

## **Author's Note**

Art is an idea that belongs to everyone. It is found in every culture. Whatever physical form it might take, whatever emotional, aesthetic, or psychological challenge it may offer, it is vital to every culture's sense of itself. I have tried to keep this thought in mind as I developed the content of this book, for although art students and teachers might be its most natural readers, the practice of "art," per se, is not a prerequisite to reading this book. Lessons learned in pursuit of art are lessons that pertain to almost everything we experience. Art is not separate from life; it is the very description of the lives we lead. And so, this book is really for everyone who cares about art and the way it enriches our being.

Humans have been producing art objects for tens of thousands of years, but art schools are a relatively recent phenomenon. Traditionally, artists received their training as apprentices to working artists or in ateliers presided over by a master. But the contemporary art school, as part of a larger liberal arts education, is an altogether different experience, reflecting the ways in which we have come to understand art as an extension of our daily culture. Art is everywhere. The way we make it, look at it, and analyze it is ever-evolving. It is that constant, ceaseless, *becoming* and transformation of art that has determined this book's content; some of the lessons have to do with ways of making and representing, but just as many remind us of the necessity of searching, knowing, and doubting.

As a teacher, I still believe that technique has an important place in art education because artists are, at their core, makers. One has a different understanding of an image or object, how it does what it does, if one knows the details and processes of its creation intimately. This is one reason imitation has always been a part of artistic training. Artists assimilate a whole range of psychological, aesthetic, political, and emotional data points, and they then make forms to organize and give meaning to them. That takes skill and practice, working in

tandem with intelligence and keen observation. But without the tools to fashion the form, it is like trying to capture air with a net—and often about as effective. Basic form-giving skills help the student make the bridge between thought and embodiment. Because existing art is the best manifestation of artistic ideas, I chose to illustrate the lessons in this book with images based on historical and contemporary works of art—to give each idea, lesson, or conceptual “thing” a visual correlative or apposite image. These drawings, with their imperfections and distortions, are mine, and as such they serve as demonstrations of what the words are largely about: how we learn through observing and attempting to capture ideas that were often originally and successfully executed by others. If my allusive drawings illustrate just how difficult it is to replicate the subtlety and nuance of another artist’s image, this should be taken as a humble acknowledgement of the difference between what a real work of art does and what an imitation accomplishes. These images are in no sense meant to be substitutes for the originals on which they are based, except for those that are my own work, or to imply agreement by the artists with the statements I have made. They are simply visual referrals to artists, ideas, and works that I believe art students should know and others

might want to consider. Notwithstanding these qualifications, I am grateful that so many artists whose works I represented expressed their understanding and approval of my intent, and I appreciate their willingness to be my collaborators, in that sense.

When I was an art student, I never imagined becoming a teacher. I was focused only on becoming a maker. My feelings then mirrored the sentiment attributed to George Bernard Shaw, “He who can, does; he who cannot, teaches.” I discovered after a couple of decades of practice, however, that all of those critical, initial discussions that rose out of the need to know and the passion to do became increasingly less a part of the conversations I was having with my fellow artists. I missed the exercise of going back to the beginning, reexamining basic premises, asking first questions. As the ability to gain new perspectives at each turn in the road became more difficult, more distant, I began to reflect on the things we discussed in art school and on why those conversations should never stop. The issues we encounter as students of art are life lessons and should always stay with us. Without them, we are not students of life.

*Kit White*

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