

Reference: <http://www.visual-arts-cork.com/drawing/pen-and-ink-drawings.htm>

## **Pen and Ink Drawings**

In fine art, the term 'pen and ink' denotes a drawing technique involving the use of black and other coloured inks which are applied to a support (generally paper) with either a dip pen or a reservoir pen. This traditional, versatile media has been used by Western artists since ancient-Egyptian times, for sketches, finished drawings or ink and wash paintings. It is also one of the main mediums involved in book illustration (see, for instance, Aubrey Beardsley) and in Surrealist automatic drawing (for details, see: Automatism in Art).

### **Early History**

Artists from several ancient cultures used ink in their fine art drawings. One of the earliest surviving images in Greek art, drawn in pen and dye (on papyrus), is *The Abduction of Briseis* (c.300 CE) by an unknown Greek artist (Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich).

However, the medium was developed to a high degree in Chinese art during the era of Tang Dynasty arts (618-906) and Song Dynasty arts (960-1279), and thereafter in Japan during the Muromachi period (1338-1573). (See Chinese painters.) Indeed, pen and ink has always been the main medium of Asian art and calligraphy in China, Japan and Korea. Traditional Chinese painting is executed with an animal hair brush dipped in black or colored ink. Oils are not generally used. Work in pure outline was called 'pai-miao', ink applied in splashes 'p'o-mo'. The most popular type of support is paper or silk, but some paintings were executed on walls or lacquerware. Completed artwork was often mounted on scrolls, which were hung or rolled up. For a guide to the aesthetics underpinning Oriental fine art drawing and writing (calligraphy), see: *Traditional Chinese Art: Characteristics*.

### **Renaissance Pen and Ink Drawings**

During the Renaissance era, stylus, metalpoint and pen with ink were considered as fine line media as opposed to the broad line of charcoal and chalks. The precise effect of pen and ink is exemplified by the virtuoso draughtsman Leonardo Da Vinci in his work *Five Grotesque Heads* (Royal Library, Windsor Castle).

According to the *Libro dell'Arte*, the practical manual written by the early Renaissance master Cennino Cennini (c.1370-1440), apprentice artists (garzone) progressed to drawing with pen and ink on paper after a year of practising on tablets with stylus, leadpoint or metalpoint. Ink was permanent once applied to paper so errors could not be erased, except by careful scraping.

The most common ink in High Renaissance Italy was made from iron gall. Its principal components, gall nuts, were rich in resin and tannic acid. When soaked in water or wine, strained, and then mixed with iron sulphates and gum arabic, the result was a liquid black ink ideal for drawing. However, over time, iron gall ink fades so that although the ink in most Renaissance drawings is now brown it would originally have been much blacker.

Ink was generally applied to paper with a quill pen. The resulting line could be anything from very thin to very broad. This line spectrum is illustrated by comparing drawings by the brothers Gentile Bellini and Giovanni Bellini. Gentile's *Turkish Man* (c.1479) and *Turkish Woman* (c.1480) were drawn with incredibly fine strokes with a thin pen. By contrast, Giovanni's *Pieta* (c.1480) was executed with broader strokes of a thicker pen. For more about sketching in Venice, see: *Venetian Drawing* (c.1500-1600). Leonardo Di Vinci's *Virgin and Child with a Cat* (c.1470s), *Madonna with Many Animals* by Albrecht

Durer (1503) and The Sacrifice of Isaac by Albrecht Altdorfer reveal other effects achievable with pen and ink.

Ink remained popular throughout the Renaissance for a wide variety of drawings from rapid sketches to detailed compositions. Wash and highlighting provided additional effects. However, despite the fluid nature of ink, the need to dip the quill repeatedly made it unsuitable for large scale drawings. These were normally drawn in chalk or charcoal, not ink. For more examples, see: Best Drawings of the Renaissance (c.1400-1550).

Diluted ink could be applied by brush in order to shade an ink drawing. This was often done with the same iron gall ink that was used in pens, but it could also be done with Bistre, a material obtained by soaking wood soot in water. The result was a brown wash that was not viscous enough for use with a pen but ideal for use with a brush. The application of wash to a pen drawing enhanced the three-D effect of the image. Examples include Benozzo Gozzoli's Studies of a Hand, Three Angels and Christ (1447); The Triumph of St Thomas Aquinas (c.1487) by Filippino Lippi, and Shallow Vessel (1524-46) by Giulio Romano.

Artists occasionally made brush drawings in ink or bistre without a pen; examples include Head Of A Middle-Aged Man (c.1507) by Vittore Carpaccio and Raphael's Drapery Study For Christ in the Disputa (1508). Pen and ink was also used in combination with other media, an example being St Hubert by Jacopo Bellini, a pen and ink drawing over chalk and leadpoint.

### **Later History**

Pen and ink was used by many draughtsmen during the Baroque, Rococo, Romantic, Neoclassical art movements and throughout the nineteenth century. Examples include: Foetus in Utero (1512), a scientific drawing by Leonardo Da Vinci using pen and ink with red chalk (Royal Library, Windsor Castle); Running Youth with Left Arm Extended (1504) by Michelangelo using pen and brown ink (British Museum); Pastoral Landscape by Claude Lorrain (1644) using pen with brown and grey brown wash; The Prophet Jonah Before the Walls of Ninevah (1654) by Rembrandt, reed pen in bistre with wash (Albertina Museum, Vienna); An Island in the Lagoon by Canaletto (18th century), using pen, brown ink and carbon ink wash (Ashmolean Museum, Oxford); numerous drawings by the Spanish artist Francisco Goya; Samuel Palmer's 1825 series of landscapes; View of Arles (1888) by Vincent Van Gogh, ink with reed pen and wash (Museum of Art, Rhode Island); Reclining Nude by Pablo Picasso (20th century), a pure line pen and ink drawing (Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University); Margaret Hilda Thatcher, Baroness Thatcher of Kesteven by Gerald Scarfe (Tate Modern). Another modern example of the use of pen and ink, can be seen in the National Self-Portrait Collection of Ireland at the University of Limerick. See for example the sumi ink portrait by the Irish artist Fionnuala Ni Chiosain.

### **Calligraphy**

Calligraphy, the art of stylized writing, is performed with a pen and a brush, using water-based rather than oil-based inks on good quality, highly absorbent paper. Pen and ink calligraphy was raised to a high level in Islamic art, since Islam forbids the representation of living beings. A strong parallel tradition existed among Aramaic and Hebrew scholars, exemplified in Hebrew Biblical art from the 9th and 10th Centuries.

The development of pen and ink artwork in Western drawing, dates from the Lindisfarne Gospels and the Canterbury and Winchester illuminated manuscripts of the 9th century, whose hallmarks include lively figures and animals, decorative foliage and exquisite calligraphy.

## **Inks**

Drawing ink first appeared in China, about 3,000 BCE. This early ink was a combination of pinewood smoke, lamp oil, and gelatin from animal skins. Next, about 400 CE, a new ink formula began to be used, incorporating ferrous sulfate (produced from iron and sulfuric acid), tannin (produced from gall-nuts) and a thickener. Since then, art inks have been made from a diversity of sources, ranging from sooty carbon based materials (bistre) to dyes derived from berries, oak galls, insects, cuttlefish and crustaceans.

Only black and white inks are permanent, as other inks contain soluble dyes rather than pigments and are not lightfast. For monochrome line drawings, most artists prefer black Indian ink, which is both permanent and waterproof. Coloured waterproof inks (also called artists' drawing inks) are available in a range of about 20 colours. Waterproof ink is essential if you wish to use a wash or tint on top of a line drawing, otherwise the linework will run. Being denser, these inks dry to a slightly gloss finish with a precise painterly quality. Non-waterproof coloured inks contain no shellac and are used mainly for washes. They can also be used for line drawings provided no washes are applied.

## **Pens**

There are two basic types: dip pens and reservoir pens. Note that the nib itself is referred to as the pen, while the main shaft is called the penholder. There are tons of different shaped nibs, each of which produces different marks.

### **Dip Pens**

Reed, quill and metal pens (that is, metal nibs set in metal holders) are classified as dip pens. They are loaded by being dipped into the ink. Traditional bamboo or reed varieties are now considered somewhat old-fashioned but are still preferred by some draughtsmen for making bold strokes. Ultra-fine lines are best made by mapping pens, or crow-quill pens.

### **Reservoir Pens**

This type of pen carries its own supply of ink in a special holder or cartridge, thus avoiding the need for 'dipping'. However, the nib is typically less flexible than that of a dip pen. Reservoir pens include: fountain pens and technical pens. The chief advantage of the latter, used by designers and illustrators, is its ability to deliver a constant flow of ink regardless of the direction in which the pen is moved. Many technical draughtsmen favour the Rotring Rapidograph or Isograph series of technical pens. Rapidographs are commonly employed by comic book and graphic novel artists, while micron pens have become very popular due to their line work and disposability. For the fine artist, the best variety is the 'art pen' or 'sketching pen', which combines most of the expressiveness of a dip pen with all the consistency of a reservoir pen.

### **Fibre-Tipped Pens and Markers**

With their consistent, quick-drying colours, modern marker pens may be more associated with graphic studios than fine art studios, but they make an excellent medium when sketching or drawing outdoors. If you intend to overlay colours, choose a solvent-based marker and, as support, use pads designed to resist colour-bleeding.

## **Brushes**

Ink drawing and painting can also be executed with a brush, a technique widely used by Western Renaissance and Chinese artists, as well as Rembrandt, Claude Lorrain, Goya and certain artist-groups. For example, the technique of combined pen-and-brush drawing was practised by the draftsmen of Germany and Holland, especially in the circle around Albrecht Durer as well as the south German Danube school, led by Altdorfer and Wolf Huber. Chinese brushes are particularly versatile for applying ink, as are sable and other soft-hair brushes.

### **Contemporary Pen and Ink Art**

The increasing sophistication of computer software programs like Photoshop, Poser, Painter and Piranisi, enables artists to automatically take a photograph and fashion it into a form of pen-and-ink image. Whether such digital or computerized graphic art leads to an enhancement or decline of traditional pen and ink drawing, remains unclear.



Cypresses at the Villa d'Este, 1838

**Samuel Palmer** (British, 1805–1881)

Brown ink, watercolor, gouache, graphite,  
and black chalk on blue paper; 12 1/2 x 9 in.  
(31.5 x 22.9 cm)

Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, Paul  
Mellon Collection

<http://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/listings/2006/samuel-palmer/photo-gallery>

Oak Trees, Lullingstone Park, 1828

**Samuel Palmer** (British, 1805–1881)

Pen and watercolor; 11 5/8 x 18 1/2 in. (29.5  
x 46.8 cm)

National Gallery of Canada

