COMPOSING FIGURES IN CONTEXT & IN PERSPECTIVE

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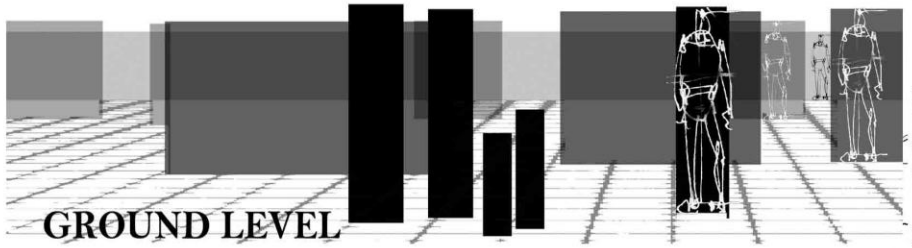
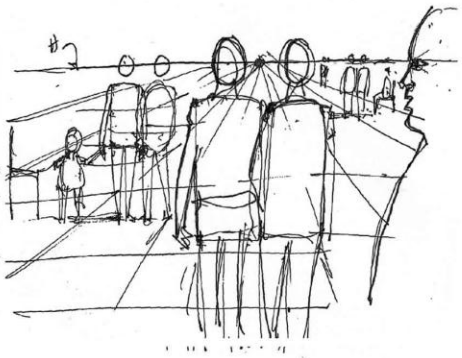
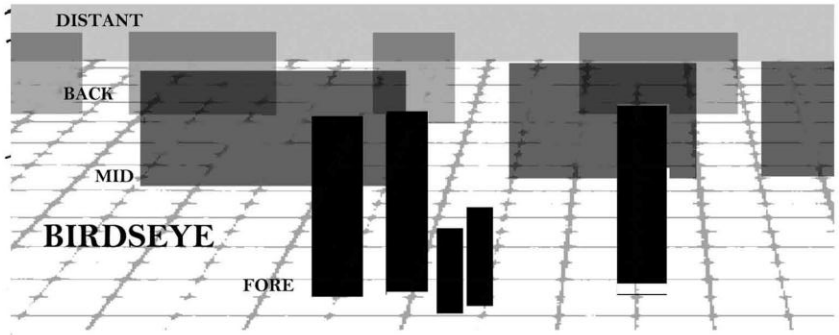
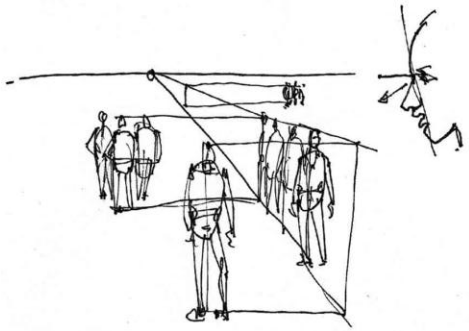




"CLOTHESLINE"

Use only when eye level of viewer (horizon) is same as eye level of people in picture

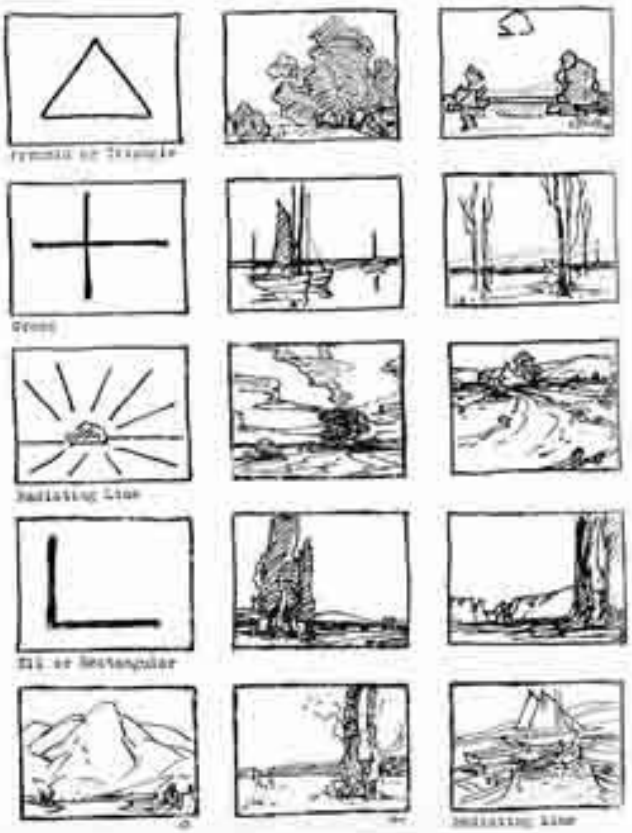




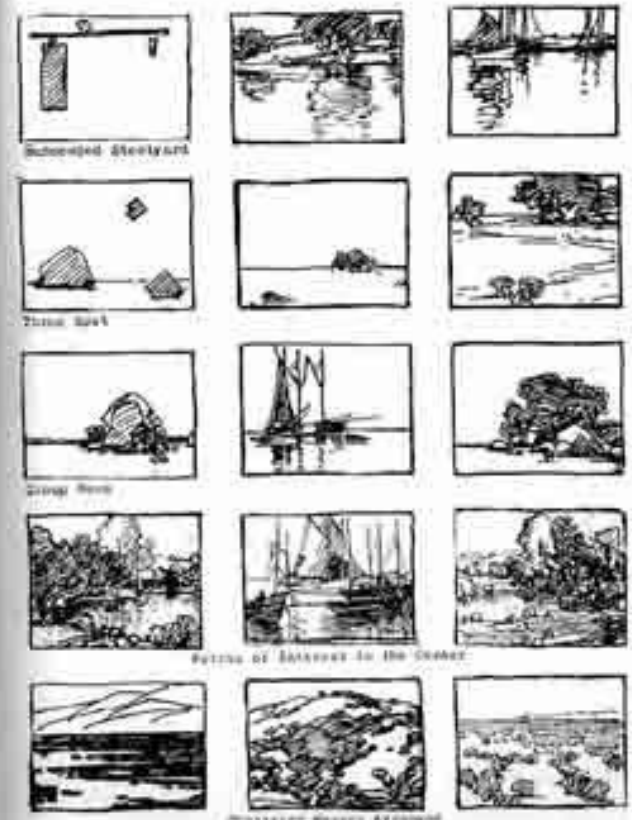
"MEASURING WALL"

Use when eye level of viewer (horizon) is above or below the eyelevel of people in picture.

Many times you will want to place figures and clusters of figures in an area such as a street or plaza. This image shows how I attempt to think of it in terms of composition. T
here's a lot more in terms of choosing activities, such as walking to and fro and at angles, but this is the basic idea: the figures create 'planes' and both 2d and 3d 'spaces' that need to be arranged in an aesthetically interesting and rhythmically spaced way.
I like to arrange the foreground people first, then mid, back, and lastly distant planes (the far distant ones may or may not not exist), paying attention to the 3d space-holes and to placement of feet on the ground plane. Then I think "What can I delete, how should I crop?".
I tend to do this on tracing paper so I can move things around and then finalize.
Along the way, I use the clothesline or measuring wall methods to keep the perspective more or less correct. Often I abbreviate this procedure as necessary



XVIII — FORMS OF COMPOSITION — W



XIX — FORMS OF COMPOSITION — I

Edgar Payne 1800's

XX — FORMS OF COMPOSITION — D

XVII — FORMS OF COMPOSITION — I

A Hem

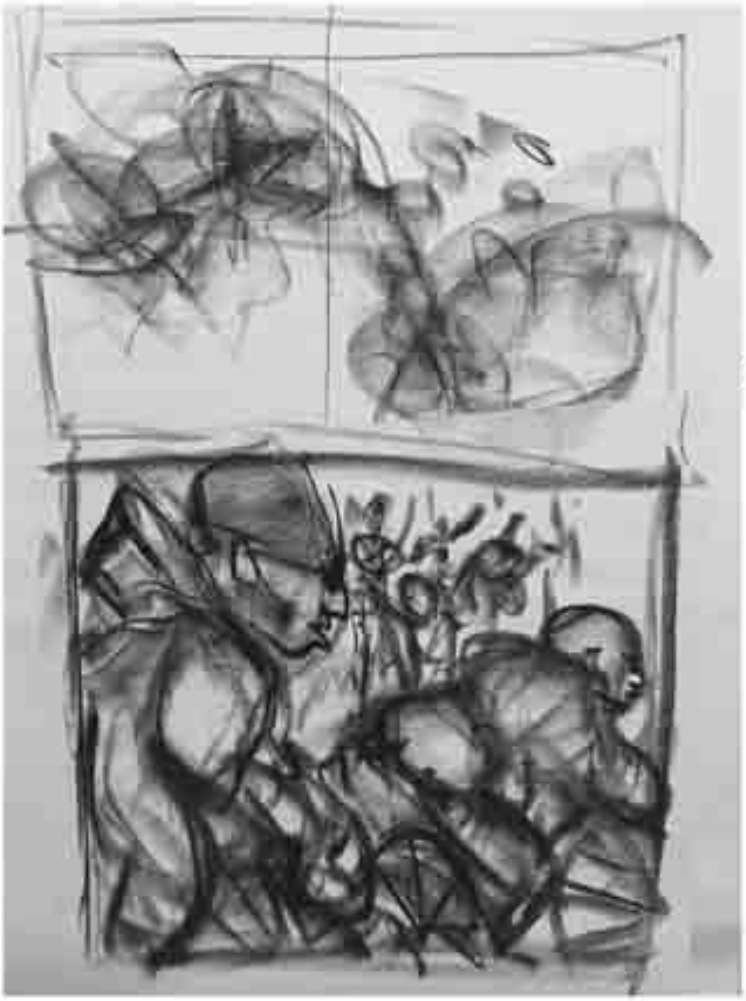
Ham!

ONE WAY OF CREATING NEW COMPOSITIONS:

Davinci is supposed to have recommended that young painters try to see landscapes In the mould stains on a wall.

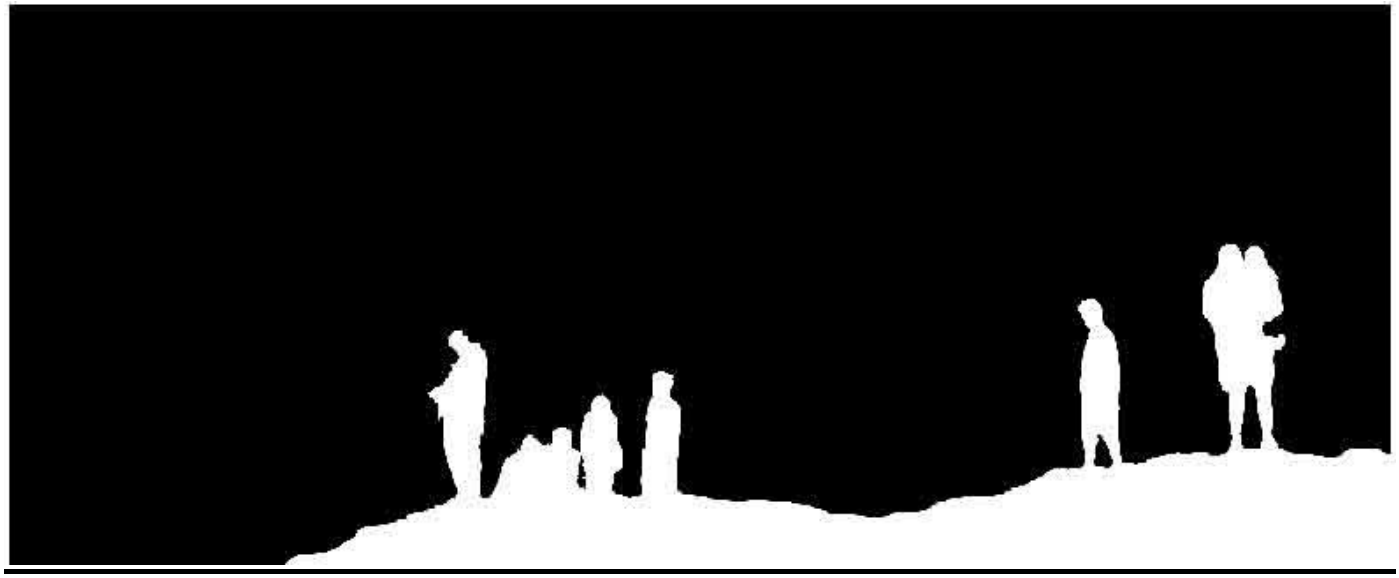
This can be called 'forced or re-purposed' composition. The flower image below is first analyzed as a gestural abstraction. This is then converted to a different subject matter.

RANDOM IMAGE



GESTURAL STUDY

RE-PURPOSED COMPOSITION
Bicycle race and spectators)



TONAL CONCEPT

RE-INTERPRET/SIMPLIFY 'CONTINUOUS-TONED IMAGES INTO 3-4 TONAL VALUES PLUS DETAIL - AS AN ABSTRACTION

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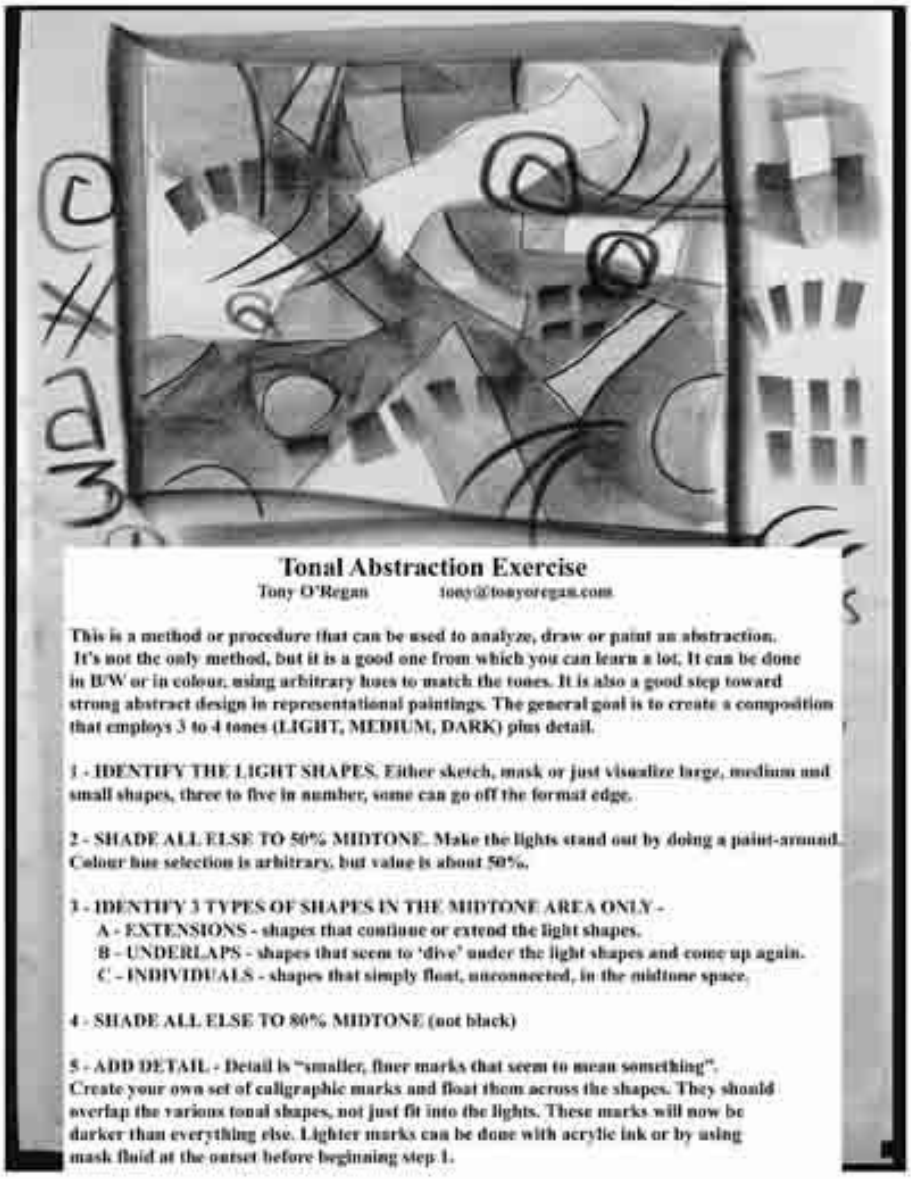

TONY O'REGAN

Tonal Abstraction Exercise

Tony O'Regan tony@tonyoregan.com

This is a method or procedure that can be used to analyze, draw or paint an abstraction. It's not the only method, but it is a good one from which you can learn a lot. It can be done in B/W or in colour, using arbitrary hues to match the tones. It is also a good step toward strong abstract design in representational paintings. The general goal is to create a composition that employs 3 to 4 tones (LIGHT, MEDIUM, DARK) plus detail.

1 - IDENTIFY THE LIGHT SHAPES. Either sketch, mask or just visualize large, medium and small shapes, three to five in number, some can go off the format edge.

2 - SHADE ALL ELSE TO 50% MIDTONE. Make the lights stand out by doing a paint-around. Colour hue selection is arbitrary, but value is about 50%.

3 - IDENTIFY 3 TYPES OF SHAPES IN THE MIDTONE AREA ONLY -
- A - EXTENSIONS - shapes that continue or extend the light shapes.
- B - UNDERLAPS - shapes that seem to 'dive' under the light shapes and come up again.
- C - INDIVIDUALS - shapes that simply float, unconnected, in the midtone space.

4 - SHADE ALL ELSE TO 80% MIDTONE (not black)

5 - ADD DETAIL - Detail is "smaller, finer marks that seem to mean something". Create your own set of calligraphic marks and float them across the shapes. They should overlap the various tonal shapes, not just fit into the lights. These marks will now be darker than everything else. Lighter marks can be done with acrylic ink or by using mask fluid at the outset before beginning step 1.

Apply this concept to PORTRAIT-STILL LIFE-LANDSCAPE-ABSTRACTS

Some Composition Fundamentals

This 'design' skill is comparable to Composition in music. A person can excel at playing an instrument (draw or paint) and not be very good at writing imaginative music (Composition) and vice versa. The skill of composition is an independent skill. Believe it or not, there are many excellent designers who do not draw well as there are many excellent songwriters who play poorly. But, a person can be also be good at both, such as, Mozart, Rembrandt. That's 'Genius'. If you are one of those, don't bother reading this. Also, as with music, merely reading and understanding without "soulful" execution is next to useless. (Also known as "Academic").

Design Elements

The usual factors of rhythm, colour, balance, the nature of 2d and 3d space, positive-negative, Figure Ground relationships, Tonal Design ,etc., all are essential factors to study within the realm of Composition.

Placement

The location of shapes and focal points is obviously a major consideration in Composition in pictures and for graphic design. These are some important related concepts:

Focal Points – We are 'hard-wired' to look at some things in a picture, such as the following: Faces, figures, hands, detail, meaning, signs symbols, contrast, saturation, etc.

EyePath –Use the location of focal points to create a simple, clear 'choreography' for viewer's eye. Single focal point, double, triple, spirals, big gesture, etc. Use 'entourage' in an architectural picture.

Dominance - We prefer to see one shape,size, tone, direction or colour, etc to be dominant, with others in a supporting role.

Viewpoint , Format, Cropping

Numbers of Shapes- Use a few strong shapes or group larger numbers of shapes into 'super-shapes', eg. A bunch of grapes can be one shape with a grape texture. Cropping and re-formatting helps reduce the numbers of shapes and increase the relative sizes of shapes within the format.

Hierarchy - Make few out of many, make some things more important than others – 'less is more'.

The 'Bagel': subordinate or 'play-down' the edges, the centre and the corners. Ideally, locate major focal points an unequal distance from each edge.

The 'Grid':
Graphic designers, architects use grids, often playfully, to organize a surface. Grids of one, two, three, five, etc. "Rule of Thirds". It's just a "suggestion", not really a 'rule'.

Space Concepts – Here is a collection of themes for organizing the 'space' in a picture:
2D Flat patterning (how many shapes/hierarchy)
Yin-yang
Big Gesture (eg zig-zag road, swooping shoreline)
Events along a path
Fore-mid-background,
Room -portal–vista
Space within a space,
All-over or "patchwork" - kind of like "wallpaper", but in a good way
Remember Pappa-Baby-Moma concept for people and trees, etc

Careful !– Try to be flexible. It is all very well to know rules and formulas, but there is no substitute for developed intuitive taste. For example: See the order in the apparent randomness of nature or 'found' images, as well as in the works of historical masters.