

Drawing and Meditation Exercises

deep root looking

alternating meditation and drawing

The easiest way to observe the interplay of meditation and drawing is to lay them next to each other and allow them naturally to bleed into each other.

What you need: **pencil, sketchbook, a comfortable place to sit, an object to draw**

For this exercise, use a complicated object, such as a tree root or rock surface and then only draw bits of it with no goal of drawing the whole thing or making it look recognisable. This supports bringing attention to the awareness element of drawing.

In a workshop setting I use a timer, but you don't have to if you don't want to.

- a) Sit on a chair, facing your object. Set the timer for 5 minutes if you are using it. Sit upright but not stiff and, if you feel comfortable to do so, close your eyes. Bring your awareness to the gravity of your body and all those places where your body touches the chair and the floor. Then, gently, bring your awareness to your breath. Where do you feel it most? Watch it in this place. Keep your awareness on your breath in this place and observe it closely, almost as if you were drawing it. If your mind wanders off, congratulate yourself for noticing, and bring it back to the breath. When the timer rings, bring your attention briefly back to the gravity of the body and then open your eyes.
- b) Without taking a break, reset the timer for another 5 minutes and start to draw. Don't think about the drawing or plan it, just start wherever your eyes first land and draw in this place, aiming to observe closely and carefully, like you did with the breath. (You could try not looking at the paper, only the object, as you draw.) Don't rub anything out with this exercise, simply draw on and allow the lines to arise as they do.
- c) repeat a and b.

Reflect on how the two actions felt next to each other. Did the meditation effect the drawing, did the drawing effect the meditation?

line walking

walking meditation and drawing

What you need: **a small sketchbook that you can easily hold in one hand (I like to use a little concertina notebook for this), a pencil, an open outdoor space such as a park, woodlands, or a garden**

- a) Find a place in the park where you can walk undisturbed. Set the timer for 5 minutes if you are using it. Walk slowly but naturally, not so slowly that it is difficult to keep balance! Bring your awareness to the soles of your feet (if you are brave you can do this barefoot) and observe all the sensations as they arise and fade during the walking. Observe the sensations of movement within the body. When the timer rings, stop briefly.
- b) Without taking a break, reset the timer if you are using it, and bring your gaze to the ground in front of you. Wherever your eyes first land is the beginning of your drawing. Imagine your

eyes draw a line on the ground, following the contours of various things seen on the ground. Your hand traces the movement of your eyes at the same time as you do it. So, your eyes stay on the ground and your hand does the drawing without you looking at your sketchbook! Walk slowly as the drawing progresses. The drawing is a 'line that goes for a walk' as Paul Klee said.

- c) repeat a and b.

One interesting thing about walking meditation, particularly for the artist, is that you both make and observe the movement at the same time. Here, the observation and participation elements of meditation are very obvious. Reflect on making movement and observing it at the same time. How did that work in the walking meditation and how did that work in the drawing? And again, how did alternating meditation and drawing effect each other?

the object-hood of clouds

observing flux

What you need: **pencil, sketchbook and access to the internet** (Find a video of cloud formations in time lapse, or "cloud lapse". For instance, on the [Cloud Appreciation Society](#) website or on [YouTube](#).)

- a) Find a comfortable seat, facing your laptop (or whatever you are using to play the video). Set the timer for 5 minutes, if you are using it. Sit upright but not stiff and, if you feel comfortable to do so, close your eyes. Bring your awareness to the gravity of your body and all those places where your body touches the chair and the floor. Then, gently, bring your awareness to your breath. This time, rather than focussing on one area of the breath, keep your awareness on the whole breath, the whole movement of the breath. Investigate how far into your body you notice your breath. Watch the whole breath ripple through your body like a wave. If your mind wanders off, congratulate yourself for noticing, and bring it back to the breath. When the timer rings, bring your attention briefly back to the gravity of the body and then open your eyes.
- b) Without taking a break, switch on your video and watch the cloud formation film. Watch it through once without drawing. Then play it again and this time draw, keeping your eyes on the cloud, draw the shapes as they change in front of you. You can draw any aspect of the cloud, but an easy way to start would be to follow the upper edge and follow the lines that appear as the cloud changes shape. Depending on the length of your video you may want to play it more than once.
- c) Repeat a and b.

We can see that we sometimes watch movement, flux, impermanence from a still point of view and sometimes from a point of view of actively initiating this movement. There is a kind of paradox in this. Clearly, we cannot be completely still but are always partaking in change, but, on the other hand, not every change we observe is one we are active agents in. This is one of the complexities of bringing meditation into drawing.