



*Mapping divides the shape into light and shadow areas with definite boundaries.*



*As the figure moves, the number and character of mapped shapes change.*



## Mapping

Light is an illusive subject. It is sometimes harsh and brilliant creating stark contrasts with the sharp shadows it casts. At other times, it behaves in a subdued, almost modest way, filling a room with a diffuse presence. To learn to draw light, its various moods is to first get a sense of its patterns and then understand how those patterns work. The former is accomplished by a procedure I call *mapping*.

In this strategy you break down all lights and all shadows into well-defined shapes, as if they were territories on a map. You must assign a definite boundary to every shape. When shadows seem indistinct, you impose boundaries anyway, arbitrarily if necessary. In doing this you create an organized map which serves as a starting point for later refinements.

The beauty of mapping is its speed. As you can see from the examples, mapping patterns are deliberately simple. There's no attempt at subtlety. Sometimes you'll end up with only a two-shaped map, one light shape and one dark shape. At other times, depending upon how the light and shadow play on your subject, you'll have as many as eight or ten shapes in your map.

Mapping is something you can employ right away, without theory or practice. Initially though, you should use it only in those situations where the light is strong, such as in direct sunlight. As you get comfortable with it, you'll discover its broader applications. Mapping can be used in quick sketches as an end in itself, or as the basis for more comprehensive drawing. In the latter case, your mapping lines will need to be more lightly drawn, but in either case, decisiveness is the key feature.

For quick sketches, there is a little trick I use to distinguish between hard and soft edges. For hard edges, I try to stop my fill-in strokes right at the boundary lines. For soft edges, I run the strokes over the boundary line in a jagged manner. When you're using pencil, map with a couple of middle tones as well as with black.

