

Studio Craft:



Image: Sketchbook page, Medieval mason Villard de Honnecourt, ca. 1230

Ask the Expert: “I love painting. It’s an obsession. However, I don’t really draw. It’s not that I’ve never enjoyed it, but every time I sit down to draw, all I can think is that I am using up time and materials that should be devoted to painting. All the other artists I know, even sculptors and glass artists, all of them draw too. How bad is it that I don’t?”

A: Every artist has a process that is individual and personal. If you are arriving at the results you want by working exclusively with paint, and that’s what drives your productivity, we can’t see anything wrong with that. Maybe your process includes all the stages of conceptualization and development with no need to do preliminary work in any other medium. Some artists like Vermeer have left no drawings whatsoever. Earlier artists,

before the introduction of inexpensive paper, drew on a slate or board with a stylus, wiping away sketches as they went.

We can’t help thinking, however, that there’s a chance you maybe just haven’t yet found the approach to drawing which relates best to your art.

The sculptor Henry Moore said, “I sometimes begin a drawing with no preconceived problem to solve, with only the desire to use pencil on paper...” but concluded, “some idea becomes conscious and crystallizes, and then a control and ordering begin to take place.”

Drawing lets the artist work out preliminary concepts of scale, color, design and form with much more efficiency than in other processes, faster and at a much lower cost of materials. Through drawing, it’s possible to refine and develop good ideas, and weed out potentially less successful ones.

It may be possible that you are putting too much pressure on yourself to achieve a finished work of art with each drawing. While some artists make drawings as the final creative objective, most of the time, drawing and sketching is a judgment-free zone, where the artist can work without the high stakes involved in production.

Artists for whom sketching is just a means to an end may use the most affordable paper- newsprint- with no expectation that these ephemeral works will last. In that case, there is a lot of freedom to consume materials and

work quickly and furiously, but also the possibility of regret, if a sketch turns out to be nice enough to display.

If you need to sketch but want to preserve the option of saving the results, select an inexpensive sketch paper that is acid-free. Most better sketch pads at art supply stores are now in this category. (Scholastic-grade pads sold at drugstores are usually not of this quality.)

For a sketch medium, select something that relates well to the work you are producing. Markers once were preferred mostly by commercial artists, but today there are brands that perform more like a paintbrush, with ink that is highly lightfast. Vine charcoal is good for subtle tonal work; compressed charcoal is better for bold lines and gestural studies. Graphite and charcoal pencils offer a range from detailed to broad. Soft pastels can be used to introduce color.

Once you've established the habit, it's time to discover how your drawings enhance your process. This may be as simple as providing warm-up exercises, or the drawings could be enlarged and transferred as the basis for fully realized works of art. We think the best reason to draw is as an enjoyable exercise on its own, that expands creativity while it hones skill.

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