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Drawing Inspiration from the City

By Victor Kerlow

As a freelance illustrator, I always have to be ready to draw. Luckily, I usually am. If I am not working in my studio, I'm probably walking around the city, drawing in a 6" x 8" drawing pad that I keep jammed into my pocket at all times. Right now I am in the process of filling up my 225th drawing pad.

Growing up and living in New York City has given me endless drawing possibilities. I do a lot of drawings of the city in my free time, and I think that is reflected in my professional illustration work. The combination of pristine



Go Get Some Rosemary, for Red Bucket Films

Strathmore® 400 Series Medium Drawing



Pioneer 10, for Port Magazine

Strathmore® 400 Series Medium Drawing

and filthy that makes up the city is a quality that I try to incorporate into the ideas and images I draw.

I'm always really psyched anytime I get a call for a job that gives me an excuse to go outside and walk around the city. One of the first illustrations that I did for *The New Yorker* was about Willet's Point in Queens. Going



Actors That Have Been In Movies With Robert Mitchum, for The Believer
Strathmore® 400 Series Medium Drawing

up there to take reference photos for the drawings was a great part of the job.

I think that everyone loves to explore New York. Exciting new places are only a subway ride away. When I was assigned a series of spot illustrations for the *NY Times* for an article about the NBA, I inevitably ended up

having to draw a lot of basketball players. That was a perfect opportunity to go down to The Cage on West 4th Street, where some of the best players in NYC go, and draw for the afternoon. Drawing the human form from life always yields a better outcome compared to referencing a photograph or drawing from memory.



Jean Gabin in Daybreak, for The New Yorker
Strathmore® 400 Series Medium Drawing

New York really is a limitless source of inspiration. Living here has helped me develop my drawing skills because I'm constantly surrounded by reference material. Whenever I work on a drawing, I always have a visual reference file in my mind for different types of fire hydrants, dogs, buildings, people, cars, ways of standing, conversational gestures, etc. Walking around the city is like an ongoing life drawing class. Just by paying attention, you can learn about the way forms are built up, without necessarily drawing them. Of course, the drawing part never hurts.

When I was younger, drawing in high school and college, I was into doing reportage type assignments, capturing a lot of the places where I hung out. A few years ago I



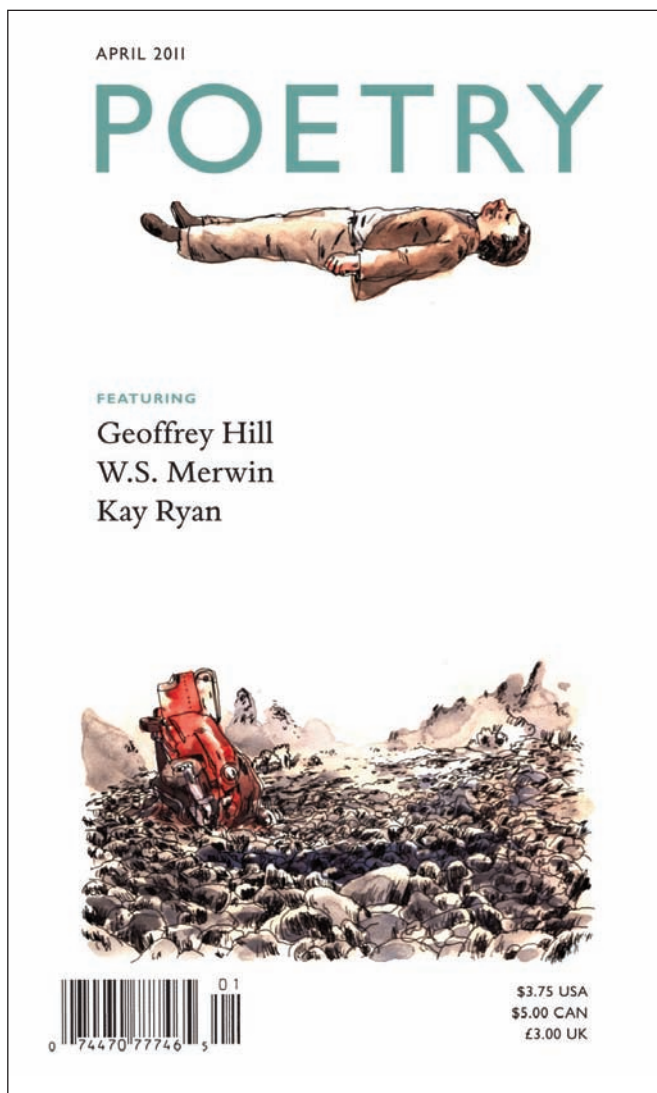
Manufacturing America's New Middle Class, for Bloomberg View
Strathmore® 400 Series Medium Drawing

worked on a project documenting all the different factories in the Meatpacking District, which was a great experience. I enjoyed talking with all the guys who work in those places. Most of the places are now closed up, so I am glad I had the chance to document the factories in particular. The neighborhood has become expensive with the arrival of too many hotels and fancy restaurants. That is just the way New York is, always changing.

There is also this fascination I have with drawing the debris that exists around objects. I think this stems from living in the city as well; flakes of filth that fall off a seagull in flight, the gum spots that decorate a sidewalk, crumbs breaking from a sandwich, or the specks of dirt that hover around a shoe that has walked on the street



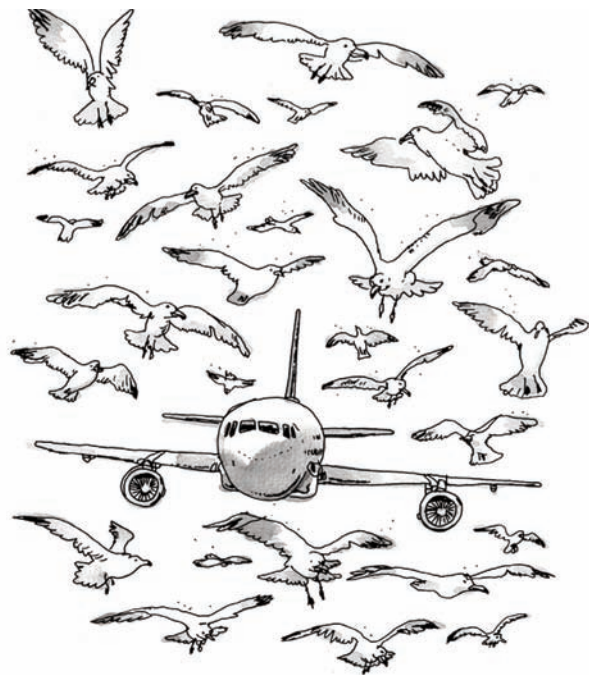
Boehner and Obama After Their Big Debt Deal, for Bloomberg View
Strathmore® 400 Series Medium Drawing



Now That's Over, cover for Poetry Magazine
Strathmore® 400 Series Medium Drawing

all day. These things all show up in my work a lot, and for me, help to make my drawings more dynamic, and more believable.

My process for finishing a job is pretty straight forward. I get a call or an email with the information about the article or work that my image will accompany. After sending a few sketches of ideas, the Art Director will get back to me and give the go ahead for whichever one they liked the most. I draw with Uni-Ball pens on



No Trash, No Crash, for The New York Times
Strathmore® 400 Series Medium Drawing

Strathmore 400 Series Medium Drawing paper, and use a variety of watercolor brands and brush types. I finalize the image and make it print ready by cleaning up a few things like stray lines or discoloration using Photoshop. The file is then sent off to be printed. This is the process I use for magazine illustrations, movie posters, comics and any other of my print-related projects.

Occasionally I will work entirely on a computer, drawing directly with a Wacom tablet, and coloring work digitally, especially for the “sketch” phase of a project. While it is possible to recreate the way actual ink and watercolor work on paper, it is always difficult to create a convincingly “real” drawing digitally. So for the most part, I let the computer assist in fixing small mistakes, as opposed to using it for the entire drawing production.

It's great that my drawings can be used for all different types of projects, because there really isn't anything I would rather do all day than draw. I am very grateful to the people that help make that possible.



The Vanishing, for Utne Reade

Strathmore® 400 Series Medium Drawing

The way I approach any drawing is basically the same. However, a comic that I draw on the bus in my drawing book, of course, isn't necessarily going to look the same as an illustration I do for a magazine.

I experiment with materials occasionally, but can only deviate so far from the ways I like to draw. I have already been drawing for a pretty long time, and I think that the ways to create images that I appreciate the most have naturally revealed themselves. However, I hope that I will continue to develop as an artist – growing, learning even more techniques and continually perfecting my skills.

Victor's Tips for Drawing Inspiration from Your City:

1. Draw the city in your free time. It will provide inspiration for your work.
2. Find excuses to get outside and walk around.
3. When you get out, pay attention to the forms and details of the objects, people, buildings and animals you encounter. They can become part of your "visual reference file" for the future.
4. Cities are always changing. Take time to sketch and draw the elements that are meaningful to you.
5. Try to find everyday subjects and make them interesting, like a rock, a stop light, etc.



Stoned, for The Diner Journal

Strathmore® 400 Series Medium Drawing

About the Author

Victor Kerlow was born, raised and educated in New York City and continues to live there, drawing full time. His clients include *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times*, IFC Films, The Criterion Collection, *The Believer*, *Poetry Magazine*, *Creative Time*, MTV and Random House. His comics have also been included in *Fantagraphics' Mome* and *Yeti* magazine, and are listed in The Best American Comics 2011.

See more of his work at victorkerlow.com and choppedintwo.blogspot.com

Featured Product

Art Journal Kits

The Strathmore® Art Journal Kit is a place where kids can explore their creativity, learn fun drawing and collage techniques and use artist quality materials. These exciting new kits are perfect gifts for young artists.



Assorted papers provide textures and colors, perfect for collage!



Heavy duty front and back covers are available in five fun colors. The durable, matte finish encourages young artists to personalize their journals.

14 pages full of projects with easy-to-follow instructions, inspirational ideas and great visuals offer an engaging introduction to drawing, collage and art.

Assorted handmade and bright construction papers provide textures and colors, perfect for collage!



Project pages inspire young artists!

Learn more at strathmoreartist.com

Strathmore® 2012 ONLINE WORKSHOP SERIES

Online Workshop Series Starts January 1, 2012

The first workshop in the series is entitled “Doodles Unleashed: Mixed Media Techniques” with Traci Bautista. Whether you are a beginner or an experienced artist, you will enjoy a creative escape as you combine different media, color, texture, collage, doodling, lettering and more to create your own mixed media paintings.

Here's a quick look at techniques Traci will be covering in four lessons:

- **Painting techniques** using stencils to create a background.
- **Doodling techniques** with different media over the stencil background.
- **Layering media** including colored pencils, watercolor crayons, and dimensional paint.
- **Graffiti layered letters** and colorful painted background using found tools.
- **Watercolor crayons, pens, colored pencils and collage** to draw a stylized face.
- **Playing with paper** in ways you never imagined!

About the Instructor Traci Bautista

Traci Bautista is an instructor, author and mixed media artist. Her art has been featured in numerous mixed media books and craft magazines. She also has been a regular guest on DIY/HGTV Craft Lab. Traci's books include *Collage Unleashed*, and *Doodles Unleashed* which will be released in early 2012.



Artwork by Traci Bautista

About the Workshops

Our online workshops are free and self-paced. Workshops are held on our virtual classroom website. Each workshop consists of four video lessons and supporting downloadable instructions. Students can participate in conversations on our discussion boards or share work in the classroom photo gallery.

Workshops are FREE! Register today at strathmoreartist.com/workshop-reg



View a short video with snapshots from Traci Bautista's workshop.

Questions From Our Website

I heard that your 400 Series pads have a thistle incorporated into each piece of art that is featured on the new covers. What is the story behind the thistle logo?

The thistle has been a symbol of excellence in art papers from Strathmore's early beginnings. In fact, the Strathmore® name and thistle originated in the late 1800's when our founder Horace Moses visited the Valley of Strathmore in Scotland. He was so inspired by the beauty of the thistle in full bloom



400 Series Artagain® artwork
by Katherine Cantrell

that he started using the name and the thistle to represent his high quality art and printing papers. The thistle may have taken on different appearances throughout our 120 years, but it remains a symbol of our commitment to quality.

Are cotton paper and rag paper the same?

The terms "rag" and "cotton" are often used interchangeably. However, rag specifically refers to papers made with cotton textile remnants. At one time, it was common for papers to consist of 100% cotton rag. However, over time, rag supply for use in papermaking became tighter as the use of synthetic fibers in textiles became more common.

Today, most fine art papers are made from 100% cotton linters or a combination of cotton rag and cotton linters. Rag fibers are longer fibers compared to cotton linters so they do provide extra strength. Cotton linters are pure cellulose fibers that are byproducts of cotton processing. Although the cotton linters' fibers are shorter than textiles, they still offer outstanding strength and archival properties.



Our 500 Series Drawing, Bristol and Illustration Board surfaces are manufactured using a combination of rag and cotton linters. The ratio of approximately 3 parts rag to 1 part linters is the standard composition for these papers. This is the same fiber make-up that has been used since these grades were first manufactured in 1893.

I purchased your 400 Series Watercolor Paper Block. I love your paper but how do I get the sheets off the block?



Watercolor paper blocks are glued on all four sides so there is no need to stretch the paper prior to painting.

Here's the process we recommend for removing sheets:

- Wait until paint is completely dry. Flip over the cover and look for the area where there is an unglued opening on the cover spine.
- Stand the block up with the opening located on the top.
- Insert an X-acto knife, butter knife or letter opener between the first and second sheets.
- Then gently run the knife around the edge of the sheet, rotating the block counter clockwise while moving the knife in the opposite direct.
- Continue splitting the glue until the sheet breaks away. Remove any remaining glue from the top sheet using your fingers.