

# Drawing an ellipse – made easy



## INTRO

We all draw ellipses. Sometimes we don't even realise it!



Russian Futurism in 1913 drawing ellipses



Pop Art in 1960's drawing ellipses



Dutch painters in 17<sup>th</sup> century drawing ellipses



J.M.W. Turner drawing ellipses

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We find ellipses everywhere

1. **Horizontal perspective** – they lie flat on a surface  
ellipse is widest left-right  
mugs, bowls, bowls, paddling pools, etc



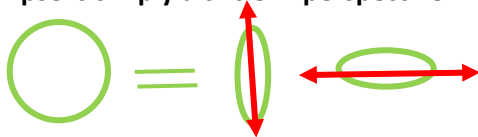
2. **Vertical perspective** – they stand up  
ellipse is widest top-bottom  
arches, wheels, road signs, etc



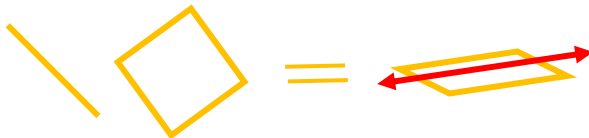
3. It even applies to drawing the human form!
  - o Same theory – different orientations



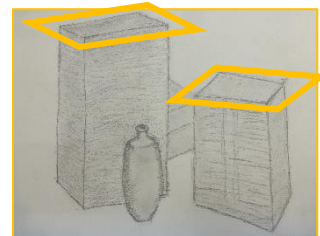
- An ellipse is simply a circle in perspective



- Same as a Parallelogram is a square in perspective



But we will leave this for another time. This project is focusing on drawing an ellipse!



## EQUIPMENT

- **Materials:** 4B-8B Pencil, rubber; choose either watercolour paint, or soft pastels, or oil pastels
  - o 3 x A4 paper + tracing paper, 1 x A3 paper for drawing or painting
- **Resources:** Round still life objects – bowls, mugs, cups, plates, bowls, fruit cut in half, wheel, etc

## ARTIST IMAGES

- [Ben Nicholson](#)

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# Drawing an ellipse – made easy

## Too complicated

Drawing ellipses can get way too complicated and I could go into tons of theory explaining an ellipse in relation to 2-point perspective.

## Its easy!

Don't worry – you can draw an ellipse perfectly well simply by knowing what to look for and what to measure – no perspective theory needed!

- **Key measurements - Height x Width**

These are the 2 basic distances we need to measure and compare to help you get the correct proportions of an ellipse.

- **The squashing of a circle**

1. Measure the distance at the **narrowest** point of the ellipse
  - Cups and bowls will be a vertical measure (see blue line in image #1 above)
  - Building archways will be a horizontal measure (see blue arrows image #2 above)
2. Compare how many times this fits into the **widest** point of the ellipse (see the red arrows in image #1+2 above)
3. Now imagine you are drawing a circle but squashing it until the widest and shortest parts of the ellipse match the measurements you have just made during step 1 - until it fits the proportions see on your object.

### Vertical squash (horizontal perspective)



This happens as you move UP + DOWN in relationship to your object (see blue arrows)

- If you look at your object from high up you will see a near perfect circle (left of the diagram)
- If you move lower down, so your eyes are closer to the object, you will see an ever narrower ellipse until you see no ellipse at all but a single line, when your eyes are level with the rim of your object. (right of the diagram)

### Horizontal squash (vertical perspective)



This happens as you move LEFT + RIGHT in relationship to your object (see blue arrows)

- If you look at your object directly in front of you, you will see a near perfect circle (left of the diagram)
- If you move further away to your left or right, the further away you go you will see an ever narrower ellipse until you see no ellipse at all but a single line (right of the diagram)



# Drawing an ellipse – made easy

## TASK 1

**Set up a still life on a tabletop of the objects you have gathered.**

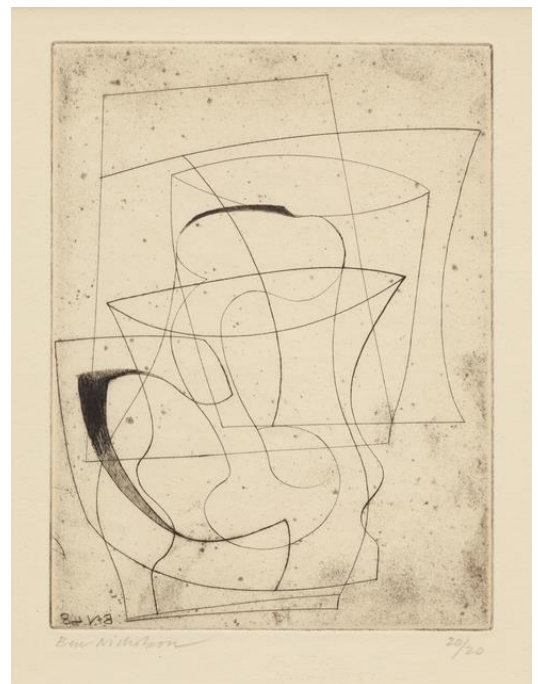
Try to select objects of different heights like a flat plate and a tall vase.

- Make 3 x A4 line drawings on paper using pencil to give yourself plenty of time to practice assessing the changes in width x height of the different ellipses in your objects.
  - Measure every ellipse you see – please don't guess!!
- Each drawing should be made from a different position
  1. Stand up so you are almost looking down on your objects
  2. Sit down so you are looking at your objects like you usually see them when eating
  3. Sit on a low chair so you are almost at eye level with your objects

## TASK 2

**Be inspired by Ben Nicholson and be happy to play around with your drawings**

- **Step 1**
- Copy your A4 drawings onto separate sheets of tracing paper. You can copy the whole drawing or part of it.
- Rub down all 3 of your pencil drawings onto your A3 paper, so they over-lap.
  - Off-set them slightly so you get unusual and interesting shapes like in Ben Nicholson's drawing on the right



- **Step 2**
- Choose either watercolour paint, soft chalk pastels or oil pastels for this picture on A3 size paper
- Using flat colour, with a little texture, select different shapes and add in colour like Ben Nicholson's painting on the left
- Choose a simple colour palette and include some neutral colours
- Leave some shapes white
- Draw over the pencil lines with a 6-8B pencil, or drawing pen

## TASK 3

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