

Observational Drawing

IN SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY EUROPE, DRAWING SERVED a strictly preparatory purpose. Painters used drawing to practice and perfect their ideas, creating countless sketches of minute details, figural forms, and background settings before reaching a desired composition for their paintings. Although painted with oil on copper, this work by Dutch artist Ambrosius Bosschaert exemplifies drawing's importance to Renaissance-era artistic practice in that it is an imagined image—a composite of observational and scientific studies of life.

Bosschaert painted this still life nearly four hundred years ago in Holland. The subject is a bouquet of flowers that bursts forth from a small glass vase in a profusion of color and texture. The vase sits on a ledge—perhaps of a balcony or window—overlooking a meandering river, a small island, and a distant city. Alongside the vase on the ledge are two seashells, a flower out of water, and a small insect.

Bosschaert's flower paintings typically consist of bouquets that could not have existed in real life, because the flowers he chose to depict did not all bloom during the same season. In this arrangement, he combined studies of tulips, irises, roses, carnations, daffodils, and various nibbling creatures. Still-life paintings such as this one provided excellent opportunities for artists to showcase their abilities to mimic textures and surfaces in great detail and with realistic effects, which they practiced first in drawing, and then perfected in painting. Bosschaert was a leader in Dutch flower paintings, and many scholars consider this painting to be his masterpiece.

Drawing from Life

Take a walk around the school, neighborhood, or community. Collect samples of nature, such as flowers, plants, leaves, petals, sticks, and insects or bugs. In teams of three, gather your source materials and arrange a still life in the classroom. Try different combinations before you reach a desired composition. Then, talk as a group about what you see and record some of the details that you notice. What details did you see that your partners did not? Choose a spot around the still life to sit and sketch. When finished, compare and contrast sketches and the different perspectives that you recorded.

For more information on drawing and its importance to artistic practice, see the introductory essay included on the curriculum CD.

For a lesson plan inspired by observational drawing, see the classroom activity *Life Drawing: Science Illustration* included in the curriculum folder.



AMBROSIUS BOSSCHAERT (Holland, 1573–1621)
Bouquet of Flowers on a Ledge, 1619–20
Oil on copper, 15½ x 14 x 2 in. (39.4 x 35.6 x 5.1 cm)
LACMA, gift of Mr. and Mrs. Edward W. Carter (M.2003.108.7)
Photo © 2010 Museum Associates/LACMA

Collage

BEFORE SURREALISM, ARTISTS GEORGES BRAQUE and Pablo Picasso invented the first mixed-media drawing techniques. Braque’s *Glass and Playing Cards* from LACMA’s permanent collection combines traditional drawing with modern collage. He created the work by layering different source materials, such as paper and faux wood paneling, on top of each other, in combination with charcoal drawing. The process incorporates drawing’s characteristic elements of spontaneity, chance, and visual exploration but with an inventive approach in a new medium. The result depicts ordinary subjects, a glass and playing cards, but avoids the conventional role of art as describing physical appearance. Instead, Braque explored an alternative way of presenting a visual equivalent of the world we see and experience. In what art historians now call the synthetic cubist phase, artists abstracted forms into rectangular shapes and flat planes, building up a composition “synthetically.” Here, Braque reduced the appearance of the glass to a series of lines, and the cards to quick notations of shape and suit. The edges of the cards are left open in places, and blurred in others, as a way of both unifying the elements and creating an overall flatness to the image. At this moment in cubism, artists sought ways to acknowledge the two-dimensional nature of the support (sheet of paper or canvas) by creating an image that defiantly rejected the appearance of depth in space. The surrealists adopted collage as a primary visual strategy because of its capacity to disorient the viewer through the unlikely juxtaposition of everyday images.

Considered one of the movement’s leaders, Max Ernst was the first to intuit the surrealist potential of collage, which relied on found materials from everyday life that could be reassembled to create perplexing surreal scenarios. For some works, his collage sources were printed teaching-aid catalogues that dealt with subjects ranging from anatomy to paleontology. According to Ernst, his collages “transform the banal pages of advertisement into dramas which reveal my most secret desires.”¹

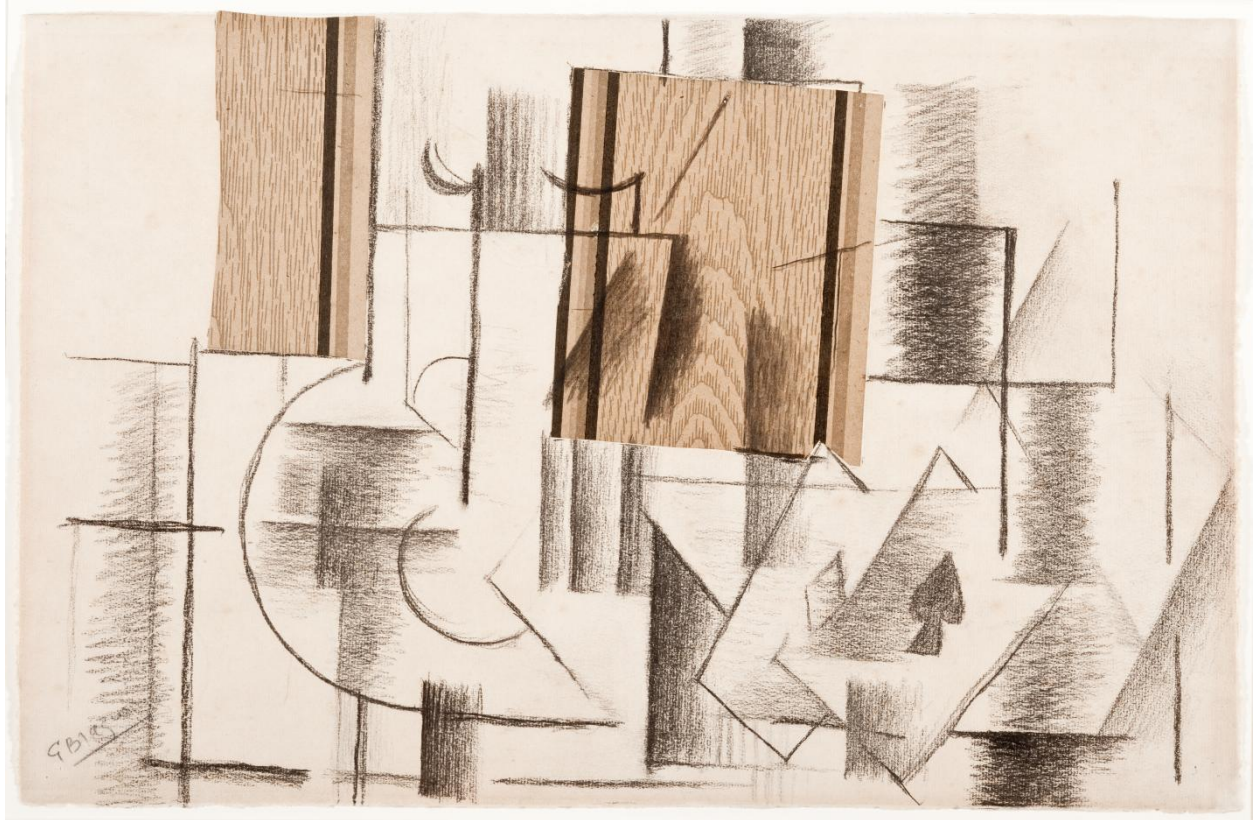
Collage Still Lifes

Create a source list of everyday materials that could be included in a still life, including objects, textiles, and foods. Gather and arrange the items into a still life, then sketch it in pencil. Next, sketch the shapes that comprise the still life’s composition. Cut out the shapes and rearrange them on another sheet of paper, transforming your drawing into collage. For a colorful or decorative touch, cut the shapes out of construction or patterned paper inspired by the still life.

1 Leslie Jones, “Tracing Dreams: Surrealist Drawing 1915–1950” in *Drawing Surrealism* (Los Angeles: LACMA, 2012), pp. 40–46.

For more information on modern drawing, see the introductory essay included on the curriculum CD.

For a lesson plan inspired by abstract drawing, see the classroom activity *Abstract Still Lifes* included in the curriculum folder.



GEORGES BRAQUE (France, 1882–1963)

Glass and Playing Cards, 1912

Mixed media/assemblage/collage, *papier collé*, and charcoal on paper

11⁵/₈ x 18¹/₈ in. (29.5 x 46 cm)

LACMA, Mr. and Mrs. William Preston Harrison Collection (31.12.2)

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Photo © 2012 Museum Associates/LACMA

Exquisite Corpse

IF AUTOMATIC DRAWING ENCAPSULATED THE SURREALIST notion of tapping into the unconscious, then the game of exquisite corpse, beginning in 1925, embodied the surrealist notions of collaboration and chance. In André Breton and Paul Eluard’s *Abridged Dictionary of Surrealism*, the exquisite corpse is defined as a “game of folded paper that consists of having several people compose a phrase or drawing collectively, none of the participants having any idea of the nature of the preceding contribution or contributions.”⁴ The earliest examples were drawn with graphite or ink or colored pencil on everyday writing paper. Around 1929 collaborators began using pastel or tempera on black paper, and beginning in the mid-1930s, collage was used. According to Breton, a frequent “player,” “What really excited us about these productions was the certainty that, no matter what, they could not possibly have been conjured up by a single brain, and that they possessed to a much greater degree the capacity for ‘deviation.’”⁵ The bizarre anthropomorphic creatures generated from games of exquisite corpse also may have provided inspiration for artists’ individual works.

To create the 1938 example featured here, *Cadavre exquis* (Exquisite Corpse) by French artists André Breton, Jacqueline Lamba, and Yves Tanguy, the artists met, perhaps in a Paris café or apartment. Each brought art materials, which became game pieces: magazines, newspapers, flyers, any kind of printed ephemera, along with scissors and glue. The artists kept their stashes of images hidden, as surprise is part of the game. They set out a piece of paper like the one shown here, about the size of a sheet of notebook paper. The first artist applied an image cut from paper and fixed it in place, maybe the clock, the cone, and perhaps the shorts shown here. Leaving a tiny part visible at the top as a

guide, the artist then passed the folded sheet, with the image mostly hidden, to the next artist. The game repeated as each “player” added a cut image to the developing collective form. The exquisite corpse game ended when the unplanned, unexpected form was revealed. The game championed ideas surrealists valued: chance, collaboration, and unexpected outcomes.

Write, Make, Collaborate

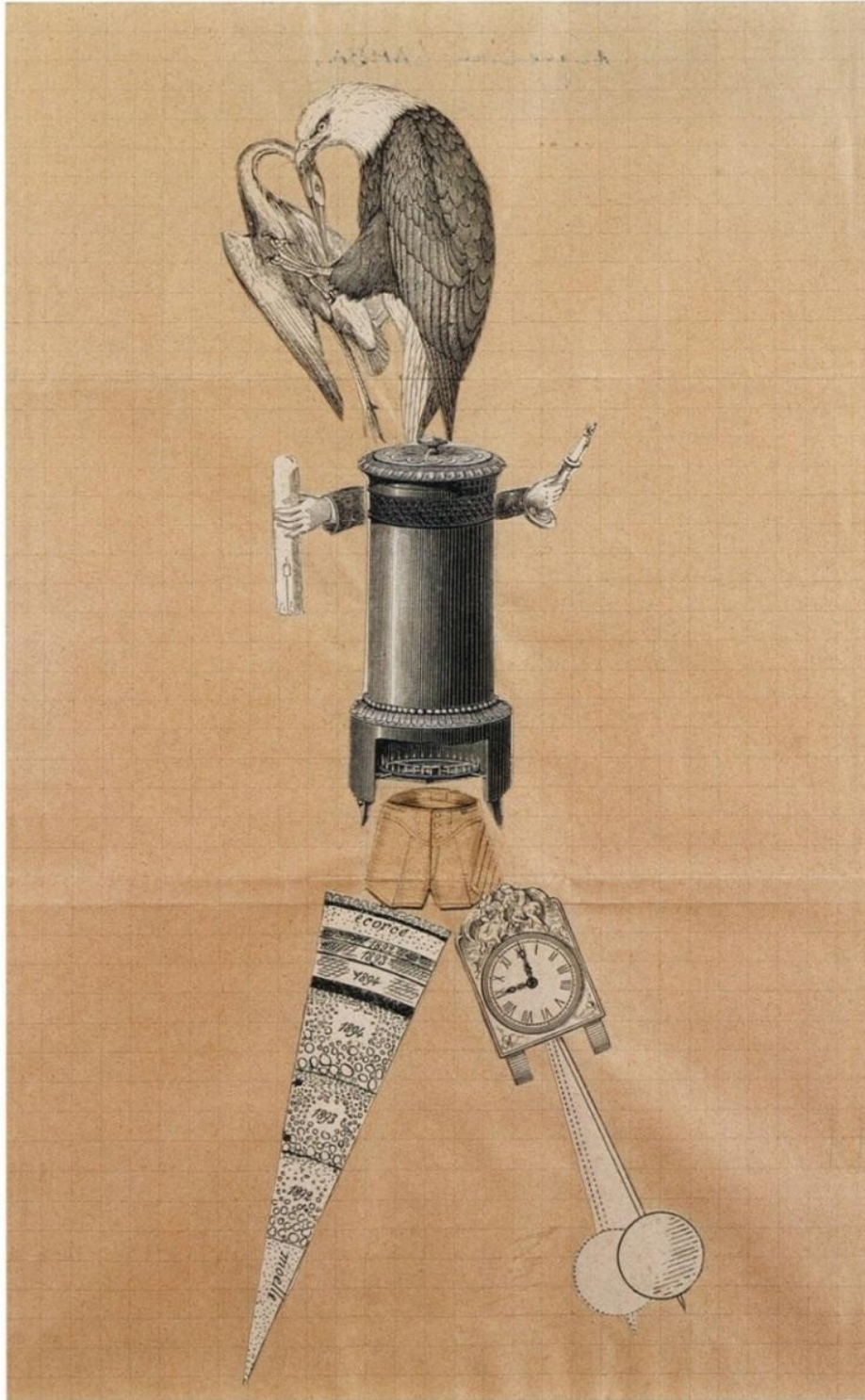
Create an exquisite corpse writing by, first, forming a group of three writers. As a group, select characters, a time, and a place for your story. Let the action of your story develop cooperatively by allowing the first writer to establish the beginning, the second to invent the middle, and the third to cement the end. Tell the story out loud as a group and then record it in writing. Pass the written story to a group of three artists, who will use the text as inspiration for an exquisite corpse drawing. Artists—read the story out loud, then individually imagine another character that might live in this strange world. Fold a single sheet of paper into three sections, then ask each artist to contribute a head, a torso, and legs to spawn a new and inventive creature. Pass the drawing along to another group of writers to use as inspiration for yet another story.

1 Leslie Jones, “Tracing Dreams: Surrealist Drawing 1915–1950” in *Drawing Surrealism* (Los Angeles: LACMA, 2012), pp. 25–30.

2 Ibid.

For art historical information on surrealism and works by other surrealist artists, see the introductory essay included on the curriculum CD.

For a lesson plan inspired by collaborative drawing, see the classroom activity *Surrealist Drawing Games* included in the curriculum folder.



ANDRÉ BRETON (France, 1896–1966)

JACQUELINE LAMBA (France, 1910–1993)

YVES TANGUY (France, 1900–1955, active United States)

Cadavre exquis (Exquisite Corpse), 1938, Collage, 9⁷/₈ x 6³/₈ in. (25.1 x 16.2 cm)

Collection Sylvio Perlstein-Antwerp © 2012 André Breton Estate

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Photo © 2012 Museum Associates/LACMA, by Hervé Lewandowski

Decalcomania

IN THE MID-1930S, ARTISTS DEVELOPED NEW automatic drawing techniques in attempts to bypass the rational mind in the creative process. Decalco-mania, for example, involved applying gouache to a sheet of paper and/or stencil and then pressing it against another sheet, creating a transfer image that is revealed when the sheets are pulled apart. Originally a decorative technique popular in the nineteenth century, it was repurposed for therapeutic usages and designated the Rorschach test in the 1920s. This test, still used today for the psychological analysis of patients, similarly involves the appearance of random shapes created by inkblots and later interpreted by a doctor. In art and medicine, there was a shared belief that the subconscious realm held valuable information.

An example from surrealism is George Hugnet's *Untitled* from LACMA's permanent collection. Here, the viewer is a critical part of the art experience, invited to envision and interpret what the artist spontaneously created. The title, *Untitled*, provides no clue or, in surrealist thought, offers no evidence of a preexisting form being described. Hugnet applied areas of gouache (an opaque watercolor) in a variety of colors onto one sheet of paper, and while the paint was still wet, pressed a second sheet on top. This transfer created the forms you see—ambiguous colors, shapes, and textures filled with endless interpretations for the viewer.

Paint-blot Drawings

Create your own decalcomania drawing by squeezing small dots of different colored nontoxic paint, such as acrylic, tempera, or gouache, onto a sheet of sturdy paper. Fold the paper in half, using your fingers to gently manipulate the paint. Experiment by tempering the pressure with which you fold and massage, allowing the paints to mix and interact in different ways. Open the sheet to reveal your paint-blot drawing, then ask a few peers to title the work according to what they see.

For information on other surrealist drawing techniques, see the introductory essay included on the curriculum CD.

For a lesson plan inspired by experimental drawing, see the classroom activity *Experimental Drawing* included in the curriculum folder.



GEORGES HUGNET (France, 1906–1974)

Untitled, c. 1935–36

Gouache, image and sheet: 9¾ x 13¾ in. (24.8 x 33.7 cm)

framed: 17⁷/₈ x 20⁵/₈ x 1 in. (44.8 x 52.4 x 2.5 cm)

LACMA, purchased with funds provided by Alice and Nahum Lainer
through the 2006/2007 Drawings Group (M. 2007.28)

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