

Pencil Values

*“Art is the only way to run away
without actually leaving.”*

—TWYLA THARP

Now that you can draw recognizable objects with more accuracy, it’s time to give them more depth, weight, and substance. To achieve that illusion of three dimensions, you need to add gray tones, also called “values” or “tonal values.” These pages will teach you when and how to apply them.

Values are shades of gray, on a scale ranging from black to white. They correspond to how dark or light, in any color, anything appears in the world around you. Beginners initially refer to values as “shading” or “shadowing.” If you start to imagine how your surroundings would look in a black-and-white photo, you will begin to “get the picture.”

Value scales are a way of arranging values systematically, from dark to light. The best way to distinguish one tone from the next, especially if they’re close in value, is by squinting.

Values are a significant concept. You’ll use a variety of techniques to achieve them in coming chapters, some of which will appeal to you more than others. But in every case, you’ll apply them for the same reason: to create the illusion of solidity and spatial dimension.

You’ll keep using pencil in this chapter, because it’s an ideal tool for creating a full range of gray tones. Pencil serves to fill in the shapes you’ve been making in the previous chapters with a variety of grays, which correspond to tonal values in anything and everything you may choose to draw.

If you’ve ever washed a load of laundry, you already know a lot about values. When you separate whites from darks, you’re sorting high-contrast values. Colors that fall between darks and lights—beiges, medium blues—belong in the medium-value range. Bright, intense colors need special care. Their intensity doesn’t fit easily with other medium colors.

SUPPLIES FOR THIS CHAPTER

2B and 2H pencils
Pink Pearl eraser
14"-x-17" drawing pad
6"-x-8" drawing pad
scrap paper
clip-on light

*“When we started
doing the shading,
it all began to
come together.
Now I could make
something that
looked more like it
was supposed to
look in real life.”*

—STUDENT PUSHPA
KAPUR

Sorting Out Values

"FINGER PAINTING"

When you smudge, both the movement of your pencil and finger echo the shape of the object you draw. Feel its contours in your imagination, then recreate that impression with the movement of pencil and/or finger. Give yourself permission to do it, to play with it. It's a kind of finger-painting technique that works to create the illusion of an object's surface.

Wherever you're sitting now, check out contrasts in the values around you: books on the shelf, furniture, the markings on your cat, the groceries on your counter. If you're people-watching, notice that each face has its own unique value scheme. Which has the darker value: brunette or blond hair? What about red hair? When you discern that it fits between the two, you've already made a value scale in your mind.

USING HOUSEHOLD ITEMS

Gather seven objects with different solid colors and different values from around your home. Avoid things that are transparent or patterned. A mixture of food, shoes, clothes, and toys will do. Arrange them in a graduated sequence, from darkest to lightest.

SQUINTING HELPS

Close your eyes nearly shut to create a slightly blurred effect. This will eliminate detail and crisp edges, and allow you to focus on the basic, overall value of the objects you've lined up.

It's fun and useful to do this exercise with assistants—kids or adults. Explain the goal and the squint technique. Then take turns placing your collection of objects on a value scale. Just one object per turn, and you can use a turn to correct another's choice.

Two areas will be particularly challenging: Close values are more difficult to distinguish from one another than high-contrast values; and the unique quality of intense colors doesn't translate entirely. They generally fall in the light-to-middle range.

Place objects in the dark and light ends first. Then fill in the middle values, building toward either end. Objects whose values are more difficult to establish will fall in the middle range.

Pick up a problem object and hold it next to each of your other lined-up objects until you find where it belongs. Don't try to get a perfect sequence; just get a feel for the concept for now. There will be natural gaps from one object to the next, depending on the items you've chosen. Some beginners treat these moves like an international chess tournament, until I remind them they're only holding eggplants and lemons!

Leave the items that make up your value scale in place, since you will be referring to them again a bit later.

EXERCISE: VALUE APPLICATION PENCIL SAMPLER

The methods described below create a variety of grays, as in the "Pencil Sampler" (opposite). Refer to those illustrations, but spread yours out much more, use plenty of 14"-x-17" paper, and experiment freely. Notice how we use fine scribbling and other movements that are similar to crayoning. The amount of pressure applied to your pencil point determines how light or dark the values become. Modify results by smudging with your finger or eraser.

1 Test your pencils by scribbling to see their value differences. Drawing pencils with the *H* code have the hardest consistency, and therefore make lighter marks; pencils with the *B* code are much softer, making darker marks.

2 Use your 2B to draw meandering, lazy lines. Let the pressure ebb and flow freely. Lift the pencil and break the line if it feels natural. Notice how the pencil line turns light and dark as it moves, creating *lost and found edges*, also known as *abbreviated contour lines*.

3 Draw six small squares and fill in three with 2B, three with 2H. Fill each square with a different value by controlling

pressure: dark, medium, light. Smudge each square; compare the value range.

4 Draw a square. Fill it in with your 2B pencil, making it as dark as you can. Then go over half of the square with your 2H to see how it subdues the 2B texture.

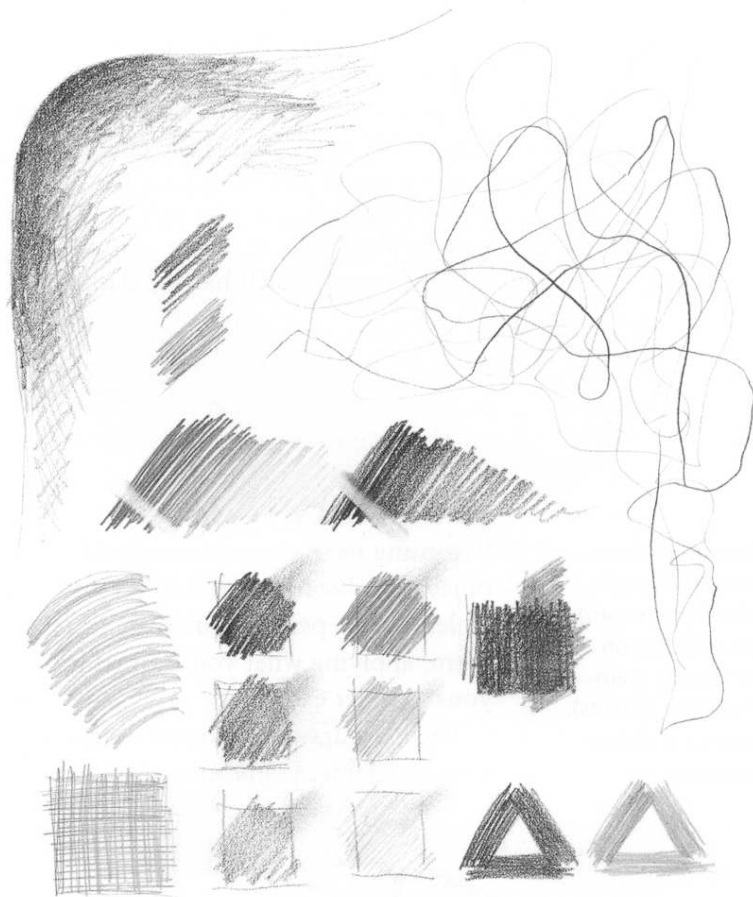
5 Make a series of curved lines, close together.

6 Make a square filled in with horizontal and vertical scribbles.

7 Using your 2B, scribble a coil on your paper. Start with lots of pressure, keeping strokes close together. Ease pressure gradually into middle values, then light ones. Now do the same with your 2H. Erase some of the light end of the first scribbles, then some of the dark. Experiment with both erasers. See which pencil (and which end) is easiest to erase.

8 Make two small triangles, one with 2B, one with 2H. Fill in a value band around each triangle, using the pencil you made them with, respectively. Make the value darker than the triangle contour line. Fill in neatly until the gray band becomes the prominent shape, not the triangle. This is the basis for making convincing highlights; the value of the contour line must merge into the surrounding value. Notice which triangle attracts your eye.

9 Draw a curving line, about three inches long. Then move your hand farther back on the pencil than normal handwriting position. Starting at the line, fill in a one-inch-wide band with a middle-gray value, using long, multidirectional scribbles. The band should bend with the curve of your line. Resume the standard hand position on your pencil. Using more pressure and finer scribbling, build a second, darker band on half of the first, starting right at the line. Add a third, much darker band on half of the second, starting at the line. Create a smooth transition among all



three value areas, using pencil scribbles, eraser, or smudging techniques, so that the bands blend into one another.

CONSTRUCTIVE EVALUATION

Put the “Pencil Sampler” that you created on the wall, and step back. Do you see a variety of gray tones, from extremely dark to very pale, silvery gray? If you didn’t make any area really dark, use your 2B to do it now. Keep in mind the full range of gray values at your disposal. Your 2B is the best overall pencil; however, 2H comes in handy for values that are light, silvery, and close, as in light skin or an egg. I often use the two pencils alternately: 2H to sketch in the basic shape and to develop the first value level; then I complete my drawing using 2B with 2H to subdue grainy texture, if needed.

PENCIL SAMPLER.

This group of pencil marks shows how to translate the value differences you explored on the opposite page into gray tones with pencil. The various shapes and values of the marks are discussed in the exercise on these two pages.

The illusion of a particular surface is created with pencil strokes. As you examine particular shapes in your sampler, if the surface of your imaginary square looks flat, that is the effect you want. Straight strokes suggest flat surfaces; rounded strokes, a curved surface. Do the values you applied along the meandering contour line evoke roundness? Three values—local, middle (transitional), and shadow—with smooth transitions between them, can make an object appear three-dimensional.

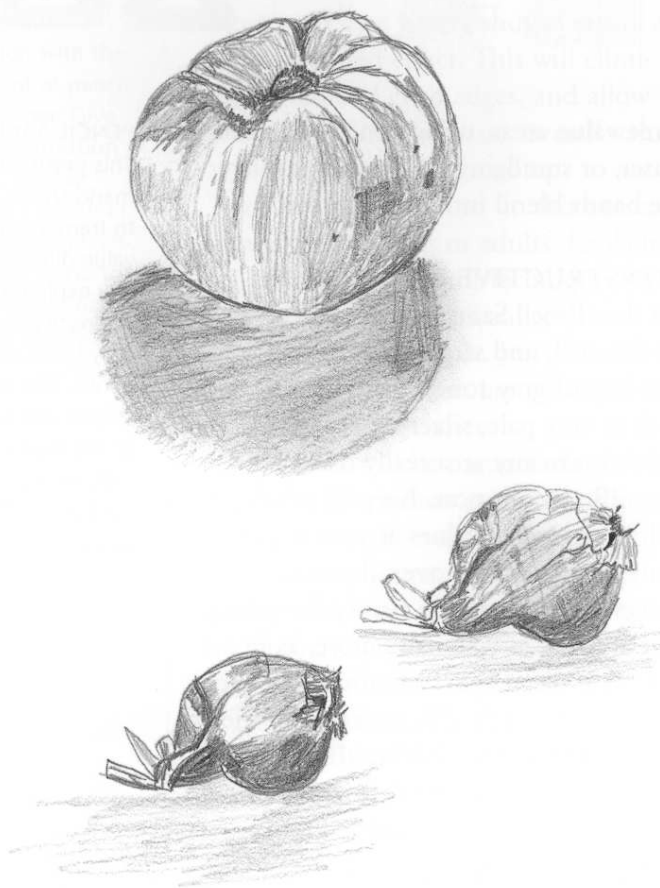
LOCAL VALUE SCALE

Returning to the seven household objects you've lined up into a value scale, make a pencil value scale from them, applying what you learned in your sampler exercises.

Begin by drawing a square to represent each object. Squint and fill in

These illustrations point up overall value (the tomato) and shadows on the objects themselves (the shallots).

DRAWINGS BY STUDENT
KIM NIGHTINGALE



each square with the overall value of its corresponding object. There will be gaps in your scale, as there are gaps in the value range of the objects. However, you should see a gradual change in the squares from light to dark (or vice versa).

ADDING VALUES TO SKETCHES

Find some items that you'd like to draw; use your 14"-x-17" paper. Smooth, rounded objects that have a sculptural quality are best for value studies. Keep them simple. But before drawing anything, let's concentrate on locating and seeing those different value categories.

Put the objects you plan to draw on a plain surface. Illuminate one side of the objects. (Don't use natural light; it moves faster than we can draw.) Turn off additional light sources. Now, see if you can locate these value areas on those objects:

- **Local value** is the dominant, overall value of an object, unaffected by shadow or reflections. It relates to an object's position on the value scale, from dark to light. For example, an eggplant has an overall darker value than a lemon, because purple is darker than yellow. The overall value of an eggplant is lighter than the shadow on it. Local value is the lightest of the three important values that make any object appear three-dimensional.
- **Shadow values** are the darkest, found in three broad categories. The first of these:
- **Shadows on an object** are caused by the play of light across it, creating shadows on the side farthest from the light. These shadows are the dark values that give an object its greatest sense of dimension.
- **Cast shadows**, the second group of shadow values, are those that fall from an object to the surface it sits on—in a still life, usually a tabletop—or across the surface of other objects. If you've ever walked down a road at night with the moon or a strong street light behind you, you've

seen your own cast shadow. It may become long and distorted, but it's a unique reflection of your shape. If you're out with friends, each shadow can be assigned to each individual, much as it can be to each object on the table in front of you.

- **Balance point shadows**, the third group of shadow shapes, make up the small, very dark area just under an object, where it touches the surface it sits on. Put this shadow value in and it will "ground" your object. Without it, the object will tend to look suspended in space. Balance point and cast shadows give your object a sense of weight.
 - **Middle values** provide transition between light and dark value shapes, to create the illusion of dimensionality. Pencil is the perfect medium for replicating that softly blended transitional value. Squinting helps you see shadow shapes. When you can see shadows, it helps you to draw the whole shape, since light and dark puzzle pieces interlock at a common border.
 - **Reflected light** can occur as highlight or as lighter areas within a shadow.
- Highlights** are areas of reflected light—the brightest spots within light areas of an object. Highlights are often seen as crisp-edged shapes on wet, glossy, smooth, and hard surfaces. In contrast, matte, nonreflective surfaces have light areas, but not highlights. Highlights can be present or not, and are not as crucial as the overall lightest area of the object in creating dimension. Reflected light causes lighter areas within a shadow, but in that case, they are still part of a shadow. Keep them darker than light areas of the object.

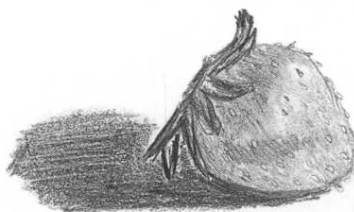
STRATEGY FOR DEPICTING HIGHLIGHTS

Highlights on clear glass require a local value of light gray, to provide contrast for the white highlights.



This drawing contains several kinds of shadows. While no highlights are present, notice the reflected light within the shadow on the pumpkin.

DRAWING BY STUDENT KIM NIGHTINGALE



A cast shadow of the strawberry echoes its shape, just as highlights reflect varying surfaces of the glass. DRAWINGS BY STUDENT KIM NIGHTINGALE

Sorting Out Values



Basic shapes of objects and shadows are the focus of this casual sketch.

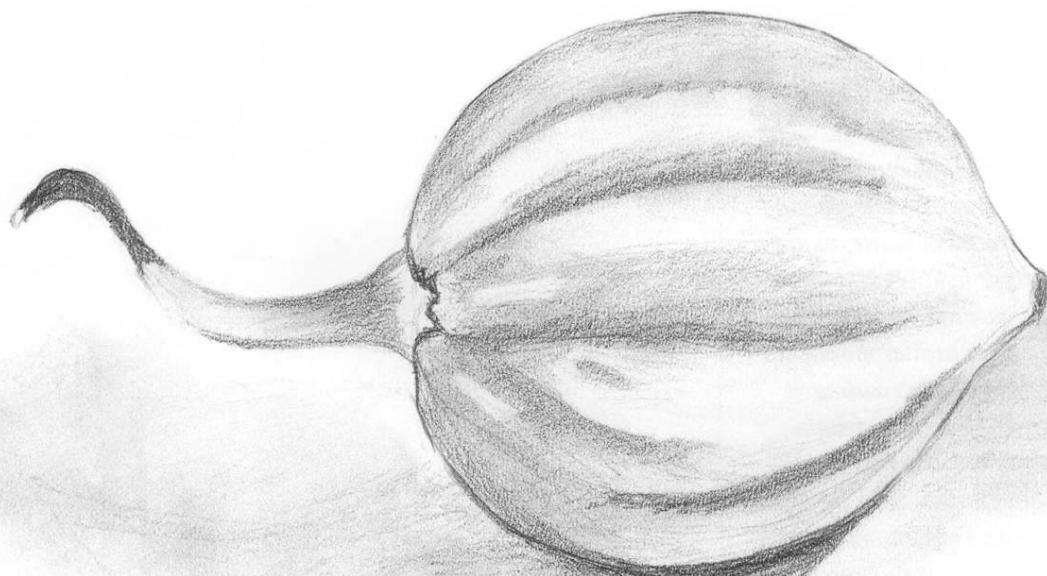
DRAWING BY STUDENT SHERRY ARTEMENKO

SHADOW SKETCHES

Using two or three differently shaped objects from your group, focus on their shadows. Squint to find the specific shadow shapes of each object, concentrating only on cast shadows and shadows on the objects themselves. Make some small, undeveloped “tryout” sketches, and use them just to practice seeing and recording shadow values. Tack them up where you can see them and the subjects, viewing from where you sat to make the drawing. Squint and compare the value shadow shapes.

“I tried to use a 2B for everything, but I found I had a heavy hand, so I had to move to the 2H. What I was trying to achieve using the 2B would turn out to be much too dark.”

—STUDENT RITA WALKER COPPING



“I did a drawing before of a squash and it wasn’t so good, but then I did this, and I thought, boy, this is pretty good! From that point, it felt do-able. I thought it would be dull and boring with no color, but it had lots of character.” —STUDENT PUSHPA KAPUR



Pressure on the 2B pencil yields the darker value scale and bold impact we see in this tulip arrangement.

DRAWING BY STUDENT
PAMELA M. HEBERTON



The silvery tonal values in this floral reflect a light touch with the 2B pencil. DRAWING BY STUDENT GENIE BOURNE



Step-by-Step Value Drawing

Art is created in layers. We begin with an underdrawing, then work on top of it in steps, as in this demonstration. Darker values, crisper contours, and more details are added gradually. Every stage is a blend of steps, including back

steps to erase, or a jump ahead, to add values before the final step. Focus on an object from your group that particularly appeals to you—one you are willing to spend time with. Point a light on the object to bring out more dramatic dimension. Use 14"-x-17" paper, 2B and 2H pencils, and the eraser on a writing pencil.

STRATEGIES FOR FILLING IN OVERALL VALUE

When you fill in an object's overall value, change the direction of your strokes every cluster or so. Keep the shape of the object in mind to direct your scribble in directions that suggest the object's contours. Try to identify at least two directions of the surface—for instance, up and down and around—and move your pencil in those directions to fill in value. Don't flatten a rounded object by applying straight lines in one direction only. Smudge to finger-paint the surface of the object with the pencil dust.

CONSTRUCTIVE EVALUATION

Compare your subject matter with your drawing, viewed at a distance. Do you see anything that needs fixing? Squint hard to pick up on any value areas that need attention. Ask yourself:

- *Are my value shapes accurate?*
- *Is a degree of dimension emerging?*
- *Do my value edges transition softly where necessary?*

If your answer is *yes* to any of the above, you're well on your way. Now you have something to build on.

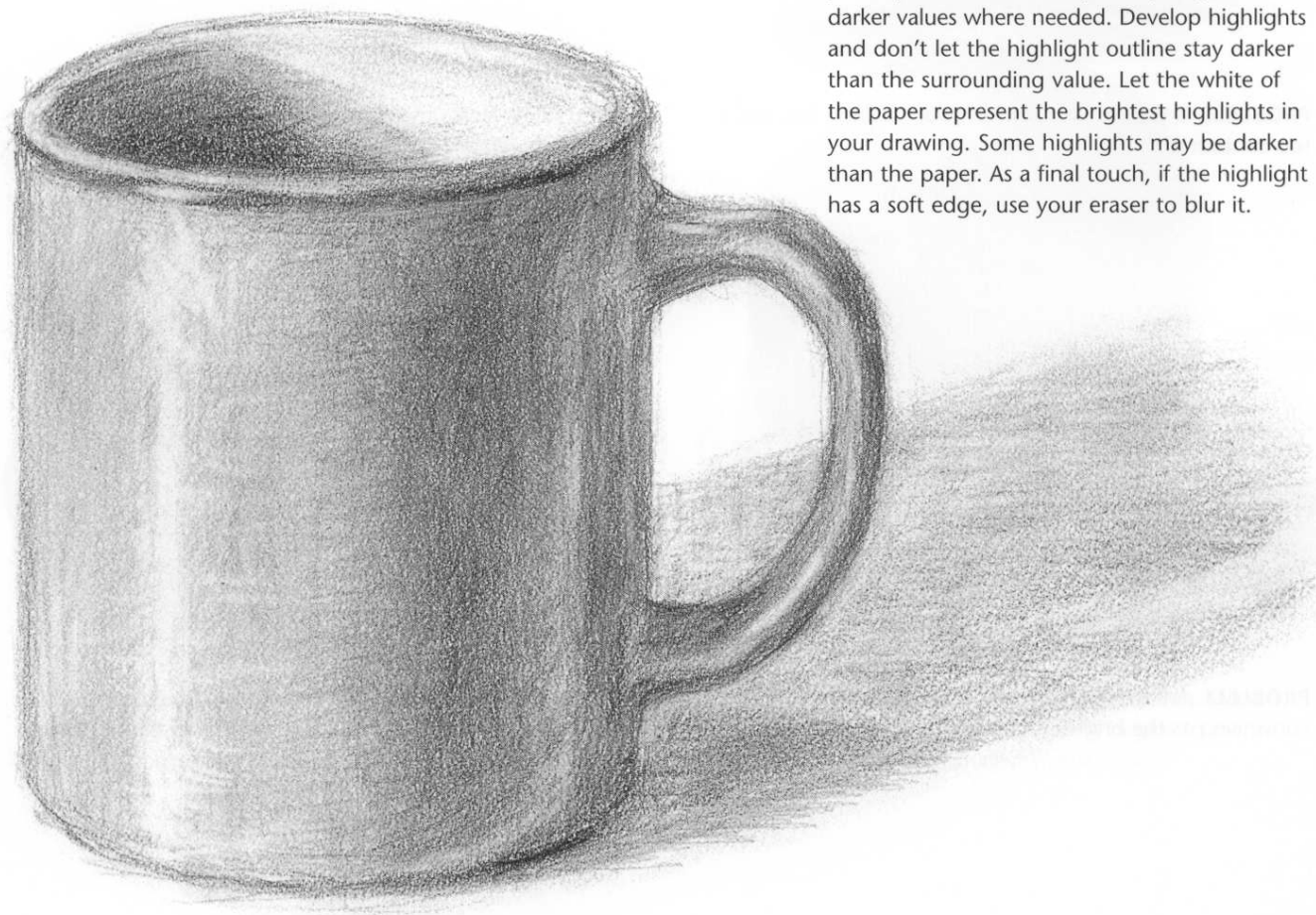
**STEP 1:
UNDERDRAWING.**
Use your preview tools and a light sketch to indicate the basic shape and scale of the object. If you're working with a symmetrical object, check it out on a vertical surface at viewing distance.



STEP 2: DEVELOPING FEATURES. Work on contours and add detail. Lightly outline any highlights. Establish the local value with a base of long, flattish scribbles. If your object is very light, use a 2H; otherwise, a 2B. Stay in the middle-value range for this step, no matter what your subject. Add the shadow shape on the object, always darker than the overall value. Soften the transition between shadow and overall value by using less pressure on your pencil. Put in the cast shadow, incorporating horizontal strokes to help the shadow lie flat. Show reflected light in the shadow, either by erasing shadow values or darkening around them. Ground the object with a balance-point shadow just beneath the object where it touches the surface.



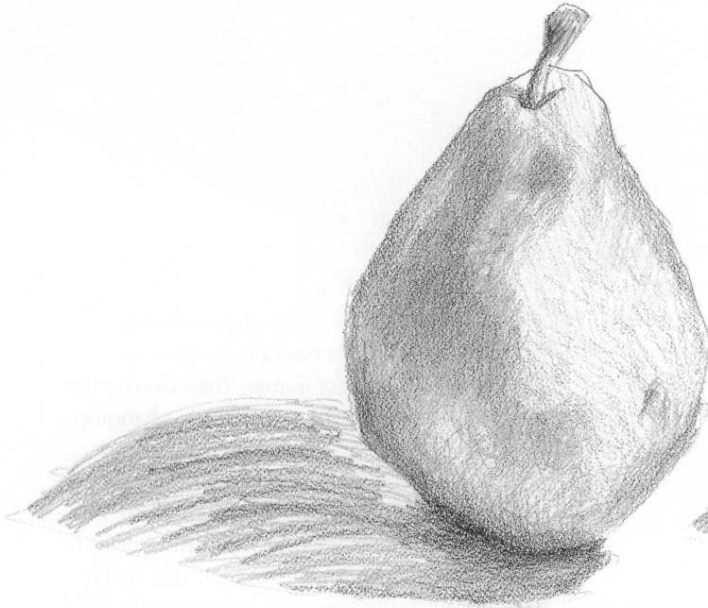
STEP 3: FINALIZING. Look at your sketch carefully, squinting to check out values as compared with subject matter. Then overlay the base with shorter, tighter scribbling, changing direction often over all value areas. Use your eraser or finger to smooth out texture; your pencil point to make crisp, sharp edges and darker values where needed. Develop highlights and don't let the highlight outline stay darker than the surrounding value. Let the white of the paper represent the brightest highlights in your drawing. Some highlights may be darker than the paper. As a final touch, if the highlight has a soft edge, use your eraser to blur it.



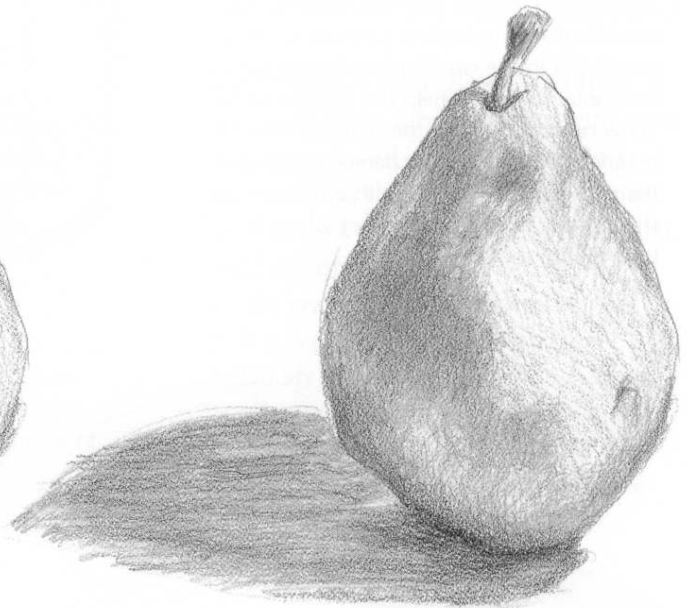
Problem Solvers

Problems routinely occur in art and in life. We feel better about making so-called mistakes if we not only acquire the ability to spot a problem, but also learn how to fix it. Although we have worked only with pencil and pen so

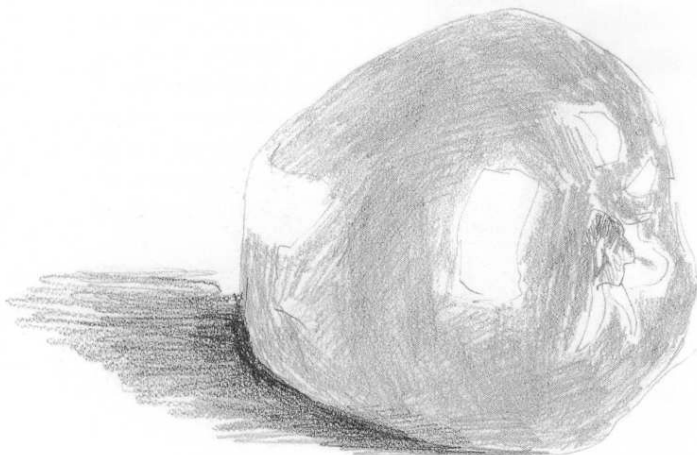
far, the following common problems and helpful solutions apply to all value drawings—not only with pencil and pen, but with wash, charcoal, and Conté, all of which will be introduced in later chapters.



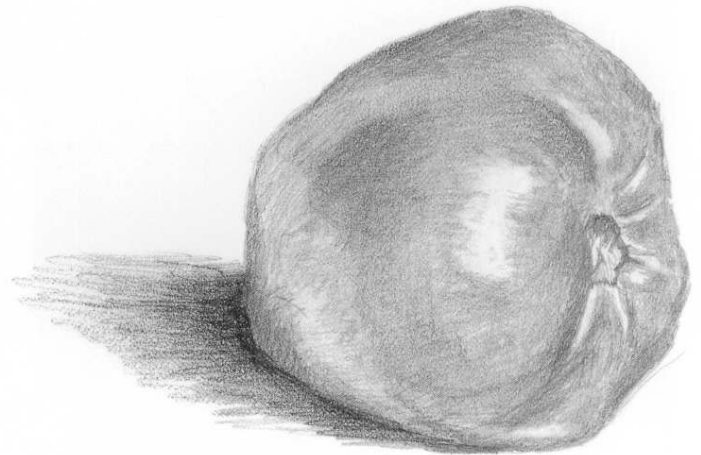
PROBLEM. Is the cast shadow on your tabletop too active, too contoured?



SOLUTION. Horizontal strokes within the shadow will flatten it, thereby reinforcing the flat table surface.



PROBLEM. Are the highlights on your drawing vague, not convincing as the brightest parts of the object?



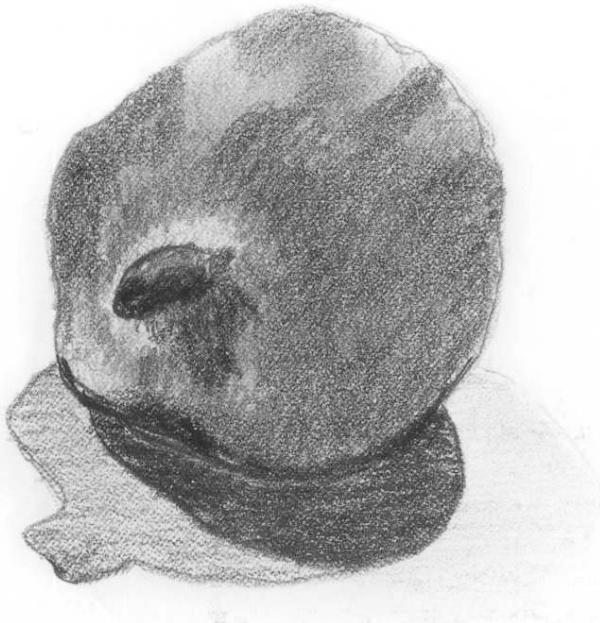
SOLUTION. Camouflage the outlines around highlights, and make them pop up well, with an application of darker, finer value scribbles.



PROBLEM. Does the shape look flat, with an abrupt transition between values, making the shadows seem pasted on, not integrated into the drawing?

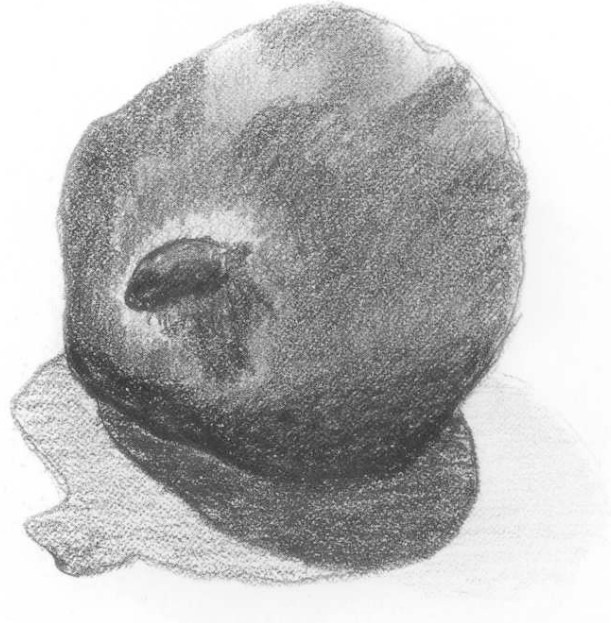


SOLUTION. Overlay stacks of straight lines with multidimensional strokes; use transitional grays between shadow and overall value; soften with finger or eraser.



PROBLEM. Does the shape look somewhat flat, not convincing the viewer that it's a three-dimensional object?

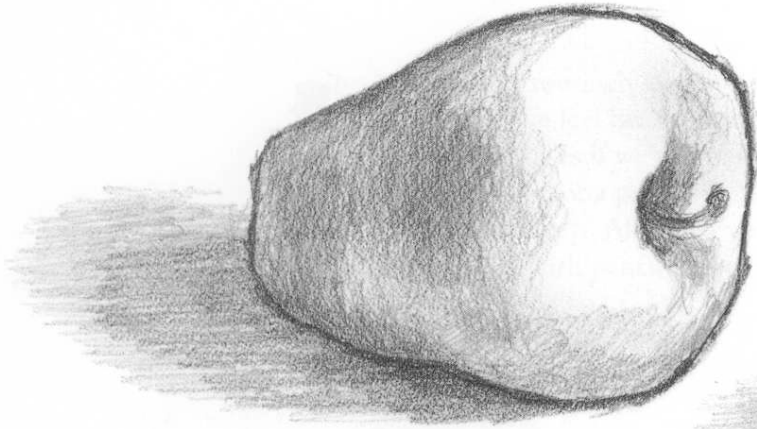
DRAWING BY STUDENT STEPHANIE SEIDEL



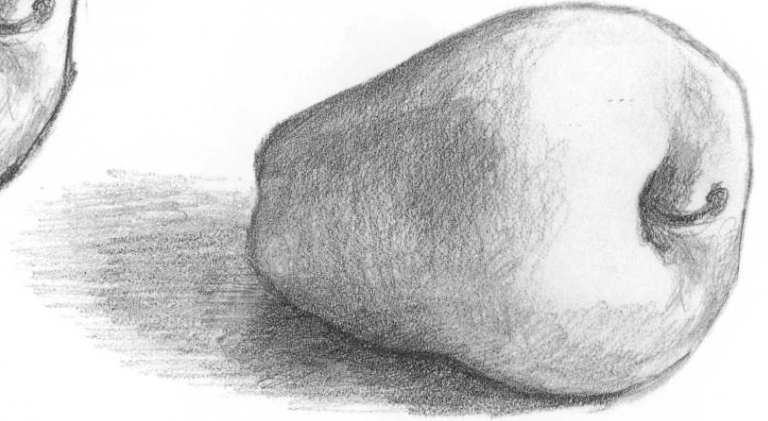
SOLUTION. Use more values to create dimension. Darken the lower portion of the object, where it begins to merge with a shadow.

DRAWING BY STUDENT STEPHANIE SEIDEL

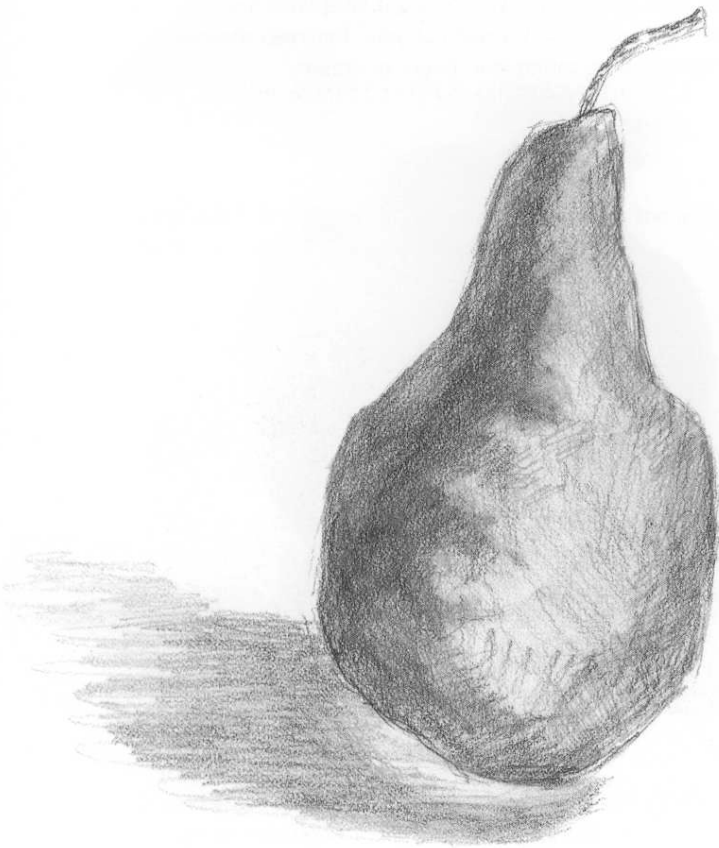
Problem Solvers



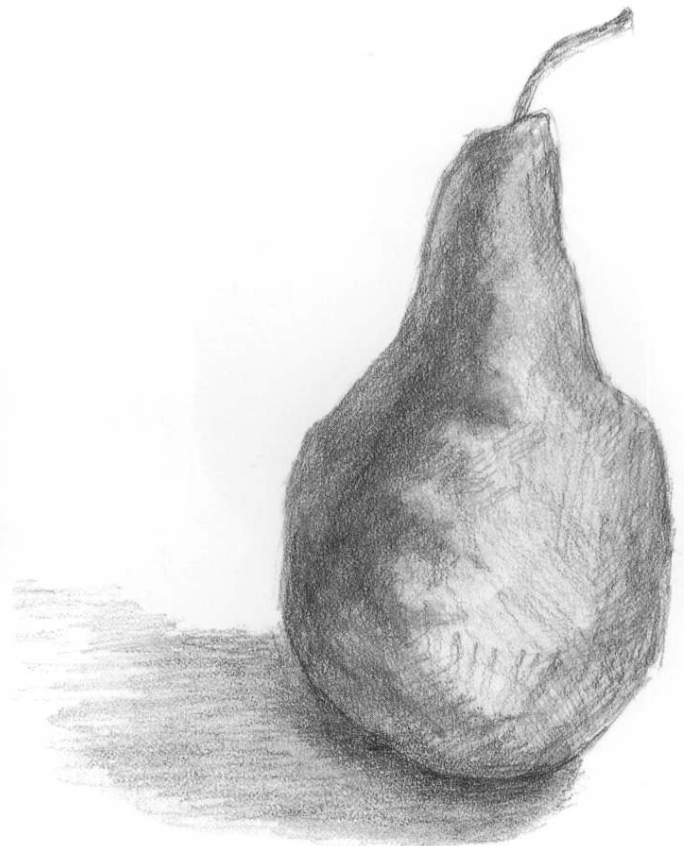
PROBLEM. Is your contour line too dominant in relation to the object's overall value?



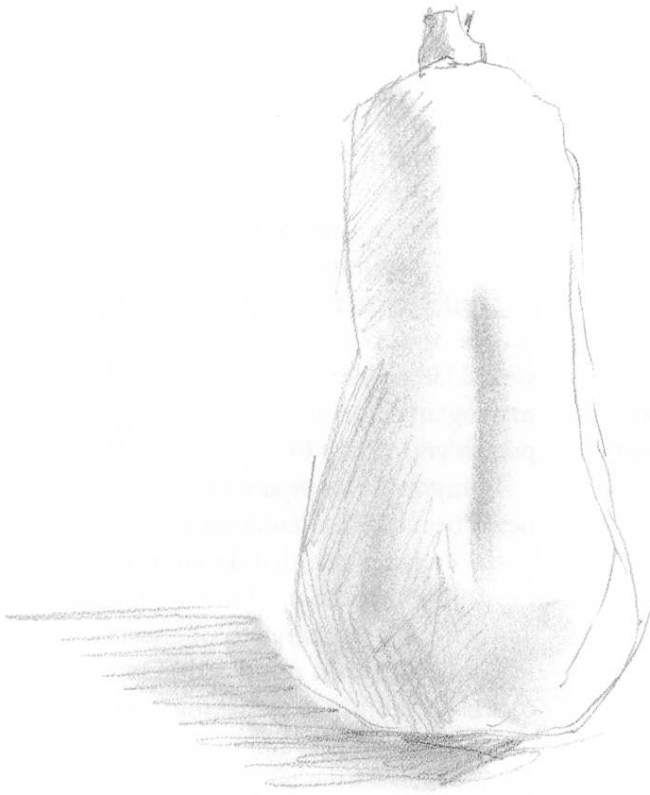
SOLUTION. If you have drawn your contour line with uniform pressure, create "lost and found edges" by softening the contour here and there with your eraser.



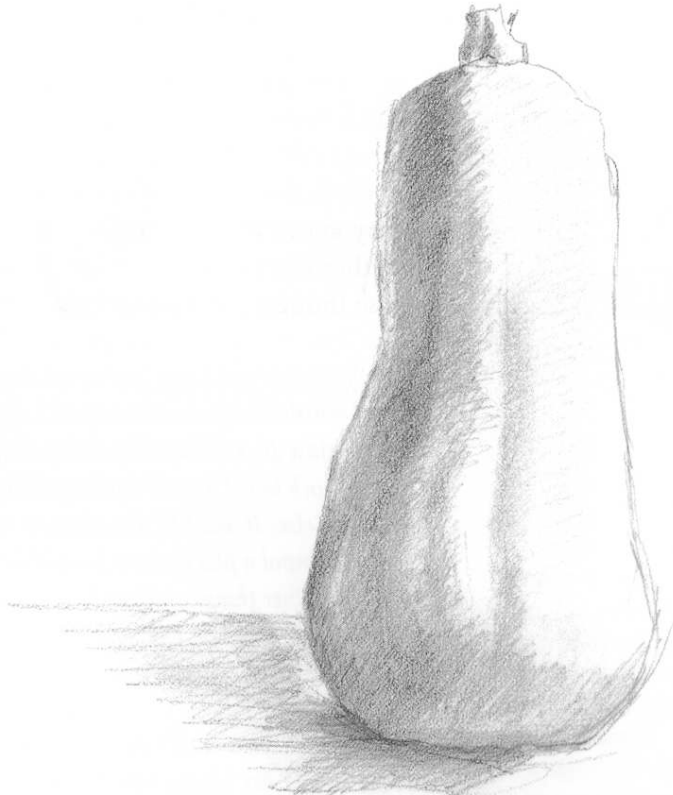
PROBLEM. Does your object seem to float rather than sit solidly on a surface?



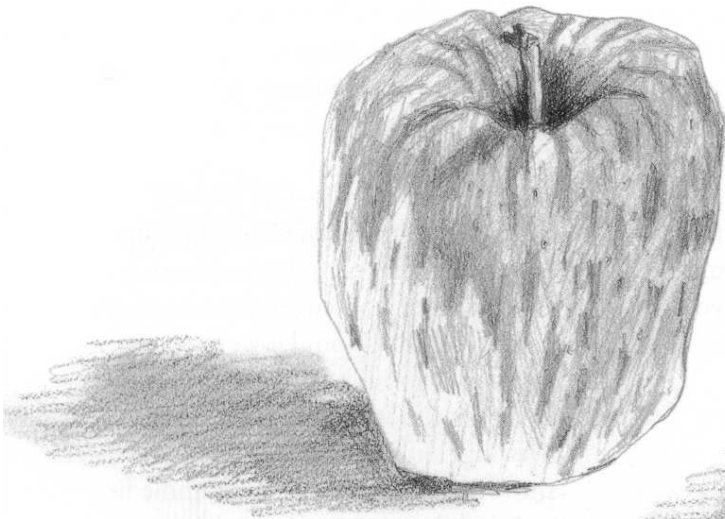
SOLUTION. Add the small, dark shadow shape beneath the object to ground it to the table.



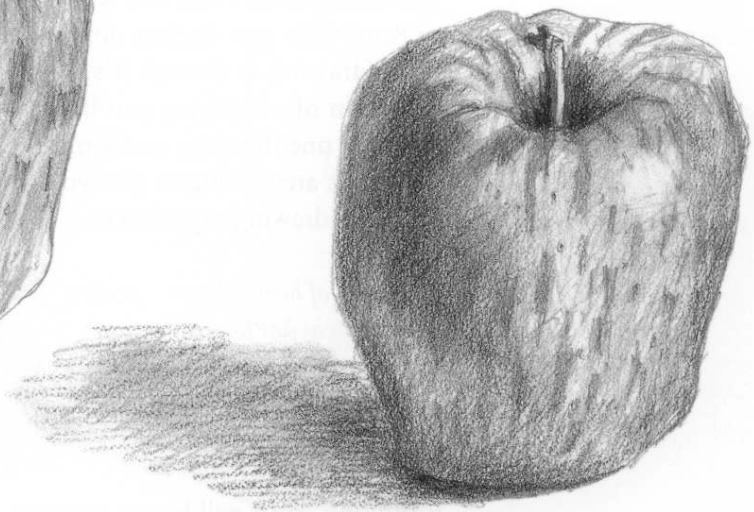
PROBLEM. Is the object too pale, as though it's fading away?



SOLUTION. Reinforce contours here and there and add darker shadows.



PROBLEM. Have you focused more on surface pattern than on depicting dimension, thereby causing the pattern to look flat?



SOLUTION. The entire object, including surface pattern, should show the effects of light and shadow in order to achieve a three-dimensional look.

Banish Perfectionism

Added to the series of “Problem Solvers” just presented, here’s one more: *Problem:* Being too critical, expecting perfection. *Solution:* Every time you worry about whether you have talent, whether you’re “good enough,” banish those thoughts and just keep drawing!

“I decided to just let go and surrender to what came out. I found that when I did let go and just draw, I became so absorbed in the work that I wasn’t thinking about anything else. It was like a meditative state. I had found a place where I could shut out all other things and just be. It was a peaceful feeling.”

—STUDENT ANITA ST. MARIE

Fear that you don’t have talent is often based on a belief that a piece of art needs to be perfect, that *you* need to be perfect. None of us can achieve perfection. In fact, when what you consider imperfect comes through in your drawing, that may be just the part that has your personal stamp and makes it unique to you. That is often where the art is.

Just concentrate when you work, learn from what you do, but don’t treat any one drawing as though it’s the culmination of everything you hope to do. It’s just one drawing; many more empty pages are waiting to give you many more drawing experiences.

“I let go of having to get it perfect. This was just for me, because I enjoyed doing it. I released myself from proving anything.”

—STUDENT ANGELA LOWY

Beginning artists will have a moment when they finally understand that wonderful art is not perfect technique or a perfect replication of subject matter. Cameras can do that. It’s the

individual’s take on what is seen, that personal filter through which reality is perceived, that makes drawings or any art form authentically beautiful, or potentially so. That truth has been recognized throughout the history of art. Perfectionism hobbles our energies. We are afraid of being seen for who we are, afraid of being vulnerable. But making art requires the courage to permit yourself to be yourself.

In my teaching experience, it’s never been the student with the greatest initial drawing ease that develops the most. A combination of intense interest and a flexible learning attitude seems to ensure the most positive development. The ability to learn from the drawing experience, and to shrug off a disappointing result, is a definite accelerator.

“A strong perfectionist bent had prevented me from trying anything I might not be good at. I learned to risk failure, because there was such pleasure in producing small drawings.”

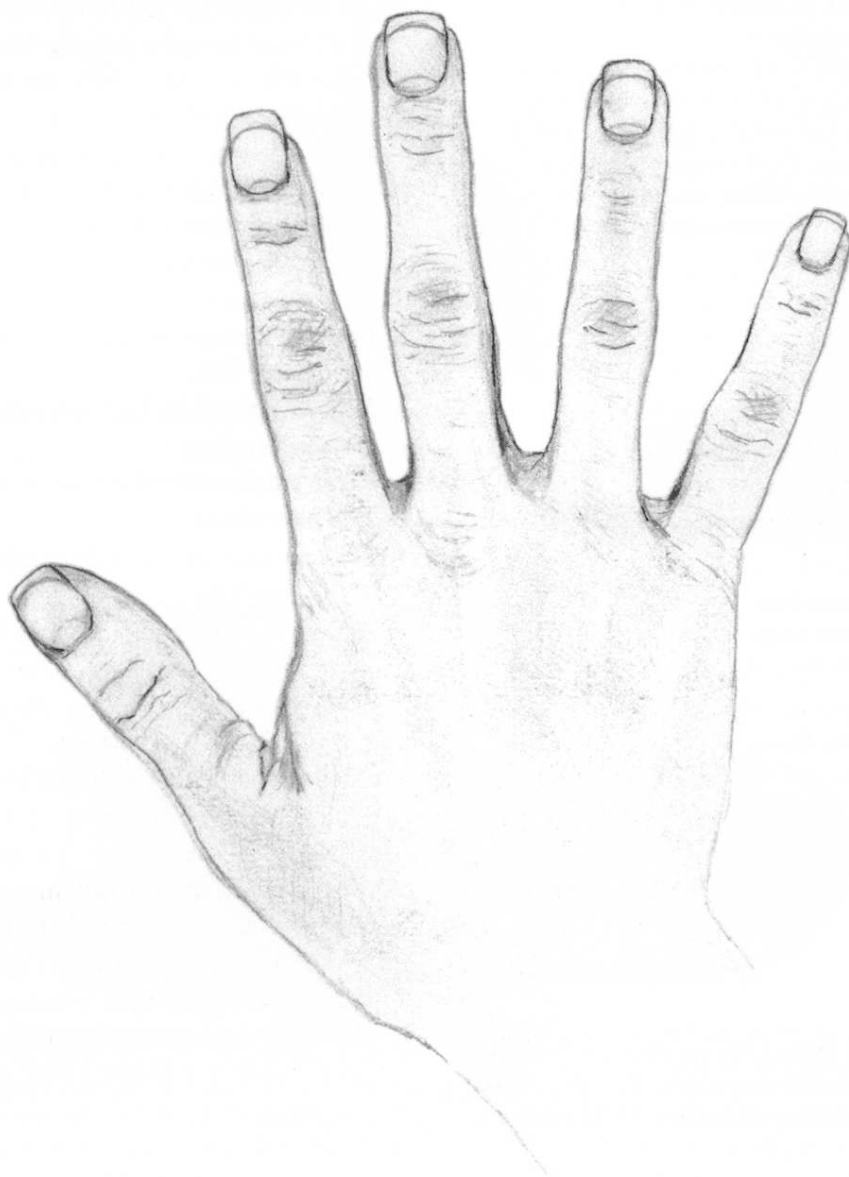
—STUDENT ANN PORFILIO

SHOW AND TELL—OR DON’T
Beginners in my classes thrive on the “show and tell” period, a structured evaluation of homework drawing that’s part of every session. However, when working on your own with this book, you may choose not to share your drawings with others. Some like to show their work to everyone immediately, while others prefer to keep it private. Do what feels best for you. And be aware that people who have not been exposed to the art world or art instruction may feel awkward in discussing your work—so *you* may have to do some teaching before sharing your drawings with them!

EXERCISE: CLOSE AT HAND

Here's a variation on our earlier draw-your-hand exercise. It's a fun way to get to exercise your pencil, observe proportions within your hand, and learn a bit about skin tone. Use your 2B or 2H pencil, depending on which matches your skin value more closely: 2B, the softer pencil, will make darker tones; 2H, the harder pencil, lighter tones. After you've completed this exercise, try sketching your hand in a variety of positions.

- 1 Trace your nondrawing hand, palm down, fingers together or spread. Draw the folds in your knuckles.
- 2 Put in shadow shapes if they are present, squinting to see them.
- 3 Use contour drawing to fill in specific nail shapes.
- 4 Fill in an overall skin value and use your finger to smooth out the surface. Use your directional lines to map out rows of knuckles in a slight semicircle.



"When I did my hand, I searched for light and dark lines, thin and thick lines, and went back again and again until I got it right—for me. When I got to drawing the tendons in my hand, I found that dragging the eraser gave it new dimension. I was immersed in the patterns of lines that became my knuckles, and the half moons that were created by my cuticles. I must have spent at least six hours 'fixing' my hand, but I loved every minute!"

—STUDENT KRISTEN NIMR