
Walt Stanchfield 63

Notes from Walt Stanchfield's Disney Drawing Classes

"Some Simple Rules"

by Walt Stanchfield

SOME SIMPLE RULES

WHAT NOT TO SEE

One of the things you have to look for when sketching from a model is what not to see. Random bumps and bulges often occur, demanding interpretation. Clothing sometimes acts contrary-wise to all common sense. An excess of cloth will often defy the main action and seemingly do something on its own. When you see this happen you have to take the matter into your own hands and make sense where there is none. I think the best way to handle this problem is to constantly refer back to your first impression of what the person is doing, as opposed to what the cloth is doing, assuming of course, that you have 'named the pose',. Naming the pose is a natural outcome of studying the pose for a first impression. You could think of each pose as a one drawing drama, or you might think of it as just 1/16th of a foot of animation.

"A GOOD BIT OF BUSINESS"

One thing that helps an animator is a "good bit of business." If the story point is. clear and definite, that gives him something solid to work with. I have often heard the admonition, "If you can't make it work--it's probably because your concept is wrong." Many an animator has struggled with a drawing, taking it off the pegs and shifting it around, tracing it with minor differences, then putting it aside in favor of a radically different approach. The concept was wrong--or at least difficult to put over.

"WHEN YOU ARE WALKING, YOU ARE WALKING"

A still drawing of a model, if there is not a solid concept of what one is drawing (gesture-wise or story-wise), can turn out to be a jumble of muscles and bone and bulges of cloth. On the other hand, if you as artist/ director/ storyman, can establish a clear cut concept of what your actor is doing--you can then make a good clear statement. There is a Zen saying: "When you are walking, you are walking; when you are eating, you are eating" Should not your drawings be as definite and simple as that?

DINNER FIRST, THEN DESSERT

Other things not to see, especially in the initial stages of a drawing, is anything that complicates or dilutes your first impression. The first impression should be as simple and direct as you can possibly make it. Constant vigilance has to be exercised to keep temptation at bay. My mother used to say, "Eat your dinner and then you can have some dessert."

BEADS WITH NECK OR NECK WITH BEADS

I have seen some sketches start with details, which is like hanging a necklace in mid-air before the neck is drawn. Sounds silly but we all do it to a certain extent. Decide at the beginning what is the main course-saving the dessert for later. You are not drawing a necklace with a person attached to it, you are drawing a person doing something. That something is either suggested by the model, or conjured up in your mind for the purpose of making the drawing a one drawing drama, thereby giving it a reason for being. The person might just have a necklace on at the time.

SHIFTING GEARS

When you see a play or movie, you allow yourself to look past the actor and see the acted. A shifting of mental gears takes place. A similar shifting takes place when drawing. You look past the model to that illusive but capturable gesture. You don't draw a costume with a person somewhere underneath (there only to hold the costume up), you draw a person, dressed in a costume, influencing that costume in the unique way that only that person can.

A GESTURE LIGHT

Wouldn't it be grand if we had a light that would illuminate just the gesture of the model? It's light would filter out all the superfluous stuff. Well there is such a light--it's within us. Illumination means: "to throw light on a subject in order to see it better."

WHAT WILL THE VIEWER SEE?

An author pictures something in his mind and he writes it down. Each time the passage is read the picture reappears in the mind of the reader. An artist pictures something in his mind, he draws it and each time the drawing is viewed, the artist's impression reappears in the mind of the viewer. If the artist lets his strong first impression (the essence of the gesture) slip away, the drawing will surely turn out to be just a cobs' of the multitude of details before him, bumps and bulges and all, and that's what will be re-emerge whenever the drawing is viewed.

SEEING INTO THE POSE

We have been fortunate lately to have had some models who stimulate us to go beyond the parts and details so we don't just see the pose, but we see into the pose. You know when that happens--the illumination light comes on. I don't profess to be a great cartoonist, I just do it for relaxation, but I do know that feeling of illumination while doing it. I plant a theme or subject in my mind and something in the mind takes it and runs it through my mental computer and in seconds there is a gag with the characters, the composition and the gag line complete. It's like picking fruit from an invisible tree. Somehow the gestures that come match the gag line, as if the subconscious has a director in there that stages everything and prompts the actors.

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DON'T BLOW IT WITH DETAILS

Drawing from the model (or developing action for a scene of animation), works that way too. You send the problem quickly through your mental system and if you can keep the parts and details from "blowing it", the computer mulls it around and sends it back to you in an illuminated form, the composition, the character and the essence of the gesture.

FIND THE LIGHT SWITCH

All of you get that feeling when your drawing "goes right", but when things go wrong you wonder what happened to that feeling--where did it go--why did it leave me right when I need it most? Whenever that feeling comes to you, just don't sit there and enjoy it, analyze it and see if you can call it up at will. And if you see someone walking around with a dazed, euphoric look on their face--you can be sure they found that light switch.

Walt

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Here are a few drawings from a scene by Milt Kahl. Study the costume. Notice how, even in a complex action, it is kept simple--no meaningless bulges or bumps. In the last drawing it settles into the epitome of simplicity. The garment, bulky as it is, echoes the gesture of the body underneath.

