



Creative by Nature Art

Drawing and Painting with

Light & Shadow

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CREATIVE by NATURE ART

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LIGHT AND SHADOW

“I thought the most beautiful thing in the world must be shadow.” Sylvia Plath

One of my favourite creative energizers is drawing and painting with light and shadow. There are two parts to this offering, ‘outside-in’ artful engagement with nature’s shadows, and inside-out’ artful engagement with our own shadow selves.

Shadows have been on my mind a lot lately. Maybe it’s because in the pacific northwest, at this wintery time of year, the sun is very low in the sky and shadows are prolific and incredibly long as they wrap their tentacles across forest pathways, roads and over walls.

A few weeks ago, while trick or treating with my husband and daughter I was struck by the gorgeous branch shadow that appeared on my husband’s right cheek. It was created when a child illuminated her way with a flashlight along a bushy stretch of dark road. The effect was spell-binding as a moving tree face emerged, alive, yet with a complex tattoo of branchy pathlines.

Then two weeks later I watched a compelling contemporary dance performance entitled “Frontier” choreographed by Crystal Pike. www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yt-eVpG8MhI

Dancers in white were embraced, supported, impeded, tracked, and intimidated by black shadowy figures with wild bird-like gestures. As the light dancers moved, tension was created by the continual presence of shadow selves or what Pike likens to dark matter, that mysterious parallel shadow universe that mirrors, sometimes bursts through, and continually shapes our own.

There has always been something about the dance of shadow on a wall or on a face that intrigues me. Maybe it’s their monochromatic nature or the clarity of their silhouette. Though even more likely it’s their continual movement. For unless created by artificial light, a shadow is always moving and changing - often very quickly since its very existence is directly tied to the movement of the earth relative to the sun. Drawing and painting shadow and light can place us in direct contact with this natural movement and change. We see and feel the movement of life.

“... the shadow of Wild Woman still lurks behind us



fern foot



during our days and in our nights. No matter where we are, the shadow that trots behind us is definitely four-footed. “ Clarissa Pinkola Estés

In a parallel way, giving in-the-moment creative expression to shadow selves, thoughts, or impulses offers insight, releases energy and makes us feel more whole. Hidden aspects of self come into the light slowly revealing their power to transform our lives. By making art in the service of knowing ourselves more fully, we can slowly turn up the light and see what shadows reveal themselves because where there is bright light there is also shadow.

PART I: DRAWING AND PAINTING WITH NATURE’S SHADOWS

By making art in the service of knowing ourselves more fully, we can slowly turn up the light and see what shadows reveal themselves.

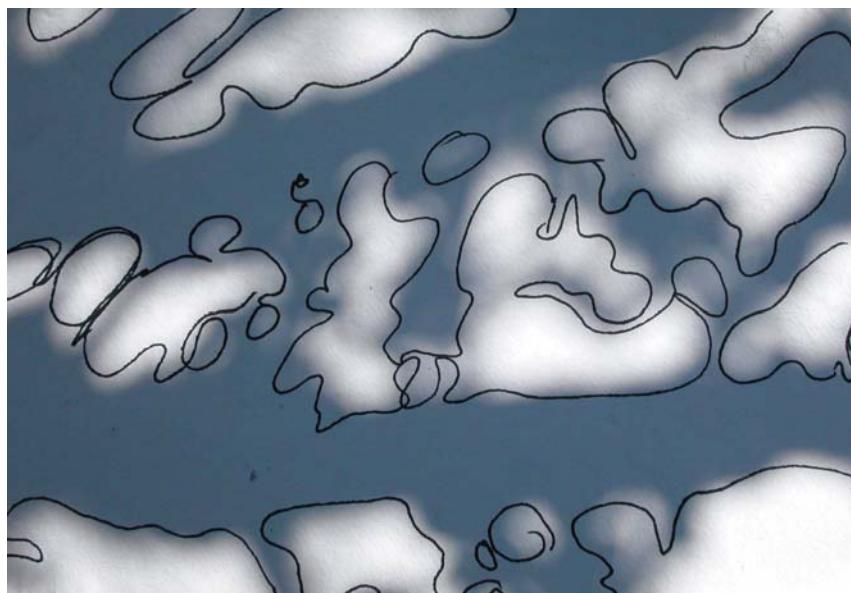
Pick a bright day for this activity. Begin your session by setting an intention (see the Create Cycle in the Introduction to Creative by nature Art PDF). To “intend” originates from the French *entendre, entendre* ‘to direct one’s attention’ (in Modern French, principally “to hear”), from the Latin *intendere* turn one’s attention, strain, literally to stretch out, extend.

Record your intention, then let it go. Literally. Setting an intention is like dropping a pebble into a still well of water and watching the ripples blossom outwards. By dropping your pebble into the well, you can then trace the meaning of your journey back to its source when you are finished. Don’t consciously hold on to the original intention, rather just carry on and create.

Take a few moments and write down what you are curious about or what you are drawn toward today.

Take your art supplies (see Creative by Nature Art Eight Day Practice PDF) as you wander outside and open to a plant, animal, or tree whose shadow really appeals to you. Ask permission to engage.

shadow outline



To begin this activity, it is probably enough to simply focus on tracing shapes and staying present to what is happening in the moment. Draw and paint by balancing the use of each hand, creating with both hands for part of the session and painting relatively equal amounts of time with your eyes open and closed. Close your eyes to choose the paint colours at least half the time. Work slowly.

Here is a video taken at the Cortes Island Children’s Forest where



Top: paintings
Middle: tree banner
Bottom: banner painting

I drew with light and shadow and the following narrative describes an encounter with the shadows of an apple tree in my front yard.

<http://creativenatureconnection.com/video/light-draw>

I worked quickly to trace the branch shadows because they moved enough to be unrecognizable in the very short time it took me to pop up and run to my studio to get my camera. I felt incredibly free as I alternated outlining the shapes created by the shadows and the dappled sunlight.

Then I painted inside the outlines. It was fun choosing the paint by running my fingers over the palette and letting my hand choose the colours. I painted the light spaces in and around the shadows. I loved giving colour to this beautiful dappled light.

For my second painting, I again started by tracing shadows but this time I gave *them* colour and left the sun lit areas alone. The shadows moved a great deal in the short time it took to paint them.

For my third painting I quickly painted the shadows free hand. This was very loose and freeing yet I needed to stay focused and decisive to quickly paint either the light or shadowed areas without outlining them first.

When all three paintings were complete, I laid them down on the ground on top of the shadows that had inspired their creation. Immediately I envisioned outlining the whole tree onto a larger piece of paper. Outlining light and shadow then painting on a large piece of mural paper seemed like an exciting extension. So I ran to my studio to look at paper options and I chose vellum because it's both smooth and shadowy.

I laid frosty vellum under the shadows of the apple tree. I coloured in the shadows free hand with a gold oil stick. I realized quickly that I needed to outline the shadows first if I wanted them on the page. So, I traced the limbs, branches, and leaves in black marker and mused that it could be fun to work in watercolour or fluid acrylic to quickly paint the moving shadows. Then I took the banner to my studio where I could lie it down on a smooth surface because I found the grass to be too uneven to paint on. I was compelled to paint the shadows gold and the dappled light shapes all different colours.

I finished the session by recording what I noticed and wondered about, then began my inside-out image.

PART II: DRAW AND PAINT SHADOW SELVES

Our inner world is a complex exquisite and powerful play of colours, lights and shadows, a cathedral of consciousness as glorious as the natural world itself. – Julia Cameron

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Now I invite you to draw and paint spontaneously on a new page. Follow what attracts by tracking the flow of what fits easily in the moment. Begin an image by closing your eyes and drawing random shapes and lines. Use both hands at least part of the time. After five minutes or so, bring your paints out and close your eyes to choose the colours. Keep your eyes closed as you paint with wild abandon, alternating hands and having fun. Do this for as long as you'd like. If it's easier to paint in pitch darkness rather than closing your eyes, I invite you to try that. When you feel finished open your eyes. This is like turning on the light to better see a shadow image - the one created in the 'dark'. Using coloured watercolour pencils, or permanent marker (wait until the paint is dry before using marker or the ink will stop running) outline interesting areas, define shadowy shapes, deepen and darken colour. Just as you outlined light and shadow in Part I, outline and define shape and colour in this new image. What is asking to be illuminated? Watch this video to learn more about how to extend your drawings and paintings in this way. www.tinyurl.com/n48vulv

To finish, you can dialogue with a shape, a being, a colour, a natural shadow. You can ask, Is there anything you'd like to share? Also, take a few moments to record anything you noticed while you were creating and anything you wonder about. Revisit your original intention. Are there any new insights, observations or questions you have? Close by expressing gratitude in some way.

Consider sharing your images and creative experiences with members of the Creative by Nature Art BLOG and enjoy a supportive community of like-minded creatives.

Learn more about Lisa Lipsett's work at www.LisaLipsett.com
Creative by Nature Art – classes, resources, art, blog
www.creativebynature.org

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