
Walt Stanchfield 56

Notes from Walt Stanchfield's Disney Drawing Classes

"A Thinking Persons Art"

by Walt Stanchfield

A THINKING PERSON'S ART

I have often attempted to explain my approach to presenting the ideas in these "handouts". I have struggled to avoid referring to myself as a "teacher" and have used words like "suggestion" rather than "correction" when offering another version of a pose. I'm really here just to share my experience and it's your prerogative to treat it however you see fit. As for the suggestions, they are only to encourage you to see in new ways, to help you break any stultifying habits of "penny-pinching" seeing. I feel that the classes I conduct and the handouts, if nothing else, create a surge of group energy that you might tap for your own personal betterment.

A couple of weeks ago I said, "These things I present are not esoteric concepts," but I was wrong--they are. They are things that only the chosen few absorb. It is the "chosen" few that lead the way and accomplish the "academy-award-worthy" animation and drawing. But it is my conviction that by earnest pursuit _anyone can be of that group. It's-just a matter of exposing oneself to some vehicle that will help one break the "sound barrier". (actually, thought barrier, for drawing is a thinking person's art)

And "There's the rub." If you're not thinking about the story behind the pose or the action, you're just drawing lines. A story board will rarely call for a character to just stand there frozen in a do-nothing pose. The story will require the character to act or react in some story-related way: shake hands, walk toward the door, or something. Even just looking requires a drawing that expresses action.

So drawing requires thinking. Thinking, being in this case, synonymous with acting. I don't know how many hundreds, perhaps thousands of times I've watched artists use lines simply because that's how they appeared on the model or on the model sheet, or in the anatomy book. Many struggle so doggedly with the construction and the detail that they miss the gesture.

Why are we so hesitant, so reluctant, or tentative to manipulate the character to suit the needs of the story? The human figure is extremely pliable, even capable of contortion. I'm not advocating contortion, but I am trying to promote thinking and acting.

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We incorporate two models occasionally, in the class, to set up some relationships to draw. This complicates things because there are two separate characters that have to be woven into one pose. The desired result is not a dual action, but rather dual characters blended into one, action. Here the lines and shapes used in each of the separate characters must relate to each other almost as if they were one character.

Here is a detail of one very successful duo pose. You feel an intensity of interest in both characters in whatever the man is pointing to.



The very first stages of a drawing will tell where your thinking is. If you are thinking story--that will begin to emerge in the first few lines drawn. Many times in the evening class, artists will carry a drawing to an advanced stage yet have no clue as to what the story behind the pose is (the most important thing in a drawing). Here's a drawing that I intercepted at a stage where I thought the artist should have been well into the story. He (or she) has perhaps 75 lines drawn and you still can't tell what's going on. To make my point, I sketched in what was happening in about 10 lines:



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To arouse that sense of urgency to get the essence down, I often ask the class to imagine they are running to board a train--which is about to leave the station. They see someone in a delightful pose which they have just got to sketch, so out comes the sketchbook. At that moment the conductor calls, "ALL ABOARD," and so they have just enough time to get the barest essence of the pose. If they get the essence down, then tomorrow it can be reconstructed--but if the essence is not there in the sketch--forget it.

Here's a nice little essence drawing. Just a few lines--dashed off in bravura fashion. A common, everyday gesture told in a very- delicate and expressive way.
(A Dan Boulous sketch)



In an article on the author Reynolds Price, (L.A. Times, Wed., May 2) it stated that he "...has respect for the tradition of storytelling. which he ranks after food as man's principle need--sex and shelter being relatively expendable." I underlined the words I want you to remember, lest your attention be deflected by other thoughts in that sentence.

You, as animation cartoonists/artists, should acknowledge that storytelling is also one of your principle needs. Not only for your job but for yourself. You should surrender to the delights of expressing yourself in drawing. If you don't feel that need now--you should expose yourself to more dramatizing, even if only in the form of books, movies, and plays, thus creating a desire to express those things.

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It's really quite a lot of fun coaxing a story (a gesture) out of a bunch of lines and shapes. And as I recently read somewhere, "It's okay to have fun."

Here's a two-model pose where one man was handing the other a telephone, saying, "It's for you." I didn't have much room for my suggestion sketch, so the figures had to be done apart, but even so, you can see a definite action and reaction relationship. I reasoned that if you're handing someone a telephone you would bend forward a little to emphasize the, "....for you." The other chap might react with, "Who, me?, or "I wonder who it can be?" He is doing two things which comprise one gesture--reaching forward with his arms to take the phone, but rearing back in an, "I wonder who it is?" attitude:



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Here's another one. Two guys shaking hands. The one on the left is all excited--he hasn't seen his friend in ages. He is exuberantly pumping away, head tucked down, shoulders up--positively gushing. He is leaning forward at the waist, as if bowing. He is demonstrative but respectful. The other chap is a little more hesitant, saying, perhaps, "Oh, hi", but thinking, "Do I know him?" The man on the left is the initiator of this action-- the one on the right is reacting. He reaches out in involuntary response but the rest of him displays caution



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See what fun drawing can be. I'm a "frustrated actor" who has spent many an hour on the stage. But now I get my kicks by doing my acting/storytelling on paper or canvas. You don't have to be an actor, but you must develop their kind of thinking. I don't know how else you can make it happen. Surely you don't want to rely on chance. Even when reading, I picture the story in my mind. I become the stage designer, the director and the actors. I am serious if it suits the story, or I can "ham it up." I require the actors to play their roles just like I did in those sketches above--acted out with heart and soul, and thinking.

Walt

P.S.
What with all the trouble it is to learn how to draw and then the stress, struggle, and strain putting it to practical use, and then me saying it's fun--reminds me of an episode of "SALT CHUCK on the rocks", by Chuck Sharman:

