

THE WORKING METHOD OF

THE MODERN PAINTER

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"Theories on art are like a doctors'
prescription, one has to be sick
to believe in them."

Maurice Vlaminck.

"I seek that rule which corrects the
emotion."

Georges Braque.

BRIEF HISTORICAL SUMMARY

Prior to 1800 advances made in painting could often be accredited to the advances made in paint technology. Since the beginning of the last century however, paint technology has stabilised, moved into the background and allowed the artist to create with the medium rather than be dictated to by it. This stabilising of art technology has also generated a lack of interest in technique, leading in turn to a number of painting techniques being lost. In some ways we know less today of the oil medium and its correct use than was known to Jan and Hubert Van Eyck and their followers. However, if this lack of concern with technique has produced a large number of valid artistic statements which are unlikely to survive physically, it also means that the hoardes of painters who painted technically perfect paintings with no valid art statement have dwindled as well.

Prior to the discovery of oil medium paints in relatively recent times, wall painting was the most commonly used technique. The fresco technique used for wall painting had been known for thousands of years and was used with little change in technique in Ancient Greece and during the Renaissance. The fresco painter used water mixed pigments which were laid on to the wet lime surface of the plaster, the binding medium being the crystallized carbonate of lime, this is slowly formed by the combining

of the carbonic acid gas found in the air and the lime. Fresco painting died a natural death when oil painting came into its own, and its technique is now used mainly by restorers, and practising artist-historians seeking the secrets of the masters.

Encaustic painting, using hot bees wax as a medium, has also largely fallen away. Egg tempera painting has diminished in popularity but is still used by some artists. This technique using the yolk of an egg as a binding medium, and the white as a varnish was mentioned by the writer Pling (A.D. 23 to 79) and used extensively in the writing of manuscripts during the middle ages. It is also described in Cennino Cennini's fifteenth century book on art technique.

Gum arabic is a medium which has lasted the test of time. It was developed by the Egyptians and is still used by water colourists today.

The reason for the continued and almost exclusive use of oil and water media by painters today can be attributed to the speeding up in our way of living, our new mobility and the comparative versatility of experience which the artist can enjoy. They are the most versatile mediums and allow the artist almost complete freedom of expression. This is especially true of oil paint, but while it is the most pliable medium it is also the most treacherous.

Drying oils as a painting medium were first used sometime between the eighth and eleventh centuries. The oils

first known to and used by painters were linseed oil, and walnut oil, obtained from the seed of the flax and kernel of the walnut respectively. For a while the oil of the hemp seed was used and later poppy oil came into use. Today linseed and poppy oil are the most commonly used.

These oils are used by artists because they are slow drying and can be worked on at some length wet. When dry, they form a hard permanent surface. This drying process takes place through the action of the oxygen and water vapour in the air on the oil. Two disturbing properties are the fact that the oil turns a brownish yellow with age and has the apparent property of rendering the pigments more translucent and at the same time deeper in tone.

The secrets of oil painting are found in its application by the artist. Vasari in "Life of the Artists" hints that Van Eyck knew of some secret recipe for mixing paint. However, all the written accounts of mixing oils are very similar and there is little to separate the descriptions of Theophilus and Eraclius in the twelfth century, Cennino Cennini in the fifteenth century and Vasari himself in the sixteenth century. Van Eyck's secret lay in his supreme technical knowledge of the properties and behaviour of the dried oil. With this knowledge he was able to mix media and paint in thin oil on a solid under painting in egg. His paintings were also done on wooden panels and the condition and brilliance of the colour are better preserved than if they had been painted on canvas.

THE USE OF VISUAL STIMULI

Since the discovery of Renaissance Reality contact with the object one intended depicting was all important. If one was going to imitate nature, nature must be there. Art training became formalised and more observation orientated; drawing from the busts of antiquity, drawing from life, drawing from nature. In the nineteenth century the artist moved out of doors completely. At first painters such as Carot painted large oil sketches out of doors and then painted academy works from these sketches in the studio. Later the Impressionists painted completely out of doors. As the twentieth century approached some artists turned from the use of visual stimuli, while others used it in varying degrees as a starting point for paintings.

Van Gogh believed in painting from nature, he went much further than the Impressionists and allowed himself to be absorbed in the whole feel of nature and thus enable his own nature to show itself on the canvas. A painting by Van Gogh, whether it be still-life or landscape is also a self-portrait. This cannot be said of the Impressionist paintings.

Van Gogh studied landscape in a very scientific visual way and absorbed it visually before allowing himself to paint it emotionally. In a letter he wrote to his brother in 1883 he writes "I have had to pay more for making an

instrument for studying proportion and perspective, the description of which is found in a book by Albrecht Durer, and which the old Dutch Masters also used. It makes it possible to compare the proportion of nearby objects with those on a more distant plane, in cases where construction according to the rules of perspective is not possible. And when one tries to do it with the eye alone - unless one is an expert and very far advanced - it is always decidedly wrong ... And after more efforts, I see a chance of getting still better results."

We can assume from the above that Van Gogh's famous instinctive passion was a cultivated one. In his first years of painting he seemed over concerned with visual reality. However, the vast number of studies he made eventually sorted themselves out in later paintings into a visual shorthand.

In another letter to his brother he writes "when I see young painters compose and draw from memory, and then haphazardly smear on whatever they like, also from memory, then keep it at a distance and put on a very mysterious gloomy face to find out what in Heaven's name it may look to be, and at last to finally make something of it, always from memory - it sometimes disgusts me."

Van Gogh's art depends upon acute observation, it is small wonder that he and Gauguin disagreed, their approaches being so radically different. Both had started as

naturalistic painters, but after meeting Emilé Bernard, one of those unfortunates who knew too much and did too little, Gauguin was able to absorb a number of his ideas and move into symbolism. For Gauguin the mind and the imagination played a greater role than the visual outside world. Even though he did not draw from nature, he submerged himself in nature, so that the images in his mind were in effect very close to the nature he lived in. Van Gogh never got to that stage of painting beyond what he saw. Art for him always had a direct relation to those objects which were in front of him.

It is too easy to make the generalisation that the more use made of visual stimuli the more figurative the painting. We think of Géricault painting the "Raft of the Medusa" with his replica of the raft and tailor's measurements of the ship wrecked on the one hand and Paul Klee taking his line for a walk on the other.

There are too many exceptions to prove any rule.

Bonnard who absorbed Van Gogh's brush technique and was strongly influenced by the impressionists' preoccupation with light worked without a model and preferred to synthesise his painting from memory. Bonnard only used the model to make a number of notation sketches. These enabled him to look at the model more closely, but did not serve as references for the painting, which he painted from memory.

By way of contrast, Matisse reached almost total abstraction

with the model in front of him. "The emotional interest aroused in me by them does not necessarily appear in the representation of their bodies. Often it is rather in the lines, through qualities distributed over the whole canvas or paper, forming the orchestration or architecture."

"To copy the objects in a still life," he said, "is nothing." "The painter must strive to render the emotion that the objects awake in him. The emotion of the ensemble, the inter-relation of the objects, the specific character of each object, all interlaced ... you must be touched by the tearlike quality of this slender, big bellied vase and by the generous volume of this copper pot."

Matisse, who at one time had his own school in Paris, taught his students, "note the essential characteristics of the model carefully; they must exist in the complete work, otherwise you have lost your concept on the way. Lines must never go wild. Every line must have its function."

When Matisse painted figures he always worked from the model, he also had a large collection of oriental and arabic objects which were a constant visual impetus to his design. Part of Matisse's abstract quality, stems from the fact that he gave as much consideration to the negative shapes between objects as to the positive shapes of the objects themselves. This is especially evident in his later work with paper cut-outs.

Picasso, who like Matisse never actually reached complete abstraction, had a Magpie nature, and collected everything which might provide any possible stimulus. He used vast buildings as his studios, including a disused perfume factory, and in these his visual stimuli lay waiting for possible further use.

Francoise Gilot describes how when Picasso painted "La Femme-Fleur" she modelled for him. The first afternoon she posed for him, she stood for three hours while he observed her without making a mark. The following day he painted the picture entirely from memory and seemed capable of drawing mentally for future reference.

Heron notes that on one of his visits to Braque's studio he opened the door to find a jug suspended in mid air in front of a glazed window. "Against this," he writes, "the potent, black jug was a startling profile, a commanding symbol. It was simply a piece of thin copper or tin sheet cut out into a jug silhouette, turning now and then on an almost invisible thread. Its very blackness and flatness - the fact that it was only a silhouette - for a moment defeated one's attempt to place it in the space in front of the window; when it faced slightly to right or left you didn't know with immediate certainty, which way it was facing. As an image it exuded a certain startling, but calm power. It had the animalistic quality possessed by all Braque's images of inanimate objects."

Liberman notes "Flat silhouettes, cut out of white paper, hung in various parts of the room, were repeated in the

paintings. On one canvas posed a large bird, on the wall appeared the shape of the same bird cut out in white."

The basic difference between Picasso and Braque, which these descriptions show, is that Braque always returned to the object, where Picasso used the object only as a starting point. This fact is sometimes physically apparent in their respective paintings. Where Braque's simplest sketches have a complete quality about them, Picasso's finished paintings sometimes tend towards the diagrammatic.

Gertrude Stein asked Picasso if "the tomato you paint is the same as the one you eat:" Picasso replied that it was. Picasso is not involved with the visual connotation of something. Braque's arranging and rearranging to such a degree that he almost creates a picture physically in front of him in the studio, would mean nothing to Picasso. Picasso's object sets free a dream inside him.

Another large difference in approach is shown by their use of studio lighting. Braque's search for "those rules which correct the emotion" took him away from the Fauve outdoors and back into the controlled light of the studio. Liberman notes of his visit to Braque's studio, "It is shut off from the outside world. It is a world of it's own, Braque's world. In the warm and diffused light, I found myself standing in a luminous womb".

He notes that Braque had replaced the normal glass in the windows with opaque glass which gave off a glow. The white walls and white curtains enhanced this glowing effect.

Heron visiting another of Braque's studios noted that it had one large window which faced south. (The general rule for natural studio lighting being north facing in the northern hemisphere and south facing in the southern hemisphere). A creamy gauze was drawn across the window forming a transparent screen which gave the room an evenly diffused radiance.

Most writers who visited Picasso in one of his many studios were surprised at the general darkness in which he painted. Francoise Gilot notes that he seemed to feel more at home in a darker room and was able to see clearly while others were still becoming accustomed to the light. Liberman wrote "Picasso works with very little of the painters essential - light. The little there is comes through the window nearest his easel in a single, intense shaft of sunlight, its blinding brightness making everything around it darker." In other studios he painted with artificial lights. Where Braque liked an all-over glow, Picasso sought the contrast which the single beam of light could splay on an object. Picasso looked for a light which would help him break down an object, help him analyse. This breaking up of the form was the starting point for Picasso's fantasy. Picasso never lead the viewer back to his starting point. The objects he saw and painted were stripped of their natural quality. Braque on the other hand was able to discover with his overall subtle light without destroying. When he analysed an object his synthesis recaptured its nature returning the viewer to the calm, real, permanent surroundings of the object.

Soutine had a different type of dependence on visual stimuli. Where Braque rearranged and composed his objects, Soutine walked until he found a ready made painting. He seems to have had the ability to know what could be a good painting before he started. He often had periods of up to six months inactivity while he searched for subjects. His companion Mdm. Gardé notes that on one occasion he spent so long wandering around a particular cluster of trees, that he was arrested for loitering. Once he had found his subject, he normally painted it straight away and seldom reworked a painting later. He enjoyed being close up to the sensations of seeing, feeling and experiencing, and it is this directness which validate his paintings. Most of Soutines still-lives were ready-found, those that were arranged lack any feeling of harmonious arrangement. The colours in them are always discordant and never "in tone", showing a sense of primitive instinctive arrangement rather than a pictorial sense.

The English painter L.S. Lowry had a similar method of finding his subject. Lowry took a regular afternoon walk around the industrial areas he painted. Unlike Soutine he never went looking for a particular subject. He just walked to absorb a constant influence. This influence was probably something other than a visual, or at least something as well as a visual influence. Although the people around him changed their manner of dress as fashions changed, he always depicted them in an early 1930's type of dress. However, in spite of this they appear timeless rather than dated, possibly indicating Lowry's subtle

ability of depicting real people rather than humans with clothes on, and the fact that that type of real person does not change with his clothes. Unlike Soutine, Lowry painted and reworked paintings for months and years before completing them.

WORKING METHODS

The Nineteenth Century Academies formulated any number of painting rules, all of which were broken in the end. Sometimes in dramatic paintings such as Gainsborough's "Blue Boy", painted to disprove one of Joshua Reynolds discourses, in other cases the old habits died hard, but died. There are no rules as to how to apply paint. One of the reasons oil painting continued is its versatility. Where Cezanne painted in washes of almost pure turpentine, Karel Appel fights his exuberant way through exorbitant impasto.

Each artist's manner of applying paint is as distinctive as his fingerprints. Madeline Hours, when delving into the "Secrets of the Great Masters" discusses how it is often the case that the only way to discover if a work is genuine, is to take an X-Ray photograph and analyse the method of application. In this way the under painting is revealed. An X-Ray photograph of the painting "St. Matthew and the Angel" by Rembrandt, shows strong vibrant under painting, while that of a faked painting of the same subject shows very hesitant surface painting. Rembrandt's handling of paint was much bolder than that of other Dutch artists of the same time. He departed from the orthodox manner, and tried to vary his technique, texture and general weight of paint within the same painting so as to break the surface tension of the painting and increase interest in any particular area.

He also developed a very subtle colour sense. His vivid colours in the early works still show the influence of Lastman. He later changed to using harmonies of light blue, yellow, pale green and olive with grey backgrounds. His colour is linked entirely to the transmission of light and shadow through chiaroscuro.

Van Gogh is an artist who has a reputation for painting in rich impasto. This reputation is probably gained from the fact that reproductions of his work normally show his impasto to exaggerated advantage. Viewing his work in reality is a disappointment as the paint is often very thinly laid on with pieces of raw canvas showing underneath, giving the whole painting a feeling of being unresolved.

Soutine also is associated with thick impasto. On viewing a large retrospective Soutine exhibition in Paris, 1973, one found that the impressions created by reproductions of his work were misleading. Once again they tended to over-emphasise the violent turbulence of the impasto. However, where the Van Gogh paintings appeared weaker in real life, the Soutine paintings showed a strength not discernible in the reproductions. Especially noticeable was the fact that when painting his carcasses of beef, Soutine used large areas of under painting covered with thin red and black glazes to build up something with the strength of impasto but with a much greater sensitivity.

Soutine's famous Céret paintings showing whole mountains and houses in turbulence, are some of those along with his early work which Soutine set about destroying, buying them up or replacing them with newer pictures when he found them. These are now thought to have anticipated Action Painting in their freedom of handling, and show his calligraphic gesturing with the brush, which has almost become Soutine's trademark. One of his probable reasons for disliking these particular works was the fact that they were too difficult to read. There was just too much of the same thing. Each distorted gesture got lost in the host of other distorted gestures. After the Ceres pictures he returned to far more naturalistic paintings in which these whirlings of the brush could register a more defined distortion, and allow the painting a more specific statement.

Something which becomes apparent viewing Soutine's paintings in real life, is the fantastic clean quality of his colour. His paintings, with the exception of his carcasses of beef which are almost life size, are all painted on a small scale. Thus although painted in one sitting, they are well worked and include a lot of wet-in-wet painting where the clean quality of his paint is all the more remarkable. Soutine kept his paint clean by painting each fresh colour with a new clean brush and then throwing it to one side, started again with another brush and fresh colour. His colours were always pre-mixed on his palette in large quantities, so that once into a painting he was only concerned with putting paint

onto canvas and not with mixing paint.

Braque had the same ability to keep his colours clean as Soutine. His working method was far more ordered than Soutines but based on the same principle. Liberman describing Braque's studio writes "Braque has the greatest number of paint brushes of any painter I have seen He uses corrugated cardboard to hold pencils and pens - each groove storing many stubs. The stands holding the palettes are made of rough tree trunks, the bark and moss left on, with pieces of iron braced in for support. On different levels of the unique central stem are different palettes, each carrying its own harmony of colour. Tools are conveniently at hand for every creative need. From his easel he hangs tomato cans. In each he mixes a certain quantity of paint which is the dominant tone of a given area of the canvas."

Like Soutine, Braque used a new brush for each stroke, and his quantity of paint ready mixed in tomato cans meant that his work was never interrupted by having to mix and match colours. In contrast to Soutine he worked very slowly making many preparatory sketches, cutting them up and composing in collages. These collages were used to inspire bigger works. At other times he worked entirely in collage method which he called "l'emotion directe." He never worked one painting through from beginning to end but rather on three or four paintings simultaneously then leaving off completely and returning to rework at a later stage. When he worked on a painting

he re-drew with chalk on top of the oil paint, and sometimes stuck on cut-outs, moving them about until he found their correct position and then finally painted them in.

Braque tried to perfect Twentieth Century studio technique. He had been trained as a house decorator and realised the advantages of systematic workmanship. He tried to develop a system of working which would give him the best possible chance of producing good paintings. He enjoyed the silent labour of painting and said that art was to him what drink was to the alcoholic. He did not really enjoy it, but he always felt the urge to have the first drink in the morning and then there was no stopping him. One is inclined to doubt the real value of all Braque's over preparation, and the obvious question to ask is whether he produced good paintings because of his thoroughness or in spite of it? What is more important is that it evolved to fulfil his needs and as such was the natural way for him to paint, and once an artist finds a genuinely natural way for him to paint, everything should fall into place more easily.

Picasso's energy dictated the size of his studio. His genius meant that he was able to absorb techniques like a sponge, mix any number of them together and still make them work. Where Braque was limited by his craftsman's respect for his materials, Picasso excelled in making things work. For Picasso there were no laws about materials and techniques. He would never be bothered

to limit himself to "good quality water colour paper" "sable hair brushes and the like." Francoise Gilot describes how when they moved to Vallauris, he quickly picked up the potters' technique, and then changed it to his own needs breaking age old rules, but making new ones which suited his particular needs. Picasso's painting needs were very simple. He told Liberman, "I use very little oil - mostly turpentine. I make my own small palettes out of plywood. I use boat paint - any kind they give me." He often painted using boat paint and house painters brushes, neither of which are the conventional artists media. Francoise Gilot observed him painting. "He used no palette. At his right was a small table covered with newspapers and three or four large cans filled with brushes standing in turpentine. Everytime he took a brush he wiped it off on the newspapers, which were a jungle of coloured smudges and slashes. Whenever he wanted pure colour he squeezed some from a tube onto the newspaper. From time to time he would mix small quantities of colour on the paper. At his feet and around the base of the easel were cans - mostly tomato cans of various sizes - that held grey and neutral tones, and other colours which he had previously mixed. He stood before the canvas for three or four hours at a stretch. He made no superfluous gestures. I asked him if it didn't tire him to stand so long in one spot. He shook his head. "No", he said, "That's why painters live so long. While I work I leave my body outside the door, the way Moslems take off their shoes before entering the Mosque."

Future generations will probably see the cinema as the typifying art form of the twentieth century. As an art form it embodies much which was in the domain of the easel painter of the last century. If Monet was "only an eye, but what an eye!", today's director is only an eye but WHAT AN EYE! He is the Impressionist Par Excellence. Not for him the twelve views of the same Cathedral facade at different times of the day, he can have his any object at anytime and for any length of time. Warhol's film "Empire" horribly overstresses this point. This visual impression coupled with the soundtrack and dramatic action makes the cinema one of the widest fields of art yet encountered. It being a predominantly visual art can be established by the fact that a film without a soundtrack is still a valid cinema statement, as is a film with no actors or actresses. The film without a visual image though is purely hypothetical. (Even Warhol has been unable to make one).

The musician who composes, expects his art to be reinterpreted by the various musicians who play his score. Similarly the playwrights' work is constantly reinterpreted and sometimes re-written. (Shakespeare probably half expected to have his work translated into Zulu). The visual image in the cinema as in all visual art is a final unretractable statement. This is where the family alliance between the film director and the easel painter

puts them apart from the other arts. They alone are responsible for what they produce. They are expected to have all the expertise to manipulate their media, and are expected to stand by their statements.

However, this eclectic omnipotence lacks the bite that it should have. The reason why it does fail is that it is a transient visual art. The cinema is unique amongst all other art forms in that it is expected to be viewed once only. The book is read, re-read and digested numerous times before it is considered to become really meaningful. Similarly the listener is expected to listen to a piece of music a number of times before he acquires a taste. The film, however, is traditionally viewed only once, and must be appreciated first time. This tradition has kept the film as true art, that is, as a true visual art form in its infancy. The only way it attains art status is through relying on the inherent art found in its musical accompaniment or literary, or dramatic content, and this is where the film is a vehicle and not an intrinsic art form in itself. Here once again it echoes a fault found in much of the easel painting of the past.

It is impossible for me to be totally objective when discussing painters' methods. By nature I agree with that which I have found to work in my own painting and disagree with that which does not. The Painters discussed have an affinity to each other and belong to the same main group of modern artists. There are many well known artists whose work has not been mentioned, people like Marcel Duchamp, Piet Mondrian and a host of other moderns. Although literature on their working methods is available, their methods are so different from those that I have experimented with in my own painting that any discussion of them, would on my part be purely hypothetical and probably meaningless.

Since I have studied at Rhodes University Art School, my opinions on art have obviously been moulded by its teachings. However, while studying I spent a number of years away from the art school and have been able to view it at a distance and reflect on its teachings. No writings have appeared on the methods and techniques used by the Grahamstown Group and the following should be taken as the way I see the groups policy on working method and not as any working plan dictated by the group.

One of its basic principles is a return to nature. This means not only to nature without but also to nature within. The artists' own nature must come through in the painting.

It believes that painters should be more directly influenced by that which surrounds them, than what can be read about in the art journals of the world. A number of its members have made a substantial contribution to landscape painting, for the most part using observed working drawings as their starting point. Different artists in the group have attained various degrees of personalised abstraction in their landscapes. This quality of seeing through the inner eye is most noticeable in work of Bradshaw. He has explored the abstract possibilities of the visual stimuli found around Grahamstown. His landscapes are always inhabited. They are never views of a nature reserve which is an unnatural nature. Themes which have occurred in his paintings include the road and the sun, which are dominant local images. Farmers' cottages and farm animals have also been absorbed and re-discovered in a fresh personal way. Some of his most personalised paintings have developed from his exploring the rhythms formed by farmlands juxtaposed with the virgin bush around it. The statement that "man is nature" is in all his work. He has explored the work of his own people, the Celts, and found a threeway link between the rhythms of their art, the rhythms of natural landscape and his own rhythms.

The group believe that technique should always be subservient to content in a painting, and should never be exploited for its own sake. At the same time the development of technical ability is stressed in the school, where students are given a traditional academic

training. The artist should reach such a high standard of technical ability, that painting for him is a natural act.

The group do not believe that a painting can be preconceived in the mind. It trusts rather in developments occurring at different times on the same painting resulting in a finished work of art. It mistrusts the painting which has arrived too easily and believes that all the work put into a painting shows in the finished picture even if not visibly apparent.

In concluding, it should be stressed that the group see visual nature as a starting point, and do not try to imitate nature. Similarly technical ability is only seen as a vehicle and not as an art in its own right. Within these broad limitations the individual group members strive for an honest freedom of expression.

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We find that different writers visiting Picasso in the same year record radical differences in his method of painting. Picasso's working method, like his art itself was predictably unpredictable.

One of the reasons for the fact that the standard of Picasso's paintings varies so greatly from one painting to the next is his working method. When chasing an idea he worked on a series of paintings depicting the same subject. In each painting he tried to go a little further towards revealing the hidden essence. Where this took time the painting is worked and resolved. When he got a sudden inspirational flash, the painting is left diagrammatic and unresolved.

Picasso wrote "a picture is not thought out and settled beforehand; while it is being done it changes as one's thoughts change. And when it is finished it goes on changing according to the state of mind of whoever is looking at it. A picture lives a life like a living creature, undergoing the changes imposed on us by our life from day to day. At the actual time I am painting a picture I may think of white and put down white. But I can't go on working all the time thinking of and painting it, colours like features, follow the changes of the emotions".

The Picasso idea is always present in his painting, he never totally destroys with the painting like Braque does. With Picasso the painting is more the vehicle

for the meaning, while with Braque the painting is the meaning. Braque has written "The painting is finished when the idea has disappeared. The image of reality that remains in the finished painting is not the idea. What remains is what comes from the spectator and the painting together, from the relationship between the two." Thus although there are great differences between Braque and Picasso, there is also a lot of common ground.

THE IMPORTANCE OF DRAWING IN PAINTING

It can be generally said that the good painter is a good draughtsman, although it does not follow that the good draughtsman will necessarily be a good painter. A good test of ability is to look at a painter's pencil drawings. The pencil, the artist's most simple tool allows a vast variety of technique and a great tonal continuum. It is a technique which allows the good to excel at the same time showing up the mediocre.

It is only in the last hundred and fifty years that drawing has been considered as an art form in its own right.

Before that it was seen only as a method used by painters to make working drawings and notations. It is still used by painters for these reasons today, and it is probably for this purpose that the best drawings are being done. A drawing done for its own sake often lacks the spontaneous strength of that done to be used as a visual reference.

Because so little value was placed on drawings, many of those belonging to the old masters were swept away when no longer needed. Rembrandt's drawings are an exception. Rembrandt was a compulsive draughtsman and there are 1,400 surviving sketches attributed to him. The majority are self contained drawings which can be viewed as independent works of art, although often rapidly done. His best drawings are those done with ink and brush alone. In these the chiaroscuro is shown with a



spontaneity that is sometimes lacking in the large oil paintings.

Van Gogh wrote to his brother "When I draw I paint, and when I paint I draw." Van Gogh saw drawing as the necessary prerequisite to painting. When still working in Holland he gave up painting completely and concentrated on drawing. He wrote to his brother "I am sure you know, that it is no more difficult to work in colour than in black and white, perhaps indeed the reverse, for so far as I can see, three fourths depends on the original sketch, it was and is my aim to bring drawing to a higher plane." "I do not object to making water-colours, but the foundation of them is in the drawing".

Van Gogh probably reached his highest peak in some of his Dutch drawings, most of which were done as preliminary work for paintings.

Cezanne said "One of the secrets we may attribute to genius may be merely acute observation." This is probably more true of Picasso than any other twentieth century painter. Picasso's greatness as a draughtsman was already evident in his teenage years, and drawing is always prominent in his paintings. During his Blue and Rose periods, Picasso came dangerously close to being a mannerist-expressionist, and it was only the powerful drawing in these works that redeemed them. The intense power of Picasso's drawing can be seen most clearly in his line drawing where a single line can define an object

with a precision which goes beyond factual efficiency into the realm of the soul.

Matisse also believed in doing exhaustive drawings of a subject before attempting to paint it. He wrote, "How can I know what something looks like unless I draw it."

Like Picasso his true greatness as a draughtsman is apparent in his simple line drawings. Discussing line drawings he told his students, "Translate the curves of the body as in sculpture. Look for their volume and their fullness. The outlines should be enough. Speaking of a melon one uses both hands to express in one gesture its spherical shape. In the same way two lines are sufficient to express one form."

An artist who worked without drawing is Soutine. Mdm. Gardé noted that he worked directly on the canvas without even any preliminary brush drawing. Soutine's natural ability to recognise a ready made picture when he saw it, probably meant that he drew his subjects mentally and analysed them subconsciously before painting.

THE SONG OF A BIRD

Picasso once said that paintings were like the song of the bird. You just listened to them and enjoyed them, rather than analyse them and discover meanings.

Presumably he included his own work in this broad description of art. Picasso's paintings are the song of a very clever eclectic parrot. If as he implied, people could listen naturally to the song of the bird, it is amazing how people like to listen to a caged canary.

The most promising bird in the art bush is Marc Chagall. His art rings with that same poetry found in the song of a bird. Unfortunately the critics have tried to transcribe his bird songs into five line music, and dissect and generally study it. They stress the imagery of Vitebsk, and the stories his Grandfather used to tell him. All this information instead of contributing to an understanding of the painting, actually detracts from a natural appreciation of it. There were any number of Grandfathers and Grandsons in Vitebsk and Chagall must have had that something extra to have made good.

The music in Chagall's work stems from Chagall's physical use of colour. Like the modern jazz musicians, who have also been likened to the song of a bird, Chagall's visual framework remains loose until the painting is finished. Colour harmonies in one section of the painting exist

there for their own sake and are deliberately discordant with other harmonies in the same painting. All the objects in his paintings enjoy complete freedom of movement within the painting and often in his other works. Yet they are so intensely personalised that nobody can be influenced by Chagall without imitating him. This is a quality also inherent in the simplest birdsong.