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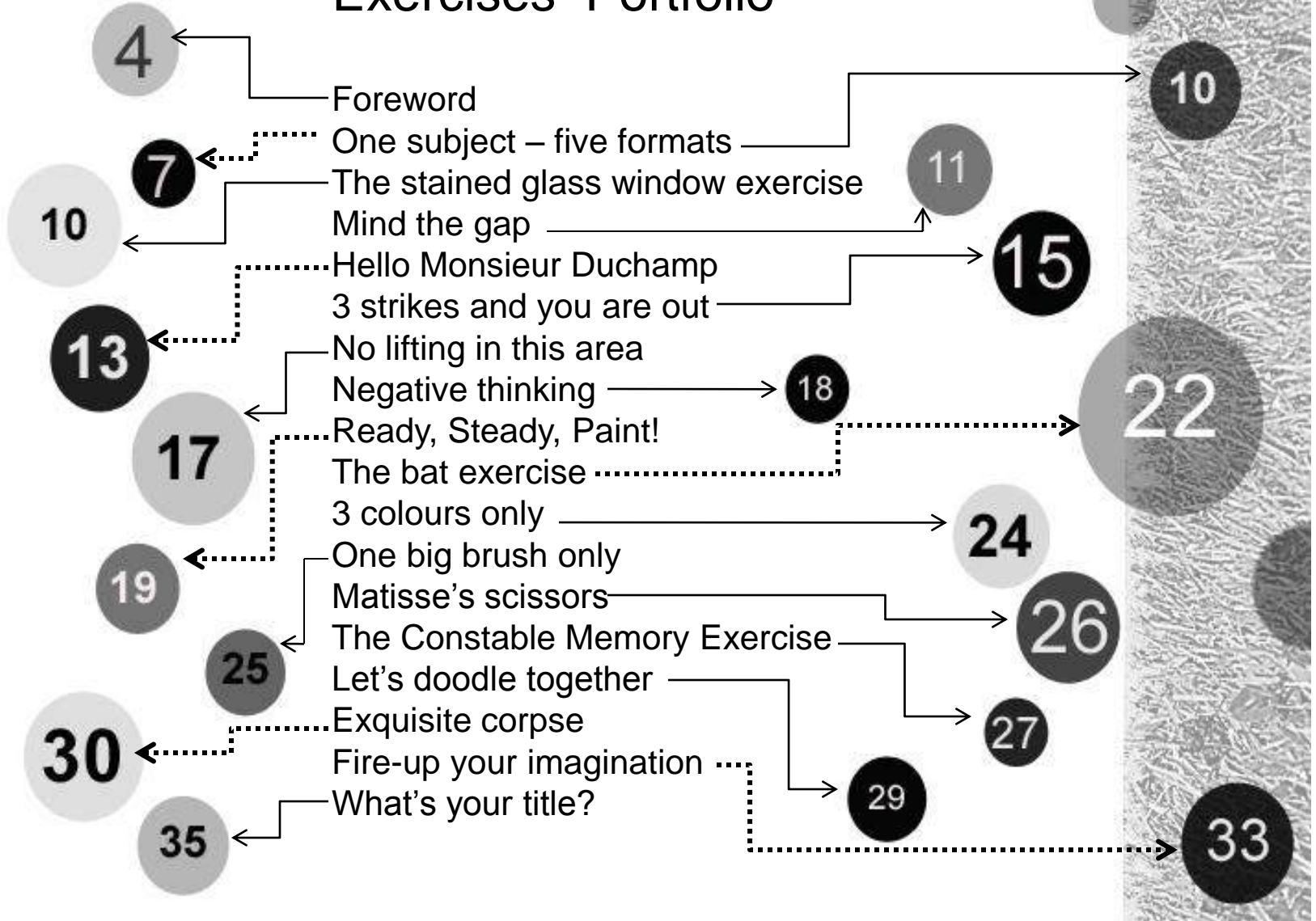
Exercises

For artists and everyone else

Benoit Philippe

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Exercises Portfolio



Foreword

You said creativity?

Creativity is a fascinating subject surrounded by many myths, the first one being that it is only a gift granted to a few at birth and therefore cannot be learnt or taught.

It is hard to define creativity. To me, it is creating new combinations, displacing meaning and making ideas collide.

There are excellent books on creativity, but many are designed for words and ideas rather than with the visual artist in mind.

Creativity thrives on constraint and the exercises in this book are based on this principle. I learnt some of them years ago and I created some more to fulfil my own needs.

Who is this book for?

I am a painter, so most of these exercises are visual ones. However, many of them do not require specific artistic skills and are suitable for anyone regardless of their age or level of artistic ability.

You can use them as warm-up before you start a new project or as a way to explore new avenues.

I hope teachers will use these exercises in their classes as they are great fun.

“Much of creative thinking involves combining previously unrelated ideas, goods or services and turning them into something new. The printing press was created by Gutenberg, who combined the coin punch with the wine press.”

Michael Michalko – “Thinkertoys”

One subject – five formats

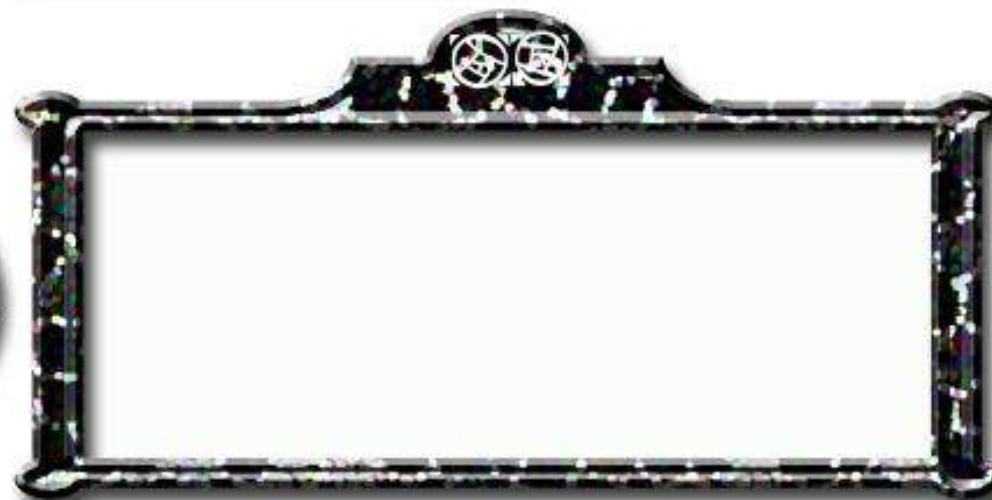
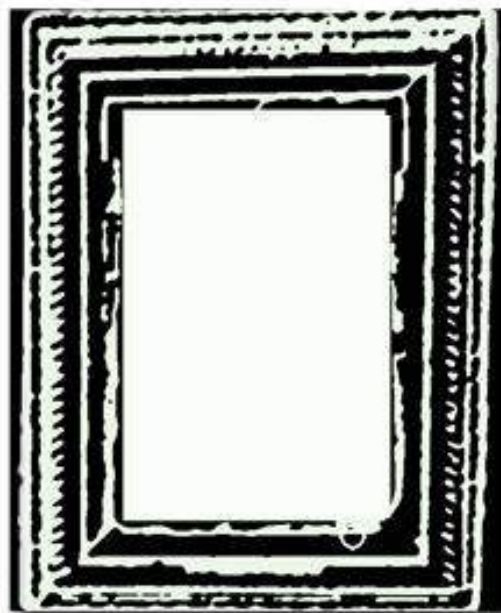
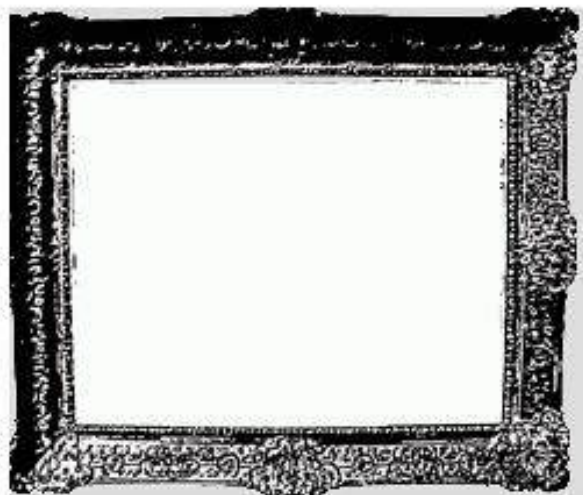
Instructions

Draw 5 different compositions in the frames provided using the reference photograph on the next page or part of it.

You don't have to be a slave to the photograph but each drawing should include at least one element taken from it.

Ready? Go to the next pages.





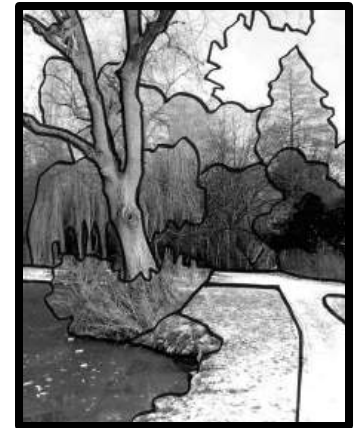
The stained glass window exercise

Instructions

Take a colour or a black and white photograph and a thick black felt pen and outline the main shapes. You can also do the same by using a sheet of tracing paper placed on top of the photograph.

Your goal is to get down to a minimum number of shapes. Try to synthesise shapes by overlooking small details.

This exercise will raise your awareness of different shapes (size, orientation) and the way they interlock.



Mind the gap

Instructions

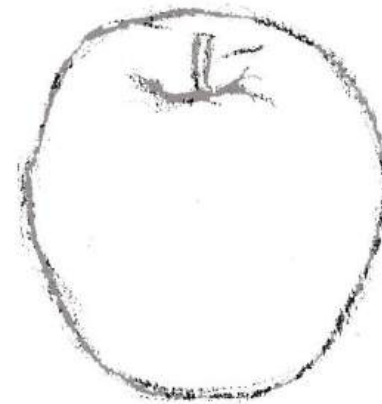
Print the next page, which features two distant objects.

With a pencil, draw other objects to link the two objects already on the page in a pleasing composition.

This exercise will make you better at composing paintings.

“Henry James said that genius is the act of perceiving similarity among disparate things. In an empty room, you’re to connect the dots, linking A to B to C to maybe come-up with H.”

Twyla Tharp – “The Creative Habit: Learn It and Use It for Life”



Hello Monsieur Duchamp

Readymades

The French artist Marcel Duchamp (28th July 1887 – 2nd October 1968) is known for his “readymades”, pieces of art made of ordinary manufactured objects that he selected and then modified (sometimes by just signing them).

He created in 1917 the most (in)famous of these artworks, titled *Fountain*, a simple ceramic urinal bearing the artist’s signature.

In homage to Marcel Duchamp, you are going to use an ordinary manufactured object as your starting point.

Hello Monsieur Duchamp

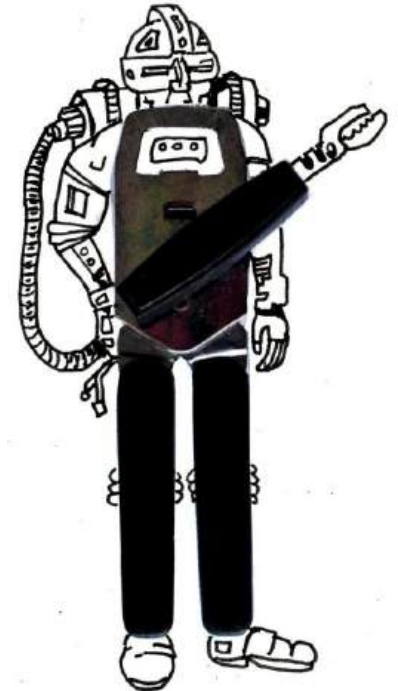
Instructions

Cut out an everyday object in a photo.

Stick it onto a piece of paper.

Draw or paint something using the object as a starting point.

The object cannot be used for what it is (for instance, if you use a glass, you can't just draw someone holding the glass. That would be too easy...and boring).



Can opener robot

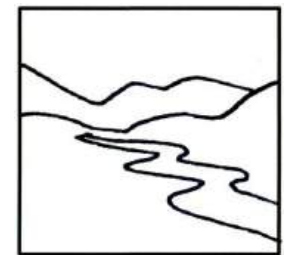
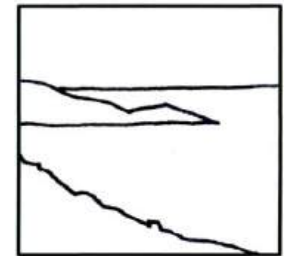
3 strikes and you are out

Instructions

The following page contains 15 squares. For each square, you are allowed only 3 lines (or circles or points). You can start anywhere in the square. When you lift your pen from the paper, that's the end of your line.

You have to stop when you touch a side of the square. Repeat for each of the 15 squares. All squares should be different.

Go to the next page to start



No lifting in this area

Instructions

Take a piece of paper and a felt pen.

Draw without lifting the pen (similar to the technique used for machine quilting). If you lift the pen from the paper, you must stop.

Beginner: It is alright to cross lines as long as the tip of the pen stays in contact with the paper.

Champion: the line cannot cross its former path.



“My line drawing is the direct and purest translation of my emotion.”

Henri Matisse

Negative thinking

Instructions

You need a sheet of smooth drawing paper, one charcoal stick, a kneadable eraser and some fixative (if you want to keep the result)

Take the piece of paper and blacken it with charcoal.

Use an eraser to remove the charcoal to reveal the light areas and draw a landscape, a figure or a portrait.



Ready, Steady, Paint!

Materials

Kitchen timer or chronometer.

Reference photograph.

3 supports of the same size for your chosen medium. For oil paint and acrylic paint, I recommend that you use a small format (6" x 8" / 15cm x 20cm). For watercolour, something close to an A4 will work.

Paint (Watercolour, oil paint or acrylic paint).

Assortment of brushes.

Usual equipment for your chosen medium.

Time

2 hours (plus initial preparation of your set-up)

Ready, Steady, Paint!

Instructions

In this exercise, you are going to work against the clock. You will paint the same subject three times. Each painting must be completed in a shorter time than the previous painting. This is the artist's equivalent of runners' interval training.

First interval: Take your first small support, set a timer to 45 minutes, and aim to complete the painting within that time. Stop painting when the alarm goes off.

Rest for 15 minutes – put the first painting away, out of sight, and go make some coffee or get some fresh air with a short walk.

Ready, Steady, Paint!

Instructions

Second interval: Same as before but with the timer set to 30 minutes. Although the time available is shorter, you already know the subject as you painted it once before. When the alarm goes off, stop and put the second painting away.

Relax for 15 minutes.

Third interval: Same as before but with the timer set to 15 minutes. No real time to think or fiddle here. Paint with your instinct.

When you are finished, put all three paintings side by side. Which one do you prefer? Why?

The bat exercise

“One day, I saw Lewis-Brown turn upside down a *Hunting Party* painting he had just finished. He told me: It is the best way to judge a painting because this way you only see values.”

Ambroise Vollard – “Recollections of a Picture Dealer”

The bat exercise

Instructions

Trace a grid on your reference photograph (or on a protective plastic sleeve where you insert the photograph) and a similar one on your support, then place the photograph upside down and make a rough design of the shapes on the support using the grid for accurate placement.

Paint the subject while keeping both your work and your model upside down.

Only turn over your painting and your reference photograph when you consider that your work is finished.

3 colours only

Instructions

Create a painting using only 3 colours (if you use watercolour). You can add white if you are painting with oil or acrylic paint.

Beginner: pick 1 blue, 1 red and 1 yellow.

Champion: pick 3 tubes of colours at random out of your paint box.

“One works with a few colours; what gives the illusion of their number is that they have been put in their right place.”

Pablo Picasso

One big brush only

Instructions

Make a painting using only one big flat brush (do not take a round brush or a rigger).

Go for a flat No.12 brush or even bigger.

Try this exercise on a small format, like a 6" x 8" (15cm x 20cm) canvas board.



Matisse's scissors

Instructions

You need several sheets of medium weight paper, a selection of gouache, acrylic or watercolour paints, some glue and a pair of scissors.

Paint several sheets of paper with flat colours (or use coloured paper).

When they are dry, cut out coloured shapes using the scissors and compose your work by gluing them on a white sheet of paper.

“Cutting in the quick of a colour reminds me of the sculptor's direct carving.”

Henri Matisse

The Constable Memory Exercise

“It now became apparent to Constable’s friends that his health was declining. It was, I believe, at this time that Sir George Beaumont undertook to be his physician, and prescribed for him that he should copy a picture entirely from memory. He was to walk every day to Sir George’s house in Grosvenor Square, look at the picture as long as he pleased, then return home and paint as much of it as he had retained in his recollection, until the copy was finished. The regular exercise and the change of scene, combined with an agreeable and not too arduous employment were to work the cure. The picture selected was a landscape by Wilson, and the experiment was tried, but the malady under which Constable laboured was not to be easily removed.”

CR Leslie - “Memoirs of the life of John Constable”

The Constable Memory Exercise

Instructions

Select a painting you like by an artist you like. Life is too short to paint something you don't have feeling for.

If you live close to an art museum (and the entry is free or you hold an annual pass), select the painting to work from in the museum's gallery. Working from an original painting will bring you more benefits.

If you work from a reproduction, keep your model outside of your studio (in your office or in a different room).

Take all the time you need to observe the painting you are copying. Then, paint only a portion of the painting each day from memory. Building-up the mental image of the model over time is part of the exercise. This image should become clearer and clearer as time passes.

Let's doodle together

Instructions

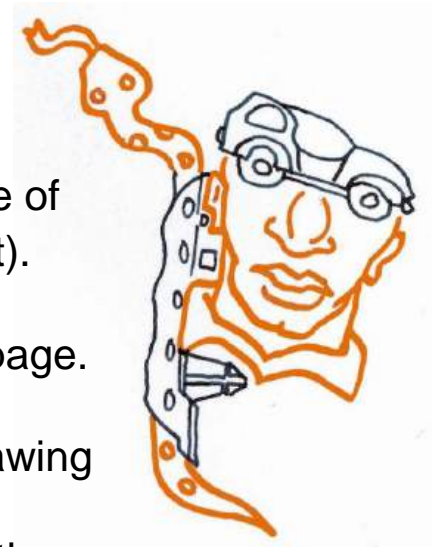
Number of participants: two or more. You need a piece of paper and pens of different colours (one per participant).

The first person draws something in the middle of the page.

The second person takes over and creates another drawing using part of the previous one and transforming it into something new, often totally unrelated. The drawing is then passed to the next person.

Each person must use an element already in the drawing. You cannot start an independent drawing.

You can turn the paper around. This helps to see shapes in new ways.



Exquisite corpse

This is a collective exercise for 2 to 4 people. You just need 1 strip of paper and 1 pen or pencil.

The group is going to draw a person (in a broad sense, as it could end-up being part animal, robot, monster or whatever your imagination tells you).

«**EXQUISITE CORPSE.** – Game using a folded paper that consists in having several persons composing a sentence or a drawing, without any of them being able to take into account the preceding contributions.»

Abridged Dictionary of Surrealism

Exquisite corpse

Instructions

The first person draws the head and then folds the strip of paper several times, only leaving visible two marks to indicate the base of the neck.

The second person draws the torso and both arms and folds the paper in the same way. Six small lines should be visible below the fold (two for the left wrist, two for the waist and two for the right wrist).

The next person draws the body from the waist to the knees as well as both hands (or claws or mechanical parts, etc.).

The last person draws the lower part of the legs (from the knees) and the feet.

At the end the paper strip is unfolded to reveal the strange creature born from the collaborative imagination of the players.



Fire-up your imagination

“I have in the past seen in clouds and walls stains which have inspired me to beautiful inventions of many things. These stains, while wholly in themselves deprived of perfection in any part, did not lack perfection in regard to their movements or other actions.”

Leonardo da Vinci

Fire-up your imagination

Instructions

Who as a kid has not found animals, faces or people in clouds? Get into the habit of using random shapes to get your imagination started. Abstract shapes are seeds to grow your creativity from. The key is to keep an open mind and “question” the shape you discover.

Find objects, animals and people in clouds, peeled bark on trees, moss, lichen, negative shapes in foliage, stains on old walls and geometric patterns on carpets or wallpapers.

What's your title?

Instructions

Go to a museum or an art gallery.

Look at the art first and don't read the label.

Try to come-up with one or two good titles for a work that inspires you.

Then, read the label and see which title you prefer (the official one or yours).



About the author

Benoit PHILIPPE is a French artist who now lives in England. He paints with oil, watercolour and pastels.

You can see his work, sign-up for his free monthly newsletter and read more of his articles on his website and his blog:

Website: <http://www.benoitphilippe.com/>

Blog: <http://myfrencheasel.blogspot.com/>

I would love to hear your feedback on this book. Please leave a comment on my blog.