



*the Art of* Learn the essential techniques of the masters  
**PORTRAIT DRAWING**



Joy Thomas



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**NORTH LIGHT BOOKS**

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**Profile in Charcoal** (previous page)

Charcoal on bond paper

**Chiaroscuro Self-Portrait** (this page)

Charcoal on on Fabriano Roma paper

**Naptime** (opposite page)

Graphite on Arches drawing paper

The logo for F+W Publications, featuring the lowercase letters 'f' and 'w' in a stylized, serif font. The 'f' is positioned to the left of the 'w', and they are both rendered in a dark, possibly black, color. The logo is located in the bottom right corner of the page.

## 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
Meters	Yards	1.1
Sq. Inches	Sq. Centimeters	6.45
Sq. Centimeters	Sq. Inches	0.16
Sq. Feet	Sq. Meters	0.09
Sq. Meters	Sq. Feet	10.8
Sq. Yards	Sq. Meters	0.8
Sq. Meters	Sq. Yards	1.2
Pounds	Kilograms	0.45
Kilograms	Pounds	2.2
Ounces	Grams	28.3
Grams	Ounces	0.035



### **About the Author**

Joy Thomas is an extraordinary artist; her beautifully crafted images capture the sitters' features, of course, but also their mood and psychology. Thomas received the first place prize for portrait painting from the American Society of Portrait Artists in 1996. Her work has appeared in *American Artist* (November 1996), *The Artist's Magazine* (April 1997), *International Artist* (January 1999), and in the book *The Best of Portrait Painting* (1998, North Light Books). In the past two decades, her work has been exhibited in museums and galleries all over the United States. Her website is [www.portraitartist.com/thomas](http://www.portraitartist.com/thomas).

**DEDICATION**

*For my family  
and in memory of Deane Keller & Jody  
Boyd*



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With much appreciation to the many artists, past and present, that continue to inspire me... especially my own wonderful students, many of whom are accomplished artists and have become good friends and painting companions.

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**MAKING TIME AND SPACE FOR ART**

# introduction



At some point, almost everyone has tried their hand at portrait drawing. First attempts at such a formidable challenge are usually less than convincing, and the entire notion is typically abandoned. For the determined few, the process of capturing a likeness is so fascinating that an intense passion for portrait drawing develops.

With a bit of guidance and a few art supplies, anyone with native talent and determination can develop the skill set necessary to become a fine artist working in the realist tradition. It simply requires continual research, study and practice of the formal elements of art such as line, value, shape, form, space and composition.

This book was written as a primer for anyone, young or old, with a real interest in portrait and figure drawing. It introduces a variety of drawing materials, techniques, methods and styles, and even provides a peek into the history of portraiture with examples of masterpieces from the past. It includes useful information about the human canon, gesture drawing, standard poses, lighting, and working with models. Art teachers and students will appreciate the classic methods of composition and systems of measurement that are explained and illustrated, along with several step-by-step portrait demonstrations.

For most of my life I have been on a quest to become a better artist. It has taken over twenty years to accumulate the basic knowledge that I am sharing in this book. Since I could not possibly include everything there is to know about portraiture, I decided to touch on the information that has proved to be the most life-changing for me.

I wish someone had given me a comprehensive guide like this when I was first attempting to draw portraits. It would have certainly hastened my development and saved me from many years of “reinventing the wheel.”

*Go into yourself and test the depths in which your life takes rise; at its source you will find the answer to the question whether you must create, accept it, just as it sounds, without inquiring into it. Perhaps it will turn out that you are called to be an artist.*

RAINER MARIA RILKE

---

# Portrait Drawing Materials

Do you remember drawing on blue-lined notebook paper with ballpoint pens and no. 2 pencil? Establishing the darks and the contour lines would deeply indent the pages beneath and those annoying blue lines certainly interfered with the finished drawings. Graduating to typing paper and permanent ink markers was a bit of an improvement but the ink would bleed, sometimes all the way through the paper, staining your parent's furniture.

It's challenging enough to create art without having to fight inadequate materials. Once you've decided to take up the practice of drawing portraits, you'll need to shop for supplies. The good news is that even the best drawing supplies are affordable. Most art supply companies have websites with descriptions and photographs of their inventory, making it is easy to order from the sites with a credit card. Place your name on their mailing lists so you will receive catalogs. If you live near a city, look up local art supply stores in a phone book, take your list and go on a shopping trip. Be sure to ask questions of the clerks; they are often working artists and may offer good advice. If you can't locate what you need, ask the proprietor to order and stock the items for you. When relatives and friends are gift shopping for you, let them know that gift certificates for art supplies would be appreciated.

## Charcoal

In many drawing classes, this is the first medium you use. Charcoal comes in a variety of densities and sizes. Vine or willow charcoal is available in varieties thin to thick, extra soft to hard, and may be purchased in boxed assortments. Both are made by burning actual sticks or twigs in a kiln. The charcoal is very fragile and breaks easily. Willow is the best choice, as it has the finest particles and the best consistency. It's used in preliminary work and is easily manipulated or removed, so it must be sprayed with a fixative before transporting or framing.

Compressed charcoal is made by mixing charcoal powder with a gum binder, which is then compressed. It comes in densities from extra soft to hard, in shapes round and square. It imparts a velvety, dark mark that is useful for making broad strokes, finishing work and creating large portraits.

Wooden charcoal pencils, especially useful for linear and detail work, are made from compressed charcoal and range from extra soft to hard. Charcoal, an impure form of carbon, also comes in powdered form.





## Charcoal

From left to right, the charcoal supplies include three variously sized sticks of compressed charcoal, vine charcoal, a charcoal pencil, and willow charcoal.

## Chalks, Crayons and Pastels

Wooden chalk pencils and Conté crayons come in many hues including the traditional colors of sanguine, sepia or bistre, white, gray and black often seen in portraiture. Unlike charcoal, chalks and pastels along with graphite pencils contain binders. When graphite was in short supply during the Napoleonic Wars, Nicolas-Jacques Conté created a crayon that is still known by his name. Today Conté crayons are actually a variety of chalk. The traditional Conté colors are sepia, sanguine, white and black.

Pastels are made with pure pigment and are noted for their brilliant hue and value range. A pastel sketch leaves much of the ground exposed and the pastel marks may appear grainy and sketchy. When the support is covered with many layers of pigment, it's called a pastel painting rather than a drawing.

## Subtractive Tools

*Subtractive drawing* might seem like a fancy term for erasing, but it's actually about lifting tone to shape form, add line or create highlights.



### Subtractive Tools

The tools above include a retractable eraser, kneaded eraser, gum eraser, extra-soft eraser, single-edged razor blade and bristle brush.

Retractable erasers are refillable and can be sharpened to a point. This works well for edges, lines, highlights and details.

Kneaded erasers are incredibly useful for erasing, lifting and redistributing tone. Since they can be stretched and shaped, kneaded erasers are excellent for subtractive work. Extra-soft erasers are great for lifting and cleaning large areas of charcoal without abrading the paper. Single-edged razor blades can scratch through ink.

### Tortillions, Stumps and Chamois Cloth

Tortillions are made of rolled paper felt and are pointed on one end. Blending stumps, which are pointed on both ends, are also made of paper felt but can be sharpened or sanded for details and softening techniques. These tools are excellent for toning.

Authentic chamois cloth (available at auto supply stores) is useful for toning and subtractive work.



## Chalks, Crayons and Stumps

Featured here are three chalk pencils (black, sanguine and white), a kneaded eraser, Conté crayons, a tortillion and two blending stumps.

## Graphite Pencils

Graphite pencils are available in different grades of hardness, from 10H (the hardest) to 8B (the softest). The higher numbered the H, the harder the pencil. The the higher numbered the B, the softer the pencil. The two other grades are HB and F, which are in-between grades. These are useful in the preliminary stages of a drawing. I've noticed that artists typically prefer the softer, darker pencils. A common selection of graphite pencils used for portrait drawing might include F, 2B, 4B and 6B.

Graphite has been around for centuries and was first used by the Aztecs. The word "graphite" derived from the Greek *graphein*, which means "to write." Europeans discovered it in the 1400s, but the substance wasn't named graphite until the late 1700s. Today's graphite pencils are made from a paste mixture of graphite, clay and water which is then fired. Varying the amount of clay in the pencil determines the hardness. Harder pencils contain more clay. Graphite also comes in a powdered form.

Another form of graphite is the woodless graphite stick. These are made of a length of graphite sealed with a resin coating. Compressed graphite sticks without the resin coating are also available.

There are many sizes of mechanical pencils. Most are self-feeding and can hold several leads in the barrel. Other holders are available for use with individual leads, charcoals or chalks.

Pencil sharpeners are certainly available, but many artists sharpen their tools with a knife and use sandpaper pointers to adjust the point of their pencil or charcoal. Sandpaper pointers consist of sheets of sandpaper on a paddle.



## Graphite Pencils, Pointers and Chamois

Shown are a sandpaper sharpener, a kneaded eraser, a chamois cloth, four graphite pencils of varying hardness, a mechanical pencil and a woodless graphite pencil.

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## **Ink**

The Old Masters were limited in their choice of inks. Today there are many lightfast inks available in a whole spectrum of colors, along with a plethora of superb artist's pens and markers in an array of sizes with points ranging from fine to ultrafine. Traditional favorite inks include the transparent and luminous brown-bistre and sepia. Quills, fountain pens and brushes may be used with bottled inks.

Ink drawings vary according to the tools and techniques used. Many resemble plate etchings, while others appear as wash paintings with linear accents. Look to Masters like the eighteenth century Giovanni Battista Tiepolo for magnificent ink drawings.

Sumi ink sticks are made of permanent ink from soot. These dry sticks are used with traditional grinding stones and water to produce inks of various intensities for use with brushes. Sumi ink sticks are often attractively gift boxed with water pans, stones and brushes. The large professional stick is typically of better quality and produces nice results when used with squirrel-pointed round brushes and wirebound quill wash brushes.

## **Silverpoint**

Silverpoint, the ancient ancestor of the graphite pencil, consists of a sharpened silver wire held by a stylus. Silverpoint requires a very smooth surface; it can be used with various papers, but is usually applied over a prepared ground containing lead white, silica or marble. The marks are gray at first, then tarnish to a warm, mellow tone of subtle contrast. Silverpoint is known for its precise hatch marks and its luminosity. Other metalpoints such as gold and copper may also be used.



## Pen and Ink Tools

The tools featured here include five markers of varying thickness, two ink wash brushes, a bottle of India ink, a box of dry Sumi ink sticks and a grinding tool called a Suzuri stone.

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# Drawing Technique

The possibilities for using your drawing materials are, of course, limitless, but there are traditional methods of application.

*Hatching* is a drawing or painting technique in which one draws close parallel lines to build tone and shadow. The appearance of the single hatch will vary according to point and medium.

*Cross-hatching* is the application of single hatch marks over existing ones, in a different direction to darken the tone.

*Side strokes* are accomplished by drawing with the side of a pencil point or crayon to achieve a wide mark or tone. The appearance will vary according to the surface texture of the support.

*Broad strokes* are made with the use of a chisel point or the edge of a broad tool like a stick of charcoal.

*Blending* can be an effective way to achieve broad areas of tone or value. The “rubbed line” is a technique that has been used for centuries to manipulate or attend to an edge. Blending can destroy the integrity of a drawing, so it’s important to avoid overusing this technique.

There are many other techniques, including stippling (applying dots), splattering, dusting and line variations such as broken, graded and accented line. Look for these techniques as you study the work of others, and try it out in your own.

## Mixing Wet and Dry Media

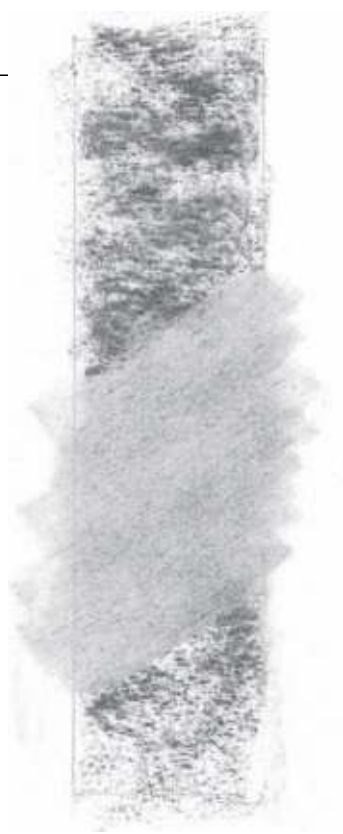
Betsy is my partner in crime when it comes to plein air painting. We have traversed the country painting like mad along the way from the mountains of Montana and Appalachia to the streets of Manhattan to the bucolic fields of Kentucky and Indiana. An instructor and close family friend, Betsy is a source of inspiration and encouragement to all that know her.

For this portrait, I used a wash of one part white gouache to two parts Raw Sienna watercolor to tone Strathmore 400 Series bristol board. After it was thoroughly dry, I wet the highlighted areas and then lifted the paint with water and a stiff brush, blotting with a paper towel. Then I drew on the dry paper with Conté crayons in black and sanguine, working primarily in horizontal hatching, to achieve this unique look.

**Betsy** (opposite page)

Watercolor and Conté on bristol board

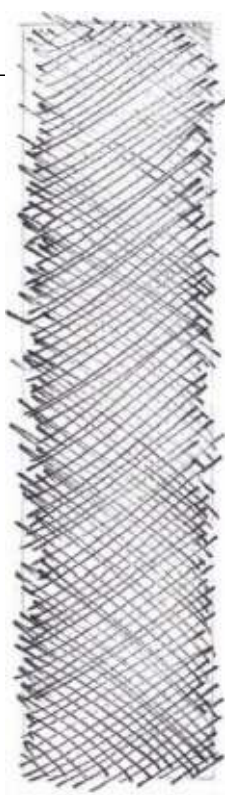




Side strokes with stump blending



Broad strokes with stump blending



Cross-hatching



Hatching



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# Paper and Sketchbooks

Paper is as important to your artwork as the charcoals and pencils you make your marks with. A good paper can make or break a drawing. It can make the drawing process easier or more difficult. The archival quality can also affect the durability and actual value of the work.

For large-scale practice, most artists often use large pads of newsprint paper, but investing in more permanent paper, like bond paper, can definitely be worthwhile. Papermaking is an art in itself. The finest drawing papers are amazing to behold and can have a true bearing on the aesthetic success of one's efforts. From plate bristol to handmade, drawing papers come in a plethora of grades, textures and colors.

## Types of Papers

Bristol is a durable, all-purpose white paper that accepts all drawing media, including washes. The plate finish is a hard, smooth nonabsorbent surface, while the vellum finish has a bit more tooth and is slightly absorbent. Both have strong surfaces that can stand up to repeated lifting and erasure. Good bristol is made from 100-percent cotton rag (see sidebar) and its thickness is determined by the ply, with two- and three-ply being the most common weights for drawing, while four- and five-ply are used for lightweight boards.

Bond papers have a finish similar to bristol and work well with most drawing media. Ledger bond has a plate surface and is opaque, while layout bond has a texture more like vellum and is lightweight and somewhat translucent.

Vellum is transparent and features a smooth surface suitable for line drawing media including pencil and pen. It has a durable surface that resists repeated erasure.

Clay coat has an ultra smooth, mineral-coated surface. Its slightly absorbent finish is designed for use with pencil, inks, silverpoint and multimedia.

Some printmaking papers have smooth, flawless surfaces that are slightly mottled to resemble vellum. Their deckled edges and subtle hues are aesthetically inviting and offer a nice surface for pencil, charcoal and Conté crayons.

Charcoal papers have more textured surfaces and come in many colors and finishes. A woven or laid paper has the screen imprint of the maker's mould, while an irregular finish is the result of the felt mats used while pressing out the wet sheet. The handmade papers are exquisite in hue and texture.

Sumi paper is an acid-free, white rice paper used for drawing, pen and ink and Sumi ink work.

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