

MUSEUM DRAWING WITH WRITE-UP ⇒ OBSERVATIONAL DRAWING GUIDE**AUTHOR'S NOTE**

This assignment is a multimodal translation of an assignment I did for my Architectural History course. Both the original piece and the multimodal translation are included in this document. The original piece is an observational drawing I did of a statue at the Museum of Fine Arts, accompanied by a short reflection about the process of drawing the statue, and what I learned from it. I was dissatisfied with the original piece's limited usage, so for the multimodal translation, I chose to create a basic informational guide about the observational drawing of faces. My original piece was limited to use only by my professor, but my translation is able to be used multiple times by many different people. This informational guide lists the steps I used to create my drawing of the *Little Fourteen-Year-Old Dancer* by Edgar Degas and puts them in a form that can be used by anyone who has basic knowledge of drawing facial features and is proficient in using the listed materials. My text is meant to be given to the 11 to 17-year-old students at the drawing camps I help teach every summer.

MUSEUM DRAWING WITH WRITE-UP

Helen Bujold

I sketched the *Little Fourteen-Year-Old Dancer* created by Edgar Degas, which is a sculpture cast in bronze. While sketching the sculpture, I needed to consider the basic shapes and its structural integrity. The girl is standing on two legs, but her weight is unevenly distributed, with the majority of it over her left foot. She stays upright because her right leg is extended in front of her, her hands are clasped behind her back, and her torso is upright and leaning backward, all effectively keeping her center of gravity over her feet. It is important to note that her feet are the only part of her touching the ground. Her shoulders are pulled back and her arms hang down from them, her hands clasped behind her back. Her neck is quite long, and her chin is lifted. In drawing her face, I realized that her lips are pulled together and her eyes are almost squinted. These features show annoyance, discomfort, and unhappiness. These emotions are all very possible for a fourteen-year-old girl who has been standing in one position for multiple hours, and they fit with the truthful portrayal of subject matter that was characteristic of realism.

From transferring what I saw onto a page, I found several pieces of information that I had originally missed. While her skin appeared to be smooth, further observation revealed that this was not the case. The skin above her sternum is not perfectly flat and her collarbones jut outwards, which upon reflection, is characteristic of an extremely young and physically fit female with hardly any



body fat. Although she is young and physically fit, she is portrayed realistically, with slightly awkward adolescent proportions and an improper stance, with her left hip jutting out. Further observation of her legs reveals that she is wearing tights. Although the material is not actually visible, the slight wrinkles and depressions that have been sculpted on her legs around her ankles and knees let the observer know that her legs are not bare. While drawing this sculpture I also noticed that in addition to the braid that is tied back with a ribbon, she has bangs and a few shorter pieces of hair that frame her face. I realized that her hair is sculpted and cast in bronze but appears to be real due to the textural lines Degas created on her head.

Both the material, texture, and color of the shoes and skin are the same, but the raised edge of the shoe creates a slight shadow which helps differentiate between the two. The satin ribbon is oversized, cream-colored, and tied in a loose bow around the base of her braid. The bodice and skirt are made of a real material, but their textures are quite different. The bodice is stiff and smooth, apart from wrinkles along her waist and by the buttons up the front, and the ruffled neckline. The tutu is full but not as stiff as the bodice and it falls down to the middle of the dancer's thigh. At first, it appeared to be very similar to a classic tutu, but in drawing it, I realized that it is made of layers of rough material that is irregular along the edges. Its dark color, rough texture, and irregular edges contrast with the cream-colored, smooth, flowing ribbon with clean edges. Drawing the different textures made me realize the importance of texture in how the statue appears to the eye because it affects the way the light hits the statue. Most importantly though, transferring everything I saw onto a page helped me to consider and appreciate every piece of the statue fully. Had I taken a photo, I would have overlooked many small details that the statue had to offer.

OBSERVATIONAL DRAWING BY PRIMARY OBSERVATION: FACES

A SHORT GUIDE

WHAT IS OBSERVATIONAL DRAWING AND WHY IS IT BENEFICIAL?

Observational drawing is the practice of drawing a subject as realistically as possible, or in other words, as you observe them in real life.

The process of observational drawing slows us down and breaks apart our conditioned way of thinking, allowing us to both see what we didn't see before (texture, small details, etc.) and fully appreciate the object.

It is best to draw from **primary observation**, which means to draw by looking at the real person rather than by looking at an image (**secondary observation**). Primary observation is better because you can better see the texture, changing light, and the object's 3D-ness. Drawing from primary observation is much more challenging because you have to push your brain to translate the 3D object you see into something 2D and because the subject may move and the light may change. Even though it has its challenges, drawings from primary observation are more genuine and often better capture objects' essence than those created from secondary observation.

MATERIALS

Paper
Pencil
Eraser
Blending stick

THIS GUIDE ASSUMES:

- You have basic knowledge of drawing facial features
- You are proficient in using the listed materials

THE STEPS

The steps below are meant to be helpful suggestions that will be elaborated on in the guide.

1. Choose an angle to draw from.
2. Roughly and lightly sketch the outline.
3. Refine the shapes and add main details.
4. Start shading.
5. Extend your shading to the whole portrait.
6. Add the darkest tones and erase if necessary to lighten some places.
7. Add texture.
8. Refine lines and add tiny details.

HELPFUL TIPS

BIGGER IS BETTER — Using a bigger paper will help make sure your movements aren't restricted.

STAY STILL — Move your head as little as possible. Any time you move, you will see your subject at a slightly different angle, so it's important to stay still in order to get things exact.

DRAW WHAT YOU SEE, NOT WHAT YOU THINK YOU SEE — Look very carefully at your subject. You should be spending more time looking at your subject than at your actual drawing.

CONSIDER LIGHTING — If possible, try to do the drawing during a period of time when the light doesn't change too drastically, as that will be a major challenge.



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THINGS TO CONSIDER:

- *Will you be comfortable?*
You'll likely want to be seated with your subject clearly in your line of sight. Craning your neck to see your subject will become uncomfortable very quickly.
- *How would you like to portray your subject?*
Would you like to portray your subject in a certain mood? If they have glasses, would like for them to wear them or take them off?
- *Will your subject be comfortable?*
Your subject may not be able to hold a smile comfortably for a very long time. It may be best for your subject to be seated comfortably and to have a soft facial expression that they will be able to hold for an extended period of time.

1. Choose an angle to draw from. Consider how long the drawing will take (you may want to get in a comfortable position) and make sure that your subject is in a comfortable position.



2. Roughly and lightly sketch the outline. It is best to start with the shape of your subject's face and then use shapes to outline their other facial features. Remember to do this lightly so that you can erase your work if necessary

OBSERVATIONAL DRAWING BY PRIMARY OBSERVATION: FACES A SHORT GUIDE

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3. Refine the shapes and add main details.

Compare your subject and drawing. Refine your original sketch making your marks slightly darker than your original sketch, by still being sure they are light enough to erase fully. Add main details like the pupils if you haven't added them yet.



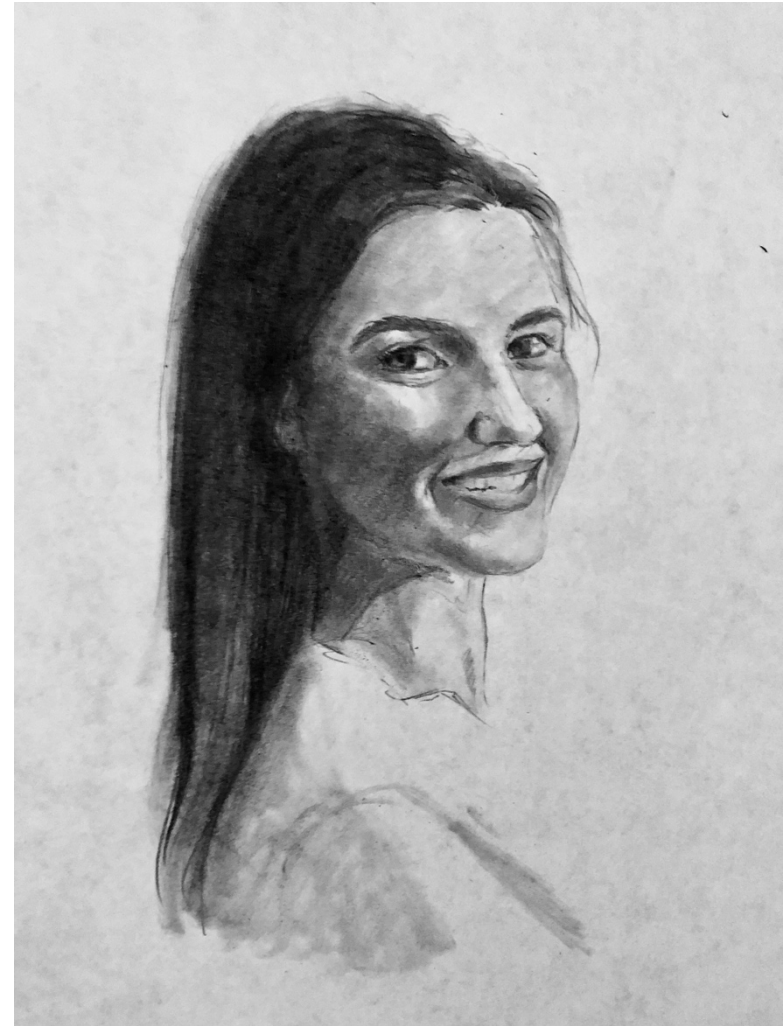
4. Start shading. It is best to start by covering the skin with a light to medium shade, depending on your subject's skin color. It is easiest to make soft marks covering the area you would like to shade and then blend the marks with a smudge stick.

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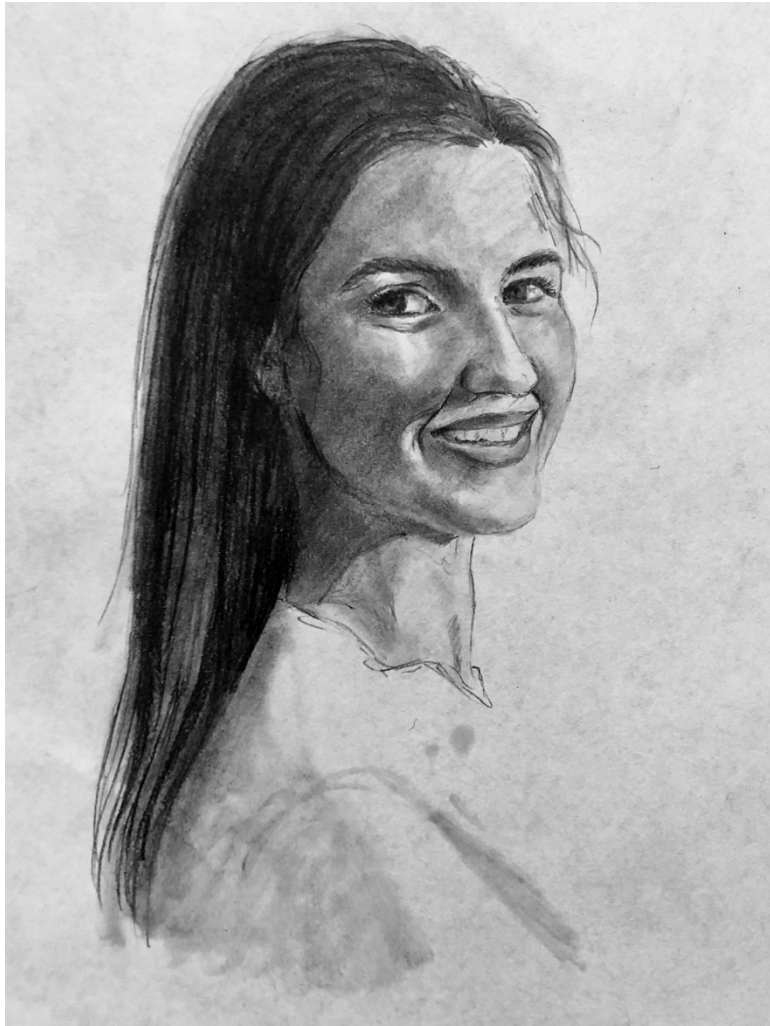
5. Extend your shading to the whole portrait. Don't leave any areas white and start to add medium-dark shades by pressing slightly harder with your pencil.



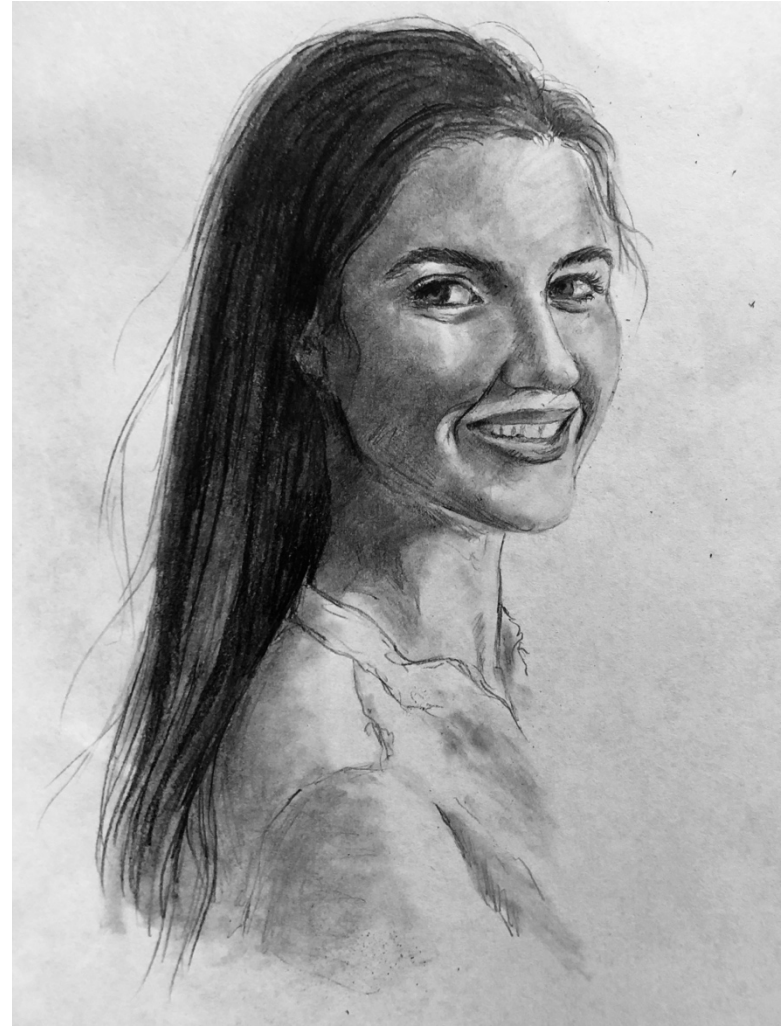
6. Add the darkest tones and erase if necessary to lighten some places. Create a dark tone by pressing harder with your pencil. Some of the darkest places may be the pupils of the eyes, the corners of the mouth, the hair, underneath the chin, and along the sides of the neck. Be sure to check your subject before adding value. You also may need to erase some value if you added too much originally.

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7. Add texture. Texture is one of the most important aspects of a drawing. After all of the shading, it is likely that most of the original lines you have drawn may have disappeared. Add lines in the hair, wrinkles on the face or clothes, etc.



8. Refine lines and add tiny details. Use your eraser and pencil to continue to refine your lines that may have been smudged out during the shading. Add the small final details, such as eyelashes, lines that separate teeth, small pieces of hair, and seams on clothing.

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Helen Bujold

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