

Title: **Of Objects and Stories: Creating Meaningful Connections Through Clay**

Description

It is often said by ceramicists that clay has memory. In the most literal sense this is true. The unique physical properties of clay and the expressive potential of its movements make the material capable of visually telling its own story and retaining its physical history.

In a figurative sense, this is true as well. Clay was used in the earliest known works of figurative art, and clay tablets were the first writing medium. In Mesoamerica, early Mayan pottery was elaborately illustrated with scenes of important events as well as casual daily happenings. Early Mayan artists signed their own work so others would know who created it. These objects help to tell and preserve memories, stories, and generational knowledge for others to learn and connect with long after their creation.

Process/project

Using a picture reference of your chosen object or vessel, and clay as a medium to preserve a memory or a story, make an object that holds a story about you, or someone you'd like to remember. Use color, illustration, carving or other surface details to visually represent the story, or give us clues about who the story is about. Through the form and surface, communicate why the story is meaningful to you and why you would like it to be remembered. Finally, sign or stamp your work so others know who created it.

The vessels and objects we make will be placed together to create a collection of objects and stories through which we may find new connections of understanding and meaning with them, and perhaps even with each other.

Materials

- Air dry clay
- Clay tools
- Acrylic paint
- Paint brushes
- Cup for water
- Spray bottle with clean water
- Sketching paper for drawing and writing

Utah Fine Arts Core

CREATE: Engage collaboratively in exploration and imaginative play with art materials, and use observation and investigation in preparation for making a work of art.

RESPOND: Interpret art by categorizing subject matter and identifying the characteristics of form.

CONNECT: Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding that people from different times and places have made art for a variety of reasons.

Utah Core Curriculum Standards

- **Social Studies:** Learn about cultures found in different regions of the world and identify examples of cultural expression.
- **English Language Arts:** Speaking, listening, evaluating information from a variety of sources, and responding appropriately.
- **Health Education:** Mental and emotional health. Relating to others, and developing personal identity.

“Put away your schoolwork. It’s time to Sketch!”

Why Sketching, not Drawing?

Sketching and Drawing are different, just like Cookie Dough and Cookies. I eat *both*, and they are different, but you must have one to get the other. *Good dough = good cookies!*

Observations and Opinions by Artist/Educator Chris Maggio regarding children and their artistic development, and how Organic Sketching can bring about more confidence.

“**It’s time to draw!**” What kid doesn’t love to hear *that* in school? It represents a lot of things to active minds, both little and big, as it includes a chance to express themselves, to get a bit *louder* than most classes allow, explore colors and art tools, a chance to brag about their awesome drawing skills (even if it’s almost non-existent!), and most of all it is a liberating span of time with freethinking and *no wrong answers*. It’s a bright spot in the day!

At least it *should* be.

Hi, everyone, I’m Chris Maggio (Mr. C to my students). As an artist/educator who has been lucky enough to work with *thousands* of kids at all levels from K-College, with incredibly diverse skill sets and wonderfully endless ideas, I have been witness to the full spectrum of interest in “drawing time”. Some love it, some not so much. I will continue from this point after clarifying that K-12 is my focus group for the following observations. I *did* go to medical school, but I am *not* a psychologist, what I *am* is privy to a keen recognition of mannerism and attitudes exhibited by small people who give clear “tells”. College level students are firstly not kids, and secondly are there voluntarily, not held in class “against their will” (as one 4th grader told me, his arms crossed and not a mark on his paper), so their maturity, at whatever level, is not *tabula rasa*. They are not included below.

I would like to talk about an oft overlooked issue.

While a majority of kids seek art as much as recess or lunch to break up the day, there are a few who find it to be a bit of a struggle, causing yet another unfortunate opportunity to turn *inward* and shy away in embarrassment for lack of skills, be it real or just perceived. With many of these children I sit one on one and teach them how to draw a turtle, and playfully associate their reluctance with that of a turtle in their shell and reassure them that *great things* go on inside a turtle’s shell. And just like with them, the turtle likes to hide away when they get a little overwhelmed. Works like a charm most every time. They now have a kindly spirit animal that they can both draw and draw *upon* as a friend. Gently coaxing some of these “turtles” into talking almost always finds the cause for their apprehension is peer pressure or taunting for their lack of artistic prowess.

What many of these kids (and their parents) don’t discover until after *years* of feeling artistically inadequate is that they are actually *extremely* talented. They were just never given,

or couldn't quite accept, some very simple guidelines and fun tricks to allow their ideas to blossom while building confidence. This is by no means a reflection on their teachers, as this disconnect is commonly part of the child's full picture. This I'm sure you know. Am hoping by my teaching to you even a shortened version of my course you will be able to instill in all your students, a confident and reliable way to begin to create without fear, and to love what they do because they created it!

A.B.C.D.F

The following has to do with a powerful force we educators wield but may not have recognized could have an *immense* downside when it is applied to creativity and the K-6 crowd. That is **Grading**. Yep, assigning their placement above or below peers because of the *teacher's* approval or disapproval of the vision and ideas in their head is more harmful than may be realized! For the ambitious ones, who regularly seek third or fourth grade fame and fortune (read: busy!), this may be a challenge they invite, and it pushes them to new limits. For this reason, I wholly promote **voluntary** art contests, even just within the classroom, allowing some to refrain without offense. Forcing the "turtles" and those not equipped to compete at a higher artistic level due to reasons beyond their control (read: not developed or confident in the visual arts) it can often be embarrassing and ultimately demoralizing on a very personal level! They will hold on to that feeling of "not good enough" into the next contest or challenge for which they unnecessarily feel unequipped, and it affects more than just one subject as well as their self-impression and confidence-building. Math, *sure* math is gradable, as $1 + 1 = 2$, end of story, and Vocabulary has a defined correct & incorrect gradable aspect, and testing/grading is necessary to establish the individual's comprehension of these Left Brained subjects. But *Art* in any form is meant to be where the mind takes flight and $1 + 1 =$ *purple cat*, and the answers are never wrong, or at least not determined by others.

Free time art is more conducive to involving the masses and displaying *all* the art as a show or Show & Tell or themed is a great confidence booster. When *anything* is the end goal, and all you ask is that they clean up their messes, that is a *positive artistic mental recess*, where clumps of those newly developing brain cells are learning to run and play together with no letter grade, so there can be no failure. Art assignments that require an adherence to certain guidelines but still require they flip on their creativity switch is an *invaluable* gradable situation, for certain, because it is more about paying attention and meeting a deadline and following instructions than it is about the art. Grade away! Given they understand the task completely I believe it's fair to judge the student's application of what is asked, but what can be detrimental is to grade on the outcome based on their skill *or lack of*. Creative skills in one kid will never match the next kid, so... apples and oranges. *Interesting note: Discussions I have had with other professional artists over the years about where we learned certain skills and who was our most formative art teacher revealed we all had our art-hearts crushed at some early stage and it haunted us for years, took a lot of successes to overcome it, to the point some questioned their career choices in the early stages. We actually painfully remember the artwork and what we put into it.*

What will we learn today, Mr. C?

“Put away your cell phones and eyes up here!” (Sorry, just had to give you a taste of your own medicine.) You are about to get a wildly different but amazingly important **sketching workshop** that will both make *you* a better artist *and* give you a connection with your students that will make them think you are the greatest art teacher in town. Over the last 15 years or so I’ve developed a wonderful course I call **Organic Sketching** whose sole purpose is to give artists and non-artists alike a professionally crafted set of *sketching* skill that will enhance and excite the confidence and the desire to create. Today I am going to teach you some of these unique and fun exercises, and no matter your artistic skill level you will have at your educated fingertips a new and interactive way to get both the extroverts and the turtles to find happiness with a regular ol’ pencil. My target audience for this **OS** course is usually ages 14 and up, but the funny part is, most of what I teach is derived from the natural tendencies of an untrained 6-year-old. Not kidding. As we work through the course, I will challenge you to revert back to an adolescent stage to find some of the artistic pleasure we lost when we went and grew up in such a hurry!

I teach this course to *many advanced and professional artists* with a variety of backgrounds, and it invariably elicits stories and memories of “when I was a kid...” So I find it apropos that I should now teach it to educators such as yourselves and ask you to bring it back around to the origin of my concept... children. And here we go.

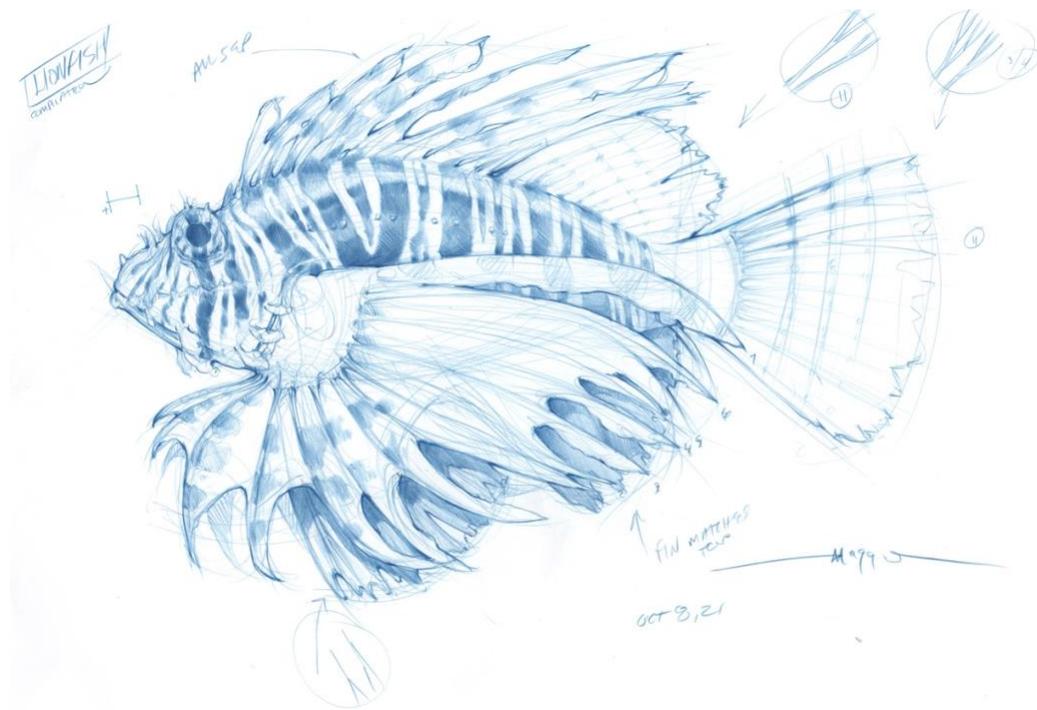
•*The following is from an informational flier as distributed in some of the studios where I teach. What we will cover today will be an abbreviated version designed to give you all the fun interactive parts that you can use to captivate a few students and involve a few more who otherwise wouldn’t bother.*

ORGANIC SKETCHING

A unique skill-building sketching method, developed and taught by artist **Chris Maggio**

Organic Sketching (OS) is a relaxing, natural, and pleasing way to express our concepts, ideas, and dreams into their *first visual stages*. It’s a combination of learned skills, observations, employing creative techniques, and *endless* practice. Sketching is typically the very first step in almost every genre of art, be it drawing, painting, sculpting, architecture, or design. Unreliable skills make starting a sketch frustrating for some people and can even make the experience of

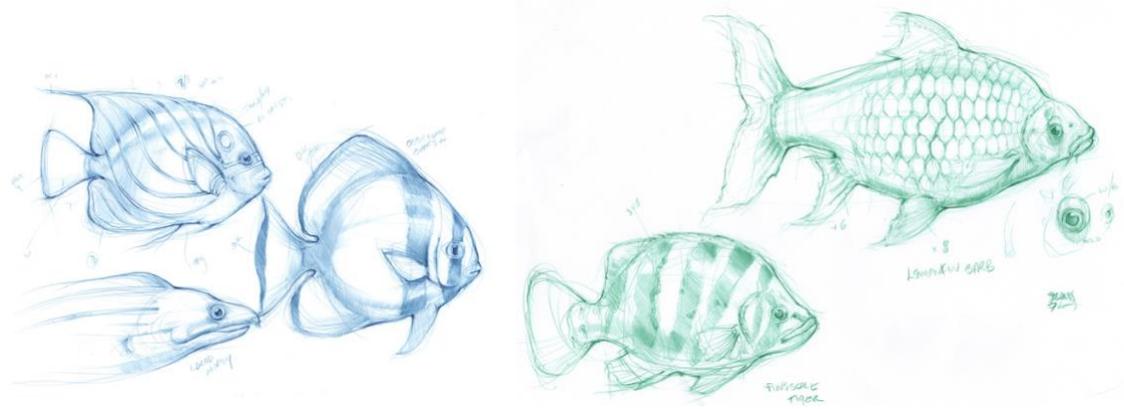
sketching a fearful hurdle! **OS** is here to help make first sketches exciting, more accurate, and *something to look forward to!*



Organic Sketching by its very nature is intended to allow one to successfully capture the simplest form of an idea or concept with pleasure and unbridled confidence.

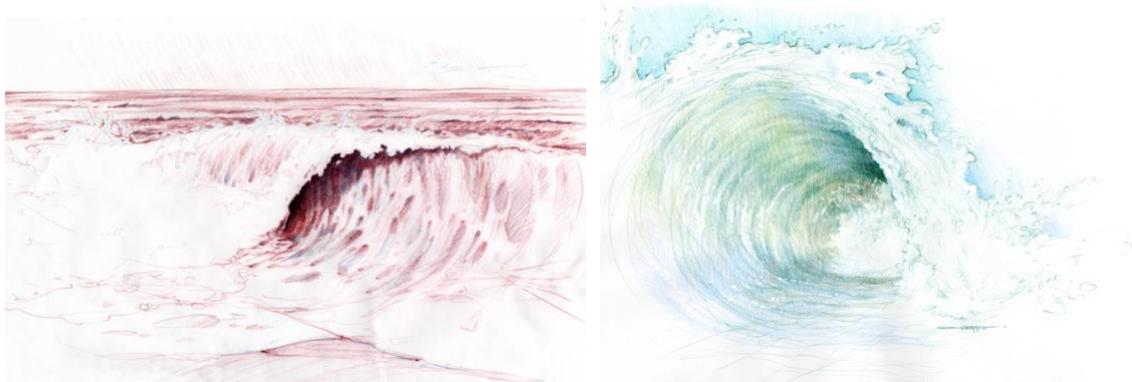
OS builds *eye-brain-hand* connections, instills confidence, and allows our visions to comfortably and smoothly come to life by returning to very *basic* sketching skills. **OS** is a non-mechanical freeform way to *think* your ideas through *as* you lay them out. Pencil-control and finesse become second nature over time, the act of sketching becomes liberating and sensual.

OS is designed around finding mass and volume, making decision lines, commitment lines, examining light, depth, and understanding effective line-crafting. Tool-familiarity is emphasized, as it's an easily correctable issue some people don't even realize they have! We will learn to "see" an object as opposed to just looking at it, developing natural pathways from our brain to our hand. In the end we find **life** in our sketches!



On the way to achieving personal drawing goals, **OS** students will absorb and process all the easy, yet refined, skills and proven techniques incorporated in this unique art-education form. Eventually in their own style they will be able to express themselves more competently. The process is all-encompassing yet allows for personal artistic strengths (at any level), self-evolution, individual style, and a greater appreciation of the results.

“The joy of sketching” ... You had it as a kid. We *all* had it as kids. Where did it go? It’s still there, and **OS** will help you to re-develop a beautiful and fluid skill set that allows pleasurable visual expression, beginning with an inner confidence that is reinforced by those good drawing habits. For a child, drawing and creating comes naturally, without restrictions on content or reality.



What’s this OS stuff all about?

OS is based on functioning words such as delicate, thoughtful, flowing, imaginative, pleasurable, and natural. The **Organic** aspect is that *it comes from within*. In class we will spend a good amount of time with our eyes closed and our hands moving, balancing our desires with our sketching, sculpting our visions, “feeling” the object. We even make ridiculous associative noises as we create! We will learn to deconstruct objects to make them easily re-constructible

on our paper, and each sketching experience reinforces the skills and the “touch” you find as you progress.

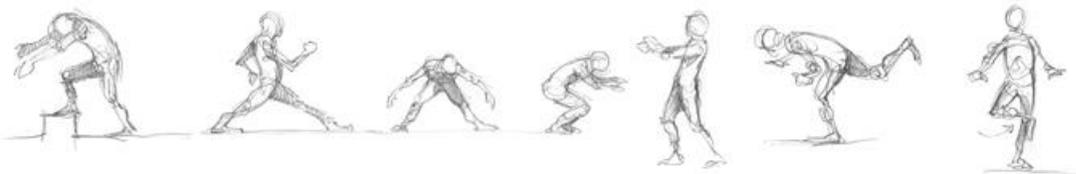


Connecting with your drawing tools.

We will learn to find the subtle nuances and power of a tool so familiar to us it will make you feel almost guilty that you hadn't used it to its fullest! Yes, I mean the mighty pencil... (if you said “brain” you still get credit). That pencil is the direct connection between that cerebral-synaptic-electrical-storm going on in your head, and your paper. Your arm and hand are just along for the ride.

Sketching is not drawing... but drawing does often include sketching.

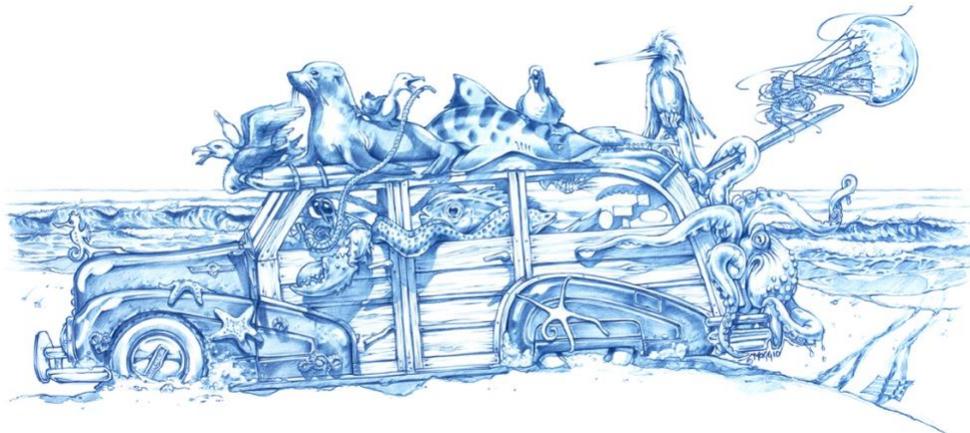
OS teaches self-correcting critiquing. You'll find “freedom from resistance” allows you to become emotional about your images *as* they develop. **Sketches are sometimes *the goal***, not *the means* to a goal... Sketching can be as simple as a couple scribbles on a napkin.



In the process of learning about **Organic Sketching** you will be instructed in certain techniques and methods, both mentally and artistically, which are integral with the teaching. They may seem like a step back at first, but they are vital and effective in learning to sketch with success and pleasure.



If you are a **novice artist**, or just haven't sketched in ages, and just wading back into the craft, together we can give you a simple but important base on which to build your visions successfully. Using these skills will help in any artistic direction, and medium, you practice. For those **established** or **professional artists** who find their work has become flat and unexciting, **OS** will reinforce your sketching techniques and tap into your deepest creative base. Sometimes we forget or skip steps that make all the difference.



I hope that these **OS** lessons I get to share with you become an important and everlasting addition to your successful artistic life. Without art, what's the point?

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CHRIS



Artist for Hire!

MAGGIO

"THAT GUY WHO DRAWS STUFF"

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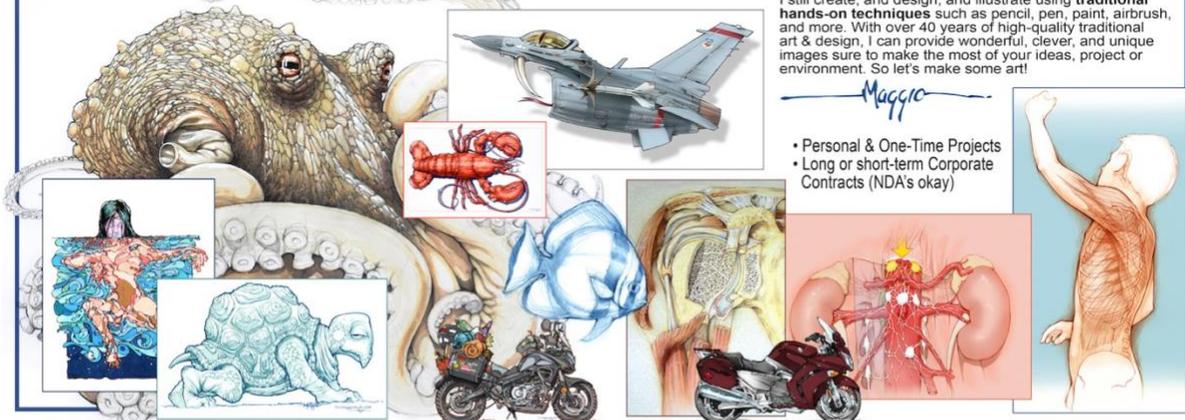
REACH OUT!

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In this era where it seems the computer has taken over, I still create, and design, and illustrate using **traditional hands-on techniques** such as pencil, pen, paint, airbrush, and more. With over 40 years of high-quality traditional art & design, I can provide wonderful, clever, and unique images sure to make the most of your ideas, project or environment. So let's make some art!

Maggio

- Personal & One-Time Projects
- Long or short-term Corporate Contracts (NDA's okay)



Art Lessons too! Private, semi-private, and group lessons available. From *Foundation Drawing* to *Organic Sketching*, *Dynamic Forms & Organic Construction*, *Perspective Drawing*, and more. Taught in my studio, your home or office, or even outdoors (weather permitting).

