
Walt Stanchfield 01

Notes from Walt Stanchfield's Disney Drawing Classes

“Abstracting the Essence” by Walt Stanchfield

“Abstracting the Essence”

ABSTRACTING THE ESSENCE

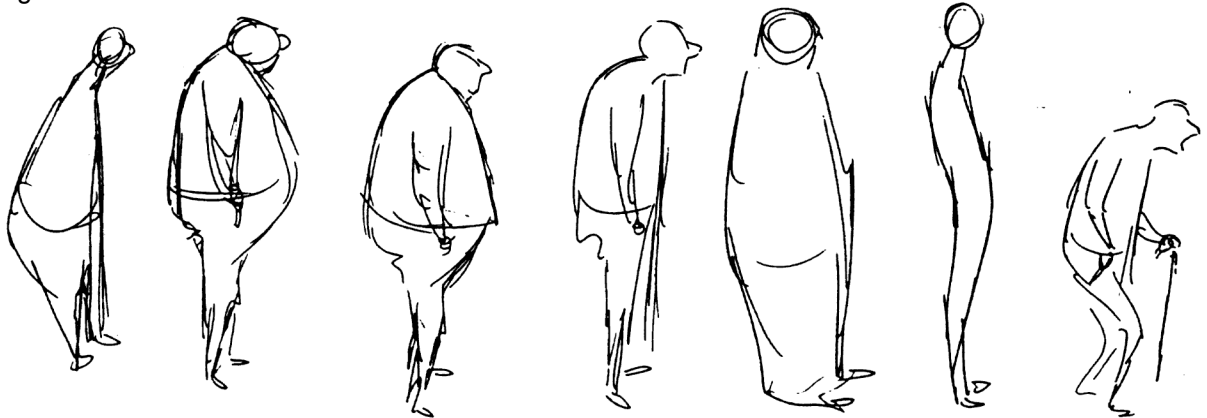
Last week I shared Ron Westwood’s sketches with you. I was not advocating a style of drawing, only in so far as a loose style allows you to study and practice drawing action—something that is hard to do if you try to make a cleaned-up, finished drawing as you go. Here are some quick sketches done in class by Broose Johnson. They are simple in style and capture the essence of the pose with an economy of line, and as you might guess, in a very few seconds:

Notice how in group 1. Broose got more twist in the second try by opening up the armhole of the dress, bringing the breast into view, sending the V of the dress farther around, breaking the silhouette with the hair, and adding a wrinkle from the left hip to the right shoulder. In group 4. note how in the drawing on the right, the tension was increased between the heads and shoulders, causing a feeling of movement. A more acute angle on the girl’s upper body allowed her hair to hang down—a nice touch. Note the improved negative space between the heads. That same area in the drawing on the left is slightly static—it repeats the perpendicular angles of the body and arm of the girl. I’m not trying to be esoteric. This kind of thinking will lead to more expressive drawing, especially in animation where body language is so important. It will aid you in capturing the essence of a gesture, and, as with Broose’s drawings—with an economy of lines. My philosophy is: if you can draw it with 10 lines, why use 75. And who can argue with the philosophy of: if you can draw it in 5 minutes, why take a half hour.



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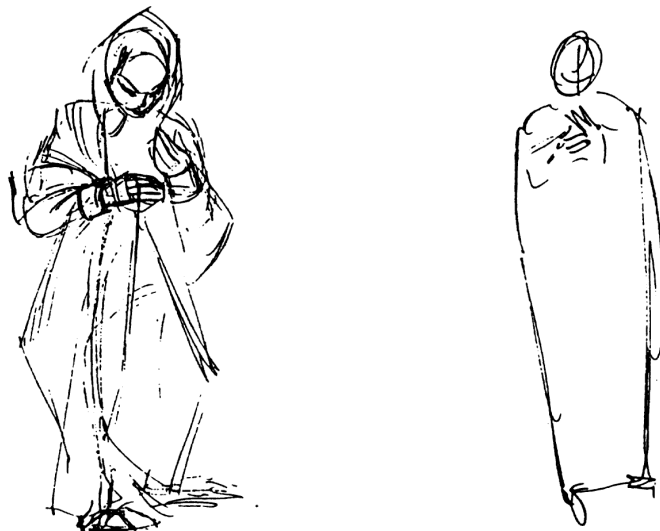
I keep searching for a short cut to learning how to draw, but as Ollie Johnston used to say of drawing in general, “It ain’t easy.” Sometimes I try to get the students to look for the overall abstract shape. I’m not always sure I am explaining what is meant by “abstract”. Last week (while driving home in my van) I sketched these abstracted shapes of some familiar (male) body types. If when drawing from life you can spot one of these shapes (or one of your own design) in the character you are drawing, it will save you the agony of searching for lines on the model to copy. If you know the overall abstract shape you are dealing with, it will be easier to apply that to the gesture.



“Find the abstract in the gesture itself.”

In addition to helping you depict general body characteristics, finding the abstract in the gesture itself will help too. The word abstract, as I use it means to summarize; make an abstract of— —a brief statement of the essential elements of a pose. So take a moment to study the type of body build, forming an abstract shape of it in your mind, then do the same with the overall pose. It simply means dropping 90% of the detail, and seeing only that 10%— —that abstract of the pose— —that essence of the pose.

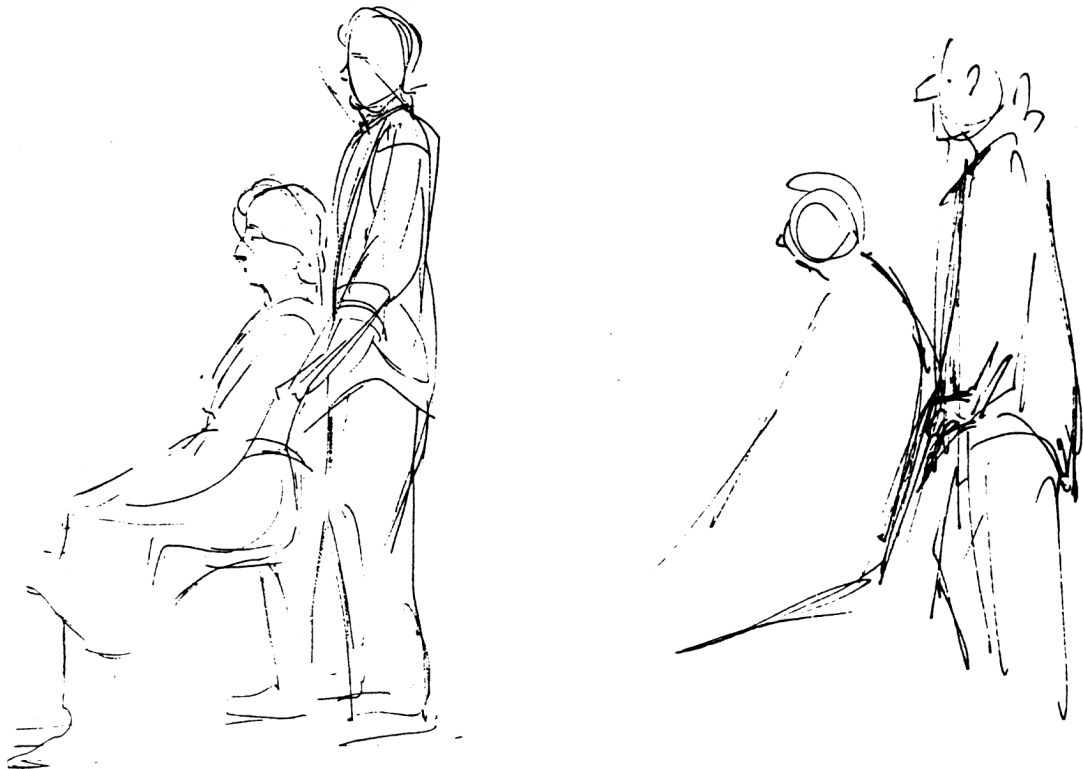
A classic example was in a handout a couple of weeks ago. There was a beautiful, almost mysterious abstract shape in the pose. The artist got bogged down in the 90 % (confusing) detail. In my sketch I attempted to deal only with that 10% essential stuff.



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Here’s another where the artist was merely drawing things—heads, arms, legs, etc., just to get them all down. I looked for not only the abstract shapes of the bodies but also the abstract of the pose. (They were being “photographed” for the family album) I used the man’s straight, more youthful body as a kind of backboard for their attention to the camera--which is helped along by the older woman’s bent forward shape.

Can you feel the movement going off to screen left where the camera is? Angles, and negative shapes are involved also. Look from one drawing to the other and you will see what happens to the negative shapes and how they help to define and simplify the drawing. I made no attempt to draw a head or an arm, or a body. I looked for the abstract shapes and they defined the body parts for me.



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