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How to draw trees with pen and ink

You will start practicing by copying my drawing first, then drawing from a photograph. We will focus here on shading that will create an illusion of a three-dimensional form of the tree and texture of the tree bark.!

Enlarge and print out the drawing below. Start with a light pencil sketch or outline of a tree. Use light pencil lines that are easy to erase later. Draw the silhouette of the tree and major knots and branches. Starting at the base of the trunk, define the direction of the bark growth with lines and shape, imitating the texture of the bark. Use continuous "wondering" lines and small shapes as strokes. Practice these strokes if you are not comfortable with applying them right away. Continue with the base of the tree. Keep in mind two things: Direction if the stroke lines and shapes - they should follow the pattern of the tree bark and "wrap" the form of the tree. Consider light and dark areas - exposed to light, and shaded areas. Give bark dimension by darkening some lines and shapes in your shading pattern. Trees are not flat! If you simplify a tree form to the very basics - it comes down to a lollipop form: a round or conical form on a stick. Each form has a highlighted side, a shadow side, and a drop shadow behind it. Just keeping this thought in mind will help you to place the strokes to build a believable three-dimensional object. If you simplify the form of a tree, what would it be? A cylinder! Remember how to shade a cylinder? Don't forget the structure of the roots - they also have their shadow and highlighted sides, they cast drop shadows as well. Continue adding texture to the tree. At this point - pay attention to the direction of the strokes. If the surface "curves" - have to strokes bend too. Skip the areas of "knots" - you will work on them later. Work the darker tones along the layout lines (tree outline). But do not outline the tree with a solid continuous line!! After darkening the sides of the tree - you can add small angled strokes to build out the shadowed areas along the bark edges in the trunk Define some fine details in the bark. Now lets shade the knots. They are large, raised "bumps" that are covered with bark. The bark follows the form of the tree - so should you. Keep in mind, that if you are looking at this tree in a park - your eye level would be somewhere in the middle of the trunk. So all details and bumps that are below your eye level - you will see them from the top side, everything that is above your eye level - you will see from the bottom. Notice that these bumps have a light side (facing light source), and dark side (shaded area). Look at the texture of the bark on those bumps and the direction it grows. Use very fine strokes for lit areas. Apply shadows with thicker strokes and small angled hatching. The further up the tree you go - further it is away from the viewer. To show that - you need to decrease the amount of details in the bark texture. Place strokes closer together. Work on branches and other details. Use shading and value to show which parts are further away and positioned behind the tree. Keep in mind the position of the light source. Everything should be consistent throughout the drawing. Other than creating a texture - the shading part is just like shading simple geometric forms (cylinders and spheres). Erase the pencil lines. Updated: 01 Jan 2021 In this guide, I will demonstrate how I simplify the drawing process and I hope that by the end of it, you will be able to draw your favorite tree. In order to draw realistic trees with pen and ink, it is important to pay attention to accuracy of the form (structure), and to learn how to create the illusion of brightness values and transitions with pens. Bamboo When looking at ANY tree, we examine its basic shapes. It is a good practice to draw its simple shapes first. Once we understand these simple shapes, we can use our artistic license and our knowledge to recreate it. There is no point drawing every single leaf as we see it (when using a reference image as a guide). Bamboo pen drawing Banana Tree For trees with big leaves, like a banana tree, first draw a study of the leaves from different angles. Make sure there is no symmetry, and that each leaf is unique, for a realistic result. You can use markers; they work well with pens. Olive Tree Trunk Look at some reference images, or actual trees, before drawing the tree trunk. First, draw outlines to create the form (structure). Next, add some guidelines and basic details. Last step is texture drawing. Focus mainly on brightness values, while drawing marks with shape and direction like the reference image. Olive tree trunks pen drawing Remember: Each olive tree trunk has its own "personality", but all olive trees share common basic shapes. With practice, it is quite easy to draw them from imagination. How to Draw Leaves Drawing leaves can be challenging. Understanding their structure and breaking the drawing process into steps, will produce a satisfying and realistic result. Each tree leaf is in different direction, has a different degree of foreshortening and is overlapping other leaves. Simply put, the form and texture of leaves is abstract and messy. To draw that, we need to be sketchy and loose with our marks, and to avoid any pattern! Next step is to pay attention to brightness values. That is how we create the illusion of volume. Meaning, three-dimensional and not flat. To create that illusion, we scribble more lines for darker values and fewer lines for brighter values: We also pay attention to leaves size, depending on the tree type and how distant it is from the observer. For big leaves, we sketch big marks and vice versa. While the treetop is messy, at its edges, we add some indication of leaves type and size. Olive tree pen drawing After understanding the characteristics of a specific tree (olive tree in this case), it is quite easy to draw it from imagination. If some terms like foreshortening and overlapping are new to you, it is advisable to read my article on how to draw with a sense of depth. It has 15 proven methods to add depth to your drawing or painting. Good to know: Mostly, I use a pen with nib size 0.1. It is small enough to create fine details. Photos & Contrast When I am taking photos of a tree, I do it from several angles. If possible, I circle the tree to get a photo from every angle. I create a photo that has high contrast as my reference image. Contrast between highlights and shadows is crucial for a drawing to stand out and to have presence. Not enough contrast will lead to a flat drawing with no depth. Too much contrast will look cartoonish. Olive tree drawing Pine Trees Important: Before we dive into complex texture and rendering, if you are a beginner, you might want to practice the next step. Create any random tree shape, sketch some random marks to fill it up and then, draw more sketchy marks in one side and at the bottom of the tree. This should not take more than 5 minutes! The advanced texture you will see after this example is just a matter of many hours of practice to refine the texture marks. Pine trees are relatively easy to draw from imagination. They have very small, needle-like leaves. I like to start by gently drawing the form and then fill it with small, random marks that are NOT in any specific direction or with recurring shape. Last step is to create more marks for darker areas, depending on the direction of light you choose. Pine trees come in many types and shapes. Looking at a reference image can help at the beginning, just as a guide to draw the form and to pay attention to dark and light areas. Other than that, try to be loose and sketchy with your marks. When drawing a close-up view, you can indicate the needle-like leaves at the edges of the tree. Pine tree pen drawing Snowy Pine Tree A pen has only one brightness value. Therefore, we have to use different techniques to create the illusion of transitions in brightness values. One technique (or style) is to use hatching. Hatching means drawing parallel lines. By drawing lines with different degree of spacing between them (or with different line width), we can create an illusion of different brightness values. Another method is to use cross-hatching. Cross-hatching means drawing sets of parallel lines in different direction. The more cross-hatching sets we draw, the darker it will look for the observer. We can use ANY pen for drawing. I prefer artist-grade technical pens (also fineliners). They create lines with fixed width and their ink is made of pigments and is very durable and lightfast. For the snow part, we can leave it empty ("white") or we can use hatching in some areas. In this example, I used some hatching and some marks with very light gray marker. Snowy Pine tree If you want to know more about markers, visit my markers review for artists. Christmas Tree A Christmas tree is just another pine tree, but with decorations. To add some baubles, first draw their shape and then try different types of hatching, cross-hatching and stippling. Stippling is a drawing technique using dots. The more dots you add in one area, the darker it will look. You can add other decorations to your Christmas tree. It is best to first sketch some test drawings on a different paper, to see what works, before adding them to your drawing. To add boxes in perspective, you should be familiar with linear perspective drawing, and learn to draw from imagination. Tip: If you find it hard to draw a tree with a pen, you can always start with a pencil. When you reach a satisfying result, you can go over it with a pen, and gently erase the pencil marks. Christmas tree Aspen & Birch Trees Aspen & birch tree trunks are easy to draw when doing it in steps. We draw the form first. Then, we add some basic details. Finally, we draw some brightness values and texture: Birch & aspen tree trunks We can use gray marker pens for coloring. Overlapping Overlapping means an object that partially covers another object. When we see an object that overlaps another object, we assume that this object is in front of the object it covers. Therefore, we use overlap to create the illusion of depth on a flat paper. Overlapping trees Because we cannot erase pen marks, we draw foreground objects first! If we want to draw a house in front of a tree, we draw the house first: We do the same for tree branches. First, we draw the branch that overlaps a tree, then the tree trunk. For trees that have a complex structure, with many branches, we can use a pencil to draw the basic shapes. When we are happy with the result, we can draw with a pen, and gently erase the pencil marks. Birch trees pen drawing Transitions Transitions are part of drawing (and painting) fundamentals. They exist everywhere! For example, different areas of a flat plane will have different relationships with any light source, reflections and shadows. Therefore, we always need to look for transitions (in brightness values) for our drawing to look realistic and natural. First, look for light and dark areas. Then, look for transitions within each area. Transitions from dark to light, from light to lighter and from dark to darker. Oak tree pen drawing By drawing with NO transitions (and using hard edges), we can create something that looks unnatural, as opposed to something realistic with transitions. The same way a gardener trims bushes and trees, we can use our artistic license to create something that looks artificial or man-made: Artistic license means to use our knowledge and experience. Once we understand how to draw leaves, we can draw anything with leaves texture. Objects, figures, vehicles or even a refrigerator: Good to know: Transitions are not limited to brightness values. Transitions exist in colors, texture, edges & temperature (transition from warm colors to cool colors). If you are struggling with realistic drawing, you might want to read my realistic pencil-drawing guide. It covers the 4 important fundamentals (accuracy of the form, brightness values, edges and transitions). Weeping Willow A weeping willow tree is a bit tricky to draw. Its leaves are easy to draw at an up-close look. As we get farther away, we can see long clusters of leaves with no single leaf shape. We can start by drawing an outline for the tree form. Do it gently. Then, one way is to draw the treetop (crown), section by section. Alternatively, like in this example, we can draw the dark values first. Something to consider: As mentioned above, a pen has one brightness value (usually black, though other colors exist). By drawing gently and swiftly, with a sharp angle, we can produce lines that are less defined and therefore, with a lighter value. Last step is to add the light values. Pay attention to brightness values, transitions and texture. Be abstract with your marks, yet with a sense of direction. Weeping Willow pen drawing How to Draw Huge Trees For some large trees, like Ficus, it is better to use a large paper sheet (A3 in this case). If the tree is too complex to draw, we can draw a grid (softly with a pencil), to divide the paper into smaller sections (and use the same grid for our reference image). Keep in mind: Drawing on a large paper with pen (or pencil) is time-consuming. For a tree like this it can easily take more than 20 hours to complete. Ficus tree pen drawing Sometimes, huge drawings may not look so big on a small screen. We can give it context by adding background trees (from imagination in this case). Background drawing Something to consider: We use the rules of atmospheric perspective when drawing backgrounds (landscape). When objects are far away, there are more atmosphere particles (that scatter light) between them and the observer. For far away objects, we use less contrast and fewer details. In addition, background layers will become lighter and have soft edges. Adding Background Trees are beautiful on their own. Sometimes though, we want to add a background. Drawing grass is a simple and easy solution for background. Start by drawing some short lines. The lines in the front should be a bit bolder and longer. Add more lines; some can be longer (mostly in the foreground). Avoid any pattern and try to be abstract with your marks. With a tree (eucalyptus in this case), grass (as background) will add depth. There is no actual depth in a drawing, our paper sheet is flat. The higher we draw on our paper (until the horizon), the farther away it will look. By drawing cast shadow by the tree, we add a sense of space to our drawing. To draw cast shadow, add more marks (lines) for that area, to create the illusion of dark value. Another option is to add some plants. For example, cattail plant (Typha). Remember: Natural plants and trees have an abstract shape. Make sure you do not draw them too round and uniform. When drawing long leaves, pay attention to cast shadows: After we test-draw the plant's parts, we can draw some loose outlines. For realistic results, we draw each flower or leaf with different size, shape and direction (but, keep in mind the tree or plant characteristics). Additionally, we pay attention to overlapping. Then, we add some brightness values and cast shadows. Cattail pen drawing Size & Context The way to define the size of objects is by placing them near other familiar objects. Although a worm is usually quite small, by drawing it big compared to known objects like trees, it is possible to create a giant monstrous worm. Giant worm On the other hand, we might want to draw a small tree, like a bonsai tree. In this case, we need context. Drawing a tree in a plant pot can help, but sometimes even large trees are sold inside pots. Drawing familiar surroundings, like a room, can help a lot in defining the bonsai's size. Bonsai tree Summary While there are no lines in nature, pens can only create lines! Drawing is creating an illusion. The world is three-dimensional but our paper-sheet is two-dimensional. We create this illusion by paying attention to brightness values, edges and transitions (among other things). A pen has only one brightness value, so, unlike other drawing mediums (graphite, charcoal, pastel...), we have to create the illusion of different brightness values and transitions. When drawing trees, focus on accuracy of the form and on brightness values. Accuracy in brightness values will create the illusion of depth and space. Make sure you have enough contrast between highlights and shadows for the drawing to be noticeable. After you master drawing the form and brightness values, details (texture) will make all the difference. If you liked this article, you might like my flower pen-drawing guide too. For my recommended pens that I used in this guide, visit my review for fineliners and technical pens for drawing.

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