Atmospheric Perspective

Atmospheric perspective refers to the progressive muting of hues, tonal values, and contrast that occur with increasing distance from the observer. Objects seen up close in the foreground of our visual field typically possess dark, saturated colors and sharply defined contrasts in value. As they move farther away, their colors become lighter and more subdued, and their tonal contrasts more diffuse. In the background, we see mainly shapes of grayed tones and muted hues.

These apparent changes in color and definition result from the diffusing quality of dust particles or pollution in the intervening atmosphere between viewer and object. This haze obscures the colors and distinctness of more distant forms. Since atmospheric perspective represents the combined effect of distance and the quality of the air that separates an object from the observer, it is also referred to as aerial perspective. This term should not be confused with a linear perspective drawn from an aerial point of view.

The graphic technique for rendering atmospheric perspective involves executing scaled variations of color and tone.

To move objects back:

- mute colors
- lighten values
- soften contrast

To bring objects forward:

- saturate colors
- darken values
- sharpen contrast

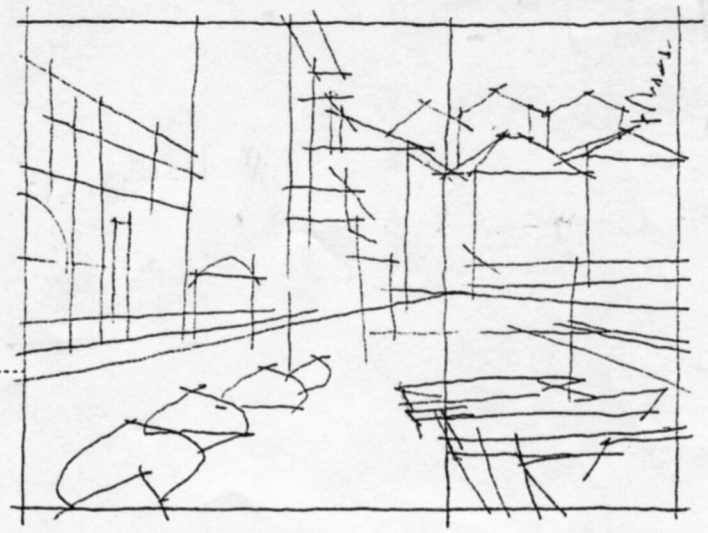
Every drawing evolves over time. Knowing where to begin, how to proceed, and when to stop are crucial to the process of drawing. Whether we are drawing from observation or the imagination, we should develop a strategy for organizing the sequence in which we draw.

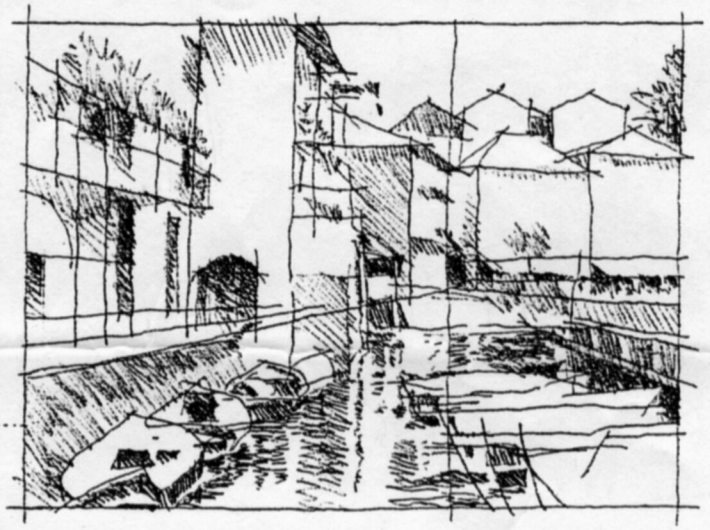
Building up a drawing in a systematic way is an important concept. We should advance by progressive stages and construct a drawing from the ground up. Each successive iteration or cycle through the drawing process should first resolve the relationships between the major parts, then resolve the relationships within each part, and finally readjust the relationships between the major parts once again.

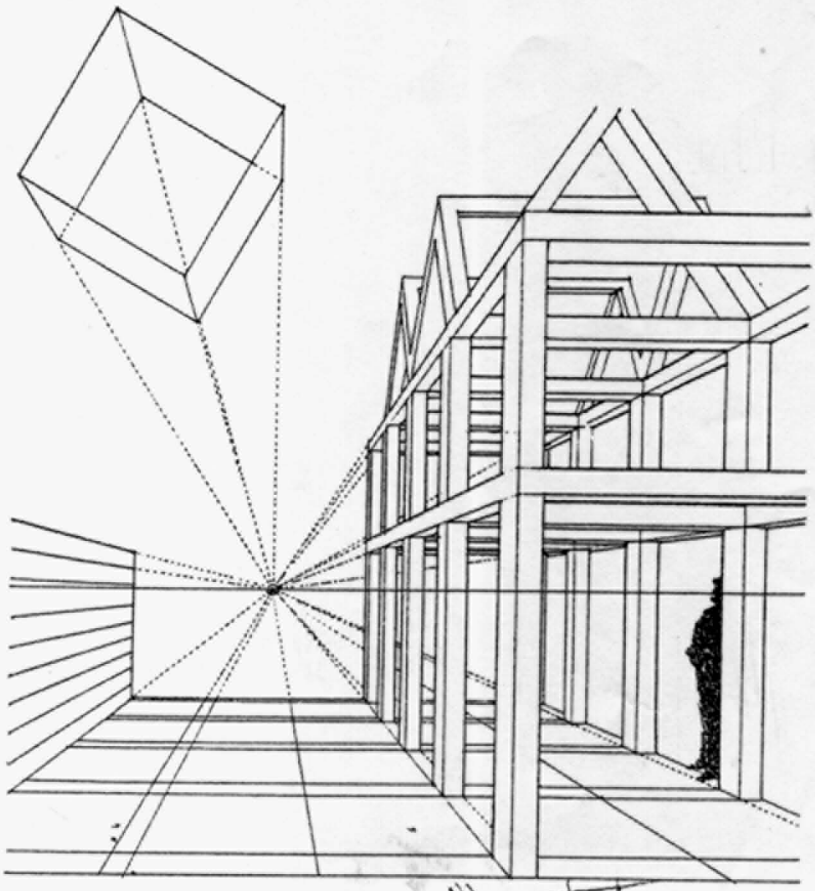
A sequential approach of tediously finishing one part of a drawing before going on to the next can easily result in distorting the relationships between each part and the rest of the composition. Maintaining a consistent level of completeness or incompleteness across the entire surface of a drawing is important to preserving a unified, balanced, and focused image.

The following procedure prescribes a way of seeing as well as drawing. It involves building up a drawing in the following stages:

- Establish composition and structure
- Layer tonal values and textures
- Add significant details







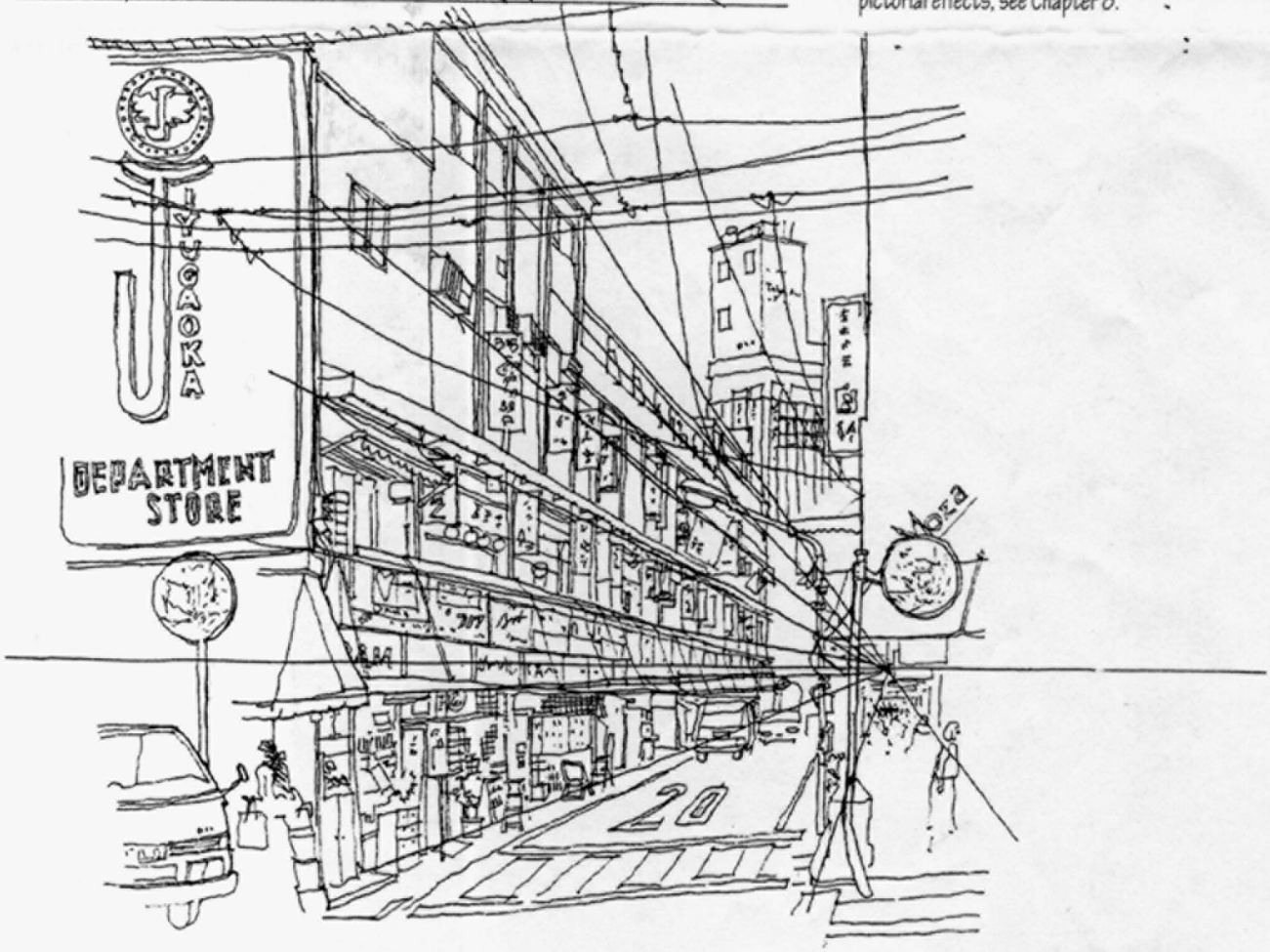
Linear Perspective

Linear perspective properly refers to a specific drawing system derived from perspective projection. As a depth cue, linear perspective relies on its chief pictorial characteristic—the apparent convergence of parallel lines to a common vanishing point as they recede into the distance.

The pictorial effect of convergence is visible in almost any photograph or perspective drawing. There is, of course, the familiar sight of railroad tracks drawing closer together as they extend toward the horizon. It is fairly easy to recognize the parallel but converging lines of walls, windows, railings, or a pavement pattern, all of which can evoke a compelling sense of depth in a drawing.

The laws of linear perspective incorporate the phenomena of reduced size and diminished spacing that give rise to both texture and size perspective. In fact, the convergence of parallel lines in linear perspective often helps regulate the pictorial effects of texture and size perspective.

For a more detailed discussion of this drawing system and its pictorial effects, see Chapter 8.

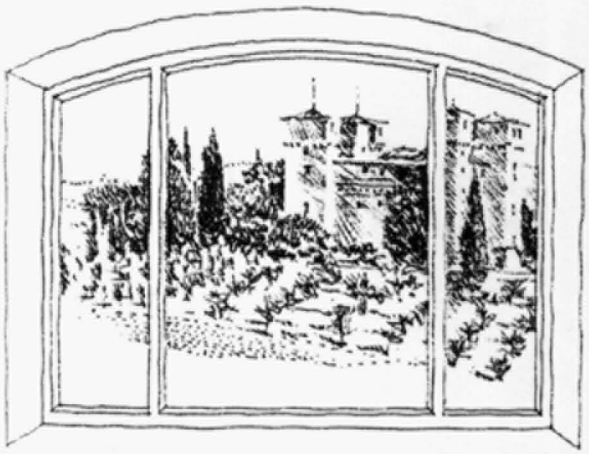


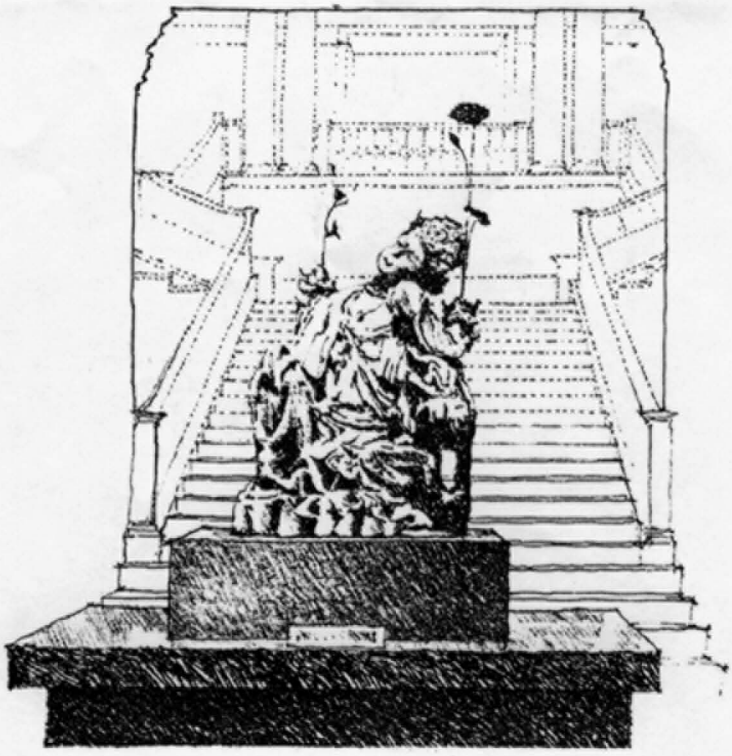
Perspective of Blur

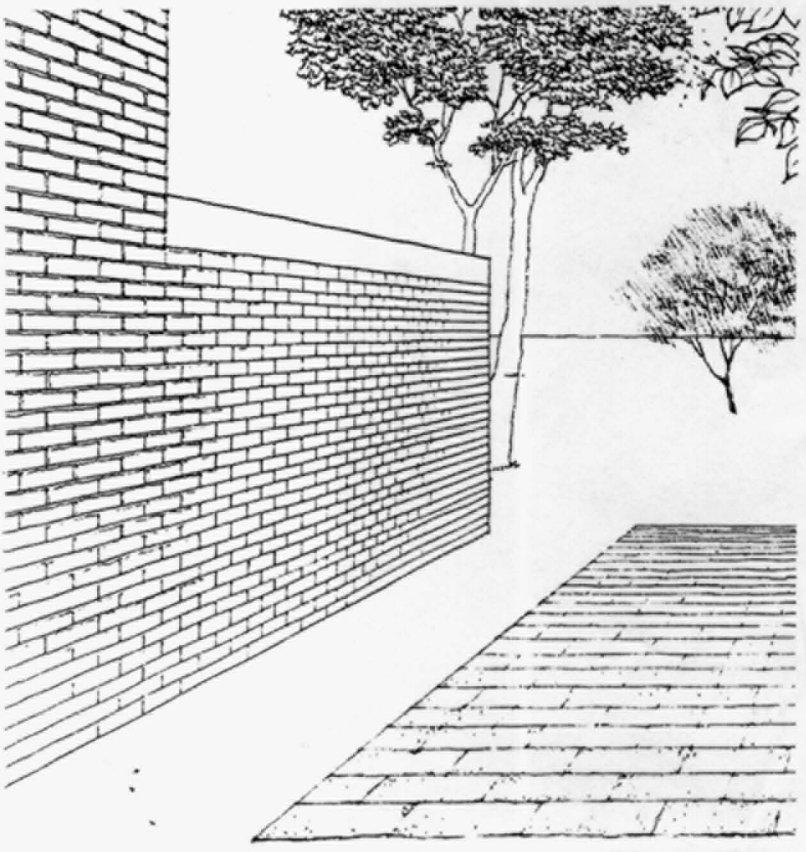
Perspective of blur refers to the indistinct form or outline of objects in any visual plane other than the one on which the eyes are focused. This depth cue reflects the fact that we normally associate clarity of vision with nearness and blurring of outlines with farness.

When we focus on an object within our visual field, there exists a range of distances through which we see sharply defined images. Within this depth of field, we see the edges, contours, and details of objects clearly. Beyond this range, the shape and form of objects appear less distinct and more diffuse. This visual phenomenon is closely related to and often incorporated into the pictorial effects of atmospheric perspective.

Critical to the reading of perspective blur in a drawing is a discernible contrast between the sharply defined edges and contours of foreground elements and the more indistinct shapes that occur in the background. The graphic equivalent of perspective blur is a diminishing or diffusion of the edges and contours of more distant objects. We can use either a lightly drawn line or a broken or dotted line to delineate these edges of shapes and contours of forms that exist beyond the focus of a drawing.







Texture Perspective

Texture perspective refers to the gradual increase in the density of the texture of a surface as it recedes into the distance. The texture gradient that we perceive on a receding surface results from the continuous reduction in size and diminished spacing of the elements that comprise the surface texture.

Consider this example. When we view a brick wall up close, we can discern the individual bricks as well as the thickness of the mortar joints. As the wall surface recedes in perspective, the brick units diminish in size and the mortar joints appear simply as lines. As the wall continues to recede still further, the brick surface becomes denser and consolidates into a tonal value.

The graphic technique for depicting the visual phenomenon of texture perspective involves gradually diminishing the size, proportion, and spacing of the graphic elements used to portray a surface texture or pattern, whether they be dots, lines, or shapes of tonal values. Proceed from identifying units in the foreground to delineating a textured pattern in the middleground, and finally to rendering a tonal value in the background. Strive for smooth transitions and be careful that the resulting tonal values do not negate the principles of atmospheric perspective.