

Studio I: Seeing is Believing

Barbara Putnam and Studio I students

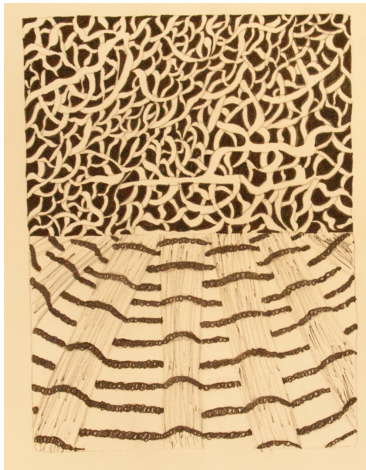
We go to school to learn how to learn. We develop physical, emotional, and perceptual skills that allow us to leave behind what we once thought were limitations. I have always loved teaching the real beginners in Studio I-- those students who are convinced that they have no eye and think they have nothing in common with those around them who mysteriously, eloquently, translate thoughts and observations onto sheets of paper. Most of us remember painting as children but learning to “speak” in a more sophisticated visual language means embracing a wholly new enterprise, similar to constructing that first meaningful conversation in a foreign language.

Learning to see and record accurate detail from the three dimensional world takes time and is broken down into small steps, beginning with studies of color, contrast, patterns, followed by learning to organize a persuasive composition, draw from images, and finally, to draw from life. The alert student discovers for example, how our eyes see objects in three dimensional space by analyzing the behavior of light on them. Each little step, with practice wins confidence: not much different from learning how to use a hockey stick, coordinating the movement of the hand, wrist, and later the shoulder, connecting mark-making with observation. Noticing what drives curiosity and holds our attention along with patterns that emerge while mastering new skills leads eventually to the discovery of our personal style or voice.

I asked students in this year’s Studio I class to deconstruct a myth about Studio Art: that you are either born with “it” or not and to describe what may be a recent or a distant memory about the process of learning to see. Included are samples of their early work followed by a drawing completed just after spring break. Here is what they said:

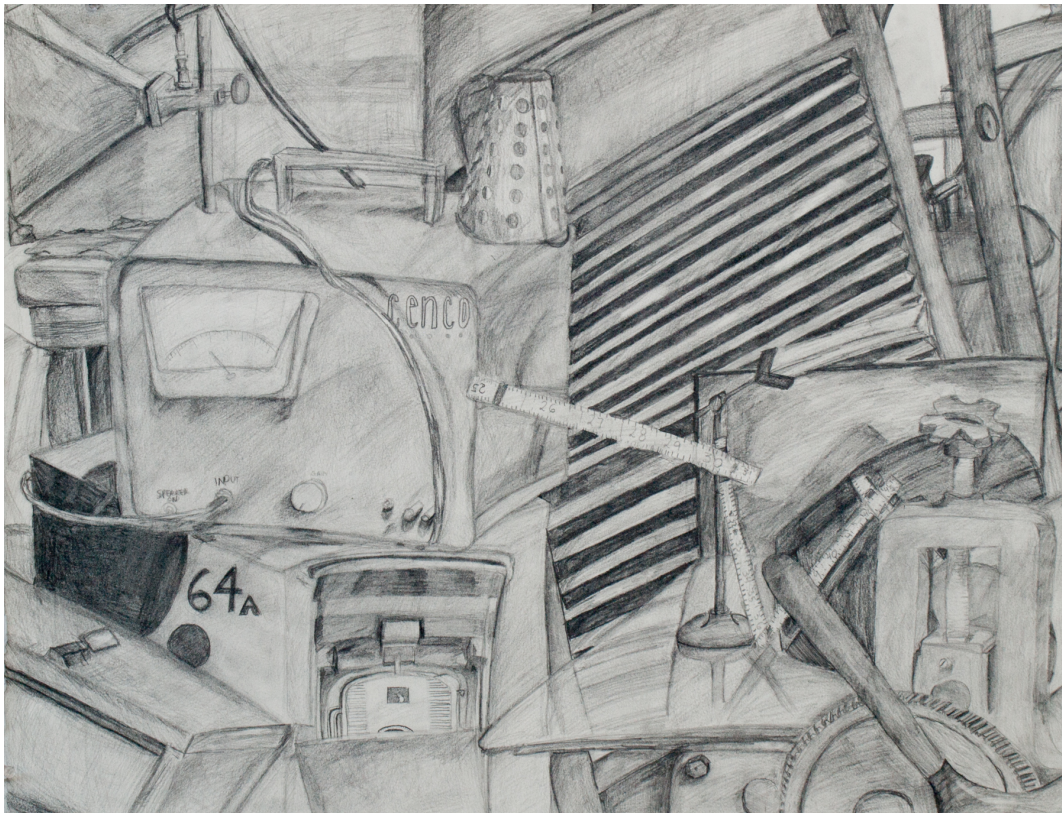
Olivia Sommers ‘17

Learning to draw is hard. Really hard. I came into this year having never done any art classes, so unlike most other people in my class I was truly learning how to draw. Learning to draw is unlike anything I



have done before. It requires a certain concentration and persistence. Traits you develop from looking at the same object in many different ways, and working constantly at a drawing for as long as it takes to make it right. Now trust me, I am no expert at drawing. I have only been drawing for about seven months. But I am an expert at getting super frustrated at my drawing and continuously trying to get it right. Drawing teaches you to look at objects and your surroundings differently. Items that I had never look twice at before this year, I pay more attention to the way that they catch light, and are constructed. Not only do I look at objects differently, but I have also learned to think more creatively for certain problems

and situations. Although learning to draw has been hard, it has been a really good learning experience, and very rewarding.



Olivia Sommers, 22X30" March, 2014

Harry Kuperstein '17

"What it was like to learn how to draw"

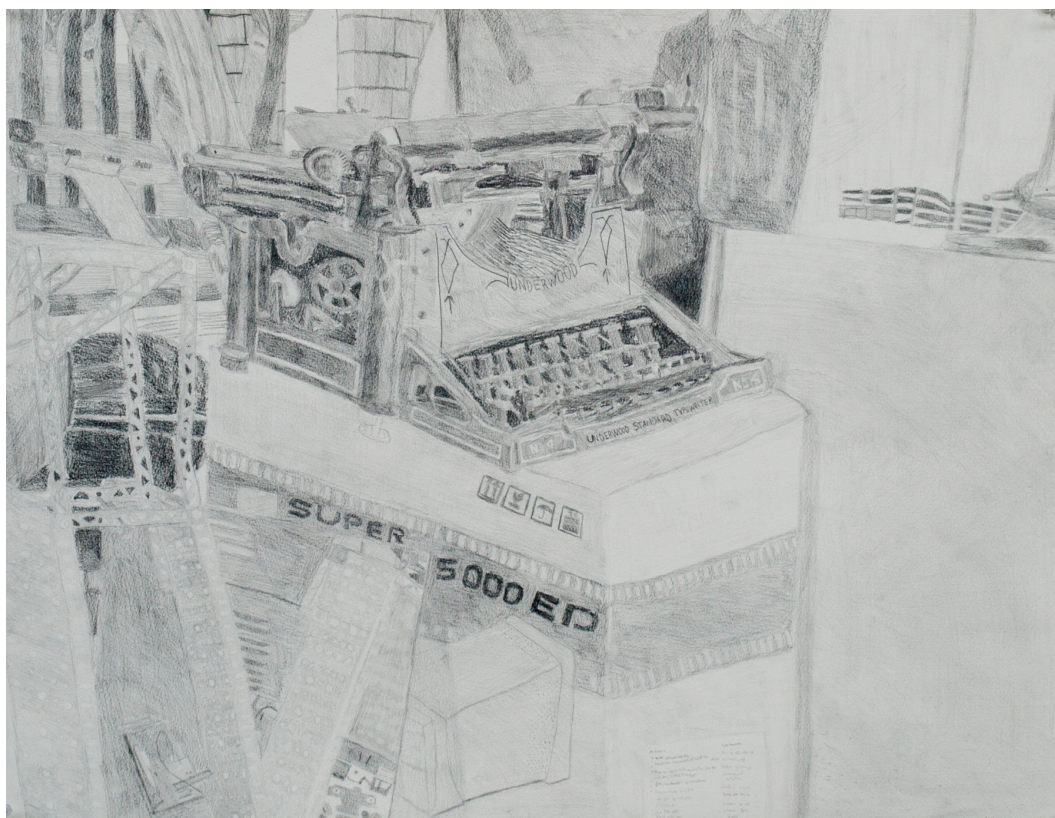
I've always been pretty bad at art, drawing, and sketches. As time went on in my years in elementary and middle school, I watched and saw lots of my friends start to realize their artistic abilities - whether that be drawing, music, or theater, and pursue it or even just use it when needed. I sat on the sidelines that



these were things you were born with, and that these people were "gifted" with something I didn't have. But when I was selecting courses for my Freshman year I picked Studio I without much thought, it seemed to me as if it'd be a good option. In this class, it was where I learned that drawing can also be a learned skill, not one you either have at birth or you don't.

As the year started I realized that I was right, I was pretty terrible at art. But I wasn't going to transfer out of the class, I had already done a few assignments and found it to be a relaxing activity from time to time. But once I had a project or two under my belt and countless late-night homework assignments that I worked through I noticed something. What was once hard at the beginning of the year was a lot easier now. I could redo all of those assignments that I had done at the beginning of the year and do so much better. It was a clear sign of improvement, and something that subconsciously slipped under my radar until it was pointed out to me. The improvement still happens though, every time I begin a new assignment I learn something new. Whether it be a new method of using my pencil, a new and easy way to describe something, or how to make certain things pop out in a drawing - it's mostly come naturally.

It's not so weird when you learning, as it's mostly masked by drowsiness and hours passed trying to finish something. But it's more so the contrast between the current piece and the first piece that I worked on that really shows me the sheer improvement. I can even see differences between an assignment I did two weeks ago and now, though generally small it's still evident. And that ability to not only see those differences, but to know that it's changing, is a clear sign that I've learned to draw and will continue to for as long as I keep practicing it.



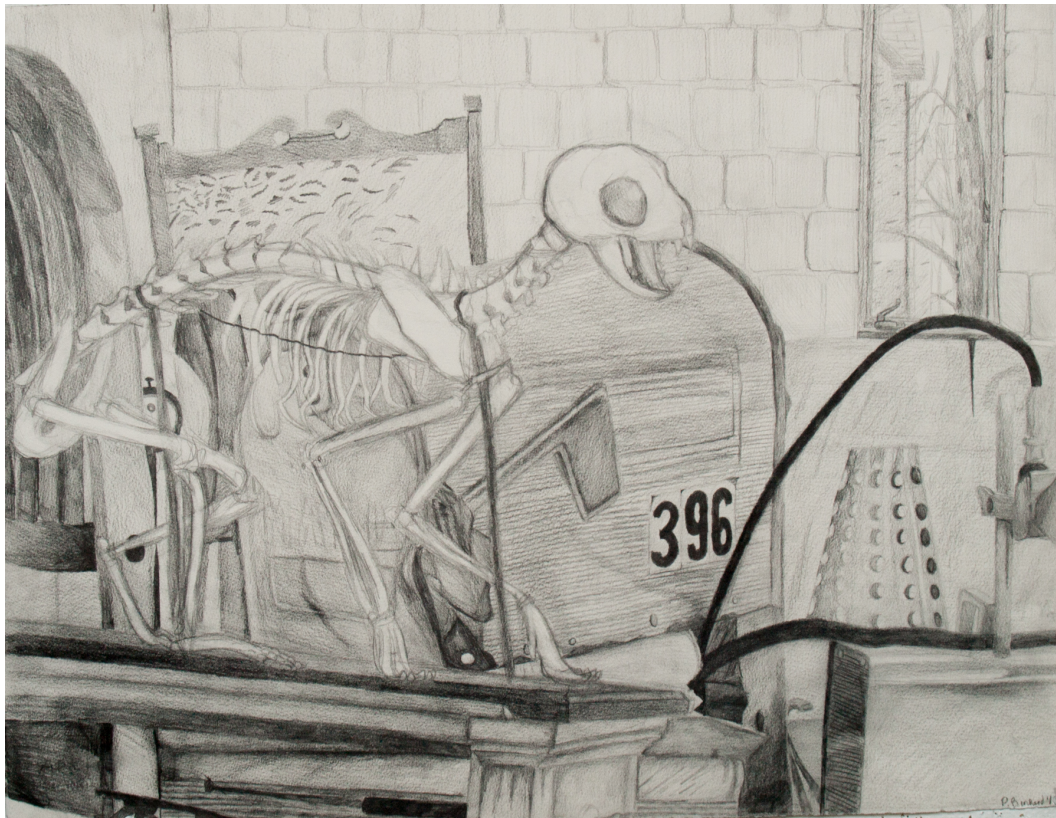
Harry Kuperstein 22X30 Pencil March, 2014

Penelope Benkard '16

"One of the reasons that I chose St. Marks was the fact that I could take both choir and art, which had been a common conflict in my old school. It was so refreshing to be able to get away from it all for 45 minutes almost every day, and put my feelings onto the paper in front of me. In studio, we learned the basics of shading, painting, and color composition. I watched as a whole new world of art was opened up to me. I could finally draw those things that I could not before. It was easier than ever to express myself and speak to others with that. The fact that I found that I can do so much that I didn't know I could makes me so happy, and constantly inspires me to try new things and take more chances with my pieces. Art has



become my therapy. Picking apart the proportions of something, and adding in colors to make someone want to stare at for hours may want to make me tear apart my drawing, but under all of that is a love for doing it. The fact that Studio is so different from the rest of my classes makes me constantly look forward to it, and crave picking up a pencil or paintbrush. It has few limitations, and this may sound cheesy, but it helps me unlock a side of myself I never knew."



Penelope Benkard 22X30 Pencil March, 2014

Joey Smith '17

"Learn how to draw? Oh no, I'm awful at it, thanks though."

"No, I have never been a good artist."

"I can't draw for my life."

Despite the common belief, artistic ability isn't a god given gift that only a select few of the population are blessed with. Believe it or not, it actually can be learned. In fact, most students in Studio 1 had little to no art experience prior to taking the course. Look where they are now. These gargantuan progressions were

made possible through the gentle nudge of Mrs. Putnam trying to get each of us students to have a breakthrough and finally get "it". Each and every student in the class is twice the artist they were in September. You know what? I'll just tell you how.

The Crash course of "Drawing 101" begins now...

Think you know what a flower looks like? How about your stuffed teddy bear at home? Your kitchen?



Your favorite Sweatshirt? You don't. Each and every one of us 3rd and 4th formers learned this. No matter how false you think this statement is, trust me, it's true. Heres a scenario... You want to draw your bed. You start drawing, you think you know what it looks like and maybe look up to the scene only about 3 or 4 times in the span you are drawing. You finish, look down at your pad, then back at your bed. Something looks wrong? Maybe you drew the bed frame at a more drastic angle than in reality. Maybe you drew the bed sheet as if it were flat ironed down thousands of times without a wrinkle etched in. These faults are what happen when your brain convinces you, "Yeah, I know what that looks like." No you don't, when it comes to drawing, if you don't put down exactly what you see, the product will not be as good as your hopes.

Okay, want to draw something? Don't reach in your bag and grab the same pencil you just took your algebra quiz with. Part of being a good artist is using the correct equipment effectively. Art pencils are labeled with the lightest tones being a number followed by the letter "H," the higher the number the more light. Then with the darker tones it is a number followed by the letter "B," the same rule applies. Most artists will block out their drawings using an "HB" pencil which is the neutral between the light and dark. An "HB" pencil is the tone of a regular school pencil.

Starting a drawing? Most inexperienced artists block out a disproportional out line then randomly fill in different parts of it with lighter and darker tones that they think are correct when doing so. What one needs to do in order to produce a good drawing is to use some type of measurement method. Then once the method is found, the user must base every object in the drawing off of it. Also, rather than using a 6B pencil when you need to draw a dark area, start off with an HB and try to build the tones.

Drawing is boring? Yeah, you're right, a lot of it can be boring. However, as one delves deep into art they will find that something deeply interests them. Whether this object of interest is glass, fabric or anatomy, the person will draw and draw and draw to find out something about it.

Drawing takes too long? Yeah, it does. Nevertheless, all of the time one spends drawing and building up tones, they will soon find out they have learned a thing or two. Practice, or as Mrs. Putnam says, "Mileage," is key when it comes to art. With the right amount of mileage, anyone can be a great artist.

My personal overall experience this year so far in Studio has been great, I have learned so much and become a significantly better artist than before. It may seem like a lot to take on, but there is no doubt in my mind that its worth it. I highly suggest taking Studio to anyone interested in trying something new.



Joey Smith drawing 22X30 Pencil March 2014