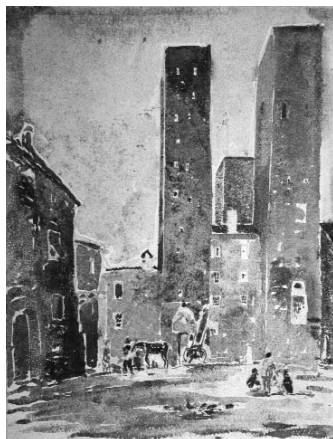
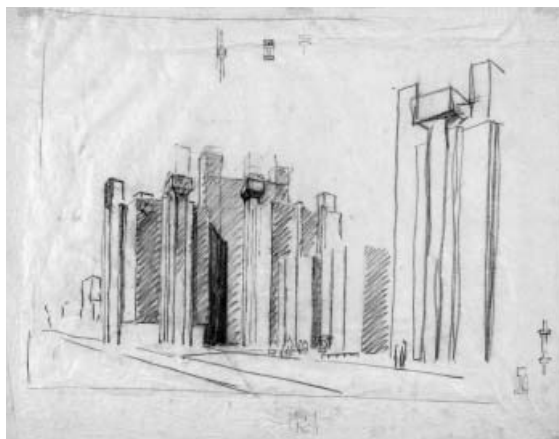


## LESSON TWO: The Power of Drawing



**IMAGE SIX:** Louis I. Kahn. American, born Estonia. 1901–1974. *Towers, San Gimignano*. 1928. Watercolor and red pencil on paper, 12  $\frac{1}{8}$  x 9  $\frac{1}{4}$ " (30.8 x 23.5 cm). Collection, Williams College Museum of Art. Museum purchase with funds provided by an anonymous donor and with the J. W. Field Fund, John B. Turner '24 Memorial Fund, Joseph O. Eaton Fund, Karl E. Weston Memorial Fund, Bentley W. Warren Fund



**IMAGE SEVEN:** Louis I. Kahn. American, born Estonia. 1901–1974. Alfred Newton Richards Medical Research Building and Biology Building, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Preliminary version: perspective. 1957. Charcoal on tracing paper, 23  $\frac{7}{8}$  x 31" (60.6 x 78.7 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of the architect



**IMAGE EIGHT:** Louis I. Kahn, c. 1971. The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia. Photograph: Martin Rich

## INTRODUCTION

Kahn learned to paint and draw at a very young age. As a child, he enrolled in after-school art classes, which he continued until he graduated from high school. In architecture school he learned how to create different types of architectural **renderings**. When he graduated from college in 1924, it was these skills that earned him his first job in an architecture firm — as a **draftsman**. In 1928, he decided to spend a year in Europe to experience great architecture of the past. He began his journey in England, then traveled across northern Europe and on to Italy and France. While he was in Europe, Kahn made many drawings that were much more painterly than the precise renderings he had created in architecture school and at the Philadelphia architecture firm. Using watercolor and pencil in new ways, he employed his new style throughout a body of work that illustrated structures that interested him for their compositional elements.

Even as Kahn's career as an architect escalated, he never abandoned painting and drawing, and he continued to create and exhibit artwork throughout his life. He also continued to travel throughout the world, creating drawings of the structures that inspired him. This lesson explores the different techniques of drawing Kahn used to articulate his ideas.

## LESSON OBJECTIVES

- Students will compare and contrast works of art in different mediums.
- Students will become familiar with the different ways architects express their ideas visually.
- Students will be exposed to different styles of rendering.

## INTRODUCTORY DISCUSSION

- Lead a discussion with your students about the role of drawing in their lives. Ask your students what kinds of subject matter they choose to draw and how they decide to represent their subjects. Ask them to make a list of the different kinds of tools they use to draw. Do they use these tools the same way every time? Inform your students about Kahn's background as an artist and how he used different techniques of rendering throughout his life.

## IMAGE-BASED DISCUSSION

- Give your students a few minutes to look at *Towers, San Gimignano* (Image Six). Ask them to describe what they see. Ask them how they would describe it to someone who has never seen it. Have them make a list of five to ten adjectives that describe this work.

Inform your students that this is a watercolor sketch of San Gimignano, a small town in the Tuscan region of Italy. Kahn made this sketch while he was traveling in Europe in 1928.

- Ask your students to consider what materials these structures could be made of. Is there any visual evidence that answers these questions?

Kahn's travel sketches were not rendered in perfect perspective. He was interested in capturing the essence of the place he was drawing, which had to do more with the feeling of the environment and less with documenting exact architectural details.

- Ask your students if they feel this drawing expresses a certain kind of mood or tone.

- Read the following quotation from Kahn out loud:

No object is entirely apart from its surroundings and therefore cannot be represented convincingly as a thing in itself; also the presence of our own individuality causes it to appear differently than it would to others. . . . There is no value in trying to imitate exactly. Photographs will serve you best of all, if that is your aim. We should not imitate when our intention is to create—to improvise. . . . I try in all my sketching not to be entirely subservient to my subject, but I have respect for it, and regard it as something tangible—alive—from which to extract my feelings. I have learned to regard it as no physical impossibility to move mountains and trees, or change cupolas and towers to suit my taste.<sup>7</sup>

- Ask your students to discuss this quotation as it relates to the image. What can we interpret about this sketch of San Gimignano based on reading this quotation? Conduct an Internet search for photographs of San Gimignano. Does Kahn's representation depict the town exactly?
- Show your students Kahn's perspective sketch for the Alfred Newton Richards Medical Research Building and Biology Building (Image Seven).

In 1957, Kahn was commissioned by the University of Pennsylvania to design a new research laboratory for the medical school. Until this time, Kahn had not built a high-rise structure. For the Richards Building he designed three laboratory towers surrounded by four monumentally scaled air-intake stacks. This was an early sketch he made to document his overall idea. He went on to create many more drawings, rendered in greater detail.

- Ask your students to look at this sketch and *Towers, San Gimignano* and observe any similarities or differences in subject, style, and technique. Ask your students if they see any relationship between the two works.

Architects create perspective sketches as a nonprecise way of articulating a main idea—much in the same way Kahn's drawing of San Gimignano gives us a sense of the mood of the place without precise, photorealistic details. The main idea in this perspective sketch is the relationship of the overall size, shape, and **scale** of the structures. Kahn began the design process with sketches like this to illustrate his broad **concept** rather than specific details.

- Show your students Image Eight. This is a picture of Kahn drawing a flower within a circle, using both hands simultaneously. Kahn learned this drawing technique in his childhood art classes in Philadelphia. To render using this technique, the drawer needs to balance his or her body movements with the sensation of the chalk against the board.
- Have your students model this exercise in your classroom. Have them draw a circle on the board or on paper tacked up on the wall, then draw a flower (a basic outline of the leaves and petals) inside the circle with both hands simultaneously. Lead a discussion with your students about this process. Did they find it difficult? Why or why not? Ask your students if they can see a benefit to practicing a technique of drawing like this one.

### ACTIVITY

Have your students visit a place in their community and spend some time observing what is there. Have them consider what mood or feeling the design of the place conveys. Encourage them to position themselves in different places in order to gain multiple perspectives. Have your students choose one perspective to render through the drawing techniques of their choice. Exhibit your students' work around the classroom and lead a discussion in which students talk about their processes.

7. Louis I. Kahn, "The Value and Aim In Sketching," in Latour, *Louis I. Kahn*, 11.