

STROKES ⁵
OF GENIUS
the best of drawing

Design and Composition | edited by Rachel Rubin Wolf

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Strokes of Genius 5: The Best of Drawing

Design and Composition

Edited by: Rachel Rubin Wolf



NORTH LIGHT BOOKS

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GARLIC IN A NEW LIGHT

Cecile Baird

Colored pencil on Stonehenge paper

13" × 20" (33cm × 51cm)

I have long been interested in how light can change objects. I look for transparent subjects and often use backlighting to enhance the transparency. I set the garlic still life up in my studio and used a carpenter's light with a 75-watt daylight bulb to create the backlighting. Because the garlic was so small, the light had to be very close to work. When I pulled the delicate layers of the garlic apart and let the backlighting shine through, it was mesmerizing. By cropping close I drew the viewer's eye around the glowing layers and especially to the light coming between the two garlics.

Introduction

Impressionist artist Pierre Bonnard taught, in agreement with a long art tradition, that drawing is the foundation of art. But he is also quoted as saying, “And after drawing comes composition. A well-composed painting is half done.” In other words, once the composition is well established, all that’s needed is to add the details.

Composition: 1) the nature of something’s ingredients or constituents; the way in which a whole or mixture is made up. 2) the action of putting things together; formation or construction. 3) a thing composed of various elements.

In two-dimensional art, the ingredients or constituents that the artist is putting together are primarily shape and value, along with line and color. How an artist accomplishes this task largely predicts the success or failure of the work of art. Twentieth-century American artist Marc Awodey said, “The anatomy of the picture is always more important than the anatomy of the subject.” *Strokes of Genius* artist Steven Thor Johanneson agrees: “Composition is the single most important aspect in any two-dimensional artwork.” In this view, the design on the two-dimensional surface is more crucial to the success of the work than is the subject itself.

However, it is also said, “Before you compose your picture it’s a good idea to ask yourself why you’re doing it.” Many of the artists in this book have voiced the same thought: The foundation of good composition is a good story. “A good composition is a story worth telling; developing the characters and illuminating their relationships is the key to bringing it across,” says Mary Ann Pals. Terry Miller says, “... the key to capturing the viewer’s eye is establishing a composition with an interesting, well-balanced idea.” Similarly, Aaron Schuerr says, “Find a clear, simple idea and subordinate everything to that one idea.”

Whichever side one emphasizes, all would agree with Olga Nielsen that “Good composition gives emotional impact to a drawing.”

We hope you are impacted by our fifth volume of *Strokes of Genius* and find a lot of tips for composing your own work along the way.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rachel". The script is fluid and cursive, with a large, sweeping 'R' and a long, trailing flourish at the end.

Rachel Rubin Wolf

Splendid Scenes



Tulip Time by the Windmill Revisited

Susan Price

Oil pastel and 2B graphite on Stonehenge paper

6½" × 10" (17cm × 25cm)

The Dynamic Figure



THE SEAMSTRESS

Carol E. Maltby

Urban Composition



Fair Fauna



The Right Stuff



About Face



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• *Self-Portrait: Homely Girl*

* Don Donaldson Memorial Award, 2012 Historic Black and White Exhibition, Salmagundi Club, New York, NY

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• *Garlic in a New Light*

• *When Morning Breaks*



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Thanks is due to all of the talented and articulate artists in this book, whose lives are “composed” of seeing beauty in simple things and making art so that we can see it too. Thank you for sharing your techniques and your wisdom with us. I am appreciative of the time (and money) spent in getting the properly formatted digital photos to us. You are a wonderful group of people and artists!

Metric Conversion Chart		
To convert	to	multiply by
Inches	Centimeters	2.54
Centimeters	Inches	0.4
Feet	Centimeters	30.5
Centimeters	Feet	0.03
Yards	Meters	0.9

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