Pearl Fincher | Museum of Fine Arts

Pearl at Home

Art projects designed for suggested ages of 5 and up, designed to be completed at home with easily-accessible art materials.

DRAWING WITH BASIC SHAPES: BLOOMING CACTUS

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About the project

Budding artists often ask, “How do I learn to draw? How do I learn to draw better?”

The first part of the answer to both questions is: **by finding or breaking down complex subjects into the basic shapes that make up the whole image.** An egg on a plate is a simple subject. It can be adequately drawn by using ovals. It becomes complex when the artist adds in the shapes of the shadows, then adds in color and tries to blend in the values.

The second part of the answer is: **practice!** Most of us need to practice any activity in which we want to participate. From bowling to cooking, to basketball and drawing, there is no substitute for practice – even for people with natural ability.

Going back to the egg example:
Your eyes need practice to see a wider array of colors and values than you are normally used to identifying. With practice at observation, you will be amazed at what you haven’t noticed before in familiar things, like an egg on a plate!

**For this project,** we’ll break down the cactus and flowers into steps to reinforce the concept of basic shapes. You can make it your own by adding color with crayons or oil pastels. Using both mediums is preferred, but this project also works with only crayons!

The crayons will help blend the oil pastels because the wax and oil are compatible vehicles for the pigments. The consistency of the media is satisfying and fun to move around on paper. Try combinations for blending on a scrap piece of paper.

Illustration from:
TIPS:
• Draw LIGHT lines with the pencil. You’ll be erasing parts of what you draw later, and it will be easier to erase light lines.
• Do NOT draw details with the pencil, only the basic shapes.

1  Begin by LIGHTLY drawing part of a large “rough” oval just off center at the bottom of your paper, similar to our example.
A slightly wiggly or imperfect line is great. This will be the barrel of the cactus, and nature is often not perfect! Do NOT draw other lines or needles; you will do that later.

2  LIGHTLY draw a collection of various-sized ovals around the top of the big oval. Overlapping is okay, as seen in our example. These ovals will become the flowers.

3  Decide which parts of your lightly-drawn lines you need to erase so the flower ovals look like they overlap at the top of the barrel oval. Once you are happy with the bunch of flowers, you can LIGHTLY add tiny ovals to represent the centers of any flowers that might be seen. Do NOT draw individual petals.
4 Add color and details using crayons or oil pastels:
Create the petals of the flowers, the striations on the cactus barrel, and the sky behind the cactus. Add depth by using darker colors in areas that will have cast shadows or where one item in your picture overlaps another. If using oil pastels, read our tips below!

OIL PASTEL TIPS:

• Apply the brighter colors and the background colors first. Add the flower centers and needles last, and make them different sizes.

• Experiment with different strokes and pressure on a scrap sheet. You can use a paper towel to blend the pastel on paper.

• Layer your drawing. Put down some color, then slowly build up layers and colors to create depth and intensity.

• Make your object really stick out with defined edges against the background.

TECHNIQUES:

Heavy pressure blending is a great way to delve right in with lots of medium and see where it takes you. Add a plentiful amount of oil pastel onto your surface followed by layers of more colors, which will leave you with a stunning bold, intermixed effect.

Stippling is a blending practice carried out by applying small, uneven strokes onto your surface. Give your piece incredible depth through impressive layering with this simple-to-master method.

Scumbling is a fun technique where you don’t have to stick to the rules and can break outside the lines – quite literally. Apply scribbles of oil pastels and continue to build them up through layering, using multiple colors until you reach your desired look and consistency.

Create blanket strokes by making thick, fast squiggles. Use thick, vertical strokes to create hatching. Blanket strokes and hatching work well for backgrounds.

Change the temperature!
Put your artwork in the refrigerator for twenty minutes. Roll the pastels between your hands to warm them up; warm pastels will help you achieve better coverage. Use this technique if your paper isn’t allowing you to add more layers.