

WHY WE TEACH DRAWING

Rallou M. Hamshaw

“Drawing is like making a gesture with the advantage of permanence.”

Henri Matisse



Henri Matisse

As a visual arts teacher in the Upper School, I have had plenty of time to consider the pedagogical and artistic value of teaching drawing to our students. Their exposure to this engaging discipline begins as early as pre-school, continues in various creative forms throughout their lower school years, and is energetically pursued in the upper school.

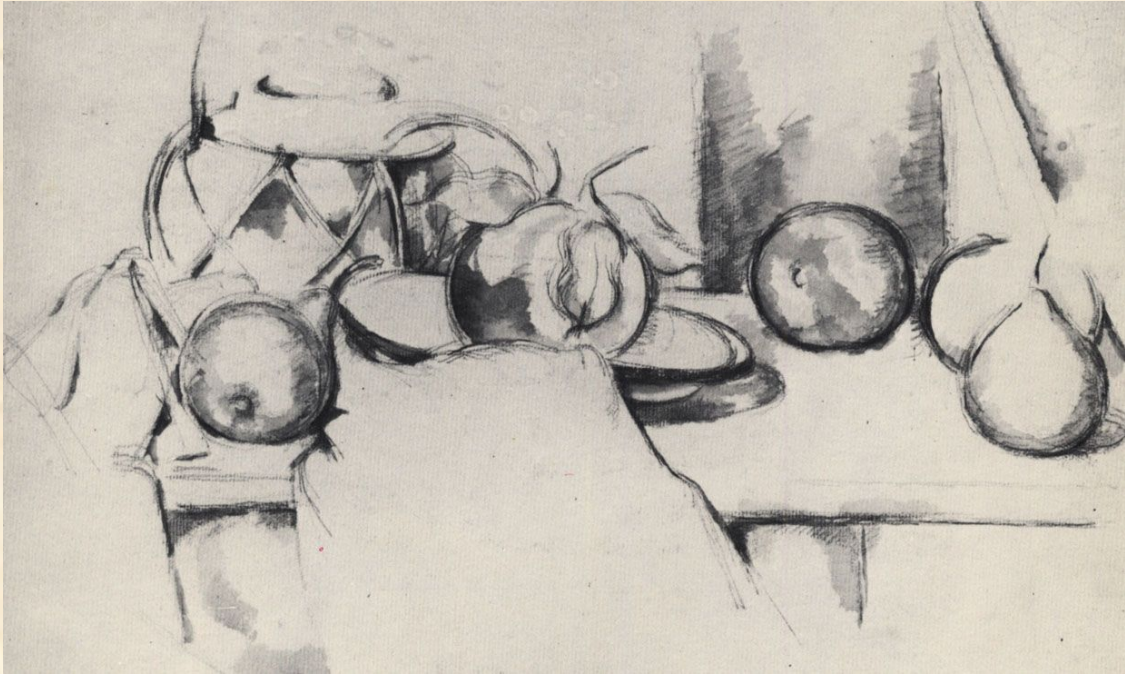
Drawing first, painting next. While artists decide how they wish to approach their work, learning how to draw surely enhances an artist's ability to paint. Composing a page, mastering media, cultivating elegant or bold line, and building volume all compose the art of drawing. Gesture, mood, and style reflect an artist's unique perspective, touch, and vision. Most frequently, drawing exists aesthetically in its own right, without serving as a blueprint for a formal painting, a mural, or freestanding sculpture, regardless of its size. Students at Rudolf Steiner School are familiar with drawing as an art form in many of their classes, from careful, descriptive work in their main lesson books, to form drawing and perspective drawing, to vivid black and white projects in their eighth and ninth grade art blocks. Many students keep sketchbooks of their own, private visual journals that reflect their imaginative ideas, translated into lines and forms of their own choosing.



Edgar Degas

In past generations, the capacity to draw well reflected a good education. Waldorf Schools understand that a healthy curriculum must be age appropriate throughout a student's experience at school. It is no surprise that ninth grade students, for example, draw in charcoal (often incorporating black pastel) on large sheets of textured paper. The medium itself is endlessly flexible and dramatic; given their predictable mood swings and intense personalities, it is the perfect choice for students of this age to explore. With drawing classes actively providing a solid foundation for cultivating skills in the ninth grade, the demands of using color that follow in the painting courses that are offered in the upper grades become more easily accessible.

It is indeed fortunate that the study of all the arts, both visual and performing, is mandatory for our students and an expectation that repeats itself throughout the run of their education at Steiner. Through the exposure and practice of the arts, each individual student is offered the rare opportunity for creative self-development. To combat the feeling of isolation or restlessness one might be experiencing during this time of self-distancing at home, anyone can consider taking up the activity of drawing. Perhaps there are parents in our community (non-professionals themselves), or visitors to our website, who might be intrigued by the challenge of drawing a picture. And while there are a plethora of excellent books and videos available to help the beginner get started, there is nothing quite as exciting as facing a blank piece of paper with pencil in hand. Launching the adventure of placing a single mark on an empty page can be thrilling, albeit a little daunting. Henri Matisse tells us that "drawing is putting a line around an idea." This is something anyone can do!



Paul Cézanne

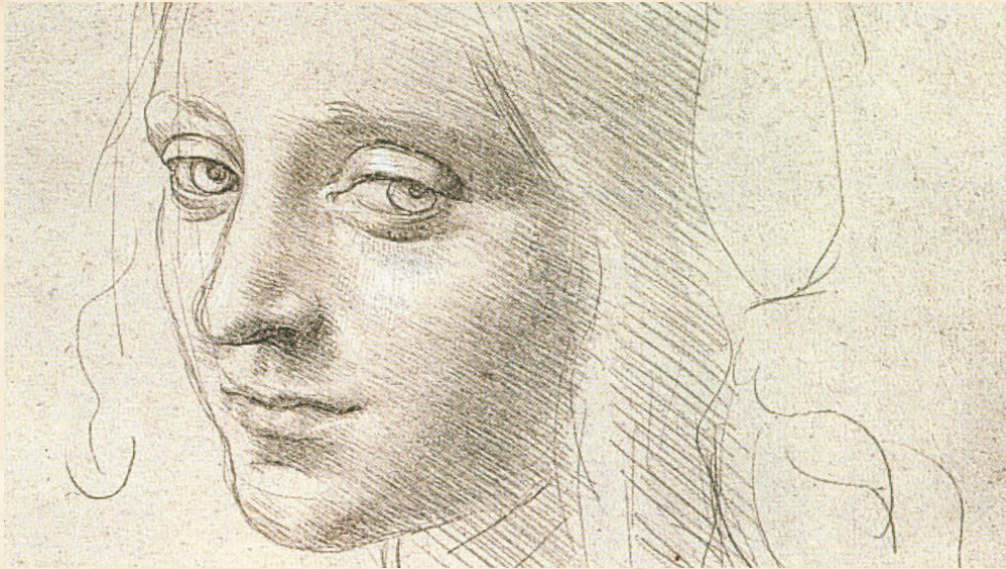
For all those interested in exploring this inspiring art form, below is a sampling of master artists whose sketches/drawings are worth spending unhurried time viewing on screen or in books, not only for learning purposes, but also for the sheer pleasure of witnessing brilliance at work through line and form:

- The Renaissance masters, especially da Vinci, Michelangelo, and Tintoretto
- Durer
- Holbein
- Rembrandt
- Velazquez
- Goya
- Watteau
- Prud'hon
- Gericault and Delacroix
- Ingres
- Degas
- Van Gogh
- Cézanne
- Munch
- Picasso
- Matisse
- Giacometti
- Seurat
- Sargent

- Diebenkorn
- Lucien Freud
- Hopper

While skill, technique, and an accomplished hand are irrefutable requirements for masterful creations in any medium, there are of course the intangible elements that identify a piece of art work as timeless and undeniably “great.” Da Vinci says it best:

“Where there is not spirit, there is no art.”



Leonardo da Vinci