

DRAWING FROM EXPERIENCE

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Life is given meaning as we search for meaning. As in life, just so in art. Most of my images, including these landscape drawings, are about the business of understanding who I am, and to understand my relationship to everything around me, whether large or small, animate or inanimate, spiritual or temporal. Like most people, the most direct way I learn is via experience, directly engaging life through living, directly engaging the landscape by drawing in it.

These landscape drawings were created in the circumstances that nineteenth century French painters called *plein air* painting, meaning that these images were created outside, in the “open air.” Nature is around you and the subject is before you, come rain or shine. This method of painting is relatively new to art, beginning in the nineteenth century, including artists like Corot, Constable, and Monet. *Plein air* painters attempted to match their palette, their color, to the landscape, initiating a new look to the otherwise long tradition of making landscapes. Color brightened, shadows became more prismatic (filled with color rather than neutral or brownish tones), and natural phenomena—light, shadow, clouds, atmospheric effects—were more precisely observed and rendered. Before these innovations, artists drew from the landscape, similar to what I am doing in my landscapes. My drawings, however, differ with traditional landscape drawing, making an assumption similar to *plein air* painting. Historically, landscape drawings were references or studies, *études*, for the creation of a studio landscape. This was a methodology that removed nature from nature, moving its memory into a studio, where the artist essentially invented the color of the landscape from his imagination. Importantly, my images are not studies for a painting that I will do later in a studio. I perceive my drawings as the final product, just as Corot, Constable, or Monet had assumed for their paintings.

Drawing landscapes directly from the subject produces a very immediate response to a physical experience, engaging all the senses. It is physical because the artist doesn't simply see but he feels, and quite literally so. The artist experiences the heat of summer, the chill of fall, the smell of rotting leaves about him, the sound of birds, insects, and people swarming around and apart from the artist. Drawing with Conté crayon and pastel, the media used in these drawings, requires a very physical response. Conté is an elongated, rectilinear stick of fused carbon, wax, and clay, three-sixteenths of an inch square. The draftsman feels the medium more so than he sees the medium. One feels the marks as they are made, the texture of the pigment, the “feel” of the paper beneath one's hand, the experience of

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mark-making. All these realities formulate the context of the experience that I am attempting to record. The physical process of making marks, representing trees, clouds, earth, rocks, and water, is felt, felt as a means of translating what is experienced into a drawing that expresses what has been experienced.

For me, there is an additional creative and expressive component when I draw from the landscape, transcending the merely physical circumstances of the landscape itself and the use of Conté crayon and pastel to interpret it. Art is not imitation. The artist does not simply mimic or slavishly reproduce optical phenomena. If this were so, the art would be removed from art. My very energy for making art would have been bled dry. As a former teacher of mine, Adrian Van Suchtelen, said: “Art is not the science of visual perception, it is the poetry of the human condition.” I would enlarge this definition by inserting “spiritual” between “human” and “condition.” Art is not simply a physical or optical sensation, it draws upon the entire being of an artist, drawing from his experiential, genetic, cultural, educational, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual qualities. In other words, these landscape drawings are about me. They are me. The way I make marks, the tools I use, the media I choose, the aesthetic, emotional, and spiritual content of these drawings constitute me. These components ultimately become both the means and the subject of making art. One draws upon these resources but it is these things that represent what I am trying to understand. These drawings ask the question, “Who am I?,” attempting to fathom myself. My efforts to achieve self-definition have not gone unaddressed.

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I am a native Westerner, still growing up in nearby Iona, Idaho, the home of my nineteenth century pioneer ancestors. I have always loved the spare yet beautiful landscape that defines eastern Idaho. The open spaces of our region form the geography of my physical and spiritual space. They inspire awe, whether through the pyrotechnics of radiant sunsets or the broad spread of land, dotted with gnarled trees and narrow waterways, viewed from my native foothills and the mountains that ring our desert plateau. My childhood memory is scented by the bitter-sweet smell of wet sagebrush, whose scent pervades the chroma infused evening air, following a rainstorm. To draw a field is to re-experience the heady scent of baled hay and to re-feel its coarse texture against my legs, the baling wire biting into my hands as I bucked bales onto a rickety hay wagon. In making these drawings I perspired, I sweated beneath a July sun, working in a field. These drawings are my sensations, defining not just my visual perceptions of the landscape but shaping my feelings, my experience, about this land. My landscape drawings attempt to convey not simply what is seen but what is felt. If my work in some way conveys my feelings, transmitted through my hands into my physical marks on paper, a small part of who I am is shared with those who enjoy these works. These landscapes are autobiographical. ☺



Zollinger's View

Vince Bodily
Conté crayon and pastel on paper
15x22", 1999

Near to Eden

Vince Bodily
Conté crayon and pastel on paper
15x22", 1999



Spori Shadows

Vince Bodily

Conté crayon and pastel on paper

15x22", 1999

July Orchard

Vince Bodily

Conté crayon and pastel on paper

15x22", 1999



Farrell's Place

Vince Bodily
Conté crayon and pastel on paper
15x22", 1999

Rigby Gothic

Vince Bodily
Conté crayon and pastel on paper
15x22", 1999



Along the Teton

Vince Bodily

Conté crayon and pastel on paper

15x22", 1999

Twilight

Vince Bodily

Conté crayon and pastel on paper

15x22", 1999