

Newark Community Art Club with Elaine Winter
Autumn Term 2020 Session 1:

Getting your observational drawing skills in gear

Materials needed:

Pencil, rubber, sharpener

White paper to draw on (any size you like to work on and whatever you have at hand)

Introduction: When we draw we often spend a lot of time looking at our paper and the marks our pencils make and less time looking at the object we are drawing. What we need to do is spend more time looking (properly looking and noticing) before and during our drawing process. It's called observational drawing for a reason – we need to observe! This session we are going to focus on improving our analytical skills to make our drawings as accurate as possible. We are not going to think about tone or texture etc here but focus on getting the drawing mapped out accurately.

Activity 1: Make a very simple arrangement to draw. A few flowers or leafy twigs in a vase, a few pieces of fruit or some vegetables on a table top, or a few things from a kitchen or desk. Arrange them so that they will not be disturbed and place them so you have a good clear view of them.

Activity 2: Do some concentrating on looking and observing first without picking up your pencil. It is a good idea to time yourself doing this. It takes a bit of discipline but set a timer for 2 minutes and spend the time just looking at the arrangement in front of you. While you are looking at it ask yourself these questions:

- How are the objects placed in relation to each other – what is in front? What is to one side? What is behind? Can you only see a small amount of one of the objects?
- What are the relative sizes of the objects as you can see them? - Which one looks biggest to you from where you are sitting/standing? Which is the smallest? How do the others relate to those for scale?
- What details can you see? This might be the imperfect skin on a piece of fruit, the curl of a leaf with all its veins and so on.

Activity 3: Now use the index finger of the hand you normally draw with and point towards your arrangement. Close or cover one eye if it helps you to focus but then use your pointed finger to outline the main forms in your arrangement.

Activity 4: Now pick up your pencil. But before you make your first mark on paper, look at your paper and think about how your arrangement is going to fit on the paper. Do you need to have your paper landscape or portrait style to fit with your arrangement? Look at the overall shape of your arrangement and work out how you will be able to fit it onto your paper. As you start to draw keep thinking about the way you have been looking analytically at the arrangement in the previous stages of this process and all the time you are drawing, try to spend MORE TIME LOOKING (really looking and noticing, not just glancing) than you do with your head down looking at your drawing. Keep doing this and don't be afraid to be critical of yourself and see where you have to adjust your drawing. If you know something is too big or too small don't just keep drawing. It will always be wrong until you make it right and once you have got your observational technique practiced you will be able to correct your own work – keep asking yourself those questions from 'activity 2' and you will be able to correct your work. When you are happy with your drawing, spend some more time looking at the arrangement and the drawing and working out how successful it is. Develop your critical eye and your drawing will develop too!