

## Chapter One

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# The Essence of Drawing



*Drawing turns the creative mind to expose its workings. Drawing discloses the heart of visual thought, coalesces spirit and perception, conjures imagination; drawing is an act of meditation, an exorcism of disorder; a courting of artistic ideas; above all it is the lean instrument of visual formation and the vortex of artistic sensibility.*

EDWARD HILL  
*The Language Of Drawing*

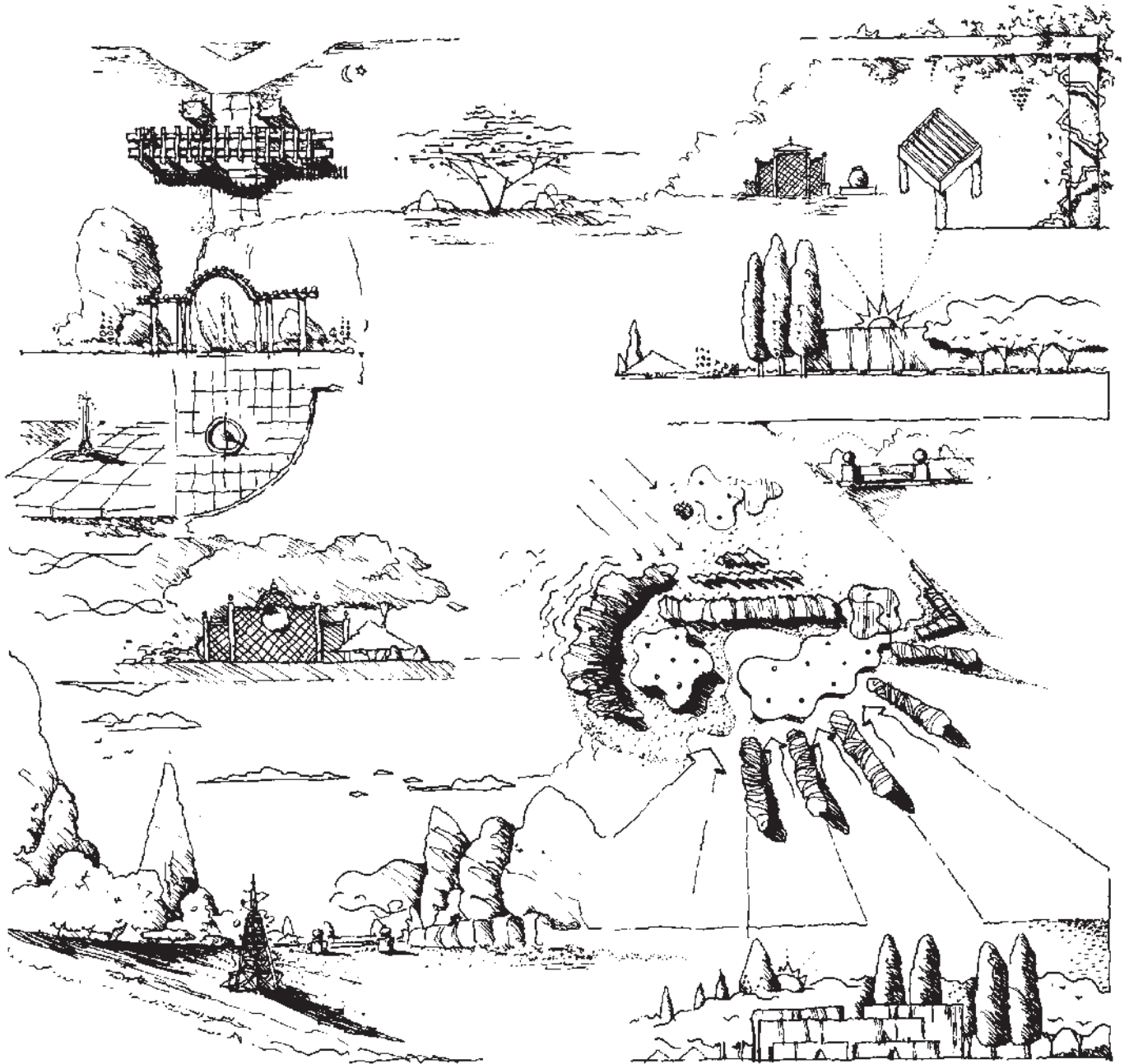


**FIGURE 1-1** *One of da Vinci's first known drawings of the Tuscan landscape, dated 1473. The artist was 21 when he made this drawing, entitled "Day of St. Mary of the Snows," which has been called "the first true landscape drawing in Western art." (Bramly, 1991, 84 ©EMB-Service, Lucerne, Switzerland)*

Why do we draw? We draw because it is the act of seeing and thinking clearly. It is an integral part of the creative process, and the ultimate design tool. Carlo Scarpa, an Italian architect, best summed this up when he said, "I draw so I can see." By moving from elevation to perspective, from plan to bird's-eye view, drawing elucidates our three-dimensional world. When I was just starting out, I remember watching my mentor, landscape architect and artist Frank James, pick up a pencil and move it across a sheet of paper; it was like watching an angel fly. Frank's facility for drawing was incredibly inspiring and a thing to behold. His ability to use drawing as an expressive design tool was marvelous.

Drawing allows a concept to evolve. It resides between freedom and structure: the freedom of ideas versus the physical structure that orders our representations of space. It provides the potential to create realistic images.

Drawing can also be a meditation. It can take you into other worlds, creating a transcendent experience. One of the constant themes of Zen art is the expression of the artist's own inner state of going nowhere in a timeless dimension.



## Definition of Drawing

Artist and teacher Edward Hill stated, "Drawing is the act of making a mark, line, or incision on a surface; and in the larger sense, a participation in the language" (1966, 8). A beautifully drawn, pure line arching across a page is a wonder to behold. It can vary from divine simplicity to dynamic movement. Drawing is a tool of exploration, and a single stroke can express thought. The artist or designer imbues line with personality

**FIGURE 1-2** *Ink on vellum. Drawing allows thinking in three dimensions.*



**FIGURE 1-3** *Frank James, Sasaki Associates. Drawing as expression.*

and thus becomes an inventor. Through drawing, artists are continually redefining themselves and creating a personal image of reality.

The beginning of each drawing is the start of an exciting new trip; when you begin, your line takes off on a journey without a map. Learning to draw can be the beginning of a creative journey that can last a lifetime. From the moment of inception to the creation of the image, every drawing has the potential to express an idea. To begin to draw requires initiative; the act of drawing is directed intuition. Charles Burchfield, one of the greatest painters of the American scene, felt that the best drawing was a spontaneous creation. Spontaneity allows an incredible pictorial and emotional range, providing access to imaginative wanderings. If you can capture this spontaneous quality in your drawings, you can make them come alive.

The development of your freehand drawing skills will help you to understand and graphically describe the environment. It is a means of investigating nature and a tool for designing entirely new ecosystems. As artist and teacher Hans Hofmann said, “The artist is an agent in whose mind nature is transformed into a new creation” (1967, 70).





**FIGURE 1-4** Charles Burchfield. Old Gnarled Tree in a Field. Pencil on paper. 17" × 22". (Courtesy Kennedy Galleries, Inc., New York City)

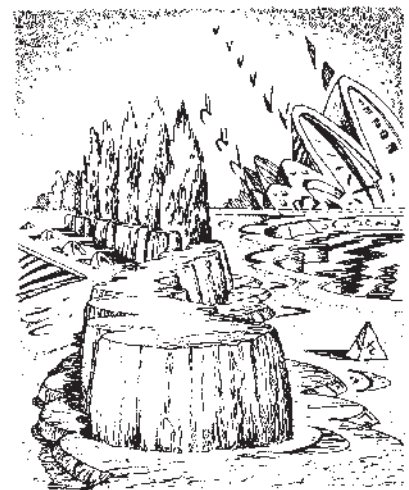
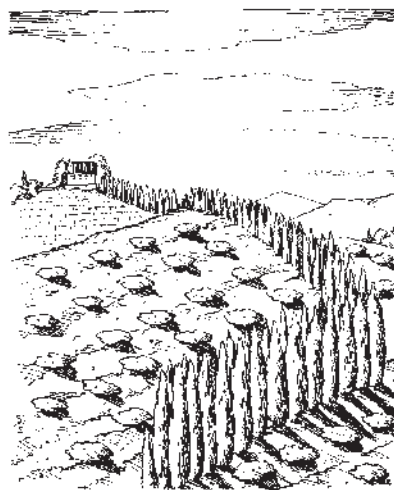
The beauty of a drawing is that you make it with your own hands; its success or failure rests entirely with you. If you develop a love for drawing, it will be reflected in your work and revealed to others. To achieve this, try to make each line you draw able to stand alone as a beautiful mark. Before beginning, empty your mind of all other thoughts. Think of yourself as an actor about to go onstage and perform. Slow down, breathe deeply, and think carefully about what you are about to do; it is an emotional response. Grasp the essence of your subject and your drawings will become your greatest teacher. You can learn much from them. Learning to relax will facilitate your ability to draw freely. Eventually you may find that drawing itself will become a method of relaxation.

You should work on each of the exercises in this book until you feel comfortable with the results. When you begin to feel pleased with the results of one exercise, go on to the next one. You can also go back and work on several at the same time.

When concentrating, you can become part of the drawing, getting inside it. Concentration is required to avoid getting into a rut, and to push yourself to evolve through experimentation. After developing a successful style, many people just replicate it again and again. Always try to improve your technique; otherwise you'll just keep repeating your mistakes. When I was in school, I was told that I might have been a good artist once, but I had become lazy and was no longer innovative. That comment lit a fire under me. As Frank James said, when you draw you should always try to "seek the truth, speak the truth, be the truth."

Learning to draw can be a baffling, frustrating experience. It will make you angry, but don't give up. Once you begin to produce satisfying drawings it will be an incredible natural high. Everything you put into your drawing will be returned to you. You can learn to draw, but you must first believe that you can. When Frank James was an architecture undergraduate at the University of Washington in 1962, he learned to draw by being inspired by such students as Laurie Olin. According to Frank, "Laurie Olin could draw like Walt Disney on psilocybin on an off day." Today Laurie is not only an award-winning landscape architect but a

**FIGURE 1-5** *Chip Sullivan. Double Imperative Landscape. Pen and ink on paper. Composing the landscape with extraordinary arrangements.*



master landscape artist. Frank forced himself to learn, and the results are wonderful. Ultimately, to inspire others to draw you will have to draw convincingly and beautifully. In a sense, you are combining ordinary things into extraordinary arrangements. Stop looking and start feeling your environment; strive toward meaning by drawing from within your psyche. Drawing is a bridge between perception and thinking. As Cennino Cennini, fifteenth-century artist and author, stated,

*Do not fail, as you go on, to draw something every day, for no matter how little it is, it will be well worthwhile, and will do you a world of good.*  
(Hill, 1966, 108)

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### **EXERCISE 1-1: Automatic Writing**

*The surrealists realized that writing is similar to drawing, in that it is mark-making, and developed this method to link the hand with the stream of consciousness. Begin by finding a comfortable, quiet spot in which to work. Take a pencil and a stack of loose paper and set them down in front of you. Clear your mind and relax. Quickly begin to write whatever comes into your mind. Do not worry about spelling or grammar. Let the words and sentences generate themselves. Try to suspend your rational thoughts. Do this for about thirty minutes a day for a week, or until it becomes second nature. You could also expand this exercise into a useful journal.*

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## **Drawing as Conceptualizing**

All great works of art evolve from a concept. Setting ideas into drawn form breathes life into them, allowing you to dip into the vast space of ideas. From the inception of an idea to its final drawn form, drawing plays an integral part in the creative process. Drawing is a conceptual tool that brings quick form to the flow of ideas.

Sometimes a designer will produce hundreds of conceptual drawings until striking the right form for the idea. These forms develop into thumbnail sketches and then into design development drawings. The final idea will then be rendered as a highly finished illustrative drawing.

## **Drawing as Seeing**

Landscape drawing is not the reproduction of nature. It is an expression of the emotions, sensations, and feelings that the landscape impresses on the artist. It is the creation of atmosphere and space.

Drawing a landscape allows you to visualize it in a new way. As opposed to taking a photograph, drawing a landscape enables you to really understand it. There is something unique about the hand-eye relationship as



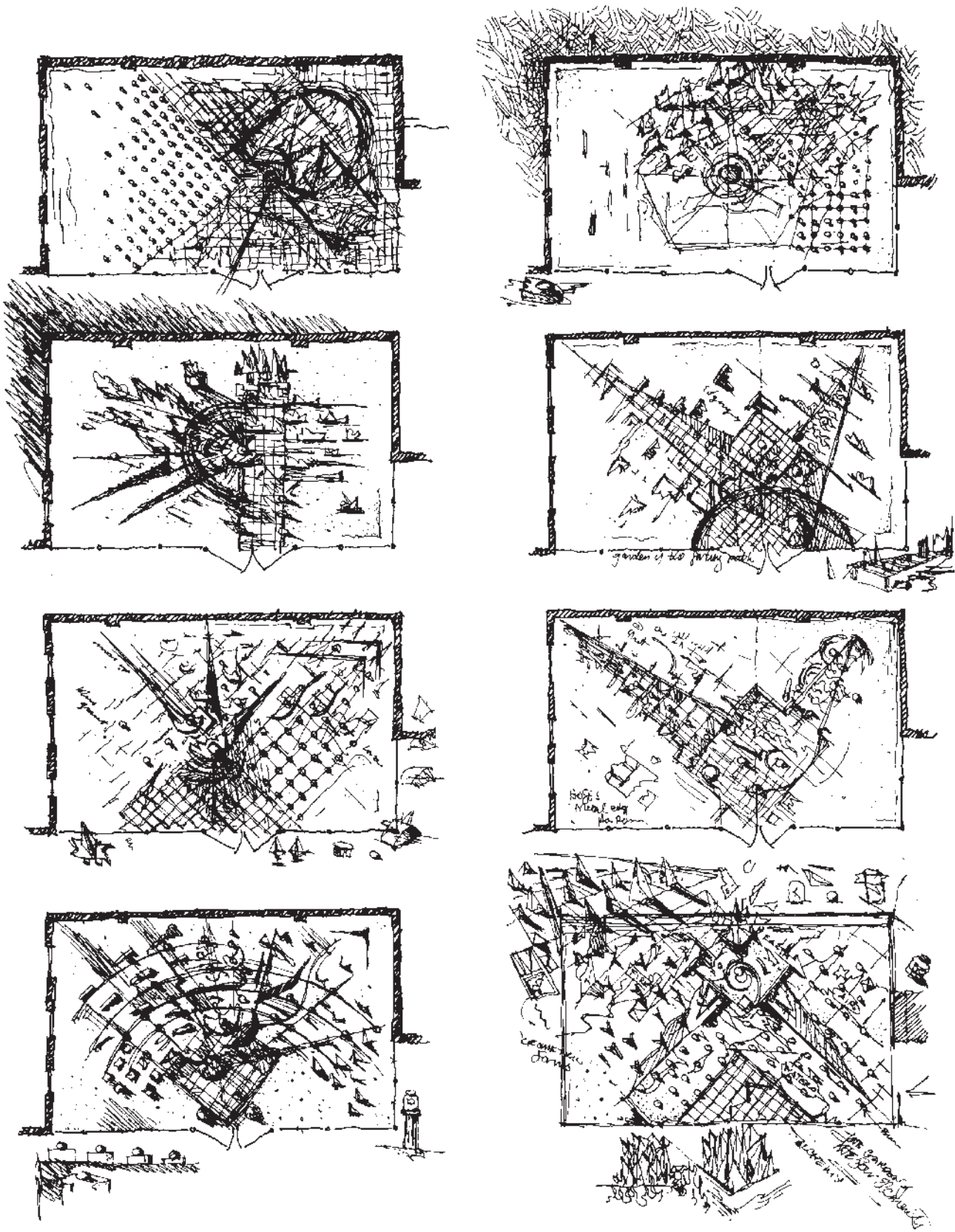
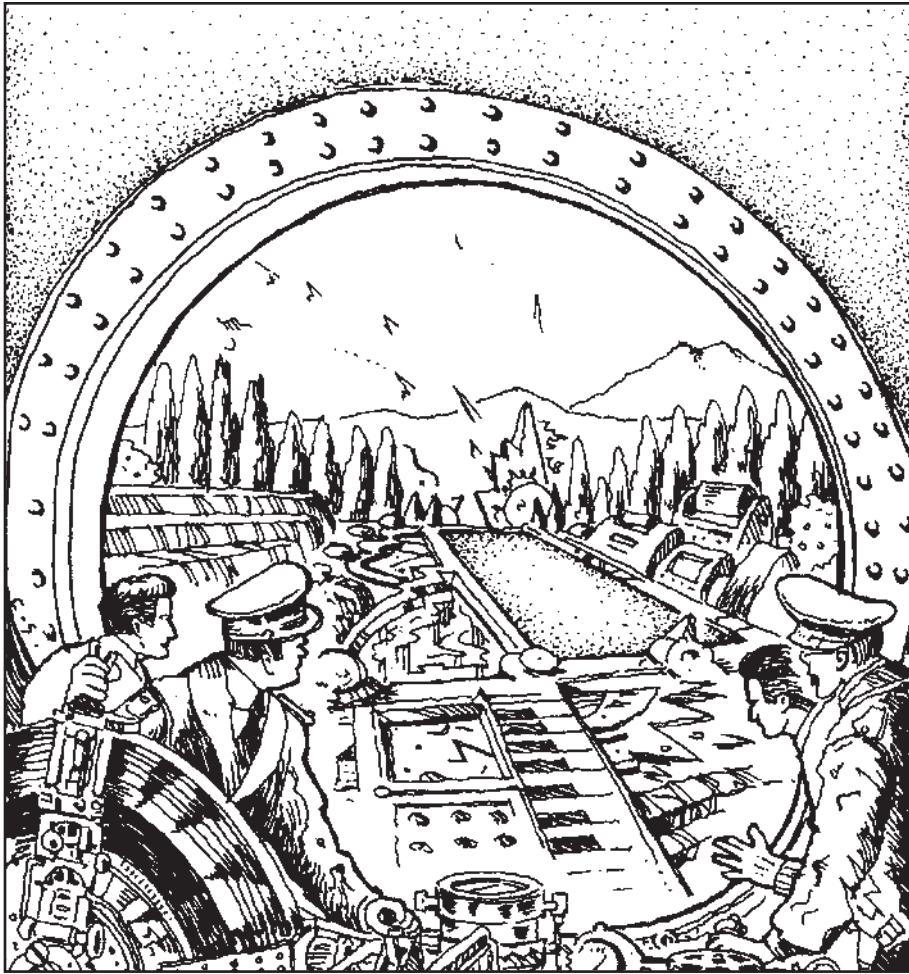


FIGURE 1-6 Pen and ink on paper. Conceptual design studies.





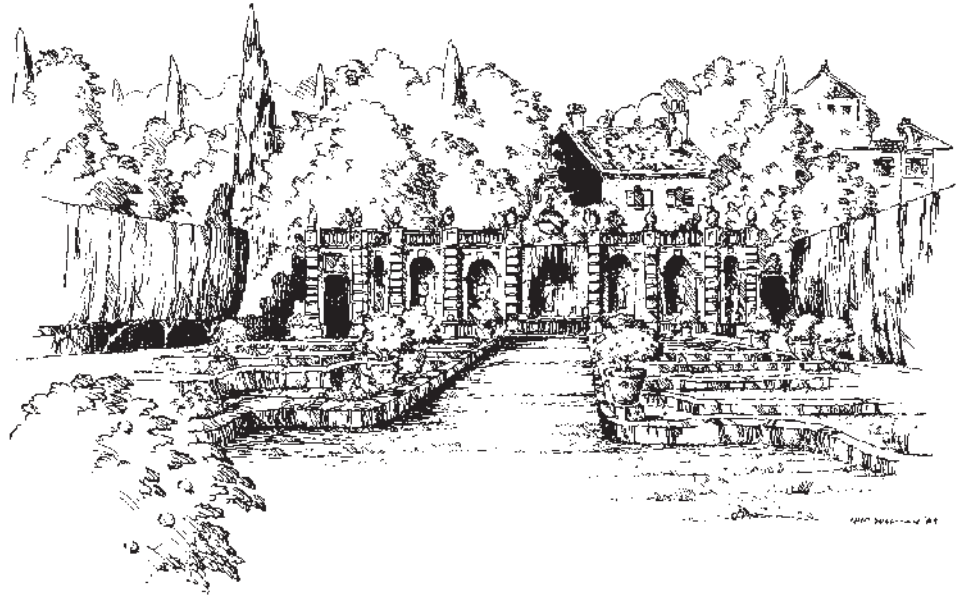
**FIGURE 1-7** *Pen and ink on paper. Discovering new ways to visualize the landscape.*

you record a subject through drawing. Drawing links your visual perceptions to your subconscious. The photographed image preserves the visual event, but drawing entails the experience of looking: we stop and become part of the subject and its time. Strive toward eliminating the separation between you and the image.

You must be persistent to capture the secrets of landscape drawing. Through the excitement of the moving hand you become part of the mystery of creation. But in order to produce excellent drawings you must have something to say. By dedicating yourself to drawing you will inform your imagination. Increasing your awareness will lead to your own form of expression. By combining imagination, visualization, and drawing, you will invent new landscapes.

It takes passion to attain this level of awareness. Even though Charles Burchfield had a full-time job, he spent every free moment sketching. He would often have to splash water on his face while drawing in order to stay awake. At work he would gulp down his lunch so he could spend the rest of his break drawing. If the ideas were really flowing, he found that after he got into bed he wouldn't be able to sleep and would have to

**FIGURE 1-8** *Pen and ink on paper.*  
*Drawing to enhance the experience of looking.*



keep getting out of bed to sketch out his ideas. When the drawings were going well he would find himself overcome with happiness.

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**EXERCISE 1-2: Seeing**

*Select a flower, a teakettle, an apple, or another common object and place it in the center of a table. Next, place a comfortable chair about 6 feet from the table, facing the object you have selected. Begin by sitting in the chair and trying to relax totally. Then completely focus on the object, ignoring everything else. Observe how the light hits it; use your eye to follow its outline; look at the shape of its shadow; let your eye wander over every single detail.*

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**EXERCISE 1-3: The Afterimage**

*Look at a bright object that is in front of a dark background. Look at it for a few moments, then close your eyes. You may continue to see the original image with your eyes closed. Practice this for about fifteen minutes a day until you are able to do it with ease. Charles Burchfield would sometimes look toward the sun and then toward the landscape, and quickly draw the first impression of what he saw.*

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**EXERCISE 1-4: Finding Your Mind's Eye**

*Sit in a comfortable chair in a quiet place. Relax for a few moments, breathing slowly and deeply. Now close your eyes and try to watch the visual images that move across your mind's eye. Seeing is more than just looking, it involves the mind. Do this as a warm-up exercise before beginning your drawing exercises.*

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**FIGURE 1-9** *Louis Sullivan. Ornamental Study. 1885. Pencil on paper. (From the Louis Sullivan Collection in the Division of Drawings and Archives, Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library, Columbia University in the City of New York)*



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## **EXERCISE 1-5: *Making Mental Images***

*This form of visualization will help intensify the experience of drawing. Sit in a comfortable chair and relax for a few minutes. Now imagine in your mind's eye that you are in one of your favorite childhood places. Try to see every detail—the floor, the furniture, the pictures on the walls, and each window—and imagine that you are in that place. If your favorite place was a landscape, imagine the plants, the smells, the feeling of the space, and every significant detail. When this is done properly, it should conjure up not only memories but also emotions. Practice this until you can re-create the space in your mind's eye, then go on and imagine other important spaces from your past.*

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## **Freedom and Structure**

The realm of drawing is balanced tenuously between freedom and structure. You must first learn the structure and fundamentals, and the ability to control the media, in order to avoid becoming stylized. Build a firm foundation with your hand and do not be seduced by technology.

The key to success is to develop a strong foundation and maintain a balance, then learn when to break all the rules and disrupt that balance. You must discover your natural point of balance between freedom and structure and then challenge it. Explore the struggle between freedom and structure. Do not strive for the perfect center; learn how to control being spontaneous and cautious. Believe in what you draw.

Today it is difficult to get a formal, traditional education in drawing and landscape architecture. Many believe that most schools now teach the “art” of rhetoric rather than the skills of drawing, painting, and sculpting. Picasso, Braque, Matisse, de Kooning, Le Corbusier, Geoffrey Jellicoe, and Garrett Eckbo all had classical educations in the fundamentals of drawing. They could all draw realistically, accurately, and beautifully. Only after they learned the basics could they go on to make the great breakthroughs and unique expressions they did.

The architect Louis Henry Sullivan’s work illustrates the direct correlation between traditional drawing skills and excellent design. He was trained firmly in the Beaux-Arts tradition. Sullivan’s drawings are exceptional works of art. The flowing, vibrant lines of his renderings expose his creative genius.

The inspiration for Sullivan’s architecture originated with his love of botany and organic patterns of growth. He studied nature’s principles of composition and then abstracted these forms into designs. Frank Lloyd Wright described Sullivan’s drawings as “poignantly beautiful rhythms.” He would develop his architectural designs from impulsive freehand sketches. There is an almost mystical quality to his drawings; some critics have even described his lines as clairvoyant. To create works of Sullivan’s caliber, we must first master the art of drawing.

No matter how fine a school you attend or how nurturing your teacher, all education is self-discipline. You must first take responsibility for teaching yourself to draw.



**FIGURE 1-10** Claude Lorrain. Wooded Landscape. Pen, brown wash. 176 × 250 mm. (Israel Museum, Jerusalem)

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### **EXERCISE 1-6: Looking at Drawings**

*Meditate on drawings from books of Louis Sullivan's work. Look closely at the sensitivity of his lines, the variations of line weight, the shadows and the accents. Try to look at his drawings every day for inspiration. Later, search out books by others whose drawings you admire; keep them around you and look at them a little each day for inspiration.*

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### **GROUP EXERCISE 1-7: Describing the Landscape**

*This exercise will sharpen your ability to describe the landscape. The drawing group should go outside and sit in a comfortable place that has a view of the landscape. Each person begins by writing a sentence describing the view or an element of the view before them on an 8½-by-11-inch lined sheet of paper. Each person then passes the page to the person on his or her right. The next person adds another sentence describing a portion of the view. Repeat this process until each person's sheet of paper is filled. Everyone then reads the page of descriptions they ended up with. Reading these descriptions will help sharpen your ability to describe landscapes. This is an important first step in learning how to visualize a landscape through drawing.*

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### **GROUP EXERCISE 1-8: *Communication Through Drawing***

*In this exercise the group must remain silent for 30 minutes. In a room where the group will not be disturbed, break off into pairs. On a 3-by-5-inch card, each individual should try to draw one of his or her thoughts without using words. After five minutes, exchange cards with your partner. Then respond to your partner's drawing by describing your emotions without words on another 3-by-5-inch card. Continue to carry on a conversation through drawing, exchanging cards every five minutes. After half an hour, stop, put up the cards, and have the participants piece together the conversation by describing the other person's cards and see if he or she got it right.*

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### **GROUP EXERCISE 1-9: *The Exquisite Corpse***

*The drawing method called "the exquisite corpse" was invented by the surrealist artist André Breton. This is a good loosening-up exercise to inspire creativity and experimentation without trying to produce preconceived images. Several people create a common drawing of a figure without seeing what the others have done. Each person must be unaware of what the previous person has drawn.*

*Begin by taking an 8½-by-11-inch sheet of unlined paper and fold it horizontally into three equal parts, like a letter. The first person begins at the top section and starts the drawing—say, with a face and shoulders—for at least five minutes. (Have someone keep time.) At the end of the five-minute period, draw just enough information below the fold so that the next person can continue the figure. For example, continue all of the lines you've drawn just below the fold. Turn the top of the paper under so that the next person cannot see what you've drawn. Pass on the paper and continue with the paper handed to you. Again, when you're finished, draw just enough below the fold so that the next person can complete, for instance, the waist, legs, and feet. When this last segment is completed, unfold the papers and display them on a wall. You will be astonished by the unexpected images produced by a range of styles but unified as a figure.*

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### **GROUP EXERCISE 1-10: *Copying a Drawing***

*This exercise illustrates how each person interprets an image. Begin this group exercise with a simple photographic image of an owl or bird. Each person should have a sheet of 8½-by-11-inch paper. The first person begins by copying the image of the owl in either pencil or pen for five minutes. Only the first person gets to see the original image. When finished, pass the drawing to the person to the right. This person copies the first person's drawing and passes the copy to be copied by the next person. After the last person finishes, hang the drawings on the wall in the order in which they were drawn. When you draw, you are editing the visual information you see. In this exercise, the final drawing will look entirely different from the original image.*

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*The Universal Traveler*, by Don Koberg and Jim Bagnall, is a handy guide-book on inventive thinking and the design process for your creative journey; it can be an excellent source of inspiration and renewal of energy for the beginning and advanced artist. Drawing practice, when combined with the creative tools and problem solving methods outlined in *The Universal Traveler*, can be extremely beneficial. Additionally, the open-ended approach of the authors can be very helpful, particularly if you get discouraged with your progress. But try not to get discouraged; the creative



(a)



(b)



(c)



(d)

**FIGURE 1-11** Everyone can improve through sustained practice. Here are examples of student work over a period of little more than a year. If you are discouraged, draw more, not less. No artist expects to create a masterpiece every time. You will improve your skills when you draw enough that you free yourself from believing that each drawing must be precious. Experiment, attack the page; draw what you think you will be able to capture. That is how you will learn.

(a) & (b) Lisa Micheli. Ink wash drawings done about a year apart.

(c) & (d) This comparison shows the dramatic improvement a student, Allison Yiu, made within the duration of a single semester. (c) The image on the left marks the beginning of the semester, and (d) the one on the right was completed during the final week of class. Through the daily regime of drawing 40 to 80 images per lecture in drawing class, mastery of the quick gesture is inevitable. (Photos: Steven Brooks)

process takes time and practice. The benefits of a drawing exercise (self-portraits, for instance) become clear only after you've repeated the exercise many times. Be assured that if you are working at it, you are progressing, whether or not your progress is visible at the moment.

## The Power of Drawing

Drawings can be powerful tools that influence the future. They have the potential to create and change the world. A good example of this can be found in the impact of the seventeenth-century landscape drawings of Claude Lorrain and Nicolas Poussin. Their style of landscape drawing established the vocabulary for England's romantic, pastoral style of the

**FIGURE 1-12** *Frank James, Sasaki Associates. Ink on paper.*



eighteenth century. Designs derived from these drawings and paintings shaped large-scale modifications of the English garden and countryside. This influence can be seen today throughout the United States in many built landscapes. By understanding these works we can begin to see the effect that drawing can have on our environment.

The drawings taken by themselves show a wonderful sensitivity in their rendering of the landscape. Many were done of Italian Renaissance gardens and became the basis for larger landscape paintings. Artistic groupings of vegetation were used to create pictorial space. Additionally, each tree was precisely rendered to bring out its individual characteristics. And because these sketches are most often done in pen and ink with sepia washes, you can almost feel the wind rushing through the leaves.

## The Spirit of Drawing



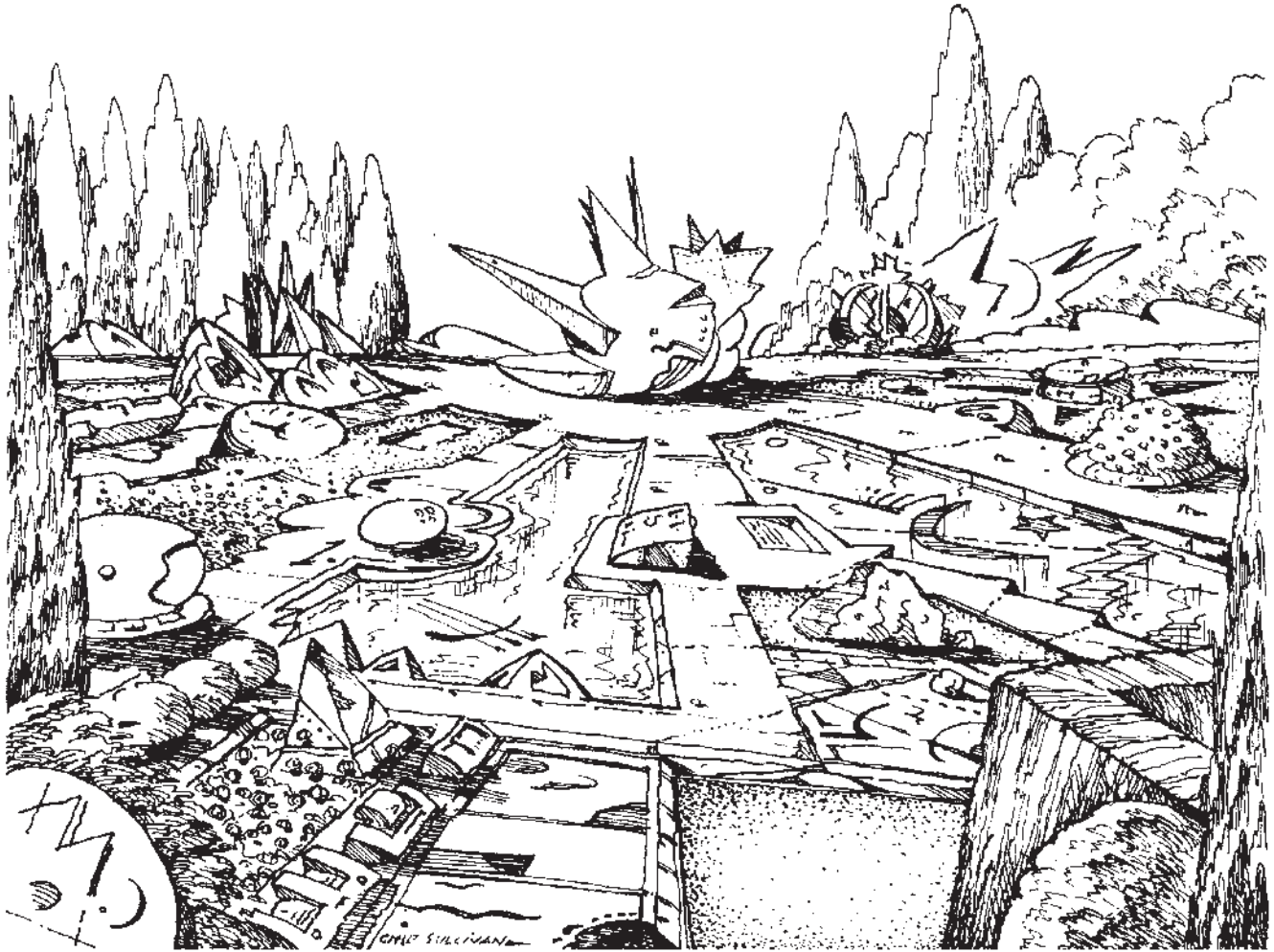
*In a drawing session of this sort, there must be a warming-up period. The first few drawings may be halting or stilted, not getting into the heart of the subject. All at once, everything begins to click, and one drawing after another may come about as if under its own power. I must confess, I love this kind of drawing in the same way as I did some of my paintings, which also seemed to have originated spontaneously. While I am engaged in producing drawings of this sort, a wonderful sense of well-being and contentment comes over me, the feeling that no other activity could possibly be as fulfilling as my reason for being alive. (Charles Burchfield in Jones, ed. 1968)*

Drawing can be an altered state of consciousness, a form of meditation, and a way of evolving to higher levels of awareness—a point in time when your concentration is focused so intently on your work that all distractions disappear. The artist essentially merges with the work. When you draw in this manner you become part of a whole new world, creating your own version of reality. This act of drawing can be a spiritual covenant between yourself and those unidentifiable higher forces. If you become totally involved in the creative act, you are “provoking and being provoked by those images. You get involved in a metaphoric revelation, and witness metaphors emerging from the work” (Flack, 1986, 9).

The profession of landscape architecture is a calling. Your art should be a friend that will never abandon you. As Robert Henri, teacher and artist, said, “I am not interested in art as a means of making a living, but I am interested in art as a means of living a life” (1923, 158).

When you draw with total concentration, time will appear to stand still, cutting through reality. If you are able to make this connection with your subconscious, it can make you a better designer. Your finished product will project this spirit, because you have transformed your individuality and energy into the work. Since you have imparted to it a life of its own, it will exert enormous power and energy on those who view it.





**FIGURE 1-13** *Pen and ink on paper.*  
*Drawing your vision.*

Drawing is also a form of magic. Your hand generates lines capable of making form come alive, magically producing your own personal vision. Just watch children watching someone who is drawing; look at the smiles and how they are awed.

While drawing, work toward attaining a state of being that is different from your ordinary wakeful state. Your sense of concentration should be trancelike. Robert Henri said of this state that “there are moments in a day, when we seem to see beyond the usual—become clairvoyant. We reach then into reality. Such are the moments of our greatest wisdom” (1923, 45). With this heightened sense of awareness of all the elements in the landscape, the true artist will be able to render it as a living thing.

*When all parts of the work start coming together, a renewed excitement is generated and builds until the harmony and balance of what you have been trying to accomplish work. You feel like a conductor bringing the full sound of the orchestra to its grand finale. You have reached the peak experience toward which all artists work. (Flack 1986, 14)*