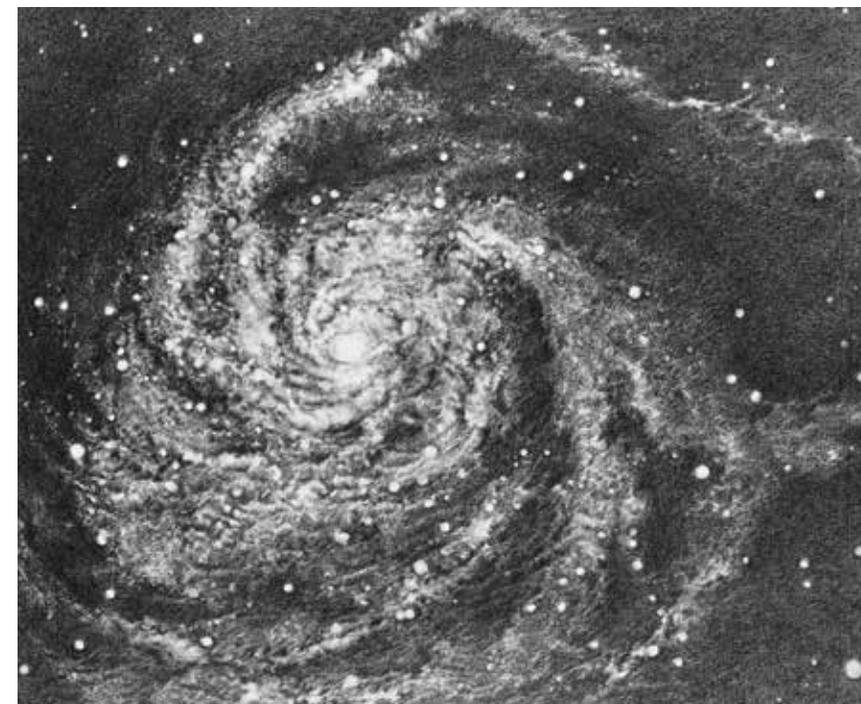


LEFT
Sharpening pencils to different, shaped tips yields a wide range of possible lines.

BELOW
With some practice you can use a razor blade to sharpen a pencil to the type of tip that you want.



LEFT
Experiment with a variety of grips and pencil points to expand the variety of marks you can make.

ABOVE
In the Beginning
by Sherry Camhy, graphite.

BELOW
Face
by Sherry Camhy, graphite.

Using a Pencil Like a Brush

Since the beginning, the lines between drawing and painting and between pencil and brush have been blurry. The word “pencil” is derived from the Latin “penicillus” or “little brush.” In ancient Rome, animal hairs were placed into a holder to make brushes for writing, and a little brush used for finishing was called a “pencil.”

Centuries later, when thin pieces of lead were put into wooden holders, a new kind of pencil-brush was born. Artists used these to make “drawings,” linear sketches thought of as studies for other work. By the 1500s graphite replaced lead and paper became more available, making it possible for artists to create more

fully rendered tonal drawings meant to stand on their own as independent works of art. Drawing began to take its place as a separate artistic category, standing alongside painting. But in the contemporary art world, the concepts of drawing and painting have again become less distinct from each other—today artists use drawing concepts in their paintings and painting concepts in their drawings.

As this very brief history shows, drawing and painting have always been intertwined, and we can explore this blurry boundary in order to achieve compelling artistic ends. This article looks at some of the many effects possible when you conceive of a pencil more like a brush.

Brushes come in many shapes, all suited to different painterly effects. Similarly, pencils can be sharpened into various shapes so that they, too, can be used for painterly effects. For example, a *round* brush resembles a pencil sharpened in the ordinary fashion: Both have cone-shaped points, with the longest and smallest place at the center of the tip. The location of the sharp point is easy to see, so the precise place where it first hits the surface will be clearly visible. These tips are designed to make fine, accurate marks.

A typically sharpened pencil is commonly used for writing, sketching, and drawing lines. Creating a traditional, fully rendered drawing using just the tip of a sharp pencil is challenging—it requires patiently (tediously, to some) drawing thin adjacent strokes until the tonal effects are

achieved. With a typically sharpened pencil, details are easy but shading difficult, and calligraphic strokes—easily done with a round brush—are nearly impossible.

An obvious difference between a pencil and a brush is that one is made of hard, unyielding graphite, the other of soft, pliable bristles. A change of pressure will change the width of a brushstroke. Putting more pressure on a pencil will make a line darker, but it will not appreciably change its width. If a pencil is tilted on its side in an attempt to make a wider mark with the graphite, the wood encasing the graphite can get in the way. But if we change the shape of the pencil’s point, these painterly effects become possible.

To sharpen a pencil so that it can make lines that vary in width and value, hold it steady at a 45-degree angle against a sandpaper block. Rub it back and forth until a tilted oval wedge shape develops at its point. (Save the finely ground graphite that falls off of the sandpaper for later use as powdered graphite.) The new tip is no longer centered, and it looks a bit like the shape of a *filbert* brush.

Hold the pencil so that the point rolls from the sharp outside edge of the oval wedge to its wider, flat middle. It may be frustrating at first, but with a little practice, you can easily make a line that moves gracefully from thin to thick and from dark to light. This kind of line adds a great deal of movement and





ABOVE
Let There Be Light

by Sherry Camhy,
graphite.

LEFT

You may find that a shorter pencil is more comfortable and allows you to more easily control the quality of line.

depth to a drawing and makes it instantly more visually compelling.

If you are working with a long pencil, try cutting it in half. The shorter length and lighter weight will cause it to fit more comfortably in the hand, making it even easier to control the movements of the pencil and the quality of its line. Once you have cut a pencil in half, you can also sharpen each of the four resulting ends into different types of points. One end can be pointed and centered. Another end can be made into an oval-like filbert. One end can be left round and dull to make soft edges, like those of a *bristle* brush. Last but not least, one end can be ground down to create a flat straight edge like a carpenter's pencil—similar to *flat* and *bright* brushes—and used to make even wider marks. When several short pencils are bundled and held together in one hand, the group of pencils will work together to make parallel marks at the same time. The result is several lines of similar length and direction

that echo one another, giving a feeling of movement to the image.

Instead of using an ordinary pencil sharpener, use a single-edged razor blade. Carve away the pencil's wood to expose a longer length of graphite. This makes it possible to increase the angle of a filbert-like point to make it even wider or to extend a round point so that it will stay sharp longer.

It takes time and practice to get the knack of it, but the reward is worth it. By having a good supply of a variety of pencils handy, you don't have to stop work to sharpen another one. It's always tempting to just keep going, but by continuing with a pencil that is no longer sharpened to the right degree you may actually destroy your image, rather than improve it.

Picking up the right pencil is like reaching for the right brush, and by practicing tactics such as these, you can add a painterly look to your graphite repertoire. You'll also be participating in an artistic tradition thousands of years in the making. ❖



Pencils can be sharpened to thin, flat points that resemble the shape of a bristle brush (right).