

NSCAD DRAWING JOURNAL

submitted to Bryan Maycock

submitted by [redacted]

My name is [redacted], I'm 26. I have a degree in art history from the University of Calgary and a Bachelor of Environmental Design from Dalhousie University. I am presently in the first year of the Masters of Architecture at Dalhousie University. I have had no formal training in drawing apart from some art classes I took when I was a kid and drafting demonstrations at architecture school. I have traveled and lived in Europe and seen and studied great masterpieces such as Raphael's 'Riva San Vitale', Leonardo Da Vinci's 'Mona Lisa', Michelangelo's 'Sistine Chapel', Jan Van Eyck's 'Arnolfini Portrait' and been able to experience the work of many others. Now as a future architect, I have a sense of space. These spaces are most often rendered by computers and less often captured by one's hand in the art of drawing which is disappearing as a tool of representation in the architectural profession. Drawing, I feel can still be an extremely powerful expressive mechanism that should not be so easily dismissed. I myself have chosen to take a drawing class at NSCAD, so that I can be more confident with my drawing skills which to date have needed improvement. Working with Bryan Maycock, head of the Foundation Department at NSCAD University, I hope to identify my weaknesses and strengths and work towards finding ways of better representing my ideas.

As part of this course, I will also be participating in a research project begun by Bryan Maycock and Ray Klein that looks at one's eye movement during a short drawing exercise of three to five minutes. Those being tested range from professional artists to students with no formal training. The study intends to investigate if there is any correlation between how one approaches drawing with a trained or untrained eye.

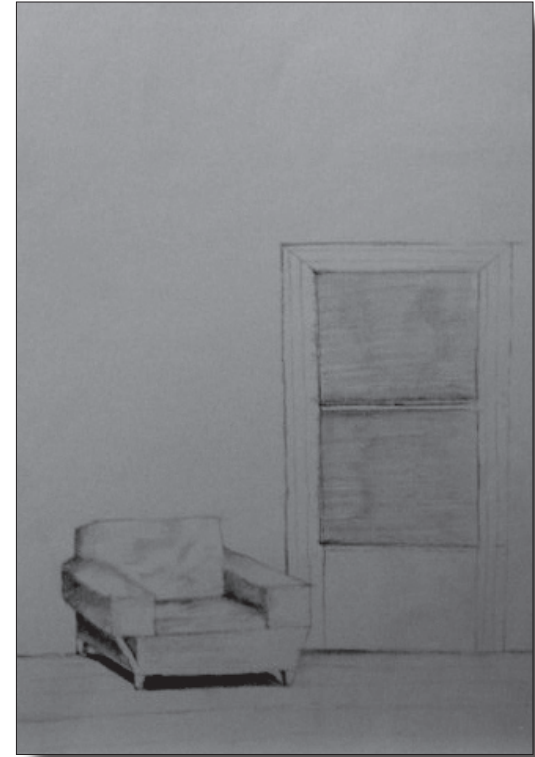
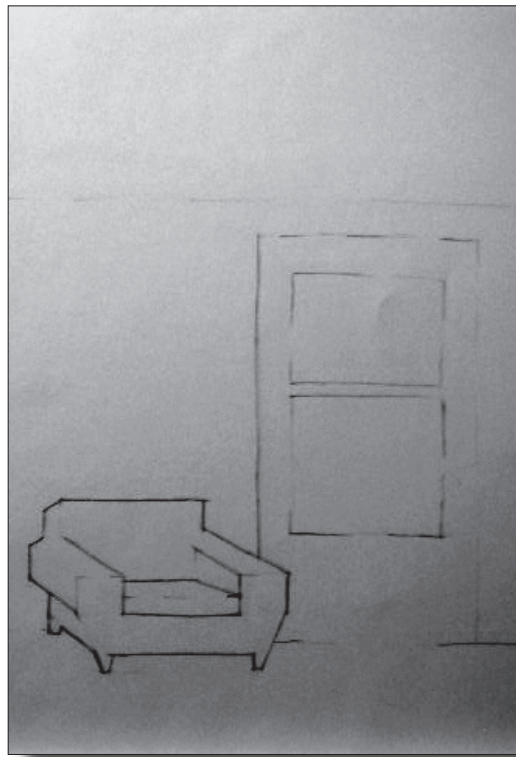
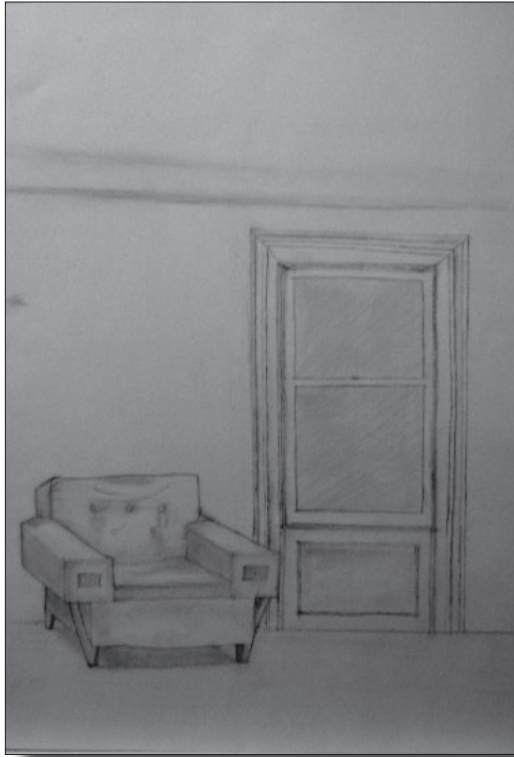
The following is a diary of my perceptions, a subjective interpretation, of how I see my skills evolving and progressing over the semester. I will be tested nine times for the research project, participate in life drawing classes, be partaking in one hour per week of instruction and then drawing 8 to 9 hours on average per week.

Sept. 12, 2007

Sitting on a bench outside, I have thirty minutes to wait until I take my first drawing test. I'm strangely nervous. I have read some of the literature on the project, know what Klein and Maycock are hypothesizing. I wonder if taking drawing classes will improve how I approach drawing, improve the clarity of my representations in architecture, help me convey my work with greater confidence?

The test:

Located on Duke Street in the basement of one of the NSCAD buildings on the downtown campus, the drawing lab is a long rectangular room filled with computer equipment, testing staff and an abundant supply of candy and water. The testing area can be found at the back of the room cordoned off with black curtains. I was asked to sit on a stool in front of a short easel. The headpiece weighing approximately 5 pounds with two small eye video cameras was placed on my head and tightened. I was given the choice of three drawing utensils. To calibrate the cameras, I was told to draw a small image in front of me. Behind this image was a board of foam core which had small red lights attached to it. These lights were lit in sequence and as they were lit, I was asked to follow them with my eyes. A curtain was then drawn and I was told to look at a series of colored dots strategically placed to different areas of the curtain to test depth perception. I was then told to close my eyes prior to recording. When I opened them, before me was a group of hanging 3 D shapes which I then set out to draw. In a rush, I was worried about completing all the objects before the time lapsed, I can't even remember where I started drawing.



Sept. 13, 2007

My first home exercise was to explore the depth of a simple space and or object with some lighting. Picking subject matter that I was comfortable with, I decided to draw the window in my room with a chair placed in front of it. At first glance, I did not think I would be presented with any difficulties. However due to the angle that I found myself sitting in relation to the window, there was distortion that I struggled to accurately represent.

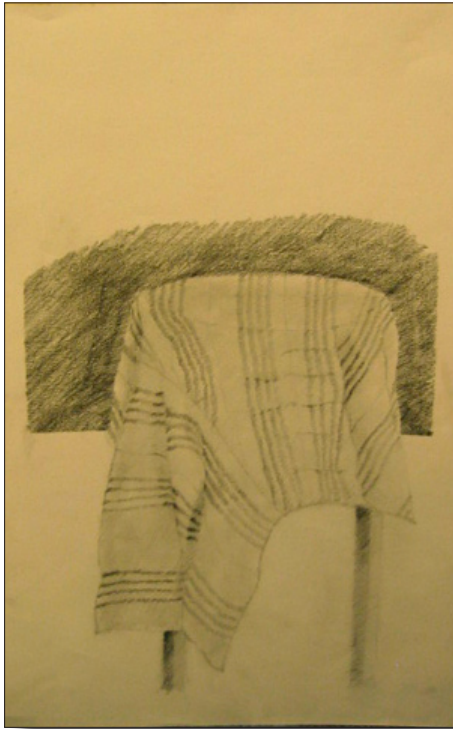
What I learned: I completed three studies, one which aspired to the type of drawing I wanted, the second was economical with mark making and focused on volumes and the third was a combination of the two. From this exercise I learned, the importance of:

- 1 - Consistency when it came to the direction of shading
- 2- Minimizing the use of line through the use of tone
- 3- Creating a frame by taping the edges off

Although some of these lessons seem straightforward, until they were pointed out, it became much clearer how much they contribute to the clarity of an image particularly when it came to highlighting volumes to create a sense of depth.

Sept. 19, 2007

Test number two followed the same routine as the first one. I assume that the same protocol will be followed with only a change of subject matter. Today, I drew from a black and white line drawing. The same shapes configured in the same way were represented as an image. I remembered that the objects from the first test were hung at different depths but when drawing from a diagram, these depths were much more difficult to read. I still have no game plan or strategy in terms of choosing where to begin drawing. Experimentation is key at this point as I'm trying to discover what seems most comfortable. Although I still feel somewhat limited by time.



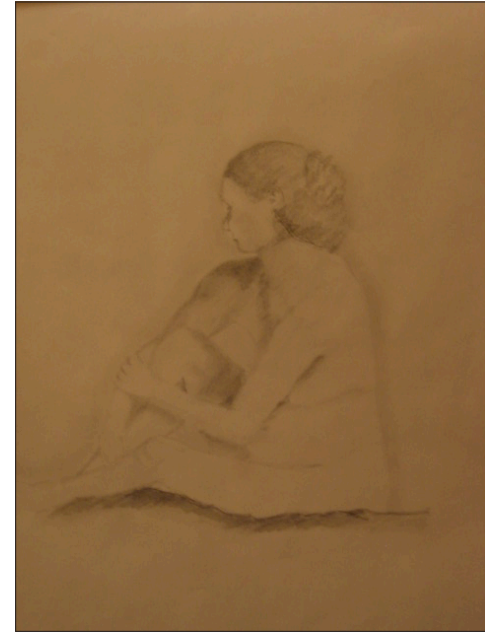
Sept. 20, 2007

Material study exploring drapes and folds

This week's exercise was to work with a material that had stripes or a pattern. Draping fabric over a stool, crumpling the same piece of fabric into a ball and lastly artistically draping it over a stool allowed me to study the continuity of line, its form and tonal changes.

What I learned: This week I learned about 'simultaneous contrast' where shading can be used to highlight or emphasize certain aspects of image. For example by darkening a background, one can highlight an edge condition. In addition, I also learned that:

- 1- Squinting can help show where equivalent darkness zones are for more continuity.
- 2- The depth of an ellipse changes as your eye level changes.
- 3 - One should be bolder when shading
- 4 - The edge of another piece of paper when shaded over can come in handy to create an edge as opposed to simply drawing a line.



Sept. 24, 2007

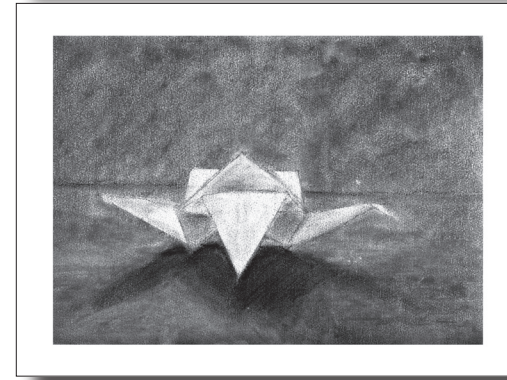
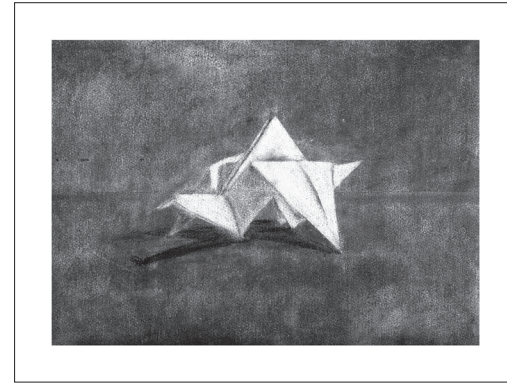
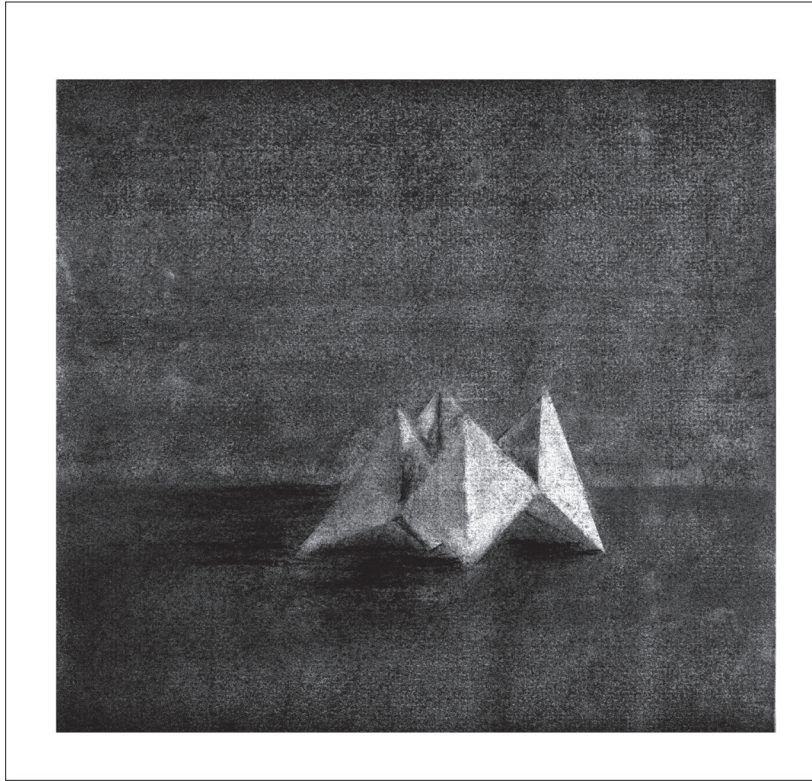
Today I drew the hanging objects again. Same routine, same time, same place. My decision of choosing where to begin drawing is still quite random as I jumped from large objects to smaller ones in different directions. I know I'm consciously choosing to draw things in no particular order yet I question if I have any control initially on my first move, my first mark on the page. I wonder if I should I be shading the objects?

Figure Drawing Class

Initially slightly intimidated by the mature crowd of artists, I entered this class not entirely knowing what to expect. Other attendees were working in mediums such as pastels, watercolor and charcoal. Looking around the room, techniques and styles varied significantly, speaking to the thought that each person might approach drawing or art in a manner which is most comfortable for them.

Gestural drawings of the model were followed by longer 30 minute poses. Using the technique of drawing using "the figure 8" and holding the pencil differently allowed me to better capture the forms that the human body took on when in different positions.

What I learned: It was pointed out to me that the human form can take on interesting voids or spaces when positioned differently. Proper proportioning of the body, hands, feet and legs was also discussed.



Sept. 27, 2007

This week's exercise was to do three studies of origami working with charcoal as a medium. These shapes were strongly illuminated from one side. Charcoal was used to shade entire page. Then a kneadable eraser was used to remove the facets and planes of the origami as they changed in contrast because of the location of the light source. This study was intended as a means to 'sculpt with light'. I was strangely much more comfortable with this exercise as I felt that finding voids came more naturally than creating them on a blank surface.

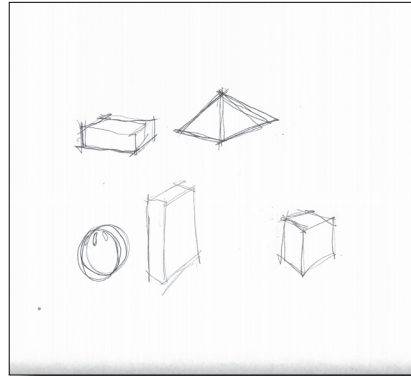
What I learned: It was discussed that although these studies of light were much more successful, certain areas could be shaded further to enhance the quality or contrast between planes.

It was also pointed out that taking photos of the process of drawing could help show how the drawing evolved from beginning to end. These photos would also help document where successful and unsuccessful approaches occurred.

In addition, it was discussed that texture could be captured by placing paper over a surface and rubbing charcoal or pencil over top of it.

October 1, 2007

A few glitches with the calibration and a ringing cell phone may have altered today's test but I am becoming quite comfortable with the material now to be drawn. Today, the subject was a black and white line diagram of the same hanging objects. I began drawing from the right hand lower corner this time, I feel more focused and my eyes dart around less perhaps because of the familiarity of the subject matter. At this point, I might even be able draw the image from memory.



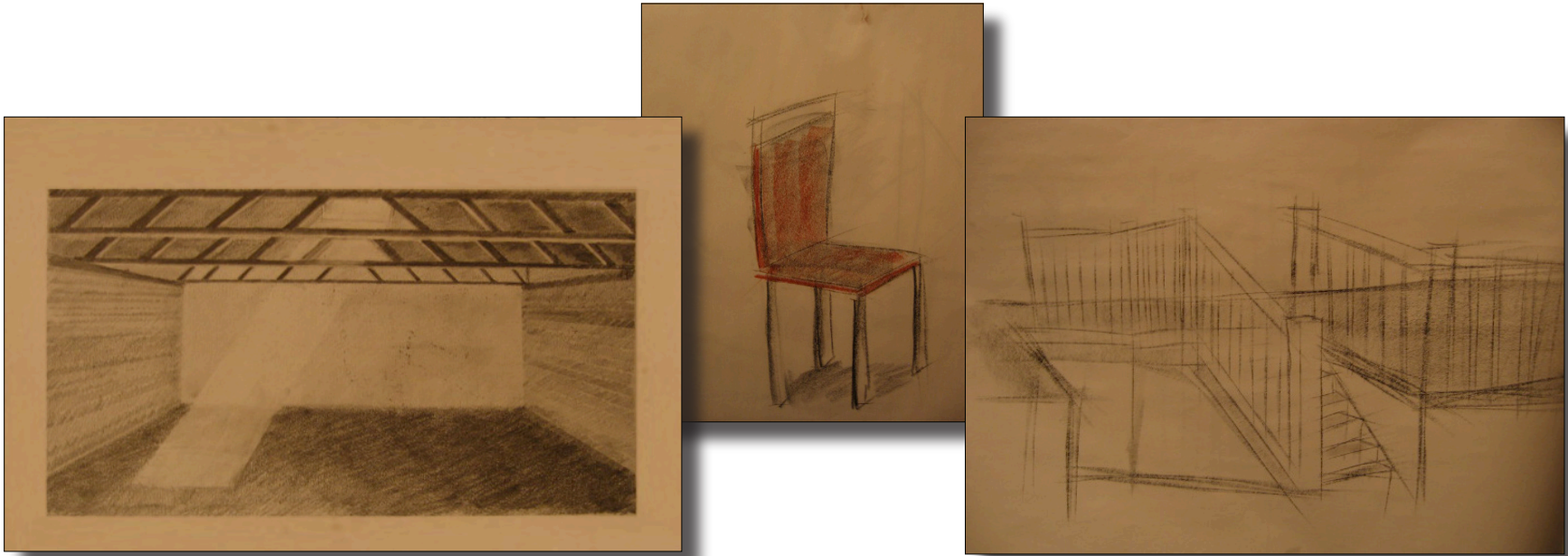
October 8, 2007

Above is a quick sketch I completed 7 days after the test. I realized that I was missing a couple objects. For some reason, as confident as I was about my abilities to redraw the objects from memory, it is clear that a few of the objects stand out more prominently in my mind than the rest. I seem to have a better recall of those objects that I typically started and finished drawing.

October 10, 2007

Today was the first time I drew from a photograph of objects for the test. Becoming accustomed to the process that takes place, I no longer feel rushed. Taking my time before my pen touches the page, I chose to start with the largest box and then the ball moving in a counterclockwise direction. Slowly and steadily, the lines feel like they are getting straighter. I know the shapes I'm drawing aren't perfect, I'm realizing that I should be paying more attention to line weight so that I can create an greater sense of depth. Difficult to see in the diagrams and photographs, a sense of depth is most apparent in the the first test with the 3D hanging objects demonstrating how much is lost when one does not draw from life. I've also discovered that I have a much harder time drawing in a counterclockwise direction in terms of relating object. Don't know if this is because I'm used to moving from left to right. Moving from right to left definitely feels dominant.

Sometimes I feel that I have bad and good drawing days. To some degree, I believe it is a state of mind but these bad days may also be associated with my inability to capture an image due to lack of technique and skill. With the beginnings of a new palette, I'm finding drawing less frustrating as I'm learning new ways of seeing things.



Oct. 13, 2007

This week's first exercise was to soak a piece of Mayfair in the shower, crumple it and then let it dry. The paper with its imperfect qualities was then covered with charcoal similar to the Origami exercise and a self-portrait was sculpted using the kneedable eraser (see next page).

This week's second exercise was to work with conte crayon on Mayfair. It was suggested to hold conte on the diagonal and use it to cut out shapes, faces, spaces etc. Examples to look at could be found in the work of artists like David Bomberg. Working with a site and architectural spaces for my design project, a vacant building was drawn from photographs. Stairs, layers of the wall and skylights became a focus.

What I learned: Doing a self-portrait and creating a likeness to myself proved difficult and was slightly frustrating given the imperfect quality of the paper. It was suggested that I pay more attention to the lines in the paper and work with them rather than against them to produce a drawing. It was also recommended that I be more liberal when shading certain areas like the nose and to take a step back more often to see the effect of the shading. The choice of working with the paper in 'landscape' was also questioned, as it would have been interesting to see the self-portrait in 'portrait' so that more of the upper torso could have been included.

With the second exercise, I discovered that a stick of conte has made it much easier to render a space quickly. Using conte to cut out a space has allowed me to highlight those characteristics I feel are significant. It has also showed me that even if drawings are sometimes exaggerated, one can still capture the essence of a space.



Oct. 15, 2007

Excessive blinking made it hard for Tom to calibrate the cameras today. Don't know if this is dryness, dust or just from lack of sleep. The subject matter was the line diagram again. Taking my time, I slowly drew the image. The testing has become quite routine for me. I'm not sure if my drawing during testing has significantly improved but I'm pretty sure my approach has changed. I feel much more confident and at ease with the testing. It was decided as well that we would take a few weeks off from testing.

Oct. 18, 2007

This week's exercise was to complete a series of readings from the International Journal of Art and Design Education. Key subjects of focus were attention, fixation, accuracy and scanning the scene.

The second exercise was to continue working on the self-portrait from the week prior. Part of this exercise was to exaggerate the quality of my head by pushing the shadow darker and to think about adding white conte. It was suggested, I look at work by Frank Auerbach and Lyonel Feininger. It was also encouraged that I draw from life this week rather than photographs.

What I learned: How we approach drawing is rooted in our childhoods. The readings presented studies that discussed how influential people like teachers, parents, siblings and one's peers can be in how we learn to approach drawing with either an open or closed mind. Some are fortunate to have parents who recognize creative strengths and encourage them while others miss out on years of developing "visual literacy". As one author points out, we live in a society that is increasingly visual yet visual literacy is not valued and in many cases neglected in schools. I have to say that I realized that my inability to complete work of the nature I imagined or to make marks of meaning was due to not giving myself enough time to think about the most ideal representations or the best approach. And while computers help enhance design, sketching and drawing provide a sense of authenticity. In combination they could be effective tools.



Oct. 22, 2007

Figure Drawing Class

Model was a no show for class today so a few volunteers from class took turns on the podium in the center of the room. While it was still a good exercise, I found it not as beneficial as drawing the nude. I felt that a lot of the human form was lost behind clothing particularly when it came to how light would bounce off a figure. I used conte as a medium this class and found that I worked too quickly. I believe I need more practice with it, as I don't feel my representations were of high quality, perhaps I need different techniques as I found it hard to capture the curvature of the body.

October 29th, 2007

This week I was assigned to read a book entitled "Undressed art", and read an article entitled "Opening my mind". After posing last week, and then reading this book, I have begun to gain a greater appreciation for models particularly having to sit still and to hold a pose for long periods. It is not only an athletic endeavor but also a mental game to keep oneself from moving.

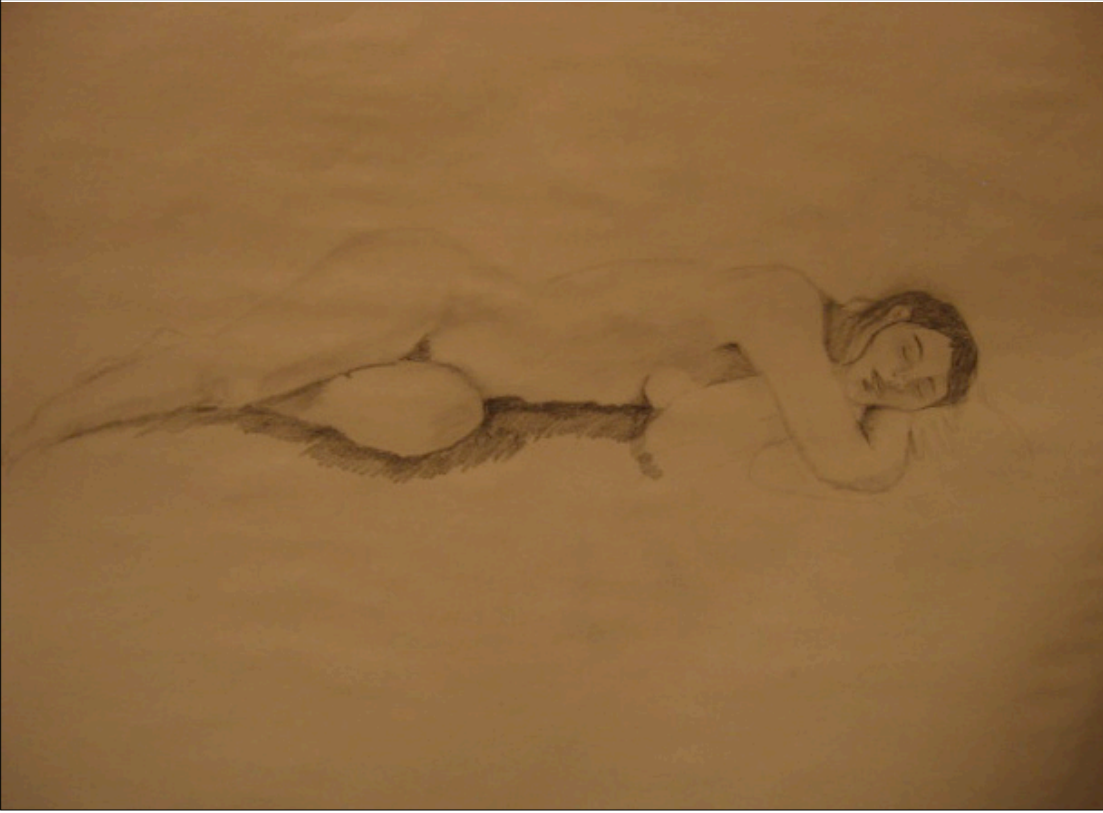
November 5, 2007

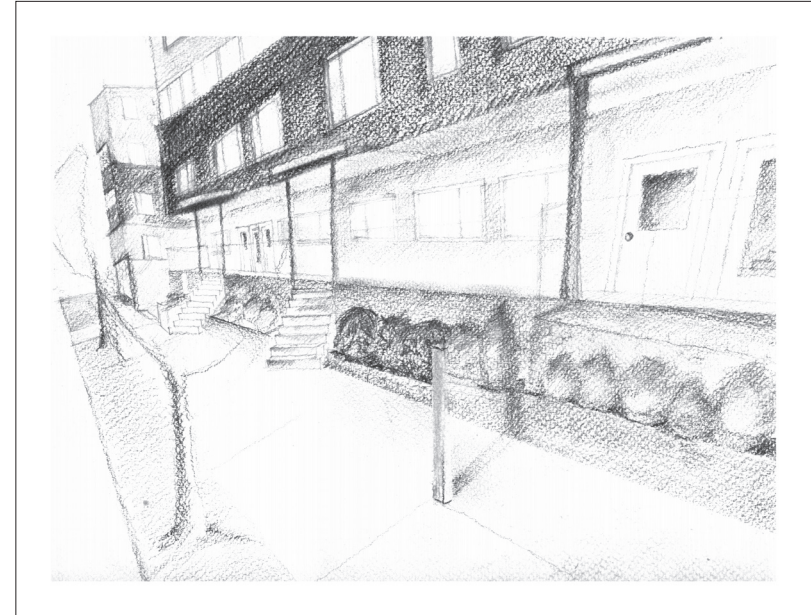
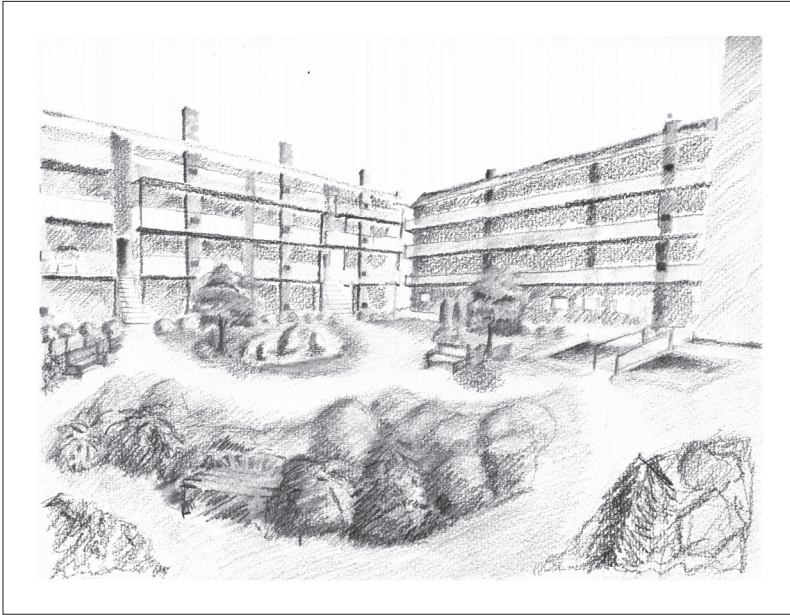
This week I was assigned to draw something related to my design project. This proved to be a difficult project given that my design wasn't finalized. I thought about ways to represent important qualities of my project, the most important being the relationship of the units to the garden space. I tried to do an axonometric of one of the units to illustrate its layout and hoped to show how one could move through the unit to access the garden. In addition, we had previously talked about using texture to represent different surfaces such as the floors. This was achieved by rubbing graphite over a piece of a paper and a textured surface. Unfortunately the scanned image file was corrupted so I was unable to include it.

What I learned: The textures themselves could act as effective tools to differentiate between surfaces. The axonometric however was not a success and did little to express a threshold or relationship between the building and the landscape. It was decided that I pursue other representations such as perspectives to show how one inhabited and experienced the space.

Figure Drawing Class

I have become accustomed to watching people move around the model to discover the perspective from which they wish to draw from. Today I remained stationary. As the model moved through the poses, I was challenged due to the foreshortening each pose presented. While I did struggle with proper proportioning I began to recognize the voids or spaces the poses created and how shading could be used to enhance the curves and contours of the human body. I have also noticed that I am no longer as heavy handed when drawing. When drawing in the past, I can remember being impatient to have a form drawn on the page. Now I know that a drawing can emerge from a page layer by layer.





November 14, 2007

Nearing the end of the semester, I'm still managing to squeeze in time for the drawing tests. This week I drew the 3D objects. Now, sitting down at 10pm to write this journal entry, I'm finding it difficult to recollect how I approached the drawing earlier in the day. Rather than thinking about the best way to draw, the best place to start on the page, I just drew. I can't remember if I started on the left or the right or even which way I moved on the page.

November 19th, 2007

Drawing perspectives of my project helps to represent important moments. Using the computer and a program called "SketchUp", I rendered my model. Using it as a tool to draw from, I was able to position a camera within the program as if I was standing at an entry way and in the garden. I then traced these perspectives and added in vegetation and shading as I saw appropriate.

What I learned: Drawing these two perspectives, I learned that I had to decide on the degree of detail to include in order to best communicate or highlight parts of my project. I also learned that perspectives taken from computer programs can be inaccurate or slightly skewed. So it is better to trust your eye and not a computer program.

November 21st, 2007

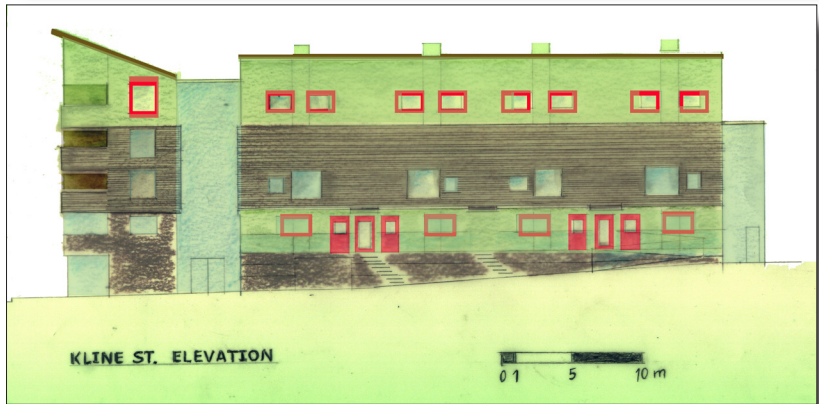
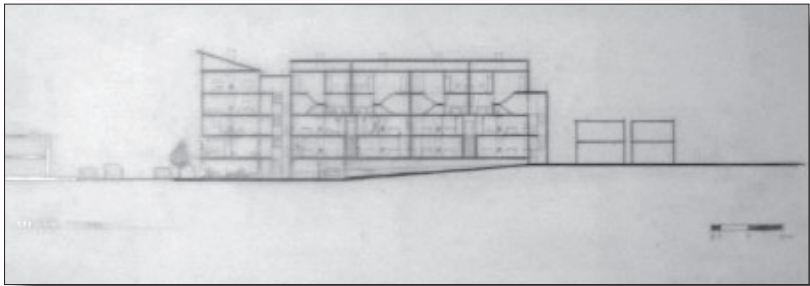
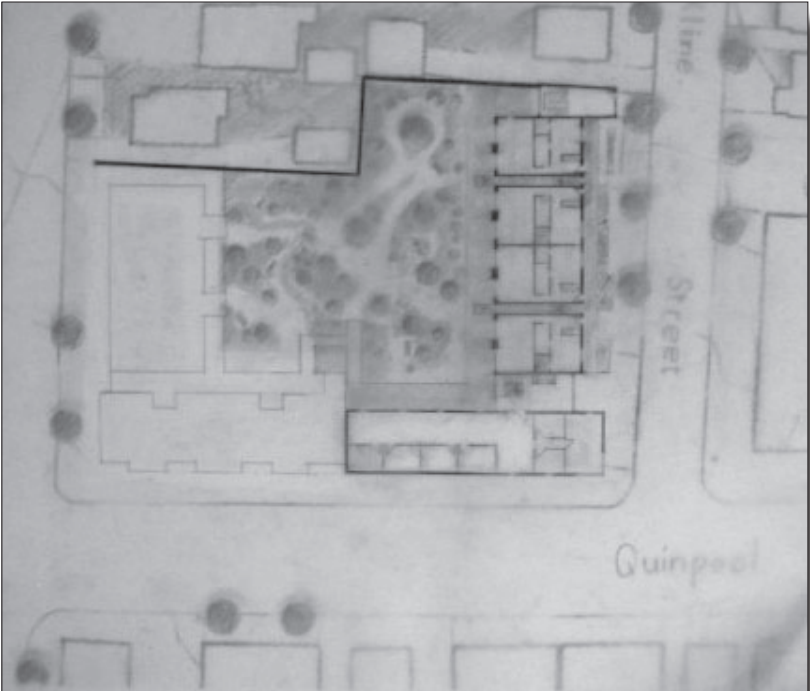
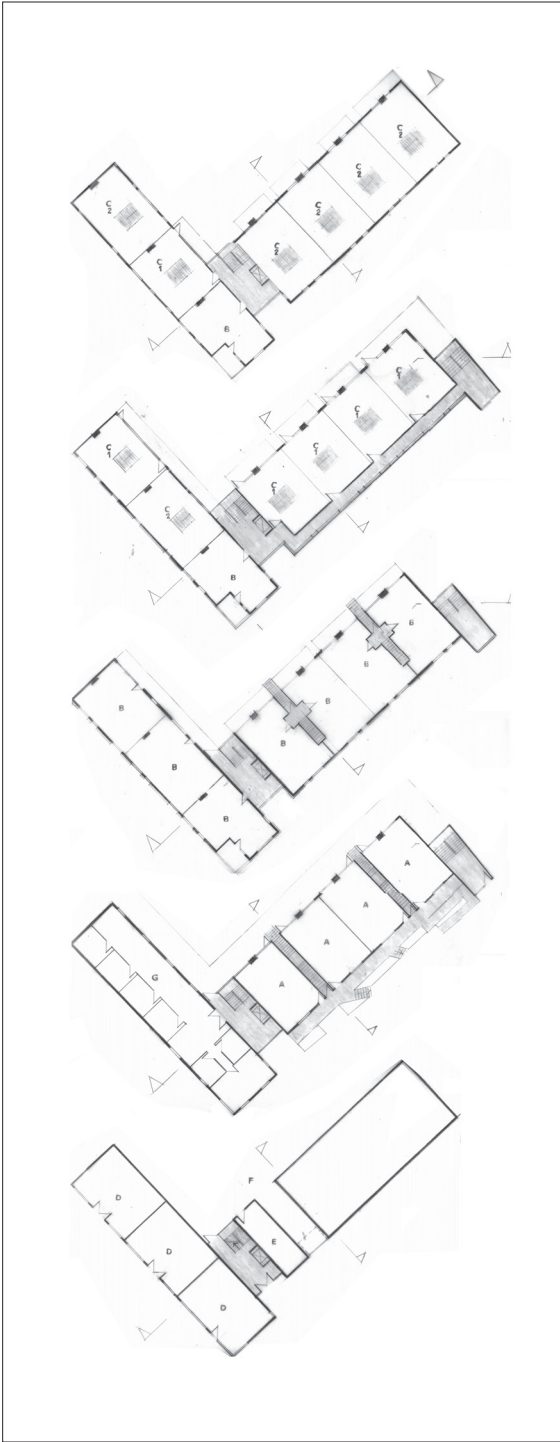
This week, I had to sprint to make it to my drawing test as I was held up with a group meeting. The test I drew was the line drawing. I didn't feel in a rush and I was able to tackle the task at hand. I captured the shapes on the page but if given a new sheet, I would have redrawn the objects, as I wasn't happy with how they were represented. It is difficult to draw something of quality in minutes, to represent shadows or measure the distance between objects. I realize that this test is about monitoring eye movement in the first few seconds of drawing but I'm beginning to think many factors influence how one approaches drawing. For example, I wonder if the amount of stress one is under affects how drawing is approached.

November 26, 2007

My last test, test number 9 was to be my last visit to the Drawing Lab. Today, I drew from the photograph. I have completed the test 9 times and while I am quite familiar with it, somehow I feel like I should now have discovered the best way to approach it. However every time I begin the test, I feel as though I look at it differently. I can only speculate on the pattern of my eye movements. I would like to say that they are more focused, more controlled in observing the image in front of me yet I am uncertain. I believe that I may glance more often at the image or objects when drawing them. My eyes may feel more trained but I don't know if this is translating to my hand and my drawing. I can remember drawing in a clockwise direction but I think my hand could have been steadier, my lines could have been straighter and the relationship between the objects could have been improved. I may be experienced in taking this test but I still feel that my eye and hand are uncoordinated when it comes to drawing. Improving my coordination will only be possible through continued practice.

December 3, 2007

This session was a few days prior to my final design presentation. Bryan came into my studio space in the architecture building to see my work and discuss how it could be improved for the presentation. He provided input about punching up colours, quality of line weight and suggested ways of keeping drawings cleaner. While final drawings were not fully completed during his visit, his insight was helpful and constructive. He encouraged consistency amongst the drawings which is my greatest struggle. The following are a few pieces from my presentation.



Summary

Taking a drawing class at NSCAD gave me new tools and skills to incorporate into my design projects. At a fundamental level, as a future architect, I feel it is important that I understand line weights, shading, perspectives, axonometrics etc. and the amount of energy, time and concentration it takes to produce a hand drawn illustration of quality so that I can better appreciate the work of past architects who did not have such luxuries.

The work of architects is often inspired by art. Drawing was at one time a huge part of architecture. However with the advent of the computer and the abundance of rendering programs, the aesthetic of architecture has become one that is derived from the digital world which is not to say that drawing is obsolete in architecture. It still very much exists but mostly in the early stages of a project. In the professional world, napkin drawings and parti sketches are still used early on to convince a potential client of a design. However computer renderings and models are most commonly used in presentations to clients. Some firms commission artists to draw or paint detailed perspectives or an all encompassing image of a project as a device to engage an audience. The reality is that using a computer is much more cost effective and time efficient when it comes to reproduction.

Searching for the best way to express an architectural idea can be a challenge. However there are key drawings that are extremely important in understanding a building and its spaces. These drawings are most commonly known as plans, sections, elevations and a site map. Conceptually a project might be strong but representationally it may be lacking. This is where I think architects could learn a great deal from artists in terms of best practices when it comes to displaying work. Visiting galleries and taking figure drawing classes exposes one to how others approach drawing. I am also convinced that it is important to handle different materials, to experiment with charcoal, conte, paints, found objects etc. to illustrate an idea, to create something that is tangible rather than something that is produced with the click of one finger on a mouse.

Lastly, one could lead me to believe that an amateur and a professional could very likely approach drawing differently on the basis that I think that experience plays a large role in how one looks at an image, landscape, person and so on. Although I do think that one has to be in the right state of mind to draw as the mind and eyes can be easily distracted by outside factors such as environmental conditions, stress and time. However I don't know how conscious we are of these factors in the first few seconds when we approach drawing.