

# DRAWING INSPIRATION

*Visual Artists at Work*



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## In the Abstract

Subject matter is linked to pre-planning as well as perception (you hand off inspiration to concept, and segue composition into technique). Without these interactions we could argue that abstract (or non-objective) art is not so heavy on *representation*, but more about *interpretation*. Thus non-representational art can simply target one's intellect, hit you in the gut, or tickle your fancy.

Perhaps you're just exploring the *stuff* of it: the tools and materials. You fool with concepts and play with rules, but the work ultimately begs only one relevant question: "What did we *learn* here?" Remember, on his way to turning on the lightbulb, Thomas Edison regarded each failed experiment as simply what not to do again.



**Figure 2-7:** Trained both in China and the United States, Lampo Leong's inky blacks, dense color, and radiant lighting speak to his fascination with process. Through digital imaging technology, he transcends the challenge of integrating a dual artistic heritage.

© Lampo Leong

## Let's Face It, It Figures

Portraiture and figurative art are esteemed subject concerns. Drawing the figure and face are at the very core of nearly every creative enterprise, and considered by many (this writer included) *the* most demanding—and rewarding—challenges of pictorial expression.

Art chops notwithstanding, everyone knows intuitively when a figure drawing is "off" or a likeness isn't quite "right." But of course, fidelity is *not* the only benchmark of a "good" figure study or portrait. However, we are hard wired for drawing from life—regardless of style, technique, or the difficulty of the task.

In any event, life drawing is a marvelous exercise guaranteed to tweak those critical mind to eye to hand mechanics.

## You're In There

"I imagine what the character is feeling in that moment," says Zina Saunders, who's been a writer-illustrator for more than 15 years. "This begins the process for me of connecting emotionally with my subject—even if that person is made up. Even if that person is me, striking a pose in the mirror for an assignment."

And Saunders considers just how much she inserts herself into every portrait. After all it is her vision of what they look like. "But," she smiles, "they look exactly like that inside themselves."

Saunders didn't set out to make intensely colored portraits; it was a natural outgrowth of her interviews with the people she was painting. Her very



**Figure 2-8:** "I visualize their energy while I'm doing their portrait," Saunders says of the folks she paints. "I almost hallucinate those hues in their faces—I perceive these vivid flashes of color as another way for me to convey their bright spirit. I'm very interested in joyousness."

© Zina Saunders



**Figure 17-1:** I was so inspired by all the brouhaha that I worked up these abstracts just for this section. The names of these hybrid paintings are “Frankenstein Meats Vegetables” and “Bride of the Son of Frankenstein Returns.” No, I didn’t try to hide the seams—what fun was that?

© Michael Fleishman



## The Road

“A journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step.” This basic precept coming down from the philosopher Lao-tzu has long been the cornerstone of Lampo Leong’s approach to both art and teaching. Trained both in China and the United States, Leong’s work (academically as well as professionally) is tempered by a multi-cultural vision.

“First, we have that journey,” Leong will tell you, “a vision—a long-term goal to make art.” That magnitude (and the *worthiness*) of this goal is at the heart of everything Leong wants to communicate as an artist and teacher. “If I have played a role in motivating students to go after this goal for themselves,” he says, “I’ve contributed to this tradition.”

**Figure 17-2:** Leong’s own experience—coming from an Asian background into an environment influenced mainly by what he labels as “European aesthetic traditions”—has shown him the value of reinvention. Leong writes classical Chinese calligraphy on traditional rice paper, then literally destroys his creation. Tearing and collaging the shards of line, he then scans and digitally rebuilds the image in Photoshop (incorporating photographic material as well). This hybrid is printed on canvas, then layered with acrylics and oils.

© Lampo Leong







**Figure 17-3:** Fundamentals are indispensable for artists of every level, and Leong pushes to integrate traditional studio exercises with critical thinking. Analysis becomes just as important as perception and expression.

“What I love is when students really see how artists truly work, *in the here and now*—the rich dialogue arising from an active engagement between artists and experience grounds the classroom experience. This provides a basic understanding of the learning process; the components are integrally related to the total context.”

© Lampo Leong

### *The Clash*

Leong sees the collision of different cultures—European, African-American, Latino, and Asian—as a tremendous opportunity for art education. He strongly respects the cultural legacy and ethnic heritage students bring while encouraging each to search for a distinctive individuality. “Only by valuing diversity,” he says, “can we best help our students realize their full potential.”

“Art, as I see it,” Leong states, “is as much about communication, concepts, and language as it is about aesthetics. Art is finding ways to transcend the limits of what has been expressed before.”

### *The Act*

“I draw for different reasons and for different purposes,” Kevin Mack considers. “Most often to communicate ideas or visual concepts to others. I’ve found that if I’m explaining something, I’m able to articulate the idea better if I’m drawing it at the same time.”

For Mack, the *act* of drawing is really the key. “It actually just helps me express myself verbally,” he explains. “Often the drawing itself is of no consequence; other times it is very much about the drawing—showing