TIPS FOR DRAWING TREES WITH PENCIL:

An Excerpt from Drawing & Painting Trees in the Landscape by Claudia Nice
Pencil marks

Although simple in design, the pencil is a very versatile tool. By changing the shape of the point or the angle at which it is applied, you can create numerous line widths. To change the value from light to dark, you can choose a softer lead, apply more pressure or overlap the strokes. The illusion of texture is created by varying the pattern of the pencil strokes, as shown below.

Stroking with the pencil point provides narrow, precise lines, while using a chisel edge or the side of the pencil will create broad lines that are good for loose sketching or filling in.

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Blends and smudges

Graphite smudges easily, whether or not it’s intentional. Protect your work by resting your hand on a separate piece of clean paper. Spraying finished areas with workable fixative is a good idea.

Controlled smudges work beautifully to create smooth, solid areas, to make graduated blends and to soften edges. Simply rub the graphite marks to make them smear. Fingers work, but using a paper stump or tortillion is less messy and more accurate.

Blended tones add a soft look to the branches of this tree, while a few final scribble lines suggest individual leaves.

1. Use quick scribble lines to suggest the contours of the branches.

2. Soften the marks with a tortillion.

3. Add details such as a few individual twigs and leaves, especially around the outside edges of the tree.

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The smooth, rounded contour of these pears is suggested by following the four easy steps shown below. Use a 2B sketching pencil and a paper tortillion. A kneaded eraser can be useful in retrieving narrow highlight areas that may be accidently smudged.

1. Make a preliminary pencil sketch.

2. Shade the contour using overlapping lines.

3. Use a tortillion to soften and blend the shading lines.

4. Smudge on some skin texturing using the pencil point and a tortillion.

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Sketching distant trees

At a distance the tone and texture of trees is softened. Try simplifying them as shown in these steps.

1. Lightly indicate the tree groupings and major shadow areas with a no. 2 pencil and a loose scribble line.

2. Use hatch marks and crosshatching to suggest the shape and texture of the tree forms. Work in light to mid-tone grays, leaving plenty of highlight areas. The greater the value range, the closer to the viewer the trees will appear.

3. Smudge and smooth the lines together using a tortillion or paper stump. Leave just a hint of outline, texture and tonal variation. The back row of trees should be less defined than those in front.

Cottonwood Canyon | 10" × 8" (25 × 20cm), graphite on paper

No. 2B and 4B pencils were used to shade and detail this drawing. The background trees are a little closer than the ones shown on the opposite page, and therefore, are slightly more detailed. Their dark shadow values provide good contrast for the foreground tree.

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My first ink pen was a crow quill dip pen with a fine nib. It provided a delicate line and was economical, but had to be recharged with ink frequently, had limited stroking direction and tended to spatter now and again. My favorite inking tool for studio work is the Koh-I-Noor Rapidograph technical pen, in nib sizes .25mm, .35mm and .50mm. It maintains a reliable line width, can be stroked in any direction and has a refillable cartridge. The drawbacks are price and maintenance—it must be cleaned on a regular basis to work properly. For field work and quick sketching, felt tip pens can’t be beat. My favorites are the Pigma Micron or the Pitt pen. Both contain permanent ink and come in a variety of nib sizes. Buy several, as you cannot tell when they are going to run out of ink.

For a quality drawing surface, choose an acid-free paper that is recommended for pen and ink work. The surface must be polished enough to prevent the ink lines from fraying along the edges.

The ink you choose is very important. There are many types available, but many are made from dyes that tend to fade over time. My favorite permanent ink is Koh-I-Noor Universal Black India Ink (3080). It is waterproof and brush-proof, allowing watercolor washes to be stroked over it without bleeding. Speedball and Higgins also make good waterproof India inks. If you are using a technical pen, make sure that the ink you choose is recommended for it. For colored ink work, I prefer Daler-Rowney FW Acrylic Artist’s Ink, in transparent colors. It’s vibrant, permanent, water resistant and compatible with a technical pen.
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