What next?

Hopefully you have enjoyed your time drawing at the Chester Beatty Library. Remember that exercising your skills can release your true potential to draw. It is important to enjoy what you are doing as well as take the time to see how you can improve.

Drawing is a great pastime that you can do almost anywhere; why not carry a small notebook with you everywhere you go to keep practising and to sketch ideas?

Notes

This section of the booklet is designed for taking notes of the things you saw while visiting the Library and for jotting down any ideas that you might want to work on in the future.
Welcome to the Chester Beatty Library

This pack is designed to help you enjoy your time and encourage you to draw at the Chester Beatty Library. Whether you are a beginner or a confident artist, this booklet will give you advice, encouragement, and helpful tips that will improve your skills as you explore the great collection of manuscripts, prints, rare books, and decorative arts that were assembled by Sir Alfred Chester Beatty.

There are plenty of things to inspire you on your visit. Within the collection, you will see a host of artistic treasures from many great cultures and religions. These can give you an inspiring insight into the diverse styles and techniques used by artists around the world and you will see artworks from across Asia, the Middle East, North Africa, and Europe. The vast range of material seen in the collection demonstrates the richness of human creative expression and spans from about 2700 BC to the present day.

Why draw?

There are many reasons why you might decide to draw. Perhaps you find that drawing is a useful skill for recording information; or maybe you find that it heightens your visual awareness and helps you see the world through fresh eyes.

Perhaps you simply find that it is a pleasurable pastime and that it brings much satisfaction. The most important thing is that you have fun and enjoy what you are doing. If you play around with different materials and techniques, you will soon discover what suits you and your style.

What should I draw?

There is no one answer to what you should draw, except that you should draw whatever you like! When it comes to drawing, there are never any right or wrong ways to do it. Simply find something that you find interesting or that you like and draw it! This booklet will give you some advice, tips, and encouragement to get you started, but once you find something you like to draw, you may discover what suits you and your style.

Portraiture

If you are interested in figurative drawing, then you will find a huge variety of examples in the Library. There is quite a difference in the way that the figure is drawn depending on when and where it was drawn.

Already in this booklet, we have looked at some ways of carrying out studies. It might be interesting to do a case study that explores some of the similarities and differences in figure drawing throughout the collection. Take note of where each picture comes from and what materials are used. Make sure to label each drawing for future reference.

Portraits do not only try and capture a likeness to their subject - they also aim to show the inner essence of that person. In many cases, they will also aim to present a flattering representation of their subject.

There are a variety of ways a portrait artist will depict their subject including full length, half length, head and shoulders, and head compositions. The angle of the head also plays a deciding factor in portraiture and throughout the collection, you may discover portraits in profile, three-quarter view, or full face.

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Decoration

Perhaps there are other parts of the collection you would like to study in fine detail. Why not take a look at some of the objects in the Islamic section? The works found in this part of the Library illustrate in exquisite form and detail the history and development of all aspects of the Islamic collection including calligraphy, illumination, miniature painting and bookbinding. Many feature finely detailed work.

Find one such piece and attempt to draw it. Perhaps you are interested in doing a quick study of a page from one of these manuscripts? If so, it may be quite challenging to fill in all of the detail. Often while sketching, artists will break their drawing into sections so that they can give a general sense of what they are studying and then magnify a part of it to show in detail what they wish to focus on. This technique may be useful to try.

Why not look for something that you find interesting and do a study which examines some of the key features that you find of interest?

What materials?

Today there is almost a limitless variety of materials for an artist to work with. This choice allows for a host of different approaches to working as well as a variety of different marks that can be made.

Within the collection you will also see a large variety of materials which have been used for image-making. Some of these include inks, rare pigments and even gold-leaf. As you make your way through the gallery today try and spot some of these different materials and see what sort of qualities each approach produces.

Drawing with pencils

Perhaps the most familiar drawing tool is the pencil. Pencils can come with a variety of graphite cores. These are graded by H and B systems.

H pencils are typically harder pencils with 9H being the hardest. B pencils are softer with 8B being the softest. The softer the graphite, the darker the mark. Pencils marked F and HB fall somewhere in the middle.

Inside your pack you will find a HB, a 2B and a 4B.

Why not experiment with some of the pencils in your pack? Which one is darkest? Can you feel the difference in the graphite?

Why not take a page and experiment with a variety of lines?

The exercise above will show you how immediate and versatile a pencil can be. Can you see how the character of the line changes depending on the hardness and softness of the graphite? Other things which will affect the character of the line include how sharply the pencil is pared, how much pressure is applied to it, and the speed in which the line is made.

How many different kinds of marks and shades can you make with just one pencil?

Here are some examples to get you started:
Drawing with line

For our next exercise we will try to do a continuous line drawing. Sometimes this type of exercise is referred to as ‘taking a line for a walk’ as it involves drawing a continuous line without allowing the pencil to leave the page.

Find something which you like and then take a pencil and begin to draw it. Take your time and remember that you are trying to make sure the pencil does not leave the page. Try your best to observe the outline of the object.

Try and capture the essence of your subject by drawing with as few strokes as possible.

While doing the exercise above try and ask yourself the following questions:

• Does the object you are drawing look two-dimensional or three-dimensional?

• Can you give the object a feeling of being three-dimensional by simply varying the quality and thickness of the line?

Perhaps take a look through the collection and examine the different ways lines can be drawn. Are there different ways that artists show three-dimensional objects in their work?

Using colour

Within your pack you will also find some colouring pencils. Although colouring pencils may at first look similar to normal pencils you will soon find that they have a very different feel and texture. Instead of using graphite, colouring pencils use clay which has been covered with pigment and then been set in wax. Try out some colouring pencils and see what you think!

Can you shade with coloured pencils or do you prefer to block in solid colour?

Take a walk through some of the East Asian collection and note the rich use of colour that is found in many of the pieces on display. Often you will see that solid blocks of colour are added to the strong black lines of an image; other times artists have chosen to draw solely with colour.

Perhaps there is an image in this part of the gallery which you like, maybe there is just a detail!

Find a colourful image or detail which you like and sketch it in your notepad.

Be aware of how colour is used and attempt to do the same. Colour can change dramatically depending on how much pressure you place on the colouring pencil. See how effectively you can try and match the colours featured in the work.

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Using different materials

Perhaps you could try exploring tone some more by using different materials. If neutral tones are grey then what would it be like to use black and white conté crayons on grey paper? How about only drawing areas of light by drawing on black paper with chalk?

It can be quite enjoyable to work with charcoal and add layers of brightness with an eraser. Through experimentation and the use of different materials you can find some exciting results.

The artists in Chester Beatty’s collection use a variety of different materials. Is it easy to recognise them? Are there any particular materials which you prefer the look of?

Why not use this space to try out different materials or take note of which materials your favourite work in the gallery is drawn with?

Shading

One technique which is often used in drawing is shading. Shading is achieved by defining the darker and lighter areas of your drawing with a variety of pressure and strokes. When executed successfully the combination of tone, shadow and light creates the illusion of solidity on a two-dimensional surface.

Take a look in the gallery to see if you can find some work which uses this technique.

Why not practice building up tones by taking a pencil and working from the lightest shade to the darkest?

Examples of shading can perhaps best be seen in Western art but this technique is also apparent in some Asian and Islamic collections. Often art will be inspired and influenced by different countries and cultures and this can be seen as you explore the Library.

4 Knight, Death and the Devil (detail)  
Albert Dürer  
1513, Germany

5 A Yellow Boy (detail)  
c. 1820, Delhi or Hassu, India

6 Okabe, Fujieda, Shimada & Kanaya Stations (detail)  
From Famous Views of the Fifty-three Stations of the Tokaidō  
Utagawa Kuniyoshi  
c. 1835, Japan
Outlining and shading

Now find an object that shows a good contrast between light and dark. If you prefer you can always try and copy an image that is already in the gallery. For this exercise we will use a pencil.

Begin by lightly sketching the outline of the object and then gently shading in a layer of tone with close parallel lines in the darker areas. Try to keep the strokes all in the same direction and with the same consistency.

For the second layer, try to remove the uniform nature of your strokes in an attempt to subtly increase the depth of tone. Many artists like to use strokes of parallel lines that overlap; this is called ‘crosshatching’.

After this is completed you should aim to increase the tone in the darkest areas with a strong layer of pressure and make sure to observe the shape of the shadows. Reflected light can then be added by working gently on the image with an eraser.

Exploring perspective

Perspective is a technique that aims to represent height, width and depth from a particular viewpoint to give the impression that the image is three-dimensional. Throughout the European, Islamic and East Asian collections you will see how artists used a variety of approaches to create this illusion.

A good example of this is reflected in the art of the Renaissance (c. 14th - 16th century). During this time artists began to explore techniques to help make their images seem more realistic. Artists used ‘linear perspective’ and worked from a fixed viewpoint to create the illusion of depth achieved by converging lines on the horizon. This technique created an illusion of peering into a space from a single viewpoint similar to looking from a window onto a landscape.

Artists in the Islamic world had a different approach to perspective. We can see that artists rarely show a linear perspective and much of what is on display has a beautiful flat quality to it. We can see that artists often created the effect of distance by simply changing the size of the figures or objects they drew. They would also occasionally draw with an ‘aerial perspective’ - a technique that involves representing distance by making colours in the background appear fainter than those in the foreground.

Artists in Japan were also interested in techniques to illustrate perspective in their work. Unlike the ‘single windows’ in European art, Japanese subjects were commonly painted on scrolls. This meant that one image could be unfolded in parts and for this reason artists could never assume a single fixed position. Instead, they created images that could be read from a number of viewpoints. Unlike linear perspective, artists used what is known as parallel perspective. Parallel lines do not converge on the horizon and instead were often hidden by the artist. This way the proportions of buildings and landscapes would never appear to warp or look unrealistic.

Take a walk around the gallery and observe the ways artists use perspective in their work.