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Why You Shouldn't Learn to Draw

All the books on drawing will teach you NOTHING

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Michael: Hey Emily. I heard you're stressed out about drawing. What's the deal?

Emily: Yeah, drawing doesn't seem very fun or accessible to me.

Michael: Bullshit.

Emily: Huh?

Michael: Either it's fun or it's not. What's the big deal?

Emily: Well, when I've done it recently, it hasn't been fun. Nothing I draw looks right.

Michael: So what? Is it fun?

Emily: No. Nothing looks right.

Michael: I don't understand what you're talking about. Looking at your bad drawings takes the fun out of it?

Emily: You've never felt this way?

Michael: Of course I have. But so what? The reason I didn't think it was fun was because of bullshit.

Emily: I don't understand.

Michael: You're the one who said it wasn't fun.

Emily: Yeah, it's not.

Michael: I guess you just don't like drawing, then. Any other problems?

Emily: Uh...OK...Well, I also said it wasn't very accessible.

Michael: What does that mean? All you need is a pencil and a piece of paper. Anyone can afford that. Or, find it in a trash can somewhere.

Emily: No, that's not what I mean. I mean, drawing takes a long time to learn. What are you supposed to do as a beginner?

Michael: What do you mean, it takes a long time to learn? Go to any kindergarten classroom and you'll see a couple dozen kids drawing without any problem.

Emily: Yeah, but they're kids. No one expects anything great from them.

Michael: But you expect something great from yourself? Didn't you just say you were a beginner? Why would you expect something great from you?

Emily: Yeah, I guess you're right. I'm being too hard on myself.

Michael: OK, so anything else? Any other problems with drawing?

Emily: I guess not. Just...I don't know how to do it.

Michael: Are you serious? OK, fine, I'll explain it step-by-step. First, you pick up the pencil. Second, put the tip of it on the paper. Third, move it around...

Emily: No, that's not what I mean. I don't know how to DRAW. You know, make it look like the thing I'm drawing.

Michael: That's easy. You push the tip of the pencil around on the paper until you have something that looks like the thing.

Emily: This is so frustrating! You are taking me too literally.

Michael: I don't understand what you're asking. How to make it look like the thing? What does that mean?

Emily: You know! When a good artist draws, they know what they're doing. It just looks good. When I draw, it doesn't. It looks like a little kid drew it.

Michael: Uh...that's because you quit drawing when you were a little kid. You haven't been practicing the way a good artist has practiced. What are you expecting will happen?

Emily: I don't know...aren't there techniques?

Michael: No.

Emily: But there are art classes, and art books, and art teachers, and YouTube videos. You're saying they're teaching nothing?

Michael: Yes. They're teaching nothing. The way to learn is to practice, make mistakes, learn from your mistakes, and figure it out.

Emily: Then, why do they have art school?

Michael: Because people want to go to school for art.

Emily: You're saying they should shut down the art schools?

Michael: No.

Emily: But what good are they, in your opinion?

Michael: I don't know. They give art students a place to go and spend time doing art, I guess. Why are you making me defend art schools? You asked me how to draw.

Emily: If I drew the way you're suggesting, they would never let me into art school.

Michael: What do I look like, the admissions committee? Yeah, they would never let you into art school, but that's because you suck at drawing. Because you'd rather argue with strangers on the Internet about drawing, rather than actually practicing drawing.

Emily: I don't want to waste my time practicing something if I'm doing it wrong.

Michael: OK, then don't do it wrong. Just do it right.

Emily: But, I don't know what's right.

Michael: Sounds like you have a problem, then.

Emily: Don't be ridiculous. If I read a book about drawing, it would tell me what's right.

Michael: So, go read a book about drawing.

Emily: Then you admit that your advice sucks?

Michael: No, of course not.

Emily: Whatever.

Now, put this down and go draw something.