Drawing Techniques by Old Masters & Contemporary Artists
A beautiful, sensuous surface is one of the principle goals of meticulous drawing. For the past 500 years, certain artists in each era have maintained fine rendering and attention to surface as a priority in their work. Making these beautiful drawings requires different skills from making good paintings. Many talented painters lack the light touch and sensitivity to produce a sensuous surface on paper. Perhaps the ultimate tool in the meticulous technique is a medium called "silverpoint".
The characteristics of silverpoint are:
1) subtlety of tone in the lighter end of the tonal scale
2) single-hatch drawing resulting in an extremely uniform, sensuous surface
Artists, whether Old Master or contemporary, who are most successful in silverpoint drawing are those with a deep concern for beauty of surface. So an artist such as Leonardo, who was perhaps the most sensitive draftsperson in all art history, is much more successful in silverpoint than an artist such as Michelangelo who is relatively heavy-handed in his drawing.
The influence of the great Italian Renaissance artist Michelangelo spread far beyond his own time. His red chalk study for one of the figures on the Sistine Chapel ceiling is an extraordinary example of his conception of the idealized male nude. In making his drawing, Michelangelo depended both on the live model and on his understanding of the idealized anatomy of classical sculpture. Although the two poses are very different, both have forward curving torsos that emphasize the muscles of the chest and abdomen. The pose comes from a famous fragment of classical sculpture that both artists knew, the Belvedere Torso.

Michelangelo Buonarroti (Italian, 1475-1564)
Study for the Nude Youth over the Prophet Daniel, 1510-11
Red chalk, 13 3/16 x 9 3/16 inches
Annibale Carracci understood this as well when he drew his figure of Hercules almost one hundred years later.

Annibale Carracci (Italian, 1560-1609)
_Hercules Resting_, 1595-97
Black chalk heightened with white, squared in black chalk on right, 13 15/16 x 20 5/8 inches
Hatching is the repetition of parallel lines to create broad areas of tone, as we see in this detail of a leg in a Michelangelo figure drawing. In Cross hatching the artist adds another series of lines that cross the first set, creating even denser areas of tone, as seen in Dürer’s arm of Eve.

Michelangelo Buonarroti (Italian, 1475-1564)
*Detail from Study for the Nude Youth over the Prophet Daniel, 1510-11 (recto)*
Red chalk and black chalk on beige laid paper, 13 3/16 x 9 3/16 inches
*Figure Studies for the Sistine Ceiling (verso)*
Red chalk heightened with traces of white

Albrecht Dürer (German, 1471-1528)
*Detail from Arm of Eve, 1507*
Point of brush and gray and black wash, brush and gray and black wash, heightened with white gouache, on blue laid paper, 33.4 x 26.7 centimeters
The Shape of an Arm

Made almost four centuries apart, these two sheets show how the tradition and function of drawings has been continuous in the history of Western art. Durer and Degas both drew in order to understand how to convincingly render the arm of a female figure they planned to use later in a finished oil painting. However, they used very different techniques to achieve this end.

Both artists wanted to understand how light falls on a form and how to make it appear three-dimensional. Durer used a network of lines—known as crosshatching—made with the point of a brush. Degas, on the other hand, used black chalk, which he could blend to make subtle tonal variations.

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Albrecht Dürer (German, 1471-1528)
Arm of Eve, 1507
Point of brush and gray and black wash, heightened with white gouache, 13 1/8 x 10 ‡ inches

Edgar Degas (French, 1834-1917)
Angel Blowing a Trumpet, 1857-59
Black chalk, 17 æ x 21 15/16 inches
Gift of the Print Club of Cleveland 1976.130

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Arm of Eve, 1507

Angel Blowing a Trumpet, 1857-59
Hatching: One of the most common ways for an artist to suggest volume and depth, or the depiction of shadow, by which closely drawn parallel lines are grouped together.

In the case of cross-hatching, the parallel lines are crossed by other sets of lines which create a dense grid-like pattern.
In this drawing, 18th century French painter Jean Honore Fragonard creates a beautifully sensuous surface with the single-hatch technique.
Raphael’s drawing with delicate combination of lines and hatching.
**Stumping, Stump work**

Artists use a stump, a tightly rolled piece of leather or paper, to manipulate and blend dry media like chalk or charcoal. Piazzetta used a stump to vary the rich blacks in this detail from a crayon drawing.

Giovanni Battista  
(Giambattista) Piazzetta  
(Italian, 1682-1754)  
*Detail from A Young Woman Buying a Pink from a Young Man, about 1740*  
Black crayon (wetted and rubbed) heightened with white chalk, on blue laid paper (faded to green-gray), 42.7 x 54.9 centimeters
Wash

Wash is a general term that generally refers to diluted ink applied with a brush. In this detail from Guercino's drawing of Venus and Cupid, the face of Venus shows how, by varying the density of the wash by varying his brushstroke, the artist achieved tonal gradation.

Giovanni Francesco Barbieri, called Guercino (Italian, 1591-1666)
Detail from Venus and Cupid, 1615-17
Pen and brown ink and brush and brown wash over red chalk, on cream laid paper, 25.5 x 39.4 centimeters
Metalpoint

As its name implies, metalpoint is a stylus made of metal that actually leaves small deposits on the paper, which must be specially prepared so that it has a slightly rough surface. Metalpoint is made of several different soft metals, including gold, bronze, or, more commonly, silver. This drawing by Raphael on paper prepared with a pink ground is in silverpoint.

Raffaello Santi, called Raphael (Italian, 1483-1520)
Detail from Studies of a Seated Female, Child’s Head, and Three Studies of a Baby, about 1507-8
Silverpoint on cream laid paper prepared with a pink ground, 12 x 15.3 cm.
Cortona’s idealized head of a youth shows the extremely refined shading that is possible with black chalk. Cortona used a combination of parallel hatching and stumping to achieve the fine gradations of surface tone that give this head three-dimensional volume.

Pietro Berrettini, called Pietro da Cortona
(Italian, 1596-1669)
Detail from Study for the Head of St. Michael, 1633
Black chalk on beige laid paper, perimeter mounted to cream laid paper, 19 × 16.8 centimeters Leonard C.
Red Chalk

Red Chalk is a naturally occurring clay that gets its red color from iron oxide (hematite). It has been popular since the Renaissance and can produce both sharp contours and delicate, smooth modeling, as in this drawing by Jusepe de Ribera.

Jusepe de Ribera
(Spanish, 1591-1652)
Detail from St. Sebastian,
1626-30
Red chalk with pen and
brown ink, on cream laid
paper, 17.3 x 12.4
centimeters
The French term "Trois Crayons" (three chalks) refers to a technique using black, red, and white chalk together to achieve a wide range of values, black being the darkest tone, red the middle tone, and white the lightest. This technique became especially celebrated in the drawings of Antoine Watteau, but this sheet is an example by Watteau's mentor, Charles de La Fosse.

Charles de La Fosse (French, 1636-1716)
Detail from St. John the Evangelist, about 1700-2
Black, red, and white chalk on beige laid paper, 42 x 26.2 centimeters
This pen and ink drawing by Rembrandt shows the artist using hatching in a broad way. His marks are relatively strong with the multi-directional strokes giving a visual rhythm—rather than a refined continuous surface—to the drawing.
Before metal was available, artists typically used quill pens made from bird feathers, and dipped the nubs in ink in order to draw. Pen lines can be loose and scratchy, as in the detail on the left, from a sheet by Fra Filippo Lippi, or careful and regular: in the next detail, we see how Degas tested his pen before he drew.

Fra Filippo Lippi (Italian, about 1406-1469)
Detail from *The Funeral of St. Stephen*, about 1460
Pen and brown ink with brush and brown wash and traces of stylus over traces of black chalk, on beige laid paper lined with cream laid paper, 24.9 x 19.3 centimeters
Squaring allows an artist to transfer a design, square by square, from one surface to another. Varying the relative scale of the grids allows one to change the scale of the composition during transfer. We often see it on drawings used to plan larger compositions, as in this black chalk sheet by Domenichino.

Domenico Zampieri, called Domenichino (Italian, 1581-1641)
Temperance, 1628-30
Black chalk heightened with white chalk, squared with black chalk, on four sheets (joined) of light gray laid paper, laid down on cream laid paper, perimeter mounted to a tertiary support of laid paper, 59.2 x 43.7 centimeters
François Boucher: Early and Late Styles

These two sheets by the French rococo artist François Boucher show his early and late style of drawing. He made the fountain design toward the beginning of his career, using black and white chalk to create a decorative play of forms that follow the French style of ornament known as rocaille. The later drawing shows a looser technique, using pen lines and freely brushed ink washes. The artist drew it in preparation for a devotional religious painting that he never finished, and the sheet may have been one of the last works he completed before his death.

François Boucher (French, 1703-1770)
Fountain with Two Tritons Blowing Conch Shells, about 1736
Black and red chalk and black chalk wash, heightened with white chalk, 14 13/16 x 8 11/16 inches

François Boucher (French, 1703-1770)
The Presentation in the Temple, about 1770
Pen and brown ink, brush and brown wash, and black chalk, heightened with white paint, 12 5/8 x 7 7/8 inches
Expressive Heads

Both of these drawings are examples of a practice exercise known as the "expressive head" (tête d'expression), in which the artist focuses in on the face and on how the features and musculature change with different emotions. The idea of studying expression developed in the late 1600s with the French painter Charles Le Brun, who developed an entire system for drawing different emotional states. The drawing shown here by Benjamin West was directly inspired by Le Brun and is meant to represent "Terror." The red-chalk drawing by Greuze, on the other hand, is more psychologically subtle, representing a combination of shame and anger.

Jean-Baptiste Greuze
(French, 1725-1805)
Head of Caracalla, about 1768
Red chalk, 15 ° x 11 15/16 inches

Benjamin West (American, worked in England, 1738-1820)
Head of a Screaming Man, 1792
Black crayon, 12 11/16 x 16 inches
Dudley P. Allen Fund 1967.130.a
The representation of social class is often an important aspect of portraiture. Here, the French artist Ingres shows the wealthy Madame Raoul Rochette looking comfortable in the height of fashion, with enormous "leg of mutton" sleeves, her hair tightly bundled at the top of her head in a style known then as an "Apollo's knot." Toulouse Lautrec's Laundress, on the other hand, is more a portrait of a type than an individual. She wears her hair in a similar way to Madame Raoul Rochette, but her slovenly appearance and weary demeanor suggest a life of difficult work.

Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres (French, 1780-1867)
Madame Désiré Raoul-Rochette, 1830
Graphite, 12 5/8 x 9 7/16 inches

Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec (French, 1864-1901)
The Laundress, 1888
Black and gray wash with white paint, scratched away in places, 29 7/8 x 24 13/16 inches
Scenes of Everyday Life

This pair of drawings shows two artists' interest in images of everyday life (genre scenes), but their approaches are very different. Piazzetta suggests a narrative with the use of just a few props—a hat, a flower—and focuses on the scene in the way a film director might use a close-up. The idealized youths engage us with their gestures and glances, but it is up to us to figure out the exact relationships among the three. Goya, on the other hand, presents a much more direct exchange—a young woman, clearly a prostitute, solicits the attention of a fat, ugly older man.

Giovanni Battista Piazzetta (Italian, 1682-1754)
A Young Woman Buying a Pink from a Young Man, about 1740
Black crayon heightened with white chalk, 16 13/16 x 21 5/8 inches

Francisco de Goya (Spanish, 1746-1828)
Prostitute Soliciting a Fat, Ugly Man, 1796-97
Brush and black and gray wash, 9  ° x 5 11/16 inches
Georges Seurat developed an incredibly refined style of drawing using the black, waxy crayon stick manufactured by the ContÉ company. Whereas most artists use at least some line when drawing with crayon or chalk, Seurat found a way to vary the pressure of the tool so that the texture of the paper picked it up in different amounts. In this way he could develop subtle tonal effects. The special quality of light that results from this technique was something that Seurat’s follower Charles Angrand well understood. Building on Seurat’s technique, Angrand used it to make larger, more open compositions and often explored rural subjects, like this harvest scene.

Georges Seurat (French, 1859-1891)
*Café-concert*, 1887-88
Conté crayon heightened with white chalk, 12 5/16 x 9 ¼ inches

Charles Angrand (French, 1854-1926)
*End of the Harvest*, 1890s
Conté crayon, 19 3/16 x 25 inches
Charles Angrand
Winslow Homer: Early and Late Watercolors

Homer was one of the greatest practitioners ever of the watercolor medium, but his style and technique changed much over the course of his career. *Boy with Anchor* is an early work and belongs to a group he made in Gloucester, Massachusetts. Homer used graphite pencil extensively to make outlines of the composition, then filled in these outlines with brush and watercolor, so that they feel tight and linear, with areas of individual color. In the later work, a radical concept showing a fish caught in mid-jump over the surface of water, he used very freely brushed and blended watercolor washes, taking advantage of the fluid quality of the medium.

Winslow Homer (American, 1836-1910)

*Boy with Anchor*, 1873
Watercolor and gouache with graphite, 7 5/8 x 13 3/4 inches

*Leaping Trout*, 1889
Watercolor over graphite, 13 ß x 19 7/8 inches
The female nude was a subject that fascinated the two towering figures of twentieth-century art, Picasso and Matisse. Picasso’s gouache of his mistress Fernande Olivier plays radically with space and bodily form: her limbs, torso, and head are all stylized and reduced to simplified to shapes rooted in geometric solids. Matisse’s model is in a very similar pose to Fernande and, like her, wears a mask like expression. The artist placed her decoratively on the sheet, with no indication of setting. His interest in pattern is evident in the complicated folds of drapery.

Pablo Picasso (Spanish, 1881-1973)
Reclining Nude (Fernande), 1906
Watercolor and gouache, with graphite and possibly charcoal, 18 5/8 x 24 1/8 inches

Henri Matisse (French, 1869-1954)
Reclining Odalisque, about 1923
Graphite, 11 1/16 x 15 1/8 inches
(Hilaire Germain) Edgar Degas (French, 1834-1917)
Detail from *Sheet of Studies and Sketches*, 1858 Graphite (central head study), pen and brown ink, brush and brown wash, and watercolor, on cream wove paper,
30.3 x 23.5 centimeters
Testing pen
In watercolor, artists paint with colored washes made of extremely fine particles of pigments dispersed in water. Watercolor is usually transparent and allows the white of the paper underneath it to affect how the color appears, and this gives it its beautiful luminosity, as in this sheet by J.M.W. Turner.

Joseph Mallord William Turner
(British, 1775-1851)
Detail from Fluelen, from the Lake of Lucerne, 1845
Watercolor with gouache, scratched away in places, on cream wove paper, 29.2 x 48 centimeters
Many people think of drawings as pencil sketches or chalk doodles, limited to shades of black and gray, and often left unfinished or preparatory to some bigger project. While some drawings may indeed represent the very beginnings of an artist’s idea, others are the intended final products. The variety of works museums now collect and exhibit as drawings is great, including graphite (or pencil), pen and ink, crayon, charcoal, and chalk, as well as watercolor, gouache (an opaque watercolor medium), and pastel.

An artist commissioned to produce a painting or sculpture would usually sketch large portions of the image, then draw numerous studies of each figure to get the pose, the anatomy, or the lighting just right. Other drawings were made as showpieces, to display the artist’s ability to potential clients. Drawings began to be hung on walls and kept in albums for viewing from the 18th century onward, which is about the time (with a few exceptions) artists began to sign their drawings, too.

"Most people enjoy seeing a drawing as a reflection of the artistic process – a very direct expression of an artist’s hand and his or her thoughts. Imagine a glimpse into Michelangelo’s mind."

Carter Foster

Co-curator of the exhibition
and associate curator of drawings
Pastel

Pastel is made by blending dry, powdered pigments with a non-greasy liquid binding medium. The resulting paste is then usually rolled into a stick and dried. In this black chalk drawing, Millet added pastel at the request of one of his friends, who thought the work would be easier to sell if it had color.

Jean-François Millet (French, 1814-1875)
Detail from First Steps, about 1858-66
Black chalk and pastel, on beige laid paper, perimeter mounted to beige wove paper, 29.5 x 45.9 centimeters
Crayon has a waxy or greasy quality created by the addition of a binder to the pigment, so the material builds up thickly on raised portions of the drawing surface. This quality allowed Georges Seurat to draw using the texture of the paper.

Georges Seurat (French, 1859-1891)
Café-concert, 1887-88
Conté crayon heightened with white chalk, on cream modern laid paper, 31.4 x 23.6 centimeters
Gouache

Gouache is similar to watercolor, but it includes the addition of a white pigment (or "body;" it is often called bodycolor) that makes it opaque. It has a matte finish, as we see in the strokes of gouache on this masterpiece by Picasso.

Pablo Picasso (Spanish, 1881-1973)
Detail from Head of a Boy, 1905-6
Opaque matte paint, possibly tempera, on board, laid down on wood and cradled, 24.6 x 18.6 centimeters
Structuring Space

Although totally different in technique, these two drawings share a similar compositional structure and illustrate how the distortion of space adds to the expressive effect of a work of art. Benton dramatizes his depiction of a raucous political meeting through the use of angular diagonals marking off the space and directing our attention to the main elements of the scene. Lawrence's scene is much calmer, but he similarly used diagonal lines to pattern the space inhabited by his figures.

Thomas Hart Benton (American, 1889-1973)
G.O.P. Convention, Cleveland, 1936
Pen and brush and black ink and black crayon, with graphite, 14 11/16 x 20 15/16 inches

Jacob Lawrence (American, 1917-2000)
Creative Therapy, 1949
Casein over graphite, 22 x 30 1/16 inches
The Force of Gesture

Made in the same decade and with similar materials, these two sheets show completely different approaches to abstraction. Both artists explored the expressive quality of gesture in these works, but the contrast in their vocabulary of forms is striking.

Bourgeois used hundreds of small brushstrokes to create a dense, all-over composition suggestive of an agitated, turbulent landscape.

Newman used two long vertical forms he called "zips" to create a sense of classical balance in his composition. His two zips play off of each other, the one defining positive space with black ink, the other negative space left by the white of the paper.

Louise Bourgeois (American, born in France, 1911)
*Untitled*, about 1950
Brush and black ink and gray wash, with white paint and traces of black chalk(?) and blue crayon, 22 x 28 inches

Barnett Newman
(American, 1905-1970)
*Untitled*, 1959
Brush and black ink, 21 1/16 x 24 1/16 inches