

Roots



Melissa Wenzel (above) working on her roots assignment.

In order to better understand Hale's chapter on position, thrust and direction; to begin to see the turning and twisting of forms in and out of the space of the page; to become more sensitive to the different pressures and speeds necessary in a mark exploring a face (or small crevice) versus a mark sliding over a big sweep of the human back (or trunk of a tree):

Please read the Xerox sheets from [Bernard Chaet's book *The Art of Drawing*](#), then find a suitable root or roots and compose a drawing studying from these forms. Use Arches paper and choose either India ink, pen and wash (brush) or vine charcoal with eraser and then compressed charcoal.

In Chaet's assignment he asks the students to study roots saying "no matter which attitude or combination of attitudes is stressed, one consideration should be borne in mind: All the extremities that were twisted into strange patterns underground derive from a central core, the trunk. This idea has a parallel in figure drawing, in which arms and legs move from the cylinder of the body." He goes on to say in the

student response to the project that "...the roots are presented in a dramatically staged composition. The actors - the large trunk and the root forms - gesticulate in the center of the stage. The lighting and ambiguous background add to the effect..., the root branches resemble claws, and the bulging mass suggests organic matter that seems capable of crawling, yet the whole shape swells and moves through the space as an entity..."

You might work with twisted roots resembling groups of animals or forms writhing or playing from a central core, or you might choose a ginger root perhaps resembling lava-like formations or yams that seem seal-like, or even better seals that seem yam like. Please look at [Turning Circles](#) on the teaching site.

Be aware of the space of the whole page and how your placement of the forms alters it. Does the root sit on the surface? Create deep space? Pop out at you? Is there fluidity of movement even in the writhing and twisting of these roots? Chaet says "...by examining root forms at close range, we are permitted many kinds of investigation. For some the roots suggest distorted animal-like configuration; others are interested in the velocity at which the forms unexpectedly travel, still others examine the sculptured weights, thrusts, and counter-thrusts into space..."

If you can't find a root, which is suitable, go to Chinatown to the markets and search out one of the forms that the vendors sell - they're extraordinary! Or a complicated branch you've found, or ginger. Perhaps you would rather work from a photograph of a group of seals? Or - if you are lucky - some horse rolling in the field. But if you do work from a photo, please choose one that is black and white and is well lit, so that the forms are elucidated. Your aim is to try to find the twisting movement of the form, as well as the turning movements of the forms in and out of the illusory space of the page. You might work with a single object but try to work so that even if you use a small root, it has monumental scale. Really try to find the change in direction as your tool travels from form to form.

We could title these drawings "Twisting and Turning."



Right Above: Student drawing of ginger roots.
Right Below: Carolyn Haydn's drawing of a maple leaf.