

Upside Down Drawing

We recognize and identify things in our world because we are familiar with them. We see, identify, name, categorize, and remember, so we think we “know”. That’s fine for facts, dates, numbers, concepts, and ideas. For seeing and drawing though, we need to look again, because things are not always as they seem.

Mostly, we’re used to seeing things one way, right side up. The left side of our brain easily identifies an object and names it for us, and then we know what it is and feel confident and secure.

But the familiar becomes instantly unfamiliar when it’s upside down or backwards. We expect to see it right side up and are confused when it is not. Upside-down shapes and relationships are strange to us because they’re different from the memory we’ve stored from past experience.

Today we’ll try two exercises to illustrate.

Exercise 1:

Write your name. Look at your name upside down and try to replicate it.

When it comes to a complicated drawing with details and proportion, it can be much easier to copy the image upside down, concentrating on the shapes and relationships rather than the drawing itself, which can seem intimidating and difficult. A complicated drawing can throw our logical left brain into a tizzy. That’s the whole idea behind this exercise...to see with the right side of your brain.

Exercise 2:

Try drawing a moderately complex line drawing upside down.

Tips:

1. Concentrate on the individual shapes, not the whole image.
2. Try not to let any names come into your mind.
3. Start where you can see a shape and draw it.
4. Work on one area at a time. Cover up most of the example drawing and only look at the specific part you are drawing.
5. Resist the temptation to see how you are doing or even think about it.

When you can send the logical left on vacation at will and concentrate on what is actually there rather than what you thought you knew, you’ll find the door to drawing swing open.

Summary:

In daily life, we’re taught to function on the analytical, verbal, left side of our brain. An artist, while working, makes a conscious shift in cognitive function from “Logical Left” to “Relational Right.” Learning to draw is really learning to see as an artist does, on the right side of the brain.