
Walt Stanchfield 04

Notes from Walt Stanchfield's Disney Drawing Classes

"Anatomy vs Gesture"

by Walt Stanchfield

Anatomy vs Gesture

ANATOMY vs GESTURE

We who are essentially cartoonists by trade, do not use rendering and are rarely called upon to draw a nude figure. Our interest is in the gesture, which is the vehicle used in fitting a character into the role it is called upon to act out. We have drawn variously, dogs, mice, owls, elephants, cats, people, etc., each distinct characters with distinct bodily shapes and bodily gestures. So to approach a model with the idea of copying a human figure plus its clothing, could be called a waste of time. Our interest is in seeing the differences in each personality and their individualistic gestures, and like a good caricaturist capture the essence of those differences. When we review the cast of characters in our past films we realize the need to place these individual characteristics with the proper character and to be consistent in their depiction. Holmes' actions had to be different and distinct from Dawson's, or their personalities would become a blur. Mickey Mouse had his own personality-his own movements and gestures, consistent with his body structure and the personality given him. Goofy, a hundredfold different in all ways from Mickey, was Goofy-because of the same principles used in different ways. There are really only a few principles of drawing but an infinite number of personality traits and gestures. To "hole in" after learning the body structures is to miss the excitement and the satisfaction of using that information to tell the story of life through the nuances of gesture.



Anatomy vs Gesture

We should be taking advantage of the variety of subjects in our sketching sessions. This one has a large mid-section with a receding chin. His body tapers down to tiny ankles that seem incongruously inadequate to carry the weight. This one is chunky, even muscular, but dainty in movement--even graceful. This one seems to act out his gestures so that we almost feel his mind working. Should we not keep these things in mind rather than deltoids, ulnas and the 7 heads tall syndrome? As Robert Henri said, "seeing into the realities - beyond the surfaces of the subject."

We must be emotional about our subject whether it has to do with serious matters or with humor. We cannot back off from our emotions--if we do the result will be a mere anatomical reproduction.

A drawing or a scene is not final when a material representation has been made, it is final when a sensitive depiction of an emotion has been made. The significance is not in the story alone, but in the illustration that makes that story come alive. Yes, there is anatomy, form, construction, model and two or three lines of etceteras, but only in so far as those things are expressive of the story.

"FEELING" THE POSE

I repeatedly harp on feeling the pose rather than merely looking at it. By looking at it only, you have to keep looking at it repeatedly as you copy the parts. In feeling the pose and I mean actually picturing in your mind, yourself as doing, the pose. If you have to, stand up, put down your drawing board and assume the pose. Feel which muscles pull or contract to get which stretch or squash. Feel where the weight falls, what is entailed to keep your balance. Feel the psychological attitude it imparts, i.e. if the head is drooped, does it evoke a sad or disappointed feeling; if the head is held high, do you feel proud or haughty or reverent--or what? So, with the whole body, impose some kind of attitude on it. Then you have that pose locked into your mind and can summon it up at will by simply seeing it in your mind and assuming that attitude. As a matter of fact you can see it from any vantage point--you could even do some mental levitation and look down on it from above.

Contrast that approach with the slow and ponderous neck tiring process of looking at the model, noticing the angle of the upper arm, looking back to the paper and sketching in the upper arm, then looking at the model to see what the lower arm is doing, then back to the paper to sketch that in, then back to the model to search out the next thing to draw, then back to the paper to see if what you have already drawn will give you a clue to what to add next--and so on, etc.

The "feeling the pose" method is of great help in a live sketching where you have an awkward view of the model, say a view where one leg and one arm are hidden from your view. With the live model the pose is somewhat clear because there are dozens of telltale indications of what is going on, but these illusive indications are difficult to capture in a line drawing. However, if you lock into the pose, you can make the necessary adjustments required to clarify the pose. After all, in animation you would have to do that. You go to great lengths to get everything "out in the open" to make your pose "readable"--so why not in a practice session. I'm sure you all know how to fantasize--okay put it to use in drawing. If you can lock into the pose you can also fantasize the pose into useful variations--which sounds a little like animating.

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