

Tip #72

Graphite Techniques



Artists often feel they need all the latest equipment, the "bells and whistles," before they can really make art - but nothing could be further from the truth. Your hand, your eye, your mind and heart are what makes art. What you use to get from here to there can be as simple as a #2 office pencil.

Pencil drawings can be elegant and restrained, quick and thunderous, linear, tonal, bold, scratchy, sinuous - you decide.

Graphite, once called plumbago, has been a favored tool of artists for centuries; the wood-encased "lead" or graphite in the familiar pencil form is newer - did you know that's how Henry David Thoreau's family made their living, in the 19th century, by the manufacture of wooden pencils? (Of course you can also use mechanical pencils that never need sharpening, or use lead holders for thicker leads-it's all up to you!) Graphite is wonderfully versatile, portable, and relatively clean ... and as inexpensive as you're liable to get!

TIP: You may need to put a clean piece of paper between the hand that holds the pencil and your drawing to protect it from unwanted smearing.

Art 72-1, How you sharpen the pencil affects the lines it makes and how you handle them.

Try out an electric sharpener (or old fashioned hand-cranked model) and then try sharpening your pencil with a sharp craft knife. Bevel one edge on sandpaper or rough paper, then try the variety of marks you can get with each. If it smells really awful, you may have an old bottle-that may or may not cause problems, but if the smell is too much for you, get a new bottle.



Art 72-1

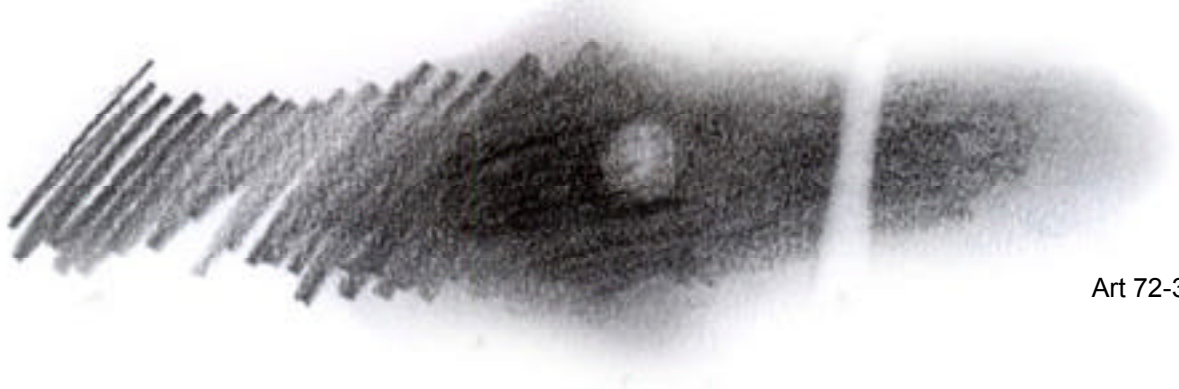
Art 72-2, Test drive your pencils



Art 72-2

Make a variety of marks and tones - if you like, make a value chart from the palest tones to the darkest your pencil is capable of. Vary the pressure on the lead. Use zigzag marks, hatching, or cross-hatching. Try making a series of dots of various sizes to suggest tone or texture. Explore, as if you'd never touched a pencil before in your life!

Art 72-3, Explore lifting and blending techniques



Art 72-3

Get yourself a kneaded eraser; knead it to a point and press it against the tone you've just made to see how much you can lift, to regain lighter values as in the lighter round area at center. Or erase with a white vinyl eraser, which can take you almost back to clean paper, usually without damaging the surface, as you can see at right.

Blend with a rolled-paper stump or with your fingertip - or a Q-tip. You can get very smooth effects with this method.

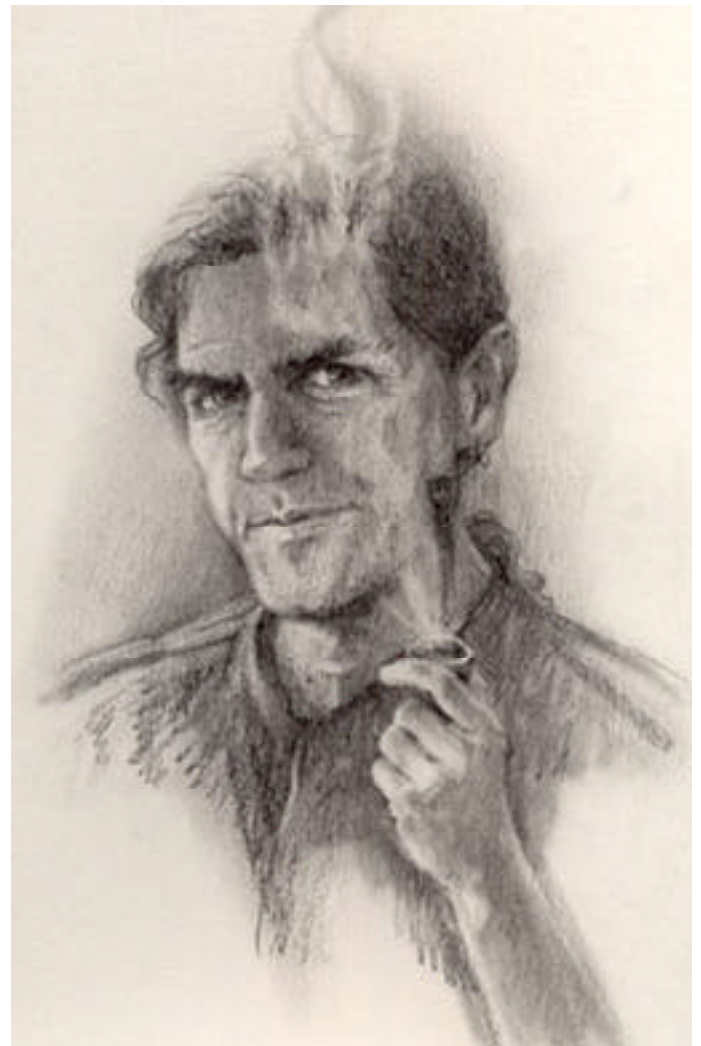
Art 72-4, "Joseph," 7" x 10" graphite on paper

See what a wide range of values and effects you can get...put your practice to work!

Here, I've drawn my sweetheart on a paper with quite a bit of "tooth" or surface texture. I pressed harder where I needed darker areas, and lifted with a kneaded eraser where I wanted his pipe smoke to drift across his face. Here and there, I augmented the kneaded rubber eraser with a soft white vinyl one for the lightest or most linear effects. I blended the midtones with my fingertip for a broad tonal variety.

TIP: The paper surface you choose will make a great difference in your final effect - very smooth paper can offer a very subtle effect and dark values, where paper with a lot of texture will give broken, sparkling lines.

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Art 72-4