

# Drawing a New Reality

Hyper-literal Seeing / Spinning Off / Mastering Shape / Adding On / Macro Drawing / Mirror Imaging / Obscuring / Sketching the Unusual

Imagination is tightly linked to observation—a familiarity with how something *actually* looks makes it possible to imagine how it *could* look. While it is the goal of this book to help you with drawing the world as seen through imagination, there is no better way to develop the imaginative muscles than drawing from direct observation. Every time you draw from life, you strengthen the connection between your eye and your hand. These connections can be powerfully adapted to drawing the images you see in the mind's eye.

How do you make drawings that are memorable, compelling, unusual, intense, from a reality that often seems to have none of these qualities? Our habits of seeing are necessarily lazy. As a practical matter, we simply haven't time to notice every strange play of light, every unusual juxtaposition or distorted reflection that crosses our visual field. Almost daily, clouds resembling rhinos and tubas pass overhead, but we are simply too busy to notice. These visual oddities get pushed to the periphery while our attention is directed to practical necessities: the traffic that surrounds us, the stair step in front of us, the food on our fork, the information on our computer screen. In this common habit of viewing the world, we don't really see—we use our eyes to confirm our expectations. We might call this *utilitarian seeing*, and we owe an ancient debt of gratitude for it—it was vital to the survival of our species and keeps us from wandering into traffic today. But it's not so good for making art.

When we get out our sketchbooks, it's time to set aside this way of looking at things. As artists, we want look at objects, even familiar objects, as if we had never seen them before. Everything is new. See the object before you not as confirmation of what you already know, but with innocent curiosity. That forkful of food coming toward your mouth has a shape. What is that shape? When you hold it in position and draw it, all of its textures, shadows and reflections come into being. The food, the fork, the hand—these everyday items have a new vividness, a new intensity. From here it's a short step to a fanciful sketch of the fork melting and the food floating off.

## HYPER-LITERAL SEEING

Innocent seeing requires that we be hyper-literal about shapes. Everything has a shape, but we must never assume in advance that we already know what it is. Each shape is unique in a particular light and from a particular angle. When we look at things as shapes, every shape is new.



# noodling ideas: mixing and matching

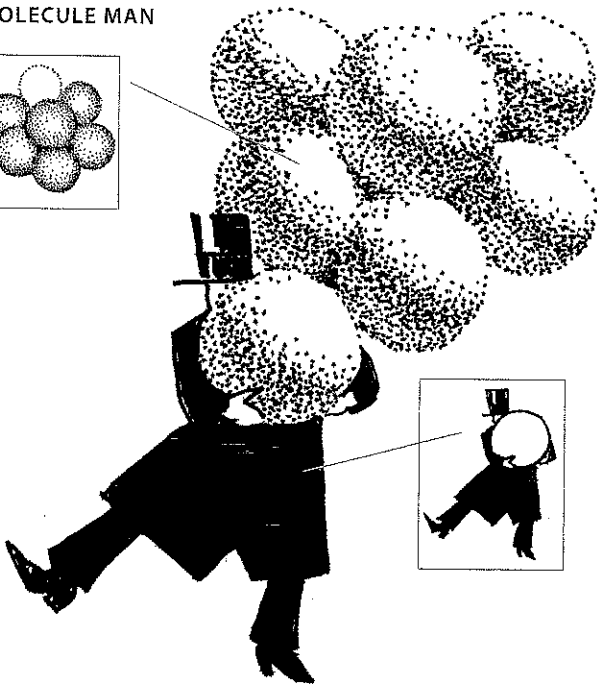
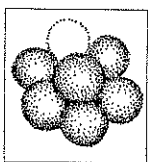
Creating is, in part, about finding relationships between seemingly unrelated things. It's about putting things together that don't seem to belong with each other—at least not until you do it. The more unexpected and improbable the pairing, the bigger the creative leap.

We will discuss this idea at length in later chapters, but for now, let's begin by simply taking an iconic character and combining it with another doodle. For example, we might first trace the character on the light table, and then trace another doodle around it as a background. That was the method I used with *Flowerdancer*.

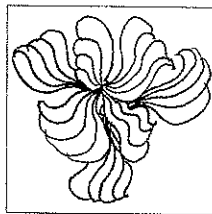
Sometimes you'll want to integrate the two images in a more intricate way. Notice how in *Lost at Sea* the waves are both behind and in front of the floating people. To do this sort of thing you need to align both original doodles on your light table with a fresh sheet of paper on top. Even then it may take several tries to get it the way you want it.

In the course of combining images, you may see a need to alter them. In *Stone Arch and Archie* I was simply going to place the man's face partly behind the arch. As I drew, it occurred to me to make the face out of stone as well.

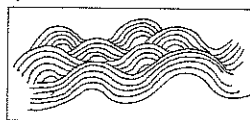
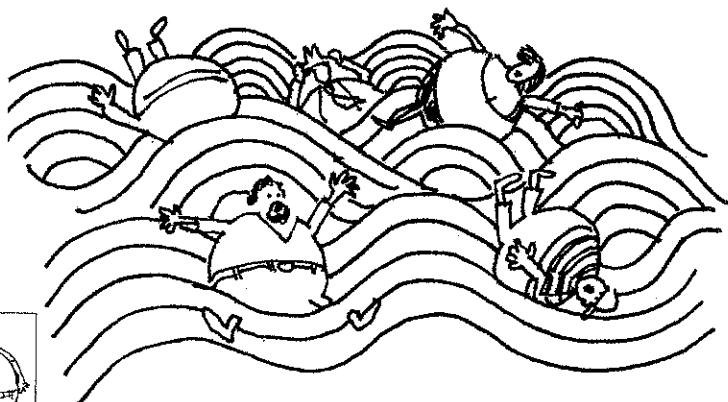
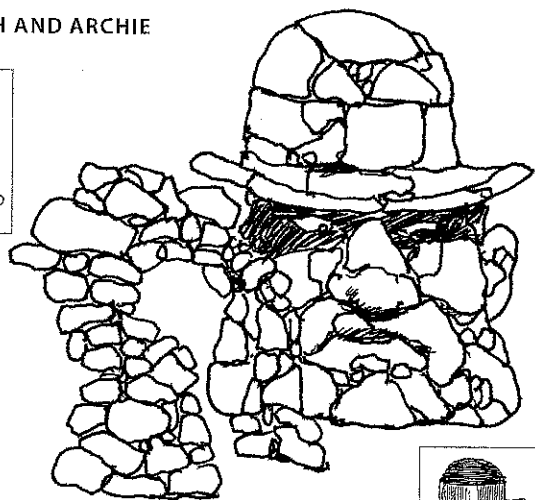
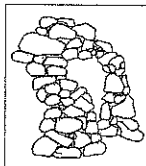
MOLECULE MAN



FLOWERDANCER

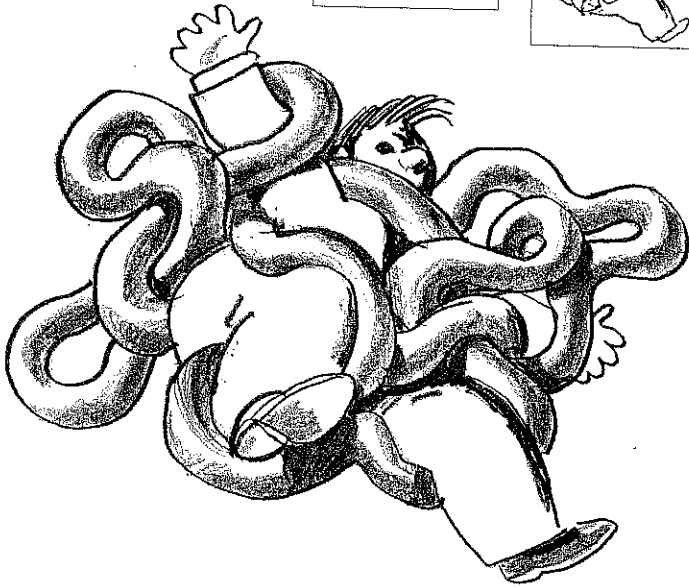
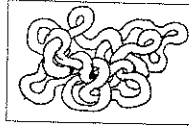


STONE ARCH AND ARCHIE

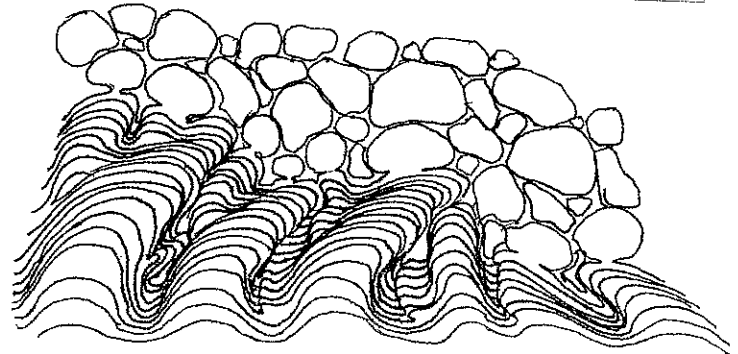
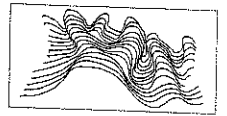


LOST AT SEA

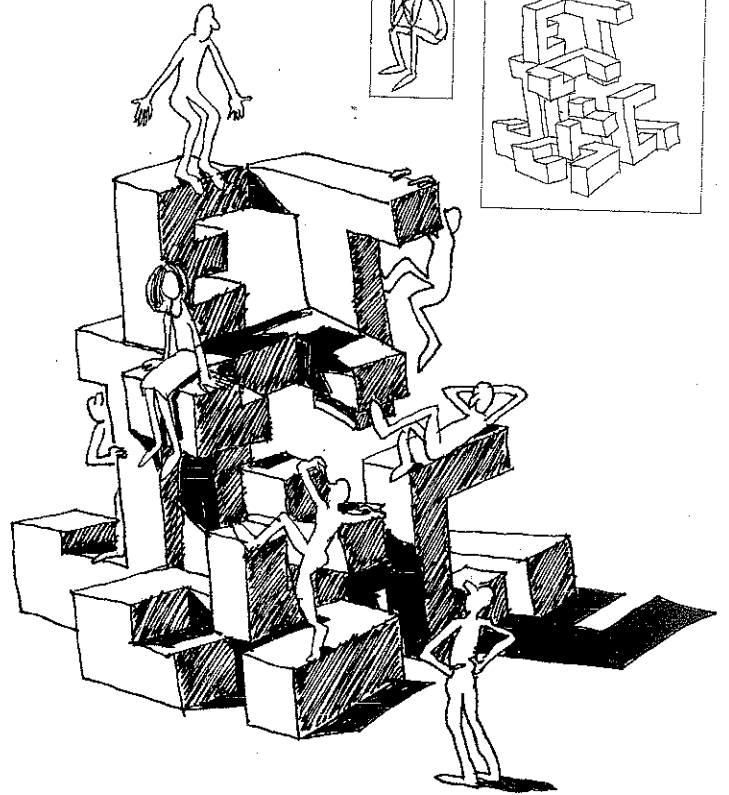
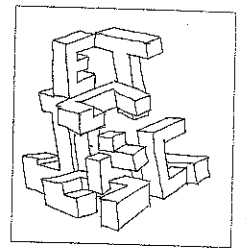
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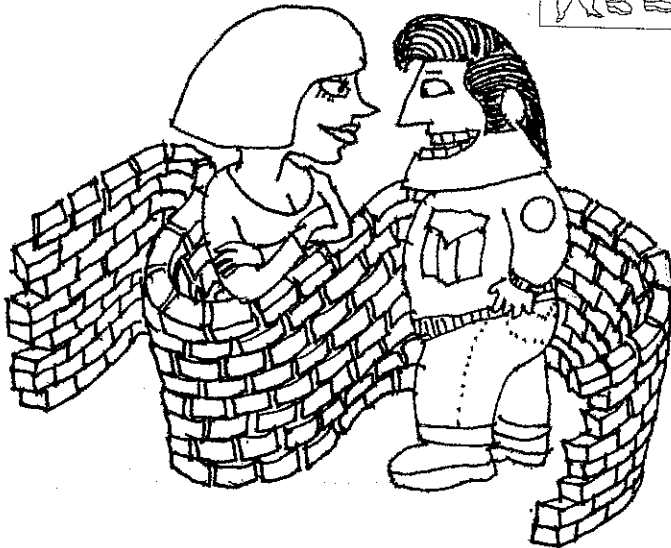
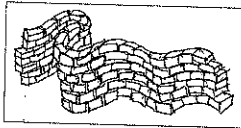
TRANSITION



SOCIAL CLIMBERS



PRISONERS OF LOVE



exercise

7

Combining

Pick any two of your doodles and trace or redraw to combine them. The new image may be a simple figure-on-background like *Flower-dancer* on page 32, or a more complicated intertwined image, like most of these other examples. You could also devise an altogether different way to put your doodles together.

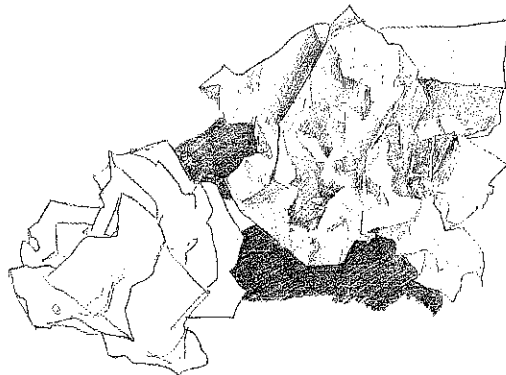
# crumpled, dented, crushed

Georges Clemenceau, the President of France during World War I, was once standing motionless on a hill overlooking the great city of Istanbul. After a long silence, one of his aides asked, "What are you thinking, Mr. President?" He replied solemnly, "I was thinking what beautiful ruins this place would make."

Indeed, there is something aesthetically pleasing about the partially destroyed—especially for a draftsman. Junkyards, weathered barns, broken dolls and ripped billboards all suggest the ravages of time and hard use. Things become more abstract

(and often more interesting) as they deteriorate, offering the artist rich opportunities for line, tone and texture and a great opportunity for mastering shapes.

Crumpled paper, put under a strong light, reveals dozens of small planes and edges. You can capture these in a drawing by carefully observing the shapes: first the overall shape of the paper, then the shapes of the creases and facets. Squint often to distinguish the strong from the subtle.

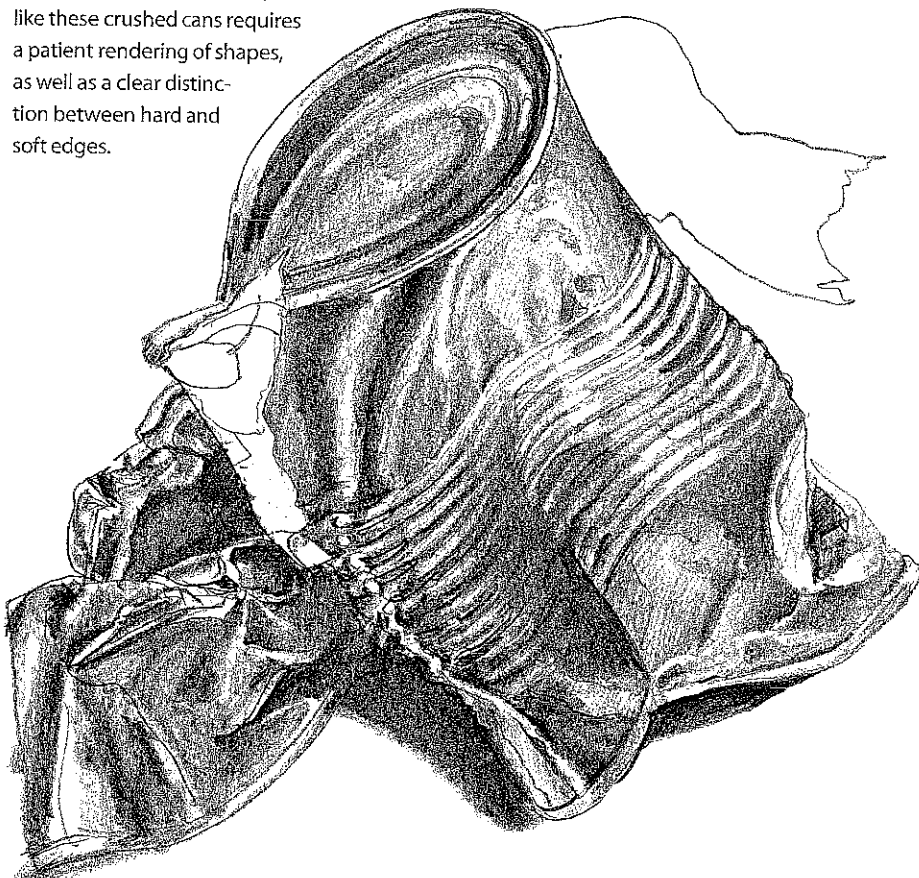


## MAPPING YOUR SUBJECT

Mapping the major shapes of your subject is a key first step in drawing complex damaged objects. This makes filling in the unusual planes and shadows a manageable problem.

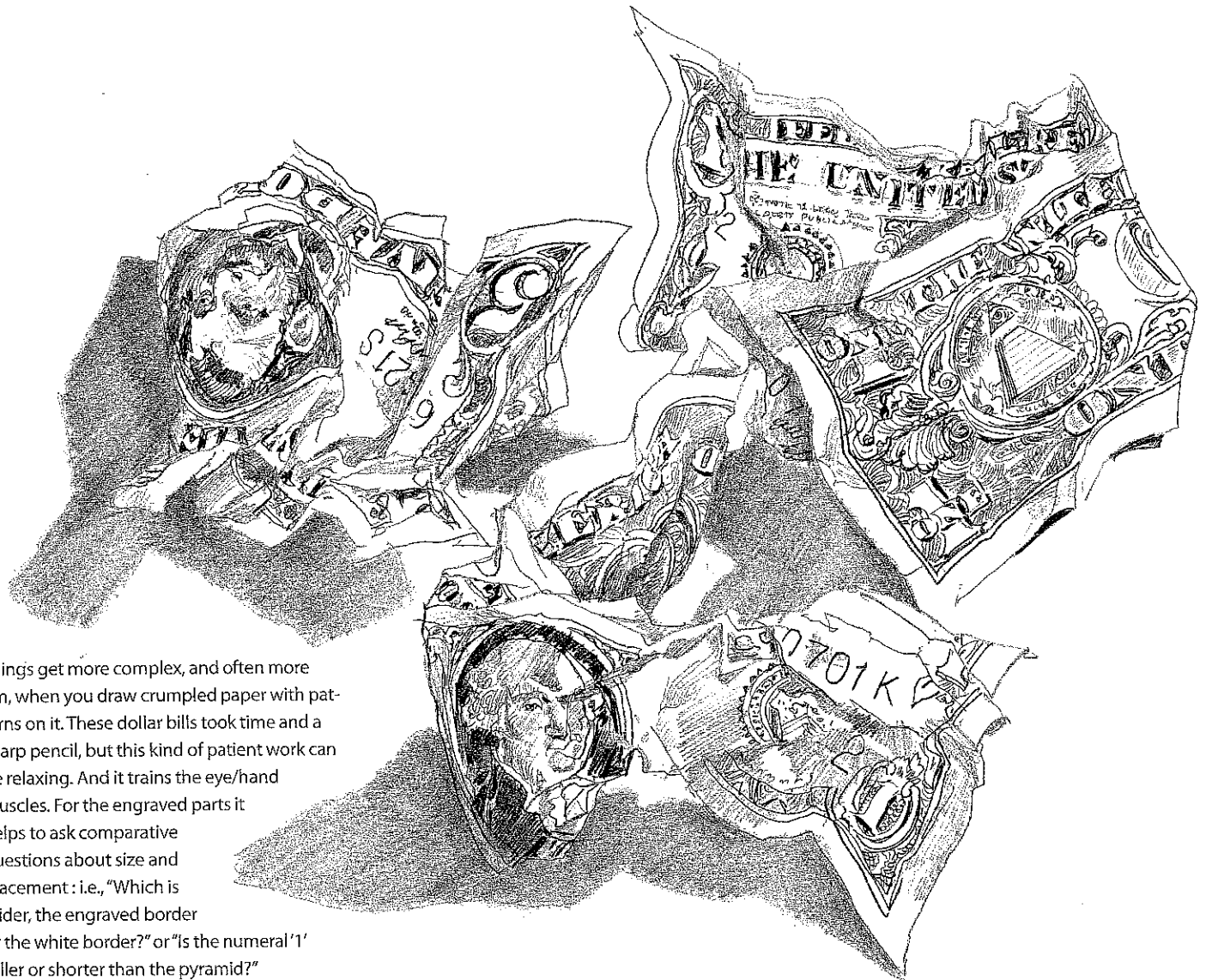
## DENTED METAL

Drawing shiny, reflective objects like these crushed cans requires a patient rendering of shapes, as well as a clear distinction between hard and soft edges.



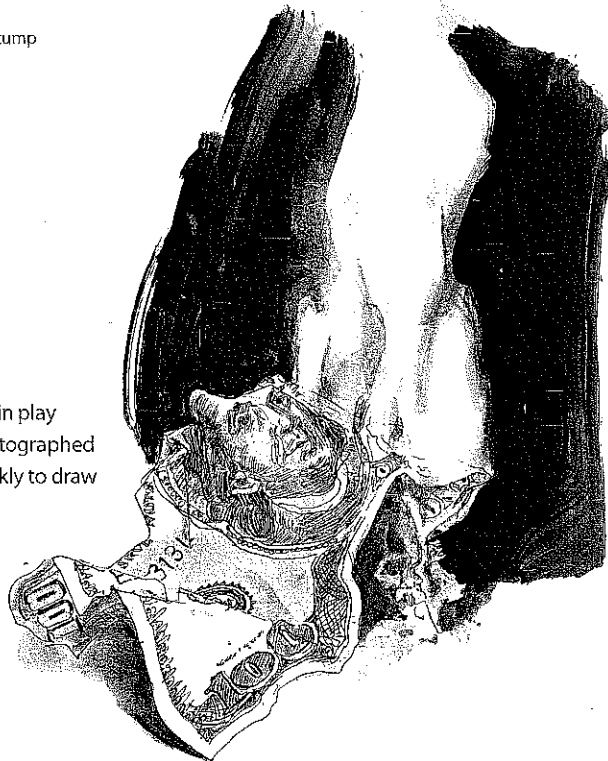
## DRAWING A SPIN-OFF

After making a few crushed-metal drawings, you get a feel for the kinds of shapes and edges involved. This familiarity allows you to invent your own forms, as I did in this drawing.



Things get more complex, and often more fun, when you draw crumpled paper with patterns on it. These dollar bills took time and a sharp pencil, but this kind of patient work can be relaxing. And it trains the eye/hand muscles. For the engraved parts it helps to ask comparative questions about size and placement: i.e., "Which is wider, the engraved border or the white border?" or "Is the numeral '1' taller or shorter than the pyramid?"

**Crumpled Money**  
 .05 mechanical pencil and paper stump



**THE SPIN-OFF**

I set this hundred-dollar bill (in play money) on fire and then photographed it because it burned too quickly to draw from direct observation.

**Money to Burn**  
 Crow quill pen and ink with ink washes

**exercise** 9

**Creating Destruction**

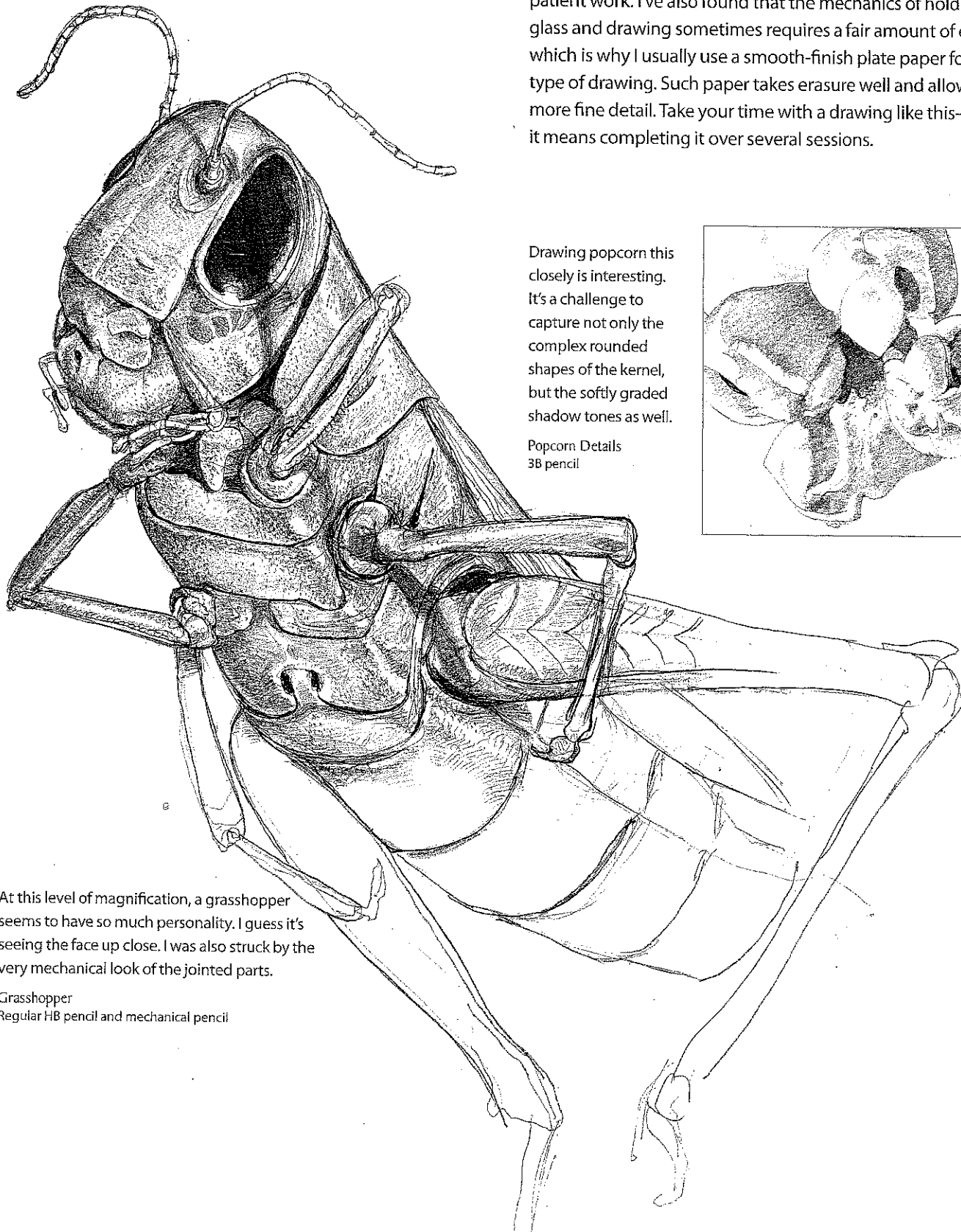
Make a carefully observed drawing of a crumpled object. First, using only line, accurately map the overall shape, then the secondary shapes, and finally the crumpled shapes and creases. When your map is complete, add the value tones. Pay particular attention to the difference between hard and soft edges. Use a 2B or softer pencil and a kneaded eraser to pick out highlights, and allow one to two hours.



# macro drawing

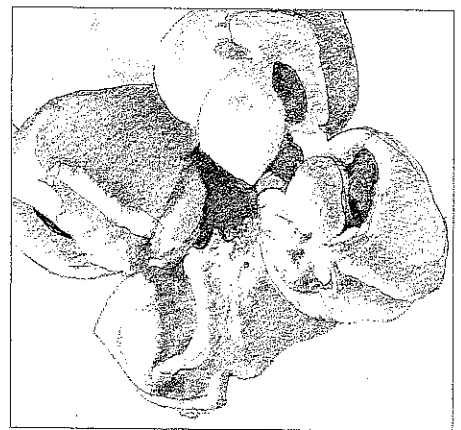
Enlarging an object transforms it. It reveals a level of structure and detail that is otherwise invisible to us. Macro drawing

involves carefully rendering something as you look at it through a magnifying glass. This requires good lighting and careful, patient work. I've also found that the mechanics of holding the glass and drawing sometimes requires a fair amount of erasing, which is why I usually use a smooth-finish plate paper for this type of drawing. Such paper takes erasure well and allows for more fine detail. Take your time with a drawing like this—even if it means completing it over several sessions.



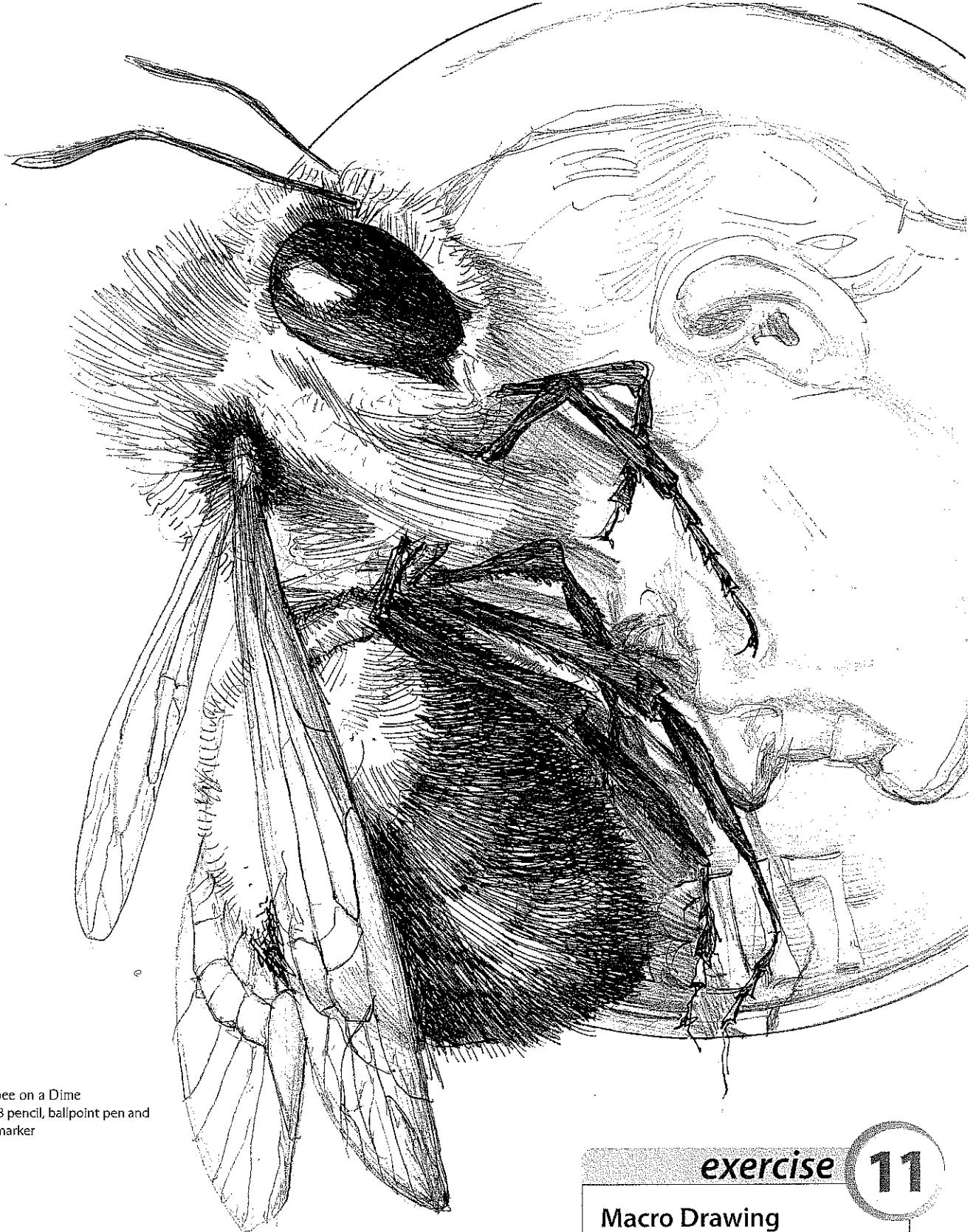
Drawing popcorn this closely is interesting. It's a challenge to capture not only the complex rounded shapes of the kernel, but the softly graded shadow tones as well.

Popcorn Details  
3B pencil



At this level of magnification, a grasshopper seems to have so much personality. I guess it's seeing the face up close. I was also struck by the very mechanical look of the jointed parts.

Grasshopper  
Regular HB pencil and mechanical pencil



Bumblebee on a Dime  
Mix of HB pencil, ballpoint pen and  
fine-tip marker

## exercise 11

### Macro Drawing

Make an enlarged image of a very small object or creature. Use a good magnifying glass and a strong light (or lights) and take your time, as much as several hours. Erase as often as needed. A drawing like this is best done over several sessions. Good subjects are dead insects, spiders, watch and computer parts, peanuts, raisins, flower parts, hermit crabs and peppercorns.



# distorted reflections

All drawing is distorted. The eye/mind/hand process invariably and unconsciously emphasizes some things at the expense of others. Rather than correct such distortions, we, as imaginative artists, should find ways of emphasizing them.

Here's a good way to start: Draw your own reflection in a fun-house mirror. If you can't get a fun-house mirror, a sheet of flexible, mirrored Mylar (available at many art stores) will do. The drawings on these pages were made by bending Mylar in various ways. You'll need to tape or clamp the Mylar so that the desired bend is held in place.

What's interesting about this exercise is that no matter how extreme the distortion, your image is still recognizable. The parts are garbled, sometimes wildly, but the relationships between them are held constant. If you draw the strange reflection accurately, it still looks like you. (It's equally interesting that sometimes you can look in a regular mirror and hardly recognize yourself. Well, at least I do that.)

A project like this one can make you comfortable with distortion. Once you've done a few of these, you can elongate, compress or otherwise torture any image you see without the help of Mylar or mirrors.



SLIM



COMPRESSED

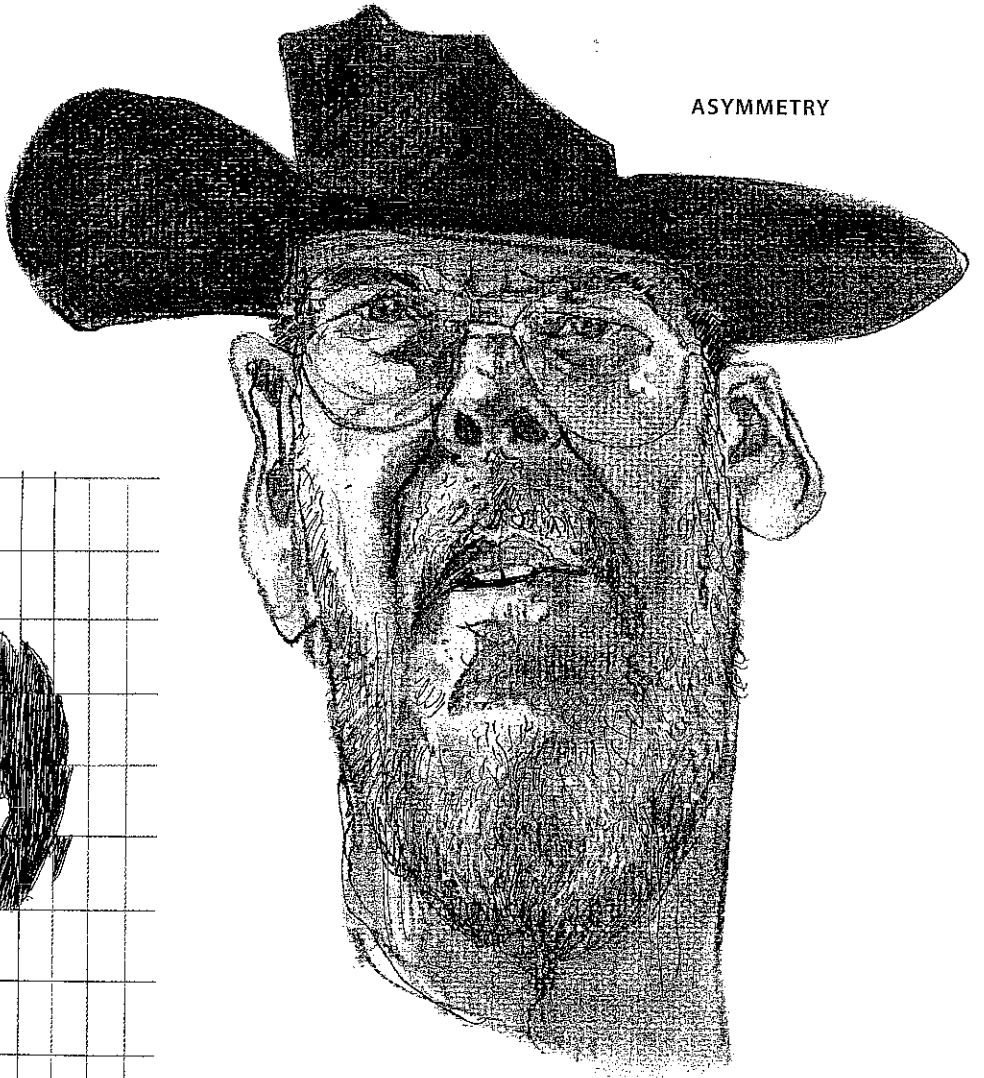
## OLD HAT

This series of distorted self-portraits was done by looking into a sheet of mirrored Mylar. To do this, pin or tape the Mylar so that it bends in various ways—and hold very still as you draw. Most of these were done in vine and compressed charcoal with the help of a kneaded eraser.





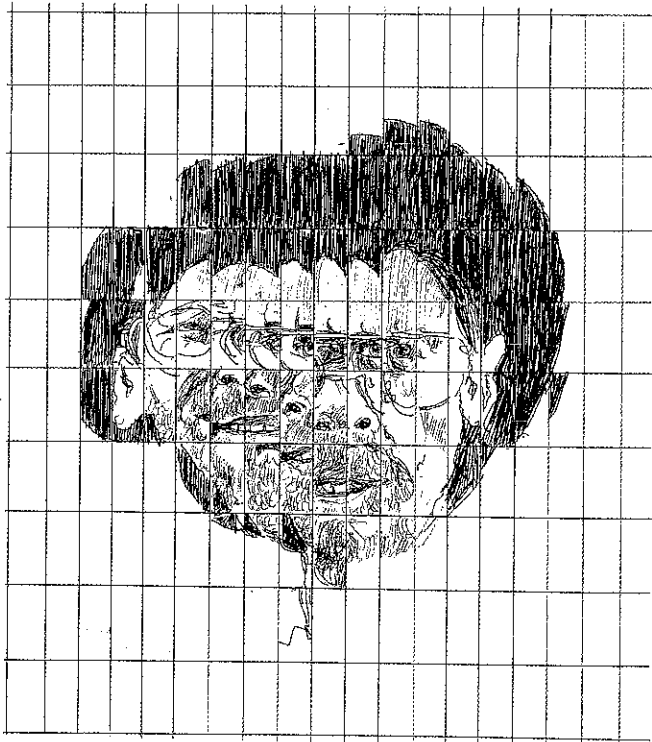
FLAT HAT



ASYMMETRY

### MOSAIC COWBOY

The drawing below was done from reflections in a mosaic mirror. It's easy to lose your place and forget which square you're working on in a complex image like this. I put a little dot on the mirror square that reflected the tip of my nose. I also kept one eye closed most of the time.



# Stretching the Truth

Making the Familiar Strange / Progressively Changing / Exaggerating Proportions / Playing With Scale / Distorting With Grids / Drawing Metaphors / Odd Juxtapositions

Drawing expressively is all about finding ways of intensifying and dramatizing your subjects to inspire a new emotion in your viewer. An accurately drawn object puts the viewer in touch with that object on a literal level—they automatically know exactly what it is and what it's used for. An exaggerated or distorted drawing of the same object tends to touch the viewer on an emotional level, inviting them to see it in a new way. It makes the familiar strange.

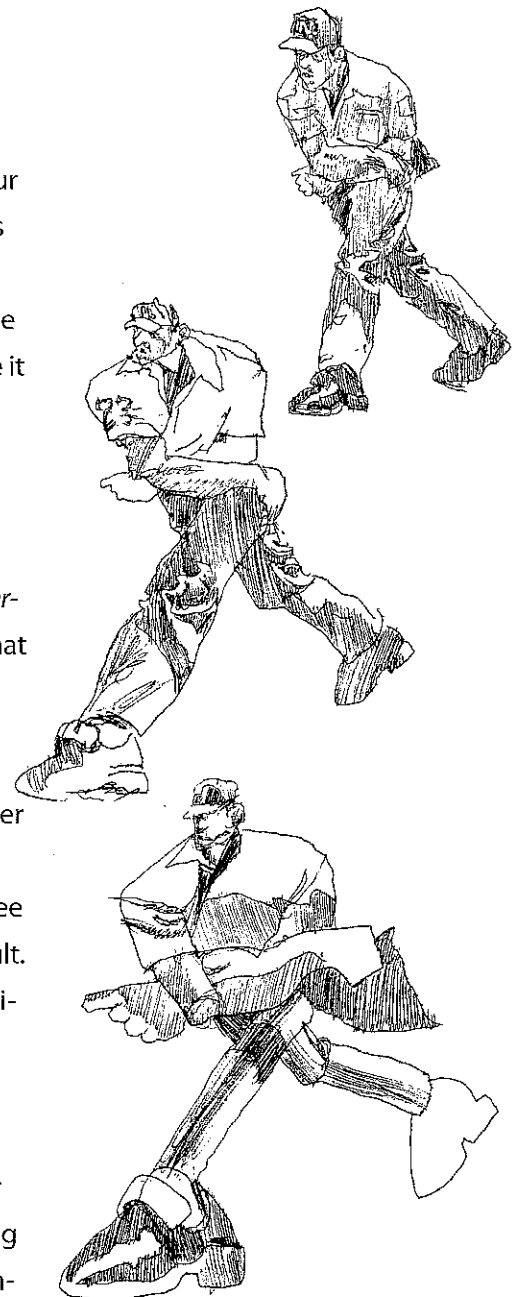
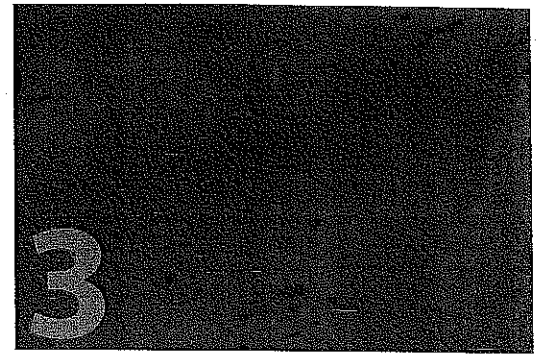
Most of us honed our drawing skills by drawing things as they appear. We trained our hand to follow our eye. Happily, these same eye/hand skills, learned through careful observation, come in handy when we draw things as they *might* appear. This point, covered in the last chapter, bears repeating: *Drawing from observation provides a powerful foundation for drawing from imagination.* It's also true that transforming observation into imagination requires something altogether new.

## Shift Your Perspective

You need new daring in your drawing—a greater willingness to suspend your inner critic, that voice that's always advising you to play it safe. From this new perspective, rather than seeing objects as having precise dimensions and contours, you see them as raw material—material to be twisted and pulled into an unexpected result. As you draw, think of your subject as clay. This new perspective liberates the imagination and opens up a whole world of possibility.

## Making the Familiar Strange

Here's another way to think of it. The reality you observe is like the picture on your TV screen. You like its sharpness and reliability, but sometimes yearn for something more expressive and poetic. Now, suppose that you found fiddling with some control knobs on the back of the set alters the images in interesting and unusual ways. Let's say that you could make the colors more vivid, or the characters more alive. You could make the images wiggly and wavy, blend foreground with background and turn clouds into people and people into trees. In this chapter we'll investigate ways of drawing in a new, more expressive mode, twiddling the knobs of reality to create something unusual, provocative or metaphoric.



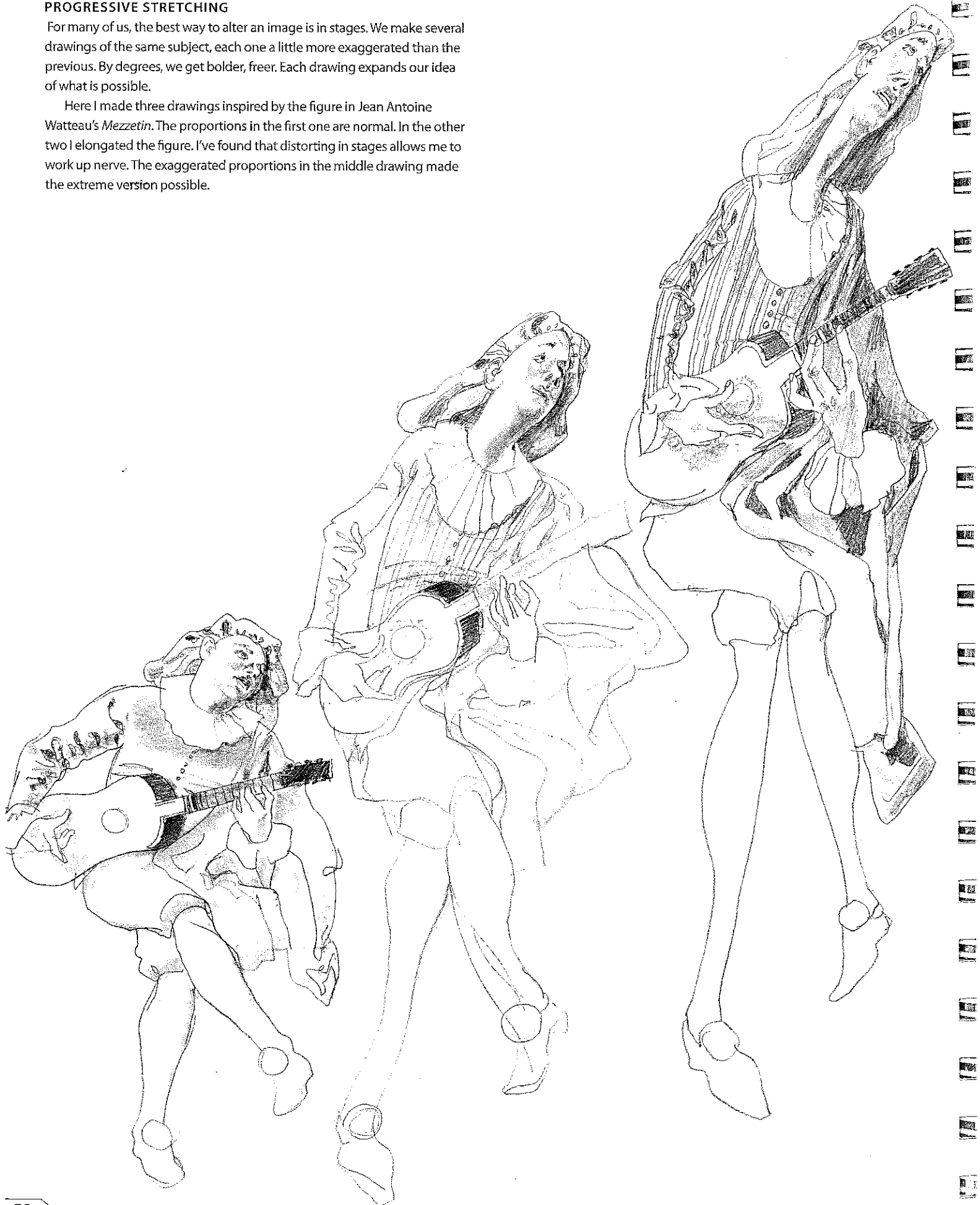
### PROGRESSIVE CHANGE

Here's another demonstration of how distortion gets easier when you do it in stages. I like to do it in groups of three. Here, the first umpire was drawn from a magazine photograph. The middle stage exaggerated the action and altered the proportions. This emboldened me to make more radical changes in the last drawing.

## PROGRESSIVE STRETCHING

For many of us, the best way to alter an image is in stages. We make several drawings of the same subject, each one a little more exaggerated than the previous. By degrees, we get bolder, freer. Each drawing expands our idea of what is possible.

Here I made three drawings inspired by the figure in Jean Antoine Watteau's *Mezzetin*. The proportions in the first one are normal. In the other two I elongated the figure. I've found that distorting in stages allows me to work up nerve. The exaggerated proportions in the middle drawing made the extreme version possible.



# exaggerating proportions

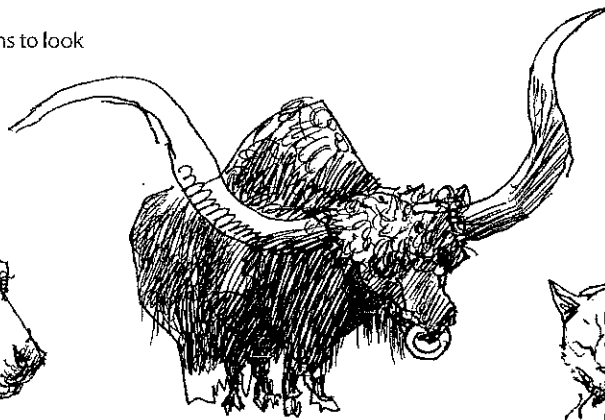
We recognize differences by comparing and contrasting. If you want to make something look big in your drawing, put it next to something small. If you have only one object, the parts should contrast with each other. Enlarging some parts of your subject while reducing others is a way of intensifying the drawing. It creates an exaggerated emphasis, expressively calling attention

to certain aspects of a person or an animal. The results may be amusing or disturbing, but almost always attention-getting.

In the animal drawings on these pages I've simply shrunk or expanded a certain part in relation to the others. Care was taken to represent the parts accurately, though not in proper proportion.

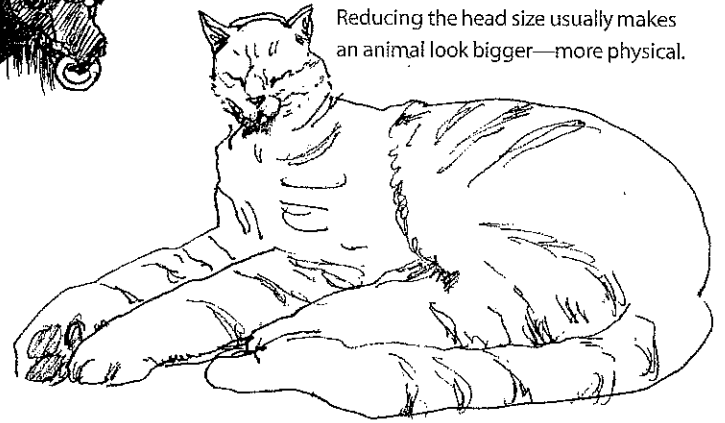
## ALL HORN

It's interesting how exaggeration begins to look normal as you draw. By the time I finished this sketch, this outlandish yak seemed quite believable to me.



## SMALL HEAD, BIG BODY

Reducing the head size usually makes an animal look bigger—more physical.



## LONG LEGS, BIG FEET

These creatures look like they were born to run. The dog's small head makes it appear far away, as if his body were extremely long.



### STRETCHING AND SQUEEZING THE HORSE

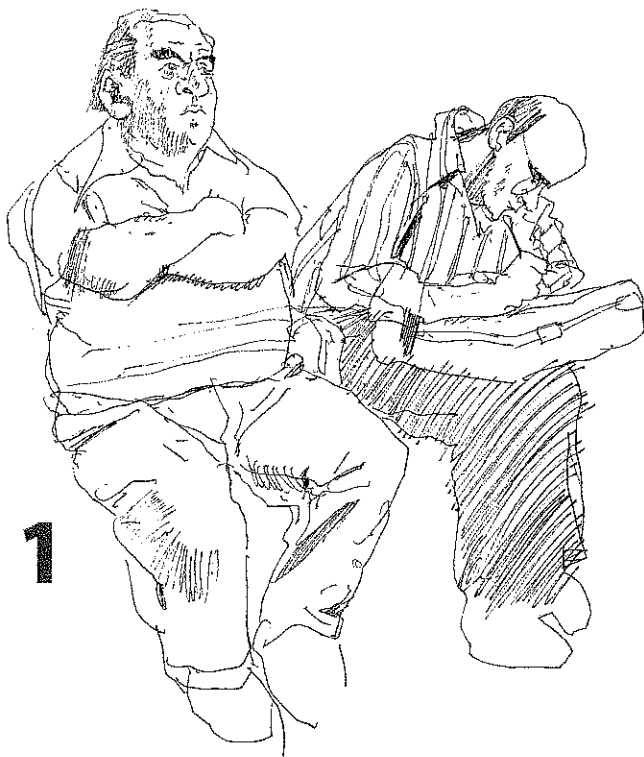
The horse represents so many things to us: grace, power, speed, work, companionship, etc. Exaggerating different parts brings out different symbolic aspects.





# emphasizing differences

Difference is information. We are aware of things because they stand out from their background. We are aware of qualities by contrasting and comparing. One way to make the familiar strange is to emphasize differences. That is, put two elements in a drawing and push the differences between them to extremes.

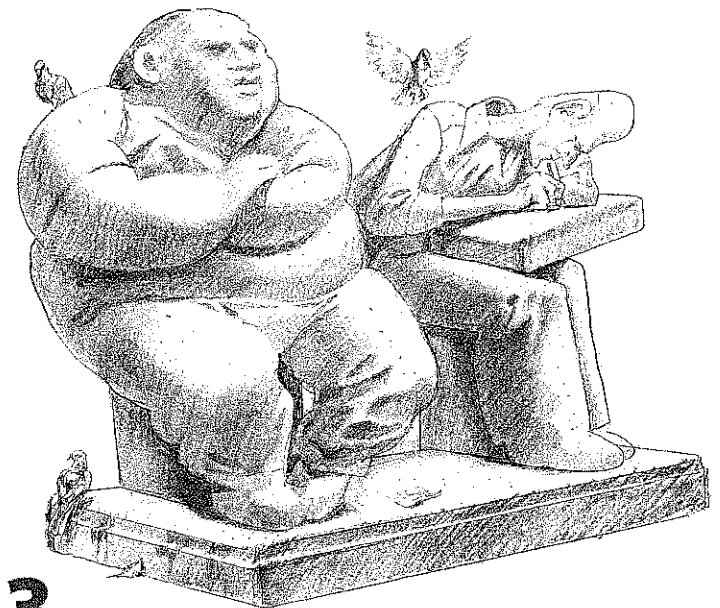


## EXAGGERATING DIFFERENCES

The first drawing is a sketch I made of two guys waiting in an airport. Something about the difference between their poses and body types caught my eye.

Later, I made a second sketch from the original. I exaggerated the differences between these two figures, making the heavier man much larger and the thinner guy more angular and bookish. For some reason they began to look like monuments to me. I imagined them as a stone sculpture in a park.

So I drew them again, this time in pencil. By using soft shading and eliminating details, I attempted to show them as if they were made of granite. And I added pigeons.



exercise

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## Progressive Distortion

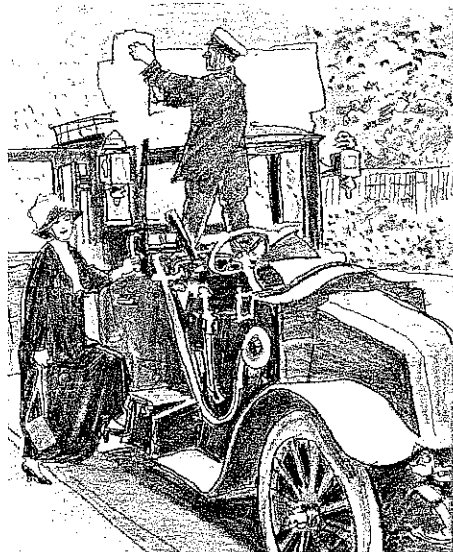
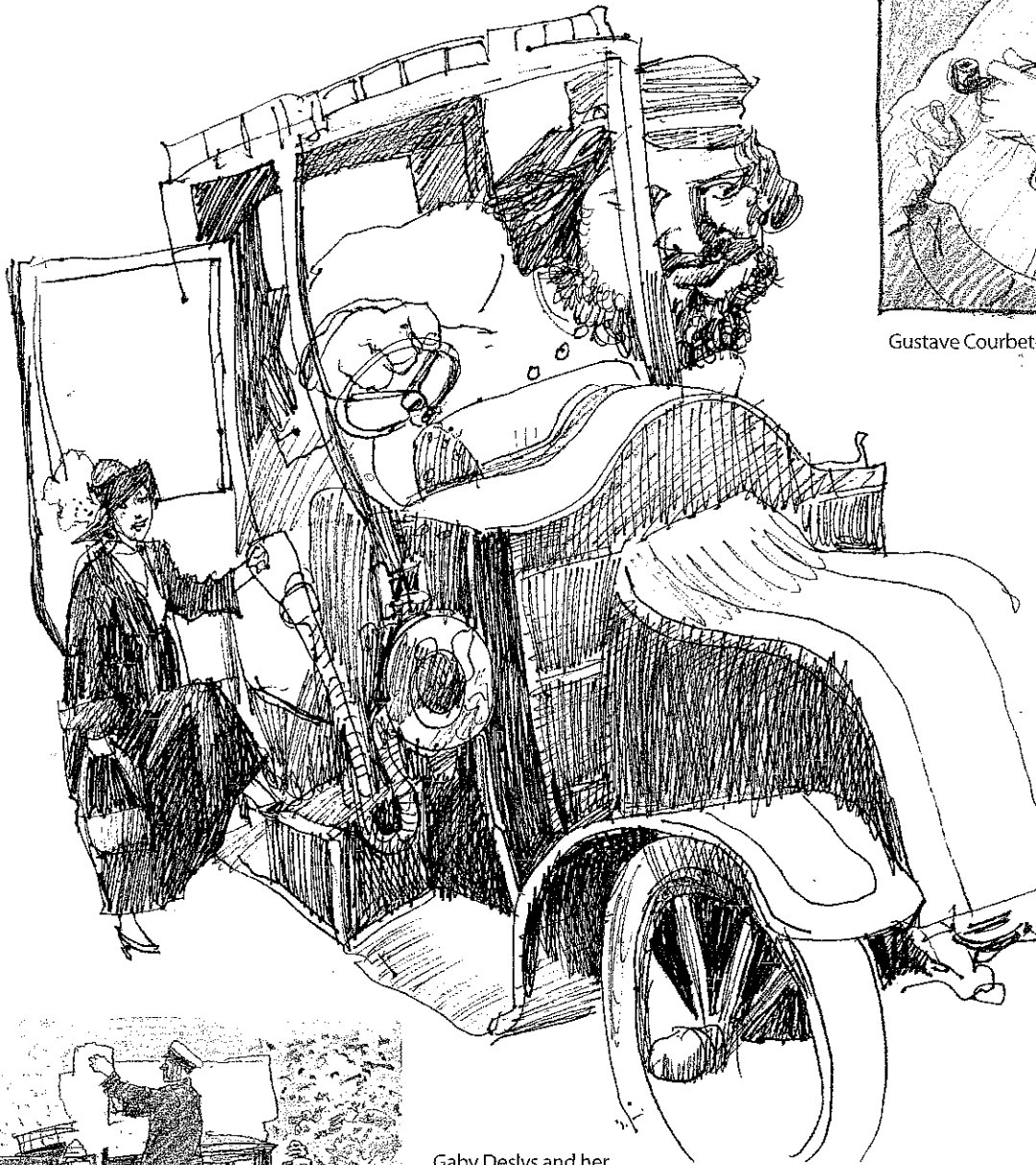
Make a series of three drawings (any subject), each more distorted than the last. Draw your original either from life or from a photograph. Then make each of your other two from the previous drawing. Forgo timidity! The last drawing should be greatly exaggerated.

# playing with scale

Sometimes it's fun to make a composite drawing from different sources and to wildly exaggerate size differences. Here I've put the artist Gustave Courbet in the driver's seat of socialite Gaby Deslys' limousine. The drawing is arresting because it almost takes a moment for the viewer to realize that Courbet is a giant.



Gustave Courbet—from a photograph



Gaby Deslys and her limousine—from a photograph

## exercise 15

### Scale Play

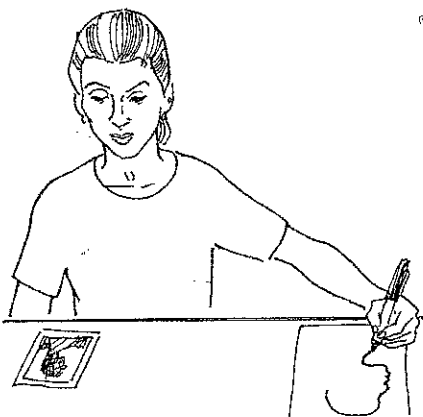
Make a composite drawing by combining elements from two different photographs. Make some of the elements out of scale—distort and exaggerate the size differences between them so that small things appear huge and vice versa. In all other ways, see if you can make the scene convincing and realistic.

# forced distortion

Many artists—even experienced professionals—find it difficult to deliberately distort their drawings. Paradoxically, good training in observation can inhibit the ability to draw expressively. Here's a two-step process that can help you break out of that constraint. It almost guarantees a more extreme and often striking image. In the first step, drawing blind, map the basic outlines of your subject with a bold, black marker. As you draw, keep your eyes on the subject (or photograph) and not on your

drawing. You may need to cheat a little by glancing at your paper from time to time to keep your place.

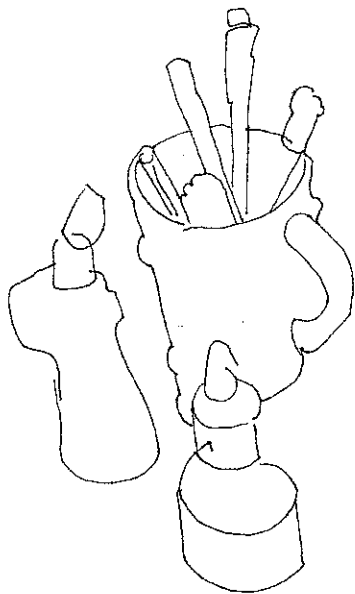
When you have completed this contour map, shift to a ballpoint pen and begin carefully filling in shading and details, now freely looking back and forth between subject and paper. The natural distortion that occurs when you draw blindly ensures that no amount of realistic shading will make your drawing look exact.



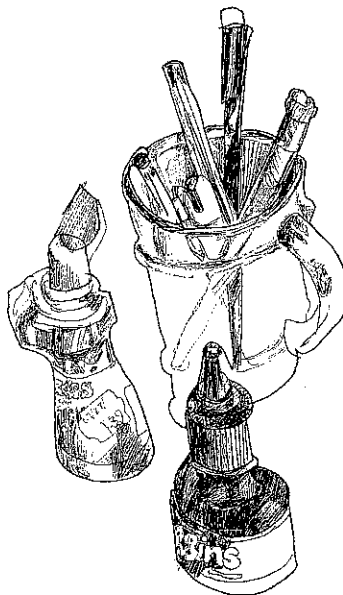
**1** Keeping your eyes on the photo and your paper off to the side, draw the outlines of your subject in bold marker.



**2** Move the paper directly in front of you. Add shadows, tones and details with a ballpoint pen.



**1** Draw blind with a felt-tip marker.



**2** Fill in shading and details with a ballpoint pen.



**1** In this blind drawing of singer Frank Sinatra, I did the features as well as the overall contours.



**2** Even after filling in, it doesn't look much like Sinatra. But that's OK. I did it my way.

### COMBINING AND EXAGGERATING PHOTOS

This drawing was made from two separate photographs. I drew the Syrian man first, and then added the Lebanese woman from another photograph behind him. I like the exaggerated difference in the sizes of their heads.

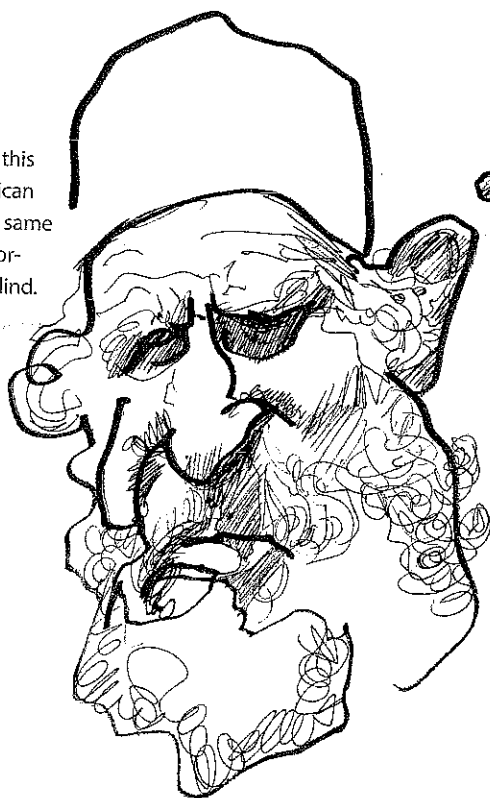


### THE SLIGHT DISTORTION OF DRAWING BLIND

At first glance, the proportions of this young girl almost look normal. But her arm and feet show the strange distortions of drawing blind.

### SKETCHING QUICKLY

Quick studies, like this one of a North African man, can have the same slight, natural distortions as drawing blind.



## exercise

# 16

### Forced Distortion

Make a blind contour drawing of a person using a bold felt-tip marker—glance at your paper only occasionally to find your place. Keep your marker in contact with your paper as much as possible. When you have completed the contours, switch to a ballpoint pen and complete the details of the drawing as realistically as possible, this time looking at your work.