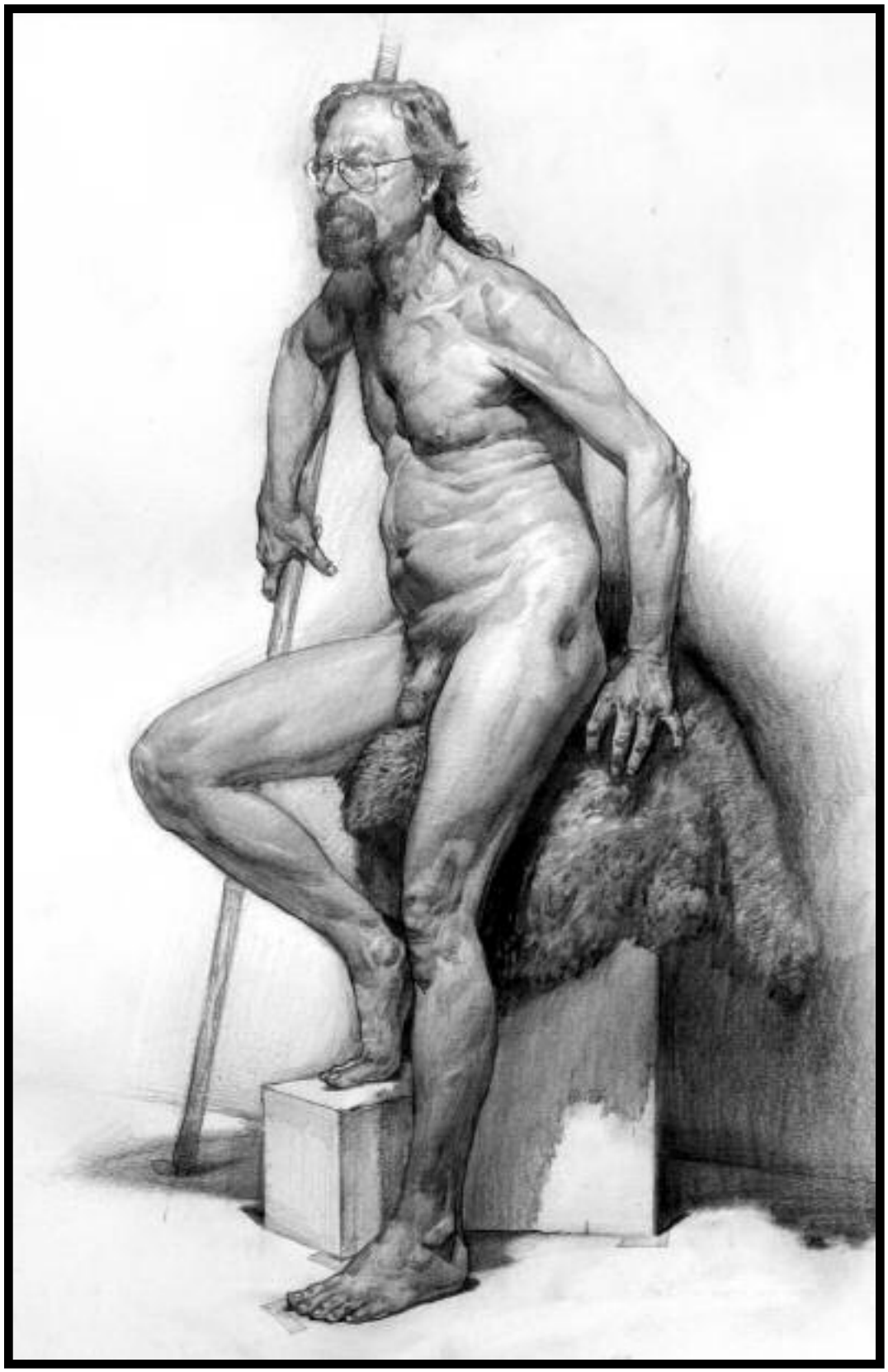
Figure Drawing Fundamentals



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Notes to the reader

This book is not meant as a step by step or a formula (art is not a formulaic pursuit) so do not study as such. This book is also not meant to solve all your problems, which can only be done by you through diligent study and hard work. This book is intended to be a guide through the world of figure drawing. Careful practice of the principles documented in this book will improve your drawings more than copying the drawings used to demonstrate these points. The best way to use this book is to find a good piece of photo reference, or better yet get into a life drawing class and apply what you have learned in this book to the problem in front of you. It does you little good to copy the drawings in this book because for the most part the problems have already been solved for you.

It is more important for you as an artist to learn the principles behind what I do and the reasoning used to govern my, or any one else's "style". In so doing you will begin to produce original art, and not just mimic, what has come before. In art there are no rules. Rules are what we often use to simplify key principles and concepts for those newly initiated into the fraternity of artists. Always try to get from any instructor why they do what they do, not how they do it. Why we do what we do is what makes us good artist's, how we do it makes us individuals. If you simply draw how someone else draws you will never be an individual. So when you study from an artist or an artist's work try to figure out why the make the choices they do, not merely copy the decisions they make.

My recommendation to you is get out your sketchbook, read through the following pages all the way to the end, and make notes where you feel necessary. Then put away the book, and get out a good piece of photo reference and your drawing pad and get to work. Only get the book out when you run into a problem. This is the best way to test how much of the material you have retained. Every time you get out the book make a mark on the chapter you needed to review, this will show you the areas you still need to study. Next get your butt into a life drawing class... this is the best way to learn.

Good luck,
E-

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Gesture

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Chapter 1: The Gesture

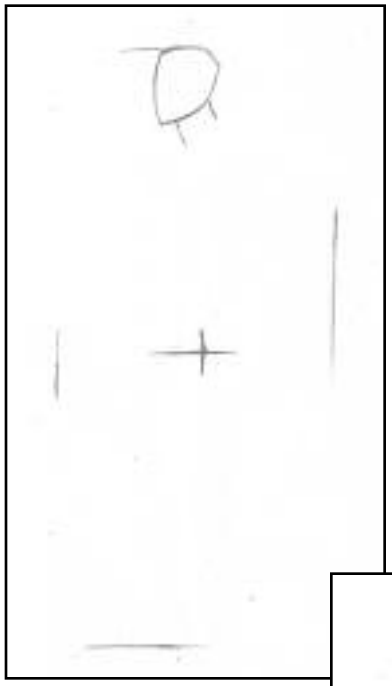
There are few things in art more challenging than drawing the human figure. I have found that when facing a daunting challenge the best thing to do is attempt to break the process down and simplify. That is what I am going to try to teach you in the following chapters; to break down the process into separate but interwoven steps and principles. The reason for doing this, is so you only have to worry about on thing at a time rather than fifty.

The first step in this process is to establish the gesture or linear lay-in. ***This is the most important step of the drawing*** because it dictates all other steps in the process.

Before going any further, lets define gesture. In it's simplest form, gesture is the action of the pose or movement between its forms. However, this is too vague because gesture should also establish the length, width and direction of all the masses of the figure. In a more abstract sense, the gesture is the life, flow and energy of the figure. This is why I say gesture is the most important step of the drawing process. If your linear lay-in doesn't have the forementioned elements neither will your finish. As you take your drawing toward completion, it will typically become more stiff and uptight, so try to give your gesture as much energy as you can with out sacrificing accuracy.

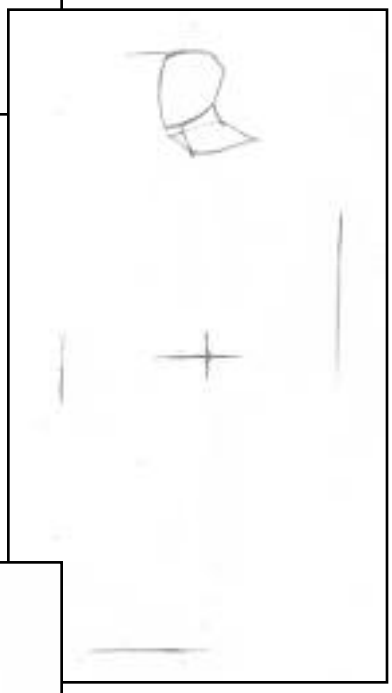
Lets begin to capture the gesture. The gesture should be established using the longest lines possible. Anything else is a scribble not a line. In the first pass through the figure you should find the triangular or pyramid shape of the pose. Almost all poses fit in to a triangle of one proportion or another. Next, begin to establish the gesture of the pose using those long lines we talked about earlier.

Remember above all else, keep it light. Nothing is a mistake until you can't erase it.



1

There are three basic lines:
c-curve
s-curve
straight



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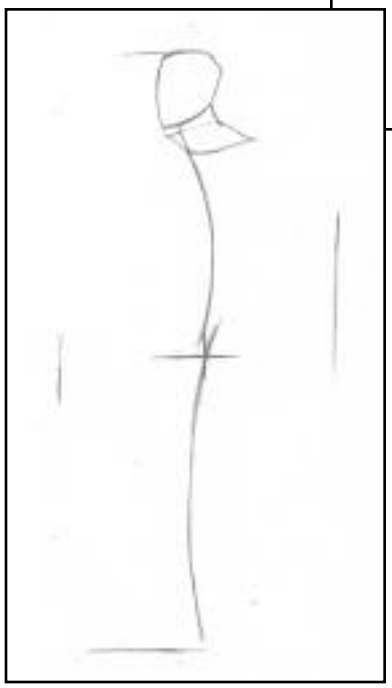


3

1) Establish the head first using either a bloated triangle or an oval (which ever works best for you), and the sweep of the neck.

2) Next establish the sweep of the shoulders from acromium process to acromium process (the acromium process is the visible and palpable bump near each end of the collar bone)

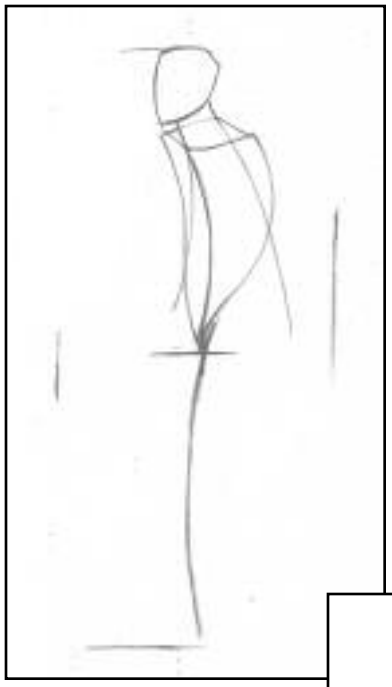
3) Now find your way to the ground as efficiently as possible. This is usually through the center line, or from the pit of the neck to the weight baring foot.

4) From the acromium process on each side draw a line mimicking the center line down to the crotch. Then draw a line from the outside of the neck to the hip on each side. These lines should establish the gesture of the torso and hips while ignoring the true breadth of the rib cage and pelvis.

From here you should inject only as much structure as is needed to connect the limbs.

5) Establish the gesture of the limbs by first drawing the flow of the limb (usually the tendenous inner portion). Then by establishing the width (the boney outer portion). Also terminate the limbs with the hands and feet, use simple geometric shapes at this time.

6) Complete the gesture with any supporting elements, in this case the stool, block, pole, etc.



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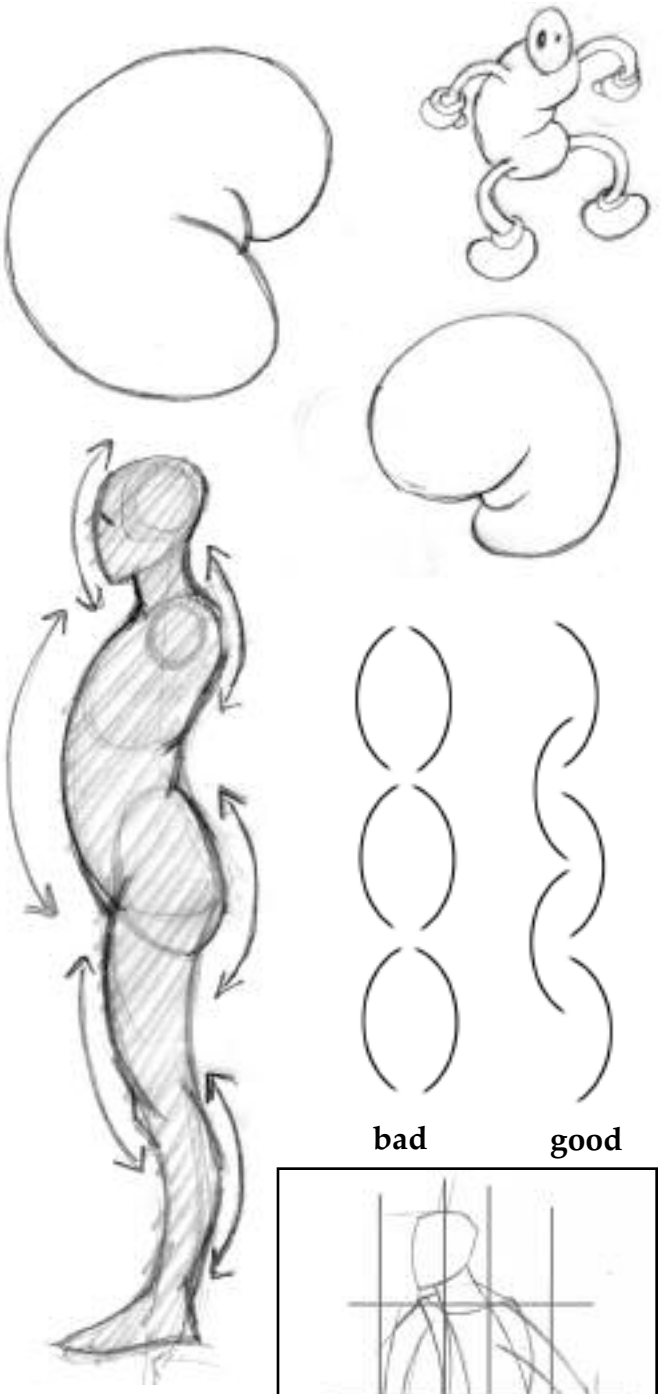
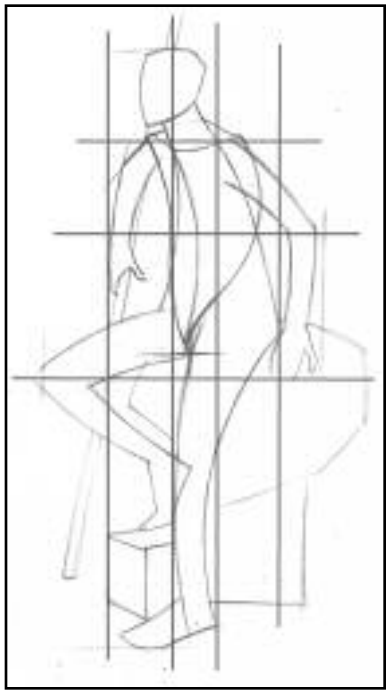
Before moving on I want to discuss a few more principles of gesture with you. Lets start with one of the most important, ***Stretch and Pinch.*** Stretch and pinch is essentially the idea that in any natural pose the body has an active or "pinch" side and an inactive or "stretch" side. This is best seen through the bean bag metaphor. When you bend a bean bag you can see the fabric elongate on one side and bunch up on the other. In fact you can stick arms, legs and a head on the bean bag and have a decent representation of a human figure.

This theory actually applies to most parts of the figure, but none so obviously as the trunk of the body. As I mentioned, the stretch and pinch happens all throughout the body, even in repose. As you can see, stretch and pinch appose each other on opposite sides of the figure, and you will rarely have stretching or pinching simultaneously on both sides of the figure. This creates a "Michelein Man" or snowman effect, which is dumpy and undesirable.



bad **good**

Plumb lines are another helpful tool during the lay-in stage of the drawing. ***Plumb lines*** are basically straight vertical or horizontal lines to help establish proper placement in your drawing. This is especially helpful in the case of foreshortening. The way plumb lines work is to hold up your pencil exactly vertical or horizontal. Where things line up on either a vertical or horizontal axis, they should line up exactly the same way in your drawing. This is a good way of double checking your drawing with the model.



Characteristics of Gesture

1) Movement between forms

2) Curved, fluid, graceful

3) Lifeline

4) Connecting line

5) Long

6) Keep it simple (s-curve c-curve straight)

7) Stretch

8) Two-dimensional

Books and Artists To Study For These Principles

Andrew Loomis:
Figure Drawing For All Its Worth

Glenn Vilppu:
Vilppu Drawing Manual

Frank Frazetta

John Paul Rubens

Steve Huston

Henrich Kley

Structure

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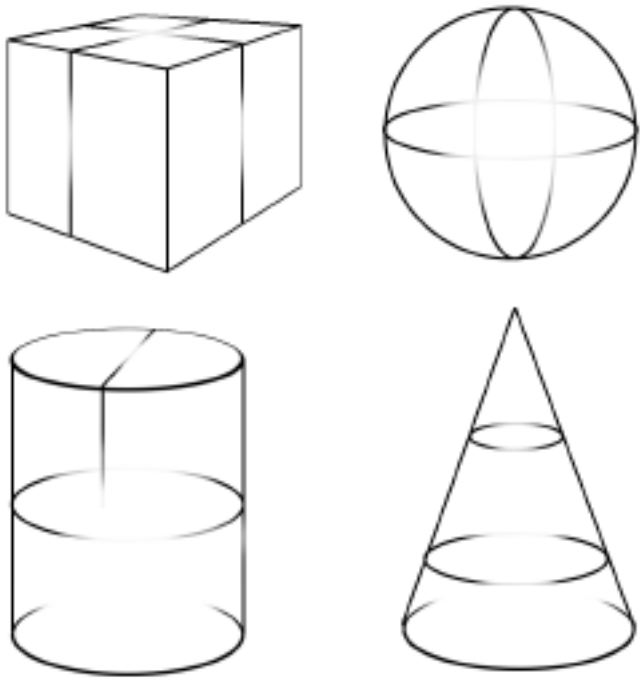
Chapter 2: Structure

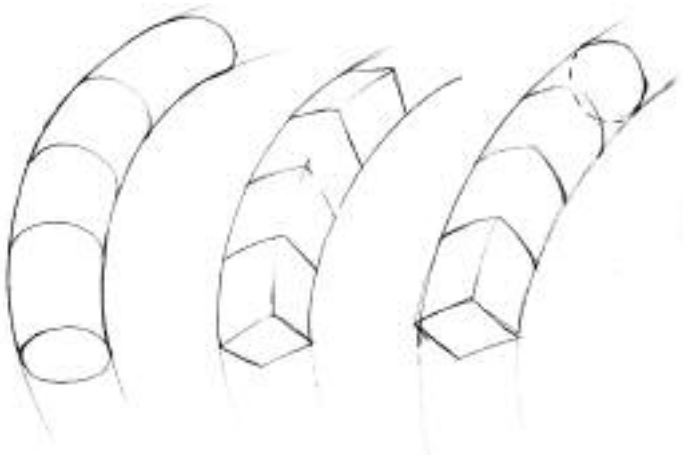


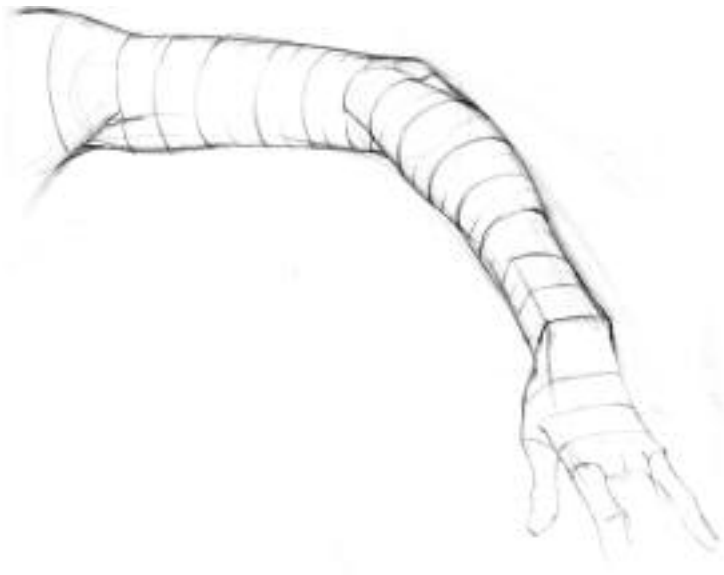
Structure is the movement around a form. While gesture is more or less a two-dimensional lay-in, ***Structure*** adds a third dimension, depth. Essentially structure turns a shape into a form. The main difference between a shape and a form breaks down like this. A square is a shape, a cube is a form; a circle is a shape, while a sphere is a form.

In the second stage of the drawing we are going be adding volume to our linear construction. The reason for using this method is so we can all be sure we understand the volumes and are not just mimicking superficial shading tricks that we have seen used by other artists. We should understand the principles behind the tricks so that we can come up with our own way of communicating with the viewer and not be stuck being a second rate copy of some other artist.

Here we are mainly going to be working with cross contour lines, which essentially take the gesture line and turn them either into a rounded cylindrical form, a squared of boxy form or anything in between. This is basically a tool for you to use later on in the drawing, a shorthand or road map for guiding you in your shading of a the form, much the way you will draw in a guideline before cutting a piece of wood.

So let us begin. First we need to analyze each form and decide three things:
1) What is the primitive form, is it a cylinder, a cube, sphere or a cone? 2) How rounded or squared off is this form? 3) What is its position in three-dimensional space? Is it angled towards me, away from me, or parallel to me? These principles are going to dictate our cross contours.





Characteristics of Structure

1) Movement over form

2) Three-dimensional

3) Pinch, flexion, tension

4) Form, depth, perspective

5) Strength

Books and Artists To Study For These Principles

Andrew Loomis:
Figure Drawing For All Its Worth

Glenn Vilppu:
Vilppu Drawing Manual

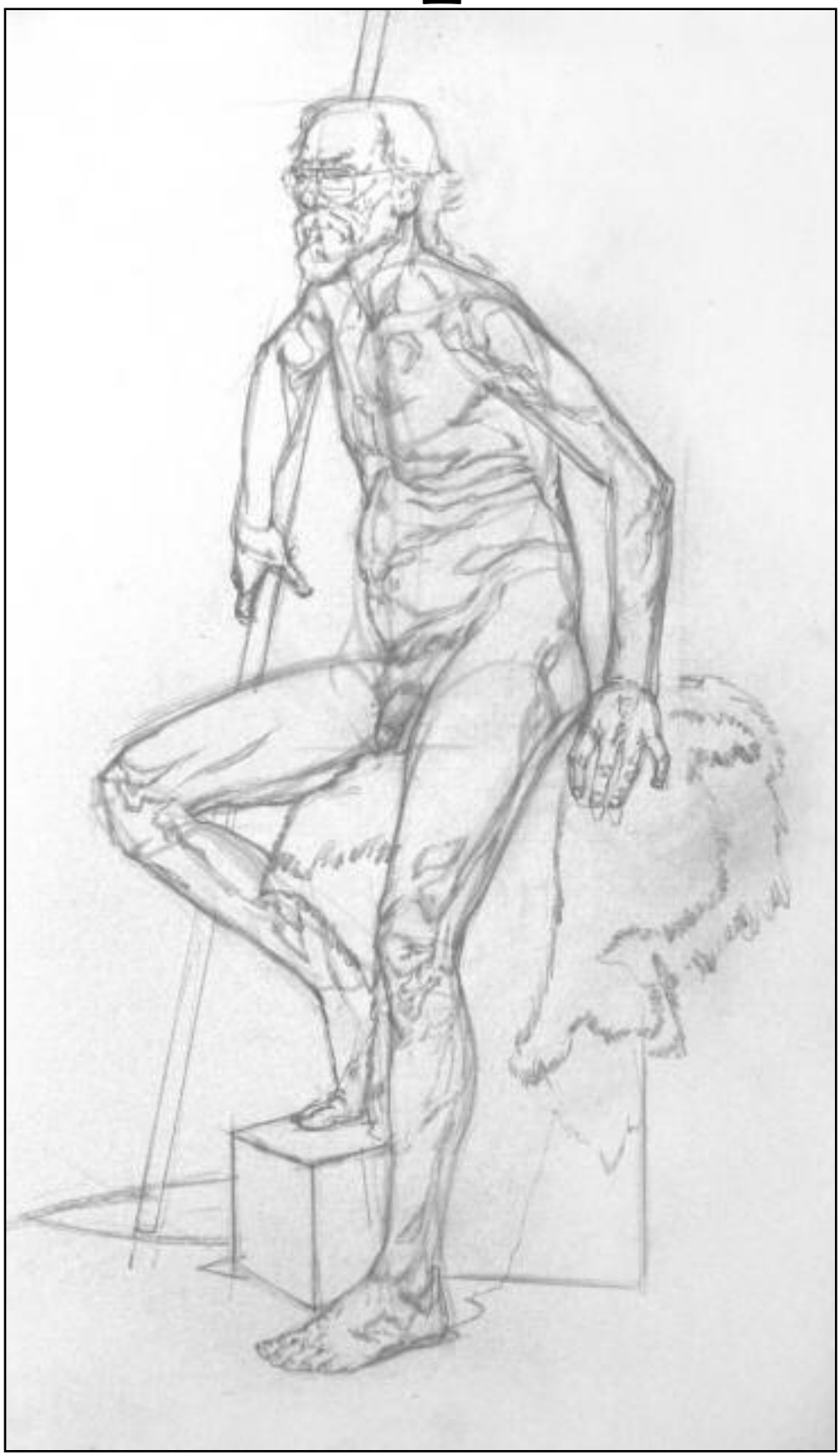
Frank Frazetta

George Bridgman

Steve Huston

Burne Hogarth
All of his books

Shapes



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Chapter 3: Shape Analyzation

Shape analyzation is probably one of the most difficult aspects of drawing for most people. It requires you to put aside most of what you have spent so long learning for a time and trust your eye. We spend most of our lives learning what an eye or nose or arm looks like. We essentially acquire a library of symbols that stand in place of reality in our mind. The problem with this is that when we sit down to draw from life part of the goal is to make it look like the person or thing that is the subject of our study that day. Now weather you are drawing your "Grandpa Joe" or a vase your approach should not change, you are still drawing *YOUR* "Grandpa Joe" or *THAT* specific vase so, at least for the purposes of training your eye, it should look like your "Grandpa Joe" or that specific vase.

The best way I have found for improving shape analyzation skills is just practice, practice, practice. That cannot be taught. However what can be taught or rather shared are a few tricks I have learned over the years that have helped me to break away from what drawing symbols rather than what is in front of you. The first thing that has helped me in seeing shapes more accurately is to squint. By squint I don't mean squint, and then strain to see through my squinted eyes. The best way I have found to squint is to sit at one arms length from my drawing surface, relax, then close my eyes and open them back up slowly until I can make out the figure as a series of blurry light and dark shapes. Don't worry that you cannot see any halftones or detail, this is actually the idea. This is the proper way to see when analyzing shapes.

Now you are probably saying "That's great, I can see the shapes, but how do I draw the darn things?". The best trick I have learned for getting my self to draw the shapes more accurately it to think of it almost like connect the dots, but (and here is the trick) you have to find the dots. So basically when looking at the perimeter of a shape I mentally, or physically if you find it helps, put a dot on my drawing surface where ever I see a major change of angle. Then I connect the dots with with a straight or

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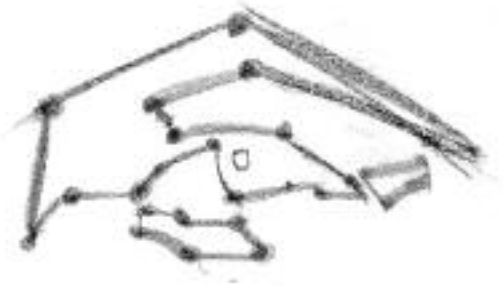
slightly curved line, whichever seems most appropriate to me. Where exactly you choose to put these "dots" and curved and straight lines is called your "design sense". The result of seeing and drawing this way is the simplifiction of the incredibly complex visuals that nature presents us with into a geometric, posterized, two value version of reality.

There are times that what works visually in the real three-dimensional world will not work in the illusionary two-dimensional world of our drawing pad. This is why we sometime have to interpret what we see and not simply translate. The things that each artist choose to change to create a better illusion of three-dimensions on their pad is very individual, so take what is presented in the rest of this chapter with a grain of salt and realize these are ways that I have found to improve my drawing on a personal level not so much an academic one.



When drawing a form that is slightly foreshortened, (which by the way almost all forms are) instead of pushing that form more into profile like a lot of beginning artists do (this is one of the things that gives a lot of artists that very stiff uptight look) I push it more into foreshortening just slightly. Another thing I like to do is push the outlines of a forms closer to to me in front of the outlines of forms farther from me. For instance if the models arm is pointed at me I push the lines of the hand in front of the those of the wrist, those of the wrist in front of the forearm, etc.

One last thing I like push in my drawings are a anatomical indications that show the volume of a form and conversely remove or play down those that go against that form. For instance I might push the hip insertion of a foreshortened leg, but not the downward bowing arch of the teardrop shape of the *vastus internus.*

Keys to shape analyzation

1) Squint

2) Squint

3) Squint

4) Two values

5) Connect the dots

6) Keep it simple

7) Visually relate lights and darks

Books and Artists To Study For These Principles

Harley Brown

Alphonse Mucha

J. C. Leyendecker

Mike Mignola

Values

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Chapter 4: Values

As mentioned in the previous chapter, we want to start our drawing with two values, this two value breakup is very important to maintain through the drawing. Once you have this established you can add as many values as you want (it is not advisable however) as long as you keep the added values secondary to the big two value separation. The rule for this says "The lightest light in the dark should always be darker than the darkest dark in the light." Thus, nothing in the unlit side of the form should be as light as anything on the lit side of the form.

The best process I have found to establish my full value range goes like this:
1) Establish the big two value block in (posterize and simplify) 2) Add in your middle tone to add depth and soften the transition between the light and dark 3) Add your darkest dark and and lightest light, preferably around your focal point with contrast lessening as you move outward away from your focal point. In the end this will give you a controlled five value drawing.

A brief aside on the subject of composition: Composition is essentially the visual break up of value grouping on your visual field. In respect to composition all drawings should be three value drawings. Essentially those three values break down into foreground, middleground, and background. Standard convention will say that the lights come forward and the darks recede. This is not entirely true, for it would be more accurate to say that contrast comes forward and lack of contrast recedes. So, in the break up of your values only put your dark and light next to other where you want to direct attention. Also it is generally a good idea to do several small scale comps to find creative and orderly breakup of value.

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Keys to controlling values

1) Squint

2) Five values or less

3) step 1: block in light and dark
step 2: add half tone
step 3: add darkest dark
step 4: add lightest light

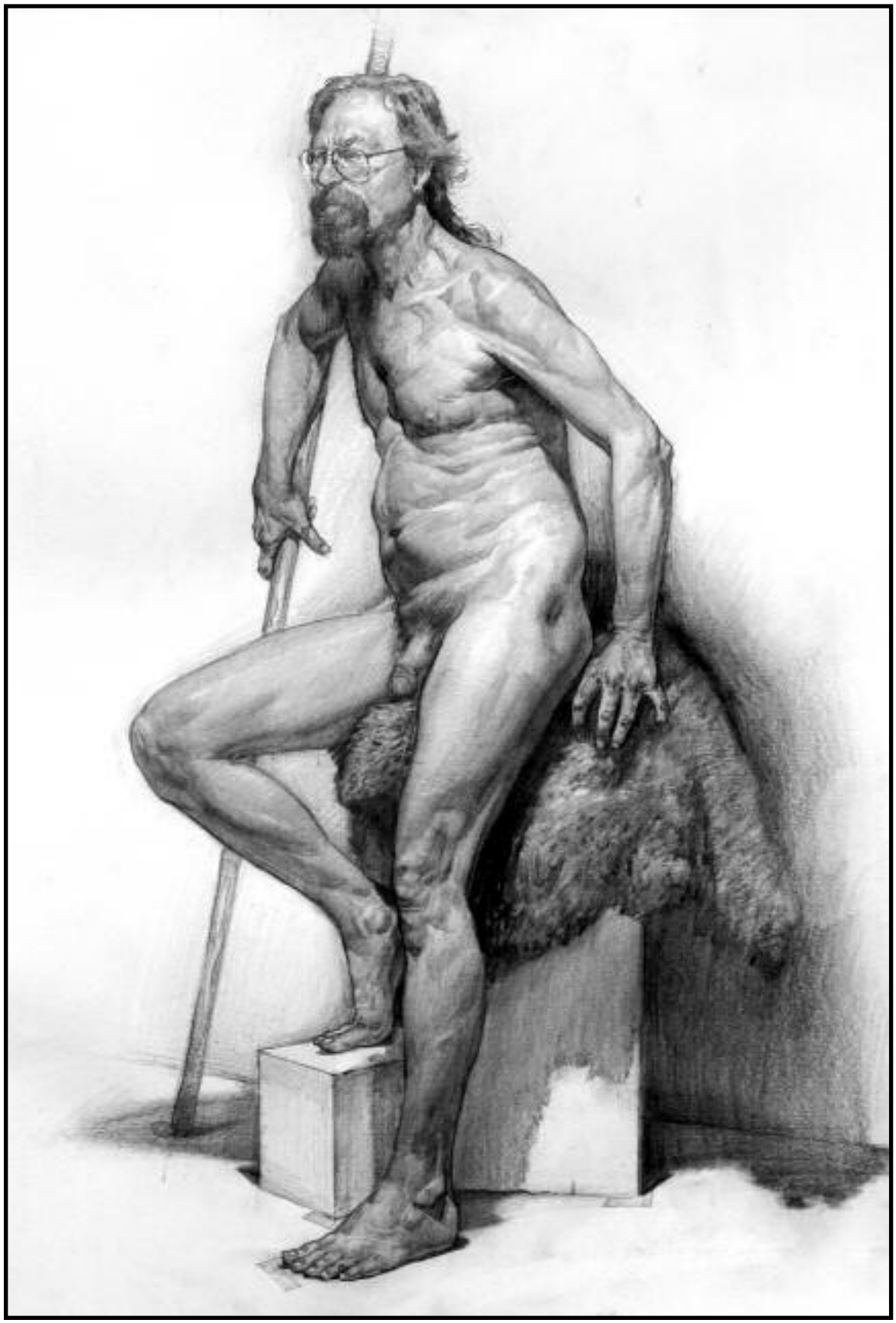
Books and Artists To Study For These Principles

Harley Brown

Richard Schmid
Alla Prima: everything I know about painting

Rembrant

Forms



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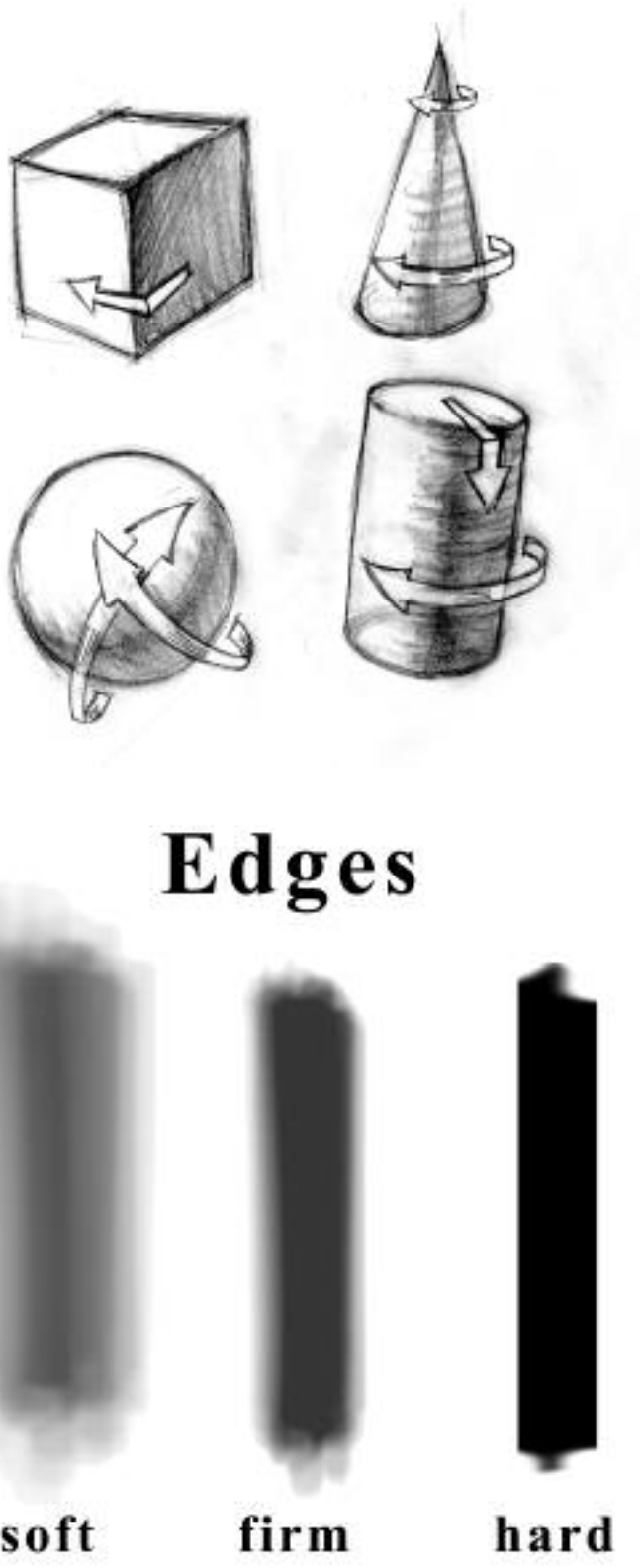
Chapter 5: Developing Forms

Form by definition is the shape or structure of anything. A at this point in our drawing we should have already defined the forms when we defined the structure, but now we need to create the illusion of light on form. To do this it is best if we break things down into the four basic primitives of form;
the *cylinder, sphere, cube, and cone*.

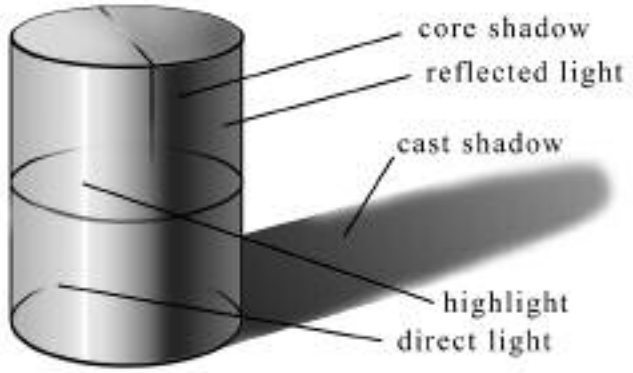
By breaking things down in to basic forms we remove ourselves from having to think about drawing complicated things like legs, fingers, etc. On any basic form lit by a single direct light source, (this is the best way to observe and learn about form) there are two basic fields of value; lit and unlit or light and dark. We have already discussed this to some degree in the previous chapters, but as in all things art related, there is overlap. Because we already discussed value I am going to jump right into the key factor in developing form and that is ***edges, or the transition between light and dark.*** Any time you have a light and dark value coming together within a form, a corner or change of plane is created visually. The sudden or gradual transition from one value to another is going to tell us weather this change of plane is sudden like on a cube or gradual like on a sphere or cylinder. This transition is what is called an edge in drawing or painting.

Basically there are four kinds of edges, soft, firm, hard, and lost. Soft edges are those gradual transitions that you will see on a rounded form. Hard edges are what you would see on an angular form like a square or at the edge of a cast shadow. A firm edge, as its name implies, is somewhere in between and would be found most commonly on an angular form that is not completely squared off, like a nose, knee or other bony areas.

Occasionally you will observe a dark band of value at the edge of a shadow. This is called a core shadow. Basically this is created when there is a transitional plane that is not being lit by the direct light source or by the reflected light bouncing off the surface beneath the form.



Identifying the value zones is very important to developing form. Even before applying your edges the careful analyzation and placement of your light, shadow and reflected light can reveal important changes of plane to the viewer. Be careful to not over-play the reflected light or core shadow card. When used too often they can create a metallic look to your figure. Even more, they can break down a drawing into too many values, and in doing so create confusion for the viewers eye. You should always strive to keep the lighting situation very clear. It will allow the viewer a stronger foot hold in your little world you have created, and therefore make a more comfortable place for the viewer to visit.



A few problem solving tips: If your drawing or painting is looking cartoon-like, check to see if your edges are too hard. This can create a graphic or cartoon-like look to your drawings. If your shapes are appearing ambiguous and lacking in structure, check to see if your edges are to soft, this can create a foggy or weak appearance to the drawing. Overly hard edges are generally favorable to overly soft for two reasons. One, viewers will grow quickly bored of a drawing they are having difficulty solving, and two, it is easier to soften an edge than to harden an edge.

Keys to Developing Form

1) Think in terms of primitives
(cubes, spheres, cylinders, and cones)

2) Carefully observe and utilize your edges

3) Identify the breakup between direct light, reflected light and core shadow.

4) In the beginning error on the side of hard edges.

Books and Artists To Study For These Principles

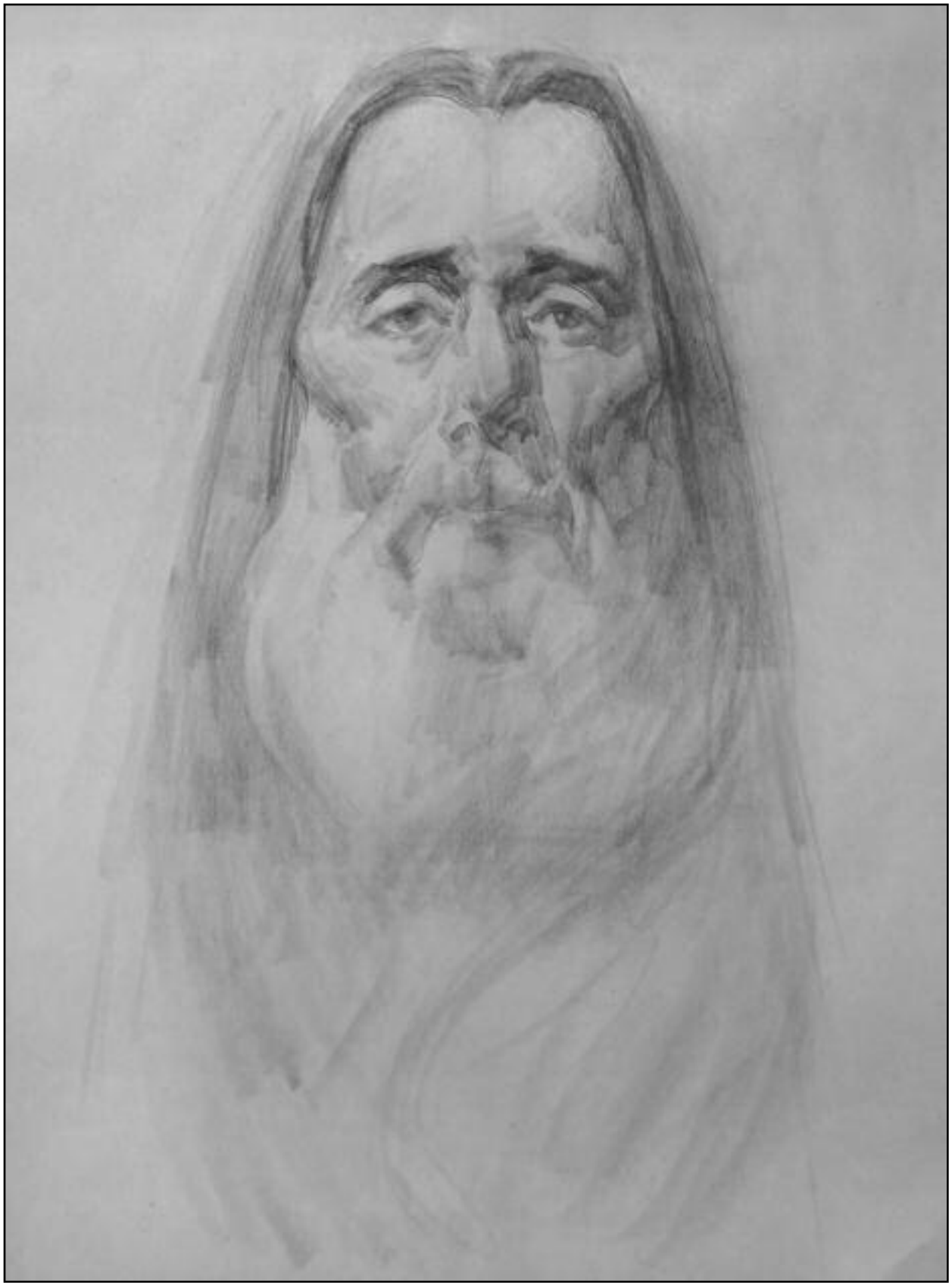
Harley Brown

Richard Schmid
Alla Prima: everything I know about painting

John Singer Sargent

Andrew Loomis

The Head



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Chapter 6: The Head

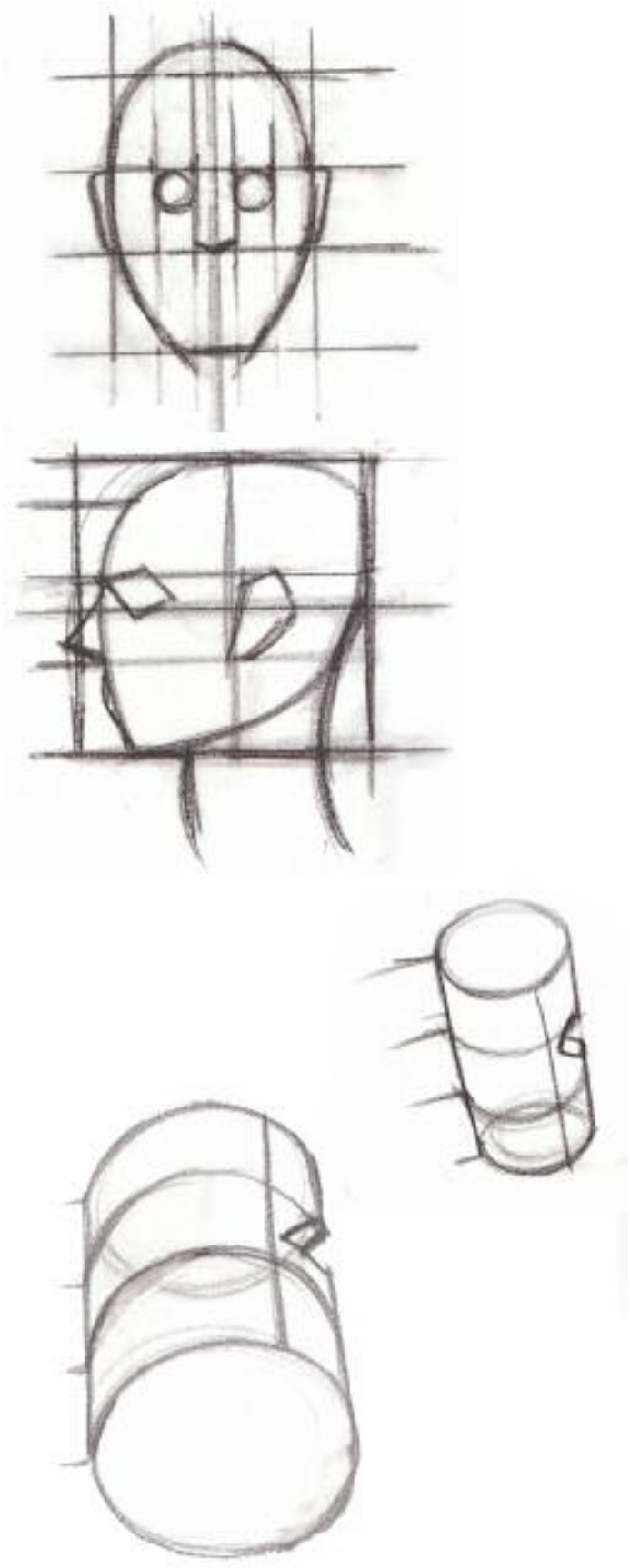
There are many ways of approaching the head. What I will be covering here are the ways that have worked best for me, but remember to look for the under-riding principles, not the technique.

Lets start at the beginning. The silhouette of the head can be drawn, from the front, as a boxy oval not unlike a pumpkin seed. And from just about every other angle except behind as a sort of bulging triangle. This is how I prefer to start the gesture of the head.

The head can essentially be broken up into thirds vertically and fifths horizontally. If we take the face plane of the head, starting at the top of the forehead or hairline and running down to the chin, and break it up into perfect thirds we will find that the top of the eye socket and the ear will fall on the top division, below the hair line, and the nose and bottom of the ear on the bottom division, above the chin. Now if we divide the width of the head into fifths we will find that the middle fifth defines the width of the nose which is then flanked be the eyes, and those by the width of the head.

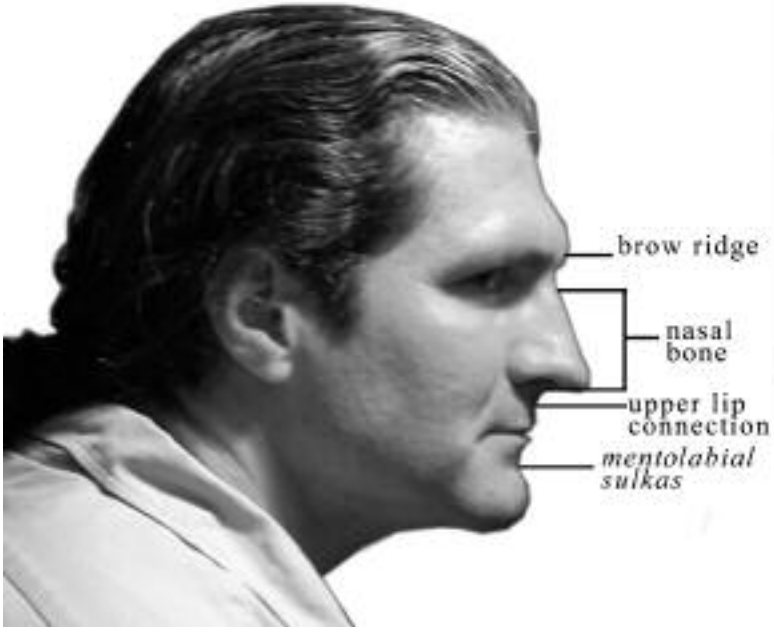
I f we now look at the head in profile we find that our vertical measurements still hold true, but our horizontal obviously change. The head in profile will fit exactly into a perfect square, if we take that square and cut it in half both vertically and horizontally we find that the ear rides on the back of the horizontal halfway and between the brow and nose marks that we found earlier. If we place the vertical halfway we can use that the place both the bottom lid of our eye as well as where the neck connects to the back of the head. A common mistake with connecting the head to the neck is placing the neck on the center of the head like a lollipop. Avoid this mistake by using this measurement.

When dealing with up and down head tilts it is helpful to think of the head as a cylinder, or more precisely as a whistle. The main reason it is helpful to think of the head this way is because it is easier to visualize your axis and division bending into perspective. If you observe a cylinder with



three equal divisions tilted up or tilted down you can find the top of your eye sockets, the bottom of your nose and your ears at any angle..

I am not going to go in depth into each of the features in this book, but there are some important points that I would like to make-some corrections to the most common mistakes I see new students make. One of the most common mistakes I see is drawing the features flat, almost like they are features painted on a volleyball, or worse yet a flat cardboard mask. It is important to realize that for protection, all of the features are built with a bit of an over-hang to protect them from things falling from above. They also fit to the slight curved contour of the face plane. Rely on skeletal markers for the placement of your features-at the brow ridge, where the cartilage of the nose connects to the nasal bone, and where the flesh portion of the lips connects to the face at the base of the nose, and at the *mentolabial sulcus* at the top of the chin.. Do not rely as much on cartilage and even less on flesh, because this varies so much from one individual to the next.



Keys to Drawing the Head

1) Break the head down into thirds vertically

2) Break the head down into fifths horizontally from the front

3) Head fits into a box in profile

4) Use a cylinder metaphor to help find up and down tilts

5) head sits forward on the neck, avoid the lollipop head

Books and Artists To Study For These Principles

Harley Brown

Andrew Loomis
Drawing the Head and Hands

John Vanderpoel
The Human Figure

George Bridgman
Complete Guide to Drawing From Life

Interlocking

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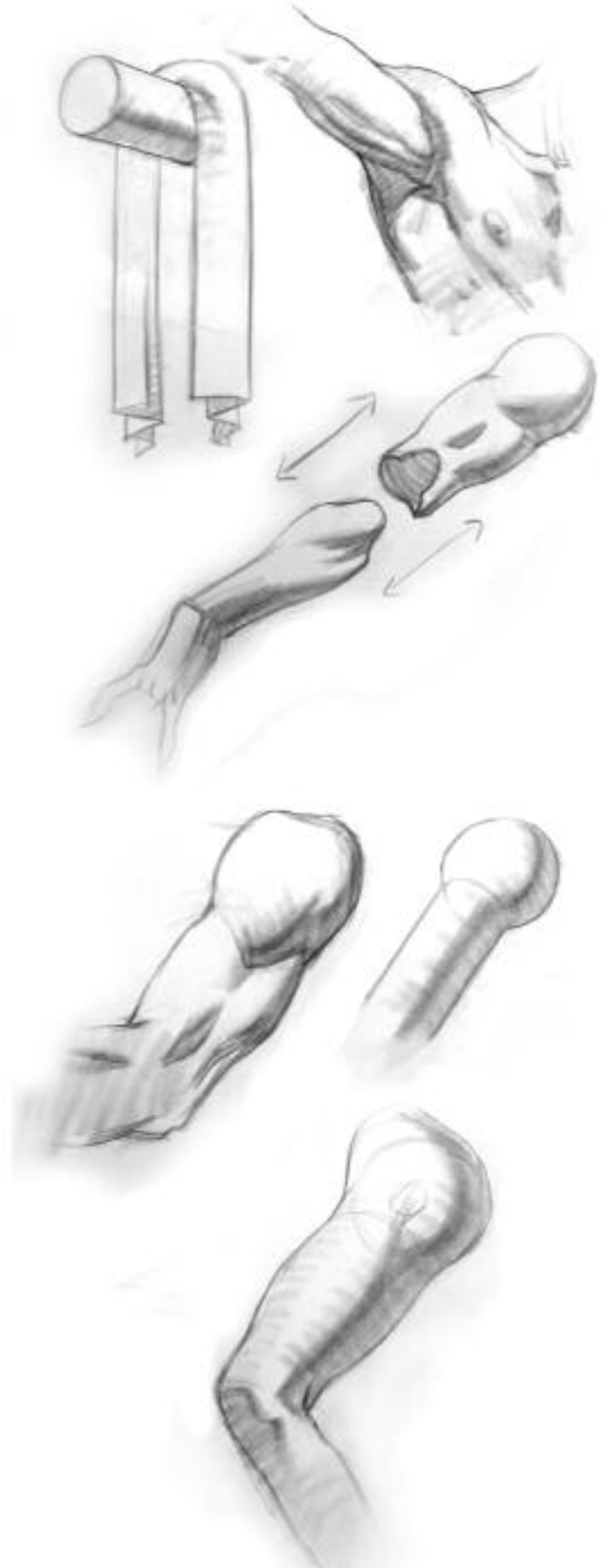
Chapter 7: Interlocking Forms

It is very important to think of the figure as a whole, and not as a series of anatomical pieces. So, as artists we need to find a way to lock these pieces together in a believable manner.

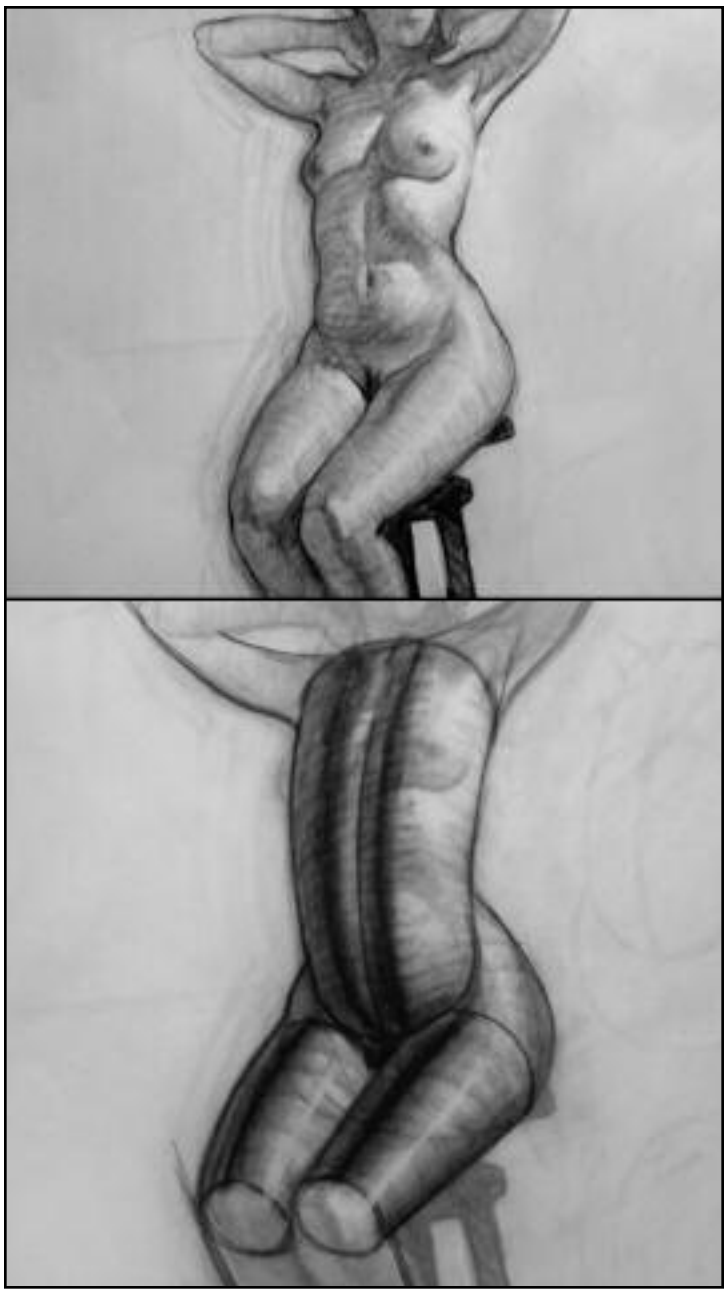
What I have shown here are simpler solutions to some of the more difficult problems. For instance, the shoulder area is a very difficult area because of the double articulation of the shoulder socket and the scapula The shoulder socket itself has only about 90 degrees of movement in any direction except backwards, which is substantially less. After this, the scapula takes over for any further motion- this is what give the human shoulder such an incredible range of motion. A good visual metaphor for this is a towel peg like you might see in a gym locker room. Think of the peg as the upper arm and the towel draped over it as the deltoid, pectoralis and scapular muscles.

Joints are always a difficult area to deal with. I will often try to break it down into interlocking puzzle pieces. Instead of using two cylinders stuck together, I employ more of a tongue-in-groove construction as demonstrated with the arm's elbow joint on the right.

Another good way of connecting areas is combined shapes. For instance, combining a sphere and a cone. This can be useful in drawing any ball-in-socket joint such as the shoulder or hip. Practice all of these, but remember that these are just principles. Don't just steal these and go on about your day! Each individual pose will present you with a different set of problems, and to solve them you will need to understand why they work. An indepth knowledge of anatomy will help with coming up with visual metaphors, but it is not necessary. What is more important is that you understand form. Once you do, you can use it as a very powerful tool to turn figure drawing into a much simpler and pleasurable experience.



I showed you this image earlier as an example of thinking of the human form in terms of simple forms. However, it is also a very good example of how to lock the figure together, and shows what I am thinking when trying to unify an area that can have a tendency to look broken. Few things will break down the believability of a drawing faster than broken areas of anatomy, so keep it simple, and good luck.



Keys to Interlocking Forms

1) Simplify

2) Use visual metaphors

3) Overlap forms

Books and Artists To Study For These Principles

Frank Frazetta

George Bridgman
Complete Guide to Drawing From Life