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Bruce's Studio News

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Tighty Righty, Lefty Loosy!*

* mechanic's aphorism for **loosening up** tight pipes and bolts...

Artists know that the process of working through a creative idea sometimes leads nowhere, but just as often, an original concept is altered by a happy accident. This may take many forms, but often it is something like a spill of paint, or an unexpected interaction of colors or media. Perhaps it's a flash of inspiration from something you see, hear or touch that changes your planned objective.

In my case an actual accident, like one that happened to me this past week, did not initially inspire me, but eventually had the effect of a "happy accident"!

I was packing up my portable miter saw, which comes with a collapsible sawhorse-type stand, when I inadvertently collapsed the metal legs on my right thumb...(like hitting it with a hammer— and yes, I swore!) I didn't need to call 911 as I did when I fell off a ladder, but I knew I had blackened the nail instantly... OUCH! Ice water in a cup was the only relief for the throbbing finger that night and into the next day.

Meanwhile, in the previous few weeks I had enrolled in a workshop with Brattleboro, VT artist Cameron Schmitz hoping to "loosen up" my drawings and work larger. I felt that my drawings were becoming too rote and sterile and I needed a push to get out of a rut! It was a good workshop, and after working with charcoal, graphite sticks, and oil paints on large paper instead of my usual pen drawings in small sketchbooks, I was feeling energized by the change.

I smashed my finger on the day I regularly hold drawing sessions in my studio with artist friends of mine. I hire models and up to a dozen of us draw from life. So now I had a swollen thumb on my drawing hand and couldn't hold a pencil, charcoal stick, pen, or brush.

So Thursday night I decided to try and draw with my left hand, while I soaked my right thumb in ice water. Because my dominant hand is my right, I wasn't sure what to expect, but I knew the approach to opposite-hand drawing has been used often by art instructors to help students "loosen up" their tight drawing style. I was pleased to find that these left-hand charcoal drawings were surprisingly facile—I had assumed that it would be an experiment in frustration, because of my right hand injury, and it turned out to be an auspicious awakening to the potential of mark making and a good exercise in heightened concentration!

Since drawing from life involves observation, proportion, gesture and line; the manner of "mark making" is secondary.

This "happy accident" resulted from the confluence of the workshop with Cameron and a forced necessity to alter my approach, already something I had worked on with her with other exercises.

Here are some of those "lefty drawings" in charcoal on 18" X 24" newsprint paper. (FYI— the drawings on the top row are all quick sketches done as 2 to 5 minute warm-up exercises. The bottom row are 10 to 25 minute drawings) None are intended to represent fine detail, but rather a loose sense of contour and mass, as well as the energy, tension, or relaxation in the pose.

