

Skip Lawrence's

# deSign for duMmies

the element **LINE**

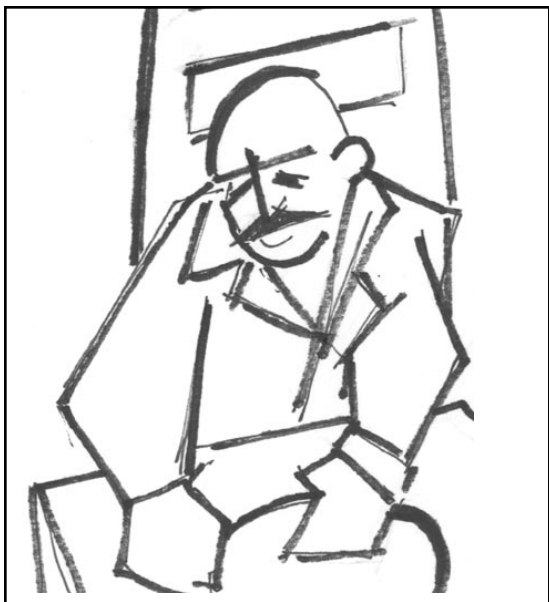
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Go to the file cabinet labeled **DESIGN**, open the drawer titled THE ELEMENTS and take out the file called **LINE**. The file is divided into two sections, **STRAIGHT LINES** and **CURVED LINES**. Don't bother to look at the log telling who has used this file; everybody from cave man to modern man has. You'll find it more helpful to study which artists used the straight lines and which used the curved.

## Straight lines

Historically, straight lines have not been as popular as curved (except with architects). The Egyptians found straight lines useful in their stylization of the human form. The use of the straight line as an expressive element is relatively modern. At the turn of the 20th century Pablo Picasso, Joseph Stella, Giorgio de Chirico, Piet Mondrian, Lyonel Feininger, John Marin, Charles Sheeler, and others used straight lines so effectively that they became an accepted and integral part of our artistic language.

## Line dominance



straight-line dominance

## Curved lines

With the exception of man-made objects just about everything on earth is made of curved lines. No wonder art is dominated by the curved line. Representational painting of figures, landscapes, and flowers will certainly require the use of the curve. Some artists have taken the use of the curved line to a higher level of importance—Toulouse Lautrec's sweeping gestural line, Thomas Hart Benton's stylized landscape, Henri Matisse's rhythmic patterns, and Winslow Homer's beautifully designed shapes (his sails swirling in the wind) are excellent examples of how curved lines can be used expressively and aesthetically.

## Accessing and using lines intelligently

Your first question should be, "Is line the appropriate technique for what I want to say?" Lines are powerful stuff. They are visually stronger than shape, color, or texture, so make certain that your use of line is not going to detract from your real intent. Once you've made your decision, you must decide what kind of line is going to dominate your painting. Not to decide is death!

Houses or barns in a landscape are popular subjects for watercolor paintings. Most architecture is made of straight lines. Generally, the landscape is dominated by curved lines. Combining the two can be dangerous. Paintings that are divided equally between straight and curved lines won't work. The effect of one type of line equaling its counterpart negates the desired effect of both.

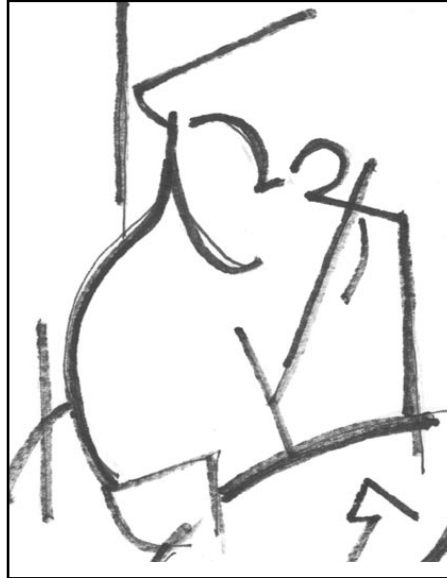
## FOR EXAMPLE

For example, your subject is a stately Southern mansion with an ancient, bending oak tree in front. The oak tree demands curved lines: the mansion straight. But only one can predominate. You must decide which and be consistent in your approach. If you do that, you will have a clear, well-designed composition.

## Line dominance



curved-line dominance



mixed dominance

### try this.....

1. Study the works of the painters mentioned and see how their use of line created unity and character.
2. Do a painting that has a straight line dominance.
3. Do a painting that has a curved line dominance. (Note - edges of shapes are considered as line) ☒

## Tips from Toph

**You goofed.** The rest of your painting looks fine, but the tree you painted behind your barn looks more like a stalk of spoiled broccoli than a live oak. What do you do: Abandon the painting? (It's common knowledge that you can't change a watercolor). Try another subject and hope you

have better luck? Or fix it?

With a little skill, patience and energy, you can successfully remove and repaint an area in a watercolor that doesn't work. The technique is simple.

### The technique

Start by laying your paper flat and wetting the offending area with a slightly stiff brush. Flat, plastic brushes, such as the "white-sable" variety, work well for this (and, as far as I'm concerned, for little else). Gently wet the whole area to be removed and let it soak for a minute. Then, start at the edge of the shape and push the loose paint toward the middle with your plastic brush. If you start in the middle and push the paint outward, you can end up with a dark line of collected paint surrounding (and drawing attention to) your stupid-looking tree. Next,

blot up the loosened paint with a soft tissue—paper towels, sponges and rags don't work—and, if necessary, repeat the process. With a little work, you can return the area to an off-white, even if it was painted with stains.

Unless you're removing and then repainting a very dark area, it's a good idea not to scrub. If you rub too vigorously with a rough sponge or rag, you'll chew up and scar the paper's soft surface.

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## Don't give up; you can "save" that painting

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You'll find it easier to remove paint from softer, heavily-sized papers such as Lana, Whatman or Winsor and Newton. Arches holds the paint more firmly, but can take a greater beating. Also, you'll have less difficulty lifting paint from a smooth surface than from a rough one.

Some areas can not be restored by simply lifting, but don't give up. In the next issue we'll describe some truly drastic measures you can take to save your painting.

You'll find some techniques for repairing a painting with opaque media on page 83.