

1.4 Design exercise: create an icon

Objective

The goal of this exercise is to grasp the essential meaning in a visual experience. The real skill is not to know how to draw, but to learn how to observe things to capture the few key elements of something we experience and how we remember it.

Background

Pablo Picasso's Bull sketches show how much effort this artist committed to the research of essential features of the animal (see this link <https://www.pinterest.it/pin/860398703794020701/>). The drawings show different interpretations of the animal and reveal the author's attempt to understand the essence of this creature.

Fig. 1.4a shows how a rhino was depicted in prehistoric graffiti and ancient prints, sometimes by individuals who had not necessarily seen one in real life. The drawings show different interpretations of the animal and reveal the attempt to grasp the essence of the image. While prehistoric images highlight the animal's profile, the prints highlight the skin that covers the rhino's body like an armour. In both cases the artist simplifies the experience.

Any description of reality is not exhaustive. The description is made by someone from a particular point of view. Like the word 'rose' cannot compete with the natural rose, equally the image of a rose. The real experience lends itself to endless descriptions.

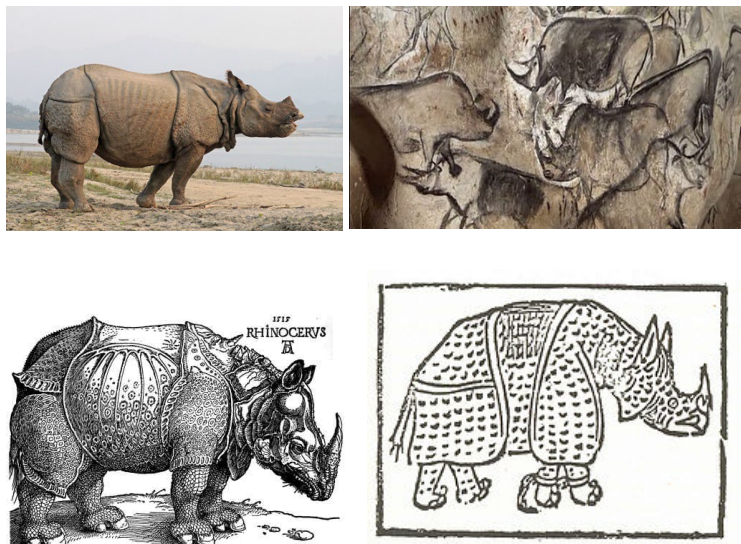


Fig. 1.4a Rhino representations (from the top left clockwise: a picture of a real rhino, prehistoric graffiti in the Chauvet cave, the first known print of the rhinoceros which illustrates a poem by Giovanni Giacomo Penni (1515), a woodcut by Albert Dürer created in the same year.

The real skill to producing an effective description is to remove, not to add. So, we must work by subtraction, but when do we have to stop? To what extent can we remove without impoverishing the message that we want to convey? We can practice, imitating Picasso's simplification process (see this short video of Picasso drawing a bull <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E94BFivA4tA>). An example is shown in Figure 1.4b, where four drawings are shown, in which we progressively removed details in drawing a Rhino.

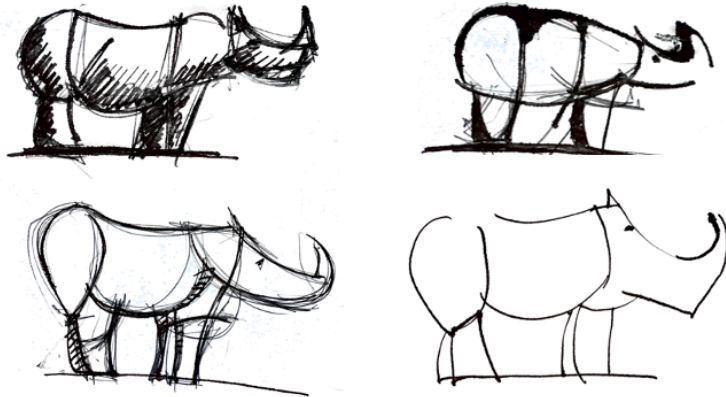


Fig. 1.4b Stylized Rhinoceros by Giuseppe Zollo, 2021.

Instructions

1. Pick an animal of your choice and try to draw it.
2. Make several attempts, trying each time to simplify the drawing so that the animal is still easy to recognize.
3. Reflect on what you eliminated and why, and on the process you followed in creating the final result.