

I love abstraction, where there's a strong hint of what the subject is, but has been artistically altered or manipulated through simplification, distortion or exaggeration to have a somewhat naive beauty. My beginning drawing students had just completed a *realistically* handled assignment and I wanted them to loosen up and try something different; therefore, I came up with this assignment.

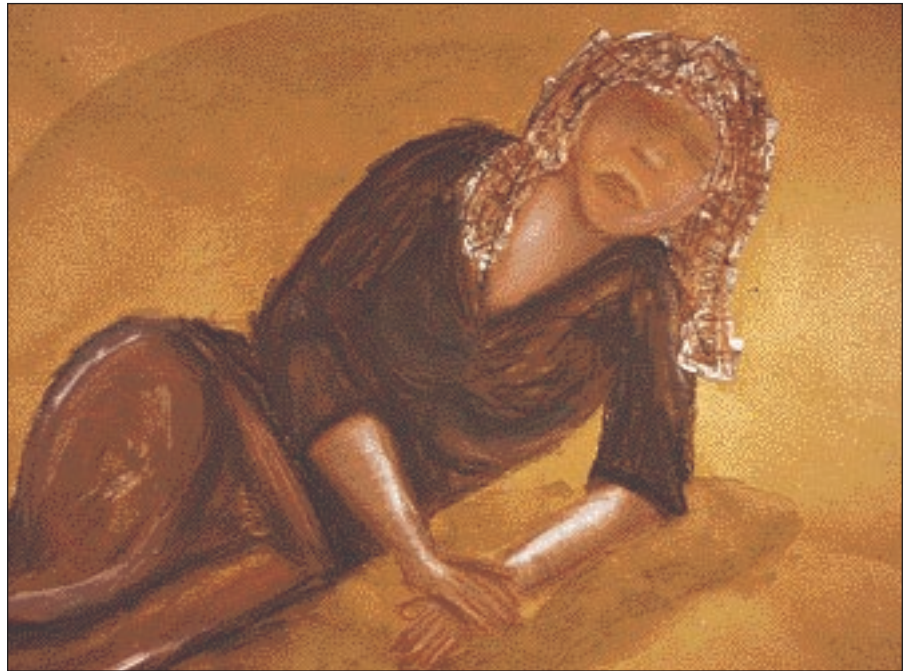
We began by sketching from models—fellow students within the room who were seated, standing or reclining on a couple of desks. Students looked for major sections of the body and their direction, then used quick, sweeping strokes to indicate the spine or the curve of a thigh.

The students were encouraged to use foreshortening, even to the point of exaggeration. The goal was to make the viewer believe that a foot or kneecap might be projected toward him. All the while, students were to keep in mind that abstraction is a departure from realism, not a cop-out for bad drawing. The kids sketched several poses and, after a couple of days of preliminary drawing, we proceeded to create an abstraction of the figure.

The actual assignment was to use the colors initially used by Braque and Picasso when they discovered “collage.” I showed my students how they

# Figurative Departures from Realism

by Geri Greenman



Amber Nolet



Tony Cicero

used wallpaper swatches, newspaper clippings and ticket stubs within their still-life paintings, combining the earth colors along with the planes and angles of early Cubism. These artists' work is exciting to me and I have a fondness for them because they initiated collage, a technique I personally enjoy and use often.

We used the same “palette” as they did, although we substituted India ink, compressed charcoal, newspaper, manila, conté, gesso and other materials to create our collages with

mixed media.

Based on the pose they selected, and depending on which model they chose, students then transferred their sketches onto larger paper. In most cases, this entailed students redrawing their figure on large heavy brown paper. (I was fortunate to receive a roll of this from a colleague's husband who owns a corrugated box company. This is great paper, which I use for painting and drawing.)

I had created a couple of examples while the students were sketching, and showed them how to apply India ink in areas where very black shadows or the sensation of weight and mass might be needed. They saw that if they used water in conjunction with the ink, it would water it down, causing it to bleed, and could then be dragged with fingers, brushes, sticks or pens (bamboo or calligraphy).

It was fun to demonstrate how pristine the white gesso can be and how one might alter that as well: watering it down, rubbing a graphite stick or com-





**Nick Cadoyanes**



**Amanda Glabus (on cover).**



**Melissa Mulligan**

pressed charcoal into it—altering the value, gouging into it. Newspaper, torn or cut, was added, then a surface treatment of conté, ink washes, gesso or any number of materials.

The works where students really exaggerated the space in which the figure lived were my favorites. Two different classes, two different results. One group totally exaggerated the figure,

while the other made their person less generalized and grounded more in realism. Nonetheless, all the results hit the mark. They are collages, experiments in mixed media and the human figure.

They were fun to do, messy (like everything I have them experiment with), but worth the vigilant clean-ups. The warmth of the brown paper gives a life to the figures. The students

learned a little about the figure, the Cubists, collage and what happens when certain media are worked into one another, combining to make a totally unexpected image. ■

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