A smudge is a trace of what was or is to come.
But a line is here. —MAY STEVENS

Line

n mathematics, a *line* is defined as a path between two points. However, in art, line is much more than a path between two points; it is the most direct means of establishing style. Line drawings are the purest form of drawing. They can convey elegance or raw energy, outrage or wit; they can be rude or polite. Jennifer Pastor's line drawing *(figure 5.1)*, for example, captures the raw energy and excitement—the trajectory of the bull and rider as they wheel through the arena—of a rodeo.

INTRODUCTION TO LINE

Line is valued both for its simple reductive power and for its potentiality for embellishment. In a lifelong career dedicated to line drawing, the Venezuelan artist Gego says, "I discovered that sometimes the in-between lines is as important as the line itself" (Gego, *Between Transparency and the Invisible*, Exhibition notes, 2005, International Center for the Arts of America, The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston). In *figure 5.2*, woven lines create layered blades of

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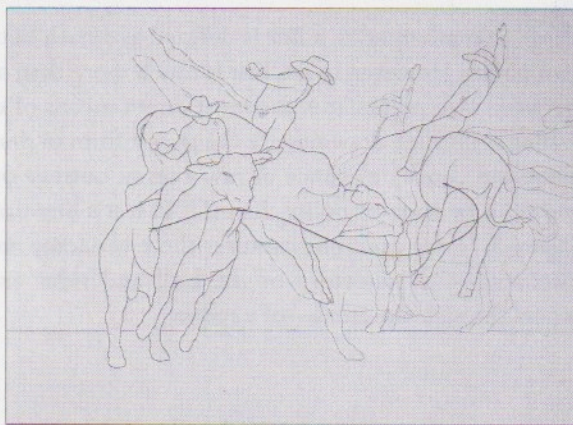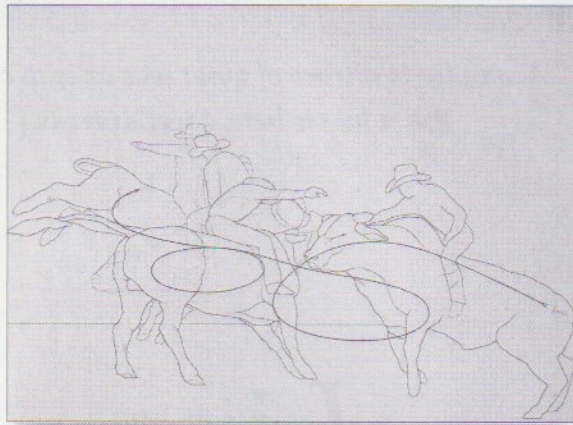
5.1. **JENNIFER PASTOR.** *Flow Chart for the "Perfect Ride" Animation.* 1999–2000. Pencil on paper, three of seven sheets, each 13½" x 17" (34.3 cm x 43.2 cm). *The Museum of Modern Art, New York.*

grass—a force field that activates the surface of the paper. The lines enclose white planes of varying shapes and sizes to stitch foreground to background.

Line can be put to analytical use as a means of converting abstract thinking into visual form. Using chance procedures and a noncompositional approach, Ellsworth Kelly made a series of drawings in which he eliminated visual control by not looking at the paper as he drew. The lines seen here *(figure 5.3)* indicate a view of rooftops and chimneys. The reduced vertical and horizontal lines state the edges of buildings; diagonal lines refer to slanted roofs, whereas curved lines indicate smoke.
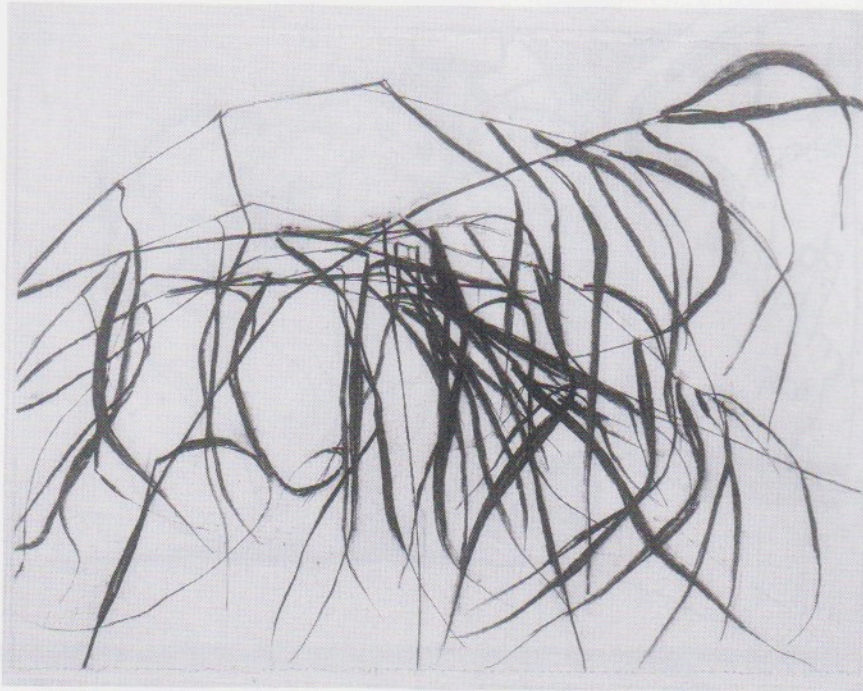
5.2. **SUSAN HARTNETT.** *Sept. 19, 03 #2, Blue-Joint grass (Calamagrostis Canadensis).* 2003. Charcoal on paper. 22¼" x 29⅞". *Copyright: Collection of Susan Hartnett.*
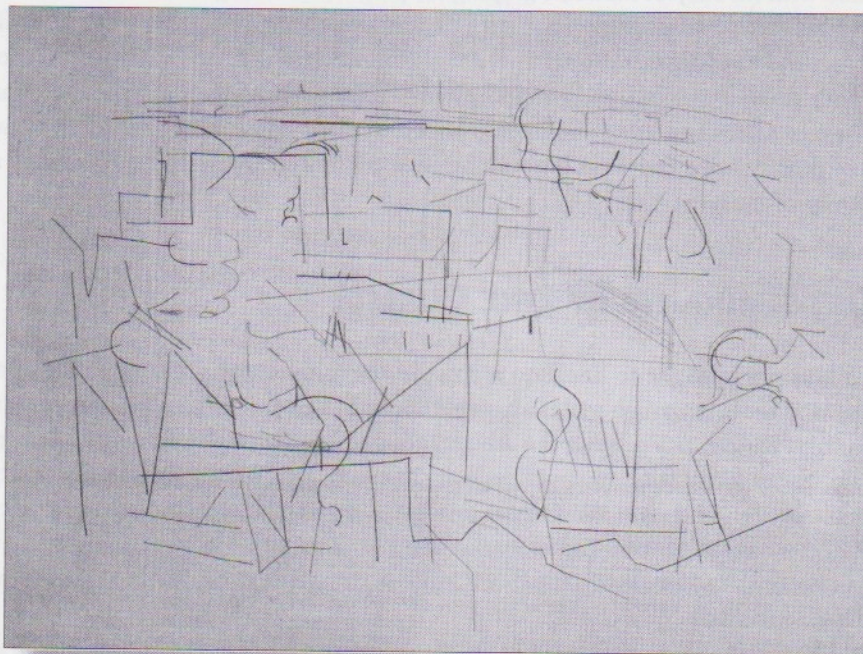
5.3. **ELLSWORTH KELLY.** *Smoke from Chimneys, Automatic Drawing from Rue Blainville.* 1950. Pencil on paper, 19¾" x 25⅝" (50.2 cm x 64.9 cm). *Harvard University Art Museums, Cambridge, Mass.*

Kelly has used line as an economical indicator of space; it is a key element in establishing the relationship between the surface of the paper and the emerging or dissolving images on it. No better means can be found for translating the world of three dimensions into one of two dimensions.

Philip Guston's drawing uses line to communicate ideas and feelings through his cartoonlike self-portraits (*figure 5.4*). His images are drawn with an exact, honest

5.4. PHILIP GUSTON. *Untitled.* 1980. Ink on paper, 1'6¾" x 2'2⅜" (46.4 cm x 67 cm). *McKee Gallery; collection of Mr. and Mrs. Harry W. Anderson.*
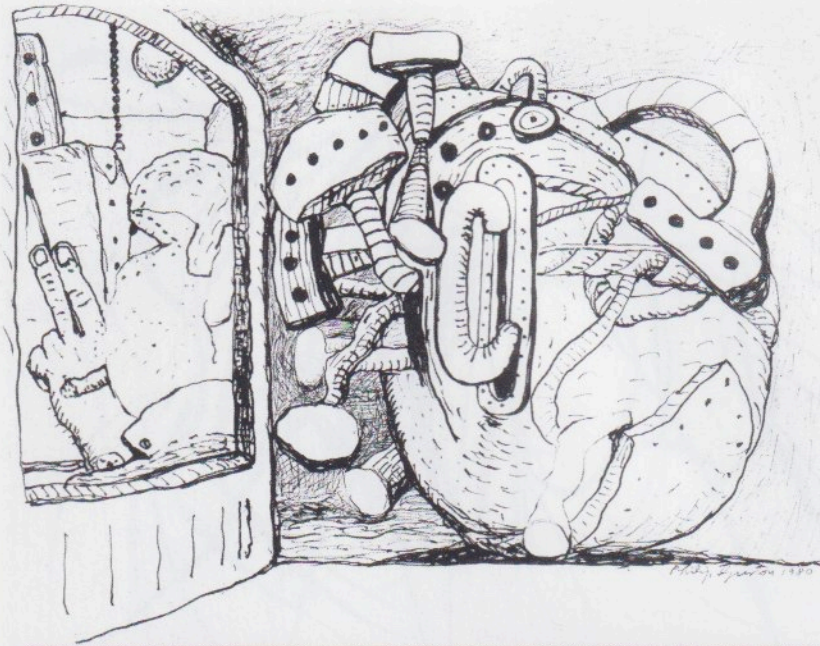
crudeness. Guston states, "It is the bareness of drawing that I like. The act of drawing that locates, suggests, discovers" (Dabrowski, *The Drawings of Philip Guston*, p. 9). Guston's blunt, line reflects his interest in the comic strip and is in tune with his subject matter, a groping for personal meaning.

You have had considerable experience already in using line—gestural line; structural line; organizational line; analytical measuring line; directional line; outline; scribbled, tangled, and wrapping lines; continuous overlapping lines; automatic lines; crosshatched lines; and lines grouped to make value. This chapter deals with line quality, with the ways line can be used both objectively and subjectively as a carrier of meaning.

DETERMINANTS OF LINE QUALITY

To become sensitive to line is to recognize the inherent qualities of various linear drawing tools. Although materials sometimes can be made to work in ways contrary to their nature, recognizing the advantages and limitations of a medium is important. Some linear tools move effortlessly to create line: pencil, felt-tip marker, ballpoint pen, and pen and ink. Others produce a grainy, abrasive line such as charcoal, chalk, and conté crayon. China markers and lithographic pencils contain grease and can be smudged or dissolved. (See Guide A, "Materials" for further discussion of drawing media.)

Using ordinary media does not diminish the impact of a drawing, as can be seen in the ballpoint pen drawing by the Korean artist Il Lee *(figure 5.5)*. The dense mass created by compiling line upon line contrasts with the wispy lines that have escaped the confines of the weighted form.

The surface on which a line is drawn is another strong determinant of the quality of that line. The character of a line scratched into a surface is different from a drawn line, and a drawn line on paper is different from one on clay, as can be seen in *figure* 5.6. Michael Gross's exaggerated figures and incised line enliven the surface of the container.

5.5. **IL LEE.** *Untitled #601.* 2001. Ballpoint pen on paper, 57" x 38". *Courtesy of Art Projects International (API), New York.*

5.6. **MICHAEL GROSS.** *Be Smart, Buy Art.* 1986. Stoneware with slip and molded decoration, 2'6" x 1'1½" diameter (76 cm x 34 cm). *The Arkansas Arts Center Foundation Collection. The Decorative Arts Museum Fund, 1986.*

Line quality is affected by the surface that receives the mark as well as by the tool that makes it, as seen in Eve Aschheim's mixed-media drawing *(figure 5.7)*. Aschheim superimposes lines made with various media on transparent paper. Some lines bleed through diluted gesso; others lie on the surface of the paper. What

5.7. **EVE ASCHHEIM.** *Lurker.* 1999. Pencil, gesso, black gesso, wax crayon, ink on Duralene mylar, 12" x 9". *The Judith Rothschild Foundation Contemporary Drawings Collection, 2005.* (TR 12112.2538).
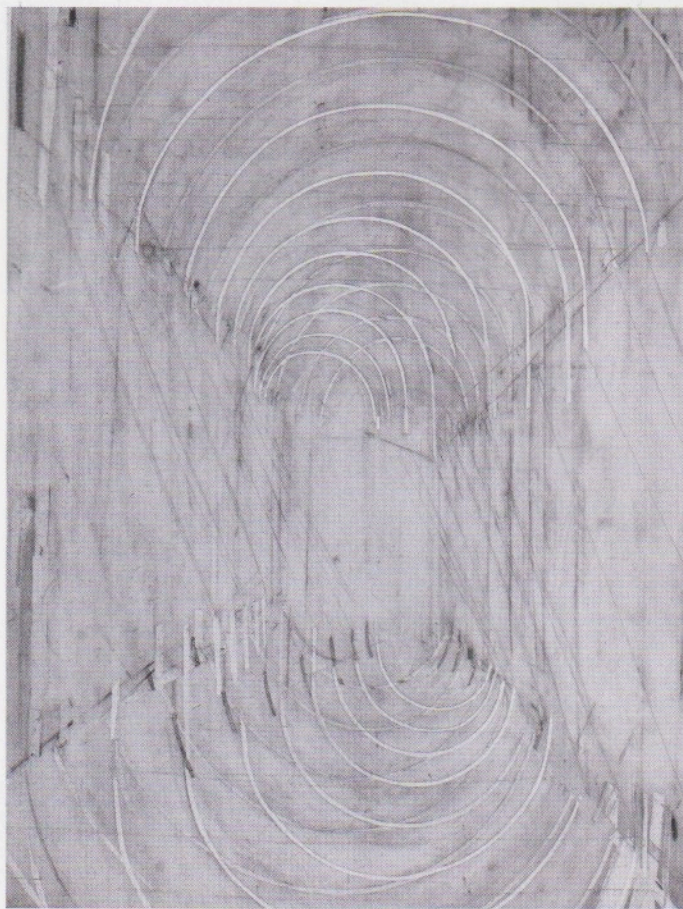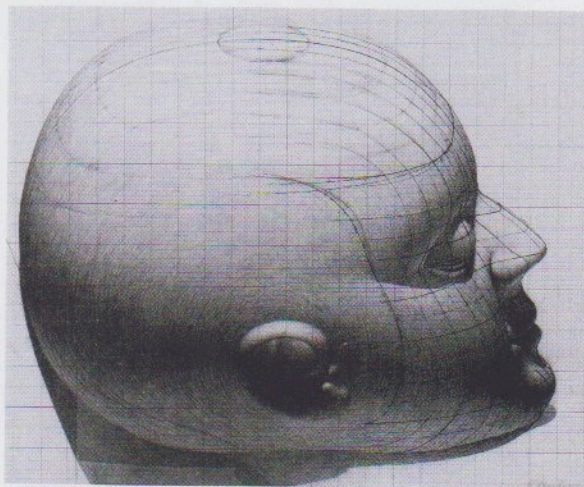
would seem to be a deep illusionistic space, a long hall, is undermined by linear complexities and contradictions in the composition. The white semicircular lines prevent an optical illusion of space and keep the attention on the surface of the drawing.

Other major determinants of line quality and drawing style are the times and societies in which the artist lives. This is most apparent with artists who deal with social commentary, such as George Grosz, a caustic critic of the conditions in Germany after World War I *(figure 5.8)*. His powerful indictments make use of exaggerated lines to convey biting commentary. His caustic accusations are conveyed by his crabbed line. Grosz said of those years that he felt the ground shaking under him and the shaking was visible in his work. Grosz's quaking line is the identifying characteristic of his drawings. An artist's linear style can be as personal as handwriting; familiarity with that style makes it easier to identify the artist. Grosz and Picasso are two artists with distinctive linear styles.

The technology of a given period exerts influence on contemporaneous drawing style and line quality as well. Just as scientific discoveries early in the century affected art styles, in today's world, the computer explosion certainly has had an equal effect on art. We are bombarded with computer-generated graphic images; it is no surprise that artists have exploited this new technology. Victor Newsome's gridded drawing of a head *(figure 5.9)* is an example of such influence. Unmistakably a contemporary drawing, its lines resemble those generated by a computer; the grid lines themselves are another reference to a mechanically generated surface. The line quality derives from technological influence.

## EXTENDED CONTEMPORARY USES OF LINE

A contemporary art phenomenon determining line quality is the relationship that drawing shares with the other disciplines of art—painting, printmaking, sculpture, and photography. Drawing, especially the linear element, extends to other disciplines and other media. The marks that define drawing are now incorporated into work by sculptors and photographers.

An example of the parallel relationship between two art disciplines can be found in a combination photo-drawing by Ian McKeever *(figure 5.10)*. In a work whose subject is the processes of erosion of the natural world, gestural line unites photography and drawing. McKeever likens drawing and photography to the landscape itself in that they both "expose and obscure, reveal and conceal . . . they are like the agents of land erosion breaking down and rebuilding surfaces" (Tony Godfrey, *Drawing Today*, p. 33). McKeever's active lines convey the idea of a world in flux.

Vik Muniz extends the use of line in even more experimental ways. He "draws" iconic subjects using thread or wire. Here, in *figure 5.11*, he has re-created the etched lines of an eighteenth-century Giovanni Piranesi print. Muniz photographs the thread drawings, enlarging them to huge prints, and then discards the original work. Muniz's work is about displacement from one cultural viewpoint to another and from one medium to another.

5.10. **IAN MCKEEVER.** *Staffa—Untitled.*
1985. Pencil and photograph on paper, 2'6" x 1'10" (76.2 cm x 55.9 cm).
Collection of the artist.
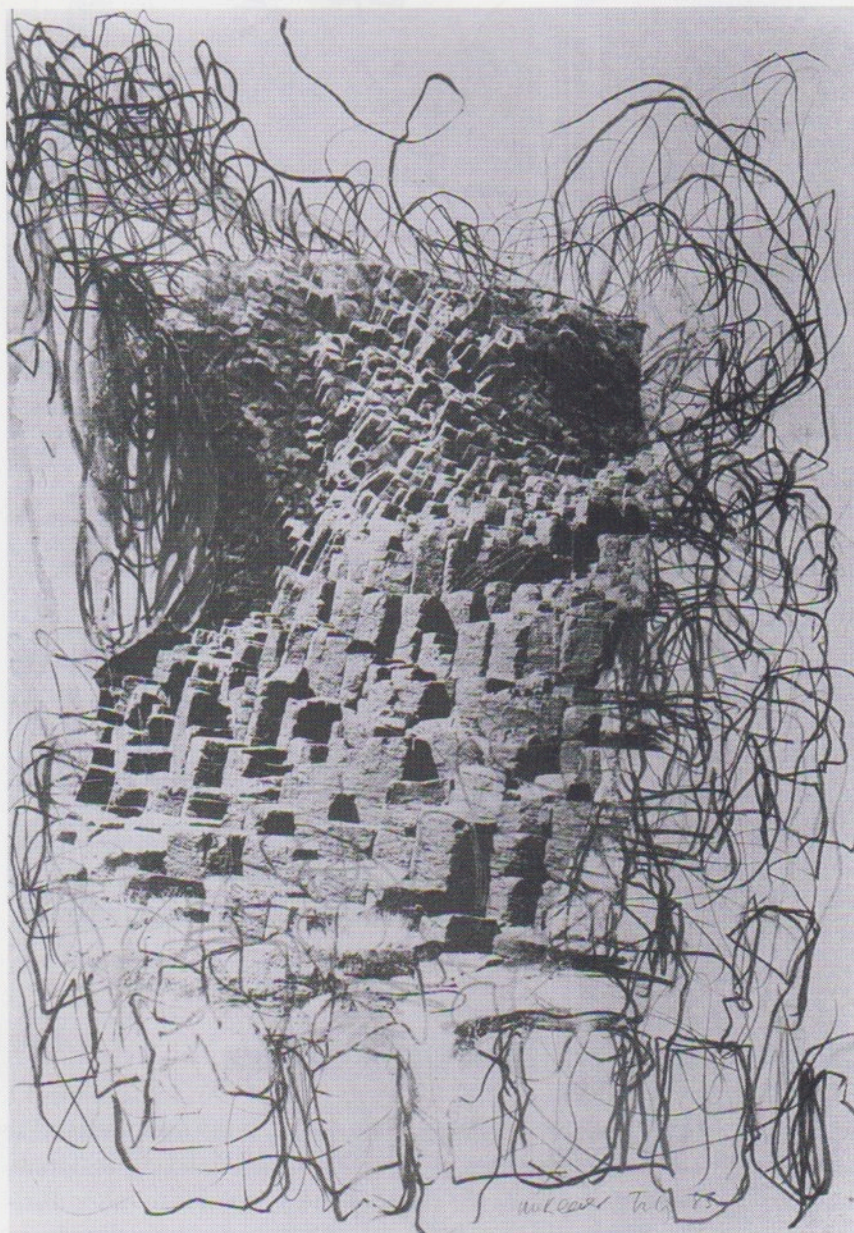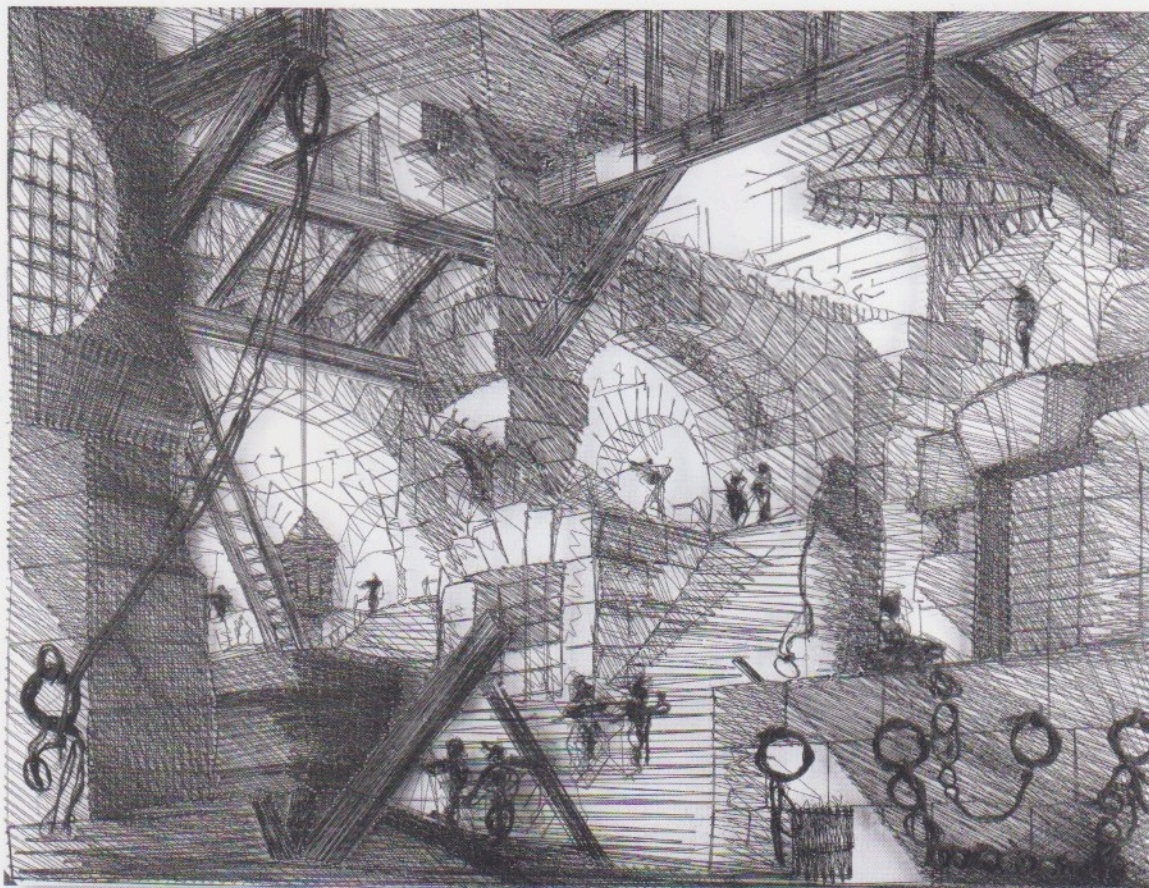
TYPES OF LINE

In our study of line quality, we will categorize some line types and learn to use them as well as recognize them in other artists' work. Remember, an artist seldom confines the use of line to one particular type of drawing. This statement can best be illustrated by William T. Wiley's tongue-in-cheek drawing *Mr. Unatural Eyes the Ape Run Ledge (figure 5.12)*. Wiley puns on the role of line with a sign in the drawing: "Suite out a line, sweet out a line" (Sweet Adeline). Wiley's works are filled with both visual and verbal puns. His dual roles as artist-magician and artist-dunce are underscored by his whimsical line quality.

Contour Line

In Chapter 2, we discussed the two basic approaches to drawing: the quick, immediate, gestural approach that sees forms in their wholeness, and the slower, more intense contour approach. Contour involves an inspection of the parts as they make up the whole. Contour, unlike outline, is spatially descriptive. It is *plastic*; that is, it emphasizes the three-dimensionality of a form. (See *figure 5.1*.)

Juan Gris's *Portrait of Max Jacob (figure 5.13)* is an example of contour; every line is fluently drawn. Slow and accurate observation is the key. The composition is subtly unified by a sidewise figure-eight shape; the clasped hands find their echoes in the bow tie and in the eyes. The form builds from the hands to the head. Gris has used contour lines of varying width to describe changes of texture, value, and color. Heavier, darker lines create accents (usually where the line changes direction, the mark is darker); lighter lines describe the less dominant interior forms.

5.12. **WILLIAM T. WILEY. *Mr. Unatural Eyes the Ape Run Ledge.*** 1975. Colored pencil and wax on paper, 3' x 2'4¾" (91 cm x 73 cm). *Collection Robert and Nancy Mollers, Houston. Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, Minn.*

5.13. **JUAN GRIS. *Portrait of Max Jacob.*** 1919. Pencil, 1'2⅜" x 10½" (36.5 cm x 26.7 cm). *The Museum of Modern Art, New York; gift of James Thrall Soby. Photograph © 1997 The Museum of Modern Art, New York.*
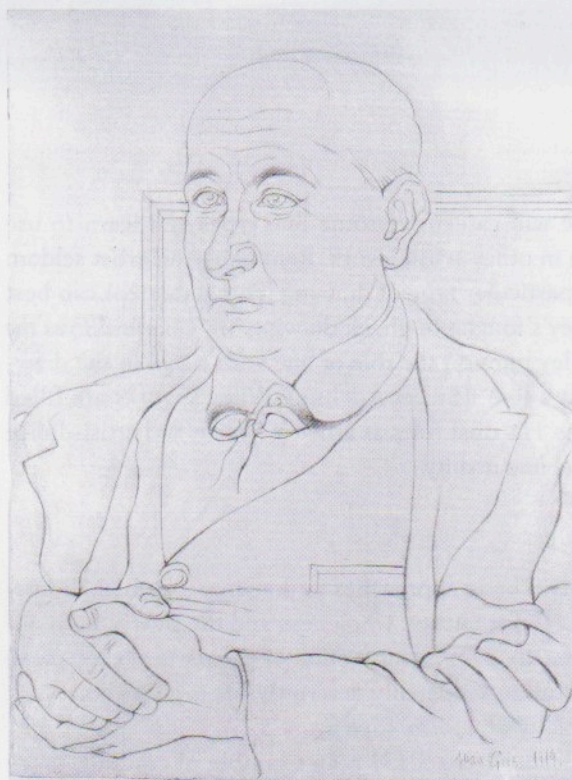
Not all contour drawings are drawn from life, however. An interesting pairing with the portrait of Max Jacob is another Gris drawing, the abstracted, mental construct *Personnage Assis (figure 5.14).* In the first drawing, Gris used intermittent dark lines; in the second one, the darker lines are not merely accents; they play the

5.14. JUAN GRIS. *Personnage Assis.* 1920. Pencil on paper, 1'1½" x 10⅝" (34.3 cm x 27 cm). *Arkansas Arts Center Foundation Collection, The Tabriz Fund, 1987. 87.47.2.*

dominant role in the composition, and spatially they set up a series of interchanging foreground, middle ground, and background planes. It reminds us once again of that ever-present issue in the drawing: figure/ground relationships.

Before moving onto specific line-drawing problems, review the steps involved in contour-line drawing below.

REVIEW: STEPS IN CONTOUR-LINE DRAWING

1. Use a sharp-pointed implement (such as a 2B pencil, or pen and ink) to produce a single incisive line.
2. Keep your eyes on the subject.
3. Imagine that the point of your drawing tool is in actual contact with the subject.
4. Do not let your eyes move more quickly than you can draw.
5. Keep your implement in contact with the paper until you come to the end of a form.
6. Keep your eye and hand coordinated.
7. Begin at the outside edge of your subject, and when you see the line turn inward, follow it to its end.
8. Draw only where there is an actual, structural plane shift or where there is a change in value, texture, or color.
9. Do not enter the interior form and draw nonexistent planes or make meaningless lines.
10. Do not worry about distorted or inaccurate proportions; they will improve after a number of sessions dedicated to contour.
11. Do not retrace already stated lines, and do not erase for correction.
12. Keep in mind line variation in weight, width, and contrast.

The next five problems present variations of contour-line drawing. They are slow contour, exaggerated contour, quick contour, cross contour, and contour with tone. Remember, the same general instructions given in Chapter 2 for blind contour are applicable for all types of contour.

PROBLEM 5.1

Slow Contour Line

Make a slow contour drawing of a machine part, keeping in mind the steps listed earlier. Draw slowly, searching for details. Do not look at your paper. Glance briefly at the drawing for realignment when you have come to the end of a form. Do not trace over already stated lines.

Make several slow contour drawings, increasing the time you spend on each drawing. You should eventually be able to spend as much as an hour on a single drawing. Experiment with different implements.

PROBLEM 5.2

Exaggerated Contour Line

Normally in contour drawings, the artist avoids intentional distortion; however, exaggerated contour line takes advantage of these distortions, intentionally promoting them. It is the preferred technique of caricaturists, who make sharp commentary on prominent personalities.

David Levine, the caricaturist for *The New York Review of Books*, is an accomplished draftsman whose drawings depict the major cultural and political figures of our time. In *figure 5.15*, Levine depicts Clement Greenberg, the most influential art

5.15. **DAVID LEVINE. Clement Greenberg.** Ink on thin board. *Lescher and Lescher, Ltd. © 1975 by David Levine. Originally appeared in* The New York Review of Books.
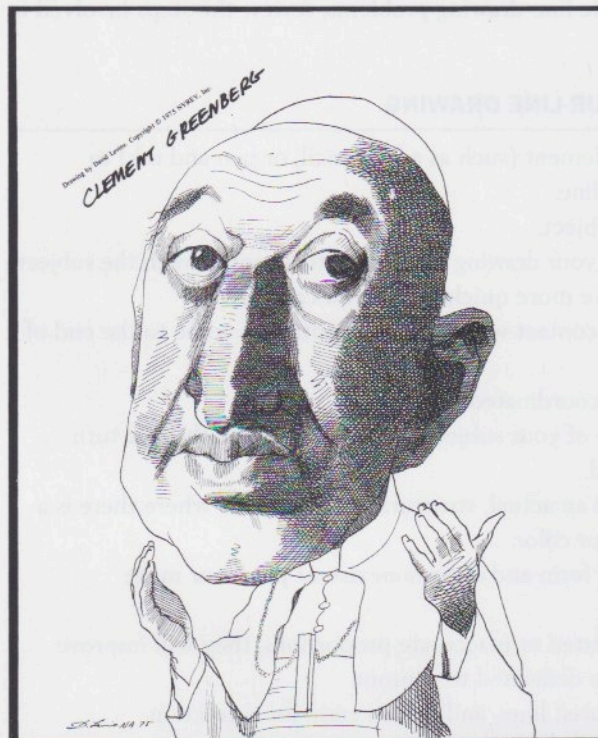
critic of his time, in the costume of a pope. In Levine's caricatures, the scale of the head dominates the picture plane; the remainder of the body is drawn in a highly reduced scale. Certain salient features of the subject's physiognomy are also exaggerated. Levine captures the essence of physical shape as well as cultural roles.

For this drawing, use a model as your subject. Your model should either stand or sit on a high stool. Use exaggerated contour line, and reverse Levine's procedure by enlarging the lower half of the model's body and reducing the scale in the upper half of the figure.

Before you start to draw, lightly dampen your paper. Use pen and ink and begin by drawing the model's feet. Using a contour line, draw until you have reached the middle of the page (you should be at knee level on the figure). Now you must radically adjust the scale of the figure to fit it in the remaining space. The resulting drawing will appear as if made from an ant's eye view. There should be a monumental feeling to the figure, as in Milton Avery's *Untitled (Male Figure)* *(figure 5.16)*.

You will notice that a different kind of line quality results from the dampened paper. You will have a darker line along the forms where you exerted more pressure or where you have lingered, waiting to draw. This line of varying width is one you should intentionally employ from time to time.

5.16. **MILTON AVERY. *Untitled (Male Figure)*** from *Eleven Provincetown Sketches*. n.d. Pencil on paper, 11" x 8½" (28 cm x 22 cm). *Collection of the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth; gift of Sally Michel Avery. © 2007 Milton Avery Trust/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.*

Quick Contour Line

Quick contour drawing is a shorthand version of slow contour. A single line is still the goal; however, the movement of the line is faster and less determined. In quick contour drawing, you are trying to catch the essence of the subject.

In Gaston Lachaise's quick contour drawing *(figure 5.17)*, the speed with which the figure was drawn is apparent. No more than a few seconds were required to make the sketch that is complete in essential information. Lines of varying weight and value serve as spatial indicators that would be absent in a contour line of maintained width. The line emphasizes the figure's repeating circular forms from head to hip; the body's masses are lyrically stated.

Make several quick contour drawings on the same page, experimenting with point of view, scale, size, and media. Alternate the time from 15 seconds to three minutes. Animals are good subjects for quick contours. Simplify their shapes to capture the essence of their poses.

5.17. **GASTON LACHAISE.** *Back of a Nude Woman.* 1929. Drawing, pencil preparation, quill pen and India ink on brush wash, 1'5⅞" x 1' (45.5 cm x 30.9 cm). *Brooklyn Museum of Art, Gift of Carl Zigrosser.*

PROBLEM 5.4

Cross-Contour Line

Cross-contour lines describe an object's horizontal contours, or cross contours, rather than its vertical edges. They emphasize an object's turn into space. You are undoubtedly familiar with contour maps, which describe the earth's land surface with their undulating lines that rise and recede. Diana Jacobs's drawing presents a visual definition of cross contour *(figure 5.18)*. The warped center of the drawn weaving is made up of cross- and vertical-contour lines, creating a spatial illusion.

In Henry Moore's drawing, *Forest Elephants (figure 5.19)*, the lines economically map the contours of the elephants, "stitching" the animals to their supporting surface. Cross-contour lines give the elephants dimension so that they seem to be emerging from a dark space.

Make a cross-contour drawing using a reclining model as subject. Imagine the line as a thread that wraps the body horizontally, encasing its mass. Refer to the Newsome drawing (see *figure 5.9*) to see how reductive cross and vertical contours can be teamed to build a three-dimensional illusion.

PROBLEM 5.5

Contour with Tone

After you have had some practice with contour drawing, you can add value or tone. Be selective in your placement of value. Don Bachardy's poignant drawing of his dying friend Christopher Isherwood *(figure 5.20)* is a good example of contour with tone. It is a compilation of quick contour, slow and exaggerated contour, cross contour, and an economical use of value. Pale washes create a focal point.

Select several old contour drawings and add a focal point by using value. The added tone should be compatible with the medium of the original.
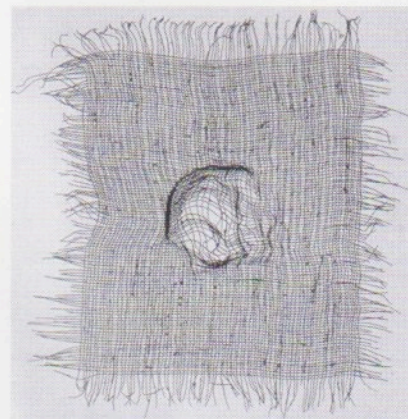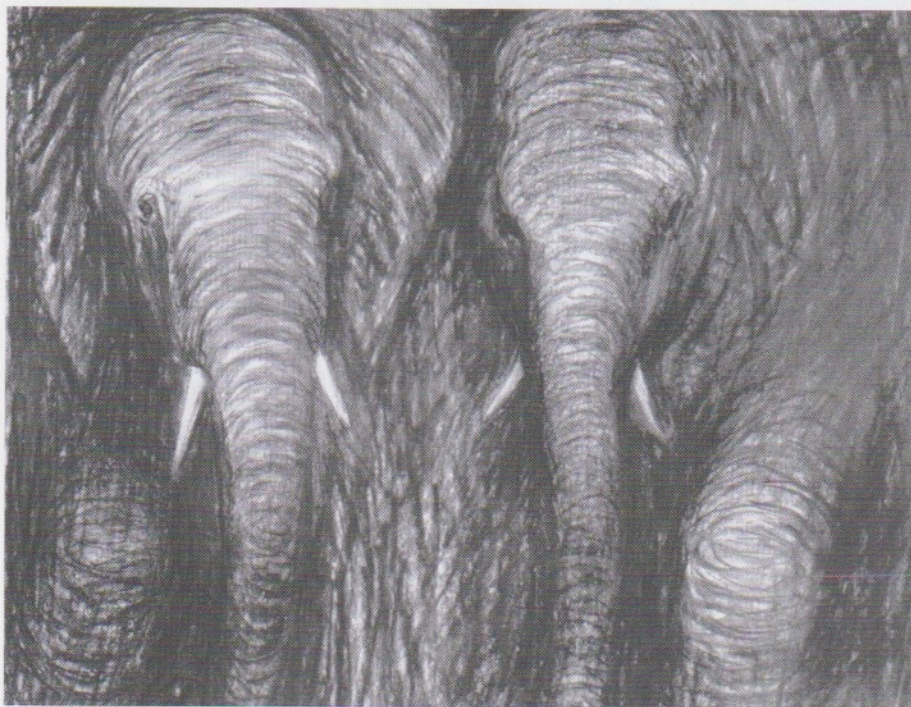
5.18. **DIANA JACOBS.** *Event.* 2001. Etching, 2'6" x 2'6" (76 cm x 76 cm). *Goya-Girl Press, Baltimore, Md.*

5.19. **HENRY MOORE.** *Forest Elephants.* 1977. Charcoal, chalk on white heavyweight wove, 1'1¹⁄₁₂" x 1'3⁷⁄₁₂" (30.7 cm x 39.6 cm). *Acquired by The Henry Moore Foundation.*

5.20. DON BACHARDY. *Christopher Isherwood.* October 20, 1985. Black acrylic wash on ragboard, 3'4" x 2'8" (1.01 m x 81 cm). *Collection of the artist. Photo by Dale Laster.*
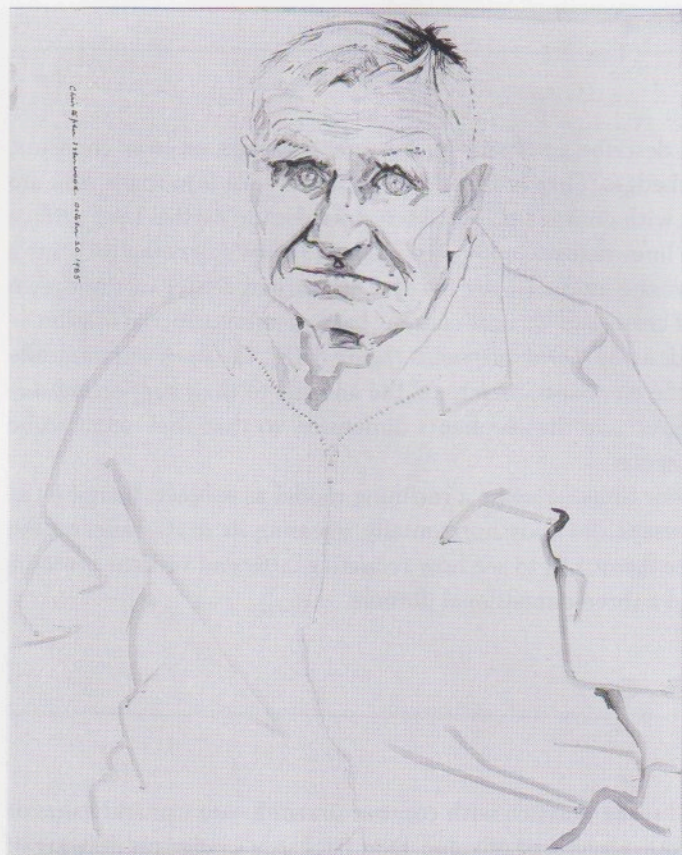
5.21. STEVE GIANAKOS. *Gorillas #10.* 1983. Ink and colored pencil on paper, 3'4" x 5' (1.02 m x 1.52 m). *Barbara Toll Fine Arts, New York.*
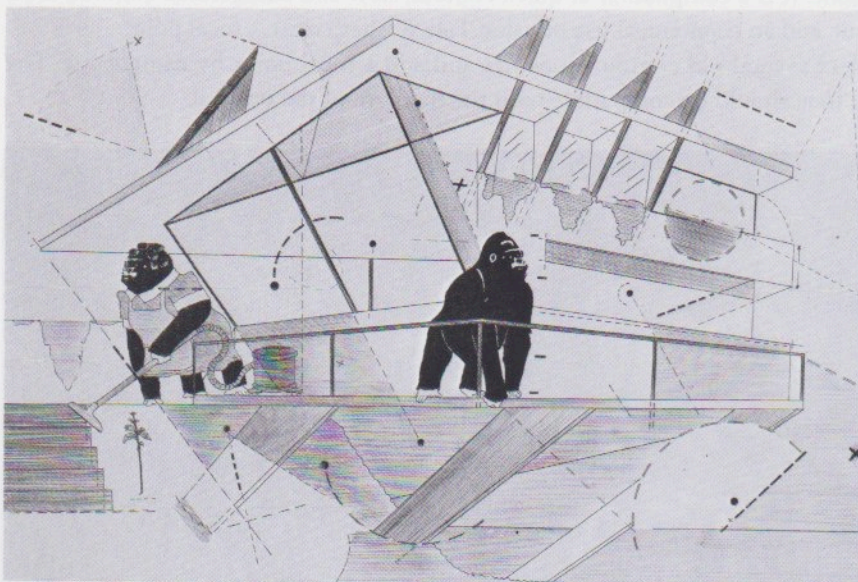
Mechanical Line

Mechanical line is an objective, nonpersonal line that maintains the same width along its full length. An example of this type of line would be an architect's ground plan in which various lines indicate different materials or levels of space. Steve Gianakos, who studied industrial design, uses a number of drafting techniques in his work *(figure 5.21)*. The carefully plotted arcs and angles are a source of humor

in the work; no doubt they are intended to make some tongue-in-cheek remark on architectural drawings. Note the mechanical application of line; each individual line is unvarying, deliberate, and controlled.

PROBLEM 5.6

Using Mechanical Line

Draw multiple views of an object—top, bottom, and sides—using mechanical line. You may keep the views separate, or you may overlap and superimpose them. Keeping in mind that mechanical line remains the same throughout its length, select a drawing tool that will produce this kind of mark, such as a pencil, felt-tip marker, ballpoint pen, or lettering pen. It would be amusing to convert an unexpected object, such as a toy or an article of clothing, to a mechanical drawing.

Structural Line

Structural lines reveal how planes connect to build volume and create a three-dimensional effect. Although a drawing can be made using only structural lines, these lines are usually found in combination with organizational or contour line. Structural lines can be grouped to create value; they can also be put to abstract use, as in Marcel Duchamp's pencil-and-wash drawing *(figure 5.22)*. Here an idea of simultaneity and sequential motion is conveyed by structural and diagrammatic lines. Change, Duchamp's recurring theme, is given graphic form through the use of structural lines.

PROBLEM 5.7

Using Structural Line

For this problem use *scratchboard*, a clay-coated paper whose surface is made to be scratched into. Use sharp implements to make white lines. The finished drawing will resemble a print, since the line is actually incised into the surface. Cut a 2-inch strip from the scratchboard to experiment with various implements before beginning
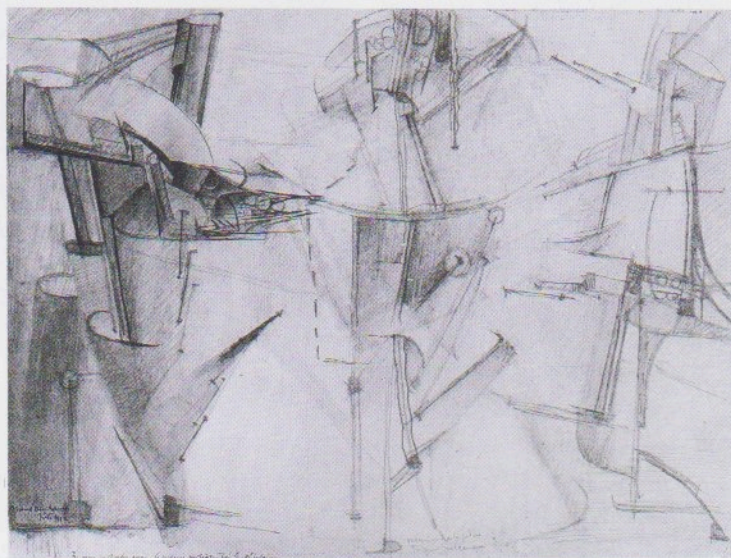
5.22. **MARCEL DUCHAMP.** *La Mariée Mise a Nu Par Ses Celibataires.* 1912. Pencil and wash, 9⅜" x 1'5⅝" (23.8 cm x 32.1 cm). *Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris. © 2007 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris/Succession Marcel Duchamp. Photograph by Philippe Migeat, Centre G. Pompidou.*

5.23. **CECIL TREMAYNE BULLER.** *Je suis à mon bien-aimé et mon bien-aimé est à moi, lui qui se nourrit parmi les lis.* 1929–1931. Wood engraving, 10¹¹⁄₁₂" x 7⁴⁄₉" (27.8 cm x 18.9 cm). *Courtesy, The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. Photo: The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.*

the drawing. Lightly transfer the basic shape of your composition onto the scratchboard before you start making heavier incised structural lines.

Make a drawing of a figure using structural lines to indicate changes of planes, to create values, and to build volume. Use parallel lines, cross-hatching, or grouped contour lines; they can be angular or curved.

In the print by the Canadian artist Cecil Tremayne Buller *(figure 5.23)*, we see how suited structural line is to woodcut. The reduction to black and white and the interchange of values result in a structural effect. The abstract patterning remains flat within a plane but the overall effect is one of interlocking volumes, both within the figures and in the print as a whole.

Lyrical Line

Lyrical drawings are intimate and reflect a sensitivity of expression. Lyric verse is akin to songs, the earliest ones accompanied by the lyre, from which the word *lyric* is derived. *Lyrical lines* are ornate, intertwined lines that flow gracefully, like arabesques.

Contour line and decorative line are frequently combined to create a lyrical mood. Lyrical drawings produce a mood of lightness and gaiety. Repeating curvilinear lines establish rhythmic patterns fitting a relaxed theme. Generally, the more deliberately controlled a line, the more objective it is. The more spontaneously a line is stated, the more subjective it is. Lyrical line falls under the subjective category and is characterized by sensitivity of expression.

Lyrical line and the drawings of Henri Matisse are synonymous. In Matisse's distinctive pen-and-ink drawing *(figure 5.24)*, the line flows effortlessly across the page. The white ground of the paper is activated by the forms that float across the surface. Matisse's line embodies his wish to make art that is as "comfortable as an armchair." We see a model, her back reflected in a mirror in the background, a door

5.24. **HENRI MATISSE.** *Nude in the Studio.* 1935. Pen and ink, 1'5¾" x 1'10⅜" (46 cm x 57 cm). *Location unknown.* © 2007 Succession H. Matisse, *Paris/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.*

to another space, another room, a window to an outside space, and in the lower right-hand corner a shorthand description of the scene just described, an even more abstract handling of space than in the dominant composition—and a notation of the artist's hand holding a pen, a reference to still another space.

PROBLEM 5.8

Using Lyrical Line

Choose a room interior as subject. Use lyrical lines to create decorative patterns. A free-flowing implement such as brush and ink or pen and ink is recommended. Draw while listening to music. The goal is spontaneity. Take a relaxed attitude.

Constricted, Aggressive Line

Constricted line makes use of angular, crabbed, assertive marks, aggressively stated. The lines should be rough and scratchy, carriers of a bitter expression; they can convey the feeling of extreme emotion, as in George Grosz's work (see *figure 5.8*).

PROBLEM 5.9

Using Constricted, Aggressive Line

The abraded surface and rugged line quality in Jean Dubuffet's drawing *(figure 5.25)* is a result of the images scratched into the surface, a technique called
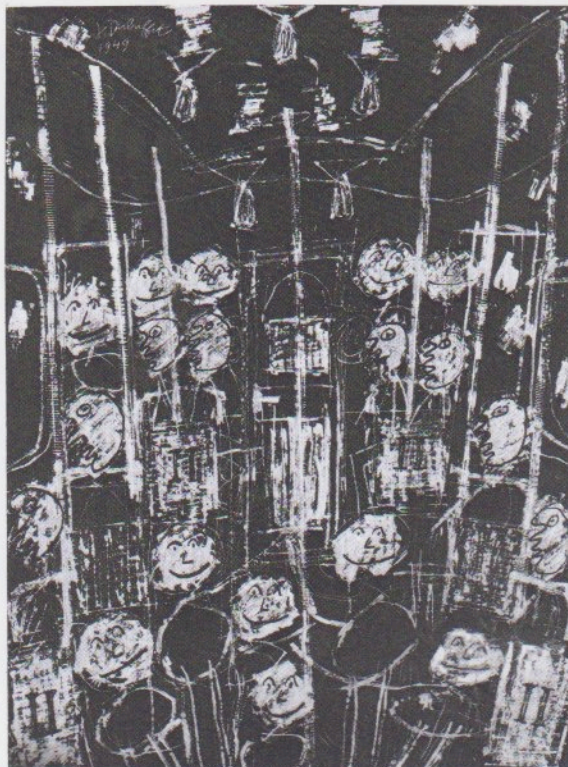
5.25. **JEAN DUBUFFET.** *Subway.* 1949. Incised ink on gesso on cardboard, 1'⅝" x 9⅞" (32.1 cm x 23.5 cm). *Collection, The Museum of Modern Art, New York. The Joan and Lester Avnet Collection. © 2007 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris. Photograph © 1997 The Museum of Modern Art, New York.*

grattage. The French artist was intent on a return to expressionistic, fetishistic, primitive art that he tagged *Art Brut*. Dubuffet aimed for immediacy and obsessiveness in his work. Aggressive, constricted marks, abraded surfaces, and grotesque imagery provided Dubuffet primitive means for primitive intent.

Coat a piece of bristol board with a layer of gesso over which you then apply a coat of black ink. Use found implements such as old pens, nails, or razor blades as scrapers to depict an event or situation toward which you feel great antipathy. Aim for a drawing style and a line quality that will underscore a bitter message.

Handwriting: Cursive and Calligraphic Line

In the Orient, artists are trained in calligraphic drawing by first practicing the individual strokes that make up the complex characters of their writing. Subtleties of surface, value, and line quality are promoted. The marks can range from rigorously severe to vigorously expressive, as in the calligraphic drawing by Isamu Noguchi (*figure 5.26*).

Ink and brush is the traditional medium of calligraphy where instrument, media, surface, and technique all play crucial roles. Variations of line encompass the full range from bold to delicate, from thick to thin. Noguchi's lines are sweepingly graceful. A Chinese saying sums up the drawing: "A line is a force."

5.26. **ISAMU NOGUCHI.** *Untitled (from the Peking Drawing Series).* 1930. Pen and ink on paper, 4' x 3' (1.22 m x 91.4 cm). *Perimeter Gallery, Chicago. Photo by Michael Tropea. © 2007 The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum, New York/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.*

PROBLEM 5.10

Using Handwriting or Calligraphic Line

On a sketch pad, practice writing with ink and a bamboo-handled Japanese brush. Hold the drawing tool near the end, away from the brush, and at a 90-degree angle to the paper. Your paper should be on a horizontal surface. Change the scale of your marks, making the transitions gradual and graceful. Apply different amounts of pressure to create flowing motions. Turn the brush between your fingers as you write. Experiment with the way you hold the brush and with the amount of ink loaded onto it.

After you have some control of the technique, make a composition of written words. Choose a text that is appealing to you—a poem, a passage from a novel, or your own original writing. In your drawing, layer the words and obscure their legibility, allowing them to be read only occasionally.

To differentiate the layers, use black, white, and sepia ink on light gray or buff paper.

Implied Line

An *implied line* is one that stops and picks up again. It can be a broken contour; the viewer conceptually fills in the breaks. Refer to the Sarmento drawing (see *figure 3.7*) to freshen your memory of implied shape.

In *figure 5.27*, David Hockney makes use of a fragmented, or implied, line. Hand, dress, and chair dissolve into a series of accent marks; their individual shapes are not clearly defined. Hockney's implied line is a weighted, broken contour line.

5.27. **DAVID HOCKNEY.** *Celia Inquiring.* 1979. Lithograph, 3'4" x 2'5" (1.016 m x 73.7 cm). *Ed: 78. © David Hockney.*

Implied line results from an interchange between positive and negative shapes. It brings the negative space into the implied positive shapes, creating spatial ambiguity. This lost-and-found characteristic requires a viewer's participation since missing lines and shapes are filled in mentally.

PROBLEM 5.11

Using Implied Line

With a still life as subject, use a felt-tip marker to alternate drawing between the left and right side of the objects in the still life; leave the opposite side empty. This technique results in implied shapes. Lighten the pressure on your drawing tool as the line begins to break. The lines should change from light to dark along their length. Use a minimal amount of line to suggest or imply shape.

Blurred Line

Blurred lines are smudged, erased, or destroyed in some way, either by rubbing or by erasure. They are frequently grouped to form a sliding edge; they are not as precisely stated as implied lines. Blurred and smudged lines create an indefinite edge, thereby resulting in an ambiguous space.

Hockney, in the study of a friend (*figure 5.28*), uses blurred and erased lines to build the figure. Lines are grouped in a single direction within each shape, binding

5.28. **DAVID HOCKNEY.** *Henry in Candlelight.* 1975. Crayon on paper, 17" x 14". *Private collection, France.* © *David Hockney.*

the figure to its space. There is an unfinished quality to the drawing, owing to the disruption of the contours. The strokes seem to emerge from the surrounding space. Hockney's technique of blurred line is especially appropriate when we note the title, *Henry in Candlelight*. The flickering quality of the light is translated into the drawing by means of the blurred line.

Blurred, erased gestural marks are signatures of Willem de Kooning's work *(figure 5.29)*. De Kooning creates a spatial ambiguity through a textural surface of built-up and erased line in both his drawings and paintings. His style gives us a strong clue as to why the Abstract Expressionists were called *Action Painters*. De Kooning was a master draftsman, yet he found it necessary to rein in his natural facility to hone his pictorial skills.

This discussion of blurred line would not be complete without mentioning what is arguably the most discussed drawing of the twentieth century, Robert Rauschenberg's 1953 *Erased de Kooning Drawing*. Rauschenberg was interested in disintegration, in obliterating the artist's hand and artistic presence from his own work, so he devised a project that would be a perfect vehicle for implementing his theories. Rauschenberg requested that de Kooning give him one of his drawings, one that de Kooning would not like to part with; the other stipulation was that it should be a drawing that would be difficult to erase. De Kooning gave the request long and serious consideration before complying. Rauschenberg spent two months trying to eliminate all traces of de Kooning's marks by carefully erasing

5.29. **WILLEM DE KOONING.** *Woman.*
1952. Pastel and pencil, 1'9" x 1'2"
(52 cm x 36 cm). *Private collection, Boston.*
© 2007 The Willem de Kooning Foundation/
Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.
Photograph by Barney Burstein, Boston.

the entire drawing. The erased surface persisted in retaining memories of the original drawing.

PROBLEM 5.12

Using Blurred Line

With a 4B pencil and a white plastic eraser, make a drawing in which you use blurred, smudged, and erased line. Using the eraser as a drawing tool, make sweeping motions that go counter to the pencil marks. Erase and blur the already established lines. Alternately redraw and erase until the drawing is finished.

In a second drawing, make a toned ground for a blurred-line drawing. Develop clusters of line with charcoal; conté crayon, stick; and eraser. In this technique, the positive and negative shapes merge; positive shapes dissolve into the ground of the toned paper. Compose your drawing so that a light, positive shape adjoins a light, negative shape; and a dark, positive shape adjoins a dark, negative shape. This will result in an ambiguity of edge.

Whimsical Line

A playful, whimsical line quality is appropriate for a lighthearted approach. This subjective line is both intuitive and directly stated. A whimsical line changes its width arbitrarily. Whimsy is more a feeling than a technique. Exaggeration and unexpected juxtapositions play a major part in creating a whimsical mood.

In a drawing rooted in the humorous vein *(figure 5.30)*, the Portuguese-born artist Paula Rego uses quick contours, insets, shifting scale, sketchy characters,

5.30. **PAULA REGO.** *Aïda.* 1983. Acrylic on paper, 7'10½" x 6'7¹¹⁄₁₂" (2.4 m x 2.03 m). *Collection of the artist.*

exaggerated proportions, and odd costumes—all of these elements convey a whimsical account of the nineteenth-century opera *Aïda*. Rego plots the narrative in both vertical and horizontal registers (note the inserts); she interrupts the theatrical flow with her subversive imagery and compilation of riotous activity. Like other artists (Walt Disney among them), Rego uses animals to underscore human foibles. A synchronic presentation replaces the linear unfolding of the opera scene by scene; in Rego's drawing the whole story is squeezed into a single, action-packed page.

PROBLEM 5.13

Using Whimsical Line

Make a drawing based on a childhood story and give it a humorous twist. Aim for caricature-like distortions, using a naïve, whimsical line. Use colored pencils or felt-tip markers.

Elizabeth Layton, a woman in her nineties, illustrates such a story in her retelling of *Cinderella (figure 5.31)*. Her shaky line may come from a hand that is trembling, but its direction is sure.

SUMMARY

Spatial Characteristics of Line

Although each problem in this chapter has generally been confined to the use of one kind of line, most artists do not limit the types of lines they use. Anna Sigmond Gudmundsdottir combines drawing and graffiti to create elaborate environments in which images from popular culture collide with text and

5.31. **ELIZABETH LAYTON.** *Cinderella.* 1986. Lithograph, 1'10" x 2'6" (56 cm x 76 cm). *Lawrence Arts Center, Kansas. Gift of the artist.*

5.32. **ANNA SIGMOND GUDMUNDSDOTTIR.**
From "The offer no one can refuse, only because the majority was invented."
2003. Mixed media on wall. *Installation at O.K. Centrum fuer Gegewartskunst, Linz, Austria.*

mythic figures *(figure 5.32)*. Web sites and archives available online are the source for her images, which she reworks in a variety of line qualities and recycled styles.

What follows is a brief summary of what you have learned about the spatial characteristics of line. Subjective lines are generally more dimensional than objective lines. This is because a subjective line changes width, changes from light to dark, and is more suggestive of space than a flat line of maintained width. Outlining makes shapes appear flat; contour line is more dimensional than outline.

A contour line of varying width and pressure is more dimensional than one of uniform weight. A discontinuous, or broken, line is more spatial than an unvarying one.

When line is stated primarily horizontally and vertically, that is, when it remains parallel to the picture plane, a shallow space results. If, however, lines penetrate the picture plane diagonally, a three-dimensional space is produced. Generally, a buildup of lines is more volumetric than a single line.

When lines are grouped in a single direction to create value, the resulting space is flatter than if the lines are not stated uniformly. Lines that create a repeating pattern of texture make a flatter space than those stated less predictably.

Remember that you must look at all the lines in a drawing together to determine its spatial effect.

As we stated at the start of this chapter, line is the most direct means of establishing style. It is as personal as handwriting and should be practiced, analyzed, and refined throughout your drawing career.

SKETCHBOOK PROJECT

Every problem in this chapter is appropriate for the sketchbook; daily contour drawings are strongly recommended. They are ideal for the sketchbook since they can be done with any subject matter and in the shortest time periods. Keep your sketchbook handy and fill it with the various types of contour drawings.

The more lines you draw, the more sensitive you will become to line quality. Being involved in simple mark making will improve your sensitivity to line. Line used abstractly as well as concretely to describe an object in the real world requires practice on a regular basis. You will begin to find possibilities for new line applications the more you draw.

PROJECT 1

The Cadavre Exquis (The Exquisite Corpse)

The *cadavre exquis* was a drawing technique devised by the Surrealists in which a group of artists work on the same drawing, each unaware of what the others have drawn. In the same drawing there will be different styles, different ideas, and mixed images. The result can be surprisingly coherent, funny, and strange at the same time.

The person who begins is to cover the beginning segment of the drawing by taping a piece of blank paper over the initial image. A line or two can be left visible so that the second person can attach the second part to the first part. Continue the process of drawing and concealing until the third person has finished. Unmask the drawing to reveal the composite drawing.

You might want to make a few rules beforehand, although this is not necessary. You could, for example, restrict what kind of imagery is to be used: parts of the body, animals, plants, or machines. Limiting the medium will make for a more visually coherent drawing. Because this exercise is designed to make you more comfortable in working with line, you should make several exquisite corpse drawings that employ line only.

COMPUTER PROJECT

PROJECT 1

Computer Drawing and Line Quality

Like the other computer exercises, much depends on the particular programs available to you. Most graphic programs allow the user to control line by width, and

sometimes the user can control line quality *(figure 5.33)*. Programs are increasingly responsive to artists who require line quality to resemble physical drawing and painting media. The 12 examples shown here are from Adobe Illustrator Brush Library. The names are: Fountain Pen, Dry Brush—Thick, Dry Ink, Calligraphic Round, Calligraphic Flat, Charcoal, Fire Ash, Scroll Pen, Chalk, Train Tracks, and Dashed. Experiment with the programs available to you and create your own inventory of line quality.

5.33. Computer drawing creating line.
Courtesy of Tom Sale.