Drawing a Lantern

with Charcoal and Graphite

Yong Chen

An EnjoyingArt Publication

The instructional video "Drawing a Lantern"

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Charcoal and Graphite Drawing Basics

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Thank you to Lauri Shaw for taking notes during the demonstration and assisting with the text for this publication.

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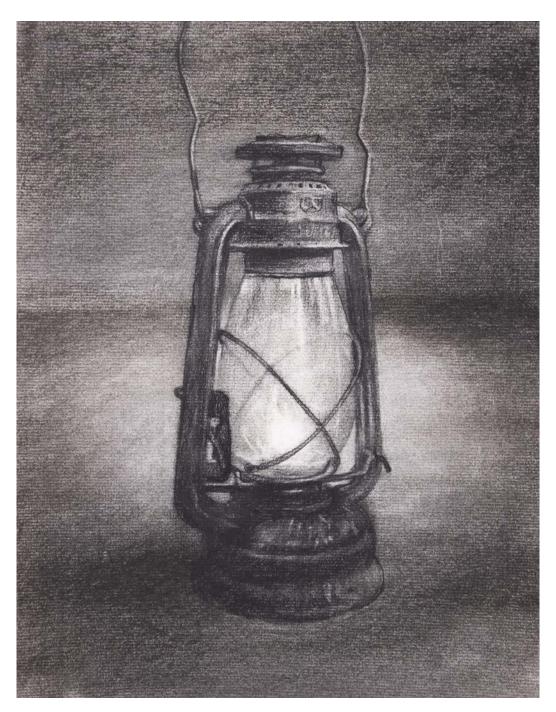
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Text set in EB Garamond 12pts.

Drawing a Lantern

This lesson is part of the EnjoyingArt Learning Challenge for December 2022.

Contents

Drawing Materials Used in this Demonstration

In this drawing lesson, I used the following materials:

Paper:

       Strathmore Charcoal Paper, 12 in. x 18 in. 64 lb.

       500 Series, archival quality, 100% cotton, laid finish, natural white.

Drawing Tools:

- Vine charcoal, medium or soft
- Compressed charcoal stick, medium
- General brand charcoal pencils, hard, medium, soft, and extra soft
- Paper blending stumps
- Kneaded eraser

paper blending stumps

GENERAL CHARCOAL ⊙ 557-6B ex. soft — extra soft
GENERAL'S. CHARCOAL ⊙ 557-4B soft — soft
CHARCOAL ⊙ 557-2B med — medium
CHARCOAL ⊙ 557-HB hard — hard

charcoal pencils

Kneaded eraser
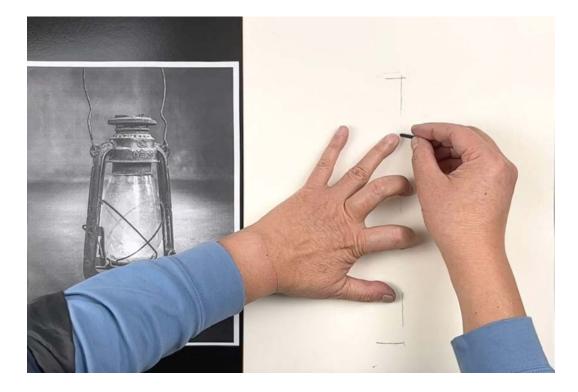
compressed charcoal

vine charcoal

Conversation

This reference is a particularly interesting subject because of the unique challenge it represents. The key to the success of the drawing will be getting the background right. The main object is much easier. But it is critical that the overall softness of the background remains consistent. Your attention needs to focus here because the background is what sets the tone for the whole composition.

A second concern is how to produce the illusion of the glow created by the flame inside the lantern. It all has to do with value contrast. It is a matter of recalibrating the values distribution throughout the drawing process.

Because the actual flame is brighter than paper white, you are going to have to shorten the values between different parts of the drawing. The flame should have no charcoal used in that area at all, and you will need to determine darker values so they balance out against those important lighter values.
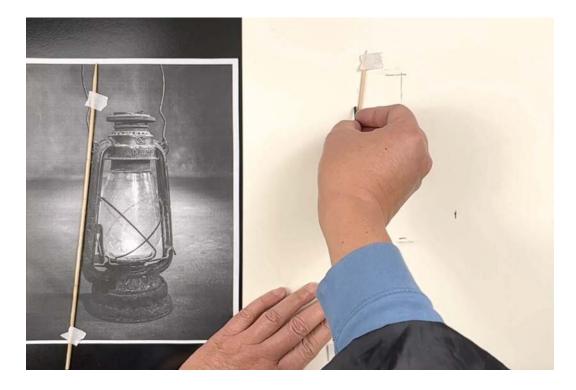
Step One - Basic Composition

The drawing process always begins by deciding where the main object will sit on the paper. Looking at the lantern, I could intentionally make it wider, for example, but I have decided I will work off this lantern and its proportions. I will begin by using a medium vine charcoal to draw.

After deciding where I want the top and bottom of the main object to be on my paper, I determine the width of the object at the middle point between them by comparing the proportions of my reference object to the proportions for my drawing. Eyeballing the width on the reference photo, I think it looks to be about one-third of the height. But by using my fingers and a stick to confirm the measurements of width to height, I see the width is actually equal to two-fifths of the height.

 I lightly draw the centerline in order to divide the width properly with half on one side and half on the other. This object is turned slightly toward the right, so I draw the centerline a little right of center. I draw softly, remembering that if I decided to change the height, I would have to redo the measurement of the width.
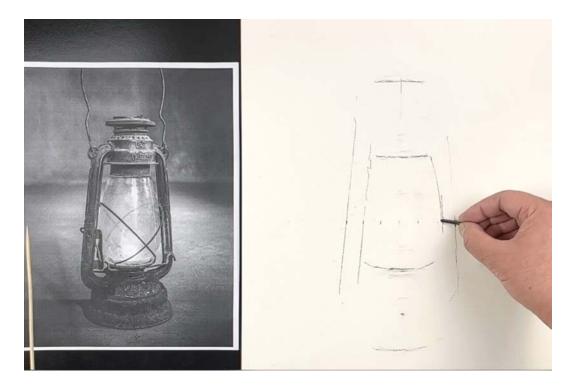
Step Two - Angular Measurement

To find the sides of the object, I use angular measurements. Patience is very important in this step. I give myself plenty of time to get this right. I tape a stick to the outside angle of the handle on the reference. Then, I tape a second stick onto the drawing using the same angle. I stick the tape on very lightly so I don't transfer any glue from the tape to my drawing.

It is easier to match these angles if the reference and my drawing are side by side. In order to compare the angles aligned by my sticks clearly, I stand two arms' lengths away from them. I need to be that far from my easel to be able to make needed adjustments to the stick taped to the drawing for it to match the angle on the reference perfectly. It is important to slow down and take the time to be certain of the match. Only then do I draw the angle on my paper. I repeat the process for the other handle.

Next, I want to determine the relative size of the three parts of the lantern. I think that the base portion of the lantern is about 1/3 of the height of the lantern. But, using my sticks, I find the size of the base is a little bit less than the middle and the top is a little bit less than the base.

The best way to check my latest measurements is to verify them using an already known measurement. I compare the height of the base to the width of the lantern which I found earlier. When I compare them using my stick, I find the height of the base is a little greater than the width of the lantern. I double-check using my stick, as the measurements here are very important. If you go by perception alone, anything that is lighter in value is perceived as larger than it really is.

Step Three - The Center Section

I begin working on the glass section of the object. Note that the handle on the left is larger than the right and the inside lines of the handles are parallel to the outside. This helps with drawing accuracy. Notice the curved line of the outside of the glass. If I compare and measure the negative spaces between the metal handles and the glass, I can recreate the curve. Slow down and give enough time to this step. You will feel much more confident about your results.

Step Four - Determining the Proportions of the Top

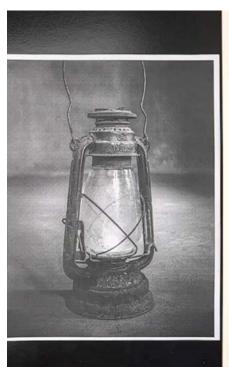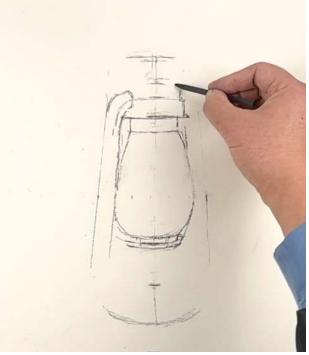Now, I move to measuring the top section of the lantern. The top is made up of four segments with the top quarter larger than the other three. The two middle segments appear a little smaller than the top and the bottom segment a little bit smaller still. I am going to double-check the width and height of each one.

I begin by checking the width of the top of the glass where my lowest segment begins. I want to compare it to a measurement I already know. If I use the stick to measure from the edge of the left side of the handle to the right side of the glass at the middle point, the width of the glass at the top is equal to half of the known measurement. Now that I have the width, I draw the line from the left side to the right and then the sides. The second part of the top section is wider than the bottom, while the third part continues at the same width as the first one I measured. I draw the lines, comparing the width to the top of the glass. The second part is also a little taller than the first, and the third part is about 2/3rds of the height of the second. At this point, I can define the curve for each of the handles. I have lots of reference points to help me finish off the top with no problem. I check with the centerline to be sure of the placement of my lines. I compare the width of the upper part with the bottom, noting the top section is a little bit

smaller than the bottom part.. I notice the horizontal lines are getting more and more curved as I am getting away from the middle of the object.

Step Five - Analyzing the Curves

Analyzing these curves, I determine the location of the eyeline. It is up slightly from the middle of the glass section. The further from the eyeline, the steeper the curve. So, I know there will be more curvature to the lines on the bottom than those on the top.

Step Six - Determining the Proportions of the Base

Next, I need to find the width of the base, remembering that if anything is darker, using our eyes alone, we think it takes up less space than it actually does. In order to find out the true width, I look for a known measurement to compare.

Halfway up the glass, from the outside of the handle on the left to the outside of the glass on the right is the same width as where the handles touch the base section. I make sure the centerline is in the middle in drawing the line from side to side.

In order to draw the top curved line, I need a way to measure it accurately. The easy way to find the curve is to draw a straight line from left to right on the reference and then compare the photo's curvature to what you create on the drawing. The centerline is the point where the curve is most pronounced.

There will be a second curved line that touches the halfway point between the top curve and the curve at the foot of the lantern. Note that the sides of each part have a little curve. Doing all of this measuring helps my mind to synchronize what I draw with my idea of what the object will finally look like.

_____~_____

I make sure the corners are in the right places. Now I can see where the handles meet the base. I draw the curves of the handles where they meet the base and then draw the little metal piece on the left side of the glass. Its height is ⅓ of the total height of the handle on the left. Then I compare the angular measurement from the bottom of the glass to the bottom of the base on the left and on the right.

Step Seven - The Glass Section

Now, I draw the wires crossing the outside of the glass. On the left, I start drawing the wire 1/3 down from the top of the glass section and then coming across the glass to the opposite bottom corner. After I draw the wires in the front, I see that the continuation of the wire visible on the back of the lantern makes a complete oval shape.

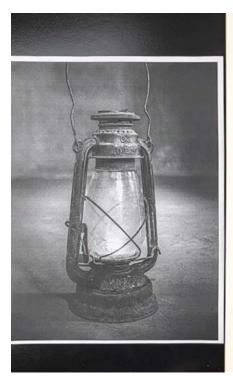People can be afraid of drawing something like this because it seems very complicated. But it becomes manageable if you work slowly and divide the process into small steps.

I then draw the two wires up from the top of the lantern. I want to observe the negative space between each of the wires and the lantern and adjust their form as needed. I do the one on the right and then start the wire on the left by first drawing the

connector. It looks like a metal ring attaching it to the handle. Then, I complete the wire's shape, comparing it closely to the reference.

Then, I decide to make an adjustment to the line representing the change in the planes behind the lantern. I move it slightly lower to create a more relaxed feeling overall.

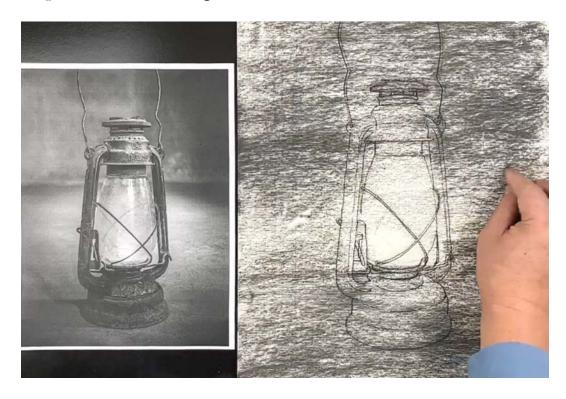## Step Eight - Confirming Lines

I am going to soften the drawing by filling in the background, but before I do, I will use a medium or hard charcoal pencil to confirm all the lines I drew with my vine charcoal. I draw over it a small line at a time, moving around the object.

I rotate the pencil from time to time to keep the point sharp. I spend my time observing carefully. I look, then draw. Look, then draw. I compare each curve to my reference until I am convinced I have drawn it properly. I look at each angle and check how much it curves. I notice the highlights. I draw the outside lines and the inside lines without using a ruler. Drawing freehand keeps the drawing more organic. I continue to measure and correct any little details that I didn't catch the first time drawing. I compare the negative and the positive spaces at the same time. If a line is not right, I need to make the correction now.

Step Nine - The Background

After completing the line confirmation, I will start working on the background. In a drawing, the background is not usually considered a most essential element. But, for the lantern to stand out the way we wish, there must be a cohesive connection between every aspect of the drawing, particularly the background.

How do I treat the background to support the main object? I create a soft background by "washing" the whole paper from left to right using vine charcoal. I completely cover the drawing except where the lantern flame will be. This is why it is so important to define everything I have drawn using the charcoal pencil before this step. Otherwise, the lines I have spent so much time drawing will just disappear.

 Now, my attention focuses on the reference's background and what I need to do on my drawing. I see how different areas need to be lighter or darker and certain areas need to be even darker still. I can already picture the flame glowing because of the value contrast between that light area and everything else.

Step Ten - Blending

But I don't want the background to have so much texture that it draws the eye away from the lantern. Right now it's too active. I use a paper towel or tissue to begin blending. It is important to control this process. I don't just blend everywhere. Sometimes I want texture to remain.

With blending, the darker areas will not be as dark and they will be more connected. I soften transitions so everything appears as part of the same family. I make the background a little bit lighter and using a clean paper towel, I remove a little bit more texture. I let it go. Working on the background from the left to the right makes everything consistent.

I add more variety to parts of the background by using a compressed charcoal stick to darken different areas. I make the bottom of the drawing even a little darker to strengthen the contrast with the top area on the right. Squinting lets me see the larger connections in the drawing rather than being caught in the details.

Compressed charcoal is a gum or glue combined with charcoal dust and this permits the charcoal to attach more strongly to the paper. I make the planes in the background

more visible. Then I compare the background to the main object. I am going to make the area outside the lantern even darker by adding more compressed charcoal. Compressed charcoal comes in hard, medium, soft and extra-soft. If you want the background to be darker, you can use a softer charcoal which will put down more charcoal onto the paper. Then I can use my hand to press it into the paper. This blending action makes the charcoal more stable and less likely to smear.

Step Eleven - Working on Value Range

I now focus on any area that needs to be darkened. I darken the cast shadows using a medium charcoal pencil. I make the bottom of the lantern darker and then soften it with my finger. When you heighten the contrast, it gives weight and intensity to the drawing. I don't yet know the proper balance between the different values because they will continue to be influenced by the decisions I make as I work.

At this point, I have to plan a form of protection for the drawing so I don't damage an area because my hand rests on the charcoal and smudges it. One method is to use a clean sheet of paper to place on my drawing. A second is to use a Mahl stick for support, or I can use my left hand to keep the right hand from touching the drawing.
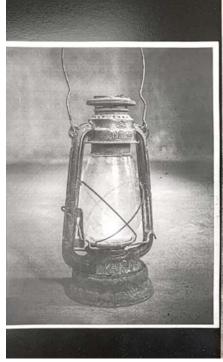
Note that carelessly drawing outside the lines and then correcting the shape with the eraser affects the texture of the background and should be avoided.

I have switched from thinking about the whole to paying attention to each small area on the drawing. Yet, even here, I am focusing on the bigger rather than the smaller details. Your attention is not on the big balance, but on the balance within smaller areas. I don't try to finish one area completely because I don't want to lose the connection to the drawing as a whole. I am constantly asking myself how dark is this area compared to other areas?

At this point, I no longer base my decisions on my reference. I have stepped away. I am now building a work of art, not making a print. I take my time, have fun, and work slowly.

When working from larger to smaller, continue to sharply observe, analyzing what it is that will make the main point of interest pop. If needed, modify the value contrast to create a new balance. This is why art is better than a photo. You are designing your work to strengthen and focus the beholders' attention.

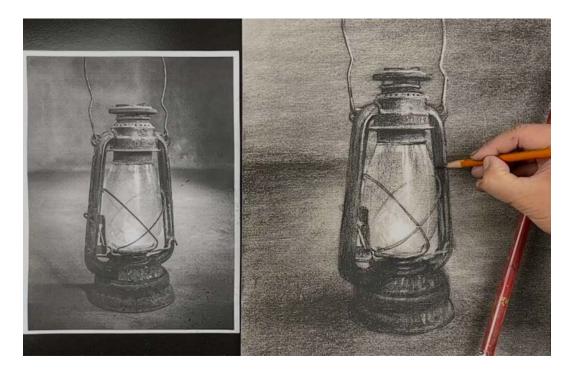## Step Twelve - Using the Kneaded Eraser

Next, I will create the light shapes and lighten areas in the drawing with a kneaded eraser. It is necessary to continuously knead the eraser to achieve the proper interaction with the charcoal. Where do you start? Start where it really matters to you. I am thinking about the outside compared to the inside. I shape the eraser to use on bigger areas. I stretch it, making a flat surface similar to the flat brush I use when painting watercolor. I remove a little bit around the lantern on the right side, judging how light I want it to be. My feelings are involved in my decisions.

I lighten up the outside on the right making it a little lighter, and I work near the lantern and make interesting textures in the background. It is ok for now. At the base of the lantern, it can be a little bit lighter – not too much. (I notice that the bottom of the lantern needs to be a little bit wider, and I make the adjustment.) I make the area at the top of the lantern lighter, but not too light. I work on the highlights on the glass. I make the area where there is a flame my lightest area.

I change the contrast to see values better. I create further details in the light areas with the eraser. I make a few other light points. If they are too light, I pull the value contrast back with charcoal. I am always analyzing the value. Little by little I am creating the feeling of a very old lantern.

Step Thirteen - Filling in the Details

The final step in the drawing process is detailing. I start from the top and work down to the bottom. I use both a hard charcoal pencil and a medium as well as my eraser to sharpen those details. From the top, I make shadows sharper and clearer.

I lighten up the area where there are impressions of writing. I don't have to actually write the word that's there unless it's significant to my primary object. I soften that area and then use the hard charcoal to suggest the writing is three-dimensional. Now the lantern is looking more and more realistic. I can stop here and I have a good drawing, but I want to keep going.

I make more lines a little sharper and a little darker. I use the charcoal pencil to modify the light and dark spaces. If I need something to be lighter, I use the eraser. If a value is too light, I add charcoal back in. I compare where I am working to the whole drawing. I look at the overall balance. Does the background need less competition between the left and the right side? I make it softer. I look at the background next to the glass. Does it need to be lighter? I make it softer, too. I want to eliminate a shape I created in the background because now I have made the light come from the corner. The blending stump makes it softer. I add something where it needs greater attention or clarification and add a few dark shapes to the background for texture.

The objective is to make a realistic drawing based on the reference but not a copy. It is continuously analyzing the drawing's balance and getting proportions and angular measurements spot on that are the keys to reaching the goal. If you like charcoal, take your time with the drawing process and have fun.

If you are supporting Yong Chen through Patreon (www.patreon.com/yongchen), you can view the full video of this lesson as one of the many benefits of your membership.

If you are not yet supporting through Patreon, you can purchase, stream and watch this video on Gumroad (yongchen.gumroad.com).
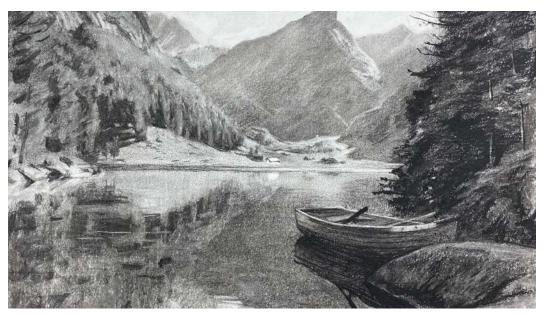
Graphite Drawing a Lantern on Toned Paper

This is part of the EnjoyingArt Learning Challenge of December 2022.

Recommended Lessons

To further study drawing techniques, here are some lessons which can be found on Gumroad. (Yong's Patreon supporters have access to all lessons through the Member Learning Center.)

Use this link to visit the lesson on Gumroad.

Use this link to visit the lesson on Gumroad.

Yong Chen is a signature member of the National Watercolor Society. He is a professor of art in Boston, Massachusetts. He is also an accomplished author, illustrator and painter having held exhibits in multiple countries. His works are found in private collections both in the US and abroad. He is the founder of EnjoyingArt, an on-line artist community, where he is teaching, coaching, and supporting members who come from across the US and from more than 21 countries around the world.

Yong earned his Master of Fine Arts in Illustration from the University of Hartford and has 30 years of teaching experience. He promotes relaxed art-making, using a systematic, yet creative process of drawing and painting in many mediums. He is not only an expert with watercolor, but with oil, Chinese calligraphy, acrylic, gouache, digital art and other mediums covering all subject matter.

Yong's Story

Yong's journey as an artist began when his father brought him to the house of an older gentleman in the village. The house was filled with beautiful drawings, oil paintings, and sculptures. Yong soon became his student, drawing and painting every day.

After finishing his degree in art in the US, he began to teach at the college level. Being able to identify directions of growth for his students was a huge challenge, but offered great satisfaction. It required understanding where each one of them was as an artist and showing them what steps they needed to take to become what they desired.

The technological age has meant that Yong has the ability to teach people anywhere in the world. His students can see their progress every week, every month. They can share their artwork in a global art community, and they can help other people to have the same opportunity.

Asked about his own dreams, Yong said, " I think I was always meant to help other people and to share my love of art with them. I want the whole world to experience a love of drawing and painting."

To learn more about Yong, visit www.yongchen.com

The EnjoyingArt Community

EnjoyingArt is an artist community with a primary focus on teaching art to people around the world over the Internet and in local classes.

The members are part of an international art community which supports their pursuit of artistic expression. Through the use of instructional videos, member-led clubs, community support and encouragement, members improve their artistic ability and work toward their individual art-related goals.

Available Memberships

Associate Member

- Access to the Basic Learning Library on drawing and painting fundamentals.
- Traceables and photo references for upcoming demos when available.
- Being able to share your artwork on a private Discord channel

Member

- Access to the Full Learning Center
- Join Member clubs on Discord and art events on Zoom
- Use Discord for interactive conversation

Companion

- Includes all Member level benefits, plus
- Monthly group critiques
- Special lessons
- Access to recorded videos on the listed activities for Companions

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