Less resistance. More art. Starting today.



THE ART GYM™ STARTER KIT

3 Tiny Exercises to Rebuild Focus, Observation and Creative Momentum

by Sarmed Mirza

The first takes 10 seconds.

For artists who keep meaning to draw... and don't.



“The more we don’t do something,
the better we get at not doing it.

Your hand has a memory.
Keep it moving,
and returning becomes easier.”

Sarmed Mirza

BEFORE YOU READ THIS



Find an edge near you.
The edge of your phone.
A mug.
A window.
Your hand.
Trace that edge slowly with your finger three times.
Done?
You just completed your first Art Gym rep.
That is what Art Gym is built around: small pieces of practice that are easy to enter but still train something useful.
Now I'll show you three more.

FIRST



WHY

Life has a habit of pulling our attention in a hundred different directions.

Work.
Family.
Responsibilities.
Endless scrolling.
Distractions.

Before we know it, days become weeks, and weeks become months.

Drawing hasn't disappeared.
We've simply lost the habit of returning to it.
The creative embers are still warm.
They just need a little gentle stoking.

This starter kit contains a few simple exercises that have helped me and my students rebuild focus, strengthen observation, and regain creative momentum.

You don't need more pressure.
You just need a way back in.

WHY

ART GYM™



Art Gym™ is the system I created to help artists return to their art more easily while training the skills underneath it, such as observation, attention and accuracy.

Each exercise is a rep: a short, focused action you can repeat. The reps are small and low-pressure, so you can practise without needing to complete a finished drawing.

The goal isn't to create a masterpiece. The goal is to keep the route into art familiar and make starting easier.

Your hand has a memory. The more often you draw, the more natural it becomes.

What begins as effort can slowly become habit, leaving more of your energy for creating rather than trying to begin.

Sometimes a rep leads to a longer session. Sometimes it doesn't. Either way, it counts. These three reps are just the beginning of what you'll discover inside Art Gym.

Art Gym



ART GYM #1:

LINE FLOW

WAKE UP YOUR HAND

“I paint like people bite their nails.”
Pablo Picasso

WHY I USE THIS

I often wondered whether Picasso's famous quote revealed a quality unique to him, or something anyone could cultivate.

Nail-biting is automatic.
So is smoking.
When I gave up smoking, I realised how much of the habit lived not in my mind, but in my hand.

This exercise works in a similar way.
It's not really about drawing.

It's about building a habit of movement.
The more often you pick up a pencil and make a few marks, the more familiar drawing becomes.

Over time, your hand begins to want to move.

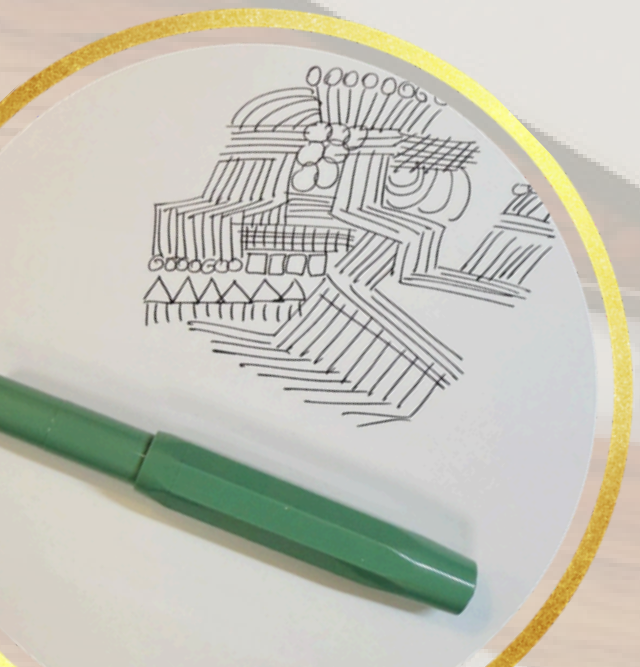
And once that happens, drawing begins to depend less on motivation.



HOW TO DO IT



- *Open your sketchbook.*
- *Set a timer for 30–90 seconds.*
- *Fill the page with lines, curves, zigzags, hash marks.*
- *No thinking.*
- *No planning.*
- *No checking for quality.*
- *Just moving.*
- *When the timer ends, stop.*
- *Repeat once or twice a day whenever you have a spare moment.*





WHY THIS WORKS

Every repetition strengthens the connection between your hand, your attention, and the act of drawing.

The goal isn't to create a picture. The goal is to make picking up a pencil feel normal.

Over time, your hand begins to want to move.

What begins as conscious effort becomes habit.

TIRED-DAY VERSION

One line. That's it.
Pick up the pencil, make one mark, put it down.

IT STILL COUNTS. YOUR HAND STILL REMEMBERS.

IMPORTANT

Don't turn this into a drawing exercise.

Don't turn it into a creativity exercise.

This practice has one job:
Keep the hand moving.

If ideas appear, great.

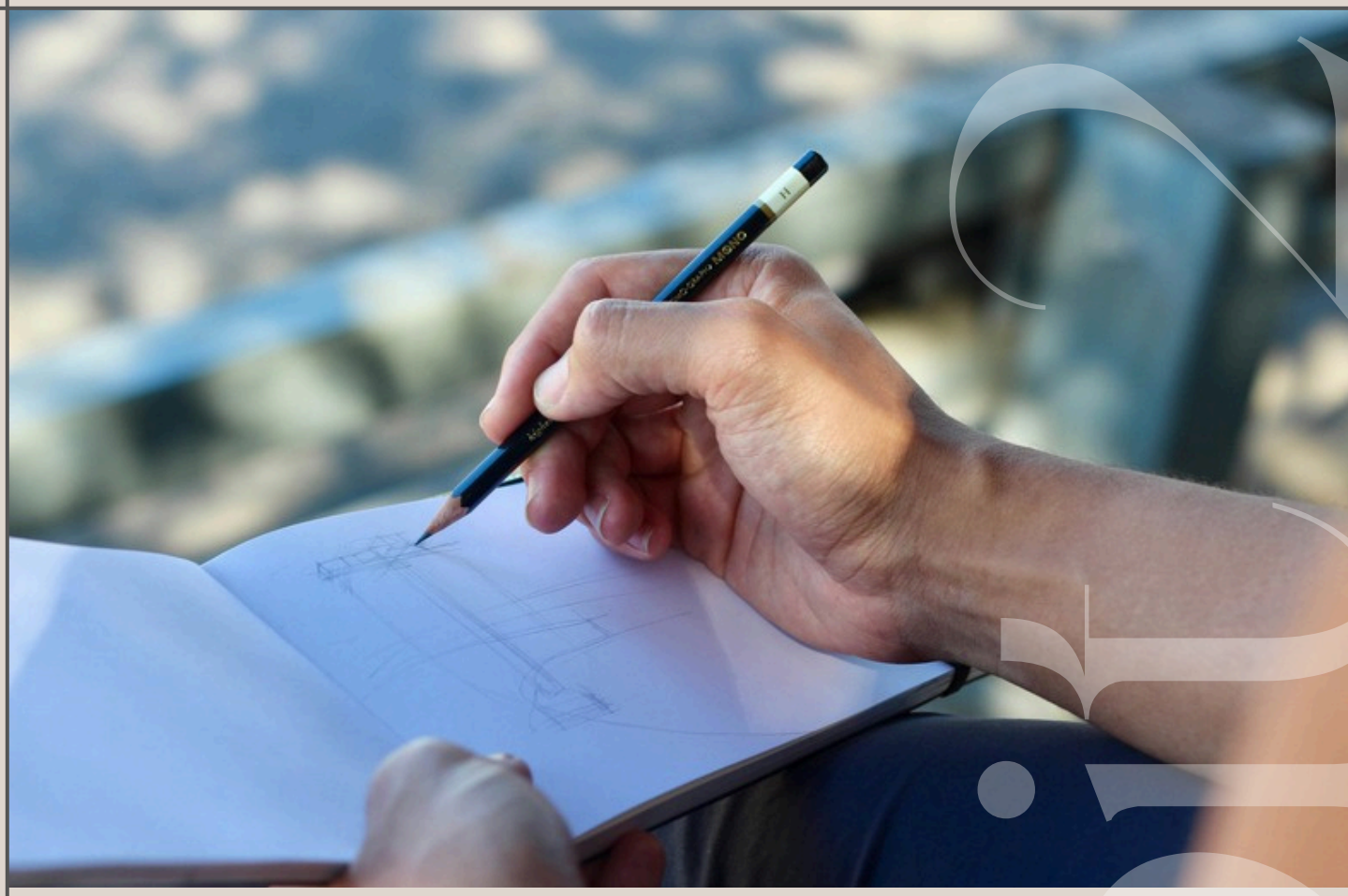
If they don't, that's fine too.

Do the exercise.

Put it away.

Then move on with your day.

The easier you keep it, the more likely it is to become a habit.

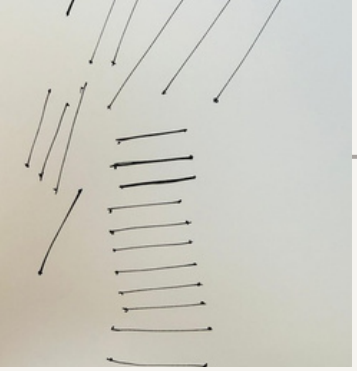


ART GYM #2:

CONNECT THE DOTS

TRAIN YOUR ACCURACY

“Discipline in art is a fundamental struggle to understand oneself.”
Agnes Martin



Accuracy isn’t about perfection. It’s about building discipline so that your hand obeys your eye.

Like tying shoelaces, the action becomes automatic.

This exercise steadies the line, which in turn steadies you.

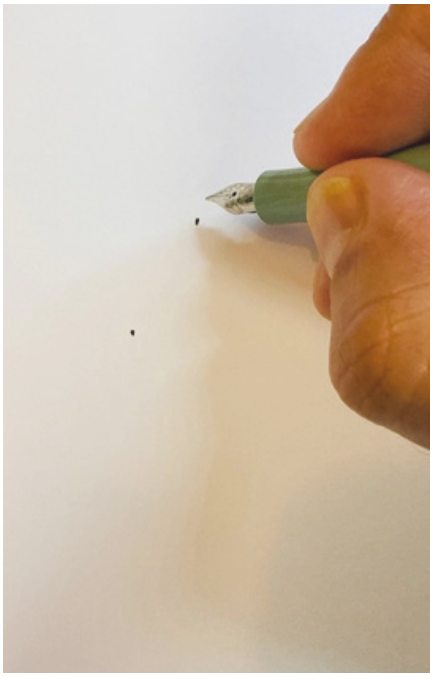


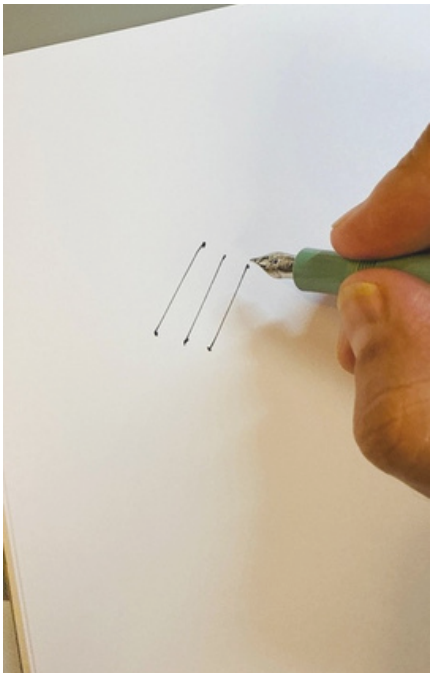
WHY THIS WORKS:

Accuracy is a habit. By repeating the same motion, your hand learns to follow the eye's command without hesitation, as a reflex.

HOW TO DO IT

- Make 2 dots a little apart, 1-2 inches (2-5 cms).
- Connect them with straight lines, curves, or hatching — 10, 20, 30 times.
- Notice which lines go off course (❌), and which land accurately (✅).
- Each day, your hand steadies more.



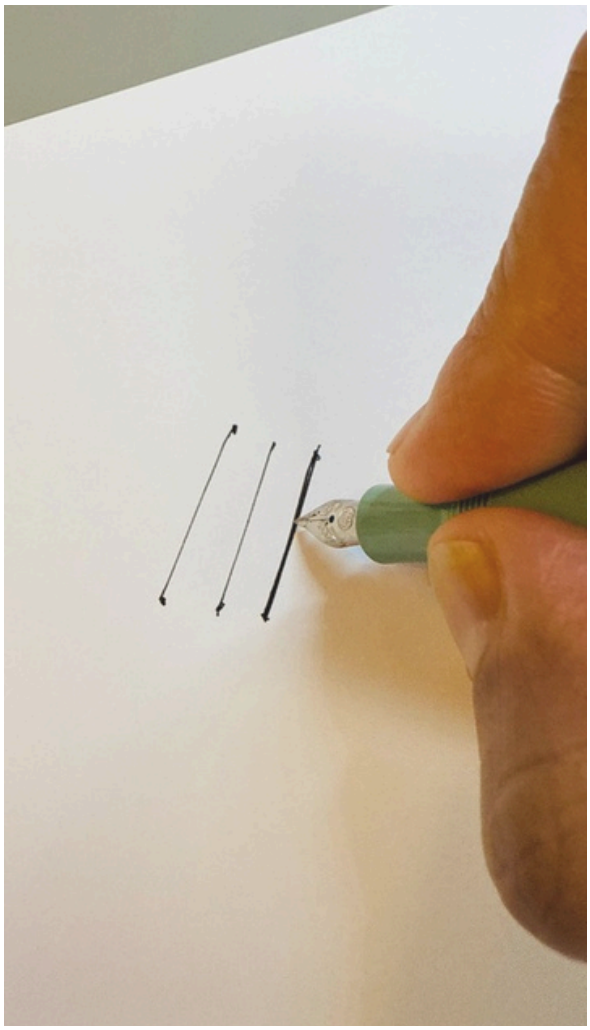


BONUS — RIDE THE RAIL

After a few sets, pick your cleanest line and trace that exact path 10–30 times.

If you’re on track, the line gets darker (not wider), that’s accuracy and control compounding.

Quick cues: light grip, breathe out on the stroke, pivot from elbow/shoulder, rotate the page to the most natural angle for you, ghost the motion, then commit.



TIRED-DAY VERSION

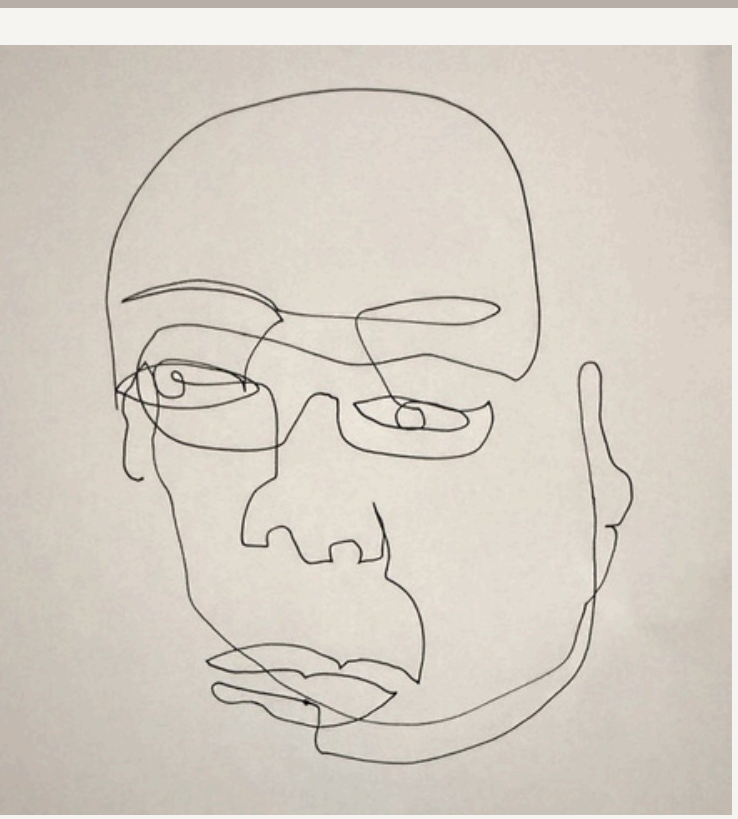
Two dots. Five lines.
Notice one that lands.
Done.

SMALL, ACCURATE AND FINISHED BEATS BIG AND ABANDONED.

ART GYM #3

BLIND CONTOUR

DEEP SEEING



“To see takes time.” — Georgia O’Keeffe

“To look at something as though we had never seen it before requires great courage.” — Henri Matisse

“I believe that the very process of looking can make a thing beautiful.” — Hockney

THIS ONE IS BIG

Every time you want to look down at the paper, that urge is not failure — it's the signal. It shows the untrained habit of avoiding stillness with the subject.





This exercise retrains that habit. When you keep your gaze on the subject and resist looking at the page, you extend the time your attention lingers. Just two or three short rounds start teaching your brain to see more deeply.

A SUPERPOWER

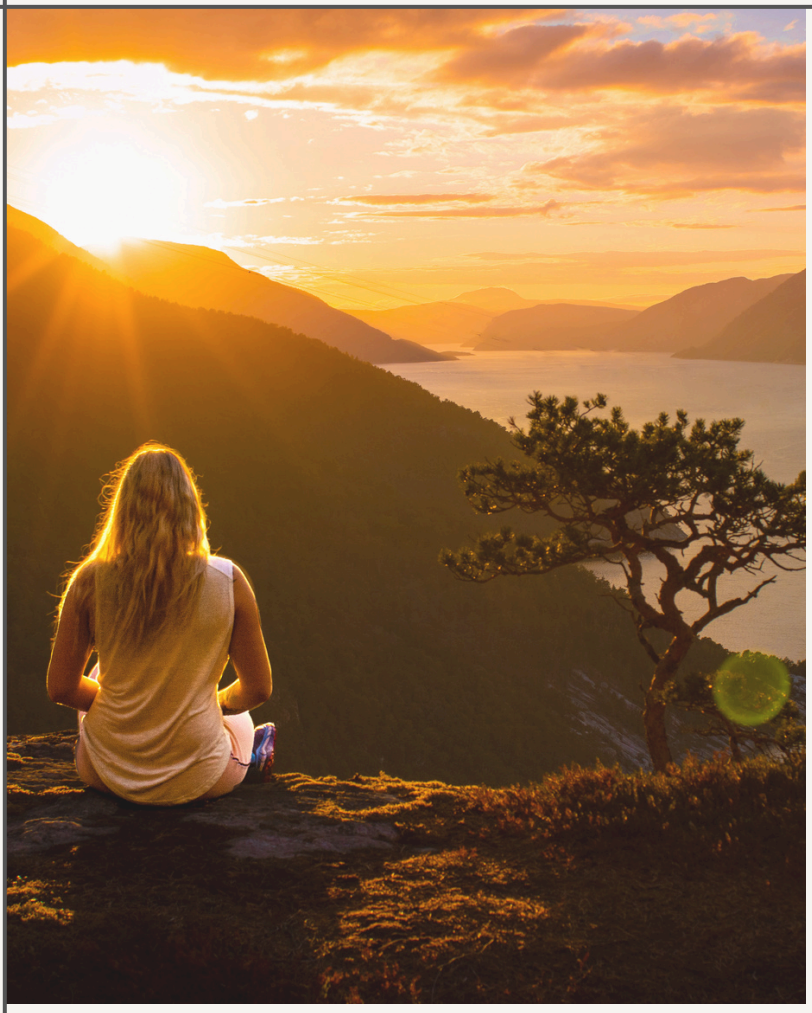


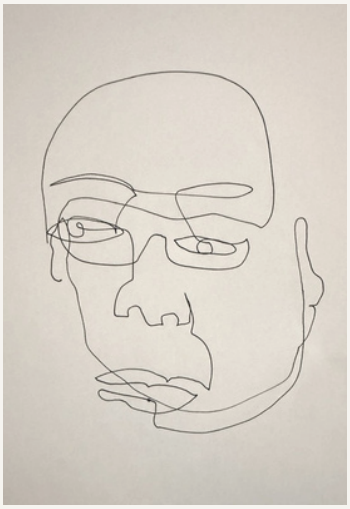
Think of it like meditation: in mindfulness, counting the breath to ten grounds you to the present, while the attention rests on non-judgmental watchfulness. If you lose the count, it means your awareness was interrupted.



Here, the pencil is your anchor. The line grounds you in the act of seeing, while your awareness rests on the subject. Lifting the pen or looking down is the equivalent of losing the count. It shows where the habit breaks.

The point isn't the drawing that appears. It's the practice of strengthening your attention, a **superpower** when it comes to creative practice.

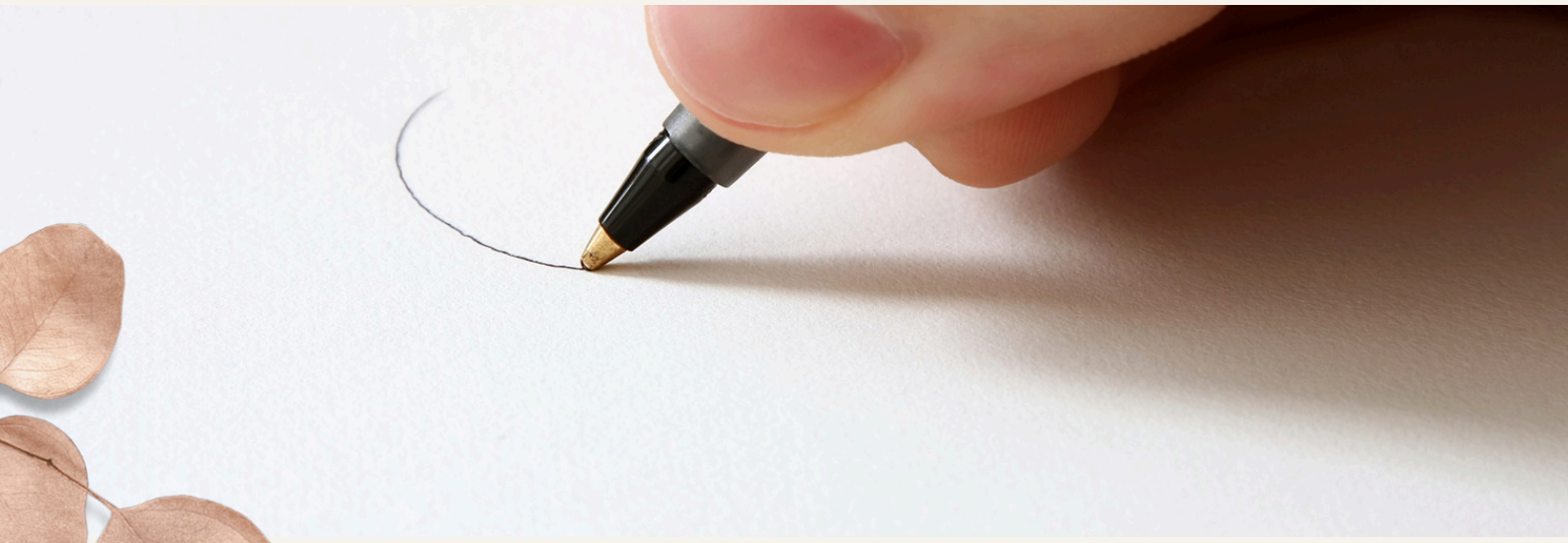






WHY THIS WORKS:

- *The urge to peek is the signal of distraction.*
- *Each time you resist, you lengthen your ability to stay with the subject.*
- *Over time, your brain learns to remain with the details instead of rushing away.*



Remember

EACH URGE TO PEEK IS A REMINDER TO STAY LONGER WITH THE SUBJECT.

You can even do this for a few seconds in a park or while travelling. It connects you more deeply to what's in front of you
in a way no photo ever could.

Do it with your friends or children - it is a lot of fun.
Let's see how it works ...





HOW TO DO IT:

- Pick a subject (a face, your hand, a mug, a tree).
- Without looking at the page, or lifting the pen/pencil, draw its outline in one continuous line.
- Limit each drawing to 20-30 seconds increasing to 1–2 minutes.
- Repeat 2–3 times for each subject. Each round, you'll notice more, especially when you go slower.



TIRED-DAY VERSION

YOUR OWN HAND, TEN SECONDS, EYES UP.
YOU CAN DO THIS IN BED, ON A BUS, OR WAITING FOR THE KETTLE.

SEEING IS STILL TRAINING.

WHAT'S NEXT...

KEEP YOUR HAND MOVING



These small drills keep your hand ready. No pressure. Use a cheap sketchbook you do not mind messing up.

Keep one quick rep in regular rotation. *Even 20 to 30 seconds count. Use a daily cue so it happens without thinking.*



BENEFIT

It removes decision fatigue, builds consistency, and trains muscle memory so drawing feels easier when you need it.

NOW GO DO THIS

☕ While the kettle boils, fill one box with marks

📺 During an advert, connect two dots 20 times

🌛 Before bed, in bed, do one blind contour of your hand, cat, dog, you get the idea :)

🗓️ Commit to one daily cue and complete one rep a day for seven days. If a project is coming, stretch each drill to two to five minutes. Every repetition makes returning easier.

THIS IS ABOUT MORE THAN DRAWING SKILLS

They help rebuild trust in yourself and your creative process.

Each time you pick up a pencil, you strengthen the habit of returning and make it easier to begin.

As your attention grows, so does your ability to notice what matters.

Over time, your artwork becomes more personal, meaningful, and uniquely yours.







Keep Going.

Whether you work in abstraction or realism, and whether you're just starting out or have years of practice, these reps are a place to return to, helping you rebuild momentum, sharpen your eye and reconnect with your art.

WHAT ART GYM TRAINS

1 **START MORE EASILY**
Athletes don't wait for match day. Art Gym is the hand-and-mind training in between: small reps that make the act of starting easier, even on days you don't feel ready to make art. It's how I keep my own practice going.

2 **TRAIN THE SKILLS UNDERNEATH**
Practise accuracy, control, proportion and coordination without the pressure of finishing a drawing.

3 **DEEPEN YOUR SEEING**
Stay with the subject longer, notice more, and strengthen your attention.

4 **QUIET THE CRITIC**
Short reps create space to let go of judgement and arrive at the page, so your mind doesn't stop your hand.

A few minutes at a time.
A richer creative life.

ART GYM™

Become someone who keeps making art.

Whether you make art for yourself, or want to develop work to exhibit and sell, you don't have to figure it all out alone. Art Gym gives you the training, support and community to keep moving forward.

INSIDE ART GYM:

- The full course, with new reps
- Monthly live sessions: make, train a skill, critique
- Feedback on your own art, any style
- A community that keeps you going

> *"Just reps, and somehow the polish is starting to show up on its own."*
> — Mirtha Peña, Art Gym member



Sarmed Mirza
Award-winning artist and educator
Scottish Portrait Awards finalist ·
Exhibited at the Royal Scottish Academy

Founding members: $37/month, locked in. Open until 31 January 2027.

JOIN ART GYM™

Not ready? Keep doing one rep a day.
I'll be in your inbox.