

How to Understand a Subject: Repeated Viewing and Persistent Redoing

When discussing some of the best projects we had been assigned in art school, I told Jen about a graphic design class where students were told to pick an animal, without knowing what we were going to do with it. I selected the octopus because I have been in love with them for ages. Then we were given instructions for different tools and constraints for creating nine versions of our animal.

I wasn't able to move on with a one-and-done, but was pushed to continue considering and representing the same subject. I saw the octopus in different ways - exploring their personality, behaviors, and physical quirks such as their textured skin, strange eyes, suckers, slender but not gangly arms, melanin ink. The experimentation taught a good lesson: our first attempt is not always the best, and it is rarely the only solution.



It's now many, many years later, but this assignment was so fun, that I still remember a lot of it. Below, I've shared the materials and processes I used for tackling each of the exercises.

Text collage - First, I created a grayscale thumbnail of the octopus to use as a reference while searching for blocks of copy with an overall value that matched each region. I carefully cut out the shapes from magazines and glued them down to create this depiction.

Master artist - An octopus inspired by the [readymades](#) of Marcel Duchamp. I still enjoy this least obvious octopus in the bunch.

Relief print - I carved sintra board with an octopus that had an old map (here there be monsters) feel. Then I rolled some acrylic paint onto the carving to print the kraken.

Collage - This one was a close up of an octopus arm made from cut and torn paper. I like the texture difference created by juxtaposing the smooth and irregular edges.

Continuous line - This octopus was drawn with a technical pen in a single line that focuses on the overall shape and the tangle of arms. More expressive than realistic, but still able to capture a few details here and there.

Master artist - This watercolor octopus references one of the [Jane Avril posters by Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec](#). I used a playful arrangement of the arms to simulate the can-can dancers in his work.

Photograph - I dripped india ink onto a large, shallow dish of oil and quickly took a picture. The reflection of the flash created a glowing eye.

Geometric - Being overwhelmed with my first foray into Adobe Creative Suite and incredibly apprehensive of digital illustration, I was least pleased with this variant. But I did learn about the pathfinder tool in Illustrator while making this weird biohazard symbol octopus.

Unusual material - Another octopus made of india ink, this time blown with a straw onto paper. The goal was to capture the moment that an octopus shoots out ink and propels itself away.

We decided to make some tweaks to the octopus series and share it as a weeklong challenge. And since the Seattle Aquarium's famous Octopus Week was coming up, what better time? [Sign up today for TRY Studio's Octopus Week](#) and we'll email you a new project every day between February 17 and 24, 2019. I'm really looking forward to trying this again!

In anticipation of the challenge, I suggest looking online for different photos or videos of octopuses, so you can see them from every angle - from being bunched tightly in a small ball to spread out with arms wide open. Watch how they move: dancing along the sea floor, unfurling an arm to taste their surroundings, camouflaging themselves, pouncing on prey. Observation and a collection of reference material will help you create a diverse set of representations, more abstract or very realistic.

I can't wait to see what octopuses you create and how you bring your unique style and spin to the challenge. Tag us on social media with [#TryStudioOctopusWeek](#) so we can check out your work!