

Drawing a Complete Course

Lucy Davidson Rosenfeld



Contents

Introduction	v
Chapter I	1
<i>Bold and Fine, Wet and Dry: Trying Out Drawing Media</i>	
Chapter II	25
<i>From Boxes to Houses: Learning How to See</i>	
Chapter III	39
<i>Over the Mountains and Through the Trees: Drawing Landscape</i>	
Chapter IV	57
<i>Trees: Different Ways of Seeing the Same Thing</i>	
Chapter V	77
<i>Apples, Bottles, and Guitars: Drawing Still Life</i>	
Chapter VI	93
<i>People: Drawing the Human Figure</i>	
Chapter VII	121
<i>Composition: How to Design a Picture</i>	
Chapter VIII	145
<i>Signs and Symbols: What Does the Drawing Mean?</i>	
Chapter IX	159
<i>Bringing You a Message: Drawings That Tell a Story</i>	
Chapter X	173
<i>What You See—And What You Imagine</i>	
Master Drawing List	187

Introduction

A word to students: This is a drawing course designed specifically for high-school students. It is a “hands-on” course in how to draw and how to appreciate drawings. Its main purpose is to open up the world of drawing to those of you who long ago decided you couldn’t draw, and to you who already love it. Drawing is fun, no matter how good or skillful you are, and it *can* be taught. The exercises in this book are designed to teach basic concepts: space, composition, media, and design. They will lead you step by step into clear sight and expression. You will have the chance to try everything from landscape perspective to political art, from still life to seascapes, from abstractions to outdoor sketching.

There are over 110 master drawings included. They are not here to be copied, but to show you some of the many ways different artists have drawn the same subjects, and to make you aware of the world of art. There are projects and discussion questions for classes to do together, but mainly this is a book for each of you to enjoy. Art is an individual activity and no two drawings should look just alike. Use your imagination and express your own personality as you follow the course.

A word about the illustrations: the diagrams are there to guide you, not to imitate. If your picture comes out looking entirely different from the diagram and yet you have carefully followed instructions, all the better! Study the master drawings at the end of each chapter carefully. These artists probably saw much the same world around them but chose to draw what they saw in different styles and with different aims. You don’t have to like them all equally, but you should try to understand the artists’ aims.

You should experiment with media as much as possible. You will probably find certain media more fun, or easier to use, but try them all! Keep in mind that the master drawings include the largest possible variety of media, from pen and ink to pastel, from lithograph or prints to charcoal. (While some prints are technically not considered drawings, they are nevertheless done with line. Since this is a book about line, they are included too.) Have fun!

A word to teachers: This course should be treated as a series of experiments by your students. Some of them may find it difficult to work with a particular medium because it is too delicate, and others may be frightened of bold expression. Encourage them to try all of the media, but if they are unable to master a particular exercise, allow them to change after several tries. Frustration at this early stage of learning can defeat the purpose of the course. (Larger paper often helps in such cases.) It is essential that you

encourage enthusiasm and free expression and good discussion of the drawings that end each chapter. The object is not only to develop “artists” but also to make an appreciative and knowledgeable art audience. We hope the arrangement of these chapters, the variety of exercises and approaches, and the inspiration of the brilliant master drawings will bring your students a whole new world of enjoyment.

Chapter IV

Trees: Different Ways of Seeing the Same Thing

Everyone knows how to make a drawing of something you'd recognize as a tree. Often you see a child's version of a tree: a trunk with a round ball on top. A tree without leaves is simplified as a letter "Y" with an extra branch sometimes. But few trees actually look like these simplified shapes. If you want to draw a tree as it really looks, you have to begin by *seeing* it as it really is. A leafy tree is seldom perfectly round, nor perfectly *symmetrical* (equally balanced), and what is often drawn as a straight trunk is usually a knobby irregular shape. Branches do not match exactly, with one opposite the next. In this chapter we'll try some ways of drawing trees so that you can express the different shapes and forms and details, rather than just a "symbolic" tree that could be any tree, anywhere.

Artists have different aims in drawing any natural form, including trees. One artist may want to capture its *form* (or three-dimensional shape), while another might want to show the details of the leaves and the patterns they make. A third artist may be interested in the idea of trees in a general sense, showing patterns of light and shadow, and simplifying the details to the most basic shapes and lines. Another might want as realistic a representation as possible. Each artist has a particular way of *seeing* the tree, and the style of his or her drawing reflects different aims. There is no single "right" way to draw from nature because you are not a camera. You must simplify in some way what you see, and what you choose to put into your drawing.

Choose a tree with leaves to draw (not an evergreen). If you can see a full leafy tree from your window, far enough away so that you can see all of it, use it as your model. If not, get a good photo of a leafy tree. If you can make outdoor sketching trips, that's even better.

EXERCISE 1 The Simplest Tree: An Outline

What you will need: media of your choice.

The simplest way to draw anything is to make its outline.

Look at your tree carefully. What is its outermost shape? How large are the leafy areas in relation to the trunk? Draw the outermost line and don't include any details. Add a line showing the ground. This drawing will be recognizable as a tree, but what does it lack? Two major things are missing: it has no three-dimensional form, and it has no detail (leaves, branches, etc.) so it looks like a flat cutout. Nevertheless, it says "tree" in a direct, childlike way.

EXERCISE 2 The Symbol of Tree, with Leaves

What you will need: black marker and white or colored paper.

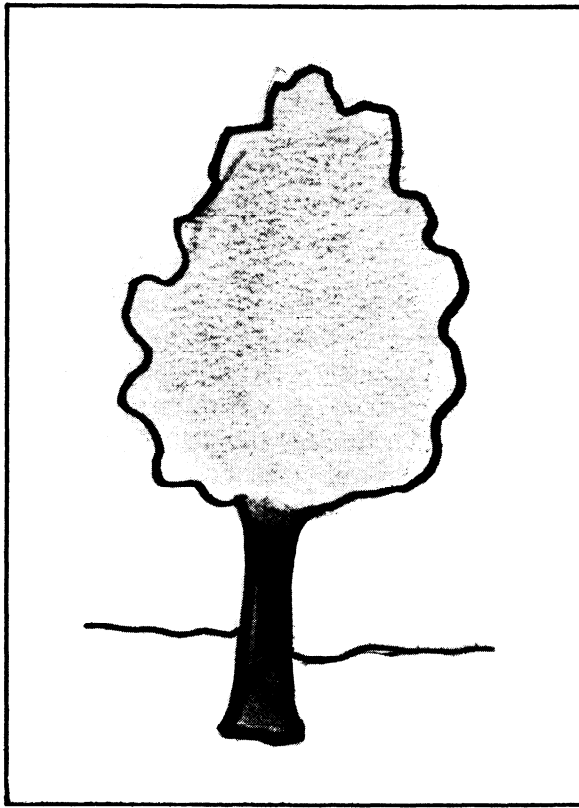
A symbol is a sign that brings you a message. A tree symbol "says" tree, without being a particular tree. If you make an outline as in Exercise 1, and add some branches and leaves, will it be a specific tree? Try it. Working from memory, make a simple black tree trunk and add some branches. (Make your drawing large enough to fill the space of your paper.)

Add leaves on all the branches, wherever you can fit them. Obviously, these leaves are not exactly where the leaves would be nor are there enough of them to be realistic. The average tree has thousands of leaves. Nor could you see the shape of each leaf fully. Your drawing gives you the *idea* of a tree, however, and anyone can recognize what it is. This is the style many *primitive* (untaught) artists have used, and the results are often decorative and charming, rather than realistic.

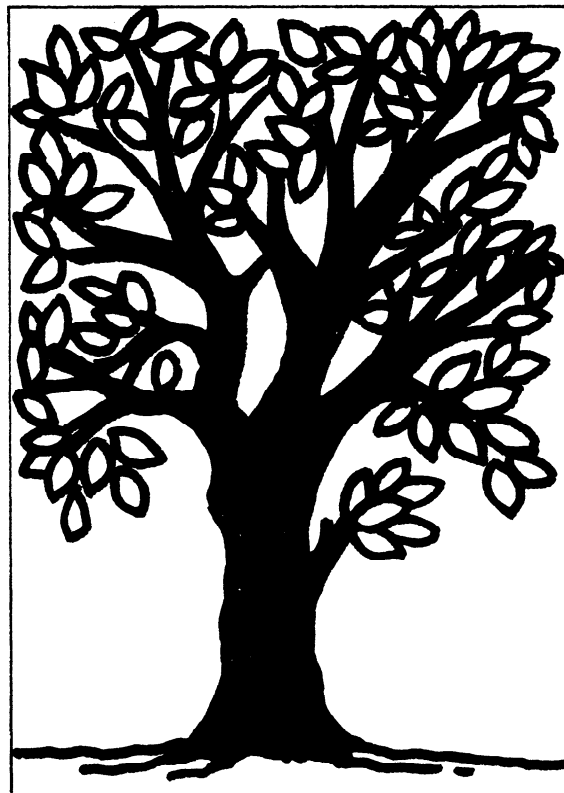
EXERCISE 3 Detailed, Fine-point Tree

What you will need: pen or sharp pointed pencil and white paper, not newsprint.

This time try to draw the tree in Exercise 1 more carefully. Begin by making the trunk and the major branches, being sure of *directions*, that is, the "lean" of the trunk and each branch. Trees generally do not grow straight up, and their branches usually curve. The accurate drawing of nature is the most common aim of most people who draw, and you should *look* at the tree over and over again. Don't try to "fix" it in your mind, and then spend a lot of time drawing from memory. Your eyes should constantly turn to the tree to see if you are getting an accurate picture. (Some artists work with their eyes entirely on their subject, seldom looking at the drawing at all. Try it!)



Ex. 1: Outline



Ex. 2: Symbol of tree

After you have the trunk and the branches placed, lightly sketch in the overall areas of leaves. You will have to simplify what you see. To do this, squint your eyes at the tree, eliminating most of the detail except the strongest branches. Once you have the overall shape and the important lines, use the ornamental line of your fine point to suggest smaller details, such as twigs and leaves, where you see them most clearly. Work within your network of branches.

Remember, the amount of small detail you use should be less important than the basic angles, lines, and shapes of the tree. Of course, you know your drawing won't include *every* twig, and every leaf, and will therefore not be totally accurate. But that is the artist's job: to filter through the details of nature to make a personal choice of what will make a good drawing.

EXERCISE 4 The Leafy Tree Again

What you will need: media of your choice, including mixed (or combined) media.

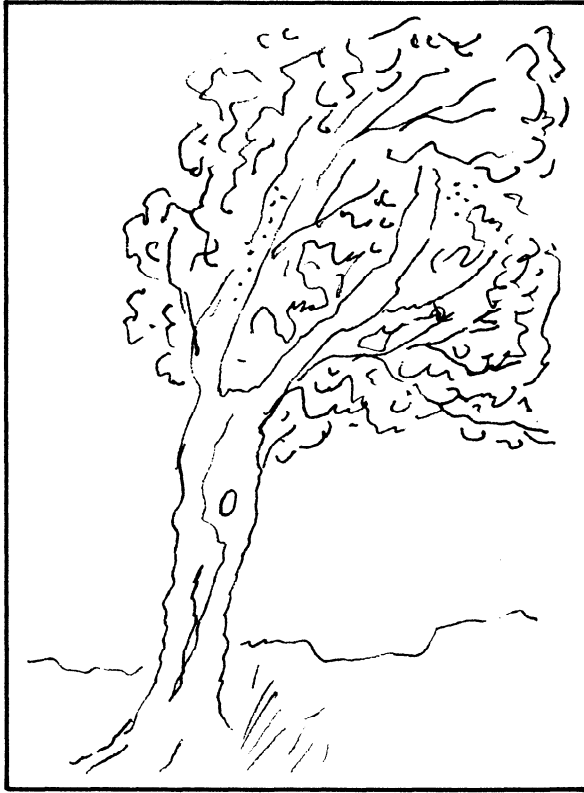
Another way to be more "specific" is to focus on one part of the tree, which you can draw with more realistic detail than if you try to make the whole tree. In Exercise 3 you should have been able to get the "lean" of the tree and its branches, but you couldn't include the leaves as they really look, nor each branch and twig. If you focus this time on one or two near areas of the tree, drawing them as accurately as possible, you can *suggest* that the rest looks the same.

In other words, choose a few of the closest branches. Catch the way the leaves look individually and how they are attached to the branch. Be careful to get the drooping or leaning characteristics of these "up-close" branches. Then sketch lightly the rest of the tree behind your detailed areas. This is one more way to *see* something complicated and to simplify it enough to make a picture of it.

EXERCISE 5 The Form of Trees

What you will need: charcoal and newsprint pad.

An entirely different way of simplifying what you see is to look for its three-dimensional form. Trees, like houses, have sides and backs, width and depth. Finding those dimensions is



Ex. 3: Detailed, fine-pointed tree



Ex. 4: The leafy tree again

not hard once you learn to see the tree as a form, or collection of forms. In the case of a pine tree, that form is like a three-dimensional triangle, or cone-shape. In many leafy trees, the form is rounded, spherical.

For this exercise, draw from memory. Make several large shapes with the side of your charcoal. These should be big, rounded or triangular, and they should suggest the *sculptural* form of leafy trees. Add trunks. Blacken the sides of each large form to help indicate roundness. This exercise should show you a different way to look at nature—in terms of form rather than detail.

EXERCISE 6 The Form of a Single Tree

What you will need: charcoal and newsprint pad.

Look again at the tree you drew in the first exercises. This time look for its sculptural form—imagine that you are going to make a statue of it. Look for its three-dimensional shapes. Begin with the trunk. It is probably a tall cylinder shape. Try to find the forms in the leafy clumps that make up the tree's shape, as though they were large lumps of clay. Use the side of your charcoal to show shadows or roundness of form.

Compare your drawing with Exercise 1; notice how your latest drawing has a sculptural form compared to the flat two-dimensional quality of your first. While it lacks the detail of Exercise 2 or 3, it gives you a more basic picture of the form of that tree, so that if you were to sculpt it you would know its basic dimensions.

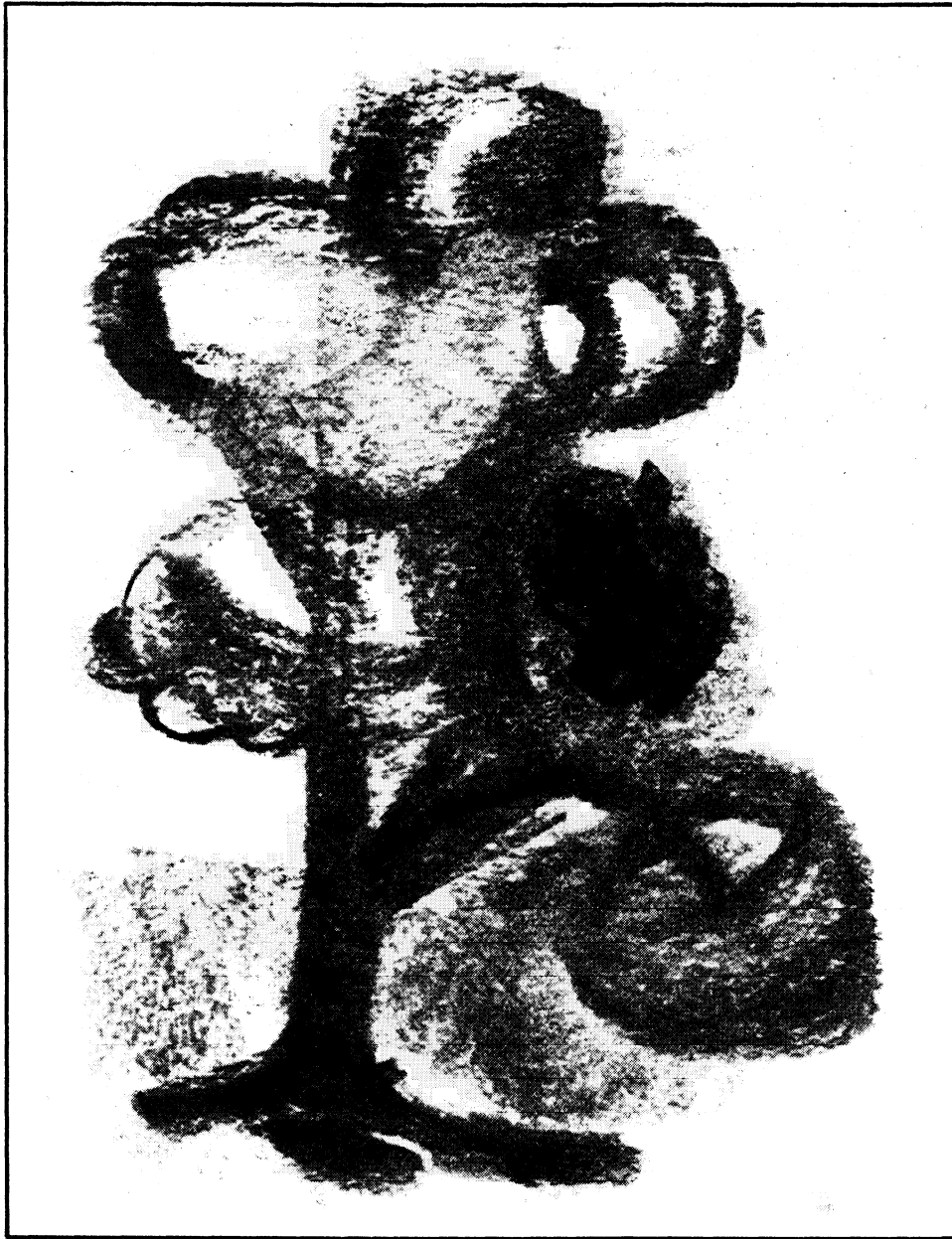
EXERCISE 7 Combining Techniques

What you will need: media of your choice.

Using the ideas of all of these exercises, draw your tree again so that it has form, detail, and beauty of line. You can use a combination of media, but you might want to begin drawing in charcoal or erasable pencil until you have the proportions right. Now experiment with different media to express the texture, shapes, characteristics, etc. of the tree. This is a “free” exercise, and it can be done many times or only once, so long as it combines both the techniques and ideas you've been working on. This is a good opportunity to try new combinations of media.



Ex. 5: The form of trees



Ex. 6: The form of a single tree



Ex. 7: The form of trees



Ex. 8: Idea of a tree

EXERCISE 8 The Idea of a Tree

What you will need: media of your choice.

Some contemporary artists have chosen to simplify nature instead of trying to show all of its details. As we saw in Exercise 2, primitive artists worked with the “idea” of a tree, rather than drawing a specific oak or elm. Modern artists have also turned to a similar idea, reducing the complex to its simplest terms. If you take a particular tree and reduce it to its most basic lines (perhaps five or six of them), you can suggest a tree without detail. Sometimes one leaf will indicate that there are thousands of leaves. This reduction of nature to its “minimal” form is worth trying too.

Look once again at your tree and choose five or six important lines. Make them boldly. Add a leaf or two. If you can see the tree in these simple terms, perhaps you can make an entire drawing of a forest the same way. Remember, these are all good ways to draw nature, each expressing the different personality or aims of the artist.

OPTIONAL

This is a good time for the first showing of your drawings. Photograph the tree you have used as a model (or use the photo that was your model). Mount it on a large poster board, and then present this series of completed exercises to show the different ways of looking at, and representing, a tree.

FOR DISCUSSION

The following drawings by master artists should give you an idea of the wide variety of their aims and objectives. Try to identify the media and the kind of line used (detailed and ornamental, hazy and deliberately unclear, sculptural, very simplified, etc.). Discuss which drawings have the most feeling of natural conditions like wind, sunlight and shadows, and which show the most interesting form in a more abstract sense. Which are the most realistic?

Master Drawings

31. *Elms in Old Hall Park* by John Constable

How did this artist combine an interest in form and detail?

32. *Cardinal Climber* by an anonymous artist from India

How did the artist's choice of media make this drawing realistic? What are some of the things you know about this particular plant from the drawing?

33. *Landscape* by Jean-Baptiste Corot

Is this drawing realistic? Is there as much detail? Is there more or less "personal expression" in this drawing?

34. *Trees Along the Seine* by Georges Seurat

What did this artist consider the most important part of the trees? How has he simplified nature?

35. *The Tree of Confession* by an anonymous English artist

Why could you call this a "symbolic" tree? Do you think the artist made this drawing "from" nature? Did he include all of the leaves and branches?

36. *Apple Tree* by Piet Mondrian

How has this 20th-century artist used nature? Is this a particular tree, or an apple tree "in general"? What do you think was the artist's objective?

37. *Fishing in the Melting Mountain* by Tani Bucho

How did this Japanese artist use media to express form?

38. *Cypress Avenue at Villa D'Este* by Jean Honoré Fragonard

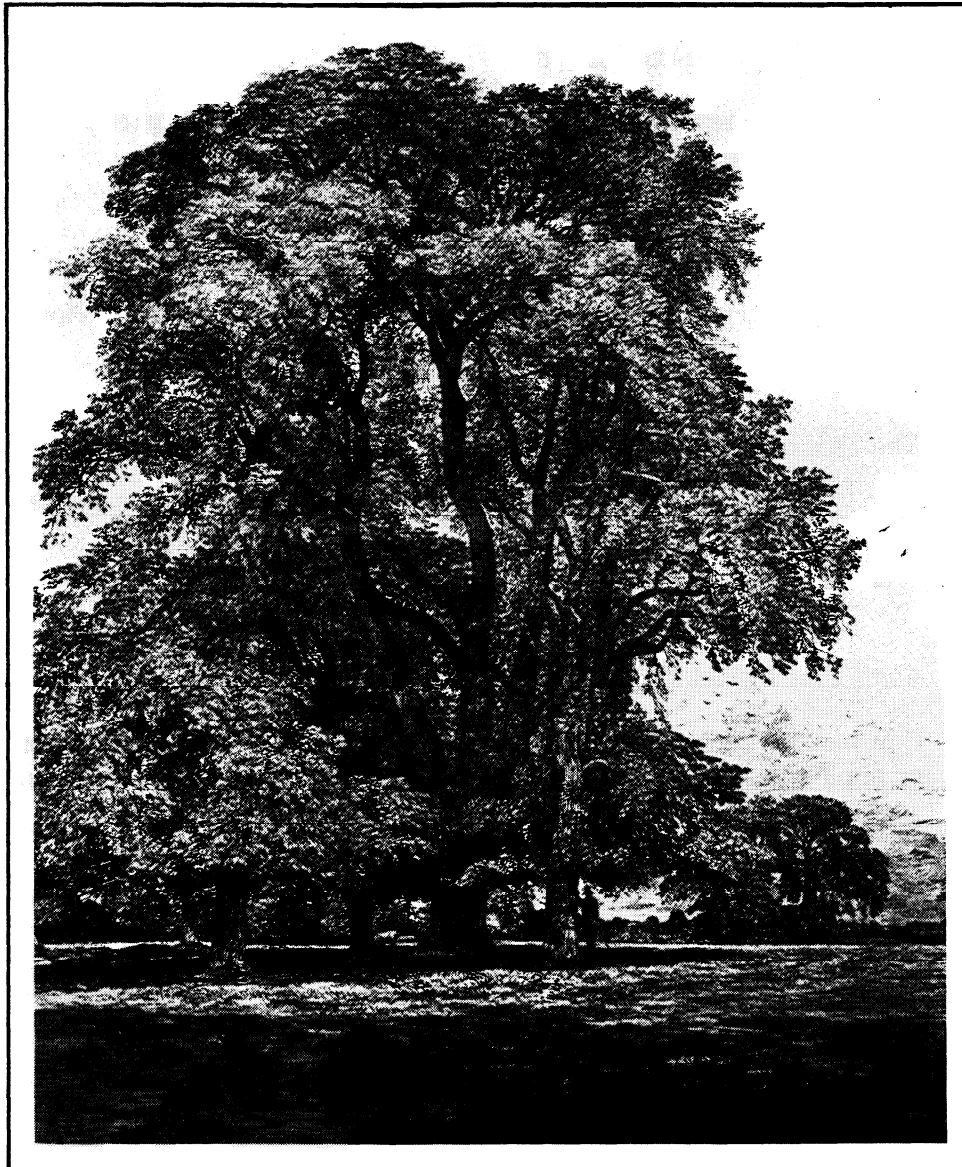
Is this artist more interested in the specific leaves and branches or in the overall shape of the trees? How has the use of shadow helped him show the dimensions?

39. *Cypresses* by Vincent van Gogh

What do you think was most interesting to this artist about these trees? Was it their form or the lines of their trunks and branches or the pattern made by the leaves?

40. *Sunrise II* by Arthur Dove

How is the 20th century interest in form, rather than realism, shown in this drawing? How does the artist use light and shadow?



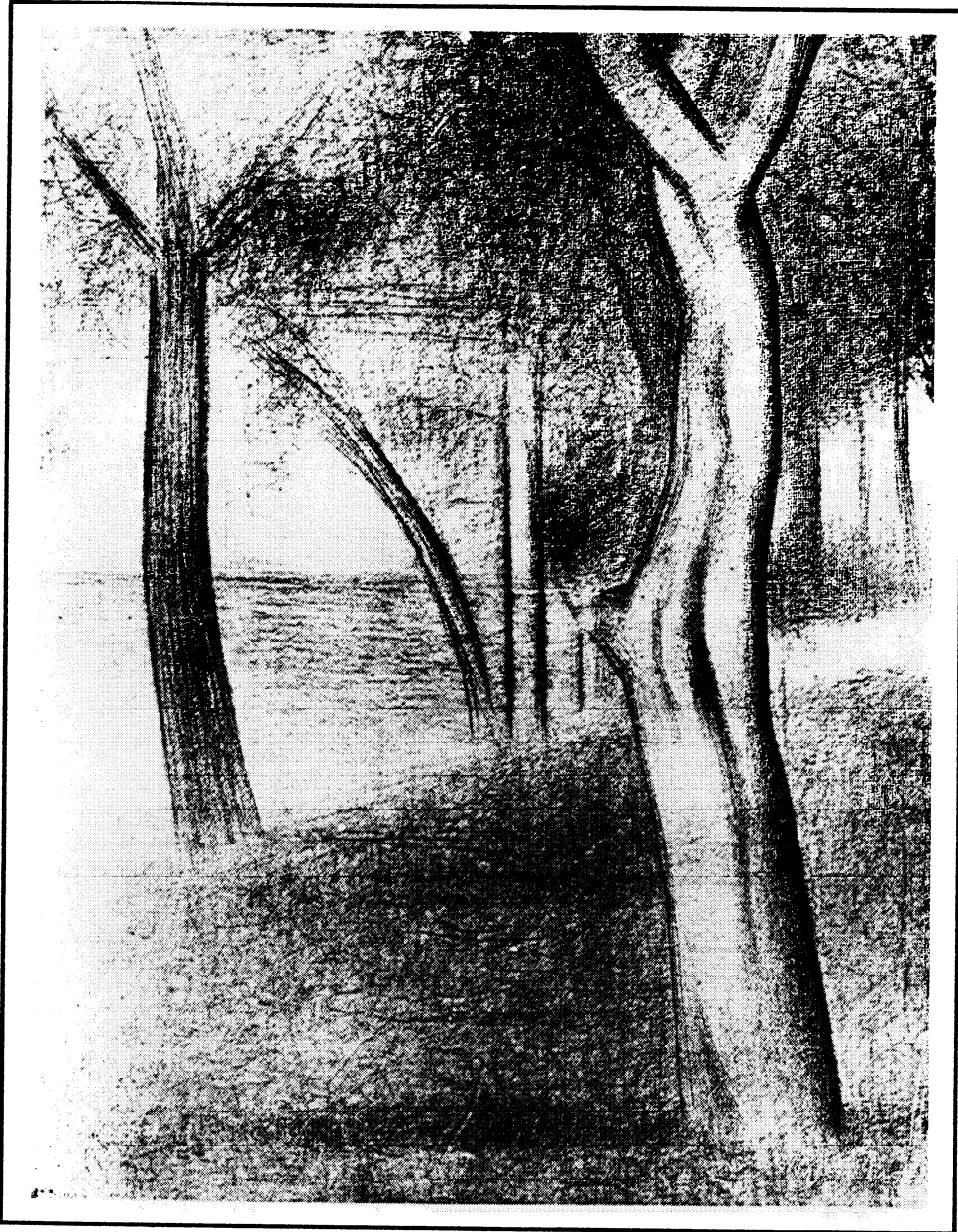
31. *Elms in Old Hall Park*, John Constable



32.
Cardinal Climber, Indian, circa 1800



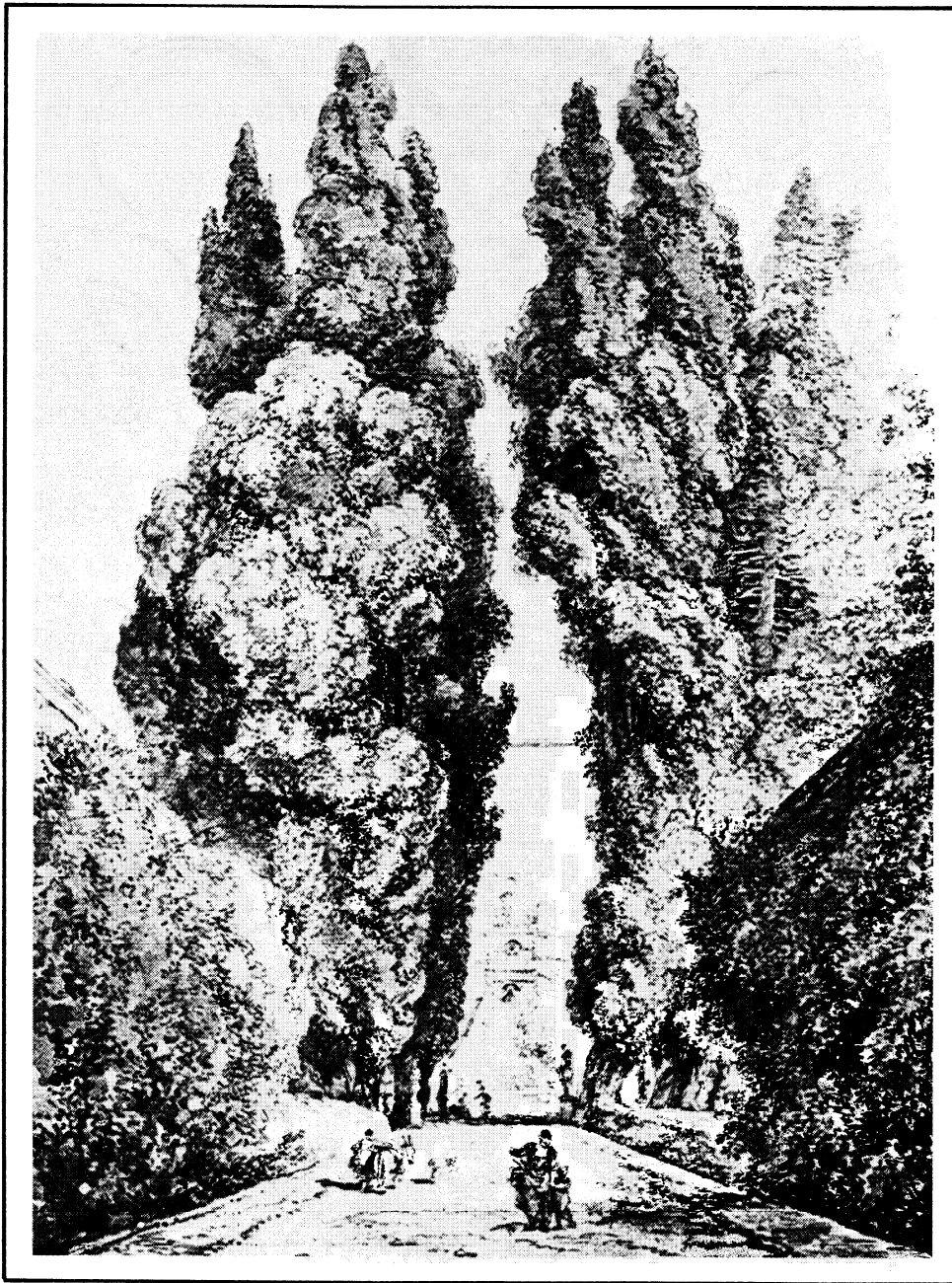
33. *Landscape*, Jean-Baptiste Corot



34. *Trees Along the Seine*, Georges Seurat



37. *Fishing in the Melting Mountain*, Tani Bucho



38. *Cypress Avenue at Villa D'Este*, Jean Honoré Fragonard



39. *Cypresses*, Vincent van Gogh



40. *Sunrise II*, Arthur Dove