DBAC Drawing & Painting Newsletter

Issue No. 2

Welcome

Hi Everyone,

Welcome to the second issue of the Newsletter.

This issue has lots of information about composition, which is relevant to drawers and painters of all levels.

Please keep sending me photos of your work; an iPad or phone camera is fine to use for this (please do your best to get it in focus). It's great to see what everyone is up to. Even if you aren't able to take a photo you can still drop me a line to let me know what you are doing artwise.

When you're sending me your work please let me know if it's just to share in the Newsletter or whether you'd also like a critique on it. That'll save me a bit of time and I don't want to be giving anyone advice if they don't want it!

You can email me directly at clarerussellart@gmail.com.

I hope you enjoy reading this issue,

Clare

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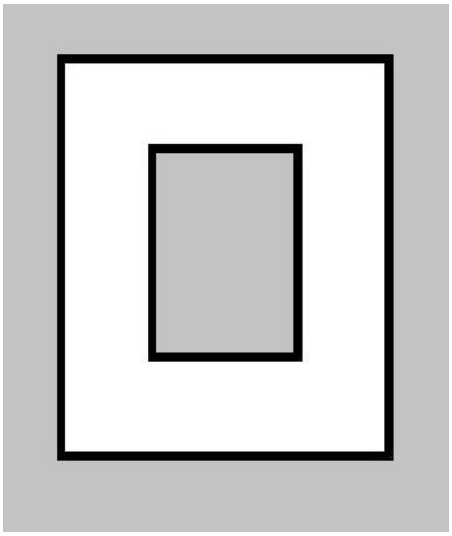
Drawing & Painting Course

Lesson 3 : Making and Using a Viewfinder

A viewfinder is simply a rectangular piece of white card or thick paper with a rectangle cut out of the middle.



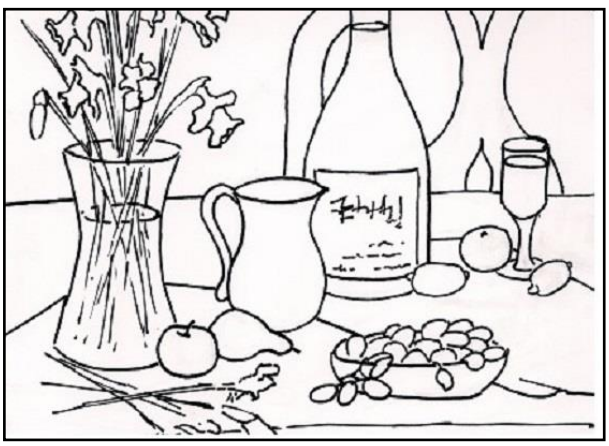
Dimensions can vary but mine are typically about 10 x 14 cm for the outside rectangle and about 4 x 6 cm for the cut-out middle rectangle.

If you're using card, you'll probably need to cut out the middle (carefully!) with a craft knife.

You can also make one out of paper, in which case you can fold it in half to cut out the middle with scissors and then open it out again. It might be a bit floppy but it's still usable.

The idea is that the edges of the inner rectangle represent the edges of your rectangular piece of paper. When you look through the inner rectangle window what you see is what you draw or paint on your piece of paper. Its big advantage is that you can 'try out' lots of different compositions without even lifting a pencil. Let's look at an example of using one.

Say, we've set up a large still life with lots of different objects. If we hold the viewfinder up near to one eye (closing the other one) and look through the inner rectangle we can see most of the still life, as shown below left. If we then move the viewfinder further away from our eye then we will see less of the still life, as shown below right.



You can easily try this for yourself just looking about your house; you don't even need to set up a still life.

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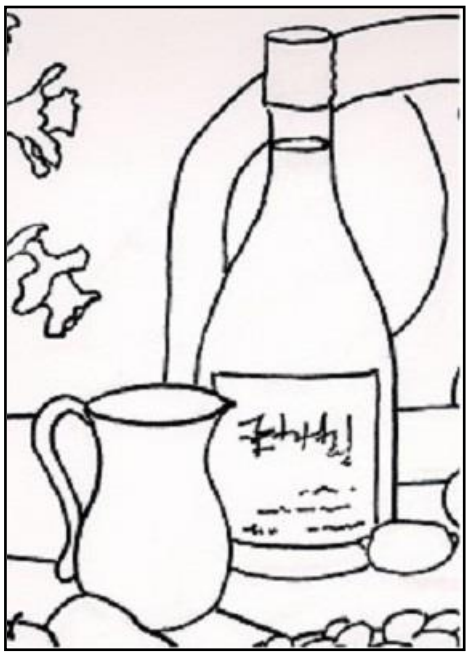
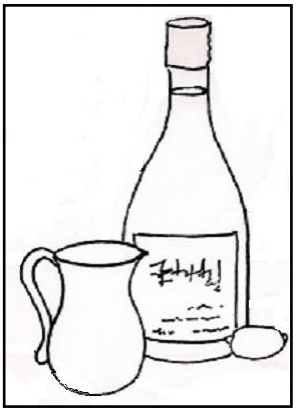


In the example above the viewfinder was held in **landscape** orientation (that's with the long edge at the bottom). Holding the viewfinder in **portrait** orientation (with the short edge at the bottom) gives us a different window into the still life.

Now, the purpose of using a viewfinder isn't to create random views of still life objects, it's to enable us to create interesting compositions. The big advantage of using one is that it lets us see the edges of our drawing or painting page. How objects intersect these edges is very important to the look of the overall piece. Let's take another example.



This is a still life with three overlapping objects but it's boring as a composition as the objects are concentrated in the middle and are surrounded by empty space. There are no shapes intersecting the edges of the paper.

This has shapes intersecting the edges but some of them look a bit 'weird'. The daffodil heads are just floating, unconnected, and the fruit looks 'cut-off' at the bottom.

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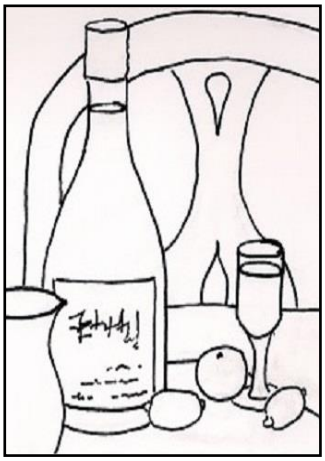

The three compositions above show more promise; they look much more interesting as the edges as well as the objects have been considered. The objects look as though they are sitting in a natural space and there's a feeling that there's more going on outside of what you can see.

I don't want to give you a set of rules for creating compositions. I know some books do but that can lead to predictable and equally boring work. It's much better if you can find your own interesting compositions. If you have a 'gut feel' that something looks ok then it probably does. Practise always helps!

Once you've identified your composition in your viewfinder, you can quickly and lightly sketch in the rough shapes on your paper. Remember to use the intersections at the edges of the paper as a guide. This initial sketching should only take a minute or so. After that you can put your viewfinder down and continue to carefully observe and work up your still life.

Do be careful you don't stray away from your original composition and end up making things too large or too small. You can avoid doing this by working on large shapes and their intersections first, before going on to smaller shapes and finally details.

If you can, have a look online at the still life paintings of Samuel Peploe or the pastels of Edgar Degas. Examine how their compositions are structured, how they intersect with the edges and suggest things beyond what we can see.

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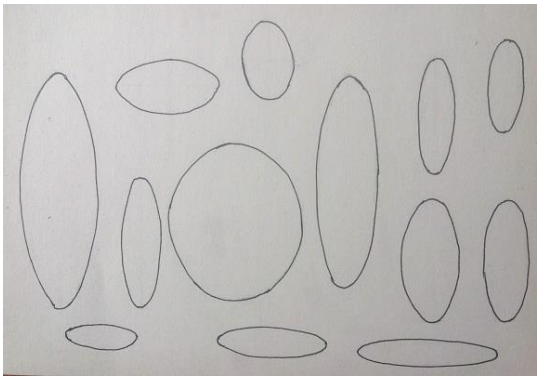
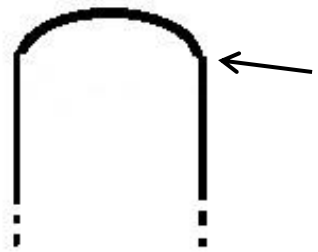
Lesson 4 : A bit more on Ellipses

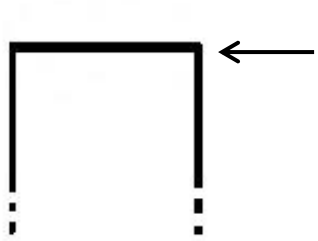
I know several of you are working hard on the ellipses lesson from Issue 1. I even got sent this page full of great ellipses – well done!



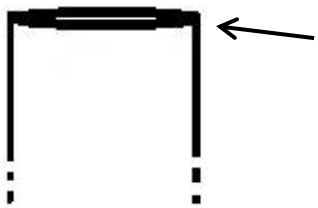
I thought I'd do a bit more explaining on using ellipses in still life. For this you'll need a cylindrical object like a mug or tin of beans (don't worry, we're not going to draw it!).



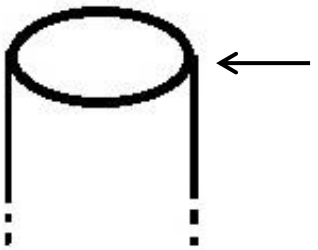
First hold the mug in front of you, above your head and look up at it. The top of the mug will form an ellipse but you'll only be able to see the curved, near edge as the far one is hidden from view.



Now bring the mug downwards until the top is exactly level with your eye line. If you go too low you'll start to see the far edge so you just want to be a little higher so you can't see it. As you are seeing the top of the mug exactly at your eye level it looks completely straight. (If you're not convinced place a ruler, pencil or straight object on it.)



Now move the mug downwards from your eye, just a tiny amount. You can see the far edge and the shape formed is a full ellipse. Notice that the ellipse is a very thin (or flat) ellipse.



Now continue to move the mug downwards. As you do, the ellipse will become fatter (or rounder) the further down you go (as shown). Eventually, when looking right over it, the ellipse will be a full circle.

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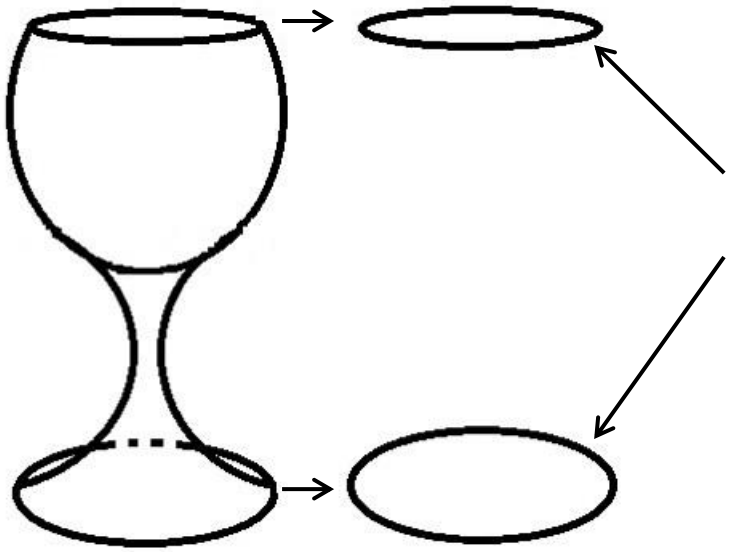
What I've just described is the **perspective** of an ellipse and it's something to be aware of when drawing still life objects to ensure they look convincing, such as the wine glass below.



Here you can see that the top ellipse of the wine glass is thinner (or flatter) than the bottom ellipse.

You don't need to get too technical about it but if something isn't looking quite right then it's worth checking that your ellipses have the correct perspective.

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‘The Kitchen Object’ Challenge

Did you do the ‘Kitchen Object Challenge’ from last time? Thanks to those of you who did and took the time to send in their efforts. I’ve shown some below.

Here’s a brief reminder of the challenge:

From your kitchen pick an everyday object; a basic, functional one, not a decorative item. It should be an object that most people will have in their kitchen. The challenge is to create an ***interesting*** *drawing or painting of this object.*

“**Glass Jars**” in pencil by Jean B.

“The background is my kitchen tiles which have pictures little pots on them.”

“**Old Tin Opener**” by Clare R.

“I cropped the object in very closely so that it became an almost abstract composition. I also gave myself an extra challenge of only allowing 2 hours from start to finish.”

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“Margaret on the Pot” by Margaret C.

“I decided to have a go at my stainless steel pot which I use for foaming hot milk. I have always ended up grinning at my elongated reflection and thought it might be an amusing subject. I started with a couple of thumbnail sketches for the composition. I have tried to make it into a proper painting with interesting colours and different brush strokes and elevated the pot on a wee stool covered in a tea towel. I used a piece of old recycled pastel paper and worked the pot in gouache, but I was using so much precious white gouache, I decided to under-paint bits of the background in cheap acrylic and then painted the pattern on the fabric with gouache again. I love my box of Caran D'ache gouache tablets (which are replaceable individually) but I have to buy a tube of quality white.”

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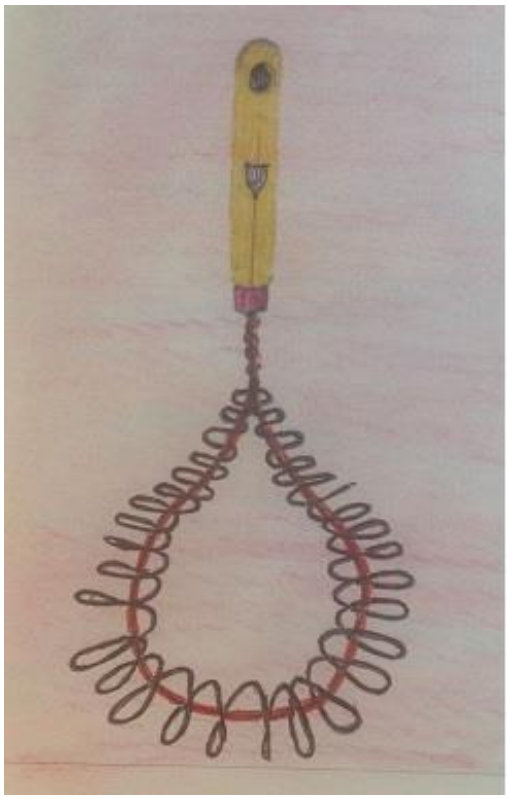
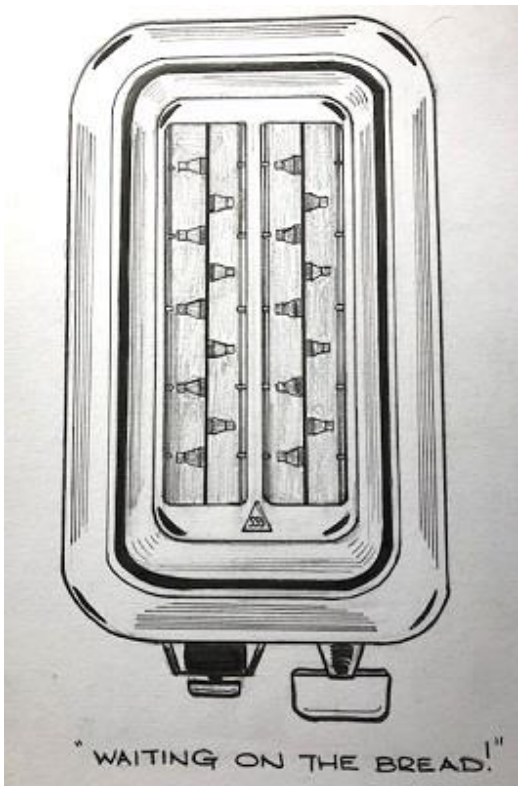


"**Egg Switch**" by Alex B.

"I decided to attempt drawing an egg switch. The one you are looking at is my 6th attempt. I am astonished at how frustrated I became trying to draw this. I simply could not make it obvious which way the thin wire was 'coiling' in relation to the main, thicker wire. So after six attempts I 'came out with my hands up'."

"**Waiting on the Bread!**" by Barbara W.



Don't worry if you didn't get round to doing this challenge – there's no time limit so you can still have a go and send me photos of your efforts.

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Fortnightly Challenge

Here's a new challenge for you…and it's a particularly tricky one!

The White-on-White Challenge

Please read through the whole challenge so you understand it before you start.

This challenge is to draw or paint a white object or objects on a white background. So, for example, you might have a white jug or cup on a white plate, on a white linen sheet or piece of white paper. If you don't have white walls you might be able to prop a piece of white card against the wall, or set up in the corner of a white double glazing unit or in the bathroom!

The important thing is the objects must be white and the whole background must also be white. You're allowed a tiny bit of non-white if it happens to be part of a white object (but it must be tiny).

You are also not allowed to use lines to describe or separate the objects; you must use blocks of tone and colour (yes, even if you are drawing).

This is a challenge in observation as you will need to study the tone and colour very closely in order to successfully describe the objects and still have them looking like they are white objects on a white background.

If you're painting, you could try to set up your objects and background outside in the sunshine in your back garden, greenhouse or even by a window. This will make the subtle colours shine out, however, you'll have to work fast to get it done before the light and shadows change too much.

And remember, the idea here is to challenge and stretch you. Hopefully you'll find them fun but don't get too frustrated or worried about what you produce – it's only a piece of paper – and the fact that you tried means you'll have learnt something.

Please email me photos of your attempts and let me know how you got on.

Good luck!

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Coaching & Critiques

Here's the story…the artist was having lunch in a pub garden and saw a wall plaque. They liked something about it so took a photograph. Later, back home, they produced this artwork which is a copy of the photograph taken (I was supplied with the original photo so I know it's a copy). I thought I'd share this critique as this is a very common thing I'm asked to look at.

"Firstly I'd like to say that this artwork is a very decent copy of the original photo. The colours work really well and I like the variety of paint application (especially the splodges).

However, if you're going to work from photos, then I suggest trying to use them just as inspiration, a starting point, an idea, and use your creativity to make something more than what the photo shows.

Consider what you liked about the scene/photo and work with that, discarding bits that are irrelevant. For example, say you liked the colours and brickwork and the expression of the character but the roots growing over it were just incidental. Well, you could leave out the roots, but what about creating an actual real-life character using the expression. Maybe he's human wearing a mask and leaf head-dress or he's a fantasy character. Keep the colour scheme and have him dancing in front of the brickwork to retain that element.

Or a totally different direction - maybe you liked the roots, the idea that nature takes over the man made. Perhaps the character represents mankind screaming and you want to draw more roots, breaking down the wall and coming through the man's mouth. Maybe the roots turn into hands and fingers… The possibilities are endless and will be deeply personal to you, which will result in interesting, unique art.

Think creatively about what you're trying to achieve. Remember the only thing you shouldn't be trying to achieve is a copy of the photo!"

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In contrast, this work by the same artist and also from a photograph is totally different. Here the artist didn't try to copy the photo but took from it the idea of a hillwalker silhouetted against strong light to create their own painting.

I love the muted palette of colours and strong tonal contrast. It has a lovely atmospheric feel to it. There's a real sense of depth and space and also a sense of movement of the walker.

If you'd like a critique of your recent drawings or paintings, then you can email me photos along with a description of how you produced the work, what you're trying to achieve and any problems you're having. I'll try to respond to them all if I can.

If I think it's relevant and useful, I'd like to share some of the problems with the group in future newsletters. Don't worry, if you're a bit shy then just tell me in the email and I won't use your name in the newsletter.

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More of your work

It's great to see some of you are working really hard on the lessons I put in the last Newsletter. Keep at it – I'm seeing progress already. Thanks for sending me photos of your work to share. Here are a couple of them.

'Still Life' in soft pastel pencil by Jan C.

'Still Life' in acrylic by Alex B.

Next time…

I'll try to get the next newsletter out in about a fortnight. In the meantime try using a viewfinder, consider the edges of your compositions, keep looking for and drawing ellipses and maybe have a go at that tricky challenge!

Whatever else you're doing, keep drawing & painting.

Clare

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