

# Digital drawing: Create art using your smartphone or tablet

Creative resource pack

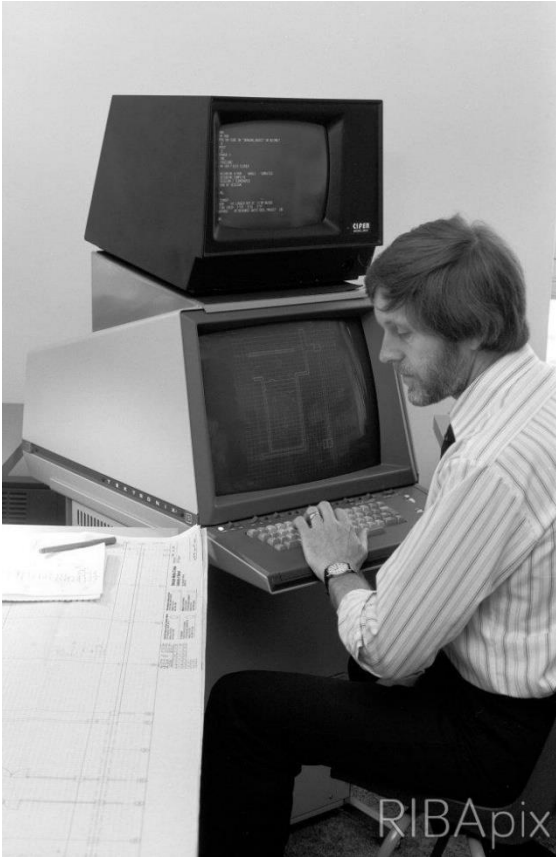
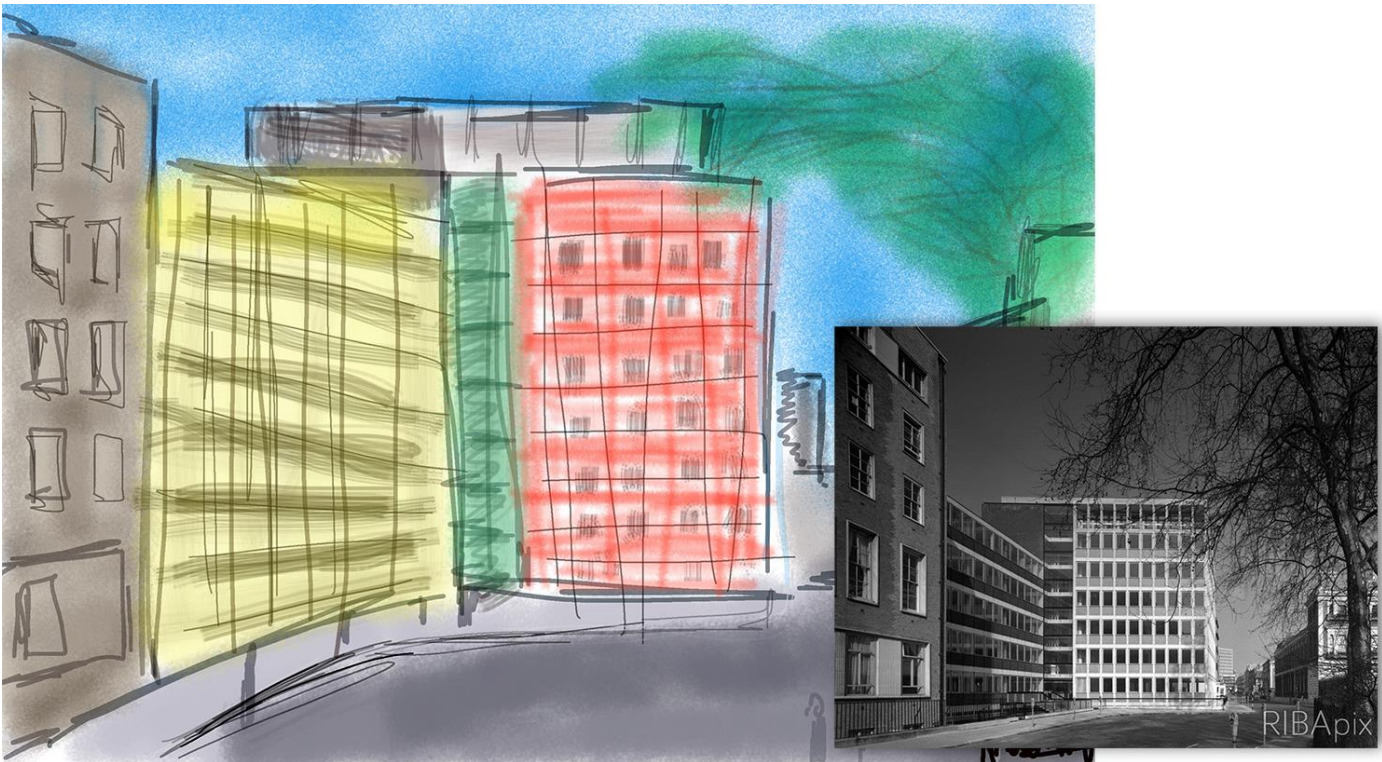


Image (left): An architect using a computer, 1981. Credit: [RIBA Collections](#)

Image (right): Drawing on an iPad. Credit: RIBA Learning

*We've come a long way with technology!*



**Inset image, left:** Participant's iPad drawing inspired by the image on the left, during a Silver Sunday event at the RIBA.  
**Main image, right:** Office building, Manchester Square, London, 1960. Credit: [RIBA Collections](#).

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## A. Introduction



Image: Participant using the RIBA Collections to inspire an iPad drawing. Credit: RIBA Learning

Tablets and smartphones are mostly used for communication, shopping and entertainment. Let's explore our artistic abilities and turn our digital devices into tools for creativity and making. Drawing digitally on a tablet or smartphone is a relatively new medium - the first iPad was only released in 2010. At its most basic it can be thought of as painting on a glass screen using your finger, though it offers much more than that. You can choose to use your finger or a stylus (you may need to check if it is compatible with your device), both work well for drawing.

### Why draw digitally?

- It can be stimulating and fun
- Learn something new and engage with technology in an enjoyable and creative way
- Apart from the relatively high upfront cost of buying a device, there is no extra cost for materials
- You can create as many art works as you like without having to worry about storing physical canvases or work
- The erase and undo functions in a drawing app means you can always undo a mistake quickly and cleanly
- Multiple colours, textures and effects offers a whole art set of possibilities
- The light weight of a device means it is portable and – especially with a smartphone – it is always at hand for drawing wherever you are and whenever you have time
- For those already engaged in making art it can be a great way to get out of your comfort zone and refresh your artistic practice

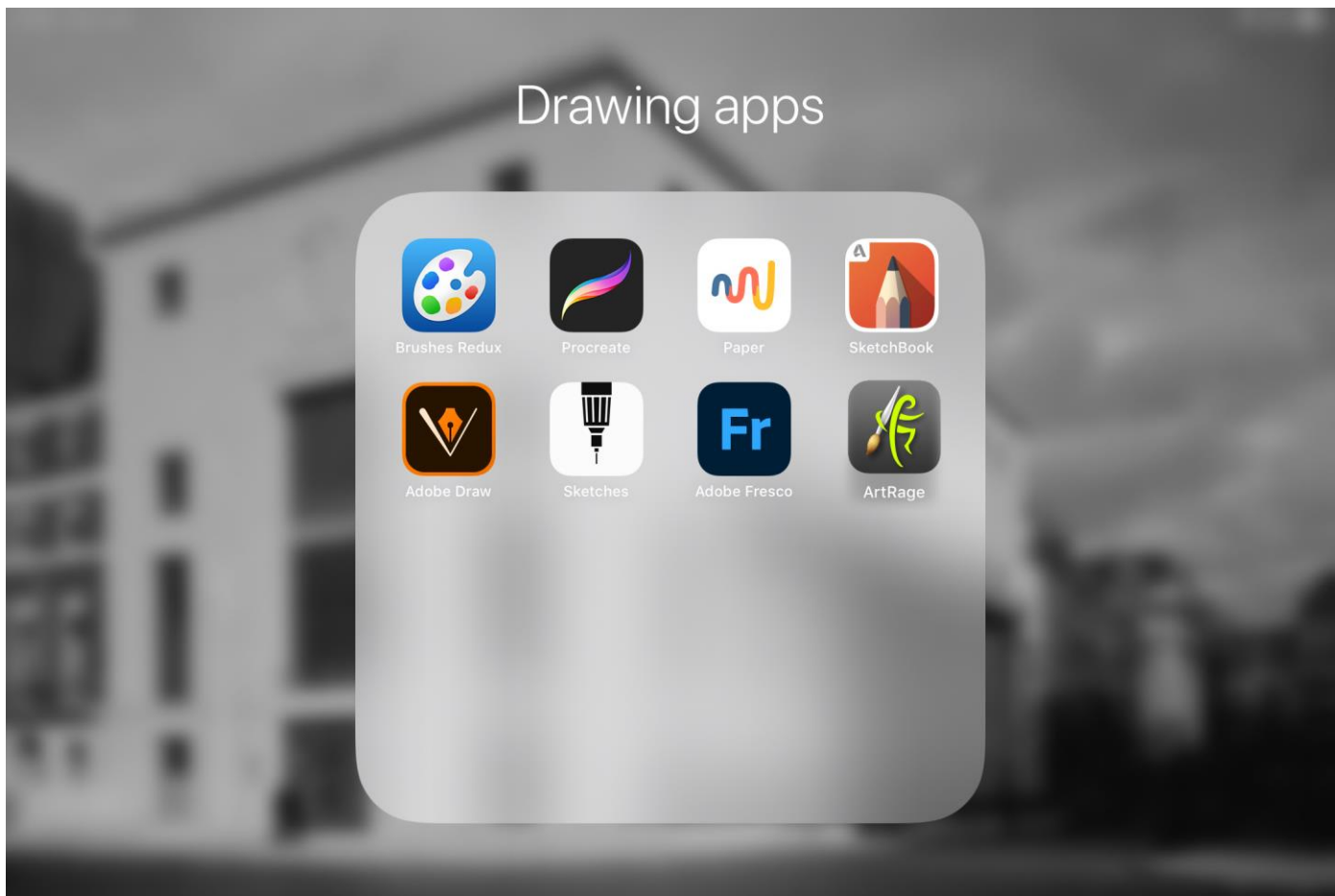


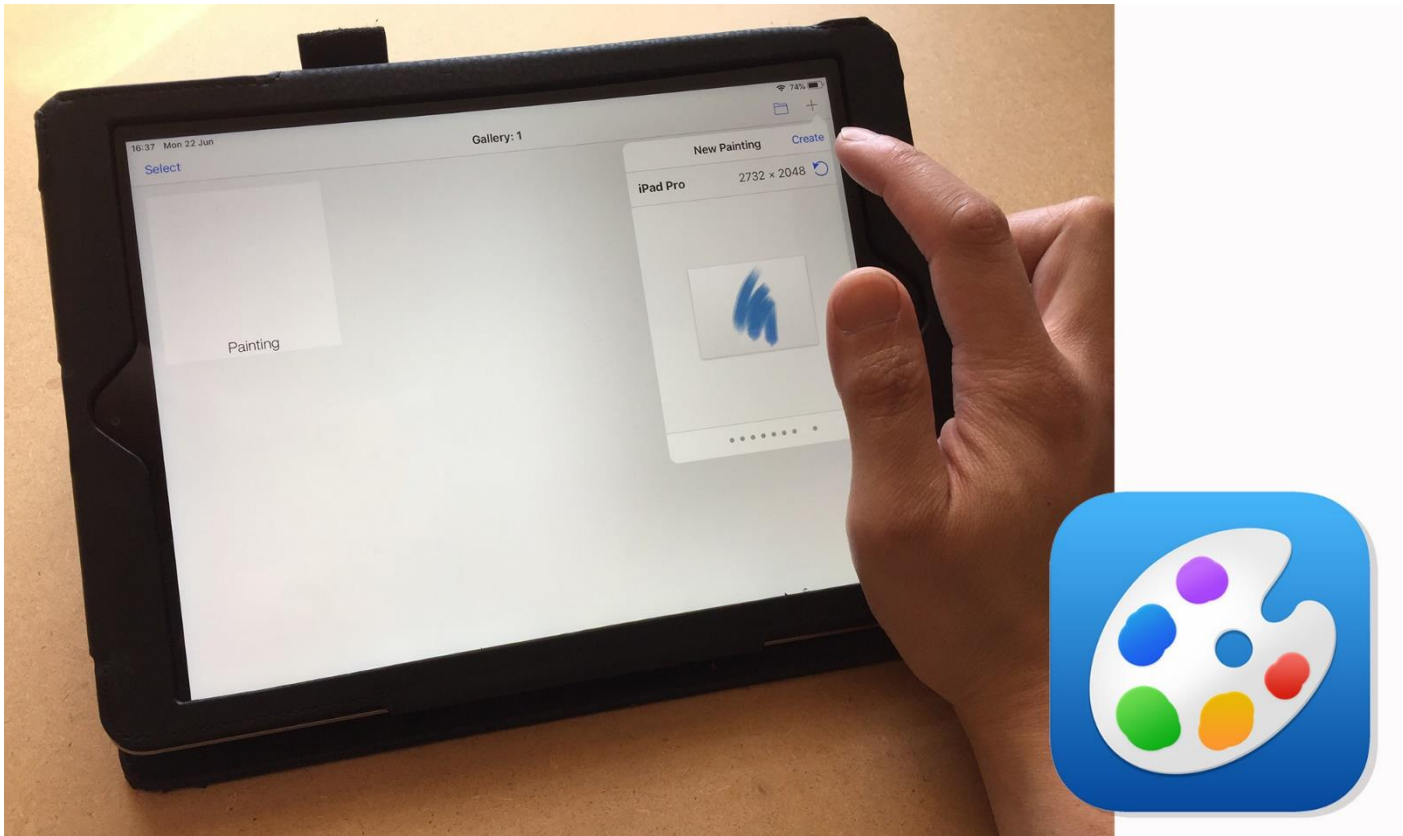
Image: Icons (buttons) for different drawing app on an iPad screen.

For this guide we will base images and instructions on an iPad and use the free [Brushes Redux](#) drawing app with our fingers. There are many devices on the market and new ones come out regularly, so for other apps and devices use this resource as a guide and a source of ideas rather than detailed instructions. There are many drawing software (apps) to choose from and download, the choice might be determined by what model of device you have. Many apps are entirely free, others are free as a basic version with extras you can buy later, and some require an upfront one-off purchase or regular subscriptions. Try out different ones to see which works for you.

Below is a list of some popular ones, but these are by no means the only apps available.

- [Adobe Illustrator Draw](#) and [Adobe Fresco](#)
- [Artrage](#)
- [Autodesk SketchBook](#)
- [Brushes Redux](#) (for iPhone and iPad)
- [Paper](#) by WeTransfer (for iPhone and iPad)
- [Procreate](#) (for iPhone and iPad)
- [Sketches](#) by Tayasui

## B. Before you draw: open a canvas



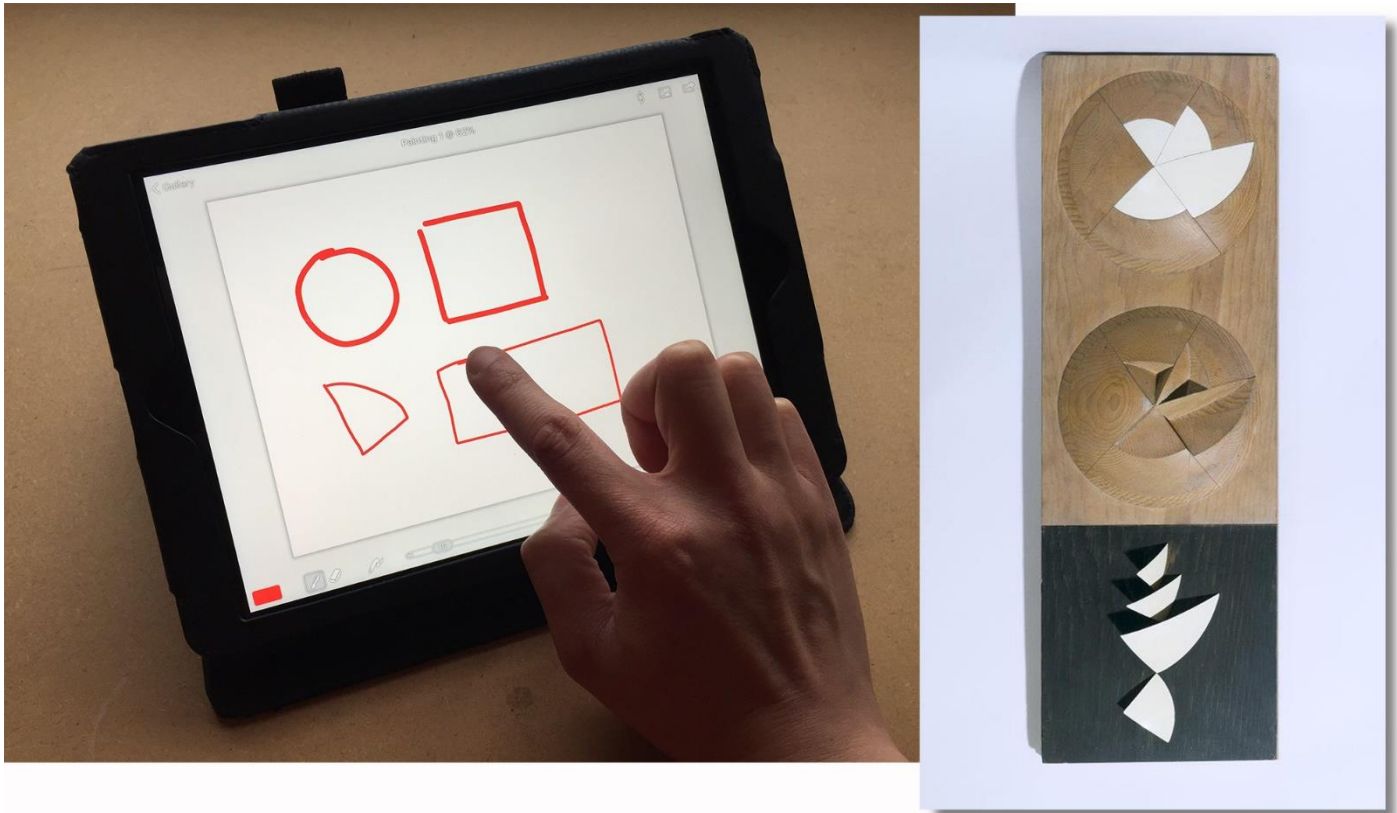
**Image, left:** Creating a new canvas in the app on an iPad. **Credit:** RIBA Learning  
**Image, right:** The Brushes Redux app icon

Download your chosen app and tap its icon on your screen to open it. This guide will be based on the Brushes Redux app for iPads. Start by creating a canvas to draw on by pressing the '+' icon on the top right corner. There are many different sizes and shapes of canvas to choose from. At this early stage, choose any by tapping the word 'create' that will then appear and the screen should go blank – that is your canvas, start drawing! In the app, all your work is automatically saved. You can have many canvases in the app, just press 'Gallery' in the top left when you are drawing to return to the home screen of the app and create a new canvas – you can have many opportunities to experiment!

## C. Start with simple drawings

At this early stage don't aim for detail or accuracy, just get used to using the drawing app. In this section we explore the tools in the app one at a time. In this app your finger is now a brush!

### Draw some shapes

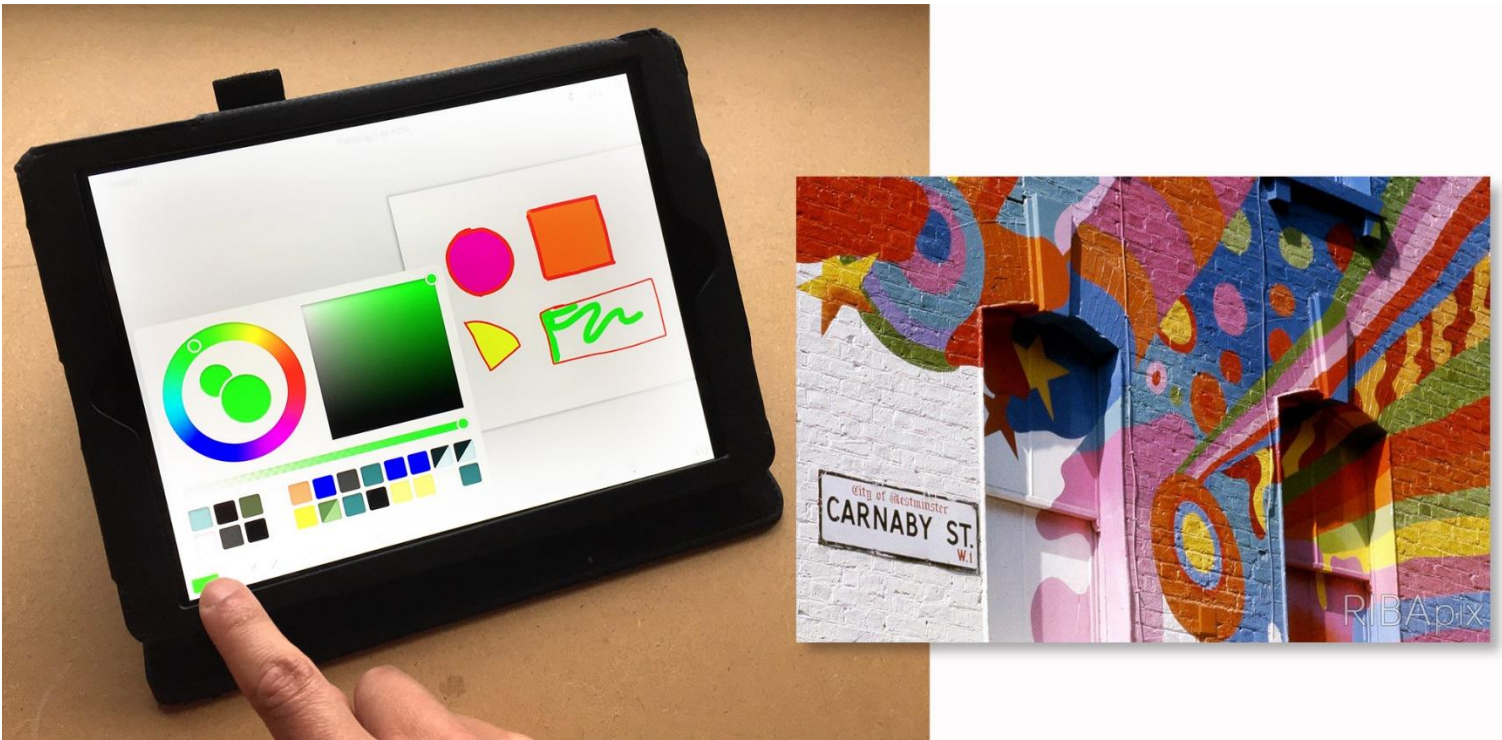


**Image, left:** Drawing shapes on an iPad. **Credit:** RIBA Learning

**Image, right:** Demonstration model of Sydney Opera House, Australia, showing the geometrical solution for the opera house shells, 1961. **Credit:** [RIBA Collections](#)

Let's start to get to know your device with a test piece by drawing simple shapes - wherever you touch on screen with your finger or stylus is where a brush mark will be made. The model above of Sydney Opera House offers lots of clear shapes we can copy onto our screen. At this stage, focus on getting used to your device and learning what some of the tools in the app do rather than aim for accuracy or detail in your drawing.

## Change the colour of your brush



Image, left: Selecting colour options from the colour wheel on an iPad. Credit: RIBA Learning

Image, right: Carnaby Street, London, 1967. Credit: [RIBA Collections](#)

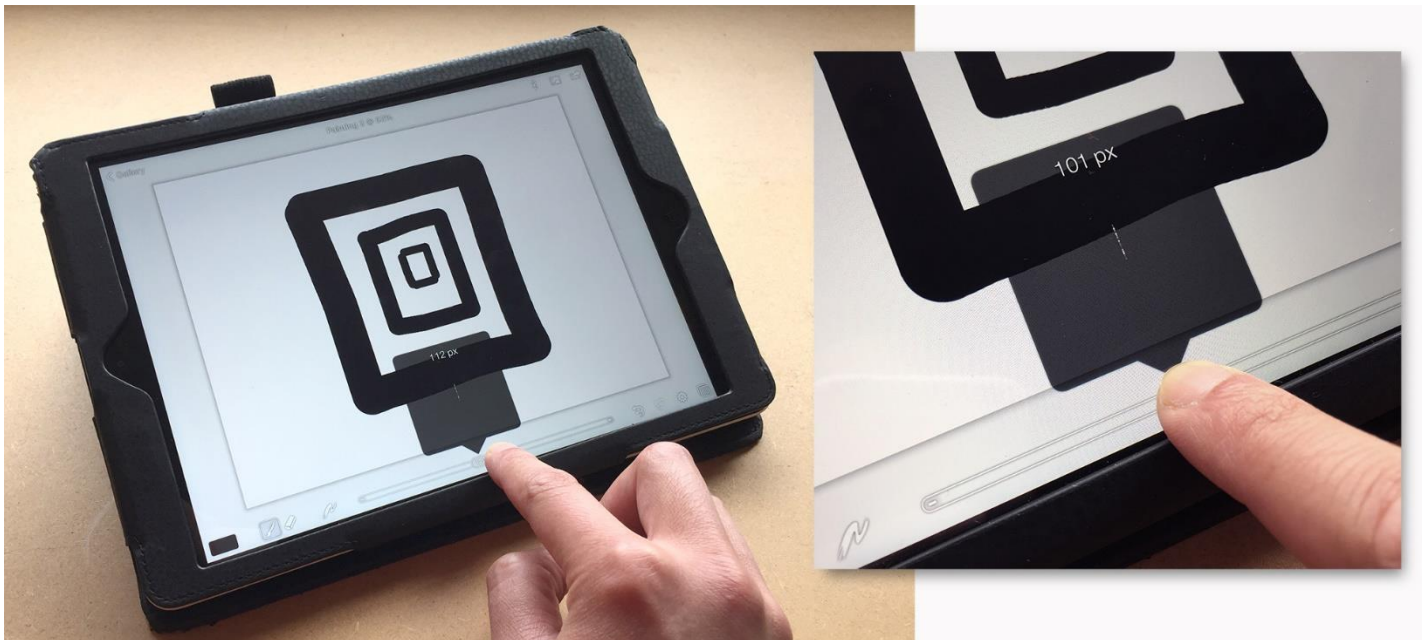
Now experiment with colour. At this stage there's no need to use 'realistic' colours, look at the above image of Carnaby Street for ideas. Carry on drawing new shapes or colour in the ones you've already drawn, whilst changing the colour you are using regularly. In this app it can be found by pressing open the coloured box on the bottom left corner (it happens to be green in the image above, it'll be whatever colour you are using that moment). This reveals a colour wheel from which you can pick any colour; the large square box to its right allows you to change the shade of your chosen colour.

Other drawing apps will have this same tool with multiple colour options, but it's likely the button will look different and be on another part of the screen.

## Change your brush size



Image: Detail of tiles, Masjid-i Jami mosque, Yazd, Iran. Credit: [RIBA Collections](#)



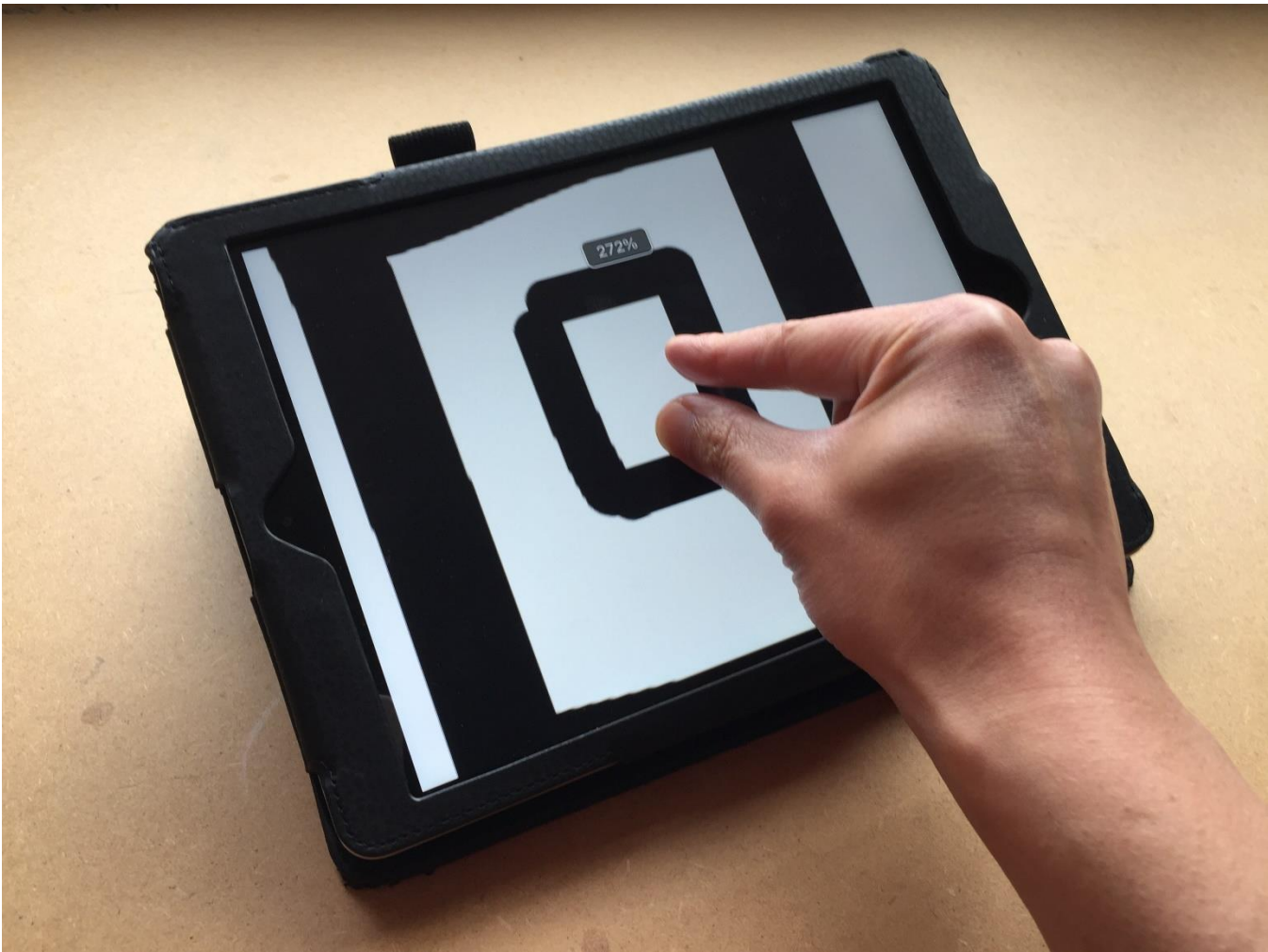
Images: Changing the brush size on an iPad. Credit: RIBA Learning

The next step is to fine tune your drawings by changing the width of your brush to produce different sized lines. Wider lines cover a greater surface area, good for colouring in shapes; thinner lines will allow for finer details such as the ones seen in the ornate mosque tiles in the top image. If your drawing is getting crowded or you want a clean canvas, remember you can create a new canvas at any time by pressing 'Gallery' in the top left corner.

In the app, the brush width can be changed by holding down the numbered square on the bar at the bottom of your screen. By dragging the square left or right, you can decrease or increase the thickness of your brush, which will be indicated by the change in number value. The lowest value is 1px and will produce the thinnest lines, 512px is the highest value and will produce the thickest lines.



## Zoom in



**Image:** Use two fingers zoom in or out of your iPad drawing. **Credit:** RIBA Learning

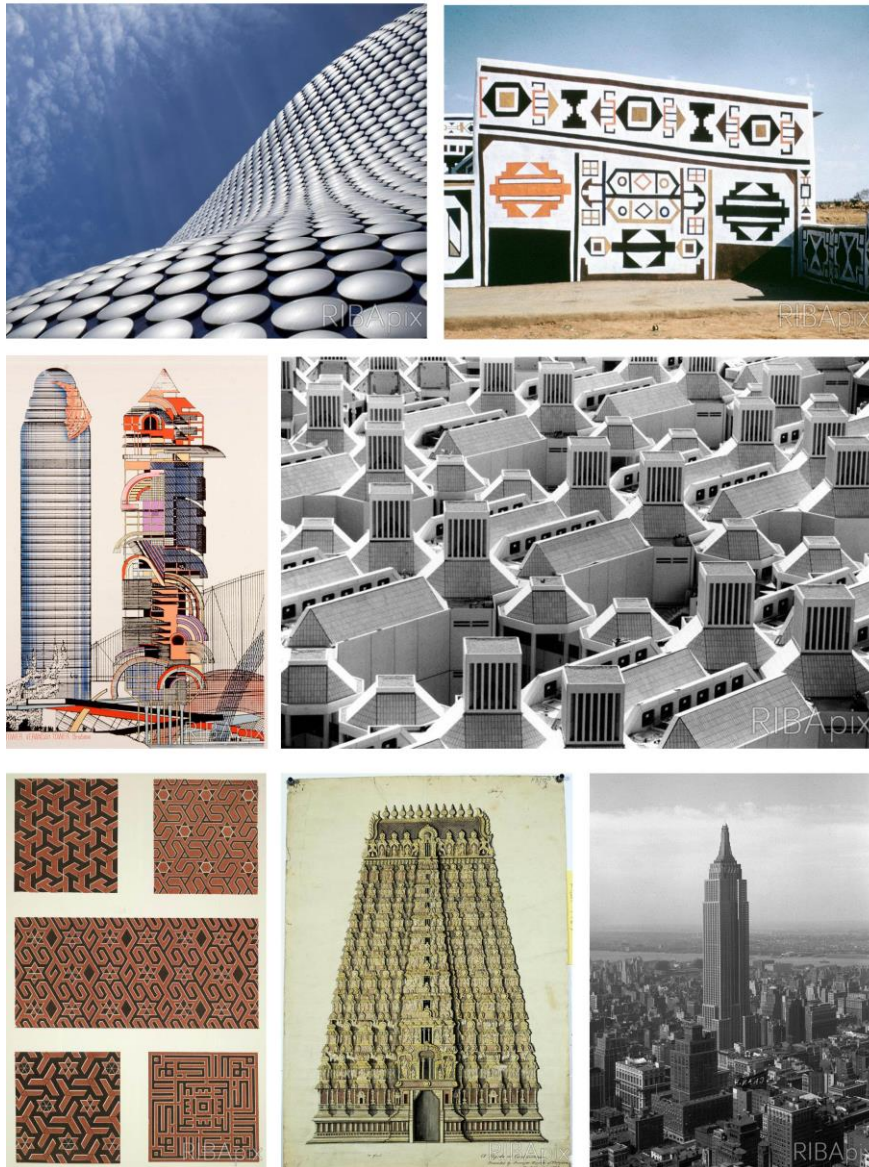
The size of your screen is not the size of your canvas that you draw on and your view is not fixed. Your thumb and forefinger used together can allow you to go beyond the physical viewing limits of your iPad.

Pinching outwards means you zoom into the part of the canvas you are touching, enabling you to add detail to your drawing. Pinching inwards means you are zooming back out to see more of the overall drawing. In this app, a number pops up with the percentage magnification as you zoom in or out. Two fingers held stiffly and moved across the screen will also move your view to other parts of the canvas without changing the magnification.

It can be easy to get disorientated on screen if you zoom in. If you are lost, just exit your work by pressing the 'gallery' button in the top left and go back into your canvas; by default your drawing will neatly fit your screen when it's reopened.

## D. Finding inspiration (RIBApix image gallery)

The RIBA Collections are mostly paper based and are from an analogue era with some items being over 500 years old, but the images they contain and artistic techniques they show can inspire our digital artwork and exploration of this new medium. Now you've got used to the basic tools, you will know your iPad well enough to start drawing something more complex. Buildings and the manmade environment around us can inspire our drawings. Look at the building you are in or what you can see from your window, or look at photographs, books or the internet as possible subjects for your drawing. Below is a small gallery of buildings that you could choose to draw, sourced from the RIBA Collections' online image database [RIBApix](#).

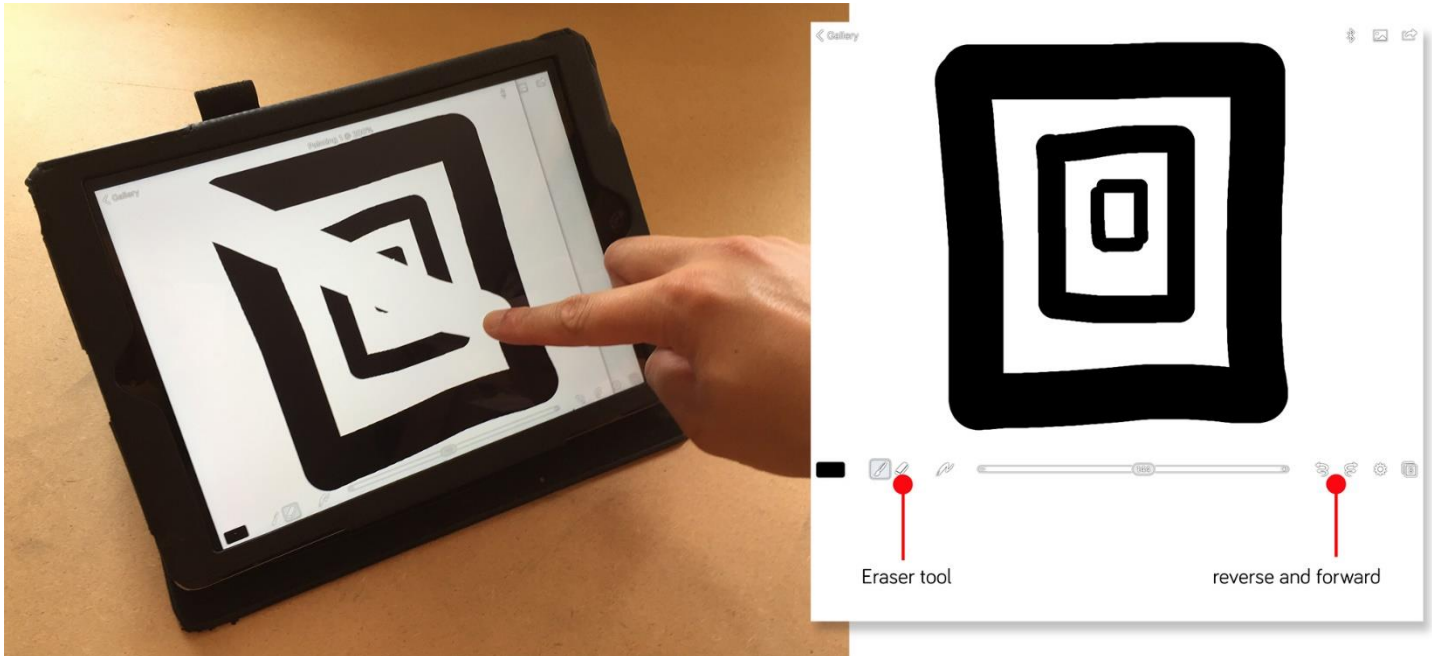


**Credit:** RIBA Collections

## E. Refining

Hopefully, you'll now be familiar with the basics and are probably keen to develop your abilities. The next pages show the other tools you could test out to refine your drawings and technique.

### Erasing



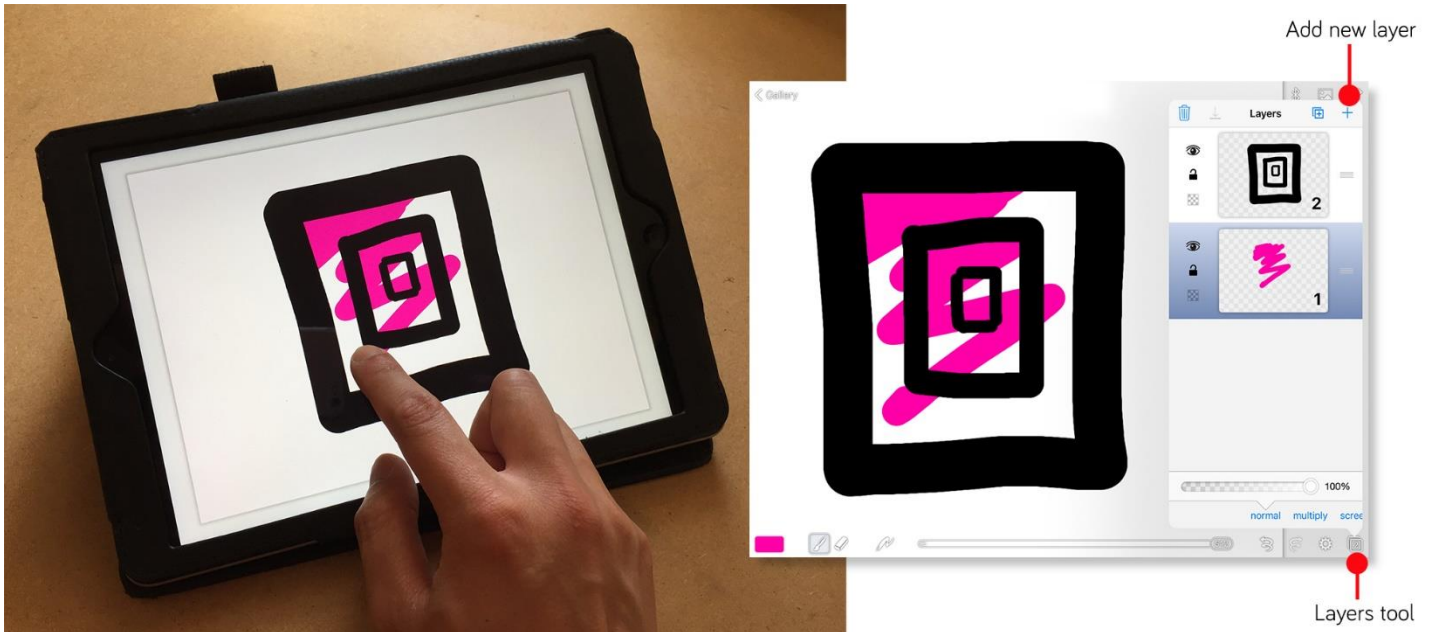
**Image:** Erasing parts of your iPad drawing (left) and the location of the erasing tools (right). **Credit:** RIBA Learning

With digital drawing there is no fear of making mistakes, you can cleanly erase multiple times without damaging your surface as would happen on paper - feel free to experiment while you draw in the knowledge you can easily undo any lines. There are two ways to erase: using the erase tool to remove every mark you touch; and the reverse tool that will remove your last marks one-by-one in reverse order of creation.

The eraser tool is the eraser-shaped icon at the bottom of the screen, press it to select it and rub the area of the drawing you want to clear.

The two curled arrows on the bottom right are the reverse and forward tools. Just tap either one - each tap taking you a step back or forward in your drawing process, this usually appears as a line-by-line change in your drawing. You can tap multiple times.

## Layers: Keeping parts of your drawing separate

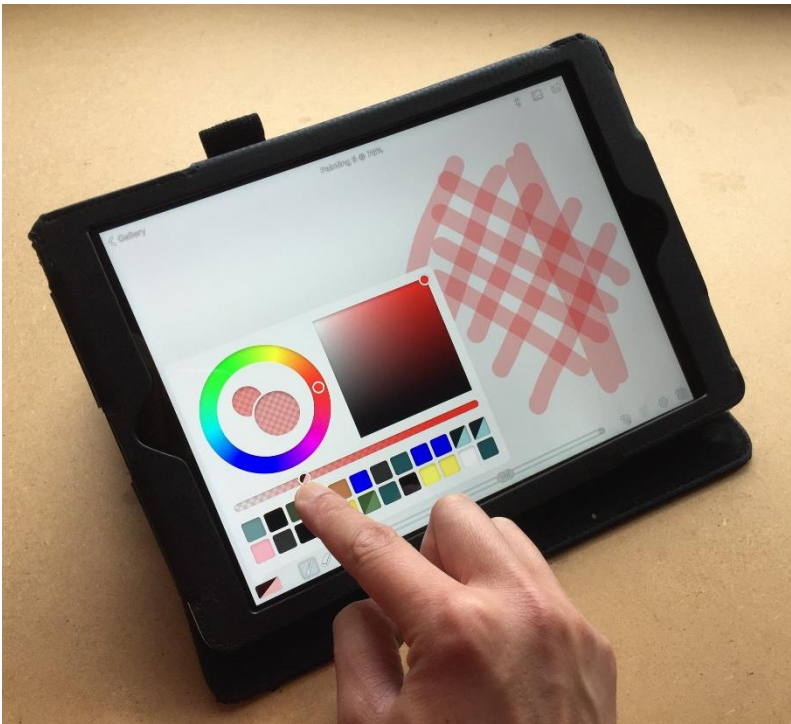


**Image:** Drawing on different layers in the app (left) and the location of the layer tool showing the different layers in the drawing (right). **Credit:** RIBA Learning

Imagine your canvas can be made up of several transparent tracing papers which we call 'layers', with anything drawn on the layer on top showing first and the one at the bottom only being seen in the areas not hidden by a drawing in the layers above. It means drawing, colouring in, deletion or editing of specific parts of your work can be done without affecting anything else if they are on different layers; outlines can be edited separate from the colour and detail, or foreground edited separate from the background.

When you press the layer tool icon on the bottom right, a panel pops up showing you all the layers, it'll only have one layer when you first start. You can add extra layers by pressing the '+' on the top right of the layers panel. In the above image you can see a drawing with two layers, the layer being drawn on is highlighted in blue, which in the image happens to be the bottom one and labelled '1'. To work on a different layer, press the one you want to work on, and it should become highlighted. Check frequently which layer you are drawing on, it's easy to get confused if you have many layers.

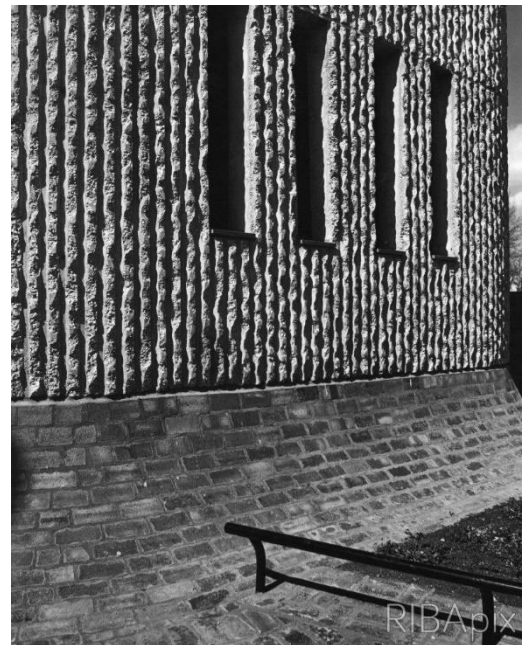
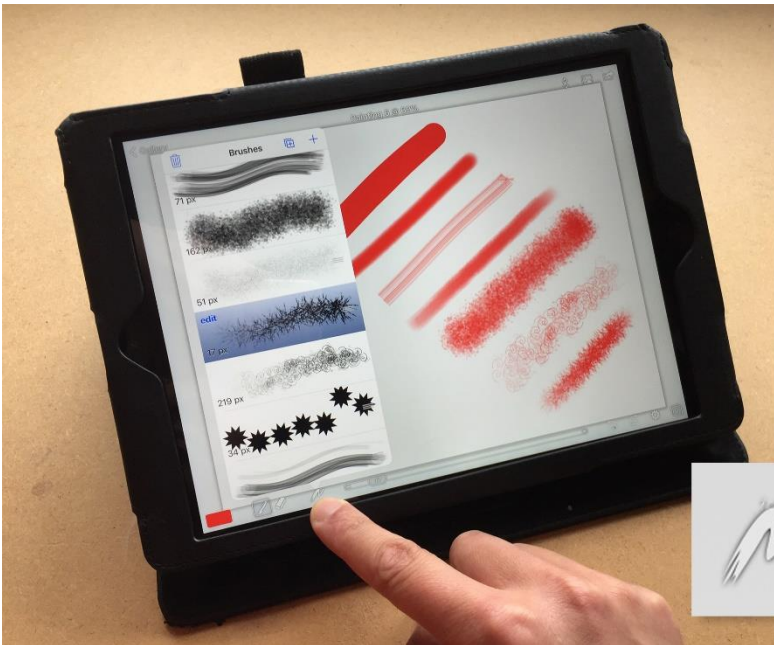
## Opacity



**Image, left:** Reducing the opacity of the brush by moving the bar below the colour wheel. **Credit:** RIBA Learning  
**Image, right:** Detail of a stained-glass window, London. **Credit:** [RIBA Collections](#)

You can fine tune the brushes by altering the opacity. Your brush is most likely to be at 100% opacity by default but reducing it can allow for subtler shading and create brush effects more like watercolour paint by recreating semi-transparent colours. Change the opacity by moving the bar found below the colour wheel (find this by pressing the coloured box in the bottom left corner).

## Textures

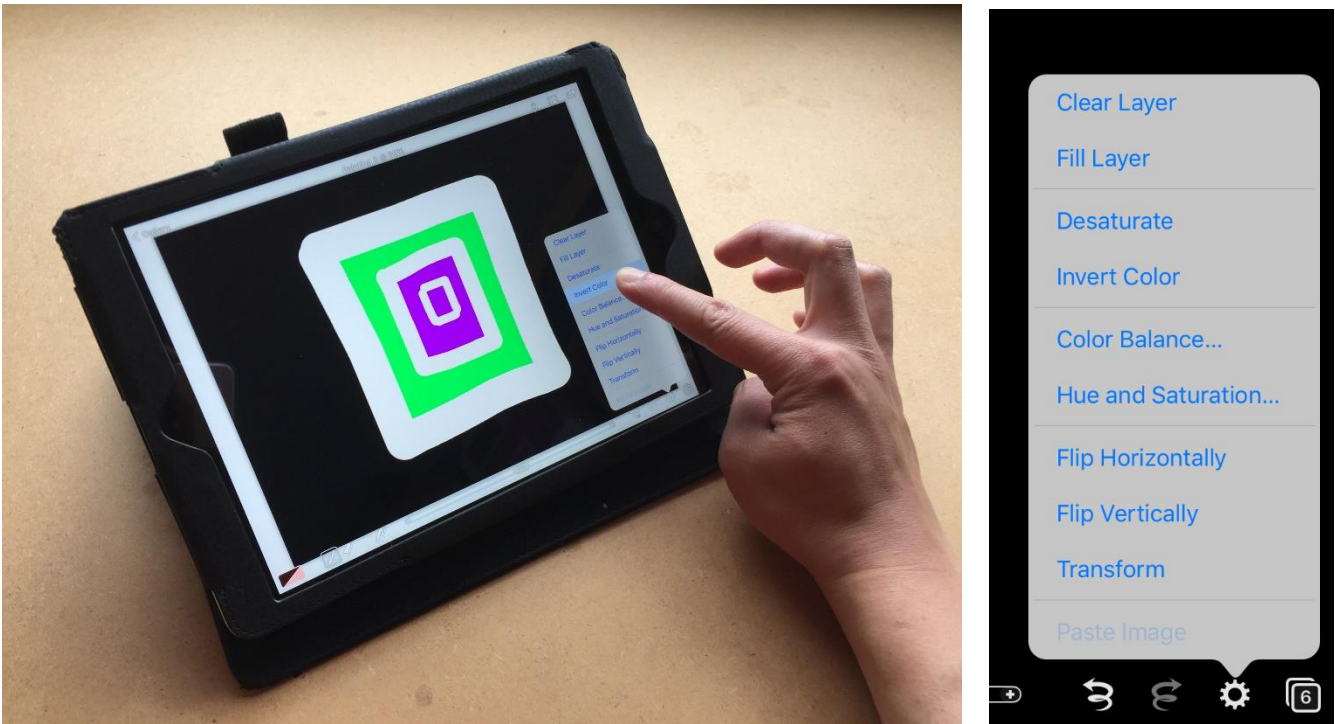


Image, left: Menu panel with the different texture options. Credit: RIBA Learning

Image, right: Detail of the concrete wall of the Elephant and Rhinoceros House, London Zoo, 1965. Credit: [RIBA Collections](#)

In the Brushes Redux drawing app there is the option to change the texture of the lines you create. Access this by pressing the icon that looks like a splash, to the right of the erase tool. A panel with different texture will pop up, scroll up or down and press the texture you want to use to select it. Most other drawing apps will also have different texture options or tools that replicate the effects of different media.

## Experimental



**Image:** Experimenting by inverting the colours in the drawing. **Credit:** RIBA Learning

With digital drawing you can experiment and create new versions by manipulating the image. Options in the 'cog' icon located at the bottom right of the screen allow you to change the size and reposition your drawing within the canvas, invert the colours and much more. You can have many canvases in the app, just press 'gallery' in the top left to return to the home screen of the app and create a new canvas – you can have many opportunities to experiment!

## Montage



**Image:** Creating a montage by adding a photo to the drawing. **Credit:** RIBA Learning

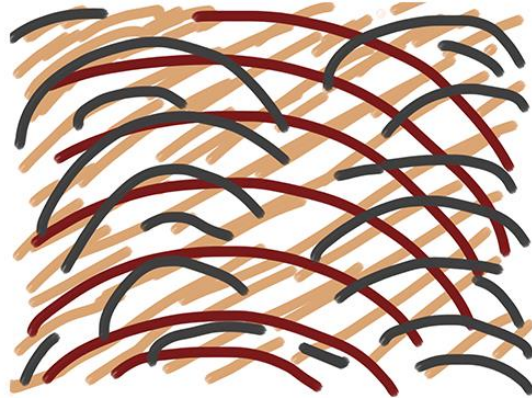
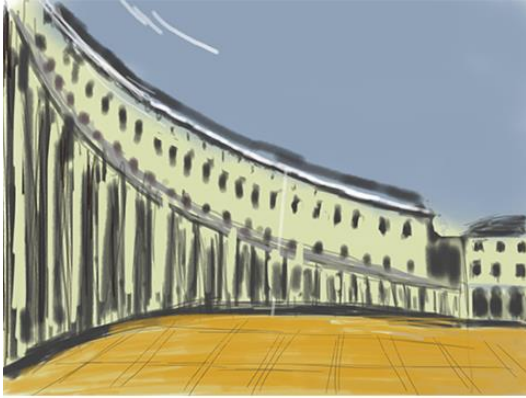
Create a montage by adding photographs to the drawing. You can take photographs using the camera in your iPad or save images from the internet to your photo album. You can then add these photographs and images to your digital drawing by pressing the 'photo' icon at the top right corner of the screen – it's the middle one of the three icons – which will take you to your iPad's photo album.

Each selected photo will be automatically added in as a new layer. As with any layer, you can edit the photograph, erase parts of it and draw onto it.



## F. The gallery: iPad drawings from past participants

Below are a range of works by older people aged 50 and over, who came to visit the RIBA to try out digital drawing for the first time after exploring the RIBA's building and architectural collections. Most had never used an iPad before. We hope these beautiful drawings inspire you!



If you use social media, do share what you create by tagging in @RIBALearning on [Twitter](#) or @riba on [Instagram](#)

## G. Additional resources

### Online: Inspiration

#### RIBApix

Search RIBApix, the RIBA's online image database, for over 100,000 inspiring images on architecture.

<https://www.architecture.com/image-library/ribapix.html>

#### Victoria and Albert Museum

The Victoria and Albert Museum also has a collection of half a million images on art, design and architecture.

<https://collections.vam.ac.uk/>

### Online: Artists

#### Tony Fretton exhibition at the Betts Project, 2016

Images and text from an exhibition showcasing the digital sketches by architect Tony Fretton as part of his design process.

<https://www.bettsproject.com/exhibitions#/tony-fretton-minis>

#### David Hockney

The website of artist David Hockney, which has a section dedicated to his recent iPad drawings of landscapes using the app Brushes Redux.

<http://www.hockney.com/home>

#### Raheem Nelson

Website of iPad artist Raheem Nelson who specialises in drawing portraits and urban landscapes using the app Procreate.

<http://www.raheemnelson.com>

### RIBA Library and collections

The RIBA Collections are the world's greatest architectural collections, with books, drawings, photographs and models available to view from the RIBA Library, 66 Portland Place, London, and the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Free entry.

**Please check opening hours and access policies before visiting.**

<https://www.architecture.com/about/riba-library-and-collections>

*Pack created by the RIBA (RIBA Learning), 2020.*

More online resources available from [www.architecture.com/Learning](http://www.architecture.com/Learning)

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