

# The Charcoal Sketch

*a supplement to the video.*

McLeod Art Studio

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# Materials

### **Vine Charcoal (medium)**

This stuff is my favorite and the only must have here (in addition to paper and kneaded eraser). It's soft, comes off easily after applying it, and really can give you everything you need for a complete work. After laying in masses of values with the sock, use it sparingly at first to define a few shapes. You'd be surprised how easily it is to make something SEEM very well described with a well-placed stroke.

### **Bristol Board (vellum)**

This is the paper I prefer to use because it's heavy. Because I like to spray water on and really get deep darks, it's the best to accommodate that and not tear up or wrinkle too much. The thickness of the paper also has a very tangible weight to it that translates to a better experience, both in the act of creating and viewing the drawing.

### **Kneaded Eraser**

I use this extensively to "draw" with after laying in charcoal masses. With practice, this tool can manipulate the drawing in a variety of ways. My favorite is to pull a portion of it to form a ridge, which can be stroked across the paper much like a brush.

### **General's Pure Powdered Charcoal**

This I put into a sock and tied a knot. It's really messy, but gives you such quick application of the medium it's hard to pass up. Tap the sock on the paper for a splatter/puff, or just smear it around.

### **General's Compressed Charcoal**

Compressed charcoal can get dark very easily and is not necessary in order to make a nice drawing. I am always careful before placing marks with it, being sure my drawing and composition are correct.

### **Blending Stump**

These are basically just a white piece of paper rolled up into a pencil shape and sharpened at both ends. I use them to either blend by taking away charcoal, or put some charcoal on the end and blend charcoal *onto* the paper.

## **Paper towels**

I use these to keep my hands relatively clean. I will also use them in a variety of ways in the drawing process. They work nicely in removing charcoal in large masses, leaving a unified stroke across the paper; this can be done with varying pressure, depending on the need. I find that a good swift motion (almost not pressing) across the paper will remove some of your work, which you'll have to do again. If I'm stuck and the drawing feels stuffy, it freshens the whole thing by bringing the values back to the middle. From there, I reassess my darks and move forward.

## **Spray Bottle**

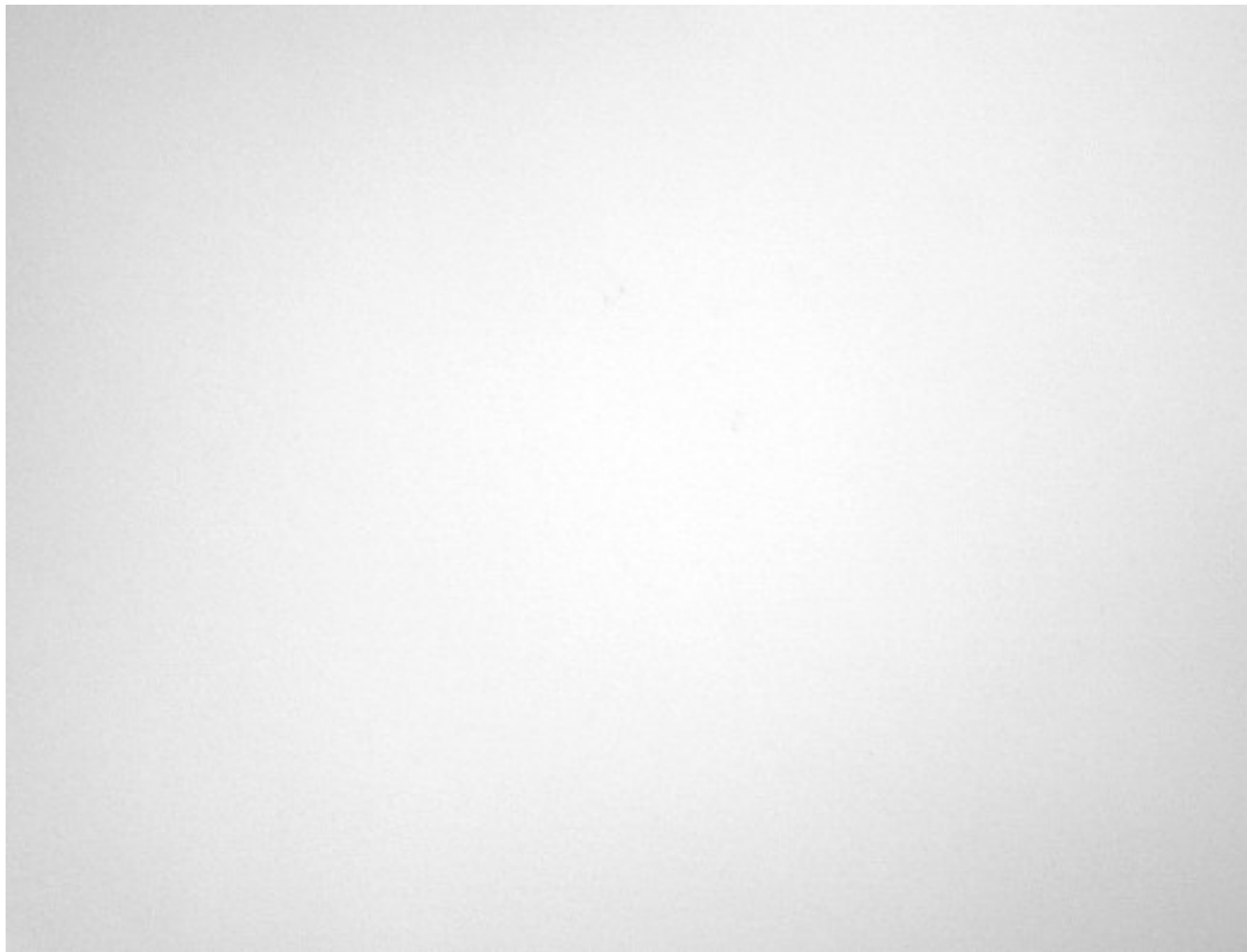
I use this from time to time if I want to achieve certain textures on the paper. I always use it with caution, but have gotten some nice textures when used in combination with a brush. Similar to the compressed charcoal, the results are usually more permanent.

## **Miscellaneous**

There's no substitute for a good thumb or index finger from time to time. However, I am very insistent on not touching the paper too often, as such action leaves oils on the paper, altering the quality of the charcoal and paper. I've also been known to use paintbrushes quite extensively, as well as other items sitting around the studio.

# Demonstration

*one*



Bristol board taped to a piece of plywood.

two



A 10 second sketch so I know where to put down the masses of value.

*three*



Here, I put the drawing horizontally on the floor and, using a combination of pats and strokes with the sock, applied a mass of values. Then I spritzed the paper with water for textural effect and to help it adhere.

four



Now I've got the drawing up on my easel and am using the kneaded eraser in combination with the sock to effectively draw the forms. I'm only looking for masses of values—big shapes. The sock helps me from zeroing in on any one area too early.

five



More value building. There is little concern here for replicating human forms. I'm thinking distances—amongst the individual shapes and those shapes with respect to the composition—and angles. I'm trying to keep out of my head a statement such as, “That's an eye, so I'm going to draw an eye.” There will come a point when such a mindset is necessary, but I find it simply distracting at 5 minutes into the drawing.

six



Because I like where the head is and how it feels as a part of the composition, I am moving into smaller shapes. Please note that I am still wary of defining features. I'm simply looking for shapes of light with the eraser and shapes of dark with the sock. As you can see in the lower right, I've also sprayed the paper again. The next step shows how I knock it down with a paint brush.

*seven*



More of the same. I am now having to get pretty particular about shapes as they define features, so I am taking great care to ensure these shapes are in correct places, with respect to each other and the overall compositional space.

*eight*



More building of the forms here. Notice how I've kept all the edges very soft except a couple places in the eye and around the nose. By keeping this discrepancy through all stages of the drawing, I effectively maintain a firm grip on my focal points.

nine



This is my first set of lines, done with a piece of vine charcoal. Notice how few lines there are, especially in the mouth, where there's one at the corner and one in the center. The rest is one value with a stroke taken out for the light plane on the bottom lip. The reason the mouth works at this point has a lot to do with what surrounds the mouth—the careful modeling of the flesh around it and its correct placement within the face.

ten



Here, I continue drawing with the vine charcoal.

*eleven*



As I work over the paper, I notice areas that aren't yet dark enough. So I use my charcoal for the same result as the sock, only in smaller areas.

twelve



Seeing that the eye was placed too high in the previous step, I wipe it off and place it again. This, too, is wrong.

*thirteen*



So I simply wiped it off again.

*fourteen*



And redrew it. Everything else remains untouched, and at this point I am very confident in the direction of the drawing. I like the composition. The face feels nice and subtle. It also looks just like my model.

*fifteen*



So I continue working, darkening the area under the nose and in the mouth.

sixteen



Now I'm ready for my darkest darks. Everything at this point is pretty gray, so I test the compressed charcoal where I know I'm going to have a crisp edge. Just putting this in shows me how light my values are in the face, but I need to let them be for now.

*seventeen*



I take the drawing off the easel, put it on the floor and shave the vine charcoal onto the surface.

*eighteen*



Using a brush, I blend the charcoal with a spritz of water on the paper. I interchange a paper towel to remove more charcoal, taking out areas that need to be lighter for the definition of form. I also begin using the compressed charcoal in the turtleneck, being sure to visualize every stroke before making it.

nineteen



I am now working with the compressed charcoal to establish my darkest areas, being careful in the face. Notice how I have yet to put many crisp edges in to define the shapes around the face. It's easy to get carried away making strong contrast and lose the organic feel of lost edges. Also note that the texture of the plywood is coming through in the hair, a texture I really like.

*twenty*



I've started revisiting areas in the face that need to be darker, using the vine charcoal.

*twenty-one*



Here, I put the drawing back on the floor and shaved the compressed charcoal on areas that needed to be darker. Then sprayed it and, back on the easel, used a brush to get different effects in the background/hair. I've also taken the compressed charcoal and continued the modeling of the folds in the turtleneck, the sweater, and the edges around the face. I've also spent time in the eyes and nose, defining the structures that have existed unstated within the masses of value.

*twenty-two*



Finished. I placed some strokes in the dark portion of the cheek, opting for a rougher look for more texture and vibrancy. I've also put the finishing touches on almost every other area—the earring, ear, mouth, eyes, and background. Somewhere in there I also signed it.