FOCUS ON FOCAL POINTS

Brenda Hoddinott



J05 INTERMEDIATE: SKILLS & SECRETS

When looking at a drawing by an accomplished artist, have you ever noticed that one specific item catches your eye more than others? This is not an accident!

Accomplished artists know a few secrets to bring attention toward what they consider the most important part of their chosen subject.

A telltale sign of a drawing by an amateur artist is a hodgepodge of subjects (or sections of a subject) without one dominant center of interest. In this article, I discuss various ways of implementing a strong focal point(s) into your drawings to create more interesting and professional works of art.

This article is divided into the following three sections:

- **CHECKING OUT FOCAL POINTS:** Focal points are an integral aspect of creating a strong composition in an artwork. Every drawing needs at least one.
- **CHOOSING A FOCAL POINT:** Your drawings illustrate your choice of subjects from your own unique perspective. Your preference of a focal point is personal to you.
- **EMPHASIZING THE FOCAL POINT:** Once you decide on a primary focal point, you need to find ways to make it stand out. In this section I discuss and demonstrate four popular methods for accentuating a focal point.

7 PAGES – 9 ILLUSTRATIONS

This article is recommended for artists of all levels, as well as students of home schooling, academic and recreational fine art educators.

Published by Hoddinott Publishing for Drawspace.com, Halifax, NS, Canada – 2008

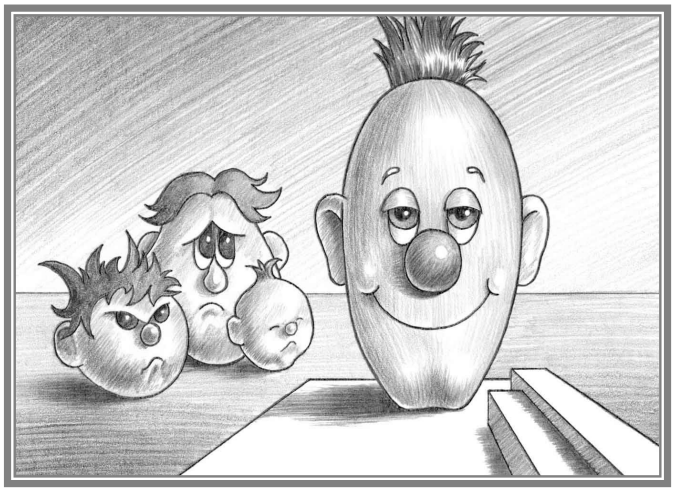
CHECKING OUT FOCAL POINTS

Focal points are an integral aspect of creating a strong composition in an artwork. Every drawing needs at least one.

In a portrait it may be the eyes, and in a landscape it may be one specific tree or object. Sometimes, it can simply be one area within a scene that is especially fascinating. A drawing can even have more than one center of interest, known as a secondary focal point(s).

Figure 501 demonstrates a fun composition with a primary focal point and three secondary ones. In this cartoon, the very happy primary focal point takes center stage, while the disgruntled secondary focal points look on. Needless to say, very few compositions have focal points as blatantly obvious as these four cartoon heads.

FIGURE 501



In Figure 502, a rugged landscape with a river becomes more inviting with the addition of a chair as the focal point. The chair invites the viewer into the drawing.

In the drawing of the violin player (Figure 503), the face is the primary focal point, and his hands and violin are secondary focal points. The violin player, Chris Church, is a long time friend who currently plays and records all over the world.

ARTSPEAK

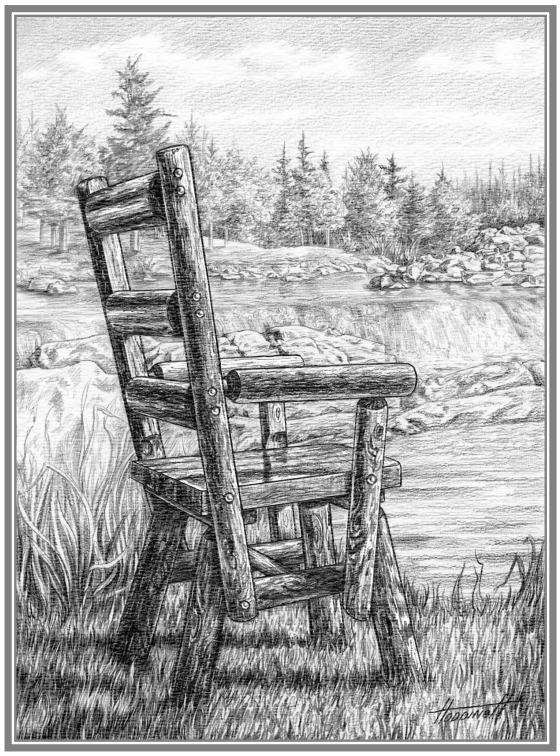
Composition refers to the arrangement of the various facets of a drawing subject within the borders of a drawing space. A strong composition brings the eyes of the viewer into what the artist considers the most important elements, known as focal points.

Focal Point is a term used to identify the most important elements in a drawing.

Primary focal point is the most important center of interest (or focus) in a drawing. For example, in a drawing of an animal, it may be the eyes, the entire face, or a whole section of the body that is especially fascinating.

Secondary focal point(s) is a center of interest in a drawing composition that is significant but not as important as the primary focal point.

FIGURE 502



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FIGURE 503



TIP

Always place your focal point off center. A focal point placed in the very center of a drawing space is a big "NO", unless you have a specific expressive or artistic reason to do so. Any object that is placed dead center commands the viewer's full attention. All other important elements of your drawing may be ignored, and the drawing loses its impact.

CHOOSING A FOCAL POINT

Your drawings illustrate your choice of subjects from your own unique perspective. Your preference of a focal point is personal to you. Think about what you want your drawing to say? Remember what attracted you this particular subject in the first place and select your focal point accordingly.

ARTSPEAK

Drawing space (also called a drawing surface or a drawing format) is the area in which you render a drawing within a specific perimeter. It can be the shape of the paper you choose, or outlined by any shape you draw, such as a square, rectangle, or circle.

FIGURE 504



The drawing in Figure 504 is rendered from a photo taken in the quaint fishing village of Peggy's Cove, Nova Scotia. The old, dilapidated lobster trap in the lower right immediately caught my eye. Hence, I chose it as my focal point.

To accentuate my focal point, I added more details and darker shading than all other objects in the scene.

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EMPHASIZING THE FOCAL POINT

Once you decide on a primary focal point, you need to find ways to make it stand out. In this section I discuss and demonstrate four popular methods for accentuating a focal point.

1) Define the focal point with more detailed shading than other aspects of your drawing.

In a portrait of my partner, John, dressed in medieval clothing (Figure 505), his face is the focal point.

ARTSPEAK

Drawing space (also called a drawing surface or a drawing format) is the area in which you render a drawing within a specific perimeter. It can be the shape of the paper you choose, or outlined by any shape you draw, such as a square, rectangle, or circle.

Shading (noun) refers to the various values in a drawing that make images appear three-dimensional; (verb) the process of adding values to a drawing so as to create the illusion of texture, form and/or three-dimensional space.

Contrast is the comparison of different values when put beside one another, and is an invaluable tool for heightening the effects of composition.

Forms are created in drawings by using perspective or adding shading to transform a shape into three-dimensional structure, such as a square changing into a cube or a circle becoming a sphere.

FIGURE 505



His eyes, moustache, goatee, and facial forms are drawn with smaller pencils and a lot of intricate details.

Conversely, everything else in this sketch is very loosely rendered.

2) Use a grouping of more than one focal point within a specific section of your drawing space.

For example, drawing one or more secondary focal point(s), close to the primary focal point, helps direct attention toward this center of interest.

In Figure 506, attention is directed toward the old barrel (primary focal point) because the shrubbery (secondary focal points) is also high contrast.

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FIGURE 506



3) Strategically position your primary focal point within the boundaries of your drawing space so it commands attention.

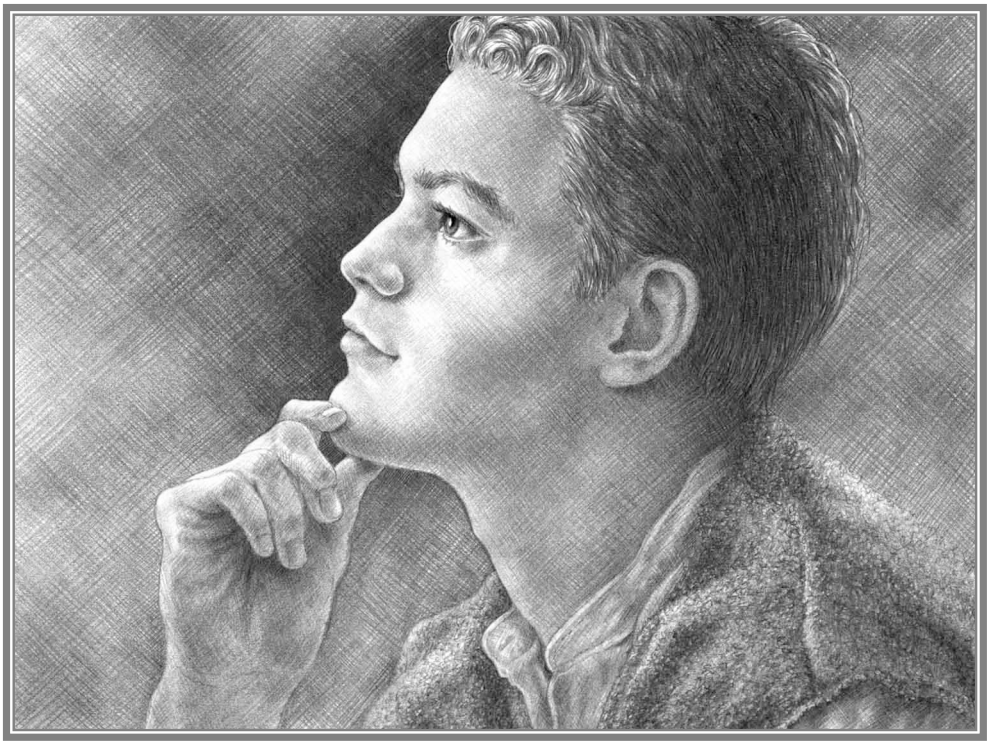
An obvious method of making an object stand out is to draw it larger than anything else in your drawing space.

For instance, in a portrait, you can make the person's head and face fill most of your drawing space.

In addition, a focal point becomes more powerful when you place it off center.

For example, the largest and most fascinating tree in a landscape is best positioned toward the right in your drawing space.

FIGURE 507



In Figure 507, the focal point is the highly detailed profile view of a young man.

His face and head are by far the largest section of the composition.

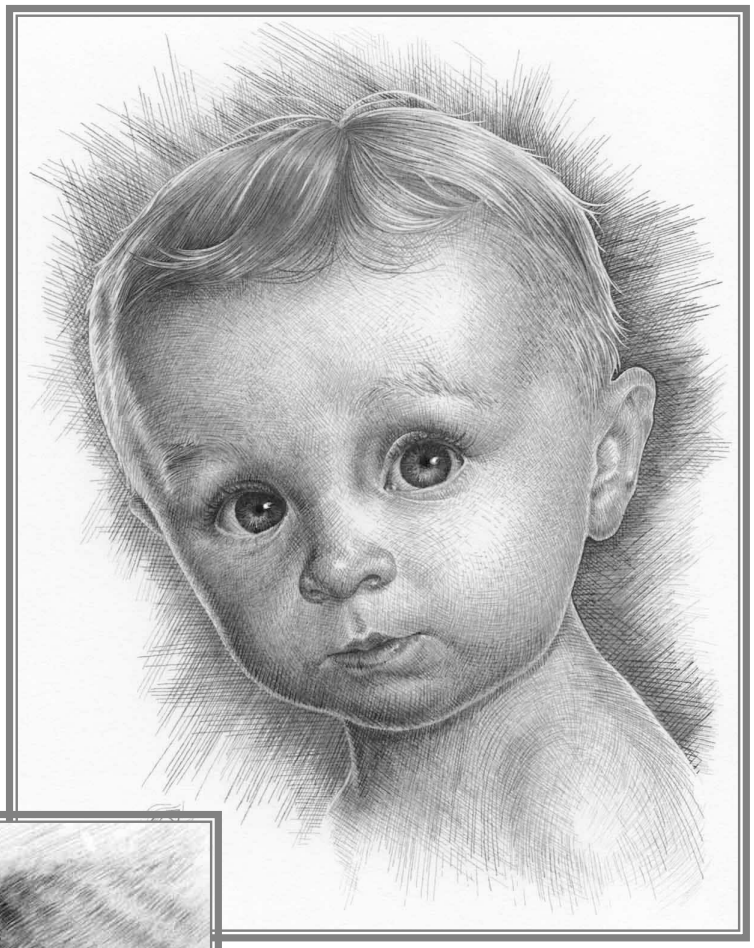
His head is side-on to the viewer, facing the left. Hence, the head is drawn closer to the right than the left.

4) Draw your focal point with a stronger contrast in values than other aspects of your drawing.

Refer to Figures 508 and 509.

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FIGURE 508



What is the very first thing you notice when you look at the portrait of my grandson, Kaiden, in Figure 508?

The darkest shading is in the pupils of his eyes. Hence, when you look at this portrait, you are immediately drawn to his eyes.

Yes, his eyes are really that big!

What part of the drawing in Figure 509 do you look at first?

FIGURE 509



If you guessed the cat's face, then I have done my job well.

Take note that the shading of the fur on the face and neck has more dark values than any other part of his body.

In addition, the dark shading of the eyes make them the most prominent feature on his face.

The next time you plan a drawing, choose a primary focal point before you put pencil to paper. Use one or more of the suggestions in this article to emphasize your center of interest.

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BRENDA HODDINOTT - BIOGRAPHY

As a self-educated teacher, visual artist, portraitist, forensic artist, and illustrator, Brenda Hoddinott utilizes diverse art media including graphite, technical pen, colored pencil, chalk pastel, charcoal, conté crayon, and oil paints.

My philosophy on teaching art is to focus primarily on the enjoyment aspects while gently introducing the technical and academic. Hence, in creating a passion for the subject matter, the quest for knowledge also becomes enjoyable.

>Brenda Hoddinott<

Born in St. John's, Newfoundland, Brenda grew up in the small town of Corner Brook. She developed strong technical competencies with a personal commitment to self directed learning, and the aid of assorted "Learn to Draw" books. During Brenda's twenty-five year career as a self-educated civilian forensic artist, numerous criminal investigation departments have employed Brenda's skills, including Royal Canadian Mounted Police and municipal police departments. In 1992, Brenda was honored with a commendation from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, and in 1994, she was awarded a Certificate of Membership from "Forensic Artists International".

Her home-based art career included graphic design, and teaching recreational drawing and painting classes. As supervisor of her community's recreational art department, Brenda hired and trained teachers, and designed curriculum for several children's art programs. In 1998, Brenda chose to end her eighteen-year career as an art educator in order to devote more time to writing, drawing, painting, and developing her websites.

Drawspace http://www.drawspace.com incorporates her unique style and innovative approach to curriculum development. This site offers downloadable and printable drawing classes for students of all abilities from the age of eight through adult. Students of all ages, levels and abilities have praised the simple step-by-step instructional approach. This site is respected as a resource for fine art educators, home schooling programs, and educational facilities throughout the world.

LEARN-TO-DRAW BOOKS BY BRENDA HODDINOTT

- **Drawing for Dummies:** Wiley Publishing, Inc., New, York, NY, this 336 page book is available on various websites and in major bookstores internationally.
- **The Complete Idiot's Guide to Drawing People:** Winner of the Alpha-Penguin Book of the Year Award 2004, Alpha - Pearson Education – Macmillan, Indianapolis, IN, this 360 page book is available on various websites and in major bookstores internationally.

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