

Line Weight & Aerial Perspective

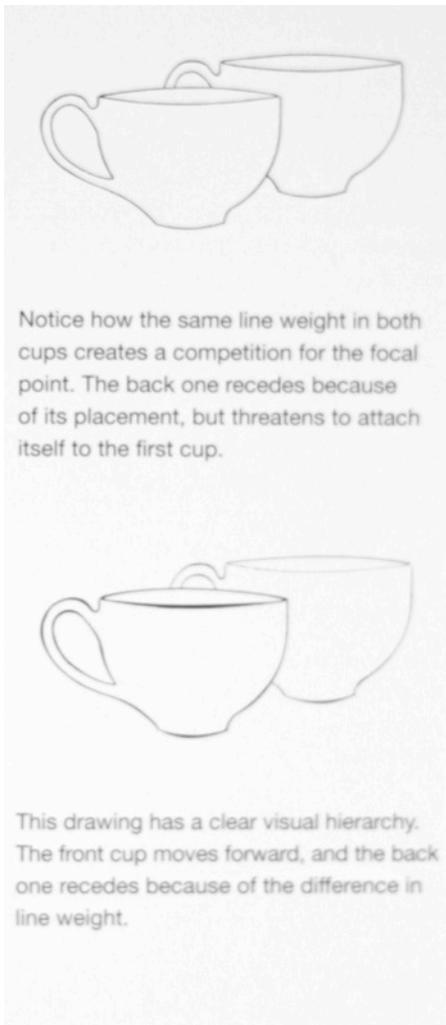
(Using line weight to create depth & focal point)

The old masters varied the lightness and darkness of a line to convey a sense of going or coming in space, generate a feeling of movement, and establish a focal point. When the line weight in a drawing is not varied, it is as if the artist is talking in a monotone voice.

LINE WEIGHT

- Beginners often start out too heavy & dark
- Sometimes a thick line can throw off overall proportion
- Similarly a closed, continuous line can easily become locked in and hard to correct
- Both types (dark & continuous) convey an emphatic statement—a certitude
- The darkest & sharpest marks are accent points
- In line drawing the illusion of aerial perspective can be created by varying line weight

Juliette Aristides –*Lessons in Classical Drawing*



“I recommend making all your lines light and thin at the beginning of a drawing. If you are having a hard time doing that, switch to a harder pencil or charcoal. Use multiple thin lines to find your drawing rather than one thick one. Leave gaps in your contour line if you are not sure how something connects. Once that you are confident that your overall drawing is accurately in place, darken lines in areas that require a more emphatic statement, a harder edge or a thicker mark.

The concept of lost & found edges relates to line weight. Imagine a spectrum of lost & found edges much like a value chart that ranges from white to black. The area of a drawing that is sharpest or darkest draws the eye most clearly to itself. It becomes a focal or accent point. By comparison, a lost edge creates atmosphere and allows for ambiguity. It moves behind and away from us. It adds variety and interest.”

Image taken from *Lessons in Classical Drawing* by **Juliette Aristides**



EXAMPLE of how line weight along with lost & found edges lead the eye... “The image is anchored by the darker accents in the facial features. As your eye moves away from the girl’s eyes toward the ear, and then to the back of her head, the line becomes very thin & light. As your eye moves down the shirt, the line dissolves entirely, fading out to the paper tone. In this manner, we as viewers know exactly where to look... The sensitivity in the handling of the line captures the tenderness of emotion between the artist and his daughter.”

The Power of A QUIET LINE...

“When I was younger, I used to think that a drawing required vigorous line work, with the full value of white to black, to be powerful. I equated emphatic mark making with strength. Now, I am of a different opinion: A beautiful line drawing should leave something to the imagination. Rather than providing immediate or obvious visual satisfaction, it demands savoring and creates an appreciation that grows over time.

PETER VAN DYCK, Self Portrait, 2006
Charcoal on paper

“The energetic line conveys the feeling of process rather than a fixed outcome. This is an appropriate visual metaphor for the artist at work.”



Depicting Aerial Perspective with Line

“Perspective is the study of how the eye perceives objects receding in space.

Aerial perspective

Another rule of perspective is that as an object recedes from the viewer, it becomes less defined and less intense, thus both softer outlines and lighter texture and tone are required when we draw an object that is a long way off. These techniques also help to cheat the eye into

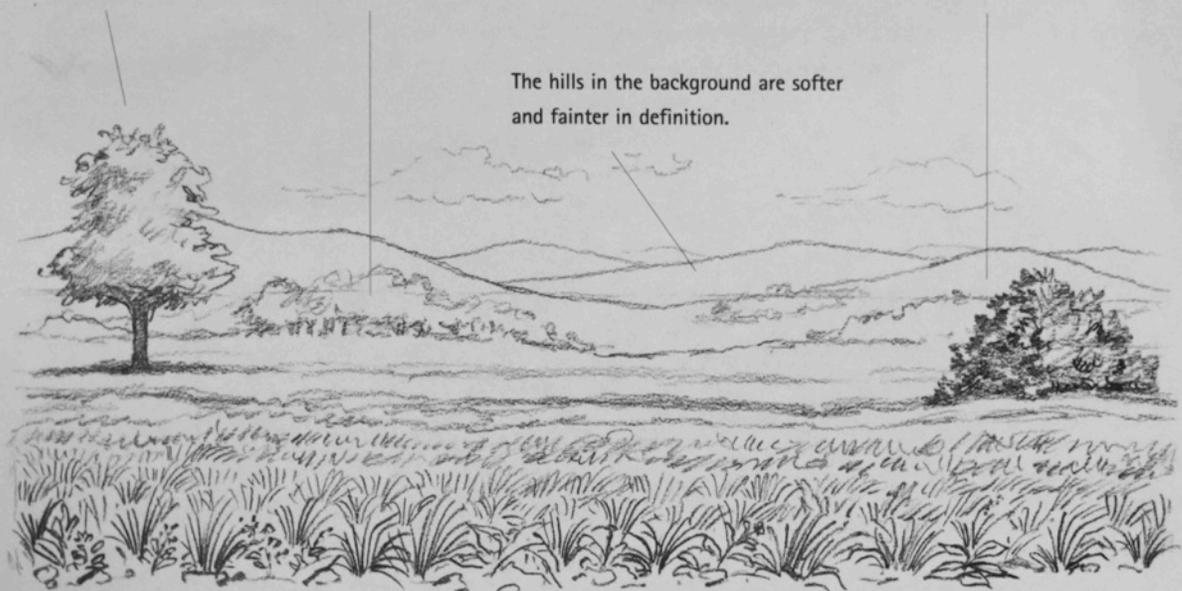
convincing the viewer he is looking into a depth when he is in fact gazing at a flat surface.

Look at the drawing below and note how the use of aerial perspective and a few simple techniques gives the eye an impression of space moving out into the distance.

The tree in the middle ground has less texture and intensity than the bush.

The trees in the further distance are less well defined and more generalized in shape.

The nearest bush is still fairly strong in texture, in contrast to the tree.

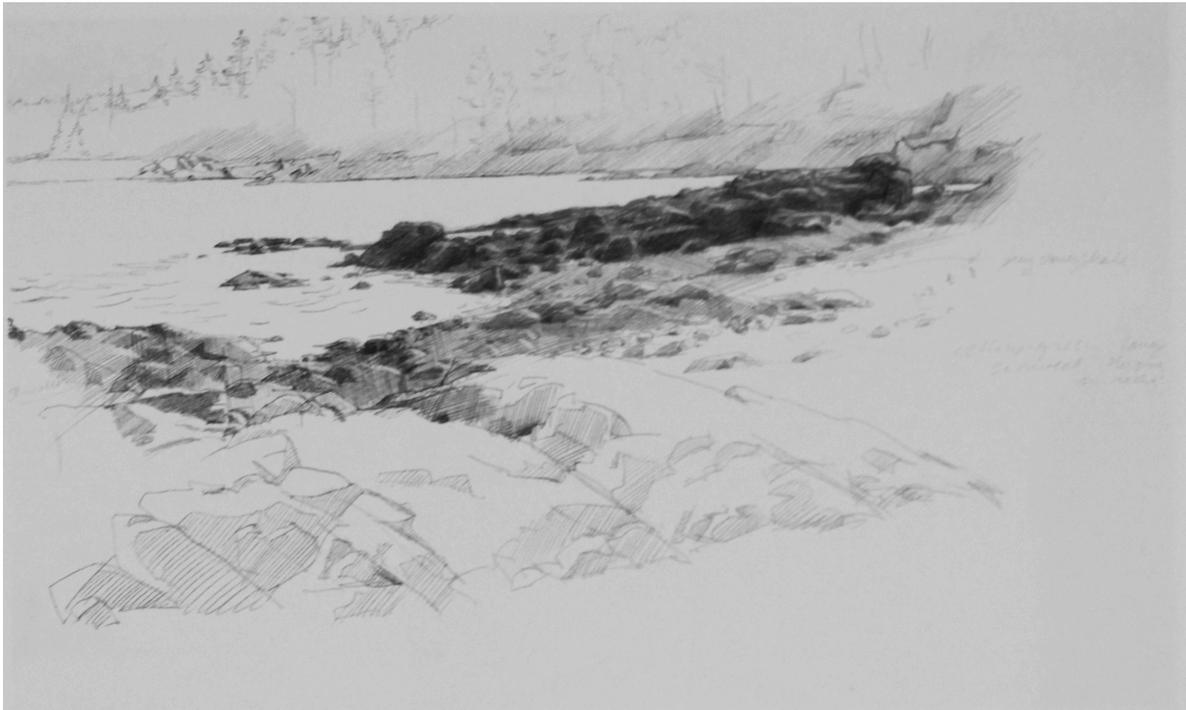


The hills in the background are softer and fainter in definition.

Detailed and strong texture and definition in close foreground. Gradually the grass loses its intensity and detail as it recedes.

Image taken from *The Complete Book of Drawing* by Barrington Barber

A SIDE NOTE...“An artist recently brought me a painting to critique. She was frustrated with the outcome and unsure what was going wrong. The drawing was technically correct; indeed, it was copied from a photograph. Yet it felt inaccurate. It took me a minute or two to find the problem: Instead of allowing the main subject to be surrounded by atmosphere, the artist had rendered the scenery in the background as dark, crisp, and colorful as the central figures in the foreground. Our eyes simply do not see that way. We need a diminution of intensity on all accounts---in value, line and color---in order for things to appear to recede. The sense of atmospheric perspective in line is created when the lines decrease in contrast as they go back in space.” Juliette Aristides



pencil on paper by Jacob Collins, *Eastholm Rocks*, 2007

Our eye is lead to the darkest most finished part of the piece before moving throughout the drawing.

Correcting Your Work

The ability to self-correct, in any field, is a challenging skill to master. In fact, it is an attribute of genius. As you carefully measure with the needle, use the plumb line, and site angles, you are training your eyes to judge more correctly. Eventually you will be so confident that you will rarely need to go to such lengths to create an accurate drawing. Slowly, through careful checking, you will begin to see patterns of where you are consistently prone to veer off in your own unique way. (For example, I often initially draw my figures long waisted.)

When I studied with Jacob Collins in New York, he talked about how important it is to correct the weakest, or least finished, areas of the drawing first. It is natural to want to keep reworking the best areas of a drawing in hopes that they will be strong enough to support the whole piece. However, that rarely works. The most effective way to improve a drawing is to make sure each part reflects your full capacity as an artist.

Appraise your work critically. Revisions are part of the process. Your drawing will gain accuracy slowly by the careful application of measurements

I tend to reach for a hatchet where only a scalpel is needed. Yet, I have learned that a drawing can feel terribly, even irreparably, wrong when really what I am seeing is just the compounded impact of many small inaccuracies—all of which can be collectively and successfully addressed.”

Juliette Aristides –*Lessons in Classical Drawing*- pages 56-57