

## LINE &amp; MARK

The most fundamental thing you can do to a drawing surface is make a mark on it. Most of the time, a drawing starts out with a blank surface of some kind, usually paper. This surface is almost always flat (two-dimensional) and, generally, passive (empty). So as soon as you do something—anything—to it, you've marked, or *activated*, it.

figure 1

Cai Guo-Qiang  
*Transient Rainbow*, 2003  
Gunpowder on paper

198 $\frac{1}{16}$  x 157 $\frac{1}{2}$  inches (505 x 400 cm)

Fractional and promised gift of Clarissa Alcock Bronfman  
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THE REASON FOR A DRAWING  
MIGHT SIMPLY BE THE PLAYING  
WITH A LINE, LIKE A MELODY  
PLAYED ON A SAXOPHONE.

*Silvia Bachli*

figure 2

**Kocot and Hatton**

13 August–17 August 2005, 2005

Ink on rag paper

15½ x 15½ inches (39 x 39 cm)

Courtesy of the Artists and Larry Becker

Contemporary Art, Philadelphia, PA

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A *mark* is an impression, deposit, or remnant left on a surface as the result of contact by a tool or object. In the world of drawing, this usually is achieved with pencil, charcoal, crayon, pastel, or paintbrush. Traditional examples of marks include things such as dots, dashes, check marks, commas, arrowheads, fingerprints, brush marks, and so on (figure 3, page 48).

Modern artists use all kinds of nontraditional tools and means to make marks: drips, stamps, stains, burn marks, punctures, stitches—you name it. Cai Guo-Qiang's work (figure 1) shows the remnants of a gunpowder explosion. Kocot and Hatton (figure 2) use traditional pen and ink on paper to create elegant linear movements.

But there's more to a mark than you might think. For most of us, what gives a mark much of its meaning is that it's made by an individual artist with his or her particular hand. So let's add to our understanding that a mark is an impression *left by a maker*. After all, drawing tools are virtually always held in your hand, which in turn is attached to your body. The tool becomes an

extension of you. And as a drawing evolves as a series of marks made over time, it stands as a recording of your hand's movements and actions. Every drawing can therefore be considered a kind of self-portrait, in that it *mirrors* your temperament, personality, and mood, as well as *records* your process of responding and making decisions. Imagine that—you reveal things about yourself every time you draw!

A *line* is a specific kind of mark—one that is much longer than it is wide. In the strictest definition, a line is a one-dimensional mark—it has length only, with one unit of height and width. For our purposes, though, a broader and more useful idea is that of *linearity*, or line as an extended mark. From this perspective, it's accurate to refer to the brushstroke in figure 4 on page 48 as a line (a mark that has linearity). So when we refer to a line, we'll most often be talking about a *linear mark* rather than something purely and academically one-dimensional.

Naturally, this distinction is somewhat contextual. The mark in the middle of figure 5 on page 48 reads as a line

Consider the four-beat musical sequence: one-two-three-four, one-two-three-four. We all know this one and are familiar with some of its variations. To get the idea, say the following *out loud*, and say the words in capitals *louder* than the word in small letters:

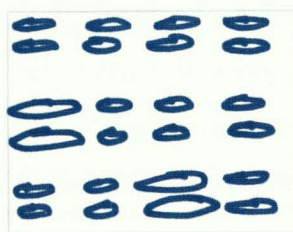


figure 3

- one-two-three-four, one-two-three-four
- **ONE**-two-three-four, **ONE**-two-three-four
- one-two-**THREE**-four, one-two-**THREE**-four

You can hear the difference in emphasis or feeling, and, looking at the printed text, you can *see* the changes in emphasis too! Now, think of a drawing containing a sequence of four ovals, and visualize drawing them this way (as illustrated in figure 3):

- same-size same-size same-size same-size, same-size same-size same-size same-size
- **LARGER** same-size same-size same-size, **LARGER** same-size same-size same-size
- same-size same-size **LARGER** same-size, same-size same-size **LARGER** same-size

Keep in mind, of course, that instead of “larger,” you could substitute smaller, fatter, thinner, and so on. And these are just a few and some of the simplest of possible variations!

Another analogy for anyone familiar with basic military training is the verbal marching orders barked by a drill sergeant—the four-beat sequence:

- Left-right-left (space), left-right-left (space)

The verbal “space” is a fourth (right) step that is implied. The drawing equivalent of this might be:

- **Small-oval big-oval small-oval (space where an absent big oval would fit)**

In working with rhythm, you automatically address issues of space, time, and motion. A shape motif (an oval, for example) occupies space; a sequence of *several* ovals consists of the space occupied by the ovals and the areas of no-thing-ness *between* the ovals. To experience such a rhythm takes time (you start by experiencing one oval and proceed through space from oval to oval and so on). And of course, these experiences of space and time lead to the experience of motion, or movement.

Rhythmic movement can occur in many different ways. The sections that follow detail some common ones.

## HORIZONTAL

Both of the drawings presented on page 129 are based on horizontal movements of a vertical bar motif. Both, in fact, exhibit *two* sets of horizontal rhythmic movements.

The underpinning of Will Barnet’s *Study for Early Spring* (figure 4) consists of a horizontal rhythmic movement of tall tree verticals. These run all the way (or nearly) from top to bottom. The intervals between the trees vary nicely; the “spacing” ranges from dense to relatively open. Then, interspersed between these tree notes runs the second horizontal rhythm of the shorter, vertical notes of the figures. The two rhythms simultaneously function in support of one another. It’s worth noting, though, that in both horizontal rhythms the notes are invariably straight and vertical. As a result, the drawing





figure 4

**Will Barnet**  
*Study for Early Spring, 1976*  
 Charcoal on paper

42 x 86 inches  
 (106.7 x 218.4 cm)

Arkansas Arts Center Foundation  
 Collection: Gift of Will and Elena  
 Barnet, 2001. 2001.025.055  
 © Will Barnet / Licensed by VAGA,  
 New York, NY

feels quite static and highly ordered. Finally, notice how on the limbs of each tree stand horizontal bars that create little counter-rhythms that move vertically.

Marcia Kocot and Tom Hatton's *21 September–29 September 2005* (figure 5) also features a horizontal rhythmic movement of repeating vertical lines. In this case, lines vary from fairly straight and placid to quite wavy and energetic. They are also very numerous and lend a feeling of great density and ambiguity—you can't always tell which line is which as they overlap and intertwine. The artists increased the complexity of the rhythm by splitting the drawing into two sections—a top bar and a slightly larger bottom bar. This change in scale creates a shift: It makes the rhythm in the bottom bar come forward or closer to us, phasing one rhythm against the other.

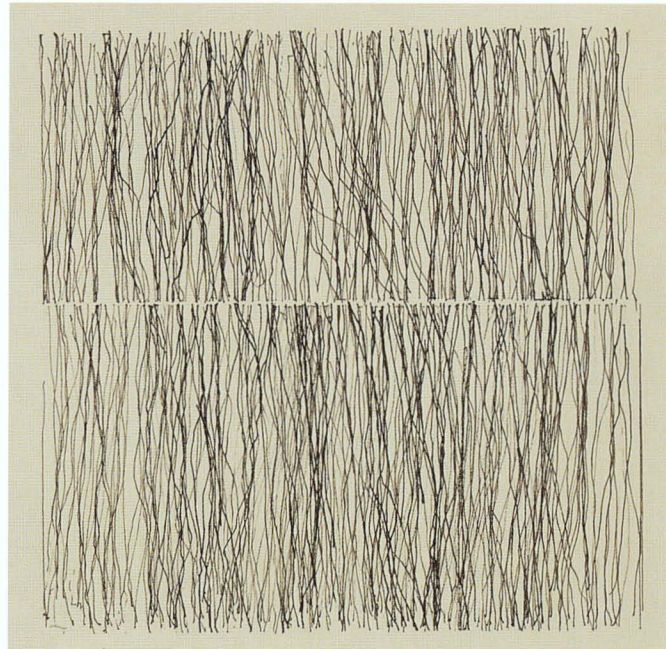


figure 5

**Kocot and Hatton**  
*21 September–29 September 2005, 2005*  
 Ink on rag paper

15½ x 15½ inches (39 x 39 cm)

Private Collection, New York  
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