

Roots, from The Art of Drawing by Bernard Chaet

By examining root forms at close range we are permitted many kinds of investigation. For some the roots suggest distorted animallike configurations; others are interested in the velocity at which the forms unexpectedly travel; still others examine the sculptured weights, thrusts, and counter-thrusts into space. yet 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.

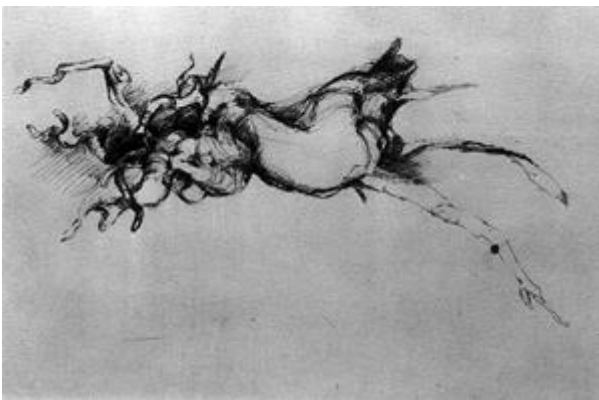
Student Responses

The first four drawings in this section suggest animal imagery. In Figure 106 the roots are presented in a dramatically staged composition. The actors - the large trunk and root forms - gesticulate in the center of the stage. The lighting and the ambiguous background add to the effect.



106. Michael Economos. *Gesticulating Roots*, 1960. Pen and ink with wash.

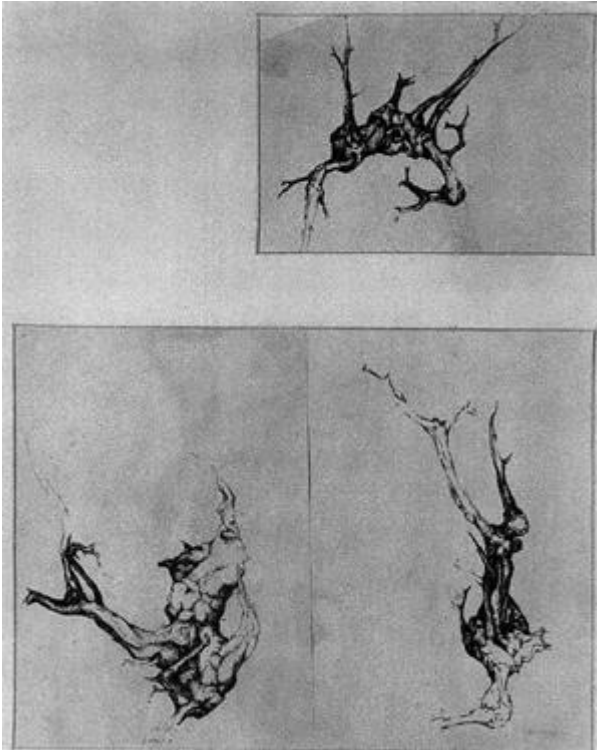
In figure 107 the root branches resemble claws, and the bulging mass suggests organic matter that seems capable of crawling, yet the whole shape swells and moves through the space as an entity. The placement of the form at the top of the page precludes immediate contact with the viewer and leaves room on the stage for potential movement. Again in Figure 108 the branches are organic, animallike forms, this time writhing and twisting diagonally across the page.



107. Student drawing. *Organic Root Forms*. Pen and ink

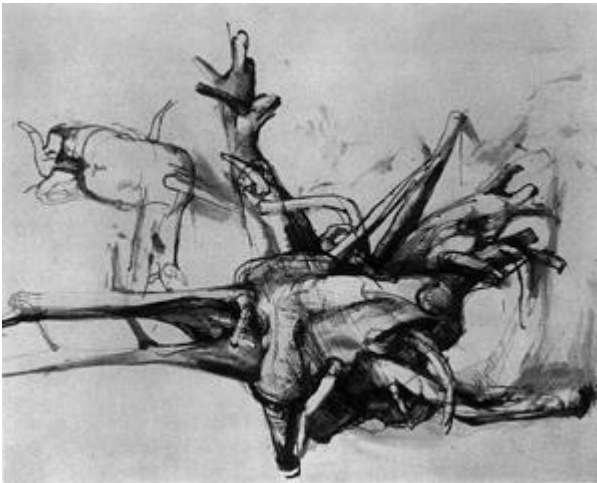


108. Frederic Felton. *Writhing Branches*, 1959. Pen and ink.



109. Asher Derman. *Three Studies of Roots*, 1957. Pen and ink.

Figure 109 is a group of three separate studies, and each gives a detailed look at minute swellings of form. This close examination does not prevent the eye from following the transitions from one part to another, nor does it prevent us from reading the overall character of the individual form.



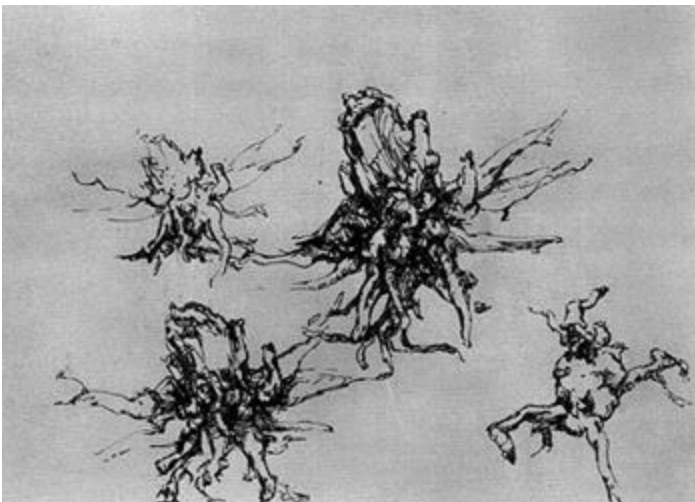
110. Michael Mazur. *Reciprocal Pressures*, 1960. Wash.

Each form in the wash drawing in Figure 110 applies weight and pressure on its neighbor in a reciprocal action. The complicated structure is interpreted as a heavy sculpture.



111. John Cohen. *Roots in Tension*, 1954. Brush and ink.

The brush drawing in Figure 111 focuses on speed. Specific details are articulated by the fast line that contains the modeled sections within its flow. Long, looping brush strokes play upon the carefully chose details. The most detailed areas are the intersections where forms meet in tension.



112. Louis Klein. *Postures of Roots*, 1959. Pen and ink.

The pen-and-ink drawing in Figure 112 uses techniques similar to those in Pisanello's work to express the actions of roots by accenting their postures. It is a study of poses - the dancing movement of a whole form - and the artist repeats the action across the page to underscore the theme.

All drawings are from the Collection of Yale University, New Haven Conn.

Begin to place loosely the objects, images you wish to draw - into the space you have created with a gestural study of the position of the masses you are depicting. Here too, keep in mind the relationship of form to form, mark to mark. Does this line sit in front or behind, do I flatten it in this way?



Left and right drawings by Sang Park;
center drawing by Conrad Seto.

Vary the mark, the direction, the scale, with this bucket of marks you CHOOSE to elucidate or express the feeling you wish to convey. As if it is a day with many different kinds of weather - areas of fog, of sun, of wind, a little rain.

You can shift them about with an eraser, alter the scale, cut in angles, obscuring some forms, elucidating others.

Begin with the masses, building up to areas of the lit skin of the planes, going in and out of fog, of focus - things in the distance seem obscured, less touched. Don't work details to begin with - organize the space of the page in terms of the movement. Keep coming back to the gesture. Don't think: "object" - "page". Think in terms of marks and space. Now there begins to be some sun and you light these skins on the forms and we called that rendering, carefully making transitions from the fog into clarity. Back to the gesture. Back to lighting - some areas developed, some ghostlike - often sacrificing a well-rendered form for the sake of the whole. Look at Leonardo.

Decide now what figures, forms, shells, fruit, etc you wish to include. Do they become giant peanuts, or mini elephants? Try to shift direction as you go from form to form and even mass to mass or plane to plane within form.

How do you combine an old master segment and a shell or life study into one page? Spend 6-10 hours at home and bring drawing plus still life objects and old master reproductions etc to class, plus a full range of materials.



Drawing by Thomas Brouillette.