

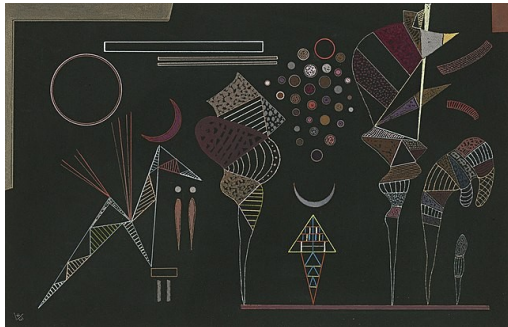
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ASK THE EXPERTS

## Studio Craft: Four Disruptive Exercises for Artists

A lot of artistic training involves rehearsed techniques and exercises that are repeated until they become automatic. Those practiced skills help add efficiency and fluidity to the process of making art, but sometimes it's good to short circuit the autopilot. Here are several exercises that disrupt established habits and help restore active engagement in the decisions involved in making a work of art.

### Dark Paper, Light Medium



Study for 'Reduced Contrasts' by Wassily Kandinsky, 1941

Usually, drawing and painting starts with making a light surface darker, and only later adding light passages through erasing, or heightening with white. Turning this approach around, starting with a dark surface and light medium, forces active decisions about values and contrasts.

Most training exercises for artists involve some variation of putting dark marks on a white ground, but for this exercise, use black paper with white chalk, light-colored pastels or colored pencils. Work from dark to light, focusing on where to reserve the darkest tones. Gradually build mid-tones, and add highlights in the final stages.

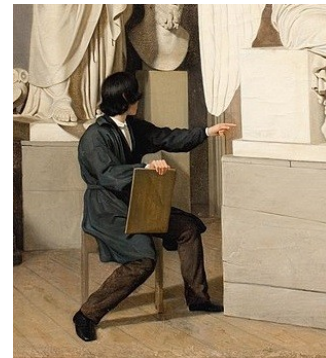
### Direct-Light Sketch



'At the Cradle' by José Jiménez Aranda

One of the most important skills in representational art is the ability to identify direct light and shadow, but often it's difficult to sort out direct light from reflected light. Fine tuning this skill can help add logic and consistency to your art. As a skill-building exercise, execute sketches which isolate direct light and cast shadow. Disregard reflected light, and treat the side of any object that isn't illuminated as though it were in dark shadow. Use high-contrast media for this exercise, like brush and ink or dark compressed charcoal.

### One Minute Memory Drawing



Julius Exner - The Plaster Cast Collection in the Royal Academy of Fine Arts (Detail) 1843

Drawing from life typically involves looking back and forth from subject to paper, or from subject to palette to canvas in rapid succession. Most of us only hold

an accurate mental snapshot of the subject for just a second or two, usually just focused on one small part of the subject. This quick exercise can help stretch the duration of memory, while increasing the amount of information we can absorb and retain. Begin by taking a sustained, 60 second look at the subject, then stop looking and shift entirely to the artwork. During the one minute look, try to study and memorize proportions, placement, and angles, as well as value contrast, light and shade. While drawing the subject from memory, avoid referring back to the subject matter. Make this a routine exercise to sharpen and maintain observational skills.

### Bas Relief Drawing



L: Nicolai Abildgaard - Thetis Immersing her Infant Son Achilles, late 18<sup>th</sup> c. (det.)  
R: Masaccio, Saint Jerome and John the Baptist, 1426-28 (det.)

Early Italian Renaissance painting was influenced by the appearance of low-relief sculptures. In a bas relief, the illusion of space is created by carefully articulating overlaps and intersections of forms, and by sculpting foreground forms in higher relief, with the background treated as flatter. As an exercise, create a drawing using the same system for creating volume and depth. Instead of using hierarchy of scale or linear perspective to create depth, concentrate on drawing closer objects as more round and full, and as objects recede, draw them as though they are flatter. Pay close attention to intersecting forms, and make sure to describe each overlap distinctly.

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