

Tricks of Trompe L'oeil

By Amanda Lutz-Beheshti

Student Objectives

1. Students will recognize and learn about the art and decorating technique of Trompe L'oeil that is centuries old and still very popular today. With this type of art so prevalent, it will help children to identify it when they see it. As we live in a world where alternative realities are being created, it is important to learn how, what and why this is accomplished to best decipher truth in visual reality as we view two-dimensional (2D) art as it appears three-dimensional (3D).
2. Learn more about illusion, shadows and lighting and perspective by studying examples of a Trompe L'oeil work of art.
3. Students will illustrate an example of Trompe L'oeil encompassing certain elements to make something appear realistic as 3D on 2D surface.

What is Trompe L'oeil?

Pronounced trômp-'lòi / trômp-'luh-yuh, Trompe L'oeil is French for “deceives the eye”. It is a technique where the artist creates an optical illusion in a painting or drawing of realistic images on a two dimensional surface (2D of length and width only) but appears as three dimensional (3D of length, width and depth). While it is first said to be used as early as the 5th Century BC into Greek and Roman times, you see it in everyday life from theater backgrounds and sets, street murals, chalk art and decorative and fine art.

Characteristics to consider with Trompe L'oeil to make objects appear “real”

- As a rule, paint/draw certain objects life-size so they should appear “real size”
- Forced Perspective – with lines converging to a vanishing point
- Shadows and highlights
- Proportion of objects / lines / shapes as they relate to other objects in art
- Usually works best when viewed standing in one particular spot

Utilizing certain techniques can produce this look through painting or drawing an object or image in life-size, incorporating light and shadows (highlights and lowlights) with other objects/backgrounds using forced perspective and a particular point of view to create an illusion that tricks the human eye into thinking it appears as real.

History

The first recorded story of the use of Trompe L'oeil is of Zeuxis, a Greek 5th century BC artist who was said to have painted grapes so life-like that birds flew down to peck at them. The story continues that his artist rival, Parrhausius, fooled him when Zeuxis tried to push aside the cloth covering of one of Parrhausius's paintings, and the trompe-l'oeil (“deceives the eye”) of the fabric turned out to be the painting itself. While their works did not survive, the use of trompe l'oeil continued through Roman frescoes and the Renaissance, and went on to be further developed by Flemish, German and later, French, painters who designed to surprise and amaze. The tradition of trompe l'oeil is still a popular technique today used by many muralists and street artists and found in theatrical sets as well as decorative and fine art paintings and drawings.

Two notable living Trompe L'oeil artists are John Pugh with his oversized wall murals and Julian Beever for his pavement drawings.

Artists and examples over time



Flemish School, *A Boy Looking through a Casement*, c.1550-60.



Still-Life by Samuel Dirksz van Hoogstraten, 1664



Pozzo, Andrea: trompe l'oeil dome
Jesuit Church, Vienna, 1600's
(the dome is a flat surface)



Pere Borell del Caso
Escaping Criticism, 1874



John Pugh, *Key of C*, 2012 Hermosa Beach, CA



Joh Pugh, *Mana Nalu*, 2008, Honolulu, HI



John Pugh
You Should Have Been Here Yesterday, 2021
 13th St. and 13th, Hermosa Beach, CA



(close-up)



"Copenhagen Zoo"
 Bates Y&R



R. Cronk, self portrait + detail from Venice Beach, 1990, 33' x 38', acrylic on masonry, Ocean Front Walk, Venice, CA.

Copyright © R. Cronk 1996 - All Rights Reserved

Venice Beach, R. Cronk, 1990

Chalk Artwork



r,
Julian Beever
Meeting Mr. Frog



Julian Beever
Batman and Robin to the Rescue
London, UK



Edgar Mueller
Mueller's Waterfall, 2007
Prairie Art Festival, Moose Jaw, Canada



David Zinn chalk artwork

Theatrical Sets



The Maitlands' residence DAVID KORINS

Beetlejuice set design by David Korins



Swan Lake set for Australian Ballet
Photographed by Daniel Boud

Art Vocabulary

Optical Illusion – a misleading image presented to the vision

Forced Perspective - the use of various techniques to create an optical illusion where objects or people are smaller, larger, closer, or farther away than they really are.

Shadow - the dark figure cast upon a surface by a body intercepting the rays from a source of light

Depth – the direct linear measurement from front to back

Two-Dimensional (2D) – having two dimensions (such as length and width), lacking the illusion of depth

Three-Dimensional (3D) – having three dimensions (such as length, width and depth), giving the illusion of depth or varying distances

Set-up and Procedure

Layout one of each item listed below per student. Put paint on non-absorbent plate or some sort of palette.

Supplies per student

1 pc mixed media paper (7" x 10")

Approx. 1 Tbsp burnt sienna acrylic paint

Approx. ½ Tbsp Black

Approx. ½-1 Tbsp White

6 Round paint brush (4 round is fine too)

6 Flat paint brush (4 or 5 is fine too)

1 Round (or any very small detail brush)

Rectangle template (approx. 3" x 6")

Small pc of artist sponge (damp)

Print-out of layout (of rectangle placement and outline of mouse)

Cup for water

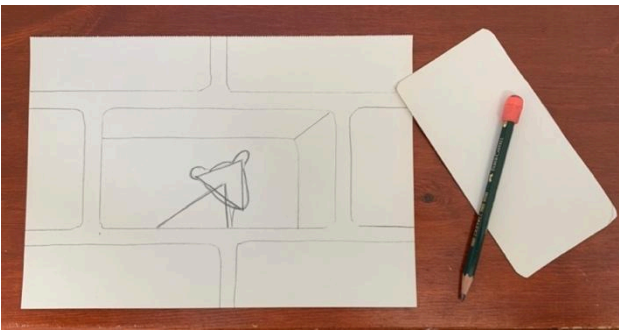
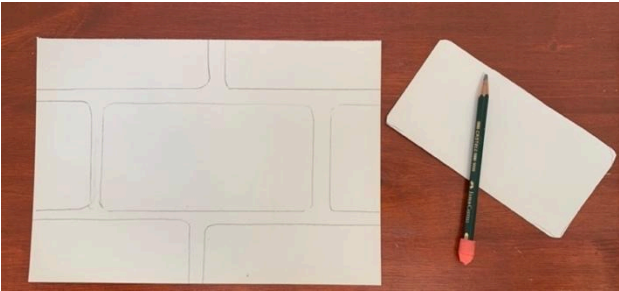
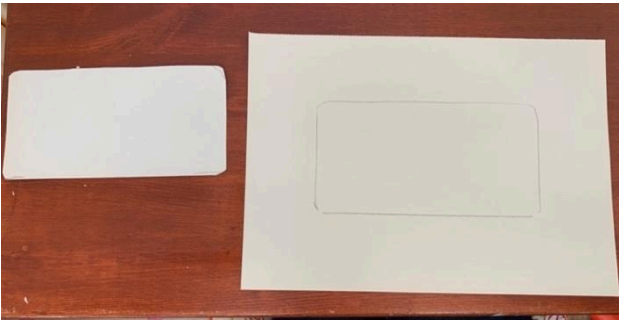
Paper towel

Pencil

Possibly Ruler and Scissors if you need to draw/cut out 3"x6" template

Procedure

1. Using rectangle template, trace 1 rectangle in the center of the page, follow layout like example (will provide layout). Does not have to be perfect!
2. Inside center rectangle, take rectangle template and slide it down and to the left about 1 inch, draw only the rectangular line that fit inside that center rectangle. Connect the two corners with a diagonal line.
3. Draw loose shape of mouse by using triangles.
4. Using 6 Flat brush, paint Burnt Sienna inside all the outside rectangles, leaving the inside one empty. Put brush in water.
5. Take wet sponge and dip and mix a little white and a little burnt sienna, sponge on the painted rectangles.
6. Using 6 Round brush, dip brush with Burnt Sienna into black paint, paint the upper shape inside the center rectangle.
7. Do not clean paintbrush. Dip brush with Burnt Sienna/Black into edge of white, mix and paint the shape to the right in the center rectangle.
8. Clean 6 Round brush. Paint black in the remaining area of the center rectangle EXCEPT the mouse shape.
9. Using 6 Rnd Brush, mix black and white for a med gray (use about ½ black, ½ white). Paint in mouse shape. Put brush in water.
10. Using 6 Flat Brush, mix black and white for light gray (mostly white, little black). Paint in grout of brick (all lines in between the burnt sienna brick).
11. Using 1 Rnd Brush and black, dab two small eyes. Dab a little white on brush and paint chin and whiskers of mouse. Paint small area of shadow where hands will go. Clean brush.
12. Using 1 Rnd Brush dab in white and burnt sienna for a light pink. Paint inside of left ear (or both ears), dab for nose and paws 3 little dabs.



Resources

Merriam-Webster Dictionary

RoyalAcademy.org

New York Times, "What is Real, What Isn't?", by Roderick Conway Morris, Nov. 20, 2009

<https://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/21/arts/21iht-conway.html>

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<https://www.julianbeever.net>

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