

# SKETCHBOOK ADVENTURES

## Prompt 20: Close your eyes – Letting go of how you see yourself

My friend Paige (who I mentioned in earlier in the workshop) used to create realistic paintings of things. One of her most popular subjects was pears. Her pears were perfectly drawn and shaded and done in bright yellows and green, like actual pears. Then one day she did something totally different. It was a self-portrait where the eyes (one of which was quite a bit bigger than the other) were off-center. Part of the mouth was off the face and bled into the background. The skin was painted blue. It was my favorite painting she had ever done. Though there wasn't anything realistic about it, I knew right away it was a self-portrait. I recognized something Paige-like in the person depicted on the canvas. It was interesting and weird and I couldn't stop looking at it. I asked her how she came up with the idea and how she was able to draw a portrait of herself that looked like her but at the same time didn't. She said she started out with a blind contour. A blind contour is a drawing you do without looking at the paper. I'd never heard of this technique but immediately wanted to try it out myself. I created several blind contour self-portraits and then ventured away from drawing myself and started drawing other things using this technique – cars, what I saw out my window, my living room, etc.

For this prompt, create a self-portrait using the blind contour technique. You'll need a mirror, pencil and your sketchbook. Sit in front of the mirror and look at yourself. Try to see yourself as if you're looking at something you've never seen before. Study the lines and curves of your face and the position and size of your features. Then begin to draw what you see without looking at the page. Don't worry about where this ends up. If your mouth is above your eyes, great! If things are closer to where they naturally are on your face, that's awesome too! Once your drawing is done, you can go over it in pen and add color (I used watercolors in the example).

The idea here is to create something without trying so hard and be okay with not knowing how it will turn out. You can also challenge yourself a bit further by not allowing yourself to pick your pencil up off the page at all as you draw. (A variation of this prompt is to close your eyes completely and draw something from your imagination without looking at the page.) With this blind contour technique, you'll likely end up with a weird yet interesting self-portrait. I love doing this prompt because it really helps me let go of how I think I look or wished I looked because I'm forced to release the idea of trying to create something that looks like me or is perfectly drawn.

