

## DRAWING

After my mother died, and I had returned home from Cleveland, I felt, sad, empty, angry, helpless. I was depressed. I kept it to myself, and went about my business as if nothing had changed. There were two more months of the ILGWU Training Institute to complete and I spent time with my friends who were very supportive.

What stands out in my memory during those months of grieving were the late nights, at home alone. I had moved into my mother's bedroom, and slept in her bed. It certainly made no sense to sleep on the day bed in the kitchen-dining-living room, which had been my bedroom all these years. I had gotten rid of my mother's things, all her personal possessions. I took over her dresser, and closet, and desk. When I got ready for bed, it was usually late at night. I had spent the evening having supper, reading, listening to the radio, cleaning up.

Then began a new routine: I had bought a sketch pad, some conte crayons, and a book of drawings by "the old masters." I would get into bed, tune in "Symphony Sid," listen to jazz, and start to copy the drawings. I don't know where the idea came from, but it was wonderful, and even therapeutic.

I used to sketch scenes from time to time—landscapes and room interiors—but not seriously. It was doodling. I had started sketching in pencil, but discovered conte crayon pencils among the art supplies when I worked at Reich and Schrift. I don't remember ever having had a class in drawing, though I must have had a number of art classes in elementary and junior high school. And I had mechanical drawing in high school, but that is not the same thing. I loved art and the art history classes that we had in high school and college. I knew my way around all the New York art museums, and had covered the walls of my apartment with art reproductions. Now I was going to try my hand at copying the work of the world's great artists.

For no logical reason, I felt a little self-conscious. I wasn't proclaiming that I was an artist. In fact I didn't tell anyone about what I was doing. I would flip through the reproductions, pick a drawing, and begin. I never knew where I should begin. Do I sketch out the scene? Do I start working from left to right, top to bottom? Do I spend a few minutes studying the work, or do I jump right in? All I knew was that what I was doing was very exciting.

I realized that for the first time, I was really looking at a work of art. When I went to a museum or looked at a book of art reproductions, I might spend a minute or two examining one piece. (I realized that a lot of people breezed through a museum, glanced at the art work, read the title and the name of the artist, and moved on.) Now, I felt as if I was getting into the heart and soul of the work. I was seeing what the artist did, as I tried to replicate it, looking at the work through the artist's eyes. I tried to do a complete sketch each evening, and I was amazed how long it took, and how short a time it felt. The hour or more passed in no time. Even when my completed work was not all that I wanted it to be, I had a feeling of satisfaction. I possessed that work. I saw it as I had not

seen it before. When the drawing looked good, I felt even better. A few years later, I joined a sculpting class which was part of the ILGWU's educational program, and felt the same sense of accomplishment when I completed a piece of sculpture. But there I had a teacher.

After a few months I stopped drawing. I don't know if it was because I filled up my sketch pad (I certainly could have gotten another), or because I had hit a plateau, or because I was feeling better and no longer needed "therapy." My drawing of old masters was a moment in time that I now look back at, and in writing about it, am overcome with nostalgia. I see myself sitting there, with my drawing board on my lap, the sketch pad on my left, the book of reproductions on my right, listening to Charlie Parker, Miles Davis, Lester Young, concentrating on the drawing.

Over the years, I sketched on vacation, and I took sculpting classes and drawing classes, but they were nothing like my drawing late at night in bed in my apartment in the Bronx, during those months in the spring of 1951.

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