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## Observing the Transformation of Sketches When Rendered in Different Scenarios

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### **Thesis Summary**

The purpose of the project was to see how a single image of my house transformed when I drew multiple iterations of it under different conditions. Each condition was applied to the artist (me); either by limiting my physical state or by creating a specific mental frame that I drew from. An example of a physical limitation would be covering up one of my eyes (Figures 3A, 3B), while an example of a mental frame would be drawing the shapes that I saw without adding any value (Figure 2A). This project consists of 31 sketches of my house. Sketches have been designated with an “A”, “B”, or “C”. “A” and “B” figures were drawn under specific conditions depending on the week, where the “B” condition was set to be antithetical to the “A” condition. “C” figures were drawn from memory with no other applied conditions apart from a one-hour time limit. As expected, the greatest differences between the drawings occurred when a greater constraint was placed on the artist, such as when I drew using three different colored markers (Figures 5A, 5B) or when I drew with my feet (Figures 9A, 9B). However, most of the drawings shared similarities between each other that were not present in the reference photo. This lends credence to the idea that the drawings in tandem work as a “comic” derived from the ideas of Scott McCloud and Nick Sousanis. Many of these similarities were also found in the “C” drawings, which were drawn without the aid of the reference photo or any of the other drawings. This can be explained by the works of Biederman and Kragel et al.: which say that humans use emotional and simplified shape schemas to process complex visual information. In essence, due to the time constraints, I drew details in the house based on how I recognized shapes and from

preestablished emotions and schemas associated with my house, instead of purely from the visual details in the reference photo.

### **Personal Statement**

I developed this project while in quarantine and completed it during the pandemic in 2020 and 2021. Starting in March of 2020, I began using art to express my thoughts and feelings that were being pressured by my circumstance (see Appendix A). Before this, I had used art (I am mostly self taught) mostly to visualize an idea or to explore a specific subject matter. As an extension of this, I chose to explore my house as a singular subject matter, but I chose to make conditions that altered myself as the artist to make differences in the subject. As the project progressed, the repeated image of the house and its distortions began-intentionally or unintentionally-to represent a somewhat universal experience during the pandemic, to myself and to other viewers.

### **Introduction**

In this project, I strived to render my house as realistically as possible in order to clearly picture the differences resulting from the applied conditions. The three major constraints for drawing realistically in this project are the amount of time spent drawing, the skill of the artist, and the external factors affecting the artist. With a few exceptions, the drawings were given a one-hour time limit, which served as a feasible amount of time to finish a drawing of the house, while also providing a strong and consistent constraint for rendering it. My skills as an artist, particularly with pen and markers, are not professional but are well practiced, so it was unlikely that my skills would significantly improve or change throughout the completion of all 31 drawings. My artistic skill was also good enough to provide a coherent representation of the house in every

drawing (with Figures 5A, 5B, 9A, 9B being possible exceptions). Therefore, assuming that my mental and physical state beforehand didn't significantly affect any drawings, the differences between each iteration would come through the physical and mental interaction with the limits of each condition.

However, taken together the images can fit the McCloud definition of a comic: "juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer" (1993, p. 9) Sousanis furthered this idea by contemplating the intersection between an artwork, (and specifically comics) the idea behind the art, the physical production of art, the artist, and the viewer (2015). Using this perspective, each subsequent drawing was changed, through small conscious and unconscious decisions I made, after viewing and rendering each previous sketch. If this were true, there would be visible differences between the drawings and the reference picture as well as from the other images in the set unrelated to the self-applied conditions.

The one-hour time constraint was implemented to give me ample time to draw my house, while also producing enough time pressure to make me draw quickly and continuously during the allotted time. This caused me to become more susceptible to drawing from mental schemas than if I were allowed time to stop and observe my reference before continuing and correcting my drawings. Biederman's theory of recognition-by-components explains that humans perceive and conceptualize objects by piecing together simplified and generalized shapes and edges (1987). Without a specified time limit, an artist would be able to process smaller areas of a reference that they recognize the components of. Under a time limit, much larger reference areas are processed the same way, most likely causing the drawing to be simplified or at least differ from the reference in some greater way. The research of Kragel et al. also found evidence that

the human visual system is connected to emotional schemas (2019). Since I drew a house, my house in particular, my visual processing of the reference and subsequent drawings were affected by my emotions and preconceptions related to houses and my house specifically. Then the resulting difference between my drawings and the reference photo would theoretically become even more apparent in the memory “C” drawings.

### **Figure Methodology**

The project consists of 31 individually drawn houses; the first was drawn in person using the house as reference, 23 of which were drawn using the same reference photo of the house, and 7 were drawn from memory of the same reference photo. All of the figures were drawn on 5.5” by 8.5”, white, acid free sketchbook paper, and were contained in a single sketchbook. All of the marks were made using Tombow brush pens, including red and blue colored pens in Figures 5A and 5B. Every figure was drawn within a set time frame (30 minutes, 1 hour, or 2 hours). With the exception of Figure 1A, all of the figures were drawn within the same room, during the afternoon, with little or no background noise. Figures labeled “A” and “B” were each drawn under specific conditions, with each number denoting the week, so that any project nA would be drawn within the same week as project nB. I determined the concept for each condition the week prior, where the “B” figure would be the opposite of the “A” figure. Figures labeled “C” were each drawn within one hour without the aid of a reference, and the number designation was used to denote which week the figure was drawn, no further conditions were used.

**Reference Photo:****A+B Figures****1A, 1B**

Figure 1A: Drawn in one hour (4:30-5:30pm) from the yard, in the same position that the reference photo was taken.  
10/19/2020



Figure 1B: Drawn in one hour (4:15-5:15pm), using the reference photo. 10/20/2020

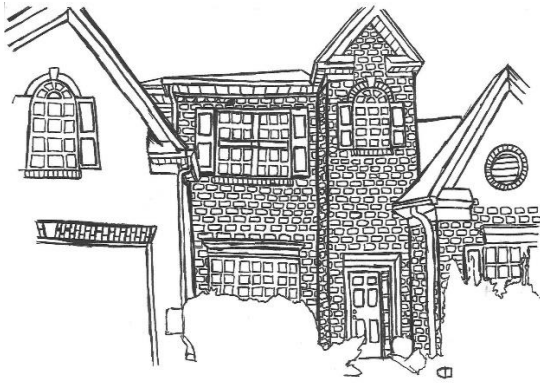
**2A, 2B**

Figure 2A: Drawn in one hour (3:30-4:30pm), using the reference photo. Rendered with attention to shape without any value. 10/26/2020



Figure 2B: Drawn in one hour (3:30-4:30pm), using the reference photo. Rendered with attention to value without focusing on shape. 10/27/2020

**3A, 3B**

Figure 3A: Drawn in one hour (5:15-6:15pm), using the reference photo. Rendered while the left eye was covered with a blindfold. 11/2/2020



Figure 3B: Drawn in one hour (5:00-6:00pm), using the reference photo. Rendered while the right eye was covered with a blindfold. 11/3/2020

**4A, 4B**

Figure 4A: Drawn in one hour (4:45-5:45pm), using the reference photo. Rendered from above leaning over a chair while the notebook was placed on the ground. 11/9/2020



Figure 4B: Drawn in one hour (6:30-7:30pm), using the reference photo. Rendered from below on the ground while the notebook was held up under a bench. 11/10/2020

**5A, 5B**

Figure 5A: Drawn in one hour (5:00-6:00pm), using the reference photo. Rendered with three pens; one black, one red, one blue; with attention paid to the blue pen. 11/16/2020

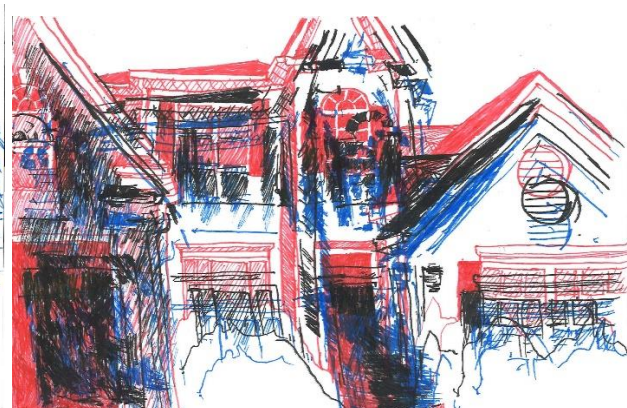


Figure 5B: Drawn in one hour (4:45-5:45pm), using the reference photo. Rendered with three pens; one black, one red, one blue; with attention paid to the red pen. 11/17/2020

**6A, 6B**

Figure 6A: Drawn in one hour (5:30-6:30pm), using the reference photo. Rendered with attention to exterior outlines, before outlining the interior shapes and details. 11/23/2020

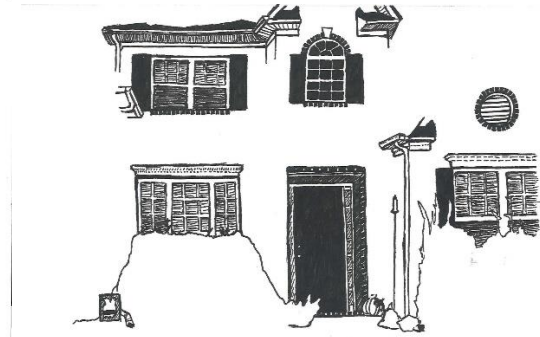


Figure 6B: Drawn in one hour (5:30-6:30pm), using the reference photo. Rendered with attention to interior shapes and details, before making any outlines. 11/24/2020

**7A, 7B**

Figure 7A: Drawn in one hour (4:45-5:45pm), using the reference photo. Rendered after the notebook was rotated 90 degrees clockwise. 11/30/2020



Figure 7B: Drawn in one hour (4:30-5:30pm), using the reference photo. Rendered after the notebook was rotated 90 degrees counterclockwise. 12/1/2020

**8A, 8B**

Figure 8A: Drawn in 30 minutes (6:25-6:55pm), using the reference photo. 1/4/2021



Figure 8B: Drawn in two hours (3:20-5:20pm), using the reference photo. 1/6/2021

**9A, 9B**

Figure 9A: Drawn in 30 minutes (4:45-5:15pm), using the reference photo. Rendered with the right foot. 1/12/2021



Figure 9B: Drawn in 30 minutes (6:00-6:30pm), using the reference photo. Rendered with the left foot. 1/13/2020

**10A, 10B**

Figure 10A: Drawn in one hour (2:45-3:45pm), using the reference photo. Rendered from the right side of the page to the left side. 1/19/2021



Figure 10B: Drawn in one hour (5:00-6:00pm), using the reference photo. Rendered from the left side of the page to the right side. 1/20/2021

**11A, 11B**

Figure 11A: Drawn in 30 minutes (2:00-2:30pm), using the reference photo. Rendered within a 3.56''x6.57'' space (half the area of the page) in the upper right-hand corner. 1/24/2021



Figure 11B: Drawn in 30 minutes (2:00-2:30pm), using the reference photo. Rendered within a 3.56''x6.57'' space (half the area of the page) in the upper left-hand corner. 1/25/2021

**12A, 12B**

Figure 12A: Drawn in one hour (3:30-4:30pm), using the reference photo. Rendered from the top of the page to the bottom of the page. 2/1/2021

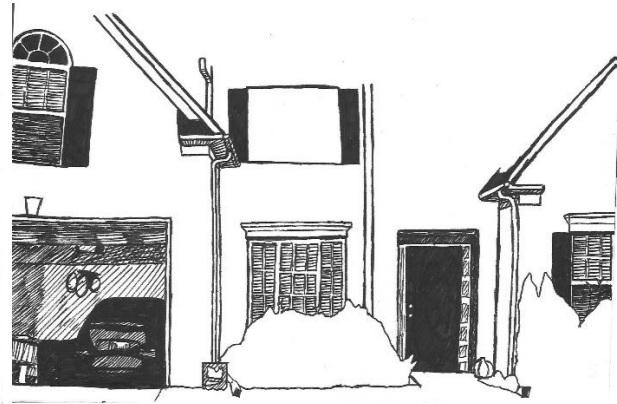


Figure 12B: Drawn in one hour (4:15-5:15pm), using the reference photo. Rendered from the bottom of the page to the top of the page. 2/3/2021

**C Figures****4C**

Figure 4C: Drawn in one hour (5:00-6:00pm), without using a reference. 11/13/2020

5C



Figure 5C: Drawn in one hour (5:15-6:15pm), without using a reference. 11/20/2020

6C



Figure 6C: Drawn in one hour (5:15-6:15pm), without using a reference. 11/27/2020

9C



Figure 9C: Drawn in one hour (12:30-1:30pm), without using a reference. 1/15/2021

**10C**

Figure 10C: Drawn in one hour (3:30-4:30pm), without using a reference.  
1/22/2021

**11C**

Figure 11C: Drawn in one hour (1:30-2:30pm), without using a reference.  
1/29/2020

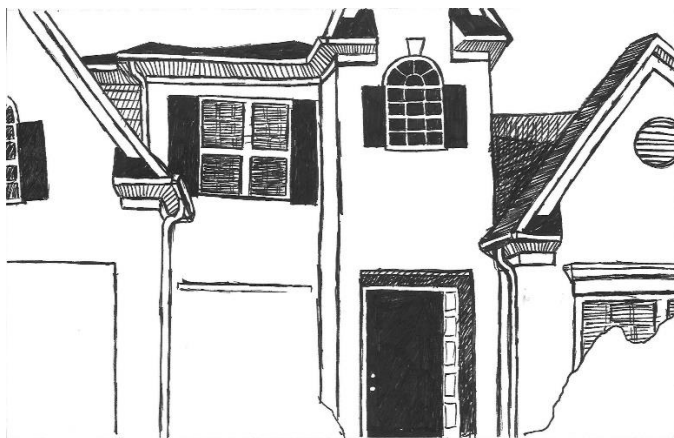
**12C**

Figure 12C: Drawn in one hour (3:00-4:00pm), without using a reference. 2/13/2021

### Conclusion

Unsurprisingly, the greatest differences between the images appeared when the drawing conditions were most different (such as 5A, 5B, 9A, 9B) from Figure 1B (which serves as the control image). However, the commonalities between each of the images, that differed from the reference photograph, show that some of the house's details were rendered at the conscious or unconscious discretion of the artist without consulting the physical reference. The most apparent of these copied inconsistencies with the reference was the perspective. The photograph was taken from a position below the horizon line, so the actual image of the house resembles a three-point perspective drawing, where all of the lines take a slight angle to converge to the top center of the page. In contrast, each of the images (with the exception of Figures 10B and 12B) resemble a two-point perspective drawing, where the lines are either perpendicular or parallel to the edges of the page. The perspective of these images mimics the style of the first drawing (1A) more than the perspective of the photograph.

Using Biederman's recognition-by-components (RBC) theory of how humans recognize objects, I can conclude that my brain recognized the shapes and edges in the reference and simplified them to right angles wherever possible within the time limit. This is corroborated by the "C" drawings, which retained the right angles and shapes, even when they did not have the proper proportions apparent in the "A" and "B" drawings. Furthermore, for concepts 10 and 12, I rendered the house from one edge of the page to the other, and many angles from the reference were more properly represented in these. This is because my attention was more focused on one side of the house at a time, as opposed to the shapes as a whole.

When the work of Kragel et al. is used as a lens, the right angles could be seen as a projection of stability. Houses are a commodified form of shelter, which is associated

emotionally as something stable and solid in the human psyche. Therefore, under the time limits, I was more likely to draw details perfectly horizontal or vertical even when they were angled in the reference. From this approach, the two-point perspective style could also have arisen from my subconscious idea of how a house should be drawn, and this idea of a house was further cemented with each additional drawing.

In the work of Vija Celmins, she focused on replicating minute natural details, where she takes the amount of time necessary to finish each detail. Therefore, instead of finishing an artwork within a set amount of time, she finished when all of the details in her frame of reference had been rendered, making many of her pieces look identical to their references (2003). Using her logic, I would have rendered small details as accurately as possible until my time ran out and the house would have looked far from finished. However instead I chose to render my house in a more iconic form so that I could finish most of the major details in one hour. Then, even when I got to concepts 10 and 12, where I was supposed to draw all of the details from one side to the other, I increased my drawing speed to match the amount I had drawn in my previous pieces, leaving many details on the opposite side of the page messy or warped. In the one drawing where I took two hours, Figure 8B, I corrected many proportion issues found in many of the other drawings and added value; but I still kept to my trend of limiting non right angles and working from the house as a whole.

Using McCloud and Sousanis' ideas about art made in sequence, the images were affected by the previous drawings in the series and by decisions that I made while drawing. When thinking of each image as a work of art or a piece in a series rather than a drawn recording of a photograph, I felt a certain obligation to draw my house in its totality rather than rendering perfectly representative details. To fit McCloud's definition of a comic, the series must "convey

information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer” (1993, p. 9). For me, the standard for conveying information was to produce as realistic of a rendering as possible under the time limit and other conditions. For this objective, I would say that I failed in many ways: I didn’t appropriate all of the angles in the reference, I didn’t detail any of the bricks, front yard, or garage in a majority of the drawings, and I consciously chose to portray many details iconically instead of relying on the reference photo. However, I think that the series succeeded at producing an aesthetic response in both me and others who have viewed the project. Other viewers enjoyed the most unusual figures-5A, 5B, 9A, 9B-which resulted from conditions that limited my ability to realistically render the house. During the project, I experienced a lot of burnout-especially after 7B-but I enjoyed the finished project of 8B from its artistic value alone. I also believe as a whole that the project speaks to the experience of being trapped during the pandemic by rendering the same house over and over again, visually evoking a progression of time.

### References

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## Appendix A

### The Birth of Athena

I drew this piece in March of 2020 and it was the first work of art that I made specifically because of the pandemic. This work is very abstract and symbolizes the emotional toll of remaining in my own head. It seems to heavily contrast the bland and experimental format of the project, but it influenced me to create the project in the first place and especially led me to consider using the house I was quarantined in as the repetitive subject matter.



## Appendix B

### The House in the Birdcage

I made this piece in March of 2021 for my Intermediate Drawing Class as a direct response to the project. I combined the changed and fundamental drawing of my house (rightside up and upside down) and further imprisoned it within a symbolic birdcage of blood with monstrous prisoners. I used the artistic language that the house represented throughout the project and forcefully altered its surroundings as a further project.

