

2. Drawing

Synopsis

This module provides an introduction to drawing. It explains the importance of drawing as a tool that is quite different from other tools with which we comprehend the world around us. A few different drawings are discussed to understand how learning to draw lends itself to creative ideation.

Lectures

- 2.1 Introduction to drawing
- 2.2 Drawing as a tool for observation
- 2.3 Communicating through drawing



Fig2.1.00

2.1 Introduction to drawing



Fig 2.1.01

Drawings made on the walls of caves at Bhimbetka, Madhya Pradesh (left) and Lascaux, France (right)). It has been suggested that these works were not artistic expressions as we understand that today, but linked to the ritual of hunting.

There is a myth that most people cannot draw. This is reinforced in early education when our first efforts at drawing receive unfavourable remarks and at times outright ridicule. There is significantly greater time devoted to learning how to read and write, than the time devoted to learn how to draw.

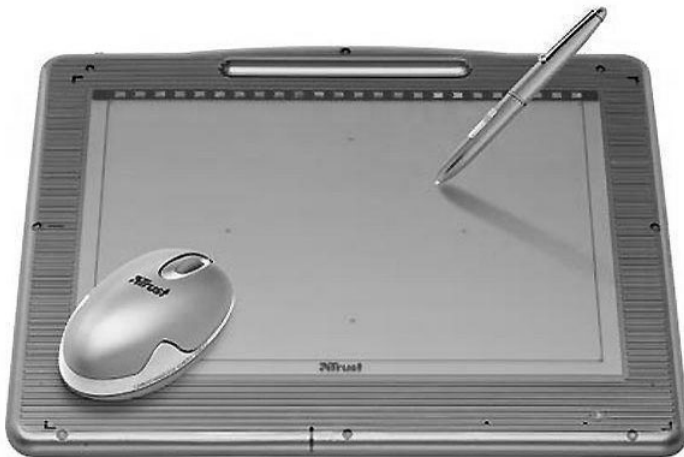


Fig 2.1.02

From drawing on cave walls to using a digital pen and tablet has been a remarkable journey, and the impulse to draw has been a surprisingly similar urge over centuries.

Most people who have enrolled for a college education would be willing to undertake some assignment that requires them to write, but very few would be willing to draw. Such is the power of discouragement received in early years.



Fig 2.1.03

A school girl fills in a drawing done as a part of a collaborative mural for the walls of the school. In order that the tool becomes an effective instrument, we need to understand what the tool can do. We need to understand the craft of writing and the craft of drawing. In this module, we shall concern ourselves with the latter. The first requirement is to go back in time and identify if at some point we were told that we were no good at drawing. Then one needs to overcome the unwillingness to draw that has crept in and once the fear of facing a blank page with a pencil has been overcome, we can embark on a new journey.



Fig 2.1.04

Children learn to make *kolams* (floor drawings done with rice paste) early in the morning. Such drawings are a common feature in many parts of India – known as *muggus* in Andhra Pradesh, *chita* in Odisha and *rangoli* in Maharashtra and Gujarat. Urban households, sometimes use readily available floor-stickers.

The best way to begin to draw is to start drawing! However, some initial notes might help understand how learning to draw is a little like learning to sing. There is some truth in the view that some people are gifted and can draw or sing quite naturally, but you would be surprised that the basics of any skill, whether it is riding a bicycle, driving a car, swimming or gymnastics, can be learnt provided there is an inclination that is backed by perseverance. To expect results in a few months is ambitious, though significant growth can be observed over a year.



Fig 2.1.05

These drawings often made with the help of a grid of dots can be very sophisticated geometrical constructions that are imbibed by people with little formal knowledge of mathematics or geometry.

A sketchbook with cheap newsprint paper invites practice sessions without the fear of 'wasting' paper. One may also keep a sketchbook with paper that is sturdier. Paper that has some texture (called cartridge paper in many places in India) is good for shading (developing tonalities or different intensities of black) than paper which has a very smooth or glossy surface.



Fig 2.1.06

Young students undergo a long apprenticeship as they learn the nuances of the traditional art of patachitra. Drawing very fine lines with a brush requires patience and riyaz (regular practice) is absolutely essential to imbibe the basic grammar.

It might be an interesting experiment to find out how paper is made and actually make some paper. This would help us understand the tactile quality of paper. One can use fingers to feel different kinds of paper and get a sense of how different papers respond to our touch. It would be helpful to remember that the excessive wastage of paper makes us insensitive to the fact that paper can have a life of its own.



Fig 2.1.07

Children draw uninhibitedly and their drawings display a confident energy. Picasso is said to have remarked that it took him years of effort to be able to draw like a child.

Industrial production processes have led to the development of a very wide range of papers with different thicknesses, textures, colours, sizes (one could get very long paper available as rolls instead of sheets). A visit to a paper manufacturer or paper-shop would be rewarding. The drawback of a plentitude of choice (and excess) is that we stop valuing the little things.

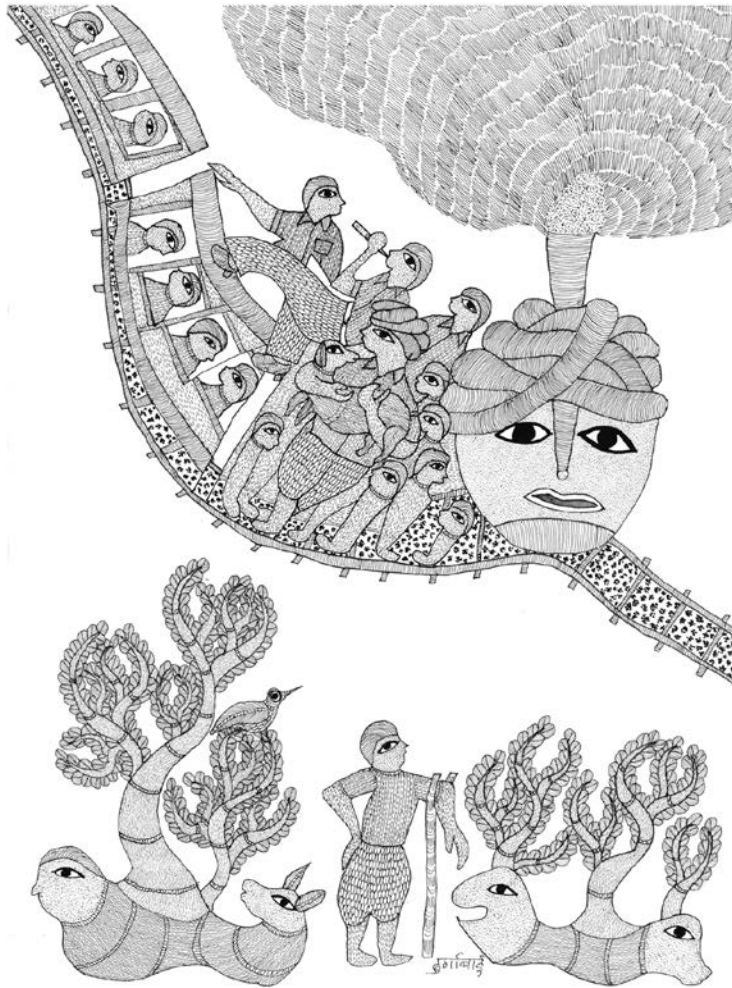


Fig 2.1.08

A drawing by a Gond tribal artist has an animated quality that comes from the world view that sees a living being even in things that are inanimate. The engine of the train above acquires a human persona.

There was an age when paper was not yet invented and barks of trees and surfaces such as palm-leaves were used for writing. Museums have collections of ancient manuscripts written and illustrated very beautifully. Printing had also not been invented and each manuscript was a special handmade work, executed with great care. Today when offset printing presses, reproduce thousands of facsimiles in a few minutes, books can be made with much greater ease and be made available to many more people, but one must also be aware that because we can get access so easily, we tend to under-value what is written and under-value the paper on which it is printed.

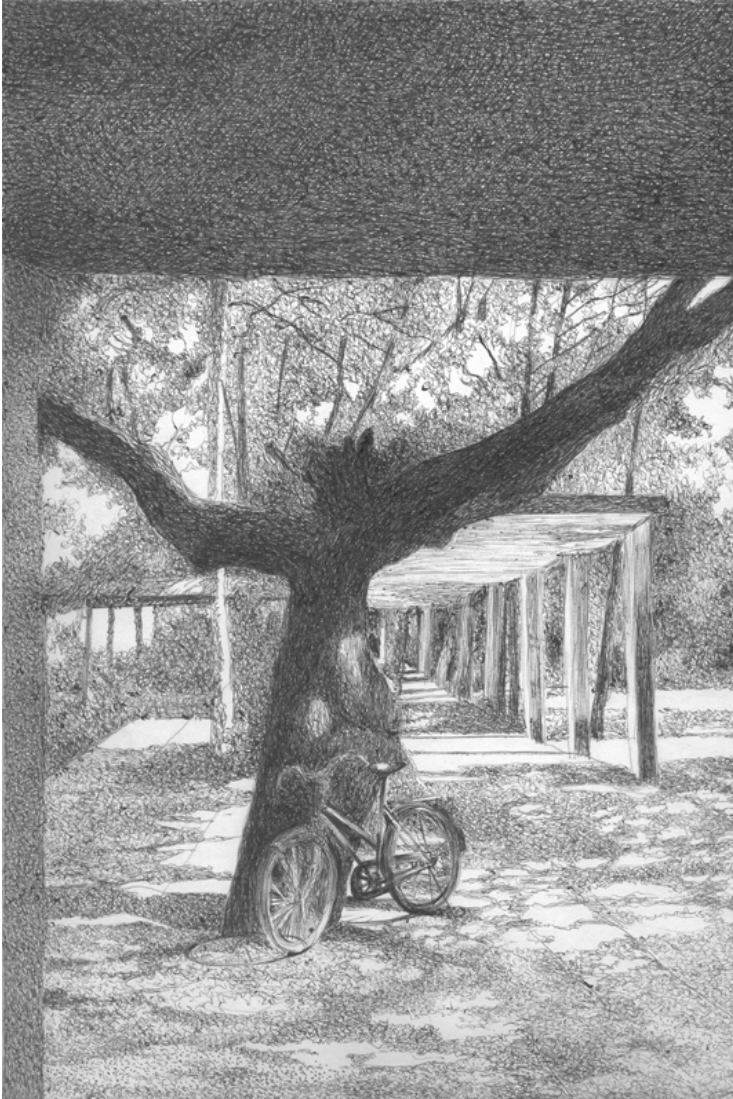


Fig 2.1.09
A pen and ink drawing.

Far from being sentimental, the argument being presented seeks to draw our attention to the shortcomings of excesses. It is interesting to note that when books were first made, and the written word was born, the value of the spoken word was challenged. There still are cultures that treasure the sacred quality of the spoken word and regard a spoken agreement as a promise, even though there is no 'concrete' proof. Even an iota of distrust, destroys the sacred quality of the spoken word. This is the reason that many contemporary courts of law, are based on written and certified documents. It would not be incorrect to interpret this reliance on written records, as a characteristic of a 'distrustful' age. The new respectability acquired by the written and the printed word, gave the book a special place in many cultures.



Fig 2.1.10

These drawings of human faces owe much of their expressive quality to the commitment of the artist towards people-centred movements.

Since the printing press was invented in the West, the book became a more prevalent object in the West. Amongst the first books to be printed was the Bible and enthusiastic missionaries carried this book to distant lands to preach the sacred text printed in the book. The strength of the book was that it was democratic - unlike words that were carriers of secret knowledge in the custody of a few, a book when printed, enabled the sharing of knowledge. This is possibly one of the reasons why the West has been so successful in the impact that the idea of modernity has on cultures worldwide. The inclination to document, articulate and share knowledge through the written word has resulted in hundreds of books in the libraries of universities worldwide. Unlike cultures that valued the spoken word and at times were unwilling to share their knowledge by writing it down, the more articulate cultures could reach out to more people.



Fig 2.1.11

A sketchbook can be a very useful record of progress made over the years as the command over drawing slowly acquires a masterly quality.

There is a quality in a human voice that allows it to connect with a fellow-human. Listening to a poet read, is an altogether different experience from reading the same poem in a book. Technologies that enabled the recording of audio signals allowed us to record the spoken word, but even here it is the excess, that takes away the value of the spoken word. In an age of internet file exchanges in various formats such as mp3, mpeg, wav and so on, a live listening can restore certain primacies. It is interesting that oral cultures are beginning to realize the follies of hoarding knowledge and have begun the process of knowledge sharing using digital technologies and not just books. It is interesting to note that cultures that stressed on the printed word seek to recover the spirit in the spoken word.