

LEGENDS & LEGACIES

FROM THE PERMANENT COLLECTION
connections

Mildred Nungaster Wolf



Contour Lines

THE KELLY

Kelly Fitzpatrick Memorial Gallery



Mildred Nungaster Wolf

Kelly Resting at The Dixie Art Colony, Watercolor

Kelly Resting at the Dixie Art Colony, 1941, Watercolor, 13" x 11"

Gift of Elizabeth "Bebe" Wolfe

Mildred Nungester Wolfe (August 23, 1912 – February 11, 2009) was a United States artist based out of Jackson, Mississippi. She was born in Celina, Ohio, but grew up in Decatur, Alabama, the daughter of a pharmacist. In 1932, she graduated from Alabama College in Montevallo. During the Great Depression, her art career was temporarily placed on hold, as she taught Latin and English in Alabama for a decade. She did make trips to study at the Chicago Art Institute and the Art Students League of New York. During a summer trip to the Kelly Fitzpatrick's Dixie Art Colony in 1937, she met her future husband, Karl Wolfe. They married in Colorado in 1944, where she was studying for a master of fine arts at Colorado College and he was working for the Air Force as a graphic artist at Lowry Field. After World War II, the Wolfes settled in Jackson, constructing Wolfe Studio^[1] and becoming regionalist artists interested in depicting Mississippi. Inspired by European Masters, Impressionists, and Post-Impressionists, she mostly painted landscapes in oil or watercolor. While Karl Wolfe was most known for his portraits, Mildred also painted several well known portraits, including one of close friend Eudora Welty that is in the National Portrait Gallery. In addition to painting, both Wolfes worked with ceramics, sculpture, and stained glass. Mildred worked in her husband's shadow for many years, first at Wolfe Studios, then at Millsaps College, where both were members of the art department. When her husband retired in 1968, she lost from her teaching position. In 1978, while Karl was included in an exhibition of Mississippi art, she was not. After Karl's death in 1984, the art community of Mississippi began appreciating Mildred for her own art, not for being Karl's wife. The Mississippi Museum of Art mounted exhibitions of her work in 1994 and 2006. In addition, the University Press of Mississippi published a monograph of Mildred's work, showing examples of her paintings and public works. Mildred Wolfe died of congestive heart failure at her Jackson home on February 11, 2009, aged 96.

Mildred Nungestger Wolfe went to Alabama College (now the University of Montevallo), graduating in 1932. After pursuing summer art studies in New York and Chicago (she learned printmaking with Will Barnet at the Art Students League), she returned to Alabama and was an associate of J. Kelly Fitzpatrick as an instructor at the Dixie Art Colony on Lake Jordan. As a result, in 1944 she married a fellow artist she had met there, Karl Wolfe, and they moved to Jackson, Mississippi.

One of Wolfe's best known paintings was her portrait of Eudora Welty, the Jackson writer who was a close friend, which she painted for the National Portrait Gallery in Washington, D.C. It was one of three portraits she painted of Welty; the others were displayed at the University of Mississippi in Oxford and at the state Department of Archives and History in Jackson.

Her other works have been displayed throughout the South, notably in the Municipal Art Gallery in Jackson and the Mississippi Museum of Art, but also in banks, public buildings and doctors' offices, as well as tucked away in private homes.

"I care about the beauty," she said in an earlier interview. "I just look for the beautiful."

What interested her were flowering shrubs, towering pines, riverbanks, and rolling farmland, as well as children, back yards, and blossoming trees. She said she was influenced by the European masters, the Impressionists and the Post-Impressionists, but she would have nothing to do with the abstract distortions of modern art.

Although primarily an oil and watercolor artist, she worked in a wide range of media, including ceramics and glass. Among her monumental pieces were stained glass windows in the Baptist Church in Hazlehurst and the Belhaven College art center in Jackson. Mosaics depicting the Stations of the Cross, created in 1958-9 for St. Richard's Catholic Church in Jackson, were featured in a special exhibition in 2004 at the Mississippi Museum of Art.

She was the widow of Karl Wolfe, prominent portrait painter of governors and other distinguished Mississippians. He died in 1984. Their studio, surrounded by woods off Interstate 55 in north Jackson, continues to be operated by their daughter Bebe, also an artist. The studio recently received the Mississippi's 2009 Governor's Awards for Excellence in the Arts and the presentation ceremony is planned later this month.

When the Wolfes moved there in 1946, it was two miles past the last transit stop outside town. Now it is a single acre of woods surrounded by paved urban developments and highway interchanges.

Mildred Wolfe was born Aug. 23, 1912, in Celina, Ohio, but grew up in Decatur, Ala., where her father was a pharmacist. In the depths of the Depression, at the age of 19, she graduated from Alabama College in Montevallo and, finding no way to support herself as a female artist, taught Latin and English in Alabama schools for 10 years. During summers, she continued to paint and studied at places like the Chicago Art Institute and the Art Students League in New York.

She and Karl, a native Mississippian, met in 1937 during one of the summer sessions at the Dixie Art Colony outside Montgomery, Ala. They married in 1944 after meeting again in Colorado where she was studying for a master of fine arts at Colorado College and he was posted by the Air Force as a graphic artist at Lowery Field.

Although both had successfully shown their works in prestigious galleries in the East, they settled down at their Jackson studio and became mainstays in the Mississippi art world, establishing themselves as regional artists focusing on the world around them.

While Karl Wolfe's forte was portraits, Mildred Wolfe concentrated on flowering landscapes and neighborhood scenes, although she too accepted commissions for portraits, especially children. She was always interested in nature, and in Alabama had painted so many mules she picked up the nickname "Muledrid."

As styles turned toward abstract expressionism, both Wolfes stopped competing in juried exhibitions and concentrated on Mississippi subjects.

"I've always told everybody, more or less, to thine own self be true," she said. "That's what I've tried to do. That's why I didn't go into abstraction or anything else that I was not really interested in, just to get in shows."

She and her husband both taught at Millsaps College, Karl in the studio and Mildred as an instructor of art history, until he reached retirement age in 1968 and she lost her job too.

At their studio, they worked in a variety of mediums, including water color, oils, ceramics and sculpture. In the 1950s, using a cast-off kiln, they started firing brightly glazed birds which still attract people from across the country every year for the annual Christmas sale at the studio.

That little kiln caught fire in 1963 and in a catastrophic blaze burned down the whole studio and destroyed a trove of paintings and artworks. Her space in the old studio never did have adequate light, and the replacement that they built gave her more room with wall-to-wall northern windows.

Drawings and Graphic Works

"I have always considered drawing not as an exercise of particular dexterity... but as a means deliberately simplified so as to give simplicity and spontaneity to the expression, which should speak without clumsiness, directly to the mind of the spectator."

"Drawing is like making an expressive gesture with the advantage of permanence."

"If I trust my drawing hand it is because in training it to serve me, I forced myself never to let it take precedence over my feelings."

Henri Matisse

Matisse considered his drawing to be a very intimate means of expression. The method of artistic execution — whether it was charcoal, pencil, crayon, etcher's burin, lithographic tusche or paper cut — varied according to the subject and personal circumstance. His favorite subjects were evocative or erotic — the female form, the nude figure or a beautiful head of a favorite model. Other themes relate to the real or imagined world of both Oceania and the Caribbean -- the lagoons, the coral and the faces of beautiful women from these far off lands. Still other subjects were inspired by classical mythology.

Matisse often made drawings to inform his paintings and sculptures, feeling that these drawings should be quick, gestural exercises that captured the form and emotion evoked in him by the subject. As the most direct expression of the artist's thoughts, drawing often helped Matisse to work out compositional and stylistic problems or new ideas. During the mid-1930s, he created distinctive series of pen-and-ink drawings on the subject of the artist and his model, while in the early 1940s he conceived his famous sequences of *Thèmes et Variations*, sensitively drawn spare works in elegant, unshaded line, describing simplified forms of female figures or still lifes. In the late 1940s and early '50s, his drawings become bolder, the contour line thicker, the forms even more simplified and devoid of detail. The latest large drawings of acrobats (1951–52), executed with a thick brush placed at the end of a long stick, are made up of contour only. They are contemporaneous with a cutout series of *Blue Nudes*, and the two mediums seem to represent two different approaches to form and space. The relationship between figure-ground becomes ambiguous and space complements the intended form. The form appears almost sculptural.

Matisse was also involved with printmaking for more than fifty years. From 1900 until his death in 1954 he completed more than eight hundred intaglios, lithographs, woodcuts, linoleum cuts, and monotypes. His attitude toward printmaking was a somewhat unconventional one in that for him it was a personal process, an extension of drawing, and a means of unwinding after long and intense periods of painting. As such, there were several distinct times during which Matisse was particularly active in the medium: 1906, 1914, and during the 1920s. In 1929 alone he made more than one hundred etchings and drypoints.

The intimate nature of Matisse's printmaking is visible in his working process. Unlike many artists who depended on close relationships with master printers in their workshops, Matisse spent more time on an etching press installed in his studio that allowed him to print when and as he liked. This intimacy is also evident in his choice of subjects, which were mostly portraits of friends, family, and fellow artists, as well as images of female figures and nudes, including a great number of odalisques made after a trip to North Africa.

Matisse's etchings and drypoints were executed on a small scale with linear fluidity, giving them a sense of immediacy and spontaneity, like pages in a sketchbook. Alternately, his lithographs were on a larger scale and made grander statements. These lithographs exploited the tonal possibilities of the medium that allowed Matisse to achieve effects of volume and depth.



Matisse: Woman Resting

Blind Contour Drawing

The purpose of this assignment will be to familiarize students with a exercise in drawing that has been used by artists throughout history. Students will learn the significance of line in drawing as well as train their hands to truly draw what the eye is seeing. They will complete multiple quick blind contour drawings and then finalize with a image where they are allowed to focus on the object. Emphasis is placed on the development of the hand to accurately execute what the eye is seeing after the exercise not, on the quality of the blind line drawings.

Time:

three to four class periods (broken up among other lessons)

Class:

All levels

Materials:

18"X24" drawing paper (white & black), pencils, chalk & oil pastels. Several objects for still life.

Objectives:

1. become familiar with line as contour.
2. Be able to develop their hand - "minds eye" coordination.
3. Deconstruct drawing from a serious painstaking work to one that is quick and intuitive.
4. Express the emotion in the line.
5. Explore the variation of materials used to make the lines.
6. Blind drawings and finished drawings must be completed on the same piece of paper. (front &back if necessary) but, students need to # drawings to allow them to reflect on the process.

Procedure:

1. Set up still life in corner of room and have students arrange their chairs so that they must have their heads turned away from their paper to view objects.
2. Pass out paper and pencils to students.
3. Demonstrate to students how to do a quick 1 minute line drawing. Emphasizing that the drawing will not be high-quality and thats "ok".
4. Explain that students are to draw the same perspective every time no moving or selecting a different area of interest.
5. Time several quick drawings varying times from 1 to 3 minutes.
6. Pause for reflection after the first 3 drawings. Ask students to reflect on what they see vs. what is being produced on the page. Do they see emotion in the drawing? Can they see some formation of the objects they are attempting to draw?
7. Allow students 15 minutes to execute a drawing of the still life after completing 5 blind contour "takes" of the objects.
8. Display quick drawings so that students may see that all struggle with this exercise and see how each develops from separating the eye from the hand.
9. Discuss with students the exercise. Did they find it useful? Freeing? Was it easier to execute their drawing after the blind drawings? Would they do it again?

Evaluation:

1. Referring to the position of the hand on the paper is minimal.
2. Demonstration of an attempt to accurately render the objects is perceptible.
3. Progression from the first drawing to final finished piece shows and increasing mastery of contour.
4. Constructive participation in classroom discussion on of the method.

Sketchbook/Homework:

1. Execute 10 quick blind line drawings of 2 objects over 3' tall or 3' wide.

What is contour drawing? To put it most simply, outline drawing. You probably already draw this way; it is the obvious way to draw with a pen or pencil and is familiar from line illustrations that we see everywhere.

What Contour Lines Represent

When contour drawing, we are focusing on the edges - the outside of an object or the line made by a fold or pattern. *Don't get fooled into using the line to draw light and dark.* The **WEIGHT** of a line, that is, how dark and thick it is, will make it jump out from the paper (if it is a strong, dark line) or sink into the paper (if it is light or thin). This is useful when you are trying to give the impression of something being closer or further away. For an illustrated guide to using contour lines, read this illustrated article on Pure Contour Drawing

Describing Form

The line that goes across an object, hinting at the form, is called a cross-contour. These lines don't usually describe an actual edge, and are often broken or 'implied', with a definite line at the start and end but with the pen lifted and re-applied to create a gradual gap in the middle. This suggests the more subtle changes in the surface of the object. To learn more about using cross-contours, read this article on Cross Contour Drawing.

Contour is commonly defined as the "outline of a figure or object." There is a definite distinction between "contour and outline." We think of an outline as a diagram or silhouette, flat and two dimensional. It is the sort of drawing you make when you place your hand flat on a piece of paper and trace around the fingers with a pencil...

Contour Drawing...

-- you cannot tell from the drawing whether the palm or the back of the hand is facing downward. Contour has a three-dimensional quality; that is, it indicates the thickness, as well as, the length and width of the form it surrounds.

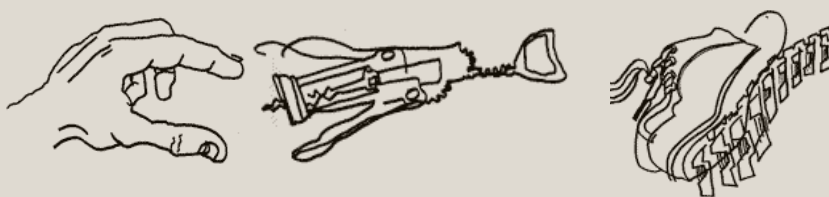
Sit close to the object or model which you intend to draw. Focus your eyes on some point-- any point will do-- along the contour of the model. Place the point of your pen on the paper. Imagine that your pen point is touching the model instead of the paper. Without taking your eyes off the model, wait until you are convinced that the pencil is touching that point on the model upon which your eyes are focused.

Then move your eyes slowly along the contour of the model and move the pen slowly along the paper. As you do this, maintain the conviction that the pen point is actually touching the contour. Be guided more by the sense of touch than by sight. This means you must draw without looking at the paper, continuously looking at the model.

Exactly coordinate the pencil with the eye. Your eye may be tempted at first to move faster than your pencil, but do not let it get ahead. Consider only the point that you are working on at the moment with no regard for any other part of the figure.

Title: Contour Drawings of:

1. artist's own hand
2. object from home
3. artist's own shoe or foot
4. portrait of friend
5. self portrait



Age Group: 4th - 6th grade

(younger grades may not be as adept with hand control)

Objectives:

1. Practice recall of observations.
2. Understand that seeing involves perception of light, color, position and texture under varying conditions.
4. Identify qualities in visual work, including line, color, shape, intensity, value, texture, composition and contrast.
5. Accept the range of special interest and abilities of their peers.

Motivation: show slides of Picasso, Matisse, and other artists who drew contour drawings.

Materials:

1. Drawing paper. 11 x 14 or larger is best.
2. Pens or pencils. No erasers for this.
3. Ask students to each bring an object from home with interesting shapes
4. Small standing mirrors for students



CONTOUR DRAWING

Sketch pad - You can start small, if you wish, at around 5 or 6 inches by 8 or 9 inches. These are good for carrying around with you, in case of a drawing emergency. If you feel comfortable with a larger size, go for it. At this point, you don't need a high grade of paper. The idea is to do lots and lots of sketches, and for this newsprint pads or a sketch pad are cheap and work fine. If money is not an issue, a heavier weight drawing paper, like Strathmore, or even a hardbound drawing book is great. An art supply or office supply store will have these materials.

Drawing tool - A soft pencil is good, preferably a 2B or 3B drawing pencil. You can also try a felt tip pen or even a ballpoint pen, just to get a different feel. These can all be found at an art supply store, some office supply stores.

Kneaded eraser - These are sold in art supply stores, or some office supply stores. A small to medium size is good, unless you are working on large paper. These can be kneaded after use, to get a cleaner surface to erase with. These only erase pencil marks, not felt tip or ballpoint. There are erasers made for these pens - look in an art or office supply store.

Exercise:

Contour drawing is a good beginning exercise, in the way that practicing scales is good for learning the piano. It uses the element of line to create a three-dimensional outline of objects. Natural objects are especially suitable, like plants, flowers, hands, and the human figure, but it is also good to try drawing non-natural objects, like containers with interesting shapes, or old shoes, which can have a lot of character. Contour drawing should be done very, very slowly. Place your chosen object in front of you, where you get a good view of it. You will be starting to draw anywhere on the object's edge - but you will be aware of how the object doesn't end at that edge, but continues behind it, usually as a rounded contour, unless the object is geometric, for instance, a cube. (An outline of the object would be two-dimensional, or flat; a contour is three-dimensional.) Keep your eyes on the object as much as possible (try not to look at your paper), and concentrate on what the contour does, every single little curve or meander. Don't worry at this time about getting an exact likeness or correct proportions. If your edge goes into the form, follow it until it ends, and then pick up the contour where you left off.

Try to feel the line, its jaggedness or smoothness, its curve, its delicacy, or sharpness. If you feel the form going away from you, press down on your pencil. Your progress should be so slow as to be painstaking - don't draw the line until you feel sure of what it does next. It is like climbing the mountain, as opposed to flying over it. And don't think about what the form is, like elbow or leaf - just draw the line/contour and what it does. When you finish the outer contours, you can draw the inside contours, for example, the features on the face, or lines on a leaf. Don't erase for this exercise! You are not making a drawing - you are involved in a process of learning.

When you are finished, don't be dismayed if it doesn't look like a "real" drawing. If you do the exercise correctly, and many, many times, you'll see progress as you look back on last month's drawings. Carry your sketchbook with you as much as possible, for when you are in life's waiting rooms. The best time to draw, when you feel confident enough to tackle a figure, is with your family or friends. People are relaxed, in comfortable positions, and unself-conscious - and they make great models. Drawing yourself is good, too - your hands and feet in different positions.

Making it fun for yourself is good, too. Draw things that really interest you, and that you love. Play your favorite music, and wear your most comfortable clothes. Save your drawings - you will see progress, I promise! You are learning to SEE. And the more you learn to see, the more you will see, and that knowledge will in turn improve your drawing.

Recommended Drawing Books:

The Natural Way to Draw, by Kimon Nicolaides, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1941.

Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain, by Betty Edwards, J.P. Tarcher, Inc., Los Angeles, Distributed by Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1979.

Once you have done many contour drawings, and are feeling adventurous, try:

Blind contour: Try doing the entire drawing without looking at your paper.

Other hand contour: Try drawing with your non-drawing hand. This will really get you to slow down!

Suggested Art/Artists for Examples of Line Drawings/Etchings:

Line has been used in many ways throughout art history; not only with contour drawing, but with variations of the contour. The following are just some examples of the use of line in art: Picasso line drawings (especially portraits) - I was unsuccessful in locating examples of these on the Web; **Holbein the Younger** (click on the *Scholar* portrait thumbnail); **Leonardo da Vinci**; **Ingres**; **Durer** (scroll down to see the engravings); **Chinese ink drawings** (click on the images to enlarge); the sculptor **Rodin's** drawings; **Mary Cassatt etchings** (influenced by Japanese prints coming into Europe in the mid-19th century).

Van Gogh also did many **ink drawings** using line; rather than limiting his use of line to contours, he used it in the form of variously shaped marks, which serve to create a textural effect, as well as to help delineate spatial depth. A **good example of the latter** shows how "empty" space (the white of the paper) can indicate a sense of spatial depth as much as the actual lines and marks do so.

