

Introduction

In this course we will be exploring elements of visual vocabulary - line, shape, color, for example - and then developing compositions in series that utilize a limited, or contained, group of elements.

In some lessons we will consider Unity and Variety (in the extreme), Focal Area (or lack thereof), Balance (or imbalance), and other aspects of compositions outlined in your handout. In other lessons we'll simply be working with a specific visual vocabulary and exploring compositional possibilities.

In each of these lessons I encourage you to explore the extremes, not the safe zone or the “balanced” composition. Find the place where unity falls apart in favor of variety or vice versa; where focal area is obliterated; where a composition looks *out* of balance. The point is to explore the components of visual expression to see how they relate to each other and to the composition as a whole.

Lesson 1: Line

In this lesson we will be exploring line, and paying particular attention to how line relates to itself, the edges of the page, how different lines relate to each other, and to a painted ground.

Explorations

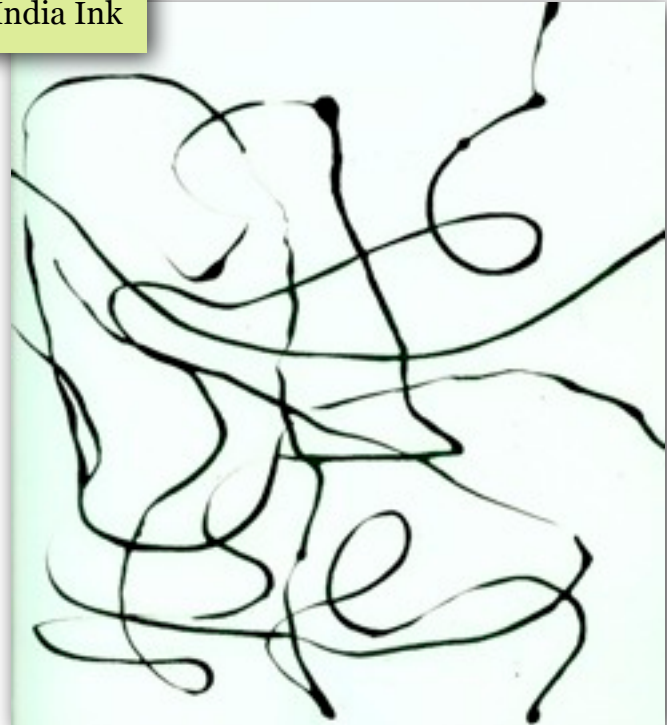
1. Exploring Line for Variety and Expressive Qualities

This is a preliminary exercise which you may have already done if you've taken Sketchbook Practice. Consider it optional. However, if you have never explored your drawing materials in this way, I highly recommend it.

Make lines across a page in as many different materials as you have. In the example to the right, from top to bottom the materials used are: oil pastel, pencil, Pitt pen with brush tip, felt-tip pen, 2B graphite, 9B graphite, china marker (or grease pencil), water-



Lines with India Ink



soluble graphite pencil, charcoal, watercolor crayon (Caran d’Ache Neocolor II), watercolor pencil.

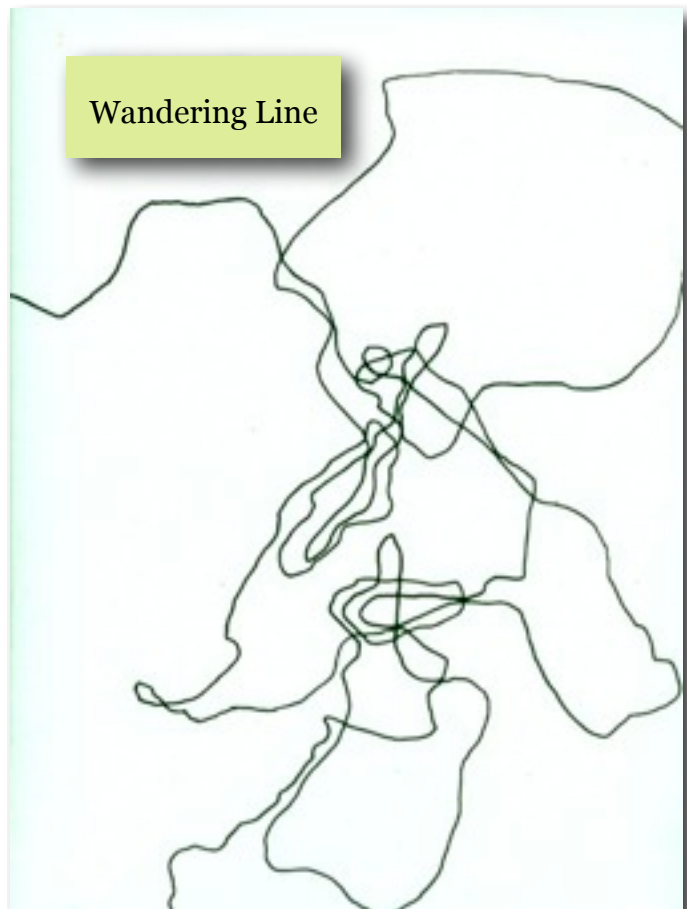
In the video I also demonstrate two ways of making lines with India ink. Try those techniques with any kind of ink or watercolor. We are looking for quality of line, so stick to black and grey; we’ll explore color in Lesson 3.

2. Wandering Line

Watch the next section of the video on “Wandering Line”. Try this on a comfortable size of paper (I’m using 9”x12” cheap drawing paper), and do several versions of it using different drawing materials. The point here is to pay attention to how the line relates to itself and to the edges of the page. It can:

- create shapes
- describe a journey

Wandering Line

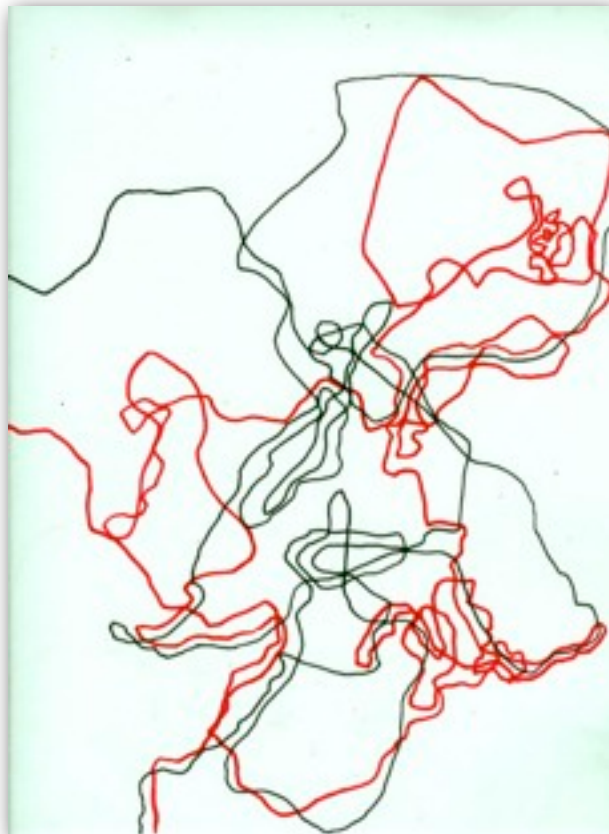


- cross itself
- run parallel to its previous path
- graze itself, or create a tangent to itself
- create dense areas of shapes and loops
- create large, spacious area

Move your drawing instrument slowly, as I do in the video, and see what the line does to the page. See how much *variety* you can get with one line using one drawing tool.

3. Line Dance

In this exercise we start with one of your Wandering Line drawings. Watch the video, and proceed as demonstrated. Create a second line - preferably in a different color or contrasting material - and let it wander, mindfully, in relation to the previous line as well as in relation to itself and to the edges of the page.



These are two examples of Line Dance.

4. Line Dance Over Painted Ground

- Watch the next section of the video and create a painted ground. Do several of these. Remember to keep the edges soft and the color contrasts low.
- First create a Wandering Line over the painted ground, letting your line pay attention to its relationship to the painted ground.
- Now do a second line, creating a Line Dance. This second line addresses its relationship to the first line, to the painted ground, and to itself.



Each line addresses the painted ground beneath, **but does not slavishly outline shapes** or emphasize transitions. The line can do its own thing as well as play with the other elements.



Another Line Dance with graphite and oil pastel

Line Dance, wet-in-wet ground, in ink and watercolor crayon



Compositions

1. Preliminary Studies

Now that you have explored line and how it relates to a few other elements of composition (other lines, painted ground, edges of the page), create a series of compositions in which line is the primary element. Your total vocabulary includes lines made with any drawing materials or paint, and painted grounds in which transitions between colors are very soft. No hard-edged shapes. Your lines may describe shapes, but don't enhance the shape aspect by coloring them in.

First, do several of these as exploratory studies, without any particular direction. See what kind of line vocabulary develops. What tools do you prefer? What colors of paint? Which brushes? What size of paper do you like to work on? Make as many of these studies as it takes to establish a few preferences. Then choose a set of parameters, or elements, to work with in your series. Keep it simple, and remember that LINE is the predominant element, not shape and color.



Here are a few of my preliminary studies. For the line work I used Pitt pen, white gel pen, paint, and watercolor crayon.



2. Working in a Series

Based on your studies, create a series of compositions that explore your chosen visual vocabulary. Not every piece in the series has to include everything - each material, color, shape, line type, etc. But limiting your elements, colors, materials, will give you parameters within which to work, and room to explore their potential.

In the three pieces below (chosen from eight in the series), I chose a color range for the painted ground: white, gray, quinacridone gold, and purple. My lines are made with a brush (watered down black acrylic paint), two sizes of Pitt pens, and the white gel pen. I used wandering-type lines as well as enclosed amorphous organic shapes. This constitutes the vocabulary of my series.

We are explicitly NOT concerned about focal point, balance, etc. This is more like an open ended exploration than a series of finished pieces. DO discipline yourself to stick with the vocabulary you have chosen (in these pieces I was dying to use solid shapes, more colors, more different kinds of lines, etc., but refrained), and keep it simple. Do *more* pieces rather than more complex pieces. We'll get to complexity soon enough, as well as finished compositions.

Don't forget to have fun!

