

Excerpt from **The Emergence of Tonal Drawing**
by *Ephraim Rubenstein* American Artist Magazine

April, 2006

Very much the same thing can be said for Wendy Artin's lovely figure studies in watercolor wash. Her response to the patterns of light and shade as they hit and describe the figure is so immediate that we feel we are looking at something truly in movement. Her models dance before us—first they are there and then they are not. She expresses their glow by marrying the light side of the figure with the paper so that the form can emerge on the shadow side with a deft wash of the brush. And even though they glow with light and move as in a flash, a credible figure is described underneath. Artin never loses the structure or compromises the substantiality of her figures. This combination of movement and palpability is what makes them so infinitely sensuous and graceful.



ABOVE
**Tamara on Her Side
With Foot in Hand**
by Wendy Arlin, 2003,
watercolor, 9 x 12.



LEFT
Lilly
by Wendy Arlin, 1997,
watercolor, 10 x 10.

OPPOSITE PAGE
**Laura Sitting With Her
Arm Crossed**
by Wendy Arlin, 2002,
watercolor, 8 x 10.

could only perceive its shape and tone. He saw the world primarily as arrangements of silhouette and value, taking the entire visual field, not just the object, into account. His drawings are, in artist Mark Karmes' view, "intensely democratic. It is as if he is stating that light doesn't discriminate in favor of one thing or another—it is merely there for all things all the time."

Seurat was able to push seeing purely in values further than it had ever been pushed before. But even he was not dogmatic about never using lines, or the idea that linear thoughts could not play an important role in structuring a tonal drawing. In fact, it is often the tension between the linear and the tonal elements that make the drawing exciting. Particularly early on.

Seurat himself exploited a kind of calligraphic scribbling within certain tonal areas that created texture and energy. Many artists, such as Francis Cunningham, use a delicate initial outline to establish the basic forms and their placement on the page. But this outline functions largely as a map to tell him where to place his values as he starts to ally tone to tone. Because Cunningham's drawings are often exquisitely delicate and suggestive, a handful of values will suffice to create a whole world. The remnants of the initial outline then start to work as a foil to show you how much work a handful of values have accomplished.

Edwin Dickinson, one of the greatest modern draftsmen, also makes incisive use of occasional lines in his tonal drawings. They function, as with Cunningham, as an initial map or, later in the drawing process, a way to find or restate a lost architectural element. One also gets the feeling that Dickinson put in occasional lines as visual punctuation—to catch your eye, lead it somewhere, slow it down, or even stop it. These linear thoughts are crucial to the tension in the drawing, although they exist as accents within the



context of a glorious, soft tonal field that carries the burden of expression in the drawing.

Tonal drawing privileges seeing over knowing—the ostensible subject matter, the "what it is," is less important than the "how it appears." As artist and instructor Charles Hawthorne pointed out, everyone knows that a piece of coal is dark and the white pages of an open book are light. But one could place the black coal in the sunlight and plunge the open book into a deep shadow and the value relationships would be reversed. An object can be so subsumed in shadow that we don't even know what it is. Tonal drawing, because of its emphasis on seeing, leaves you open to the unexpectedness of the visual world, to the unpredictable. It places you right smack in the middle of a struggle between what you believe to be out there, and what actually is there.

In Francis Cunningham's two drapery studies, the drapery is the occasion rather than the subject of the drawing. Cunningham has downplayed the objective reality of the objects—chair, drapery, model stand—even though they are recognizable and constitute an important part of the piece.