



**BALL STATE  
UNIVERSITY**

**College of Fine Arts  
School of Art**

## Portfolio Development: Tips for Creating Drawings from Observation

*The drawings in this presentation were created by students in the Foundations program at Ball State University.*

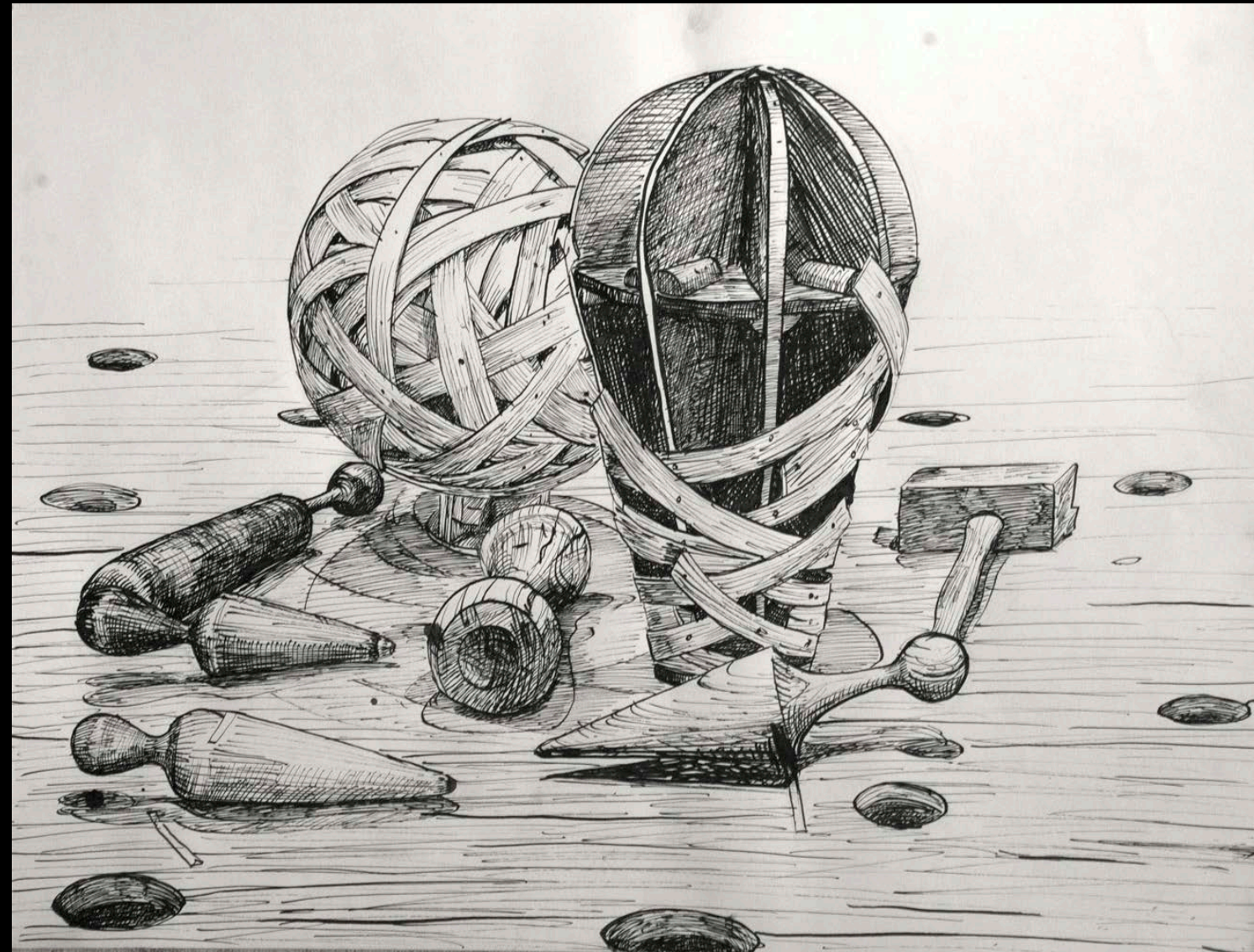


### *What is observational drawing?*

When you draw from direct observation, you are drawing from the three-dimensional world that surrounds you, versus from a previously existing image such as a photo. You can examine your subjects from different viewpoints and from near and far.

## *What is the goal of observational drawing?*

- It's not necessarily about creating a good copy of what you see, but is a process for learning about what you have chosen to draw.
- Drawing is a way to analyze a subject, examine its properties, think about its potential range of meanings, and form a better understanding of it.
- Drawing from observation is one of the best ways to improve your drawing skills!



*Observational drawings can take many different forms.*

This is a contour line study of a large plant on the Ball State campus, made with sumi ink and a bamboo brush. The artist first sketched out the major shapes with a light layer of charcoal.

Notice how the drawing fills the majority of the compositional space and the lines explore the interior of the shapes. That information is just as important as the edge of the shape and gives the leaves dimension.

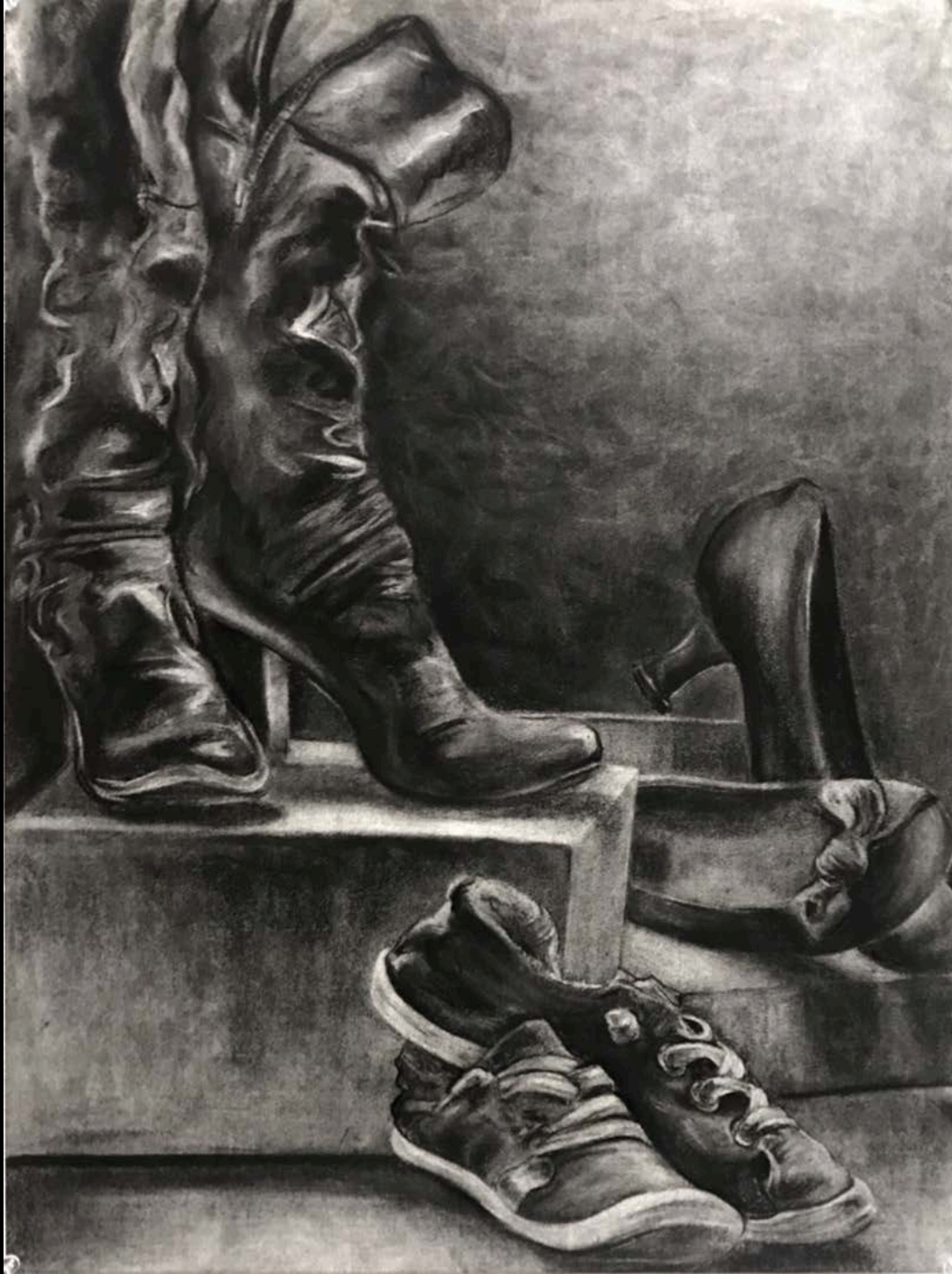


Make sure you choose subjects that you are interested in and that are a good challenge for you.

This a linear study of a bicycle in charcoal pencil.

Notice how the artist has erased and redrawn the form to gain an understanding of proportions.





You can find excellent subjects in your home. Artists and designers find potential compositions everywhere!

This is a tonal study in charcoal. Using shoes and boxes to create different elevations, this student has made an dramatic drawing that emphasizes the different textures and surfaces of the subjects.

Using a strong, directional light source can provide deep shadows and bright highlights for you to draw.

This drawing of shoes could also be thought of as a portrait of the owner. The shoes suggest different activities and roles.

A well-organized still-life is a good subject for an observational drawing.

This is a pastel study of a complex still-life.

Notice how the artist has chosen objects that include solid vessels and gourds, transparent bottles, and architectural subjects like stools. All of these present unique challenges.

The dark spaces in the background help to unify the image.



Simple subjects, like a piece of fabric, can become complex drawing objects if you play with them.

This sheet has been draped over a line, and it has transformed into a good exercise for a tonal study.

It can sometimes be easier to draw at a larger scale than at the scale of a sketchbook page, such as on 11" x 14" -- 18" x 24" pieces of paper. Smaller paper sizes can make it more difficult to manipulate materials.



Spaces, such as interiors, buildings, or landscapes that you can directly observe, are great subjects for observational drawing.

This is an ink study of the Frog Baby fountain at Ball State.



Landscapes can offer the opportunity to describe layers of information and a sense of foreground, middle ground and background.

In this study, the artist has experimented with mark-making to suggest leaves in early spring.

Notice how the darkest marks in this drawing push forward, and lighter marks sink back to develop spatial depth.



If you like drawing the human figure, self-portraits are always a great choice for an observational drawing. Make sure you set up your drawing space so that you are comfortable and can draw for an extended period of time.

It's hard to hold a facial expression like a smile for a long time. Observational portraits usually have more subtle expressions than, for example, a photograph of someone captured in a brief moment.

Drawing your friends and family is also a good exercise, if they will sit still for you!

