

# 4

## The Interaction of Drawing and Design

In previous chapters, we established the concept of the flat picture plane. This chapter enlarges on that discussion and in the process confirms that responses to two-dimensional organization are integral to the practice of expressive drawing, representational or otherwise.

### Drawing and Design: A Natural Union

Design, on some level, plays a part in our everyday existence. But much of the order in our lives is taken for granted, from the simple matter of organizing daily routines to managing the more complex forces of, let us say, career and home life into a state of equilibrium.

Indeed, design is such a natural part of our consciousness that when we witness something that is superbly organized—as, for instance, the consummate execution of a double play in baseball—we recognize immediately how wonderfully all the parts had to fit together for that to happen. We are thrilled, and it feels good to witness something so well realized, perhaps because the order in our own lives seldom reaches that pitch of resolution.

In drawing, as in all the arts, design is just as natural and ever-present. In fact, you cannot draw *without* designing. Science revealed decades ago that visual perception itself is an automatic process of selecting and making patterns. This means that when we look at things our eyes and mind begin immediately organizing visual differences and similarities so that we might create order out of potential chaos.

So when you draw to represent your subject, you are simultaneously recording sensations of perceived order. By this we don't mean to imply that you will necessarily create well-designed drawings from the outset of your drawing practice but only that there is no mystery connected with the qualities of design; they are simply a part of common experience.

### Principles of Design

When transferred to the art-making process, these qualities of order are generally referred to as the principles of design. They are given names such as *unity and variety, contrast, emphasis, balance, movement, repetition and rhythm, and economy.*

The principles of design are used by artists to organize the so-called *visual elements* (lines, tones, shapes, textures, and colors) into a unified drawing.

Distinguishing these design phenomena by name may give the impression that they can be set apart from one another and given fixed definitions. On the contrary, they are frequently inseparable and seemingly unlimited in their interactions. Thus, the descriptions below must, of necessity, be neither final nor precise. These summaries are offered only as a set of guidelines to reinforce what you will quite naturally discover on your own.

### UNITY AND VARIETY

Imagine, if you will, a country with a population so diverse that it suffers from internal dissension. Its leaders, recognizing that such discord makes the nation vulnerable, look for ways to encourage unity, or a state of oneness, so that the nation's people may stand consolidated against external aggression.

The process of drawing is in many ways the same. A blank sheet of drawing paper, before you put a mark on it, is a totality. Make a mark and you have interrupted its unity of surface—and thereby created tension. Adding more marks increases the potential for variety, or difference, while also causing areas of potential agreement, or similarity, to emerge. Your goal when drawing is to find ways to harmonize the conflict of varied forces by building on those areas of agreement so that a sense of unity may be restored.

Thus, we may say that the major polarities in a work of art are unity and variety. Unity underlies a work's impact as a complete event; variety is the agent that enlivens a work and sustains interest. In this regard, look at Figures 4-1 and 4-2. Both are complete visual statements, and yet each in its own way has sufficient variety to leaven the experience. The variations in *Short Schedule* (Fig. 4-1) consist essentially of subtle modifications among the nail groupings; in comparison, the multiple images in Figure 4-2 differ more distinctly in their tonal and textural combinations.

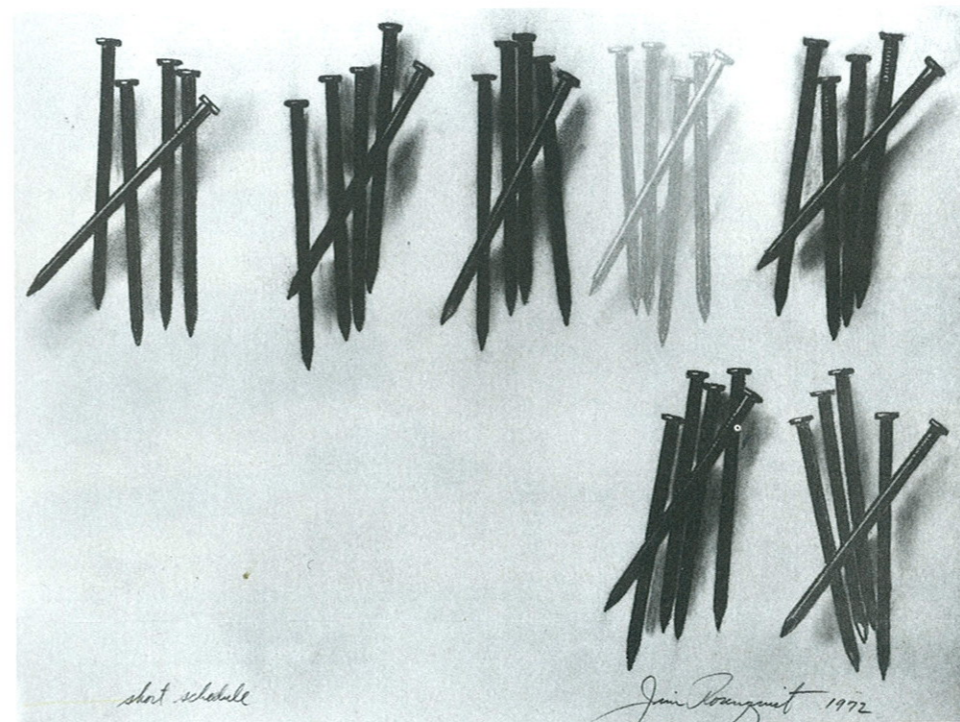
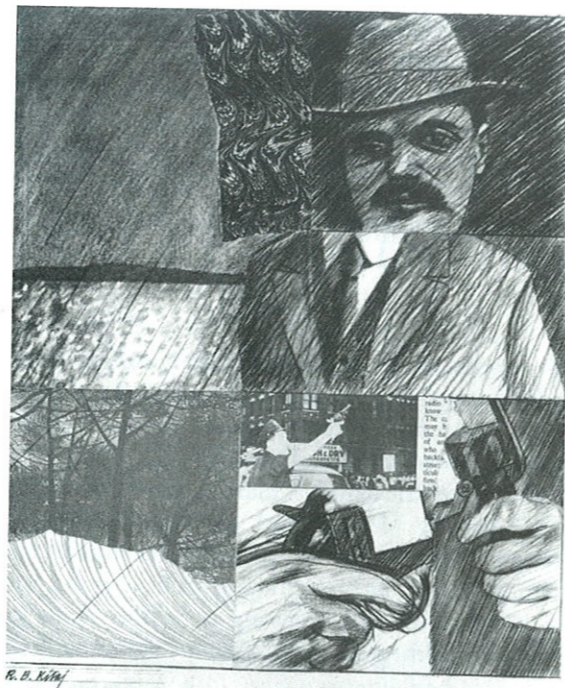


FIGURE 4-1  
JAMES ROSENQUIST  
*Short Schedule*, 1972  
Pencil, charcoal, pastel, 30 × 40"  
© James Rosenquist/Licensed by VAGA,  
New York, NY

FIGURE 4-2  
R. B. KITAJ (b. 1932)  
*Untitled: Cover of the Times Literary Supplement, 1963.*  
Cut and pasted paper, charcoal  
and pencil 15 × 10 3/4"  
© Copyright of the Artist. John B. Turner  
Fund. The Museum of Modern Art, New  
York, NY, USA. Digital Image © The  
Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by  
SCALA/Art Resource, NY (414.1969)

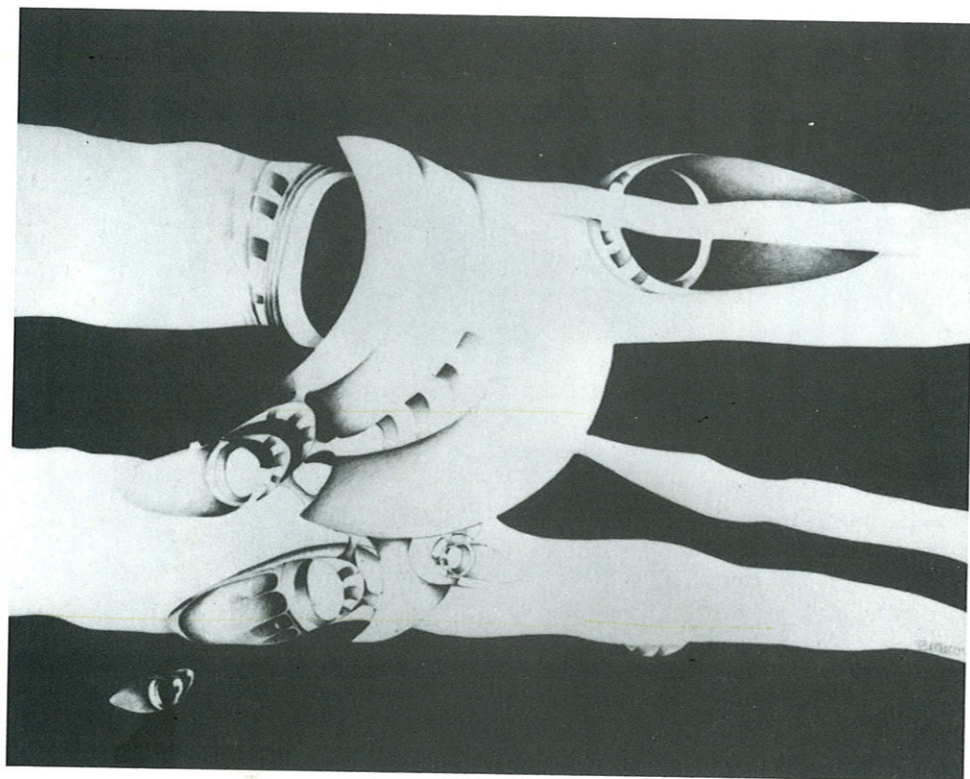


### CONTRAST

When aspects of variety in a drawing become more emphatic, contrast is the result. Contrast may refer to pronounced differences in, for example, scale, lights and darks, shape, handling of media, and activity (busy versus quiet).

In the drawing by Lee Bontecou (Fig. 4-3), look at the startling tonal contrasts and also how rounded masses are poised against larger stretches of flat, unbroken shape. As often happens when contrasts are this extreme, the areas in

FIGURE 4-3  
LEE BONTECOU  
*Untitled, 1967*  
Pencil, ink on paper, 20 × 26"  
Courtesy, Leo Castelli Gallery



Volume - contrast



FIGURE 4-4  
CHARLES SHEELER  
*Interior, Bucks County Barn, 1932*  
Crayon on paper.  
Board 20 1/4" × 24 1/4" (51.4 × 61.6 cm),  
Image 15" × 18 1/16"  
Whitney Museum of American Art,  
New York; purchase 33.78

conflict animate each other. They form a relationship based on an attraction of opposites that intensifies their respective differences and helps to bind the drawing together.

### EMPHASIS

Levels of emphasis in a drawing are achieved through aesthetic handling (giving certain areas more contrast or a prominent texture, for example) or through the unusual placement or scale of selected lines, tones, or shapes. In Figure 4-4, the silhouetted carriage acts as a focal point due to its stark value contrast, placement (just off-center), the slot-like shape of light, and the relative visual calm surrounding the canopy top. Emphasis in this area is reinforced by the series of squares that frame the carriage; the rhythms of their subtly varying axes help move the eye from the center of interest to the drawing's overall compositional architecture.

Without emphasis, the visual clues needed to establish the artist's expressive priorities would be absent. Emphasis assists viewer perception by calling attention to significant parts of a drawing. And by placing the elements in dominant and subordinate roles, emphasis lends a hierarchical structure to a drawing and thereby advances unity.

### BALANCE

Balance refers to a sense of equilibrium among all parts of a drawing. Typically, drawings are organized on the basis of either symmetrical or asymmetrical balance. The term *symmetrical balance* applies to an image that is divided into virtually mirrorlike halves. Perfect symmetry imparts a formal bearing and is therefore usually reserved for works that are emblematic in character (Fig. 4-5). Many artists who wish to reap the unity that symmetry provides but avoid the ceremonious quality often attached to perfect symmetry employ instead what is sometimes referred to as *near, or approximate, symmetry* (Fig. 4-6).

Emblem - symbol

FIGURE 4-5  
CHARLES STIVEN  
*Do Opposites Attract?*  
Charcoal and conté pencil on  
paper, 48 × 72"  
Courtesy, the artist

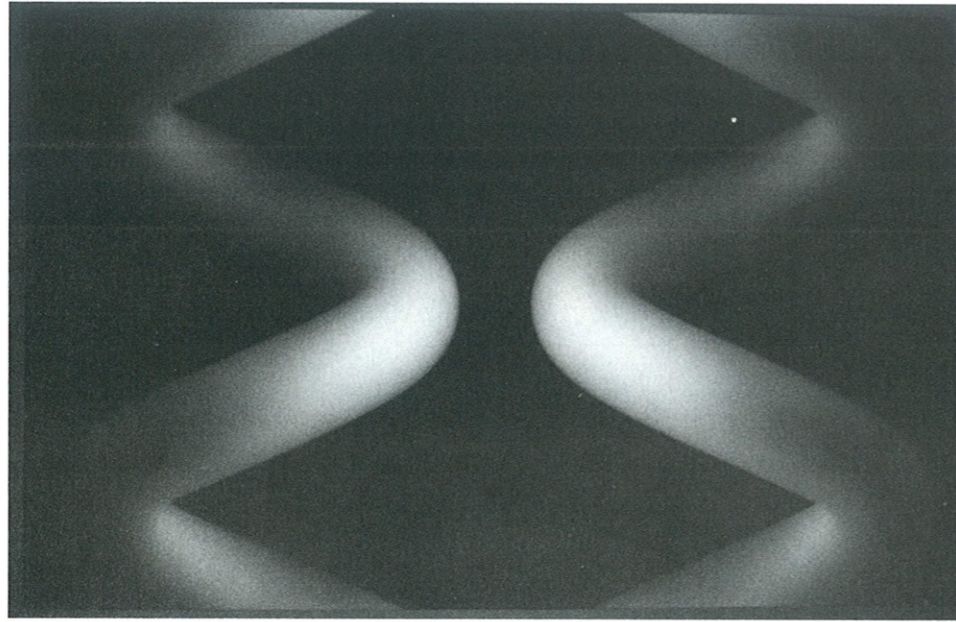
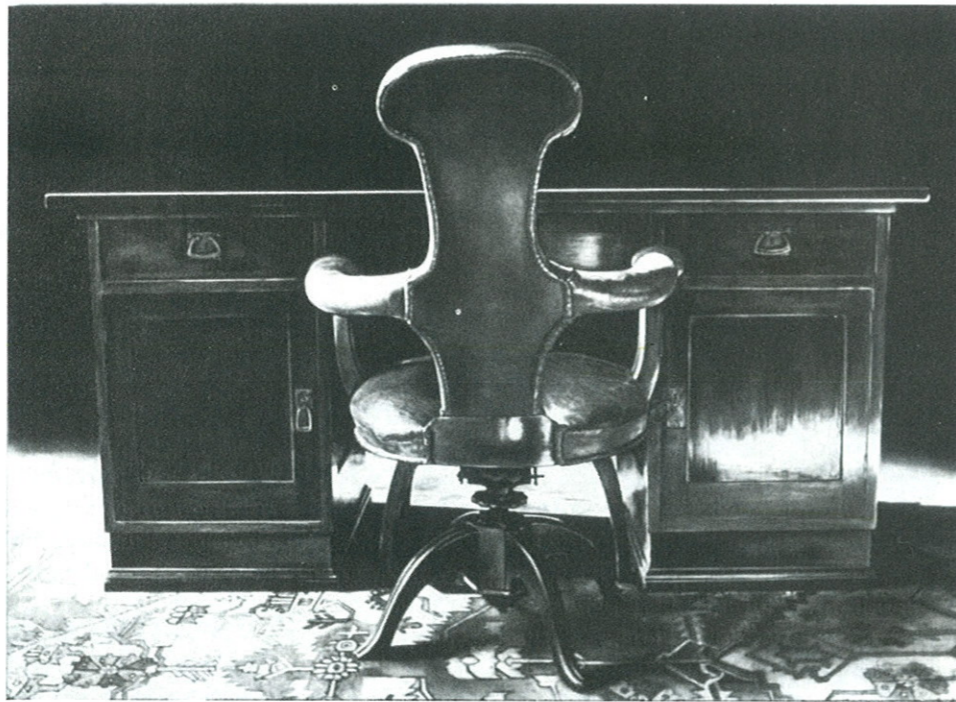


FIGURE 4-6  
JOHN VIRTUE  
No. 32 1985-86. Ink on paper on  
hard board mounted on wood,  
50 × 56"  
Courtesy of Lisson Gallery, London



Ordinarily, though, your working drawings will exhibit a diversity of image characteristics—that is, different shapes, tones, textures, sizes, directions, and so forth—unevenly distributed across the picture plane. In this case you will want to use “asymmetrical balance.” *Asymmetrical balance* entails adjusting the “visual weights” of what you draw (*visual weight* refers to how much an area attracts the eye) to bring these contrasting forces of your drawing into a state of equilibrium. For example, avoid clustering large, complex events on one side of your page without establishing areas on the other side that, although dissimilar in their visual impact, serve as a counterbalance. In Figure 4-7, for instance, note the

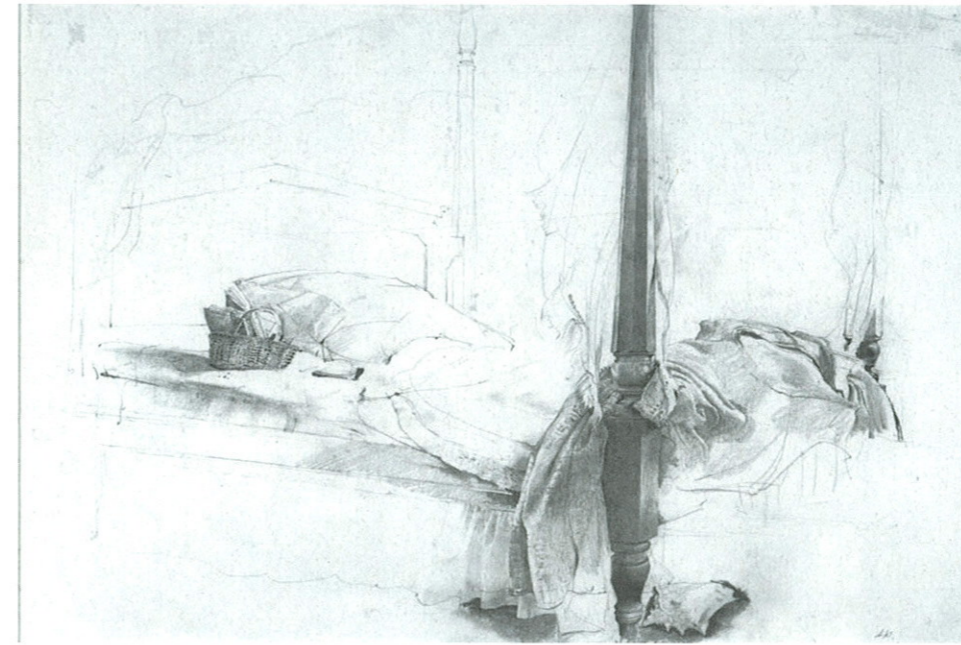


FIGURE 4-7  
ANDREW WYETH  
*The Bed, Study for Chambered Nautilus*, 1956  
Pencil on paper  
Private collection. © Andrew Wyeth. Courtesy Brandywine River Museum

prominent gesture to the left of the drawing that has its visual climax in the derailed basket and its shadow. This cantilevered weight is balanced by the intersecting forces of the dark, vertical bedpost and the diagonal, scrunched bedspread.

#### MOVEMENT

When selected lines, tones, and shapes are given emphasis in a drawing, they will often imply direction. These separate directions should be organized into a pattern of movement to fluidly guide the viewer's eye across the entire two-dimensional space of the drawing.

Look at Figure 4-8. Although there is a central focal point in this drawing, the artist has not allowed our eyes to remain idle. We are swept around the surface by a series of curves and opposing diagonals, which are given momentum by changing line weights and clusters of shaded, smaller shapes.

#### REPETITION AND RHYTHM

Artists often repeat similar shapes, lines, tones, textures, and movements to create organizational relationships in their drawings. Repeated elements do not have to reproduce each other exactly, nor must they always appear in an altogether obvious manner. In Figure 4-9, for example, the figure X on the horizon (representing a windmill) is echoed by a larger X in the foreground that is embedded in the landscape, as is made evident in Figure 4-10. This subtle use of pictorial repetition helps to unify both the two-dimensional and the illusory three-dimensional space of the drawing.

When a visual element, such as a line, shape, or unit of texture, is repeated often enough to make it a major unifying feature in a drawing, it creates what is referred to as a *motif*. In this regard, note the elliptical forms that populate Figure 4-11 in the guises of anatomical features, still-life objects, a light fixture, and a half mirror, the arcing shape of which is completed inside the figure. If a particular unit of a drawing is repeated extensively, a marked pattern will result. When a drawing is largely constituted of such a pattern, sufficient variation should occur

FIGURE 4-8  
PIRANESI  
*Capriccio*  
© The Pierpont Morgan Library, Art  
Resource, New York (1966.11:19)



FIGURE 4-9  
EMIL NOLDE  
*Landscape with Windmill*  
Brush and black printer's ink on  
tan paper, 17 1/2 × 23 1/4"  
Private collection. © Nolde-Stiftung Seebull.  
Reprinted by permission



to avoid visual boredom. In Figure 4-12, two strong motifs create contrasting patterns that enliven the surface of the drawing.

*Rhythm* is based on the measured repetition of features in a drawing. The more these related elements are stressed, especially if the accents and visual pace (or tempo) are varied, the more pronounced the rhythm will be in a work of art. Look, for example, at Figure 4-13, in which both the similar movements of the tree trunks and the intervals of negative space between them are charged with an alternation of stronger and weaker accents.

Rhythm can also be used to invest an otherwise uniform pattern with a sense of pulse. In René Magritte's *The Thought Which Sees* (Fig. 4-14), the delicate tonal changes in the marks create a unified surface that optically vibrates. This

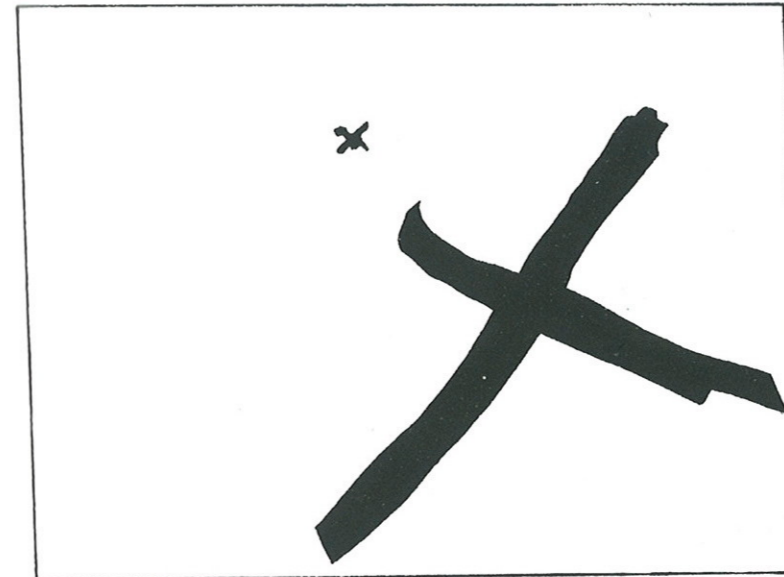


FIGURE 4-10

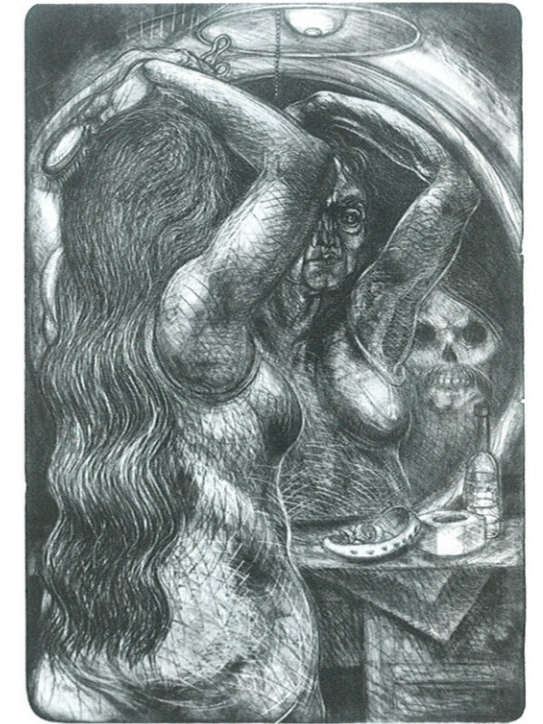


FIGURE 4-11  
LUIZ JIMENEZ  
*Abuela*, 1997  
Lithograph, edition 100, 48 × 35 1/2"  
Courtesy, ACA Galleries, New York  
© 2003 Luis Jimenez/Artists Rights Society  
(ARS), New York



FIGURE 4-12  
JACK BEAL  
*Fat Landscape*, 1967  
Charcoal with stamping on ivory  
card paper, 501 mm × 650 mm  
Photo courtesy of George Adams Gallery,  
New York. Collection: The Art Institute of  
Chicago (1968.42).



FIGURE 4-13  
BILL RICHARDS  
*Fern Swamp*, 1974  
Graphite on paper, 17 × 21½"  
Courtesy, Nancy Hoffman Gallery, New York

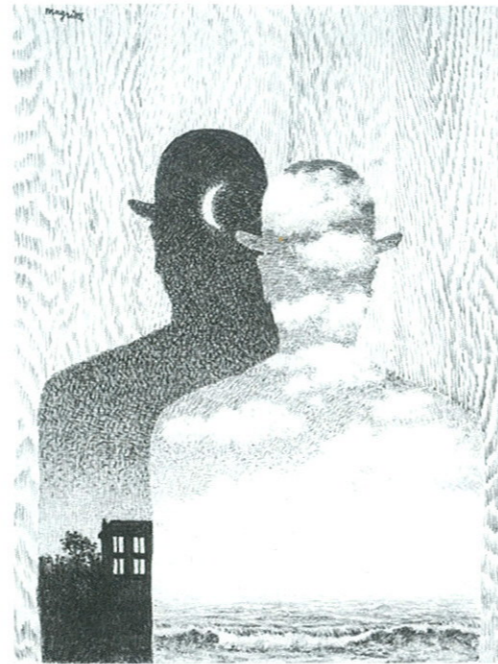


FIGURE 4-14  
RENÉ MAGRITTE (1898–1967)  
*The Thought Which Sees*, 1965  
Graphite on paper, 15¼ × 11¼"  
The Museum of Modern Art, New York.  
Digital Image © The Museum of Modern  
Art/Licensed by SCALA/Art Resource, NY.  
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Charles B. Benenson.  
© 2003 C. Herscovici, Brussels/Artists Rights  
Society (ARS), New York (261.1966)

work is also a prime example of how organizational properties in a drawing can extend meaning: The meter of the finely woven pattern of marks recalls the hypnotic rhythms of the depicted waves and rolling clouds.

#### ECONOMY

From time to time, you may find a drawing you are working on is too complicated and, as a result, appears disorganized. In that case, it will be important for you to rework certain aspects of the drawing, strengthening latent areas of similarity and eliminating nonessential areas of difference. By this means, you will clarify relationships so that a simpler arrangement is achieved, thus imparting to your drawing an economy of expression. Economy is not based on limiting the number of things portrayed, however. Instead it depends on each part of a work contributing to a larger system of order, as in Figure 4-15. In this drawing the visual chaos in the wake of a tornado has been organized into distinct passages, based on arrangements of tone, scale, and pattern. Note how the jumble of dissimilar forms in the center foreground along with the overturned Shasta trailer may be regarded as a single, consolidated shape occupying roughly the middle of the picture.

**Exercise 4A** Here are three simple exercises that will provide countless hours of challenging drawing in your sketchbook.

**Drawing 1.** Choose a subject that clearly exhibits a particular design principle. A landscape, for example, may be perceived as having asymmetrical balance, and ivy growing on a wall may demonstrate the concept of pattern. Carefully observe and draw your subject, paying special attention to its particular design implications and how they may be extended. Refer to the drawing of a piano (Fig. 4-16), in which the contrast between large and small parts is emphasized.



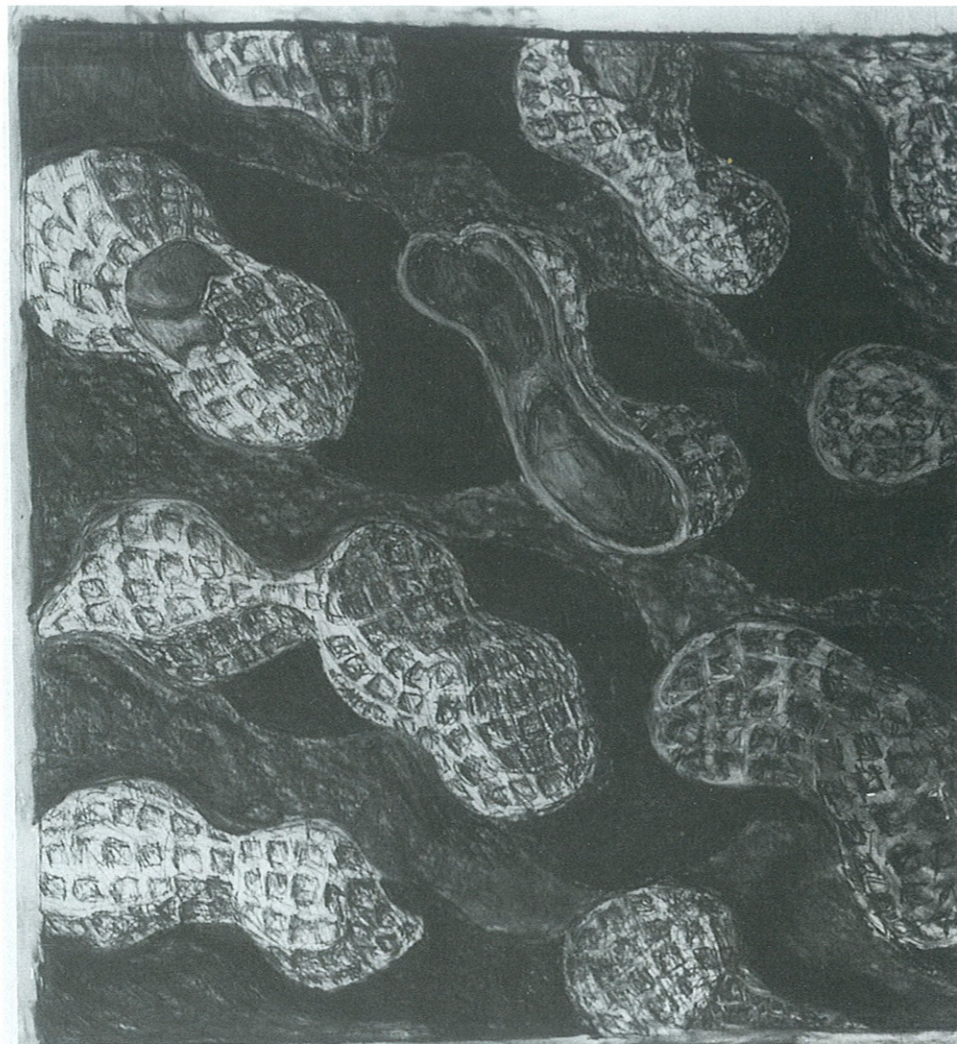
FIGURE 4-15  
SCOTT WHITE  
*Shasta*, 1999  
Oil on canvas, 97 × 67.5"  
Courtesy, the artist



FIGURE 4-16  
CHEREEN TANNER, Arizona State  
University  
Student drawing: contrasting size  
relationships as an organizing  
device  
Charcoal, 18 × 24"  
Courtesy, the artist

**Drawing 2.** Choose a common object as the source of a motif for your drawing. Repeat the object, or selected parts of it, across your paper. Provide some variety by, for instance, turning the object over to depict its other side, as in Figure 4-17, or overlapping some of the images. Alternatively, you may wish to draw your objects in different visual guises, that is, change their scale, clarity, positive-negative status, and so forth. Or perhaps as the drawing proceeds, you may wish to place more emphasis on certain areas to establish a center of interest and also to develop paths of movement to guide the eye through your drawing.

FIGURE 4-17  
GREGORY BOAS, Pratt Institute  
Student drawing: peanut motif  
4 × 4"  
Courtesy, the artist



*Drawing 3.* The goal of this drawing is to combine two or more design ideas without sacrificing either unity or variety. In Figure 4-18, the generally globular shape of the vegetables constitutes a unifying motif, a unity that is strengthened by the near-symmetrical arrangement. But note how the linear stalks of the beet top provide a strong contrast to the relatively broad, gleaming sides of the eggplant.

### *Gesture Drawing as a Means to Design*

In Chapter 1, "The Three-Dimensional Space of a Drawing," gesture drawing was presented as the primary way for artists to grasp the essential visual character of an object or a space. But a gesture drawing may also serve as the foundation, or "rough," for the more sustained development of a particular image.

At times, artists will divide a page into several formats to test, in a sort of gestural "shorthand," how a subject may best be laid out in preparation for a sustained work (Fig. 4-19).

But just as frequently, marks from gestural explorations serve as the underpinning for a work in progress and so are not apparent in the finished product. The gestural spirit of search and discovery remains embedded, however, in the naturalness with which the subject has been represented.



FIGURE 4-18  
MARCIA SMARTT, Middle Tennessee  
State University  
Student drawing: still life  
combining motif, contrast, and  
repetition of forms  
Charcoal, 28 × 22"  
Courtesy, the artist

A particularly illuminating example of this may be found in Figure 4-20. In this drawing, Giacometti, the twentieth-century Swiss artist, has penetrated below the surface detail of a section of a fifteenth-century painting by Hubert and Jan van Eyck (Fig. 4-21) to expose the work's latent gestural energy and structural conviction.

The Giacometti is thrilling to look at not only because it is a beautiful drawing in its own right but also because it functions as a sort of x-ray, interpreting for the onlooker what takes place inside another work of art. This latter point is especially significant for us, since it suggests that artists may use gesture drawing as a tool to diagnose the basic state of their *own* works in progress. Let us suppose, for example, that after a drawing is well under way you decide that parts of your image are lacking in structure or that the overall design is in some way deficient. In response, you might very well make gestural studies on separate sheets of paper so as to analyze these shortcomings prior to resolving them in the actual work.

Giacometti's interpretive drawing has another far-reaching implication for the drawing student. You will notice that he deliberately made a format border to enclose the excerpt of the Ghent altarpiece he chose to draw. His awareness of the rectangular shape within which to conduct his search suggests that gestural activity may be intimately linked with the design conception of a drawing.

In fact, we may say that design in a drawing is often initiated when gestural responses to a subject are laid out and scaled to the limits of the drawing's format. Barlach's gestural study (Fig. 4-22) has admirably taken into account the overall proportions and rudimentary structural properties of this running figure. But what interests us most here is the way in which the figure's extension into space coincides with the paper's edge. This is significant because, while Barlach took

FIGURE 4-19  
MAX BECKMANN  
*Study for the Night*  
Pen and ink  
Allan Frumkin Collection of Prints by Max Beckmann. Photograph © 2003 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

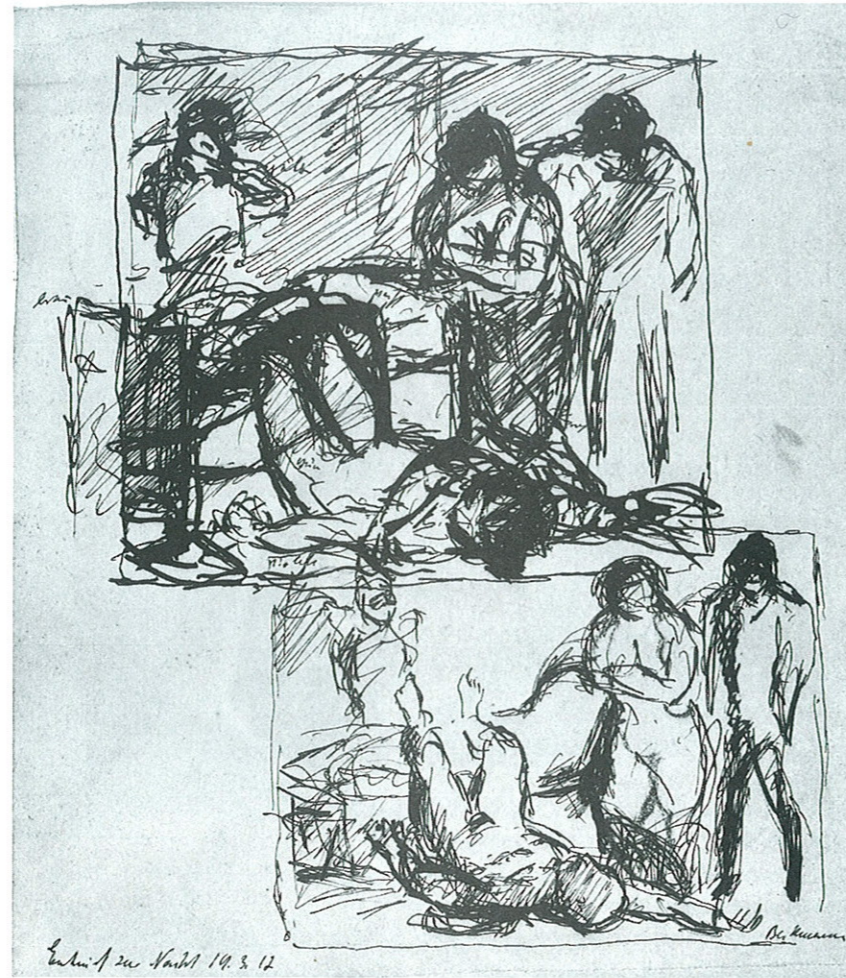
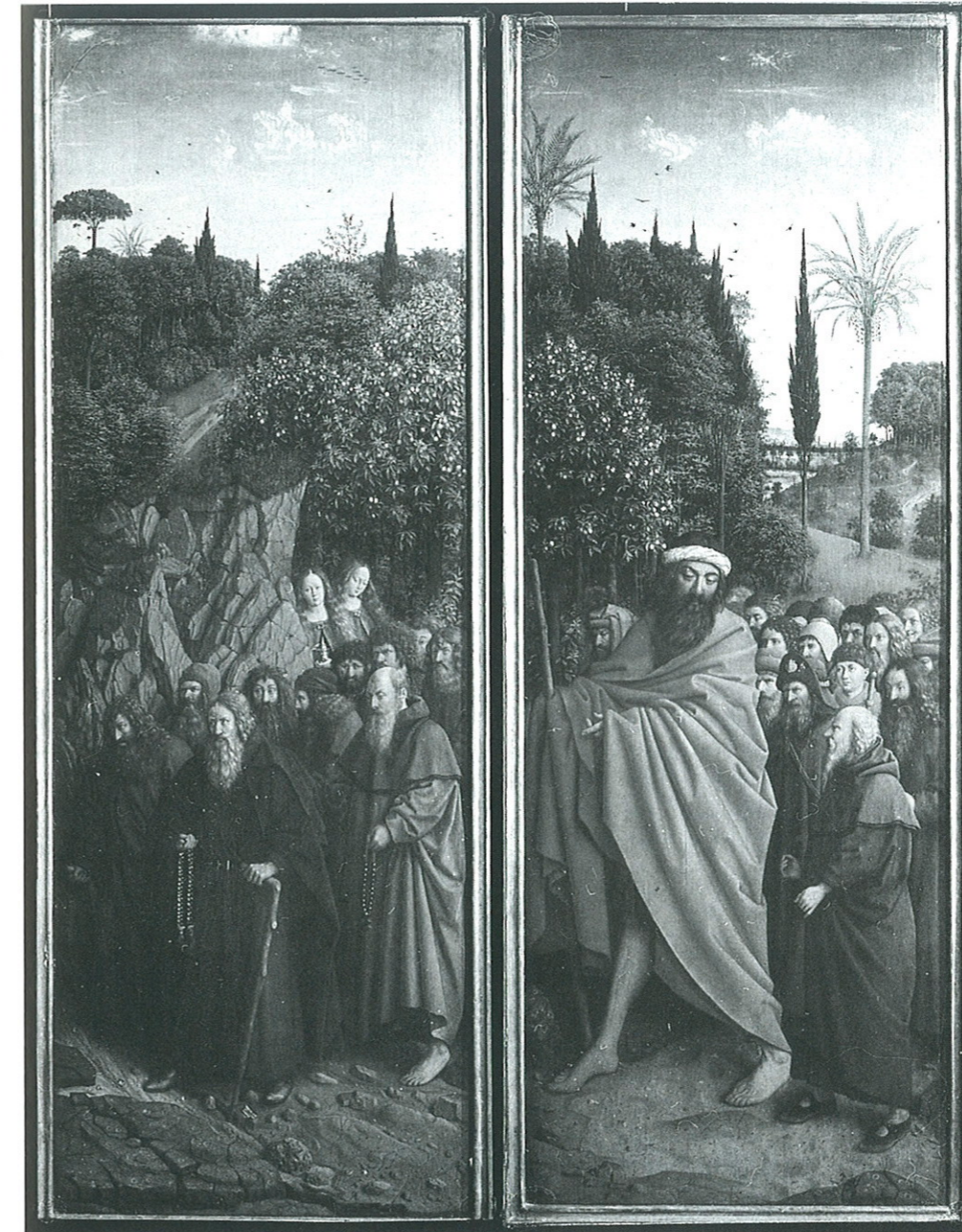


FIGURE 4-20  
ALBERTO GIACOMETTI  
*Landscape*  
Pen on paper  
© 2003 Artists Rights Society (ARS),  
New York/ADAGP, Paris



FIGURE 4-21  
HUBERT AND JAN VAN EYCK  
"The Adoration of the Mystic  
Lamb," detail of *The Ghent  
Altarpiece*, front right-hand  
panels, 1432  
Tempera and oil on wood  
Giraudon, Art Resource, New York



visual possession of the man's image, he simultaneously took physical possession of his drawing surface.

This simultaneous seizing of the gesture of the subject along with the total engagement of the picture's surface is typical of gesture drawing at its best. In the heat of the moment, the artist's own eye and arm generalize the expressive attitudes and organization of parts that are characteristic of the subject. At the same time, the artist is intuitively aware of how the placement and directional energies of the emerging image relate to the rectangular page on which it is drawn. While in the act of drawing, the edges of the drawing constitute the boundaries of the artist's visually created world, so the artist feels the necessity of making the image within those bounds as absolutely real and immediate as possible. Consequently, we are often excited when looking at a gesture drawing, at seeing so much energy packed into a small, flat space. This principle applies even to the drawing of nonobjective images, as may be seen in the gestural study by sculptor

FIGURE 4-22  
ERNST BARLACH  
*Running Man*, 1918  
Charcoal on white drawing paper,  
22.8 × 30 cm  
Schult III, 1296. © Ernst Barlach  
Lizenzverwaltung Ratzeburg, Hamburg,  
Germany. Photo: Thormann



Richard Serra (Fig. 4-23), in which a quadrilateral form has been dramatically represented.

Beginners often start with single objects to get the feel of gesture drawing and its design implications (Fig. 4-24). But the gestural approach is equally appropriate for subjects comprised of multiple objects, such as still lifes, interiors (Fig. 4-25), and landscapes (Fig. 4-26). Drawing multiple objects challenges the artist to empathize with the unique gestural expression of each part of a subject. And as individual gestures are realized, the artist must be alert to correspondences that emerge between areas, since they will suggest larger gestural patterns, which may in turn point to options for organizing the drawing overall.

Look, for example, at *The Farm* (Fig. 4-27) by John Bennett. Each area has its own kind of gestural shorthand, producing a work that is fresh and altogether unstudied in expression. But as an outgrowth of its spontaneity, the trailing lines from each major division of the page create a zigzagging pattern that purposely binds together the spatial illusion and surface design of this drawing.

FIGURE 4-23  
RICHARD SERRA  
*Zonder Titel*  
Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller, Amsterdam,  
The Netherlands. © 2003 Richard  
Serra/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

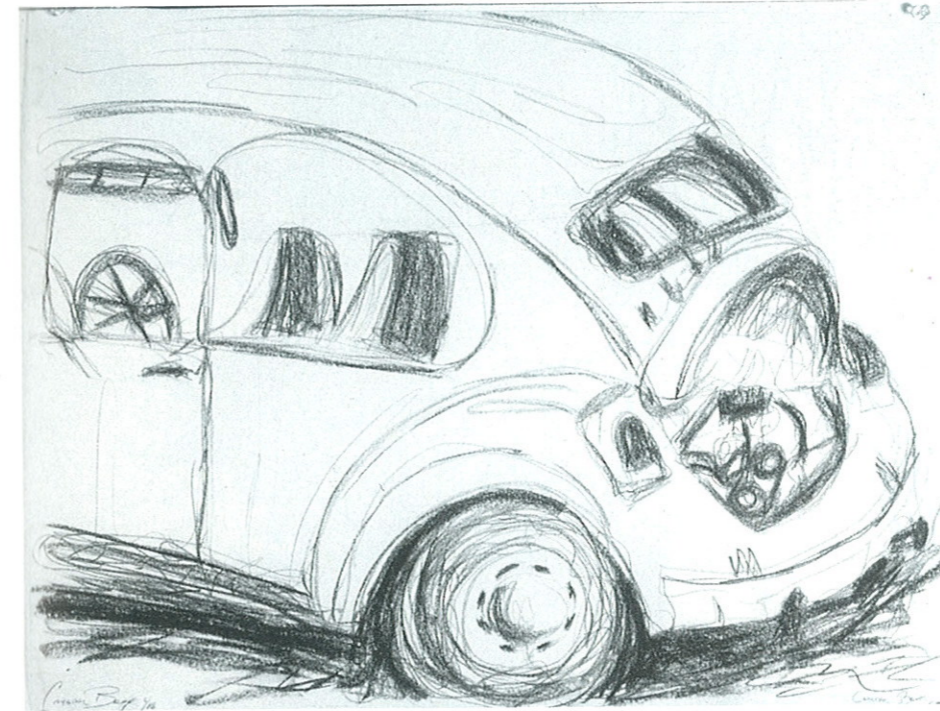
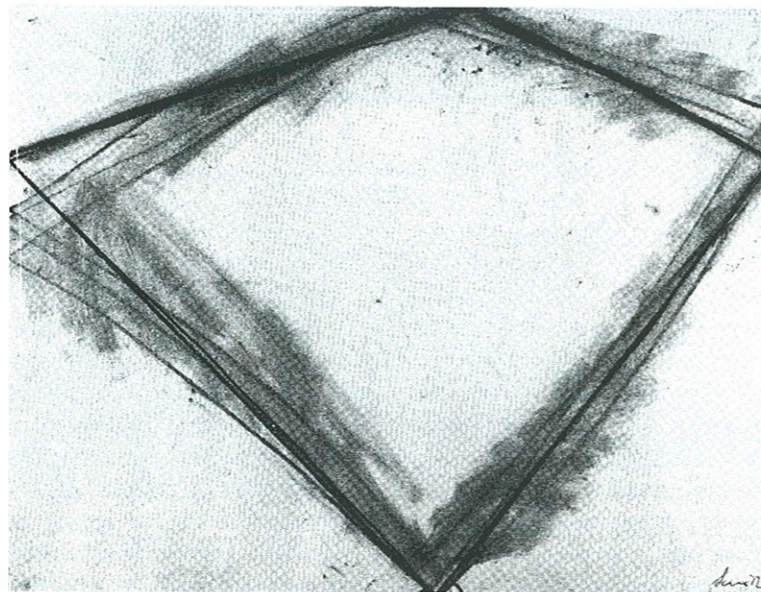


FIGURE 4-24  
CRYSTAL BRAY, Arizona State  
University  
Student drawing: gesture drawing  
of a single object  
Charcoal, 18 × 24"  
Courtesy, the artist



FIGURE 4-25  
EDGAR DEGAS  
*Study for Interior*  
Pencil  
Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris

It is interesting to see how the drawing by Gaspar van Wittel (Fig. 4-28) retains a similar gestural freshness. In this work, the slashing marks and abruptly brushed areas of wash summarize the major spatial planes. At the same time, they describe the edges of a mountain range, cuts in the landscape, and the underside of a mass of vegetation that advances toward the picture plane. But much as with Bennett's drawing, these same marks are also the agents of an inventive design strategy in which positive and negative zones are melded into a cohesive unit.

To clarify this last point, compare Figure 4-28 with Figure 4-29. Note that van Wittel divided his page into three major areas, and also see how he grouped the dominant dark masses into a tilted, rectangular shape that rests on the bottom edge of the drawing, poised, it would seem, to move into spectator space.

FIGURE 4-26  
FRANK AUERBACH  
*Study for Mornington Crescent*, 1967  
Pencil, 9 7/8 × 11 3/4"  
Private Collection, New York



FIGURE 4-27  
JOHN BENNETT  
*The Farm*, 1981  
Pencil, 9 × 6"  
Courtesy, the artist



**Exercise 4B** These two projects will urge you toward a more gestural conception in your work.

**Drawing 1.** Using an interior as your subject, choose a viewpoint that offers a dynamic spatial movement. Taking a broad medium, such as lecturer's chalk or a good-sized brush charged with ink or paint, gesturally summarize the space of the room and the spatial points represented by objects, while at the same time taking possession of the entire drawing format (Fig. 4-30).



FIGURE 4-28  
GASPAR VAN WITTEL  
*View of Tivoli*, 1700-1710  
Pen and brown ink  
Courtesy, Courtauld Institute Gallery,  
Somerset House, London

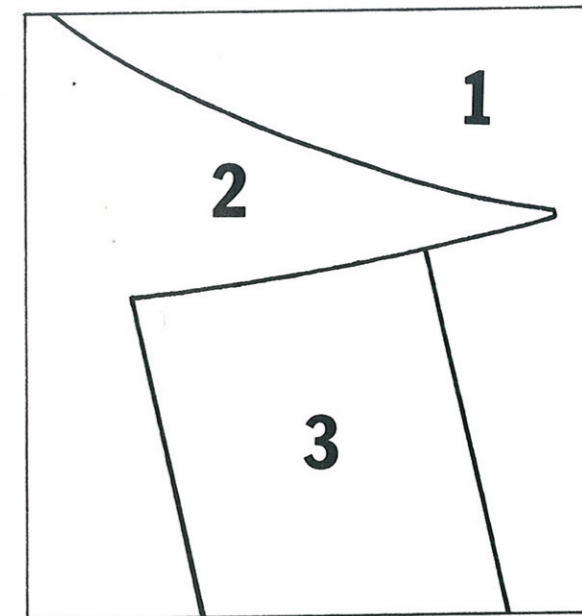


FIGURE 4-29

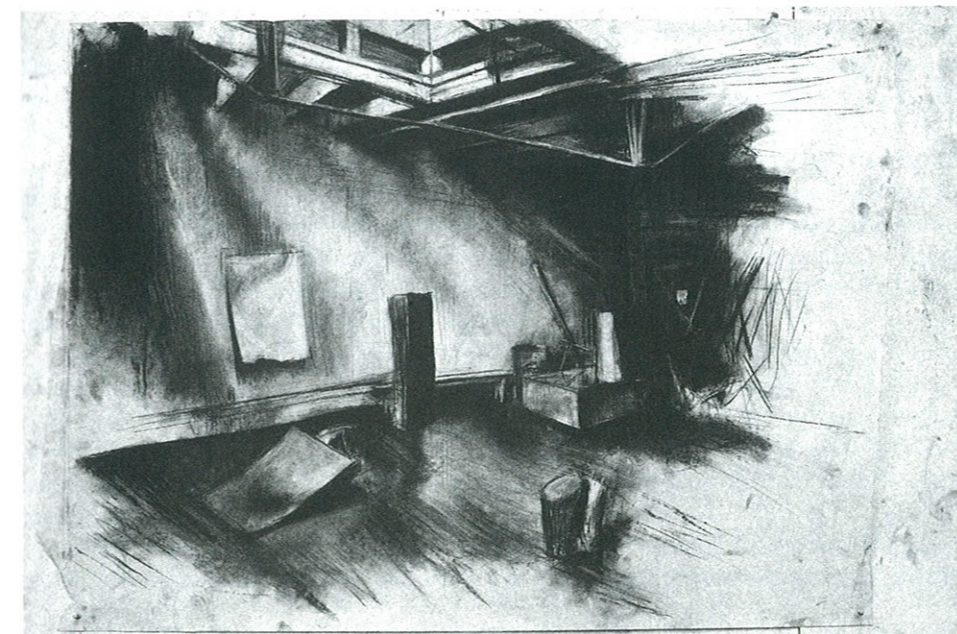


FIGURE 4-30  
Student drawing: gesture drawing  
used as a means to design