



Watercolor Live From Paris - Instructor: Alex Hillkurtz

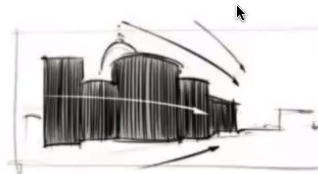
# Drawing America

## Overview of Lesson:

This week's lesson is about adding *character* to paintings of architecture through applying the concept of "action verbs" and principles of character to inanimate objects. Rather than thinking of buildings only in terms of stable adjectives, we can ask ourselves: what are buildings *doing*? (For examples, see below: we can see and draw buildings as *bounding* or *stretching*.) Once the action verb is in mind, all elements of the building will start to take on that action, and still buildings become infused with a sense of life. We can also think about buildings through their "feelings," that is, through painting rain, temperature, heat, and motion.

Along the same lines, we can think about architecture as having "character." Imagining buildings as specific actors in specific roles will lend the buildings personality and bring them to life. (For examples, see below: one Parisian building possesses the character of actress Catherine Deneuve; the Paris Gare de Leon station has the character of actor Hugh Laurie in *House*).

## Examples of Motion:



The church *bounds/bounces* into the piazza...



The bridge *reaches* out...

I

## Example of Feeling:

Below: although this horse statue is not physically moving, we can feel its energy.



When we think of paintings as characters in motion, paintings gain life. The more specific we can get the better: the more *specific the action* and the more *dynamic the action* that we imagine, the better the results. For example, we might think of a building as “sitting,” but it will produce better results to think of the building as a “mother hen crouched over her eggs.”

This principle of specificity applies to the character of buildings as well. Imagining the building as someone specific in your life or a specific actor or actress in a specific role that they have played will make the building come further to life.

#### Examples of Character in Buildings:

Below: three buildings in Porto, Portugal look like three old brothers, who have lived their lifetimes together and are now hunched on the side of the road.



Below: this church, which was bombed in the war, looks like an old, retired veteran who has seen war.



Further Examples of Character in Buildings:

Below: this Parisian building below has the character of actress Catherine Deneuve.



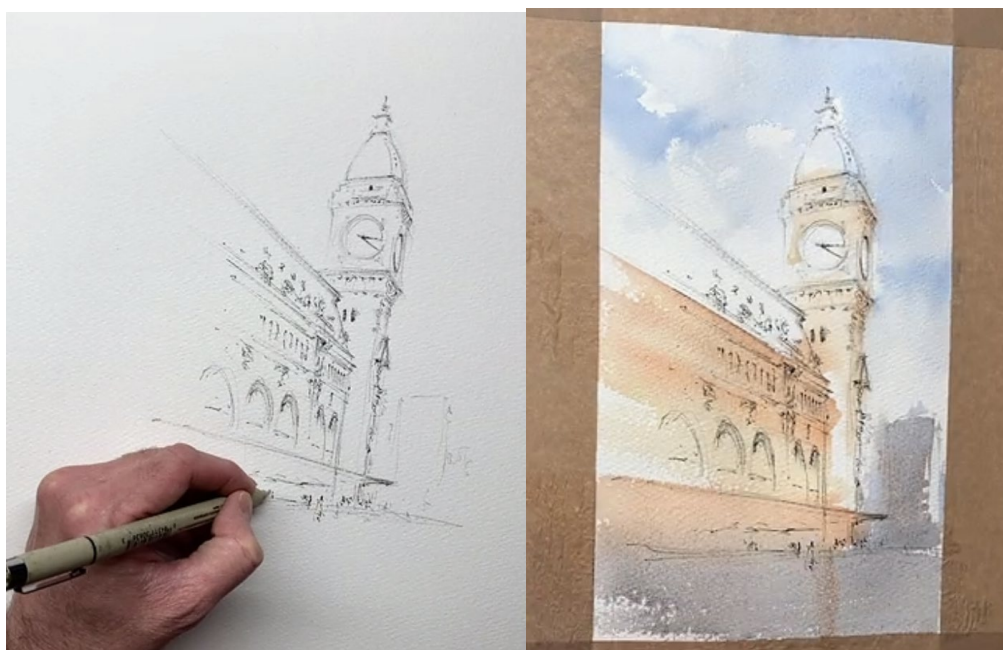
Instructor Demonstration:

Below: this train station, the Paris Gare de Leon, can be imagined as Hugh Laurie, the British actor who plays House in *House*. Like Laurie's character, the building might be described as seeming simultaneously confident and insecure.



Live Drawing:

Below: tower of the Paris Gare de Leon, with Hugh Laurie in mind.







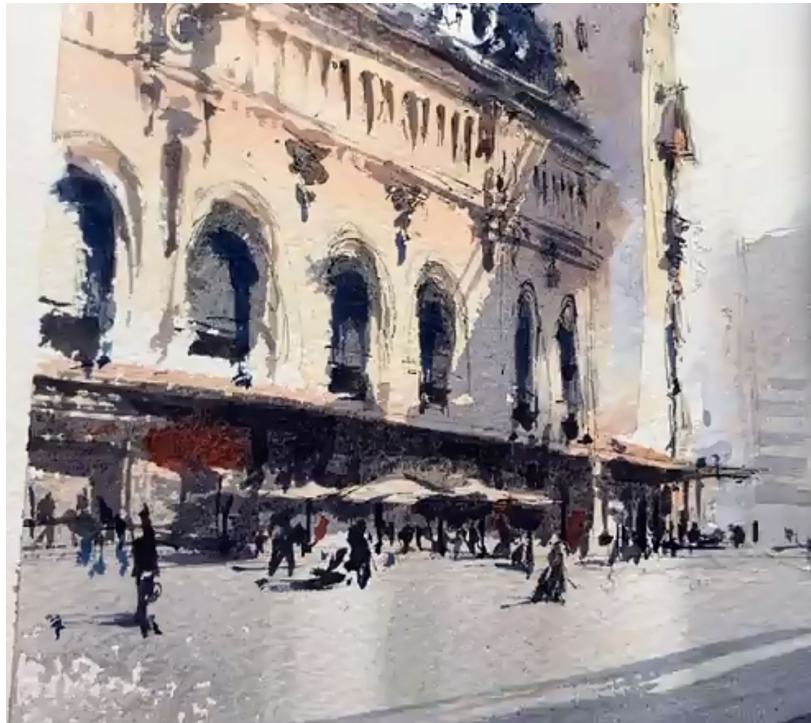
Above, note the use of color (fairly monochromatic, which means everything blends together) and the use of shadow, specifically the use of warm/cool shadows over the tower face. The details here are loose, “squiggly,” and not quite precise, but when zoomed out they appear comprehensive—small “imperfections” in the painting can help bring the building to life. The environment is also altered slightly from the reference image. All of these elements help bring out the character of the building.

At this point in the process, the instructor began to deviate more from the reference image, making decisions about what elements to lighten and darken. The people were drawn as silhouettes, rather than in detail. Color was lifted off

of the clock face using water. (Demonstration includes discussion of Escoda Reserva brushes, dagger brushes, and which brushes are used for which elements.)

- The instructor used a pen to create the final details on the roof, and added some details to the facade of the building. All of these elements contribute to the *personality* of the building—rather than painting it cleanly, additional details help bring out a slightly tired-around-the-eyes, slightly rough Hugh Laurie character.

Below: Detail from final version of instructor demonstration.



Below: Final version of instructor demonstration.



Homework Assignment:

1. Find an image of a building and describe what it is *doing* using a verb.  
Find an image of an environment that shows an *element* (heat, wind, cold, etc.)
2. Find an image of a building or structure and describe its *character*.  
Personify it as much as you can. Imagine what actor would best portray this character.
3. Paint the *character* of your building.