

Jan 5th, 2004

The Shape of a Song



After completing her tiger drawing, Nasya (3.8) draws a bus apparently peopled by familiar faces. When asked she says a word I don't understand but her mother is right there to clarify. The drawing is based on an animation that Nasya watches having to do with vegetable characters. The faces in the bus however seem to be people from her own life. ("The driver, Dad, Laura, little one.")

Above the bus Nasya draws a rather rhythmic form while singing most quietly to herself. I ask her to tell about this shape.

Nasya: "...my song that we sing on the bus."



Would you sing this song?

Nasya begins singing and drawing the same kind of sinuous lines on a new piece of paper as she sings.

What are those lines just above the bus? (The jagged, sawtooth sort of lines.)

Nasya: "...when the bus moves."



Nasya rose to the challenge of depicting a song without a second thought. Many of us lost this ability early in our childhood. Without use, such ability withers. As adults the majority of us can no longer see this way. Exceptions have included Mondrian and Kandinsky, both of whom used music to inform their brush. Because we have let this ability to represent atrophy, it becomes almost impossible to recognize when it is presented to us.

I like to think of it as an x-ray that can reveal one small bit of the complicated architecture of a child's mind, not as an end in itself but a key to the next question.

Nasya has used the language of line to translate the languages of music and motion to a visual form. We know now that this is not some static, silent sort of vehicle but a musical bus in motion, spiced with friends and relations.

While sketching along with Nasya in order to follow her thinking, I neglected to leave enough space above my bus and so placed the drawing of her song in front. Nasya informed me at this point that the "bus can't move right now". I sometimes forget just how substantial an idea can be.