

## Leonardo Diptych

We begin this year with a question. What is it that interests us; that compels us to make things, which we try to explain visually? What it is we have no words for – we can't seem to explain away and always seem to evade our grasp. Where is it in nature, which is what surrounds us, our bodies being an aspect of nature—then there is our "better nature" peeking out looking for what is true about what we are now asking. Where is it in the experiences which may be called narrative in painting, that tell us stories which represent our experiences in a more universal way—is this myth?

How do we wish to express our interests as artists? What is it we wish to understand? And if we choose a visual medium to express our desire, we are then faced with the question "do we have the craft of draft-man-ship"? And even if we do have that ability to draft –to visually find the means to explore what it is we seek to understand- do we have the ability to *pay* attention for long enough to evolve these desires into something visual, something tangible, or do we run out of steam.

Keeping this question in mind, please do a study or a series of studies from



Above is a drawing by Gamble Staempfli, a student at Bard College. The Leonardo drapery study to the left gave Gamble the skills and the idea for the chain link "posed" to reiterate the compositional quality of the Leonardo.

Leonardo's Nature studies (or another artist of similar quality you prefer—Tintoretto, Rembrandt, Raphael etc.).

Try to see where your visual strengths or weaknesses are, where you lose attention or are unable to be true to the feeling or the essence of what Leonardo had in mind. Can you make the marks as if you were Leonardo, seeing what he saw? When you have

completed this, take an object from nature itself (a tree, a leaf, mountains, your shell, animals, etc.) and try to relate the compositional format and mark-making techniques of the Leonardo to the study you are



Above: Leonardo diptych by Ami Mehta.  
Below: Drawings by Haley Mellin.



now trying from direct observation. You could choose Leonardo trees, for example, and draw a similar grouping of your own in nature. Try to see how your hand works differently when drawing an old master's drawing of a tree and when interpreting the tree in the flesh.

You will then have a diptych (two pieces which are related and can function as one). Try to use arches cover buff paper - two sheets of the same size. Use the same materials the artist used. If you wish, you may substitute the old masters or objects for something, which inspires you more. Tiepolo and shells or Cezanne and apples.... but keep it a real master and bring in the reproduction you worked from or the garlic you draw! These are due in two weeks; please bring in what you have started next week so we can work on them in class.

If you have been in this class before, try to incorporate the questions of materials, scale or transfer of imagery to the above. For example, you might iron newsprint with beeswax onto the tick of the diptych to work with glazes or overlays. Or you might attempt to work with photo transfer. Please try not to be too academic or literal. Reread this assignment: it does not say, "do a *copy*"; it says, "do a **study**"!



Above are three different studies of the same Cambiaso drawing.

Below left to right: Study after Rubens by Mozghan Sabba in various stages; in her diptych, Kirsten Ryder likened the movement of the Tintoretto to a shell; detail of triptych by Haley Mellin.

