

Drawing and Poetry: The Overlooked Object



**Adventures
of the
Mundane**



Paul Patrick Fenner

Adventures of the Mundane by Paul Patrick Fenner

Drawing and Poetry: The Overlooked Object

Most of the objects in our home are tools of one kind or another: things that we use rather than look at. We know them intimately, but more through touch than through sight. I'm thinking of things like door-handles, taps, toilet seats, drawers, light switches, biros, potato peelers. These are things that are so close to us, so attuned to our use that they are like parts of our bodies. Like our elbows or ears, we are using them all the time, but don't think about them at all (it's not necessary to examine the door-handle before we use it). What if we turn our full attention to these objects? Drawing is a way of deepening our understanding of the world; by drawing something, our relationship to it is transformed. The more we draw, the more mysterious and amazing everything becomes. In the following task you are going to draw some of the objects in your home. When considered in isolation, liberated from scale, they might start to take on new resonances, provoke different associations. Bottles, kitchen implements, electrical appliances might suddenly become architectural, monumental.



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Drawing task

Materials: sketchbook/pad (A4 or larger), soft pencil (ideally 7b or above), charcoal or other soft dry media, rubber

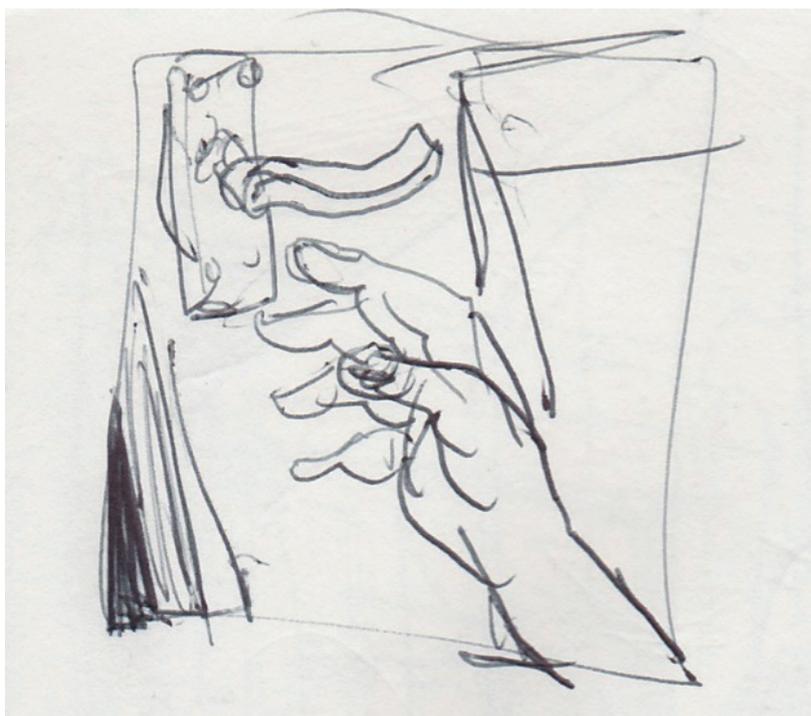
Time: 1 hour

Think about the kind of objects in your home that you know more through touch than through sight. Take a walk around your house or flat and find five objects of this kind.

You're going to spend **10 minutes** drawing each object. One A4 sheet of paper for each object (either loose sheets, or in a sketchbook if you have one).

Take a moment to look at your sheet of paper before you begin: make your lines appropriate to the size of the page. First, draw your hand as if reaching in from the bottom of the page toward the object. As you draw, think of the action associated with the object. Imagine you are reaching out with your line, using the line rather than your hand to grasp the object.

After you have finished, do one more drawing of each, spending no more than **30 seconds** on each one. You can get someone to time you, or set a timer on your phone. It's important that you draw the whole thing in time. Don't worry about how it comes out, don't worry about proportion, just as long as everything joins up and you have a complete object.



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Reflection

The world of the everyday is all the more mysterious for being so familiar, and few people understood this more than the French poet Francis Ponge (1899 – 1988). Ponge devoted practically his entire life's work to an exploration of the most ordinary and overlooked of objects both natural and human-made. In his 1942 book *Le Partis Pris des Choses* ('on the side of things') he examines in short prose poems such things as pebbles, packing crates, and jugs...

The Jug (La Cruche)

No other word has the ring of a jug. Thanks to the U that opens in the middle of it, jug is hollower than hollow, and in its own way. It is a hollow surrounded by fragile earth: roughcast and easy to crack.

Jug is first empty and as soon as possible empty again.

Empty jug is resonant.

Jug is first empty and filled up with song.

So shallow that water rushes into it, jug is first empty and filled up with song.

Jug is first empty and as soon as possible empty again.

It is an indifferent sort of object, a mere go between.

Among a few glasses (for example) with care share it out.

It is therefore but a go-between, which we could get along without. Hence cheap; of middling worth.

But it comes in handy and is used every day.

A workaday object, whose only reason to exist is to be used a lot.

A little rough, succinct; despicable? – Its loss would not be a disaster...

The jug is made of the commonest materials; often of pottery.

It doesn't have the bombastic form, the emphasis of amphorae.

It is a mere vase, slightly compounded by a handle; a pot belly; a wide neck – and often the bluntish beak of a duck.

A farmyard object. A domestic object.

So the particularity of the jug is to be both poor and fragile: so somehow precious. And the problem with it is that one must – for such is also its character – use it every day.

We must take hold of this poor thing (a mere go-between, worthless, cheap), place it in the light of day, handle it, make use of it; clean, fill, empty.

The jug goes so often to water that in the end it breaks. It perishes of long use. Not from wear: by accident. That is, if you like, by wearing out its chances of survival.

It is a utensil that perishes from a special kind of wear: by wearing out its chances of survival.

So the jug, which has a simple, cheerful personality, perishes of long use.

One is advised to handle it with care. Put it where it won't bang into things. Leave some space between it and the other things.

Treat it as a dancer his partner. When right up close, be prudent, Avoid hitting nearby couples.

Full, it may overflow, empty it may break.

Don't bang it down... don't give it too little room.

So this is an object that we use day in day out, but with regard to which, in spite of its cheapness, we must take care how we move about. To keep it in shape, so it doesn't break, go to pieces suddenly, devoid of interest, heartrending and derisory.

It is true some people, to console themselves, linger – and why not? – over the pot shards: noting that they are convex... crooked even... petaliform... that there is a kinship with rose petals, egg shells... who's to say?

But is this not a kind of mockery?

For everything I've just said of the jug, couldn't one say equally Well about *words*?

(translated by Beverley Bie Brahic, 2008)

Handwritten signature or scribble consisting of several overlapping, curved lines.