

Describing the Complex World

Teacher's note: This is a project that aims to bridge the gap between drawing from life and more applied work like comics and storyboarding. It is a project that requires students to gather a lot of visual reference in their sketchbook and then bring it back to the studio and use this information to come up with a narrative. It teaches a number of valuable lessons. It gets students drawing from life, WITH A PURPOSE. They will come to value the importance of reference and keeping good sketchbooks. They also will realize that the world offers an unequaled reference resource, just waiting to be plundered!

For this assignment you will choose one of the following subject areas:

- * Your neighborhood
- * Your workplace
- * Downtown
- * A museum or community center.

Stage one is to gather as much reference as possible in your sketchbook. Draw everything: the building(s), the interior and exterior spaces, architectural details, people in the spaces going about their everyday business, details of their activities. You can concentrate on any particular aspects of the subject that interest you. This is the stage that tests your ability to DRAW FROM LIFE (and gets you really working in that sketchbook).

Stage two is where you begin to apply this information and start working from your imagination. You will produce a black and white "STORYBOARD" [or comic] about your chosen subject area. Working in panels that measure 4.5" x 6," [more advanced students may compose their panels as they wish] you will produce a 16-panel narrative. This can be executed in any black and white medium. Each panel should be directly based on sketchbook material. The 16 panels could be simply a series of views of the space, or you could choose to develop a story. You could take us on a journey through the space, for example. You could be in the panels, or one of your characters could be there. I'll leave that up to you... so have some fun with it!

What is important is that you demonstrate your ability to work from life, and to USE that material, combined with your imagination, in an applied piece of work.

Specifics:

- * STAGE ONE: THE SKETCHBOOK.
- * Choose the subject that is of most interest to you, and which will be the easiest for you to study.
- * Gather as much information in the form of sketches as you can.
- * Include interior and exterior spaces (using perspective) and any details that interest you.
- * Draw people using the spaces (using gesture drawing).

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- * Once you have begun this process, you may get an idea for an overall story.
- * This might mean you need to gather specific information for that story.
- * STAGE TWO: THE "STORYBOARD."
- * Using the observed drawing you produced in your sketchbooks, apply it to a series of 16 panels.
 - * Medium: black and white, your choice.
 - * 4.5" x 6" panels. (I recommend you use Bristol board for pencil, and decent drawing paper for charcoal).
 - * When they are complete, mount the 16 panels on four 14" x 17" sheets of Bristol or matt-board.
 - * As long as you base your project primarily on reference, you may introduce some elements from imagination.

One of the things I like about this project is that it really gets students thinking about how reference actually HELPS make a story believable. They also get to wrestle with a lot of tricky challenges, like perspective and figure placement. Much can be learned from having to interpret the original sketchbook material. For example, a student should be encouraged to extrapolate a new eye level appropriate for a panel, which may not have been the view they drew from life. Or place an imaginary figure in an existing perspectival space. Most importantly it gets students DRAWING!

-- Contributed by Patrick Welch