LESSON 1

PRESENTATION AND BASIC FORMS

In this lesson, we illustrate the various topics that we'll discuss in this unique and original Drawing Course for comic cartoons. First we want to explain why we chose this type of drawing. Simple: the comic cartoon, both fun and engaging, is less complicated than true life drawings. To produce good true life cartoons, you need good knowledge of anatomy, physical proportions and of perspective.

When we were children, we loved a whole range of cartoon characters who enriched our fantasy and even became a part of our lives, The Captain and the Kids, Felix the Cat, Andy Capp, Asterix, Donald Duck, Mickey Mouse, Charlie Brown and who knows how many others.

If you're constant enough to follow our lessons, you'll find that drawing is easier than you might think; we're all potential cartoonists and we can all learn to draw well our comic cartoons.

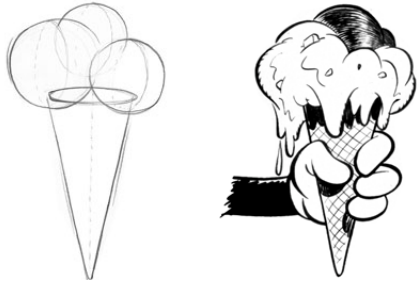
THE LESSON

This course is divided into 10 lessons, each with a video where you can easily follow the explanations. These are simple and clearly taught, always fun, and full of surprises for you.
And the structure of each lesson? The method we follow is kept simple, starting with some fundamental and we hope not too tedious concepts. Then using theoretical explanations we illustrate the many aspects of cartoon drawing, with useful graphic examples that are also fun to follow.

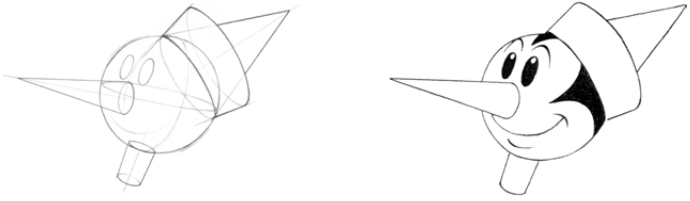
At the end of each lesson there are some exercises that will help you to practice the methods taught, so that you can draw clearly and simply any type of comic cartoon.

TOPICS

In the 10 lessons of the Course, there are many topics that we'll raise and examine together. We'll start with the composition of basic shapes.



To start, we illustrate basic shapes such as the cube, the sphere and the cylinder, so that we can learn to draw these simple geometric figures.



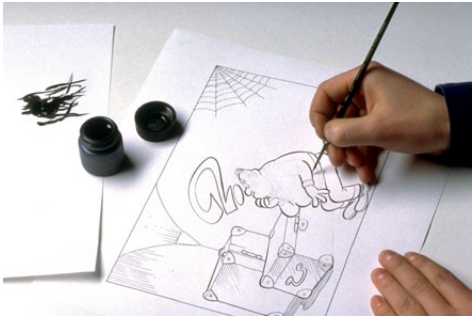
We discuss briefly the topic of perspective.

Here we'll talk in some depth of anatomy, showing how to draw, step by step, a character in a comic cartoon.

We'll see how facial features can be fun.

This is a lesson that differs from the others; here we'll discuss the analogies between comics and cartoon films.

After teaching you to draw with sufficient skill, we move on and describe professional coloring techniques.



Here we have a lesson that will fill you with enthusiasm: we're learning to color our cartoons with a range of techniques. Tempera, colored pencils, water color, airbrush.

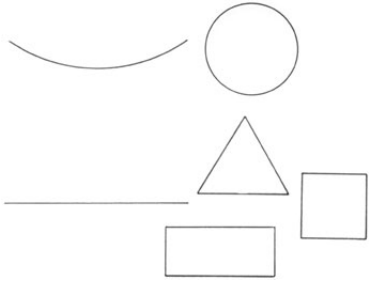
How to set up a cartoon drawing, starting with the initial sketch, will be another fascinating topic.
We'll then complete the course with a discussion of the curious language that's used in comic cartoons, talking of the visualized metaphors, of onomatopoeias, captions and of balloons.

The conclusion will then show you how to develop and write the script, from the initial sketches to the final coloring.

YOUR WORKSPACE

Before starting, we describe the ideal working environment that you'll need: quiet and efficient.
First of all, light has a fundamental role: the lighting should be natural, but if artificial, possibly not fluorescent.
It's very important to do your drawing when sitting comfortably, using an anatomical type seat and a drawing board with a sloping surface; this lets you keep your spine in a correct posture, and also allows a good view of the cartoon being drawn. If the board is horizontal, the cartoonist has a distorted view while a slope offers a more correct vertical vision of the work.
Beside your drawing board, you'll need somewhere to keep all the items needed for drawing work: instruments and materials, illustrations of various types to help you in your job.

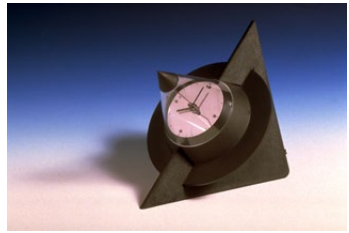
Now we start in earnest with the first lesson in our comic cartoon drawing Course.
Before working on our characters, we'll start right at the beginning with basic concepts, such as points and lines.
What is a line? A line is nothing more than a series of points next to one another. The line in any drawing is of fundamental importance: all figures are made up of various types of line. Thanks to lines we can construct all geometrical forms, from the simplest to the most complex. And that's what we'll do in the following pages.



A concave line forms curved figures, such as a circle; straight lines construct angular figures such as triangles, squares or rectangles.

These geometrical forms are called plane, as they fall on two-dimensional plane surfaces. In reality we know they don't exist: they are a purely abstract concept. If we look around us at real objects, even the thinnest, we see they have not two but three dimensions, which we call height, length and depth; they are characterized by having volume.

Now the forms of all these objects can be referred directly to a certain type of geometrical volume.
Some examples: a penholder might remind us of a cylinder; a round shaped pencil sharpener can look like a sphere; a table clock could be conical; a book certainly has the form of a parallelepiped.



The volume of any object also relates to some plane geometrical form; it is from such forms that volumes can be created. Let's consider a circle: if we rotate a circle around a diameter, we create a sphere.
If on the other hand we put six squares together in a certain order, we have a cube.

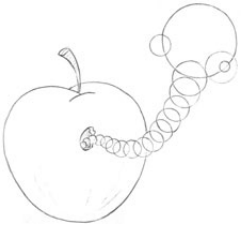
Now triangles offer us two possibilities. The first lets us develop a pyramid, while if we rotate an image of the triangle, we can form a cone.
In the same way, six rectangles simply assembled can form a parallelepiped, while by rotating a single rectangle we obtain a cylinder.
It's clear by now that all the objects around us have a form that can remind us of one of the geometrical figures illustrated.

The following pages will help us learn how to draw certain objects having geometric forms similar to the ones we've just seen.
For all of you who want to learn how to draw cartoons, it is very important to start by understanding a basic concept: before exercising our own fantasy, we must practice drawing as much as possible, copying the real figures that surround us. This is why we shall take as examples, various objects that you must then copy, after reading carefully the following pages.

THE CIRCLE AND THE SPHERE

We'll start with the circle and the sphere. These perfect geometric forms are quite difficult to find in the real world. We might think of a billiard ball or a football, as obvious examples.

But an apple has a form that reminds us of the sphere. So we've chosen this as our example to copy.
As we know, an apple appears flattened at the base and the top, where we'll finish by putting two short lines to represent the stalk.



THE TRIANGLE AND THE PYRAMID

There are not many examples of this geometrical form, though the immediate image that springs to mind when looking at a triangle is an Egyptian pyramid.

Drawing this is easy, as all the lines are very simple. We can make things easier still by using a ruler and starting from the vertex, but in the end it's a simple drawing to do, even free-hand.

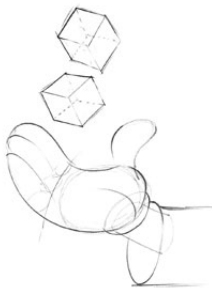
To complete the drawing, make it more realistic and interesting, we'll put in one of the local palm trees.

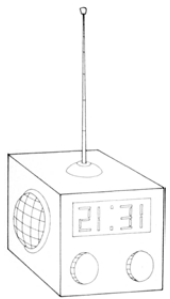
Now we can assemble all the images we've learnt to create, using the triangular figure; the result is decidedly realistic.

THE SQUARE AND THE CUBE

Now we move on to the square and the cube.
There are many objects around us that show this form. An example is a box; and drawing this is so simple that we can't resist adding a bow.

We could also draw some classic dice. Here too the drawing is somewhat elementary. But we'll add on to the six faces a series of small geometric forms, of a type we've learnt about: circles, to indicate the spots on the faces of the dice.
If we want to draw something more complex, we could try a radio alarm clock in the form of a cube. Certainly creating this structure is very similar to the cases we just described; but we'll add on some more detail, such as the knobs, but these are only small circles, so don't need too much thought.



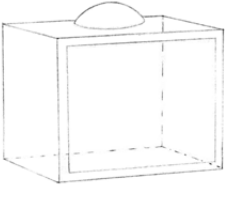


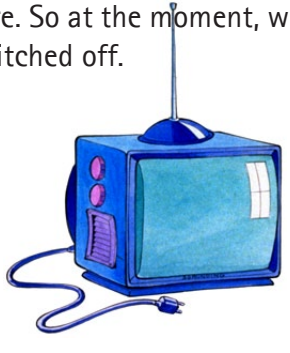
THE RECTANGLE AND THE PARALLELEPIPED

We can produce a long list of objects with this shape, but here we'll stop at the most representative: a door, a picture, a radiator, a comic book, a bookshelf, even just the form of our room itself.

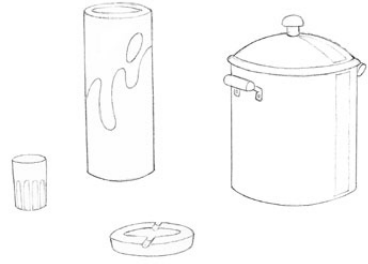
First we'll draw a simple object: the video-tape cassette or CD of our course, naturally! And this is really a very simple job.

And now, second, we'll draw a more complicated object, again using our fantasy: a TV screen showing our transmission.
For the moment, you'll be able to draw the screen, but not for now the image that appears there. So at the moment, we'll be happy to draw the TV itself – switched off.

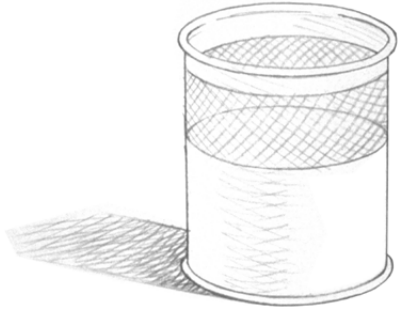




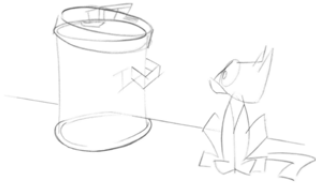
THE RECTANGLE AND THE CYLINDER



Now we'll talk about the cylinder. There are really very many objects with this shape: from a drinking glass, to a cooking pot, an ash tray or a flower-pot.
We thought of a waste paper basket.



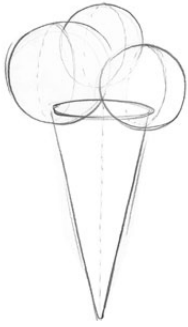
This is a drawing that appears quite often in cartoons: the rubbish bin, sometimes with some dents and usually with the lid askew. We might even see some fish bones peering out, probably there to entice the local cats.
Another example, so often seen in the world of the cartoonist, is the fire-fighter's hydrant, so common in the streets of America in the thirties, and so useful.. for the local dogs.



THE TRIANGLE AND THE CONE

Last, we want to draw a cone that immediately brings to mind an ice-cream. If you look carefully at this image, you'll see it has the form of a cone, upside down. This lets us understand an important truth: that for the volumes we've talked about until now, we must learn to see them in all the positions they may take.

To finish the drawing, we'll add three spheres at the top of the cone, to represent vanilla cream, chocolate and pistachio.



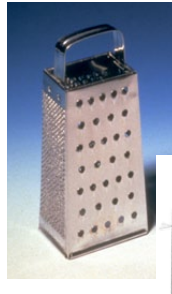
EXERCISES

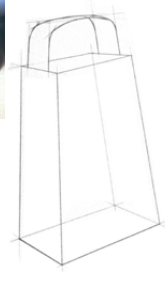
Learning to draw well needs much practice and also lots of training for our vision. This is our suggestion that we'll never tire of offering.

Look at the objects around you.

The exercise we suggest is to discover in the objects around you the geometrical volumes we have talked about.

Choose some of these objects and try to reconstruct their forms.



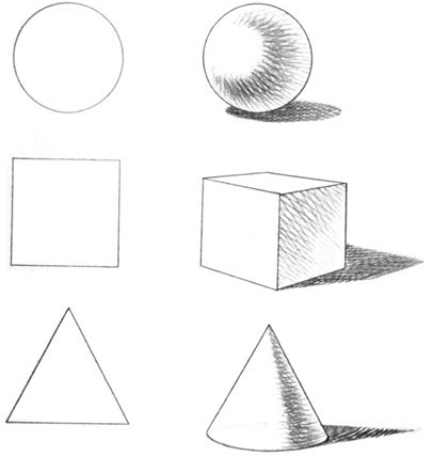


BASIC FORMS

This topic covers the composition of basic forms. What is a basic form?

To understand this, we go back a little. Do you remember? We talked of points, of lines and of the geometrical figures that make up volumes: the circle, relating to the sphere; the square and the cube: the triangle with the pyramid and the cone; the rectangle related to the parallelepiped and the cylinder.

These are the basic forms that when assembled let us create more complex figures. It's difficult to find pure forms in the reality around us. But much easier to find them in various combinations. In the following pages, you'll learn to draw some of them.



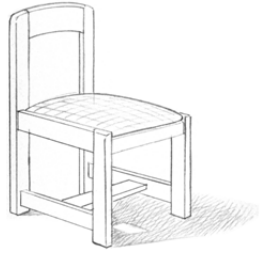
The chair

Take some paper, a pencil and a rubber. We'll start with an example that's simple to draw: a chair.

This is an object made up of a series of similar basic forms, some parallelepipeds of various sizes. To draw the cartoon correctly, the pencil lines must always be light. So use a pencil that suits your hand.

This is how we can proceed to create the form of the chair structure: we start with the seat, adding the back and then the legs. When drawing, never try to reach the final result immediately.

The intermediate stage, the sketch of the object, is important and it's easily reached by assembling some of the basic forms. Now we pencil in more firmly the structure, with more determination and weight. The earlier, lighter lines, remain hidden. You'll see that drawing our chair was simpler than we thought.



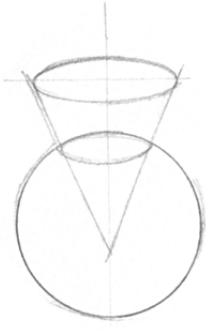
The amphora

Second example: the amphora.

We need to identify the structure: this is an object made up of two different basic forms, a sphere and an upturned cone.

So we proceed in sequence sketching first the sphere, and

then adding on top the upturned cone.
After setting up the structure correctly, you can now shape the outline with a steady and safe hand.

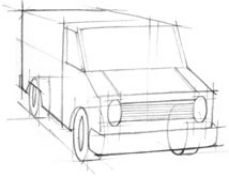


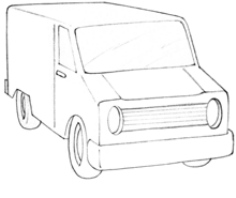
The truck

Third example: a truck

As we proceed, you'll notice that the difficulties in our drawings increase; but this will reassure you as up to now we've not met any particular problem.

So let's carry on with our exercise on this image, made up by adding two different basic forms, some parallelepipeds and also some cylinders.





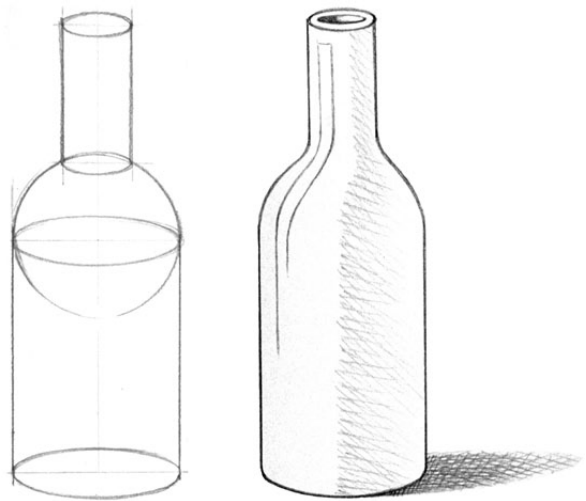
First, we'll draw the parallelepiped representing the trailer. Then the two parallelepipeds for the driver's cabin. We now add the cylinders that represent the wheels. Last we go over the drawing again with our pencil to complete the details of our truck.

The bottle

Fourth example: the bottle.

This is an object with three basic forms, of which two are similar and the third differs: two cylinders and a sphere.

As always, we start with the structure that here must be built up as follows: first the larger cylinder, then the sphere on top, and then a second cylinder smaller than the first. Last we model the outline, starting with the cylindrical body, moving up slowly to the neck of the bottle; and now we see how easy it was to create the image we wanted.



The glass

Fifth example, similar to the fourth: the glass.

This is an object that uses three basic forms, the sum of a hemisphere, a cylinder and a reversed cone.

As for this last basic form, we remember the note we made before; every geometrical figure must be seen and experienced in all possible positions it can take up; in this case the cone appears reversed as said, in a way we don't usually think of.

The drawing of a glass, so essential in shape, is quickly done; as also our underlining to completion.

The house

Sixth and last example: the house.

Maybe you've often wanted to create this drawing in the past. Certainly you did, on an impulse, without thinking it could be better done for a more pleasant result, by breaking up the structure into a series of geometrical figures.

The house is made up of a combination of two basic forms: the cube and a truncated pyramid.

We build the structure, starting with a cube, representing the walls of the house. Then we add the pyramid, for the roof. Now we only need to define the image, adding a door and some windows, which are nothing more than simple rectangles.

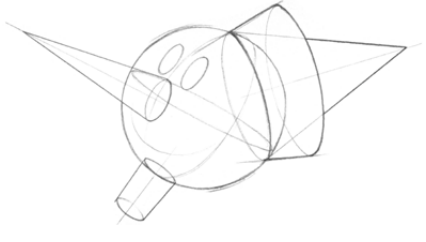
Now go over the drawing again with heavier pencil lines.
And this time too, with great ease, we've created our cartoon.

The human figure

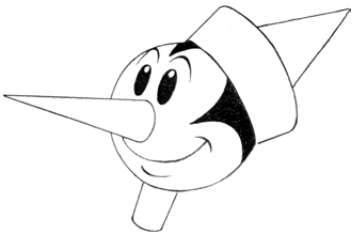
In the above pages, you've learnt to draw still life objects, constructed using various combinations of the basic forms. Now we need to concentrate a little more, as we begin to face the more difficult part of a more complex drawing: the construction of the human figure.

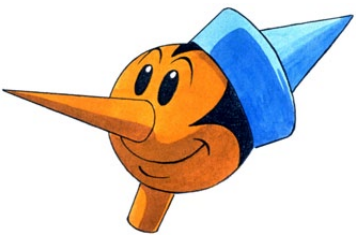
First we must get used to thinking of the human figure as if it were an object. To help you, we decided on a character of great physical meaning as being clearly formed using elements that remind us of geometry: Pinocchio.

This is a fine example of an assembly of basic forms that together make up his face and his body. Modeling them correctly, we can perfectly define his figure; and we show him here with the best possible chromatic result.



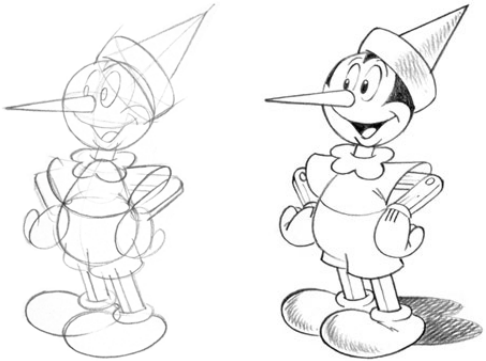
So now we move on to draw our Pinocchio.
What pencil should we use?
We suggest H or HB, the harder pencils.
By now you know that the first phase is to sketch the structure.
We start with the head. His face is really a sphere; so we sketch a sphere. Below the head is a narrow cylinder, his neck. A cone represents his famous nose. His hat is quite simply another cone.
Now let's work on the details: for his eyes we pencil in two small oval shapes, as also for the pupils. For the lips and eyebrows simple arched lines are enough.





Now the body. Made up of a number of parallelepipeds of various sizes, the first part to draw for the body is the trunk. Then the arms and legs with their extremities, the hands and feet. By now you should have a good scheme of construction for Pinocchio.
Second step: the final definition of the image, going over the outline again.

Outlining, as it's incisive, needs a pencil that will leave more marked lines. You can use a softer pencil such as a B or 2B. You'll need to draw with a sure hand, and patience.
After a few more lessons, we'll go into more detail on how to construct the human figure. This will show you how to give form to our heroes in comic cartoons.

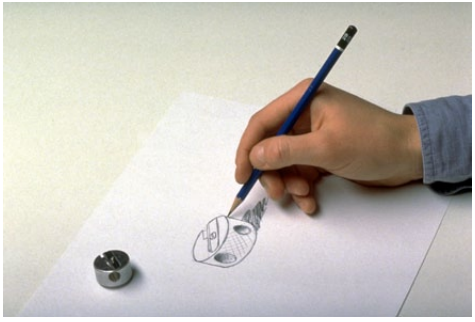


EXERCISES

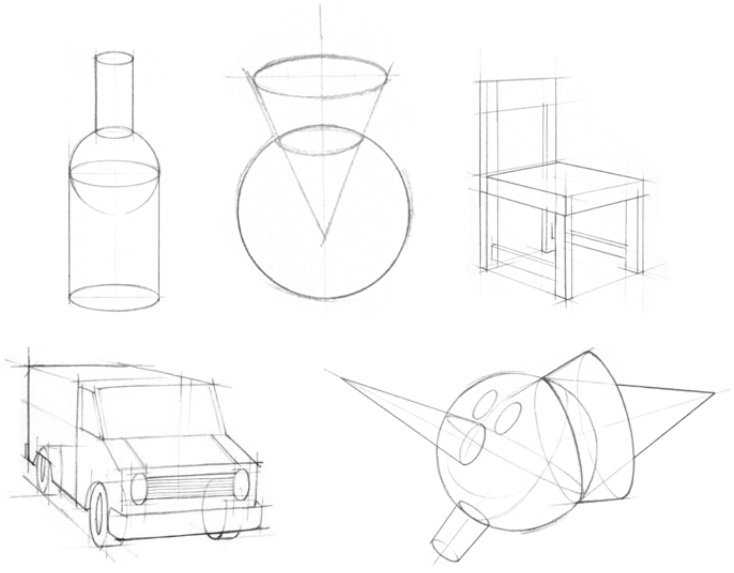
First exercise

We talked about composition of an object by using the basic forms.
Do you remember the examples we used? Choose one of the objects we illustrated, as you wish, and try to draw it from memory.

Second exercise
Look around you.
Find an object having a fairly simple form and try to draw it, following our instructions carefully:
first step: the sketch
second step: defining the outline
Then repeat the exercise, taking your inspiration from other objects.



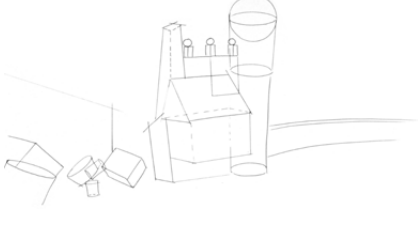
Before continuing to another topic, we must make a small premise.
The first part of this lesson was somewhat technical and may have seemed a little boring to you. However you'll know it was necessary and fundamental. Remember that all the great cartoonists, before reaching good results had to take in the same ideas. You need to be patient and you'll see that you can soon reach their good results too.
Once this is clear, we can finish the topic of the basic forms. Do you remember?
We spoke of assembling geometric forms that together help to build the structure of an object such as an amphora, a truck, a house or a person like Pinocchio.



To better understand these concepts and apply them to cartoon drawing, we suggest another image that can be seen as an assembly of basic forms. These will be more or less complicated and "deformed" like the illustration you'll see later.
Clearly it's the graphic and chromatic presentation that makes it so attractive, but without a correct basic structure, the result may not be so spectacular!

Let's imagine now that we place on top a transparent sheet of acetate. Thanks to this and with the help of a felt-tip pen, we identify the lines of the structure for each object that makes up the image, but without considering perspective. All the elements that you recognize, thanks to the following images, are placed in a three dimensional space; this space is well defined by rules of perspective, a topic that we'll discuss in the next lessons.

For now it's enough if we recognize the geometric construction of the single objects such as a house with its details and landscape and can see their structure.



We repeat the same operation with another image.
Again we place a transparent sheet over the image.
Using the same technique as before, we trace the lines that make up the structure of the various objects, much more varied here. Suddenly we discover for each object, its own geometric form. It will be interesting to compare this with the original, to see even better the objects in the cartoon.
And with this topic we have concluded.