

Deconstruction of Influences

Understanding exactly what you love about your influences — not just who they are but what specific visual qualities attract you to their work.

BEGINNER

Every artist has influences — artists they admired, works that inspired them, visual experiences that formed their taste. Style development begins with identifying and understanding these influences specifically. Not I like Moebius — but I like the way Moebius uses precise clean line at varying weights with large open areas of flat color and extreme detail contrast. The more specific your analysis, the more usable the influence becomes. When you know exactly what you love — the thin-to-thick line variation, the specific blue-gray palette, the way foliage is suggested with three marks — you can intentionally incorporate those qualities rather than simply imitating the surface appearance of your influences' work.

HOBBYIST

Influence deconstruction is an analytical practice. Take a work you admire and ask: What is the line quality? What is the value structure? What is the color palette? What is the compositional approach? What is the level of detail and how is it distributed? What is the mark character — thick, thin, scratchy, smooth, gestural, mechanical? What is the emotional quality of the work? Answering these questions in writing, not just in feeling, converts a vague sense of admiration into actionable knowledge. An influence map — a visual collage of work from your five to ten most important influences — is a practical tool that makes your sources visible and comparable.

PROFESSIONAL

Professional artists often cite their influences openly — not as admissions of derivativeness but as demonstrations of taste and learning. Austin Kleon in *Steal Like an Artist* argues that all creative work is recombination of influences and that the artist who knows their influences and uses them deliberately is more original, not less, than the artist who pretends to have none. At a professional level, understanding your influences allows you to discuss your work intelligently with clients, art directors, and collaborators — describing the tradition your work sits in communicates more useful information than claiming a purely original style.