life spirit, the gladness of being, the desire of the sexes; and also those connected with the sadness and mystery of death and decay, &c.

The technical side of an art is, however, not concerned with these deeper motives but with the

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things of sense through which they find expression; in the case of painting, the visible universe.

The artist is capable of being stimulated to artistic expression by all things seen, no matter what; to him nothing comes amiss. Great pictures have been made of beautiful people in beautiful clothes and of squalid people in ugly clothes, of beautiful architectural buildings and the ugly hovels of the poor. And the same painter who painted the Alps painted the Great Western Railway.

The visible world is to the artist, as it were, a wonderful garment, at times revealing to him the Beyond, the Inner Truth there is in all things. He has a consciousness of some correspondence with something the other side of visible things and dimly felt through them, a "still, small voice" which he is impelled to interpret to man. It is the expression of this all-pervading inner significance that I think we recognise as beauty, and that prompted Keats to say:

"Beauty is truth, truth beauty."

And hence it is that the love of truth and the love of beauty can exist together in the work of the artist. The search for this inner

truth is the search for beauty. People whose vision does not penetrate beyond the narrow limits of the commonplace, and to whom a cabbage is but a vulgar vegetable, are surprised if they see a beautiful picture painted of one, and say that the artist has idealised it, meaning that he has consciously altered its appearance on some idealistic formula; whereas he has probably only honestly given expression to a truer, deeper vision than they had been aware of. The commonplace is not the true, but only the shallow, view of things.

Plate II.

DRAWING BY LEONARDO DA VINCI FROM THE ROYAL
COLLECTION AT WINDSOR

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Fromentin's

"Art is the expression of the invisible by means of the visible"

expresses the same idea, and it is this that gives to art its high place among the works of man.

Beautiful things seem to put us in correspondence with a world the harmonies of which are more perfect, and bring a deeper peace than this imperfect life seems capable of yielding of itself. Our moments of peace are, I think, always associated with some form of beauty, of this spark of harmony within corresponding with some infinite source without. Like a mariner's compass, we are restless until we find repose in this one direction. In moments of beauty (for beauty is, strictly speaking, a state of mind rather than an attribute of certain objects, although certain things have the power of inducing it more than others) we seem to get a glimpse of this deeper truth behind the things of sense. And who can say but that this sense, dull enough in most of us, is not an echo of a

greater harmony existing somewhere the other side of things, that we dimly feel through them, evasive though it is.

But we must tread lightly in these rarefied regions and get on to more practical concerns. By finding and emphasising in his work those elements in visual appearances that express these profounder things, the painter is enabled to stimulate the perception of them in others.

In the representation of a fine mountain, for instance, there are, besides all its rhythmic beauty of form and colour, associations touching deeper chords in our natures—associations connected with its size, age, and permanence, &c.; at any rate we have more feelings than form and colour of themselves

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are capable of arousing. And these things must be felt by the painter, and his picture painted under the influence of these feelings, if he is instinctively to select those elements of form and colour that convey them. Such deeper feelings are far too intimately associated even with the finer beauties of mere form and colour for the painter to be able to neglect them; no amount of technical knowledge will take the place of feeling, or direct the painter so surely in his selection of what is fine.

There are those who would say, "This is all very well, but the painter's concern is with form and colour and paint, and nothing else. If he paints the mountain faithfully from that point of view, it will suggest all these other associations to those who want them." And others who would say that the form and colour of appearances are only to be used as a language to give expression to the feelings common to all men. "Art for art's sake" and "Art for subject's sake." There are these two extreme positions to consider, and it will depend on the individual on which side his work lies. His interest will be more on the aesthetic side, in the feelings directly concerned with form and colour; or on the side of the mental

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