

# Graphite is media for control

**B**UT, ADAM, I want some, too." I objected as Adam poured the remaining few ounces of Kool-aid into his glass.

So he politely poured some of his into glass for me. In the small talk that followed, Adam said, "Hey, dad, did you see my hand?" At this, I looked at his hand and saw that it was pure red from his fingertips to his knuckles.

"What's that?" I asked.

Casually, Adam explained, "Oh, I got that from Kool-aid the Kool-aid."

"But why didn't you use a spoon?" I asked. "It's not nice to stir it with your hands."

"Well, I know that," said young Adam, with a slight trace of irritation in his voice, "but the spoon was too short."

"Oh, I see," I said with a laugh as I poured my Kool-aid back into his glass.

Even a task as simple as Adam's takes mastery. Mastery merely means control and control means practice and practice requires time and time requires commitment. Before you can easily use any media, you must gain relative mastery of it.

IF YOU DON'T set aside a few dollars for entertainment, they won't be there when you want them. If you don't set aside time for your family and friends, you won't find the time. And likewise, if you don't set aside time for art work, it will fall to the wayside in the press of business.

The term commitment means "no alternatives, no excuses or pledges." So regardless of where you spend the time, be sure you commit yourself to the time required for your artwork.

Mastery or control of any medium can come about only through practice and instruction. Practice is primary and instruction is secondary. Mastery, however, without instruction requires a much greater amount of time. I feel the best media to begin to learn control is graphite or pencil.

To master graphite, I also feel you must use different hardnesses of pencil. The range of hardness in graphite is very useful to artists and yet it is so often neglected.

GRAPHITE PENCILS range from 9B, which is very black, to 9H, which makes a very light gray line. Many artists use just one or two soft pencils (B and 2B) and obtain the required shades of gray by alternating the pressure on the pencil.

Even though this can produce a beautiful pencil rendering, try the use of a full gamut of grays. When only using one or two pencils, you must lightly stroke the paper to achieve a light gray. This, however, shows the grain of the paper and tells the world that is a pencil drawing.

Use soft pencils (6B, 5B, 4B, 3B, 2B, B and HB) for black or dark areas and hard pencils (H, 2H, 3H, 4H, 5H, 6H, 7H, 8H, 9H) for light or white areas. With these, you can achieve photographic realism that requires viewers to ask how it was done.

Here are two tips that will help you master the graphite pencil medium.

First, do your basic drawing on cheap layout paper. Here is where you do all the work and make all the mistakes.

REMEMBER TO LOOK at your drawing in the mirror. The reversed image will show your mistakes faster than an art teacher.

Then transfer your corrected and perfected drawing to a clean sheet of good, heavy drawing paper or two- or three-ply Bristol board.

The second tip is not to rely on an outline to establish a shape or form. In reality, there are no black outlines to define shapes and forms. You see objects because they are of a different color, shape or texture than your surroundings.

In graphite, you are working only in shades of gray, so use shades of gray contrasting against each other rather than defining every shape with lines. If you do this, you will be pleased at how realistic your work will become.

More than any other medium, people will put their nose right up to the artwork and look and ask what medium it is. Dulling or mat spray gives the artwork such a finished look that often people will mistake it for a print.

So if you are a Jack of all media, try being a master of one. Now I think I'll go show Adam where a long-handled spoon is.

David Messing has been an art teacher for 10 years and operates the Art Store and More, 16233 Middlebelt, Livonia. He encourages comments and questions from readers. These can be directed to him in care of this newspaper, at 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia 48150.



**artifacts**  
**David Messing**

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— David Messing

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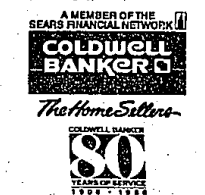
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