

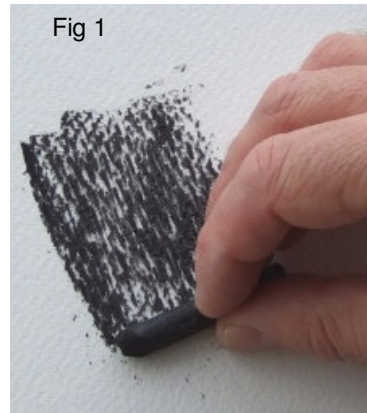
Expand your creativity - Part 4: loosen up with charcoal



Using charcoal instead of a pencil is a great way to loosen up your drawings. Because of its very nature, charcoal is a soft and free flowing medium that doesn't allow you to make tiny detailed drawings, but is great for sketching the overall essence of a piece. It makes you loosen up.

If you have never used charcoal before, I really encourage you to have a go.

Charcoal comes in various thicknesses and is usually made by burning willow twigs. Try and buy a few thin sticks and a few thicker ones. You can draw on almost any type of paper, but I would recommend using something with a bit of 'tooth' to it, like watercolour or pastel paper.



Exercise 1.

Take a stick of charcoal and break off a piece about 5cm or 2 inches long. It is much easier to work with shorter lengths like this. Spend a couple of minutes just drawing a few lines and marks to get the feel of it.

As well as drawing lines, you can shade in whole areas by using the side of the charcoal (Fig 1) and you can use an eraser to remove it to leave light marks (Fig 2). Have a go at these techniques.

Exercise 2.

Step 1. Draw a circle and add a dot to it as shown here to create an orange or an apple.



Step 2. Then use your finger to smudge the lines to form shadow areas. Add more charcoal and blend it again as necessary to create the roundness of the fruit.



Exercise 3.

Now let's create some folds in a cloth.

Step 1. Draw a line and then blend the bottom edge only with your finger. Repeat this with a second and third line.



Step 2. Add some pattern stripes to your cloth to really show up those folds.





Exercise 4.

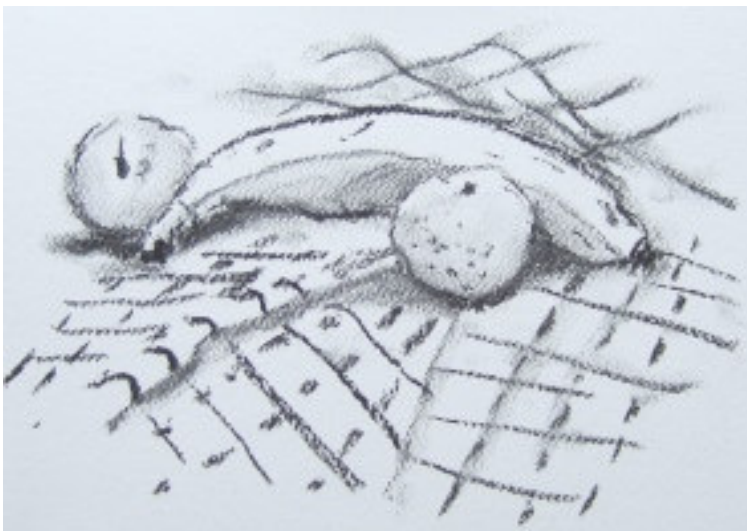
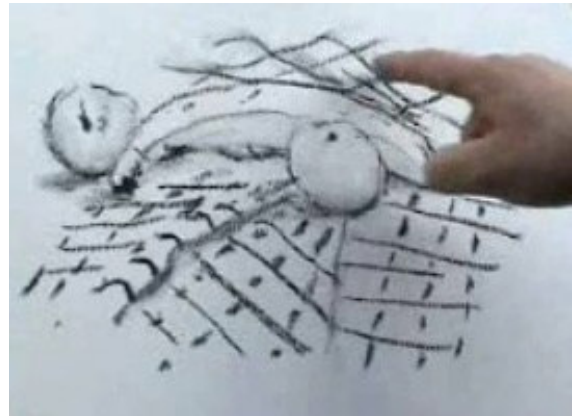
Now let's have a go at drawing some real fruit and cloth. Set up a still life something like this, and place your paper where you can see both the still life and the drawing at the same time. If you have to keep turning around then one of them is in the wrong place!

Step 1. Drawing from the shoulder, (keeping your elbow straight and just moving your arm and the charcoal from your shoulder as much as possible) plot in the rough outlines of the fruit. You will find that by drawing from the shoulder instead of keeping your arm locked and moving the charcoal with your fingers, you will produce a looser and better drawing.



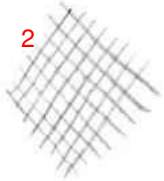
Step 2. When the outlines are drawn in, blend or smudge the charcoal with your finger to create some shadow areas. Go back in with the charcoal to re-instate any lines that have disappeared.

Step 3. When you have finished the fruit, begin to draw in the cloth, once again smudging to create shadow areas, or to send the cloth behind the fruit into the background.



The finished drawing should have enough detail to show exactly what it is, but not too much. It is easy to overwork charcoal and to end up with a muddy mess, so remember - less is more.

drawing with: Pencils part 2: creative lines



We have seen how we can shade in our drawings using tonal blocks, but here is another way of doing this. It's called hatching and cross hatching. Hatched lines are lines drawn parallel to each other (Fig 1) and crosshatched lines are two or more sets of these criss-crossing each other (as in Fig 2).

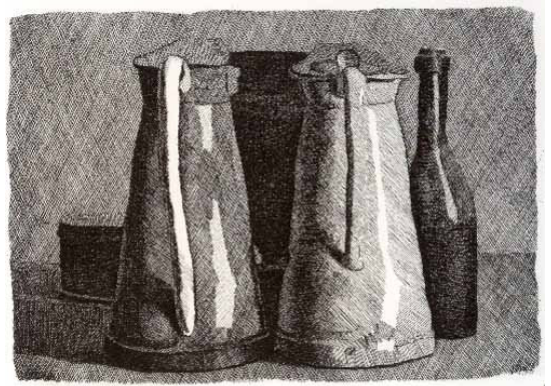
Exercise 1

Try these exercises out to see how it works (use an HB pencil for this).

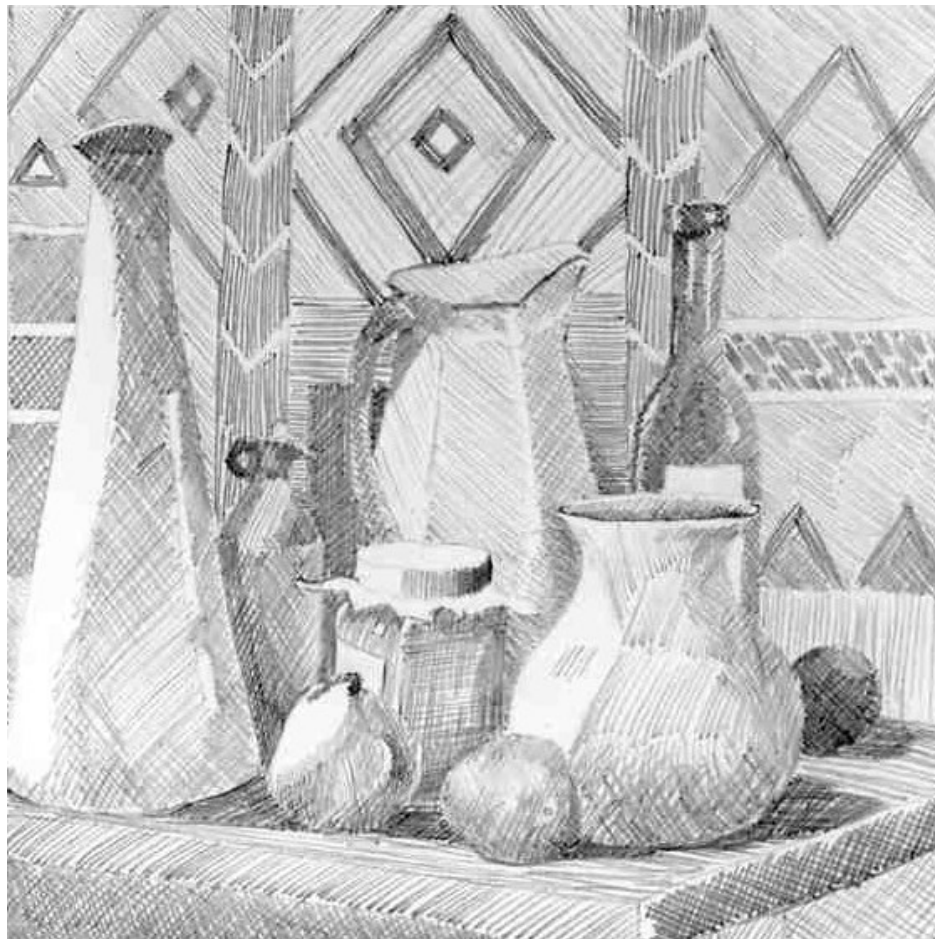
1. Draw several lines next to each other as shown here, leaving about two pencil line widths between each line. Draw them all in the same direction, starting from the top and drawing down the page.
2. Turn the paper around and repeat this across the first set of lines.
3. Turn the paper again and add a third set of lines, crossing the other two. Notice how the shaded area gets darker, the more lines you add.
4. Now do the same but with the lines drawn much closer to each other.
5. Add a second set of lines
6. and a third

Notice how much darker this shaded area is to the first set (3)

7. Now try using curved lines for the hatching and cross hatching to see the effect it can give.



Giorgio Morandi *Still life with five objects* 1956



Giorgio Morandi (1890 – 1964) was an Italian painter who specialized in still life.

He loved drawing and painting arrangements of jugs and pots and, like the drawing above, he often used cross hatching to achieve his effects.

Exercise 2

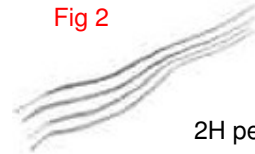
Find some photos or paintings of pots and jugs, or set up your own still life with items from the kitchen, and then draw your own Morandi style picture, using cross hatching for all the shading, as I have done here. I used an HB pencil for the whole picture.

We can use hatching in a different way to produce wonderfully expressive lines.

Try this experiment: Take a 2B pencil and draw a wavy line, starting off lightly, then pressing harder on the paper as you move along the line, and then lifting the pencil slowly off the paper to make a lighter mark. The line should be thin and light at both ends with a thicker darker part in the middle. Draw a few more lines alongside it and the result should look something like Figure 1.

Now do the same with a 2H pencil and notice how the effect of light/dark and thin/thick is much less noticeable. It is much harder to see the differences. (Figure 2.)

Fig 2



2H pencil

Finally do the same with a 6B pencil. The thick dark parts of the line should be quite thick and dark with this pencil (Figure 3).

Fig 3



6B pencil

Fig 4



We can use these expressive lines to build character and texture into our drawings. Look at figure 4. Could this be a horse's tail, one side of a girl's hair, or even a waterfall? Just by pressing harder or lighter on our pencil, we are able to create shadow and highlight areas.

Exercise 3

Try drawing something from life or from a photo that will allow you to use marks like these. Choose perhaps someone's hair, or the fur on an animal, or some fabric, or something in a landscape such as a waterfall, a field of long grass, or the bark of a tree.

Expressive lines can also be used to liven up any drawing. Look at figure 5 here. This building was drawn very neatly with a 2B pencil and a straight edge or ruler. It is fairly accurate, but boring! There is no life in it.

Fig 5



But in figure 6 I drew the same picture freehand using expressive lines. Some are thick and dark, some thin and light, there are some sections missing and other straight lines have become a bit wavy. But the whole picture has life and character, and took about half as long to draw as figure 5.

Fig 6



Exercise 4

Draw a building from a photo or from real life using freehand expressive marks and see how much character you can put into it.