

Short Lectures.

R. F. Chisholm

1878

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Delivered at the Madras School of Arts

BY

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FIRST LECTURE.—DRAWING.

MADRAS:
HIGGINBOTHAM AND CO.

1878.

MADRAS:
PRINTED BY HINDUSTHAN LBS Co.,
FEBRUARY, 1973.

FIRST LECTURE.

DRAWING.

THE art of drawing, or perhaps more correctly speaking a knowledge of proportion, is of national importance. Although comparatively few can draw, all admit that a knowledge of the art would be of great advantage. By drawing, I do not mean the kind of instruction usually given in schools—a coarse imitation of the methods adopted by eminent artists to interpret nature—but that more just appreciation of line and angle essential to the art craftsman, and fully developed in the highest efforts of artistic genius. The usual school description of drawing affords a certain amount of harmless amusement to the student, and after a few touches from the master, pleases the student's friends, but the actual knowledge acquired is exceedingly small, if you wish to test this, place a bowl or a spoon before the youth who unhesitatingly attacks mountains, castles, ships and trees, ask him to draw these simple things, and mark the result.

It not unfrequently happens that people who draw landscapes are unable to introduce into them groups of figures or cattle; not that a man or a cow are more difficult to draw than a mountain or a tree, but the forms are less variable, we know them better, and what they look like, and we at once become critical if they present a different appearance on paper to what we had a right to expect. It does not much



matter if a hill is drawn twice its height, or a tree twice its breadth, but draw a human face with the nose twice its proper breadth, and the result is to say the least conspicuous!

Drawing is the art of measuring by the eye. Most people imagine the art to consist of a certain dexterity of hand, and no doubt that member by constant practice becomes a most obedient servant of his master the eye, but the latter is the seat of the graphic art and makes or mars the draughtsman. Just in the way that the ear of the backwoodsman detects sounds inaudible to his civilized brother, and the Astronomer, configurations on the planets invisible to the ordinary observer, so the eye of the artist

detects those minute gradations of shade, and that justness of angle, which makes a representation like the natural object. Let me show you in a coarse way how subtle bounding lines are, and how small a touch alters an expression. Here is a face. (1) It isn't a



pretty face, but it is sufficiently pleasing to illustrate the point, without rubbing it out, I thicken the line in places

and wipe off the surplus chalk, and a touch or two presents you with a very morose looking individual (2) two or three touches added and the face becomes good-natured. (3) It is related of Foote, the celebrated Comedian, that conscious of his power of creating and retaining an expression, he sat for his portrait under an assumed name. At the second sitting Foote put on a different expression, the artist was much annoyed to find his work all wrong and altered his painting to suit the new characteristics. At the third sitting, the celebrated Comedian adopted a third expression, and so worried the artist that Foote was compelled to declare himself, and both laughed heartily at the joke.

To return to drawing. The eye literally *surveys* the object to be drawn, much in the same way that surveying instruments work out the form of a field. The eye measures angles like a theodolite, and distances like a chain, it checks the distances by angles, and the angles by distances. This method of drawing will be more readily seen in complicated groups of subjects, but in order to give you an idea of the process, I will draw this very simple form with which you are all acquainted, a water goglet.

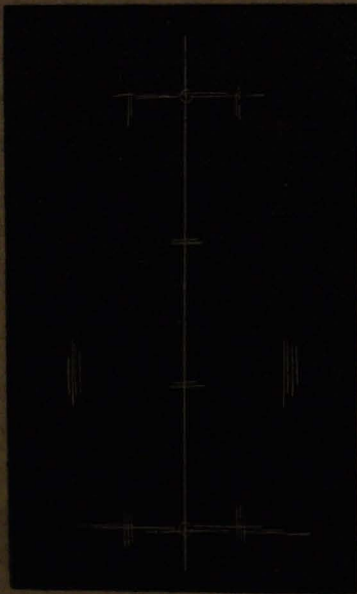


Fig. 3.

I first of all make a vertical line to represent the position I wish it to occupy on the board. Fig. 3. I next mark where the top should come and where the bottom should come * *. I now decide a very important point the breadth of the object with reference to its height, this is usually so difficult, that I would recommend you always to do this by a pencil measurement. The pencil is dropped lightly

between the second and third fingers, the arm thrown out straight, one eye closed, and the top of the pencil made to coincide with the top of the object. The thumb is then slipped up the near side of the pencil until it coincides with the bottom of the object, the pencil is then moved round until it lies horizontally at right angles, you will then see accurately what proportion the breadth is to the height. In this case I find it to be a little more than half the height. I

find the narrow part of the neck to be about two-thirds of the height and so divide the vertical height into three parts. This completes the first process or arranging the proportions. I now look to the general form and by straight lines indicate roughly the bounding lines of the object squared up. Fig. 4. This completes the second process or blocking in. I now look more closely to the forms of the

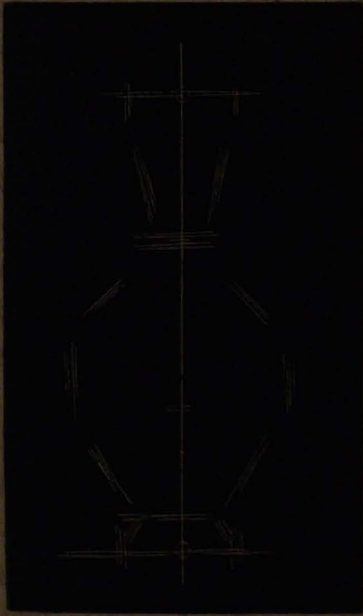


Fig. 4.

curved lines and guided by the blocking in draw the whole of the object, continually and altering until I get it like Fig. 5. Having satisfied myself of its

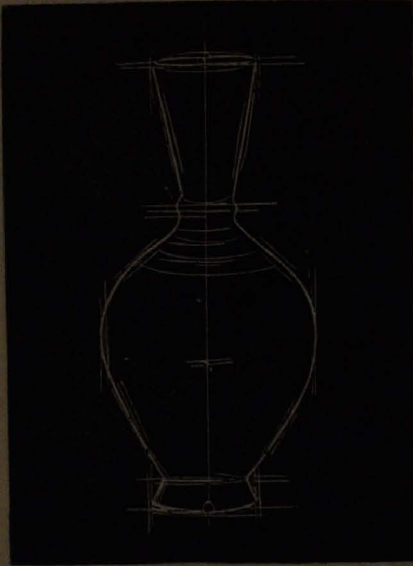


Fig. 5.



Fig. 6.

accuracy, I go over the line I wish to remain a little harder, and this completes the third process or drawing. Now with the cloth I wipe out the whole thing (Indian rubber on paper serving the same purpose) leaving only a faint indication of the last lines which I wished to remain. Then with a free steady hand I retrace the whole of these lines, which completes the last process or lining in. Fig. 6.

As I first of all determined the exact position the vase was to occupy on the drawing board. You will see that it was just as easy to draw it larger or smaller or in fact any size.

In copying free hand drawings it is very essential to enlarge or reduce the size of the original, for if you copy the same size, the temptation to measure is irresistible.

The chief difficulty I find in teaching is to make students look at the object to be drawn, to divest themselves entirely of their knowledge of the actual shape of the object, and to draw it simply by the appearance it presents. I place this square in this position and I ask a class to draw it. Now you

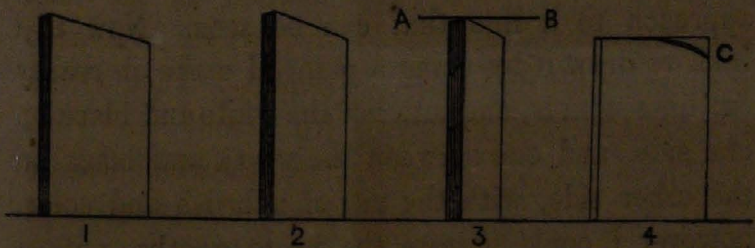


Fig. 7.

who are on my right will see it like this. 1. You in the centre like this, 2, and you on my left like this. 3. If you were a junior-drawing class, ten to one but you would all draw it like this. 4. You would *know* it to be square, and you would draw it square. If I made a line on the black board behind as A B, in order that you might see exactly the angle of the top from the horizontal, I should get you only to draw down one corner feebly

as at C. It is most important then when drawing from objects, to forget entirely the actual shape of the object, and to study only the *appearance* it presents.

Hitherto we have been considering objects as bounded by lines, let me impress upon you, that there is no such thing as a line in nature. Euclid's definition of a line is length without breadth, which of course is inconceivable. I take a sheet of white paper and lay it on the black board, the boundary between the white and the black is the nearest approach to a line that can be seen. Now if I wish to draw it by using a point, I make in reality *two* lines, that is, one between the white and black on one side, and one between the white and black on the other side, with the aid of a brush and color, however I could imitate the form exactly, with a color similar to the ground I could paint all the surface unoccupied by the sheet of white paper, and this process in a way illustrates the next step in drawing. First, you learn the forms of objects by outlining them, and secondly, you learn to depict them by the forms of the masses of shade. It is a most important step when you advance to work by forms and not by lines, Ruskin—perhaps the greatest authority on art the world has yet seen capable of writing—recommends you to draw a



Fig. 8.

attempting to draw a bounding line; this point work is more or less tedious although capable of the highest finish. I will endeavour to show you further the great value of studying objects by the shapes of their shadows and not the bounding lines. I have here some color mixed to a neutral tint, and



Fig. 9.

stone, by commencing on the deep shadow and gradually feeling your way out to the border in this way. Fig. 8. You see that I have left the form of a pebble magnified without once

as you see a brush incapable of producing a line, and I hope by a few touches to block out a form which will be at least distinguished by you all. Here in a few seconds is a Countryman with a hat on. Fig. 9. Now to convey to you the same idea as forceably with chalk or pencil would probably take

me half an hour. You not only see that it is a Countryman with a wide-awake on, you see that he is a comparatively young man, one touch of the brush converts him into an older man, and another gives him a Roman nose.* In my next lecture I will treat more particularly of free hand and model drawing.

* Successive touches on the drawing.
