

FOUNDATIONS

in **drawing**

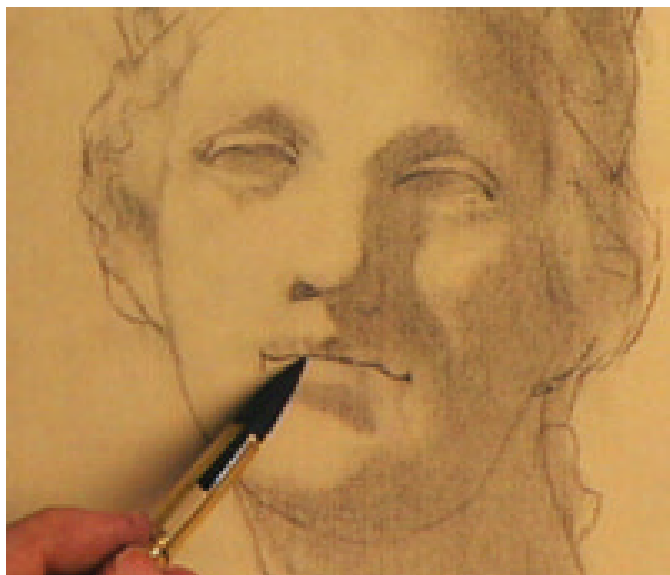
FOUNDATIONS IN DRAWING

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Foundation in Drawing for the Beginning Artist



Lesson 1: Basic Proportion

Drawing at its core is comprised of three elements: expression, the construct and craft. Expression is the emotional and spiritual act of drawing; the construct is the language of drawing; the craft is, of course, the technical means by which language and expression is conveyed.

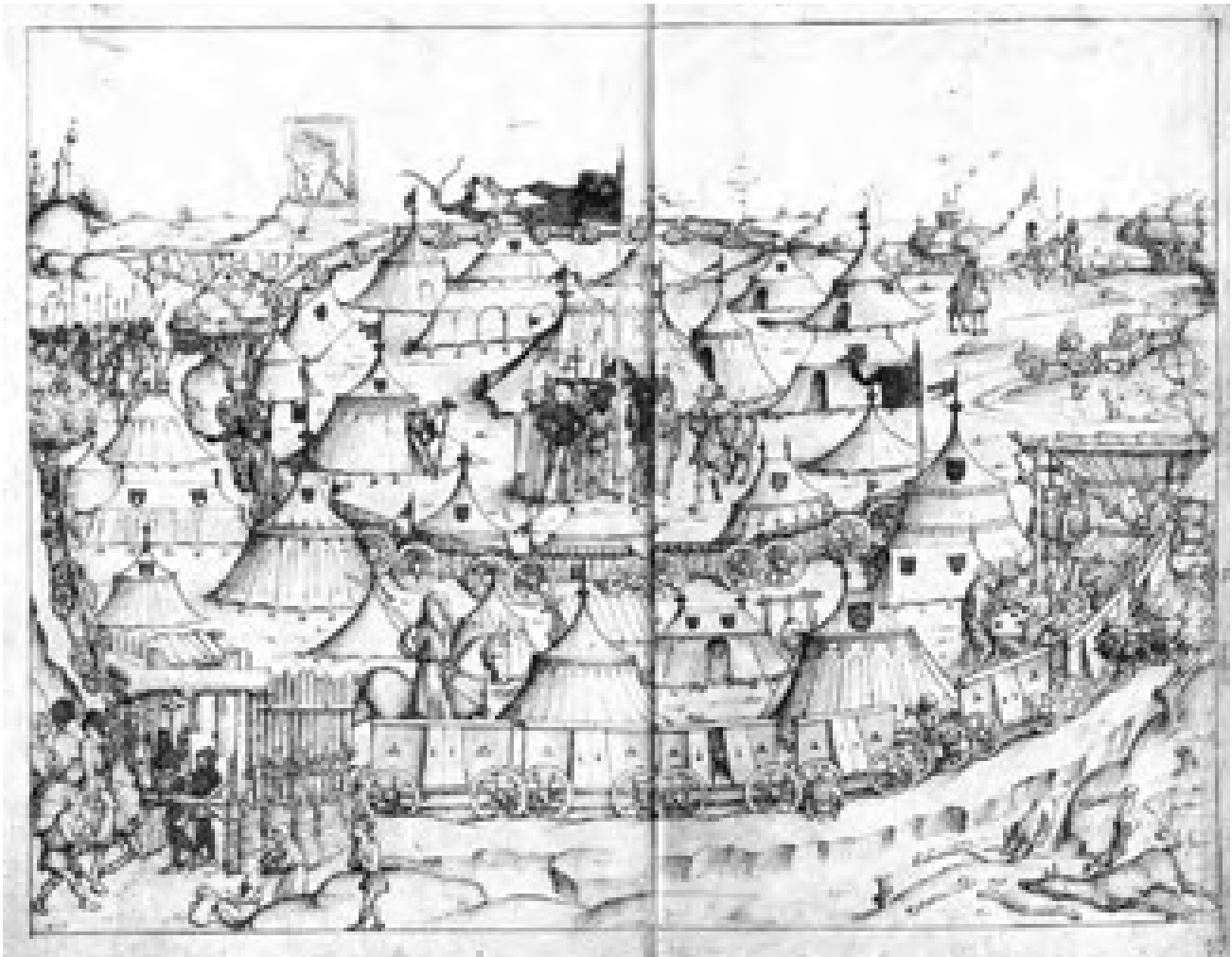
The beginner artist need pay only scant attention to expression and the language of drawing. Later when your foundational drawing skills have been acquired will you feel the need for the expressive element in your work. Most likely, though, as your skill increases you will naturally and effortlessly begin to develop your own voice. Subjective timbre is inevitable.

Acquiring the foundational skills of drawing first and then evolving towards the expressive is the preferred and most efficient route. The self-taught artist will find themselves spending the greater part of their art career struggling with the foundational drawing skills which is unnecessary as it really does not take long to acquire the basic drawing skills. Additionally the self-taught artist's expression will also suffer and, sooner or later, will stall at a very basic level. There is an expressive sameness to most self-taught artists' work.



John Constable, Salisbury Cathedral, 1829

The construct is the shared language between the artist and the viewer. We read drawings and paintings at both the conscious and unconscious level. The conscious level is learned in very much the same way that we have been taught to read this sentence. If this were written in, for example, the Cyrillic alphabet it would be unintelligible to most of us.



Unknown artist circa 15th Century, German

The same is true when we read drawings. Spatial perspective in drawing is an invention that came to be fully understood in the high Renaissance (circa 1500). When we look at a landscape drawing, for example Salisbury Cathedral by the 19th Century British artist John Constable, we readily accept the illusion of spatial depth on the flat 2-dimensional plane which is our paper (or canvas).

The illusion of spatial depth had to be first realized and developed by several generations of Renaissance artists, about 50 years, and then gradually 'taught' to the viewers of their drawings and paintings. Before then the pictorial surface (the canvas) was rendered spatially flat as this 15th Century drawing shows. Bear in mind, too, that many cultures have presented the picture plane as flat. Spatial depth in drawing and painting is a Western device.

This presents an interesting conundrum: 15th Century and earlier people could readily see spatial depth in reality but when it came to drawing spatial depth was unknown. The elements of perspective drawing were yet to be invented of course but I am speaking of a deeper language that is perception.

Perception

When we look at an object or a landscape our brain's cerebral (left-side for the right-handed) mode/cortex analyses and assures us of that object's spatial reality. The problem begins when we



R. Felder of New Orleans, LA, Self Portrait. My critique of Ralph's drawing is at the end of this lesson.

The trained artist, however, has acquired both the skills and experience to suppress the limbic symbols and render a convincingly 'real' portrait drawing. The beginning artist's first task then is to train their 'eye' to both see and relate the reality of what is seen onto the canvas.

As an artist and teacher my foremost concern is to look behind the stage at how and why a master work succeeds. The strokes and brilliant dashes of pigment that are readily apparent in great drawings and paintings play only a supporting role. The real action lies deeper.

¹ The cerebral is also categorized into the occipital (visual processing), parietal (movement, orientation, calculation, recognition), temporal (sound and speech processing, aspects of memory), and frontal (thinking, conceptualisation, planning).

try to draw that object; our limbic (emotional right-side) mode conflicts with the cerebral¹ and a compromise is reached. The result is manifested in drawing as a symbol of what we see.

An example of this cerebral/limbic conflict is when a beginner artist tries their hand at portrait drawing the inevitable result is a generic symbolic preconception of the face. The beginner will over-exaggerate the eyes, draw a small bulbous nose, a small mouth and overall the face will be too large for the head. These are all symbolic preconceptions.



Michael Britton, *Portrait Drawing of Sonya in Sanguine Conte*

The Classical Foundation

The impetus of classical Greek sculpture and architecture lay the foundation of Western civilization. At its core is the belief in the harmonious correspondence of nature and form. This belief can be summarized in the geometer Pythagoras' ascertainment that all of nature's forms subscribe in one way or another to the Golden number which is 1.618.

Pythagoras (560-480 BC) demonstrated that the Golden number is the basis for the proportions of the human figure and that each part corresponded harmoniously to the proportion 1.618. The Greek sculptor Phidias employed the Golden number fully to his sculptures. The sculpture shown here is the Venus de Milo whose proportions directly relate to 1.618. The Golden number and, hence, the Golden Rectangle is generally referred to as Phi (after Phidias).

Plato termed 1.618 as the number of the world's soul.

In addition to the Golden rectangle there are nine other dynamic rectangles. I will introduce you to three of them in this lesson.



The Elements of Form

Form is comprised of three basic elements: proportion, shape and tone. This first lesson will focus on proportion.

In drawing and painting the rectangle is the basic shape. Every object and group of objects (i.e., still life, landscape) fits within a rectangle. The paper, or canvas, that we work on is also a rectangle. Circular or shaped canvases also fit within a rectangle.



Michael Britton, *Portrait drawing of Verna*, Graphite



Extrapolating on the ideas of the classical Greeks every natural and 'well-designed' manmade object, such as architecture and objects d'art for example, correspond in one way or another to one of the dynamic rectangles. This harmonious correspondence is the behind the stage determinant of 'beauty' and, hence, is the engine that powers art. My portrait drawing of Verna is composed within a dynamic rectangle.

In my teaching I believe that the beginning artist should first be made aware of and sensitized to the dynamic rectangles. Recognizing the proportions of dynamic rectangles greatly speeds up the beginner's acquisition of the foundational tools of drawing and will continue to steadfastly contribute to your growth as an artist.

Case in point: When we begin to draw a portrait, for example, our first agenda is to size and place the head within a composition on our paper. Doing so entails that we must first determine the height to width proportion of the head. In other words we need to decide upon the correct rectangle that best fits the head.

The first step in this sanguine conte portrait drawing was to determine the height/width

proportion (the rectangle) of the head and to place that rectangle succinctly within the confines of my canvas (the paper).

As a classically trained artist I can readily visualize the dimensions of the height and width of the head as a rectangle. Having many years of experience I need only indicate the height of the head with two pinpricks. The rest is an ingrained procedure.

The beginning artist, however, first needs to acquire the skill of accurately assessing height/width proportion whether their chosen genre is the portrait, still life, landscape, etc. Following are three exercises that will set you on the right path.

Incidentally, the rectangle (height/width proportion) of this portrait drawing is a dynamic rectangle. Even after 2,500 years Pythagoras' dictums of natural design law and harmonious correspondence still prove true. At the end of this lesson I will illustrate the construction of this dynamic rectangle. The following three lessons are deceptively simple and you may be tempted to forego these exercises ... but be advised ... these three simple lessons are the rock on which your entire art career will depend! I kid you not.

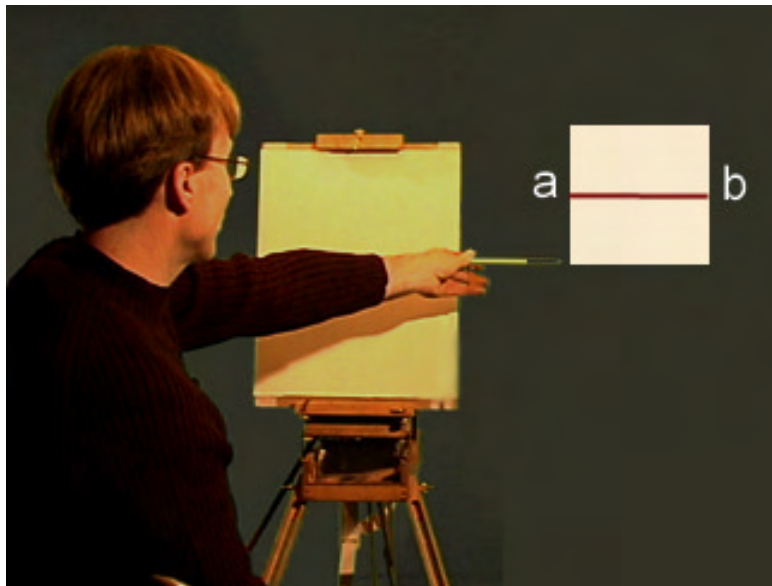
Exercise 1: the square

The square is the root of all geometric forms and is designated as 1. As you learn to draw you will be surprised at how many objects are actually of the same height and width. More important though is we need to establish the procedure for sighting.

Sighting is the term used for determining relationships of proportion by holding a measuring instrument (I recommend a 12" neutral colored and thin knitting needle) at arms length to compare a width to a length.

For this lesson the square serves as an excellent litmus test: if you are sighting correctly then, needless to say, the length will equal the width.

First, print out the following three sheets of rectangles. The first sheet is the square, the second is the double square and the third is a Root 2 dynamic rectangle.



Tape the square onto a wall about 6 to 8 feet distance from your easel and also at your eye level. On a sheet of newsprint quickly draw the square (use any drawing medium of your choice, i.e., charcoal, pencil, etc.). This should be your best guess. Do not make any corrections nor must you premeasure - premeasuring will defeat this exercise and your training!

With your knitting needle hold your arm straight out with your elbow locked to determine the width of the square from **a** to **b**. You will need to close an eye and adjust your knitting needle so that the point is at **b** and your thumbnail is at **a**. If you are using a pencil instead of a knitting needle be sure to use the sharpened point as it is more accurate.

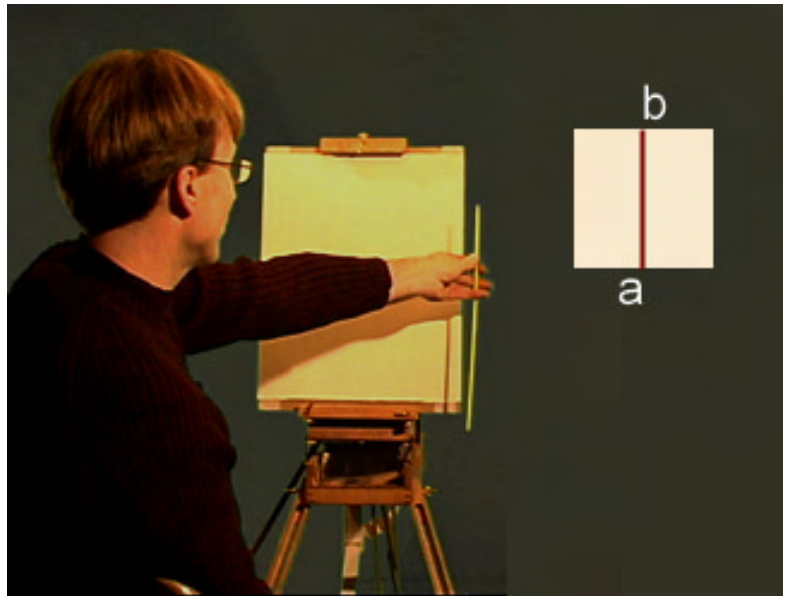
Keeping your elbow locked and your thumbnail fixed into its position rotate the knitting needle so that it is perpendicular. If you are sighting correctly then the tip of the knitting needle will be at the top of the square at **b** and your thumbnail at **a**.



The Square

Now use your knitting needle to ascertain that you have drawn the square correctly. If the height/width proportion of your square is off that will immediately tell you if your tendency is to draw things too wide or too narrow. This is important. A large part of your training is the process of correcting erroneous tendencies.

Note: You cannot directly relate your sight-sized measure to your paper. You will find your sight-sized measure way too small. What we are doing instead is called **Relational Sighting**.



Repeat this exercise as many times as needed until you can consistently draw an accurate square. I'm not worried about if your lines are straight; the primary concern here is to train yourself to adjudge similar proportion.

It is also equally important that you do not race through this exercise; doing so will gain you nothing. This lesson is deceptively simple but it is a powerful one that establishes the foundation upon which everything else is built.

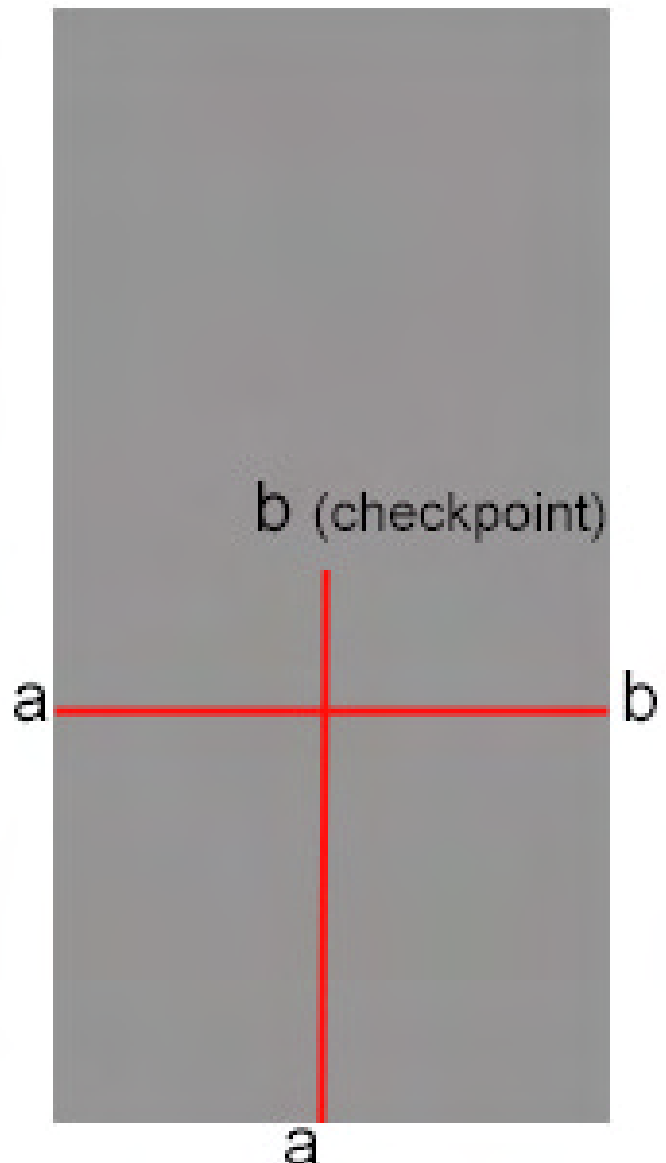
Exercise 2: the double square

The double square is also a dynamic rectangle. For this exercise tape the **double square** (Sheet 2) onto a wall also about 6 to 8 feet from your easel.

On a sheet of newsprint quickly draw **without pre-measuring** your best guess of the double square. Again do not make any corrections to your initial strike. **Striking** is an important component of drawing that will be discussed in Lesson 2: Shape.

With your knitting needle sight the width of the double square from **a** to **b** and, as with the square, keep your elbow locked and rotate your knitting needle perpendicularly so that your thumb is at the base of the double square at **a**.

The point of your knitting needle should now be halfway up the height of the double square at **b**. **b** is called the **checkpoint**. You can make a small mark on the double square printout to make it easier for you. Later on in this course we will be looking for landmarks within our subjects to use as our checkpoints.



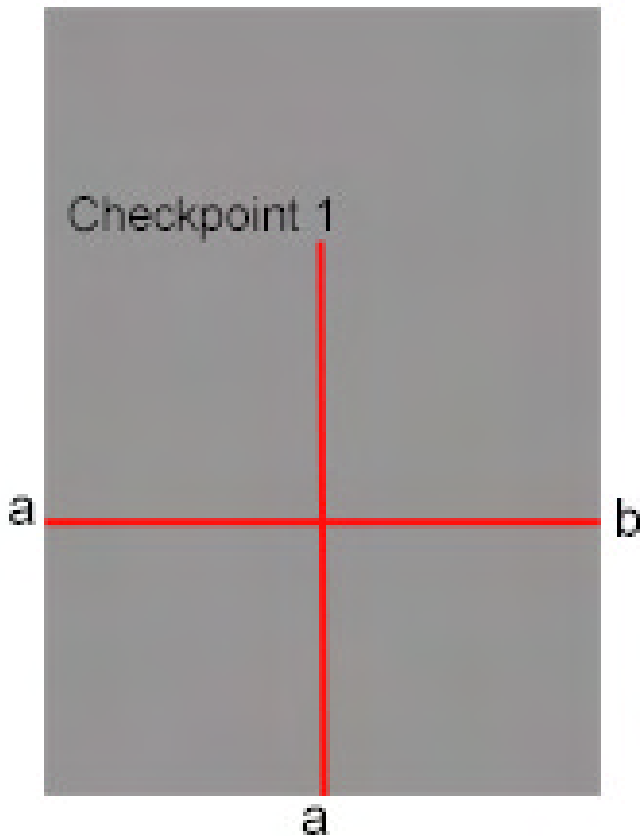
Still keeping your arm straight out and elbow locked move your knitting needle up so that your thumbnail is at the newfound checkpoint - **b** becomes **a**. If you are sighting correcting the point of your knitting needle is now at the top of the double square at **b**.

Hence, the height of this rectangle is twice the width. Again this exercise is deceptively simple, embarrassingly so, but it is critical as it establishes a baseline.

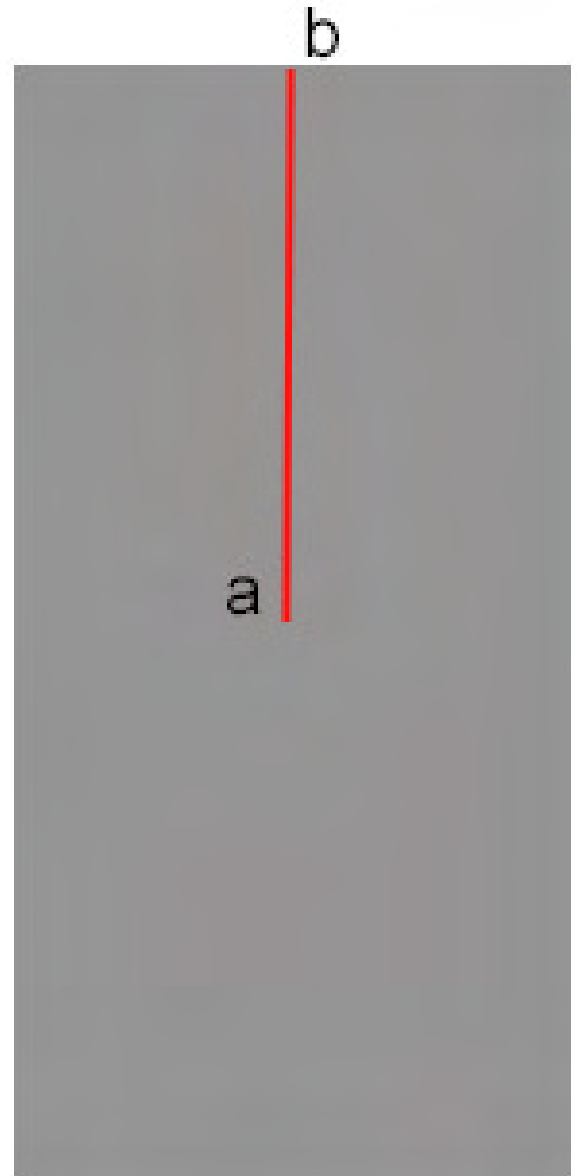
Now relate these proportions to the double square that you have drawn (struck) on your paper. Is your double square too wide? Too narrow, perhaps? Again, you are alerted to your tendencies.

As with the square repeat this exercise until you can consistently strike the proportions of a double square accurately.

The next exercise raises the bar considerably.



The Root 2 Dynamic Rectangle and Checkpoint 1



Exercise 3: the root 2 rectangle

The Golden Rectangle gets all of the glory and fame but for artists the Root 2 dynamic rectangle is the most useful. The proportion of the Root 2 rectangle is 1.4142 and is ideally suited for both the portrait and the still-life.

As with the square and double square affix the third sheet (the Root 2 rectangle) onto the wall and strike (quickly draw) it onto your paper.

Sighting the width of the Root 2 rectangle you will first determine the first checkpoint. Again make a small mark on the print out to serve as your checkpoint/landmark.

It is immediately apparent that your second checkpoint will be above the rectangle and this is the crux of the entire lesson.

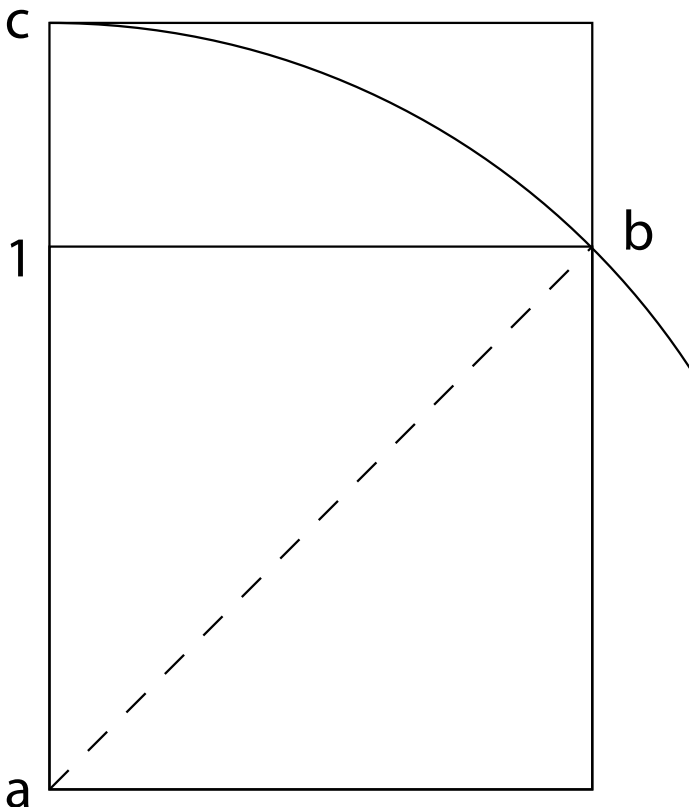
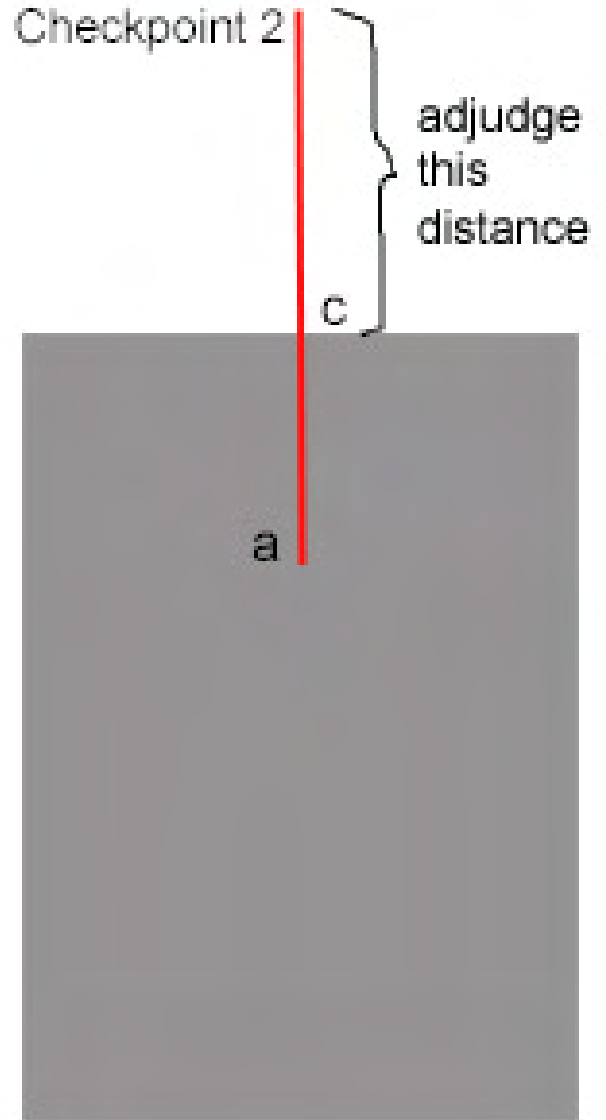
Moving your knitting needle up so that your thumb is now at **Checkpoint 1** you need to now place the **2nd checkpoint**. Easier said than done.

The critical moment in your initial training has now arrived.

In drawing the general rule is that it is always more accurate to ascertain a short distance than a longer one. Therefore you will need to take your best guess as to the distance from **Checkpoint 2** to **c**. [True, **ac** is the shortest distance but that is for a later lesson.] On your paper mark the placement of **Checkpoint 2** (it is twice the width of your Root 2 sketch).

You now need to determine the placement of **c**. Looking at your sketch does it look like the top of your Root 2 rectangle is correct compared to where you feel the measure **c** should be?

With this exercise you can, and should, make whatever corrections you deem necessary. But do not measure your rectangle until you are satisfied that your drawing is as correct as you can make it. As you repeatedly work this exercise you will be literally saving yourself years of struggle.



We now need to check our progress. You could multiply the width by 1.4142 (the ratio of Root 2) and check your drawing with a ruler but there is little fun to be had with that method. I am training you to be able to accurately draw freehand not to draw as a mechanical draughtsman.

To check your Root 2 rectangle drawing first establish a square within your rectangle. It should be at **Checkpoint 1**. Incidentally this square has a term: the **rabatement** which is a powerful compositional tool.

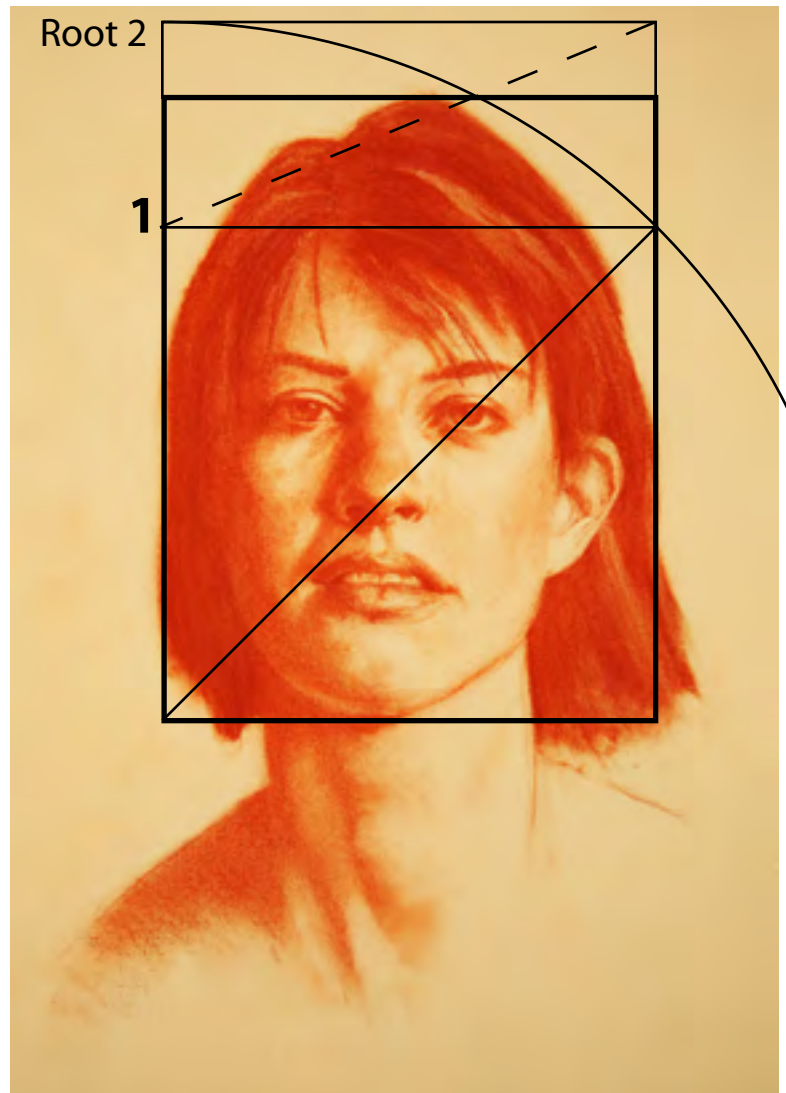
Using the square's diagonal **ab** as the radius inscribe an arc to **c** as I have illustrated here. If your Root 2 rectangle drawing is correct (and if it is at even your third or fourth attempt give yourself a hearty congratulations) then **c** will be at the top corner of your drawing.

If **c** is above your drawing then it is too wide; conversely if **c** is below then your drawing is too narrow. Another general rule of drawing is: **Always correct the width.** This rule is often broken, of course, and with good reason at times but it does serve a useful purpose in keeping your composition under control.

Repeat this exercise until you can consistently strike an accurate Root 2 rectangle. Successfully doing so, as I have said previously, will set you light years ahead.

Acquiring the skill of recognizing and striking dynamic rectangles is an important first step in portrait drawing where achieving a likeness relies heavily on correctly establishing the proportion and shape of the head.

In this sanguine conte portrait drawing the overall shape of the head fits within a geometrically truncated Root 2 rectangle. It should be noted that one need not be fully conversant with geometry in order to draw well. (But it is important if your ambition is to draw at the master level.) Being aware of the basic dynamic rectangles, however, will put you in good stead. Recognizing a Root 2 or Square in your subject, whether it is a portrait or a landscape or still life, is a great boon and will significantly accelerate your learning experience.



Learn to Draw Like a Pro

I mean really learn how to draw. And not just how to draw a tree, a face, etc. but learn how to draw anything.

Drawing, at base, is about accurately ascribing shape. It takes on average about a month to acquire this all important skill. Yet most beginners never do and find themselves perpetually stuck.

The first two-hours of my Beginning to Draw instant download video workshop is dedicated to training you how to accurately strike the arabesque (contour) of anything.

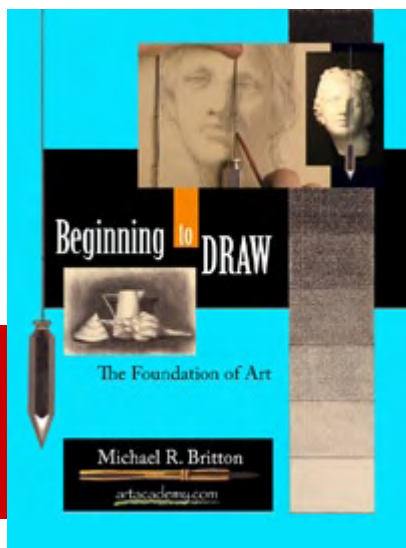
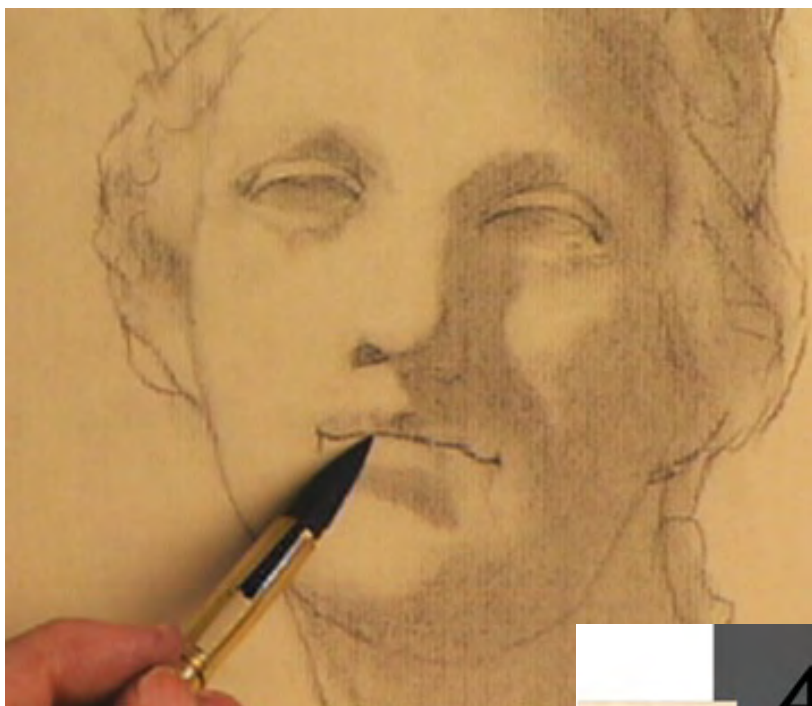
The second, two hour part of Beginning to Draw teaches you how to build tone step-by-step thus rendering a 3-dimensional, plastic effect to your drawing.

Part three is your Introduction to Portrait Drawing.

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September 2008

**Ralph Felder,
New Orleans, Louisiana**

Form and Figure

Ralph has been kind enough over the past year to supply us with lots of feedback on the programs he purchased last summer and has been diligently studying while e-mailing us some of his work to show us his progress. He also adapted the “plexiglass exercise” to his own needs with great results. While Ralph tells us he is new to portraiture he has made some real inroads and tackled some challenging subjects for us to discuss.

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In his own words ...

After purchasing your **Mastering Portrait Drawing 1: The Frontal Pose DVD Workshop** earlier I've just ordered the remaining **Portrait Drawing Studio Collection**. The teaching methods and high quality technical production are absolutely stunning! From scanning the web this find is a true "diamond in the rough".

[Here] is the first serious self-portrait efforts. Applied are concepts taught in the **Mastering Portrait Drawing 1: The Frontal Pose Workshop**. The arabesque learning exercise with dry eraser markers on plexus glass is very effective in quickly improving this critical drawing skill. In a matter of several hours practice using the two color method, I'm learning to "nail" (well almost) the arabesque using this exercise.

Attached is a charcoal portrait of my wife, Susan. The attire was selected to suggest her profession in the medical field. My wife is a dentist and I am practicing drawing her real "dead" human skull that she got in dental school.



[Also], another portrait with interesting drapery. The subject is my son who is studying culinary arts at the New Orleans community college, Delgado. He is employed now and has worked as a cook at the Red Fish grill in the French Quarter for over a year. The restaurant has won best seafood restaurant in Louisiana four times.

I'm a rookie at portrait drawing – I most likely made common drawing mistakes. I want the drawing right, but my main objective is creating an image of artistic merit!

Thanks for your newsletters. My objective is to learn how to paint portraits like Sargent!

The Critique

The Self Portraits

If you really want to squirm then nothing will test your symbolic preconceptions quite like attempting a self portrait. And yet the self portrait is one of the greatest training grounds. As difficult as it is to be both artist and model, it is an extremely effective way to practice from life on the cheap while developing your observation and portrait drawing skills.

One only has to visit a museum to see many a master's self portrait. It has also been common over the centuries for painters to incorporate themselves into paintings like a film director's cameo in a movie. We saw this in our study of Titian last month and previously in Raphael.



Sometimes self-portraits are executed to try out a new style of painting. In other cases it's entirely financially motivated – like Vincent Van Gogh. He couldn't afford a model so painted himself over and over while honing technique and color.

Perhaps, one of the greatest examples of self portrait intertwined with hidden meaning, illusion and story-telling ability is Velazquez' masterpiece Las Meninas.

So for Ralph to tackle a self portrait from life quite early on in his career is a real test of his mettle and is to be commended and I encourage all of you to try at least one.

As artists, we must always keep reminding ourselves that human beings don't have big puppy dog eyes. I prefer students to visualize beady little eyes more like a snake or lizard. Because the eyes are the window to the soul we think they are bigger than they are. It's something that all portrait/figure artists have to fight to understate. Shaving off a millimeter here and there can make a huge difference.

Overall Ralph the proportions and placements of the self portraits are believable and the arabesque is improving in its quality and structure in the second attempt. I can see the likeness from the photo you've included particularly in the first attempt. At this stage you are still drawing hair in strands instead of as tonal passages. So once again it's the age old struggle against those symbolic preconceptions we talk about in the DVDs and newsletters.

Symbolic preconceptions, for those of you who have not heard the term before, is how the brain interprets and simplifies complex shape. *E.g.* When children or beginning artists draw almonds for eyes; an "M" for a mouth; two holes for a nose, etc., these are symbolic preconceptions.

The initial challenge for all artists is setting up for pose. First, the pose must strike our interest (this includes portraiture), but equally important is the lighting. Flat lighting dulls and flattens form. Lighting your subject so that there is an interesting and dynamic light/dark pattern will improve your work immediately by giving it a sculptural quality. As an example I've included one of my drawings to illustrate this point.

For hair to read realistically: block it in tonally as a broad mid-tone, pick out the lights, and then continue to build up the deeper tonal passages which you will find are actually shapes not individual strands. These shapes will become smaller and smaller as you seek the darkest darks with each pass. The odd strand may be drawn carefully at the very end to "suggest" strands of hair to the viewer. With hair, eyelashes and eyebrows less is more and they all must be approached tonally.

In **Mastering Portrait Drawing 2: The Profile View** I demonstrate quite a complex hair style that looks like lots of strands. This study will benefit all your portraits and figures.



The shirt as you've drawn it isn't ringing true. It reads more as an after-thought than a careful consideration of the collar's form. Unfortunately, it pulls the whole work down and demonstrates exactly why the study of drapery is so important.

I'm sure you've made some inroads now that you have the **Drapery Workshop**. The arabesque of the drapery and the shoulder structure and anatomy that supports it are equally as important as the head and need to be just as carefully rendered if you intend to include them.

In these initial portrait studies the area that most needs work is your skill in handling your materials – your pencils, erasers. Like most beginners they have a sketchy quality rather than progressively rendered passages of line and tone. Focus on building up your cross-hatching skills to render tone which will give your drawings a professional feel.

Your line work has improved by the second attempt and is becoming cleaner. If you want to study gorgeous line work then look at Picasso's drawings – just pure unadulterated line. About these drawings they said – "Picasso draws like an angel" – so exquisitely simple, elegant and deceptively masterful are they. It's easy to dismiss them as almost childish.

Two Careers in Portrait

The portraits of Ralph's wife Susan, a dentist and his son, a chef, demonstrate the draped half portrait as might often be requested in commissions. The drapery in the form of work attire add interest and certainly when someone has a huge knife in their hand and is looking right at you it's going to catch your attention. If the subject wasn't smiling we might be in real trouble.



The portraits of Ralph's wife Susan, a dentist and his son, a chef, demonstrate the draped half portrait as might often be requested in commissions. The drapery in the form of work attire add interest and certainly when someone has a huge knife in their hand and is looking right at you it's going to catch your attention. If the subject wasn't smiling we might be in real trouble.

Props such as this can provide very effective symbolism. A huge knife – even in the hands of a chef – can be seen as quite threatening so be careful how you pose your subject and how props read and know what you want to say. This is where thumbnail sketches come in handy to test out ideas.

While great attention has been paid to the props and drapery, less attention has been paid to the center of focus – the face. The eyes appear too high and too wide on the face Ralph. Beware of the highlights in the eyes, quite often they are overstated, much to a work's detriment. Overall, Ralph, your pencil technique, tonal stretch and drawing has improved here.

Despite my usual objections to teeth in a portrait, a dentist with smiling teeth showing is probably a good thing if done extremely well. If the teeth are all individually delineated the viewers eye will focus on them. So, less is always more with teeth. They are better handled with tone as they usually fall into shadow. The mouth is quite



well drawn especially the fact the lower lip has been correctly articulated with tone only. Well done.

The reason the shirt and clothing does not read realistically is because it has been constructed without regard to the underlying anatomical structure of Susan's shoulders and a lack of tonal resolution. The drapery and shoulder line are more solidly structured here however. Like the head, straight architectonic lines purvey a sense of structure.

The proportions and placement of the features are quite good in this portrait Ralph although I would check the placement of the eyes and height to width ratios. It's the anatomy and construction of the features that is giving you trouble in all the faces you've presented here. You have achieved expression but are still struggling to see shape and tone at this stage and to push the drawings far enough.

It's time to go back to the basics break down each feature. I would recommend practicing drawing each feature separately as I've done on your **Mastering Portrait Drawing 1: The Frontal Pose** DVD workshop and your **Features** Cdrom. Draw many noses, many ears, many mouths and many eyes. Your own will do. Draw them large and bring them up to complete resolution tonally.

The hair in *Susan* is approached with much improvement as a large tonal mass. One immediately gets a sense of the texture.

A few words about the figure

Your figure work is really coming along Ralph. You are achieving quite a nice feeling of solid 3 dimensional form and the proportions look quite good. The broad planes of the figure make it much easier to deal with than the face but do continue to bring your faces up alongside your figure work because at this point like most figurative artists it is the weakest part overall.

The ribs on the left-side model have gotten away from you. This is due to having to interpret a subtle and complex form without understanding the anatomy.

My overall sense of this drawing is conflicted: on one hand there seems to be an allusion to Raphael's conte drawing *The Three Graces*; and on the other hand the gestures of these two models suggest calendar pin-ups – the kind that one would see in an auto mechanics shop. Now that I've waded into an aesthetic swamp let me be more specific.

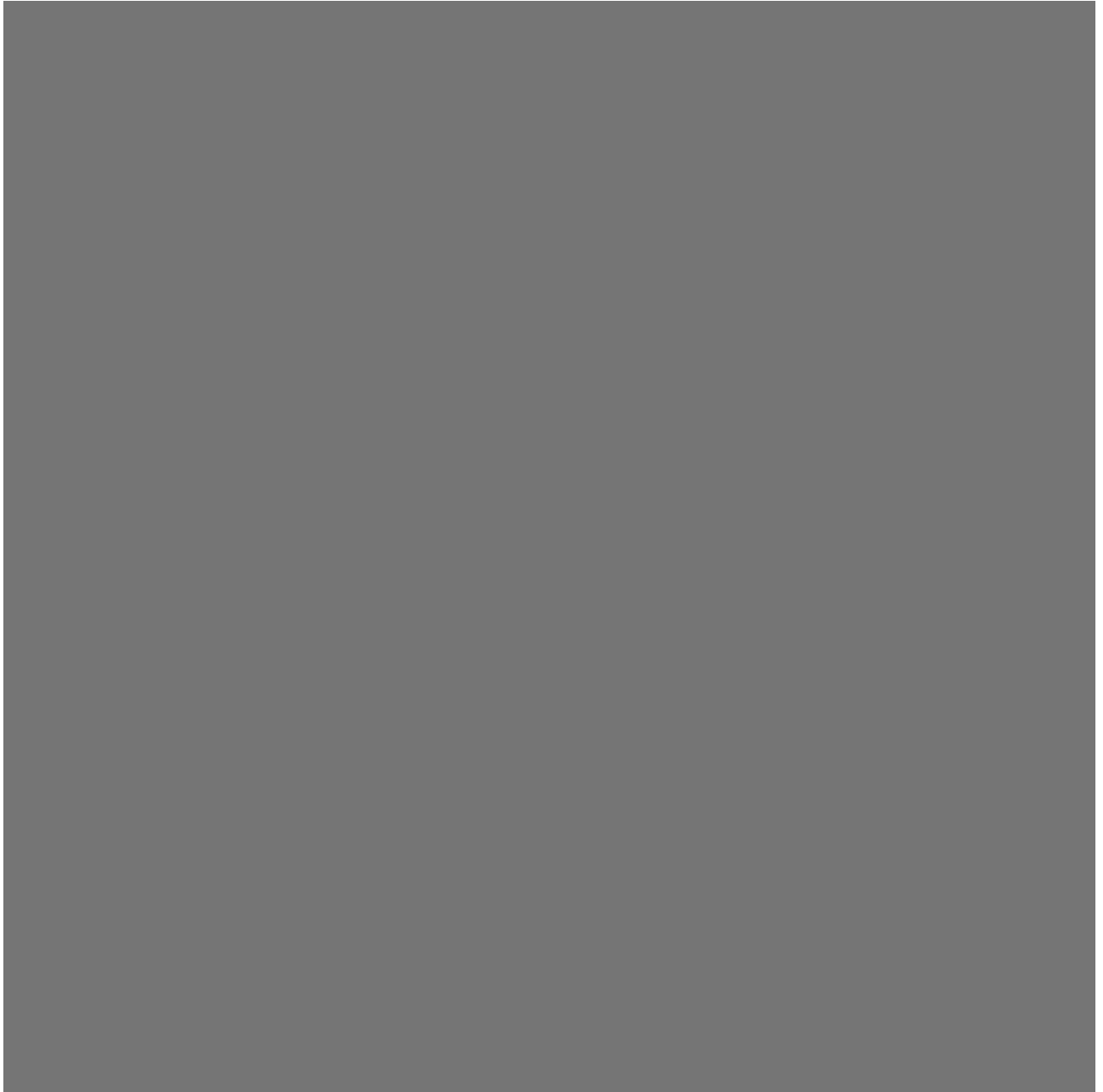
The problem with working from commercial photographs is that there is a completely different set of priorities. Commercial and fashion photography is deliberately flat (and also airbrushed and distorted). Attending life drawing sessions is important, but if there are no sessions in your area then the best alternative is to draw from master drawings. Raphael is an excellent starting point.

Ralph, thank you so much for sharing your work with us. Keep up the great effort as you are really seeing progress as the drawings here attest to and you are solidly on the right track.

Michael



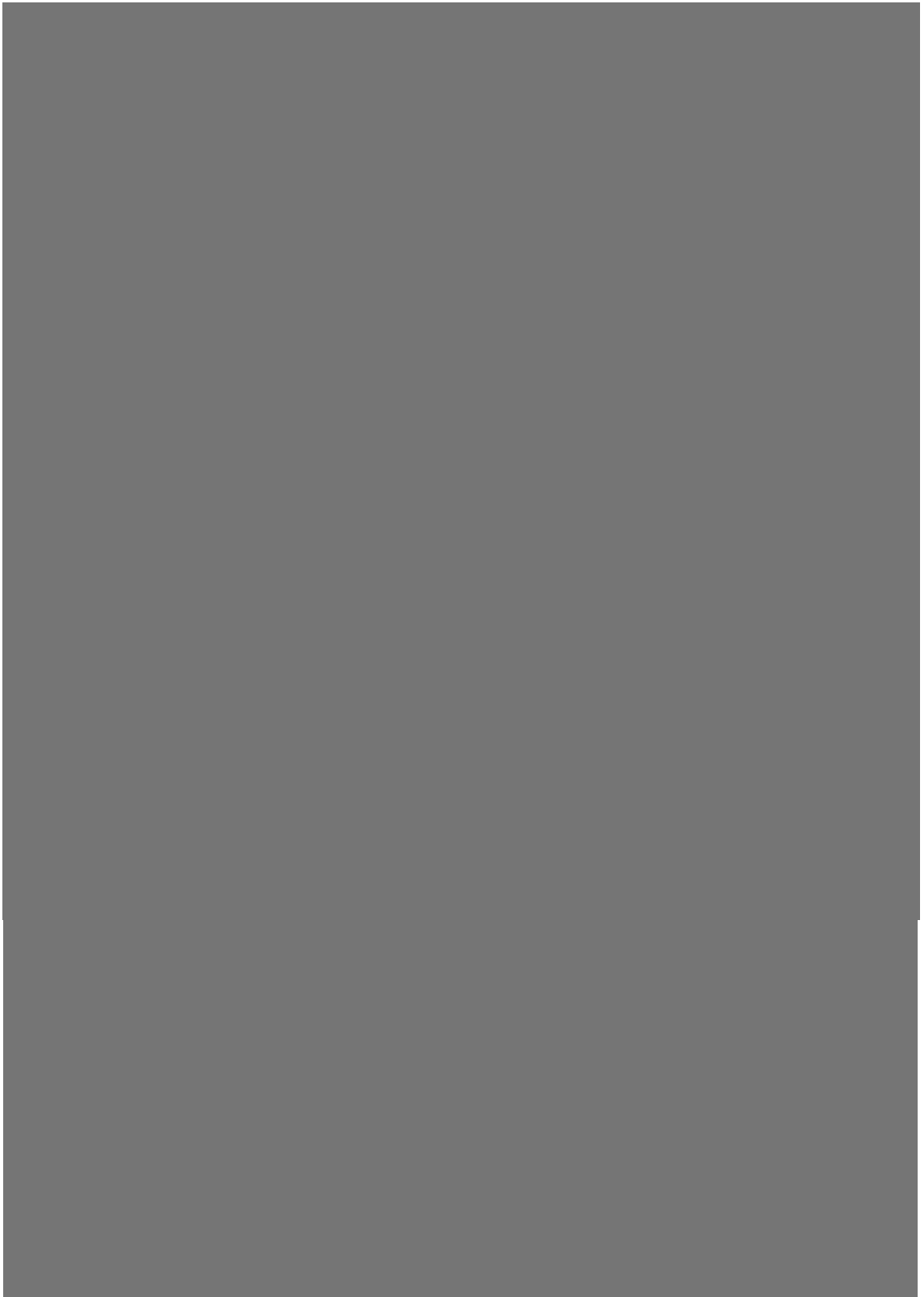
Exercise 1: The Square



Exercise 2: The Double Square



Exercise 3: The Root 2 Rectangle



Foundation in Drawing for the Beginning Artist

Lesson 2: Striking Shape



Having now understood and developed the skill of applying rectangular proportion to our drawing we can now proceed to striking the shape of objects.

When the untrained and self-taught artist attempts a portrait drawing quite often they will begin with an eye and grow out the drawing from there. The fallacy in doing so is that one quickly loses the finer qualities of composition, we simply have no idea of how such a portrait will shape up within our canvas (pictorial surface). The fact of the matter is that a drawing lacking in finesse, or clumsily rendered, can still impart a powerful impact on a viewer if it is well composed. Composition will always trump rendering. A finely rendered drawing lacking compositional force will only go so far as to be a technical exercise. As artists we want more.

The trained artist begins a portrait by first striking the primary shape of the head. This is generally called drawing the **contour**. I am not particularly fond of the term contour; it speaks too much of a deliberate mapping out of shape and, as such, can feel static.



I prefer to term the initial sketching of the overall shape as **striking the arabesque**. For me striking the arabesque implies implies a dynamic gestural rhythm that imparts a sense of life. Consider too that terminology implies intent. In figure drawing and complex still life or landscape arrangements we go beyond the seemingly simple arabesque to the **construct** or **envelope**. I'll talk about the construct later in this lesson.

The locus of this lesson is to train you how to strike the arabesque whether it be a portrait or a simple organic object such as a potato. The procedure and skill-level is the same.

But to be honest, accurately striking the arabesque of a potato is more of a challenge for me than the portrait. The reason for this is not for a lack of potato drawing skill but subjective timbre. I am deeply attracted to the portrait and figural; potatoes have little appeal to me (unless they are deep fried, dossed with ketchup and served alongside a well-dressed cheeseburger). That said potatoes, turnips and such are excellent training subjects. You do not need to have a model in order to begin learning how to draw portraits.

Let's first discuss the procedure of learning how to accurately strike the arabesque and then I will give you a couple of exercises to get you started.

When we look at an object we need to distill it to its simplest aspect. We should not (more accurately, **MUST NOT**) be caught up in minor elements. Our initial interest is only in the main shape of our subject. Even the gray-filled arabesque shown here offers more information than is prudent. Of course I could have distilled this exercise even more but my feeling is that this important point would then be overlooked. A banal metaphor for this would be: You can't learn to swim in a wading pool.

Step 1: Print out the two exercises at the end of this lesson and tape **Shape: the portrait's frontal pose** to a wall about 5 to 6 feet from your station point. Your station point is the spot at which you are standing at your easel.

In **Lesson 1, Basic Proportion**, you learned the importance of recognizing and relating the rectangle onto your paper (which is your pictorial surface, but is universally termed the **canvas**).



On an 8x10" or even a little smaller piece of plexiglass and using a black chinamarker or other water-soluble marker strike the rectangle that you feel best fits this portrait shape from the top of the head to where I have marked the base of the chin with a white line.

DO NOT PRE-MEASURE!!

(If you do you will only be cheating yourself)

By letting your eyes slightly fall out of focus you can better gauge the height/width proportion. This is called **soft eye**.

Note: Strike your rectangle a little smaller than the printout. Otherwise this exercise will not work.

Now hold the rectangle that you have just struck on the plexiglass up to the printout of the portrait-shape. If you are successful your rectangle should fit succinctly within the main body of the portrait shape as I have shown here.

If you have diligently applied yourself to Lesson 1 of this course you should have little trouble accurately striking this rectangle. And if your rectangle doesn't fit note whether is too wide or too short. That will be your erroneous tendency. Wipe off your rectangle and repeat until reasonably successful.

top of
the head —

Drawing a rectangle that encapsulates our subject is a necessary but short-lived endeavor. Now that you can assess basic height/width proportion we now only need to begin with marking the top and base of the head with two marks (barely seen pinpricks are better and my heavy marks are for teaching purposes only).

My top mark indicates the uppermost part of the head, the lower mark determines the size of the head at the base of the chin (the *mental protuberance*) and, hence, determines the all-important placement and size of the head in my composition.

chin —

With experience you will develop an innate feel for where to mark the *mental protuberance* of the chin. In this frontal pose the *mental protuberance* is easily determined; so too is the case in the profile view although there is a subtlety in that placement; not so easy is the 3/4 or 7/8's view but that is a concern for when you are at an intermediate level.

On your plexiglass mark the top of the head and *mental protuberance* of your proposed arabesque so that it is no more nor no less than 6 to 6 1/2 inches.



Now we arrive at the crux of the lesson - striking the arabesque. First, let your eyes fall into soft eye and visualize the width of your now imaginary rectangle.

Most artists prefer to begin at the top and work downwards and this is a good starting point. With your chinamarker on your plexiglass take your best stab at what you feel is the shape of the head. Again, do not pre-measure anything. My intent is to train you to actually feel shape.

Many beginners will strike their first arabesque with round arcing lines. There may even be the strong urge to draw an oval and then 'cheat-out' the chin area. A common reason for this is that many of us were taught to draw a portrait beginning with an oval and over the years this 'lesson' has been reinforced repeatedly. Sadly this ill-conceived approach has firmly established itself with predictable results.

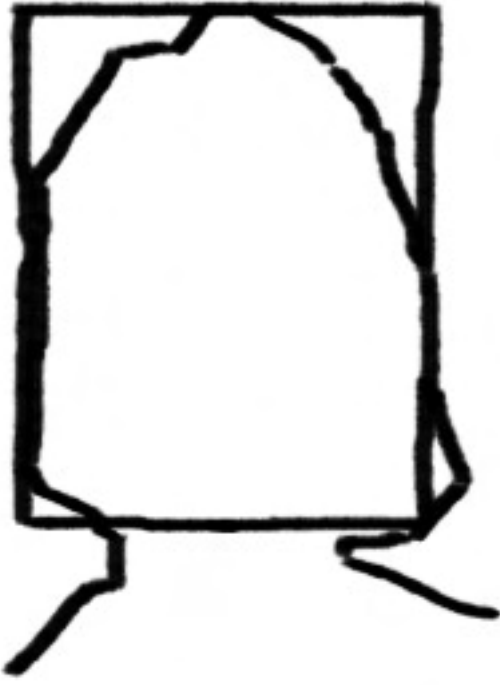
Instead of round arcing lines use straight lines. Straight lines lend an architectonic feeling of solidity to the arabesque.



From your station-point hold your first arabesque up the printout to see how well, or not so well, your drawing fits within the printout.

If your result is like the one I have illustrated here you are not alone. Most beginners tend to draw the head too wide and with overly roundish lines as I've just discussed.

Allow yourself at least five attempts to reasonably strike the shape and if you are still having trouble take a half-step back and first draw the rectangle.



Taking that half-step back allows me to illustrate two important aspects of drawing shape: **positive** and the **negative** shape. The **positive** is the object's shape; the **negative** is the remainder within the pictorial surface.

Needless to say, when drawing a single head it is difficult to envision the large negative shapes determined by the edge of your paper (canvas). Seeing the negative shapes within the confines of the rectangle, however, are much easier.

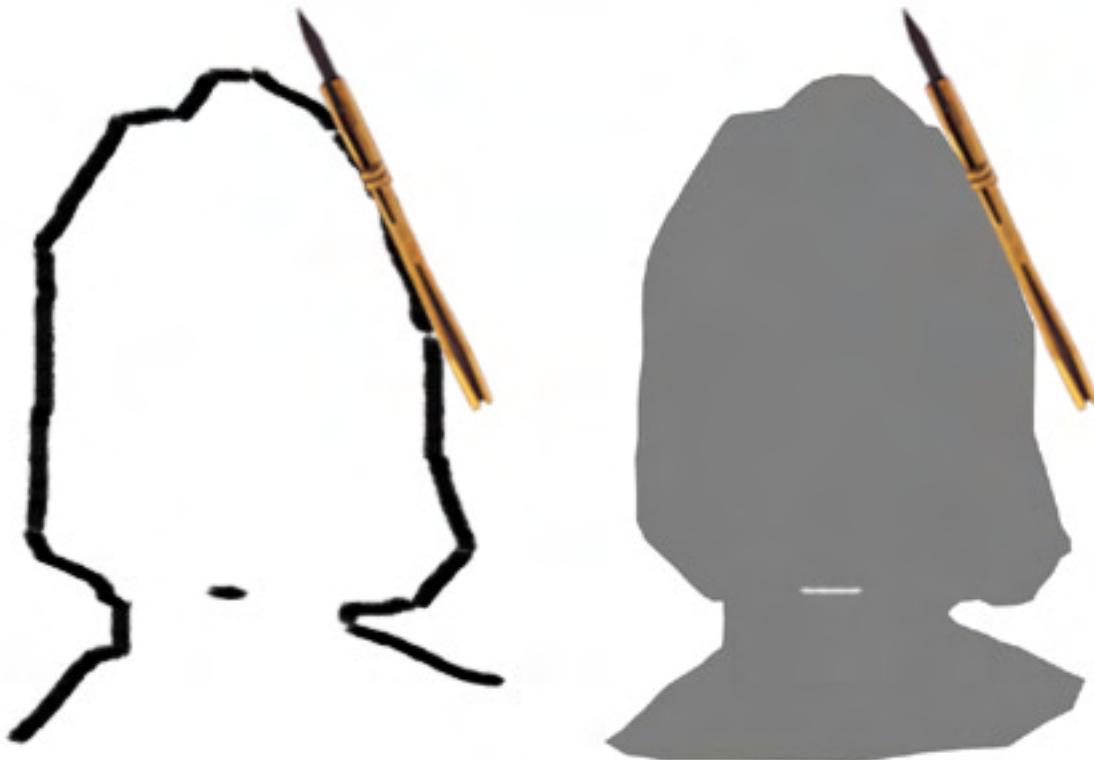
Now first strike the rectangle and then sight its height/width proportion to ensure its accuracy.

Using your rectangle strike the arabesque of the head while taking note of the positive and negative shapes. Later you will be working positive shape against negative shape as you strive for ever more accuracy.

By now you are likely feeling the need to more accurately adjudge angles.

For your training regimen it is always better to **strike first and then verify**.

To gauge an angle is much like the practice of sighting. Hold your pencil (or drawing instrument) at arm's length and keeping your elbow locked lay your pencil along the angle's edge. If find it useful to at least mutter the time of the angle (in this illustration my angle is at 11:00. Or more precisely at 10:52 but who am I to quibble.).

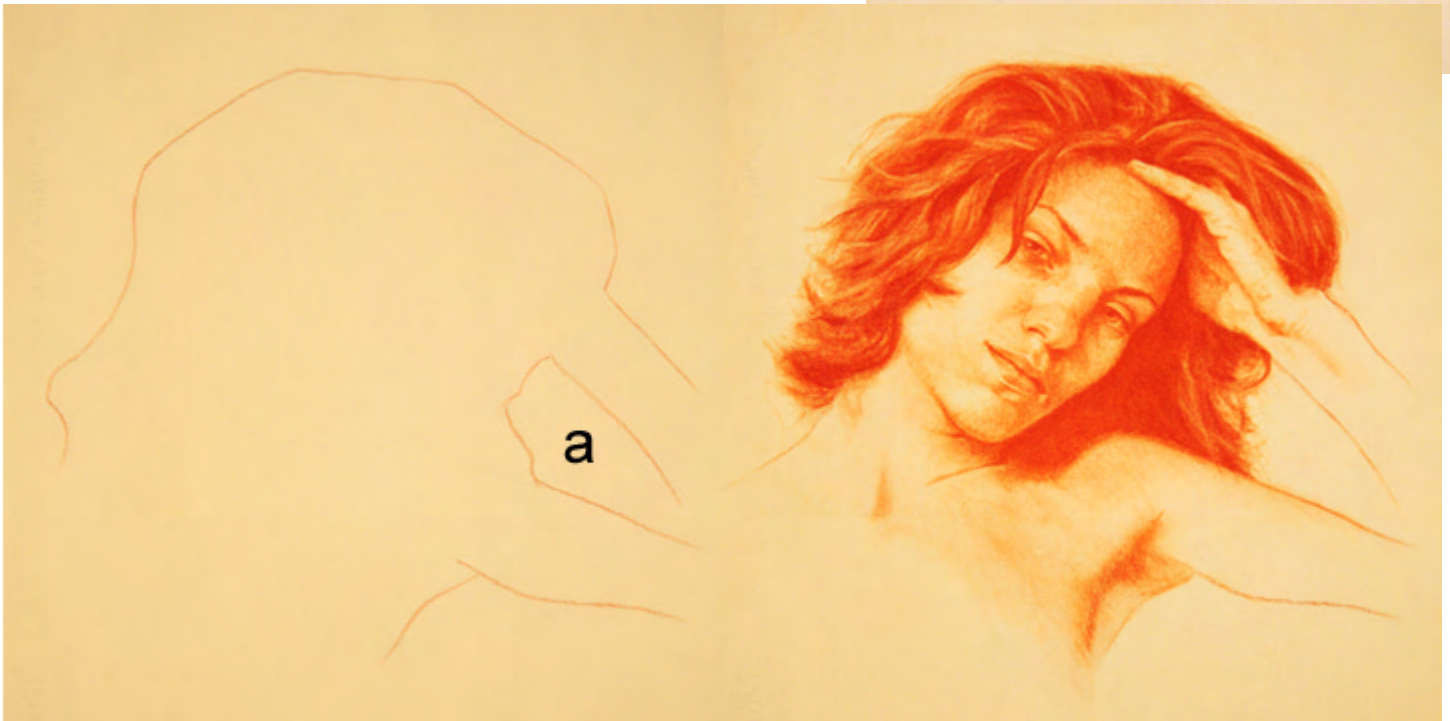


Keeping your elbow locked and maintaining the sighted angle of your pencil directly transpose this angle to your drawing. This is not 100% accurate but it is the best method that we have.

You can check all of your angles this way but I find that once the major angles are established everything else will fall into place effortlessly.

Developing your striking skill using this plexi-glass exercise is the singularly most powerful way to learn how to draw what you see accurately. With practice and experience you will find that striking the arabesque for a portrait takes literally less than 10 seconds and becomes as fluid and innate as writing your name.

When you have acquired the skill of striking the arabesque you will then be ready to tackle the **construct**.



The **construct** is a more complex arabesque. It incorporates not only the entire outside shape but also the gesture inclusive of the hand and arm. Although the hand is inside the parameter of the hair and head it still must be sensed.

The experienced and well-trained artist can strike the construct as readily as the arabesque. The only real difference here between striking the arabesque and the simple construct of this sanguine portrait is the incorporation of the arm and the succinct placement of the negative shape between the forearm and the upperarm at 'a'.



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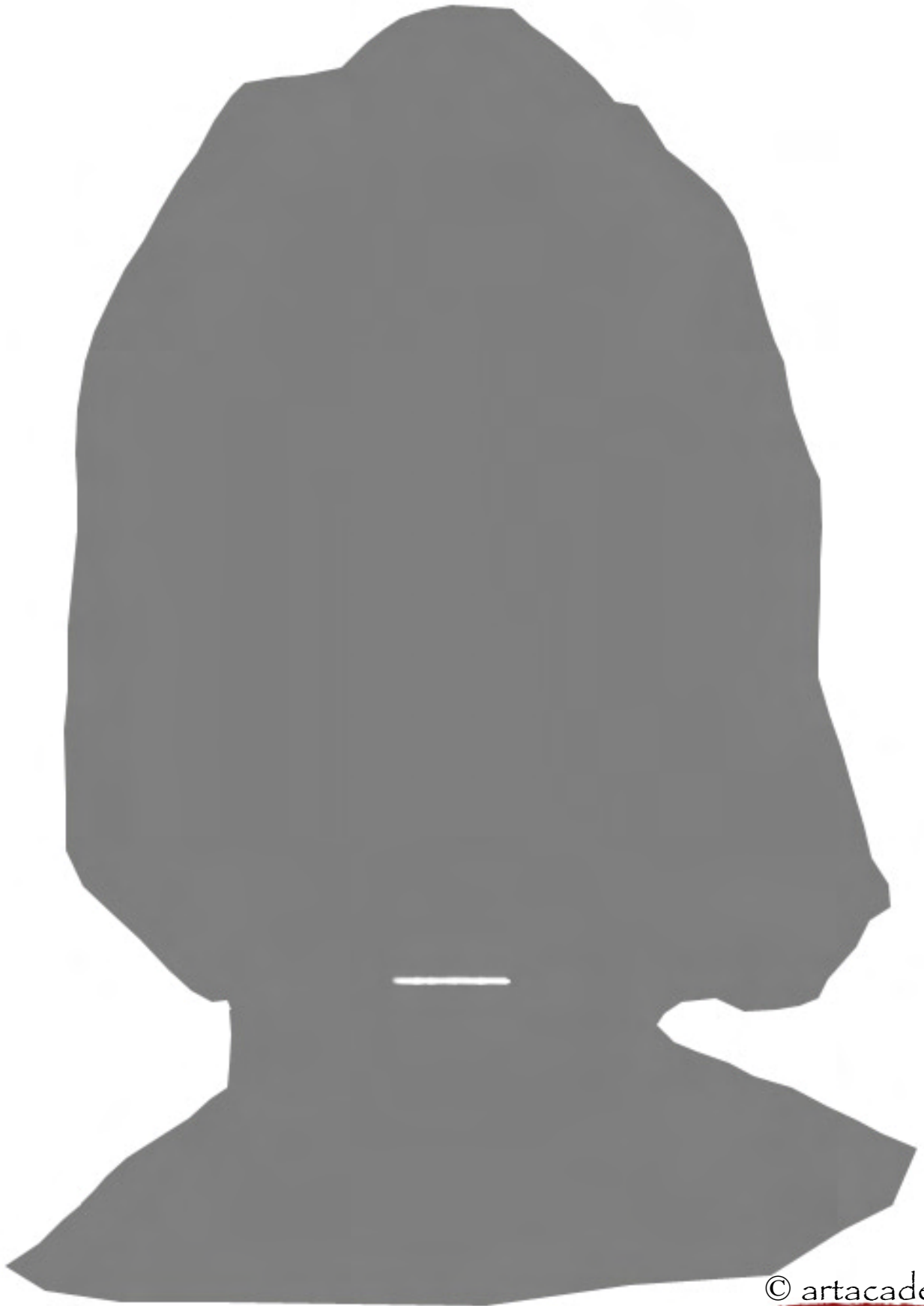
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Shape: the portrait's frontal pose



Shape: the construct



Foundation in Drawing for the Beginning Artist

Lesson 3: Placing Landmarks



Once the arabesque has been accurately struck we now proceed to placing landmarks that will greatly facilitate the accurate arrangement of the internal elements and corresponding gestures. Whether your genre is portrait, figure, landscape or still-life the practice of fixing a few succinct landmarks is the same.

The caveat is: **place only a few landmarks!** For this lesson I will demonstrate the procedure for placing the important landmarks for portrait drawing. Also included is a training sheet that, like the exercises for proportion (Lesson 1) and striking shape (Lesson 2) is a deceptively simple yet powerful tool.

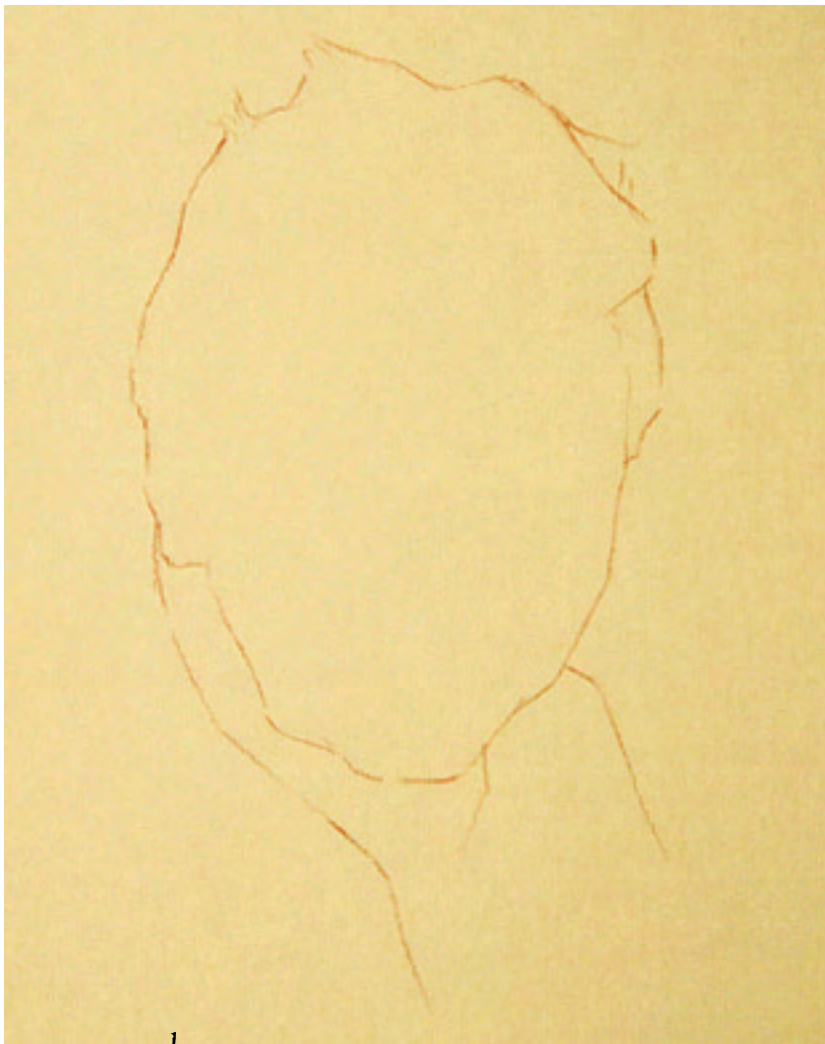
Permit me for a moment to pull out my ever available orange crate and preach. A sad, yet true, reality is that most beginning artists will not do these exercises preferring to rush into the more glamorous endeavor of actual picture making. The tragedy is that the glamour is short-lived. For the beginning artist the process of learning how to draw is not in acquiring a large volume of 'how-to's', *i.e.*, how to draw a tree, how to draw a dinner plate in perspective, etc. – yes, these are important but are best left for later study when, and if, you need a specific procedural reference

The beginning artist's primary focus should be on first developing, then finely honing, their perceptual and striking skills. That is where the magic of drawing and painting is. Everything else builds upon that.

Permit me just one more moment to tell you a tragic tale: When I first began to attend classes at the Art Students' League in New York City in 1980 I was thrilled to be in the same paint splattered studios where many of my heroes had studied. Admittedly I was a little less thrilled to find that I was also working on the same wobbly easels that possessed an uncanny knack for tossing a wet painting onto the floor at the most inappropriate moments. Mind you, there is never an appropriate moment for a wet canvas to belly-flop.

In some of my classes several fellow students proudly confided that they had been attending the League and studying since the Second World War. They possessed volumes of knowledge, they could readily recite the recipe for Mahoger medium for oil painting, how best to cook-up size (rabbit skin glue and water heated to near boiling point – but if it boils it spoils!) and masterfully lead-gesso fine Belgian linen. But their drawing skills were dismal. They could not strike an arabesque even by resorting to myriad gadgets such as grids, precision-tooled view finders, and camera obscuras.

I was dumbfounded. How, after 35 years, had they still not mastered the foundational drawing skills. Something was terribly amiss. The problem was that rather than spend a few months on building their basic drawing skills they chose instead to leap directly into painting. 'Drawing is old hat!' was their battle cry followed by whoops of 'Paint loose! Paint free!'



After a few vainglorious years of slapping on paint many of these students realised that they were not progressing beyond a sophomore level. They had stalled and remained stalled for decades. Some were too proud to admit that they needed to start again and acquire those all-important basic skills; many quit painting grudgingly telling themselves that one had to be born with a talent for drawing and painting.

There are no shortcuts but there are efficient and proven learning techniques. First, though, you must respect the art. Respecting the art entails the acknowledgement that there is no quick and 'easy' route to mastering drawing and painting.

That concludes my sermon, now onto the lesson plan.

For Lesson 3: Placing Landmarks I will use this complex, forward leaning portrait drawing. My reasons for this will become apparent as the lesson progresses.

As with the exercises in Lesson 1 and 2 print out the large PDF sheets at the end of this lesson and tape them in turn at eye-level onto a wall about 6 feet from your easel.

Strike the arabesque using a china-marker or water-soluble black marker onto a small sheet of plexiglass and check it for accuracy. If you have acquired the skill of striking shape (Lesson 2) this exercise will present only a slightly increased level of difficulty.

Don't try to strike every bulge and indent, it isn't necessary but you do need to accurately establish the height/width proportion and general overall shape of the head with straight lines.



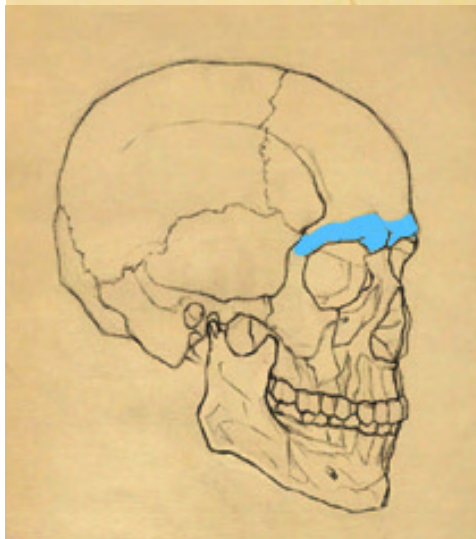
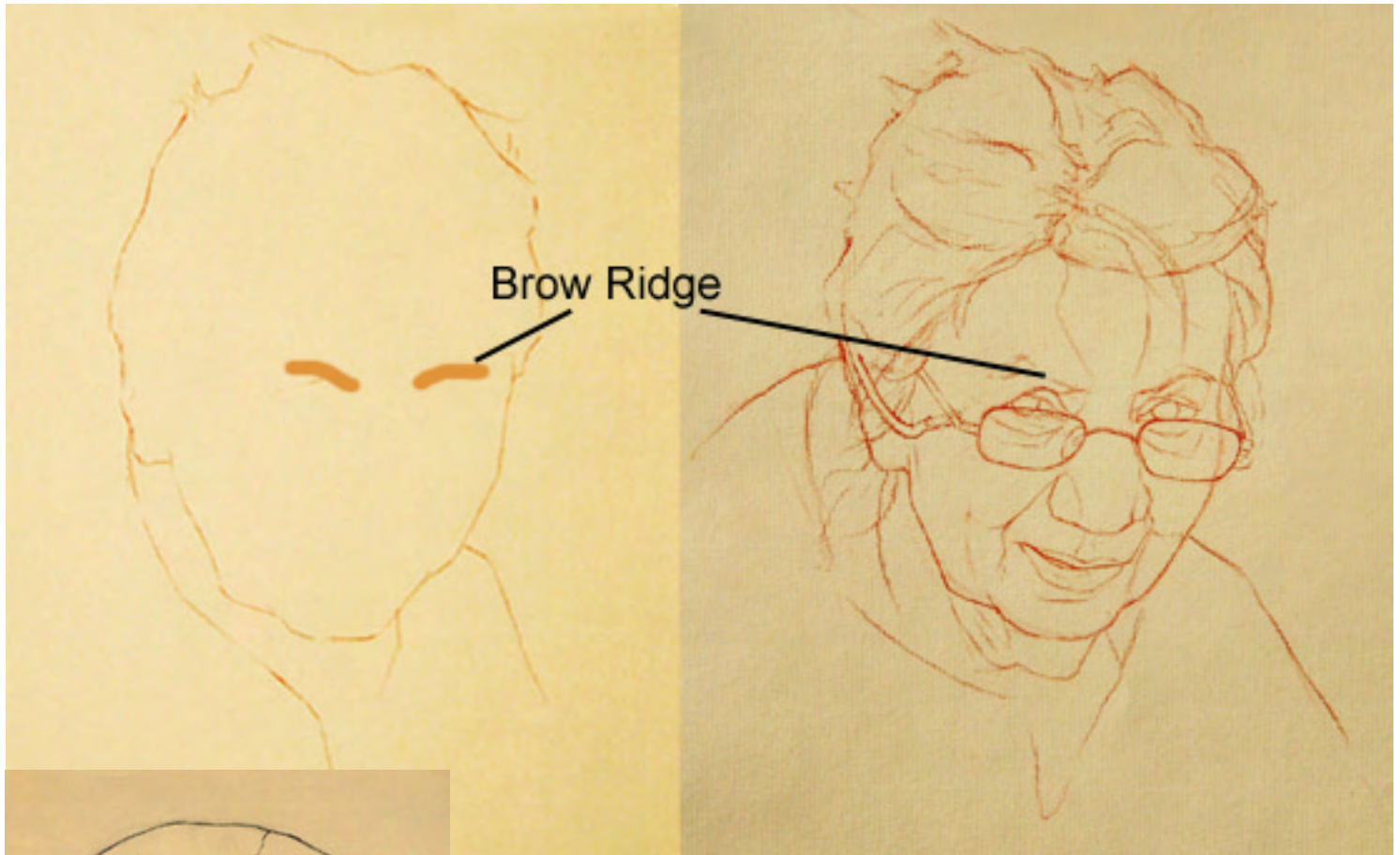
Your plexiglass arabesque should look somewhat like what I have illustrated here. At this point of your training don't be overly concerned with line quality – that comes later and will develop naturally.

Holding your plexiglass arabesque up to the print-out sheet it should look, again, somewhat as illustrated. As previously said you should not strive for every nook and cranny: The basic proportion and shape is critical though.



Once the arabesque has been struck accurately we proceed interiorly to place the major landmarks.

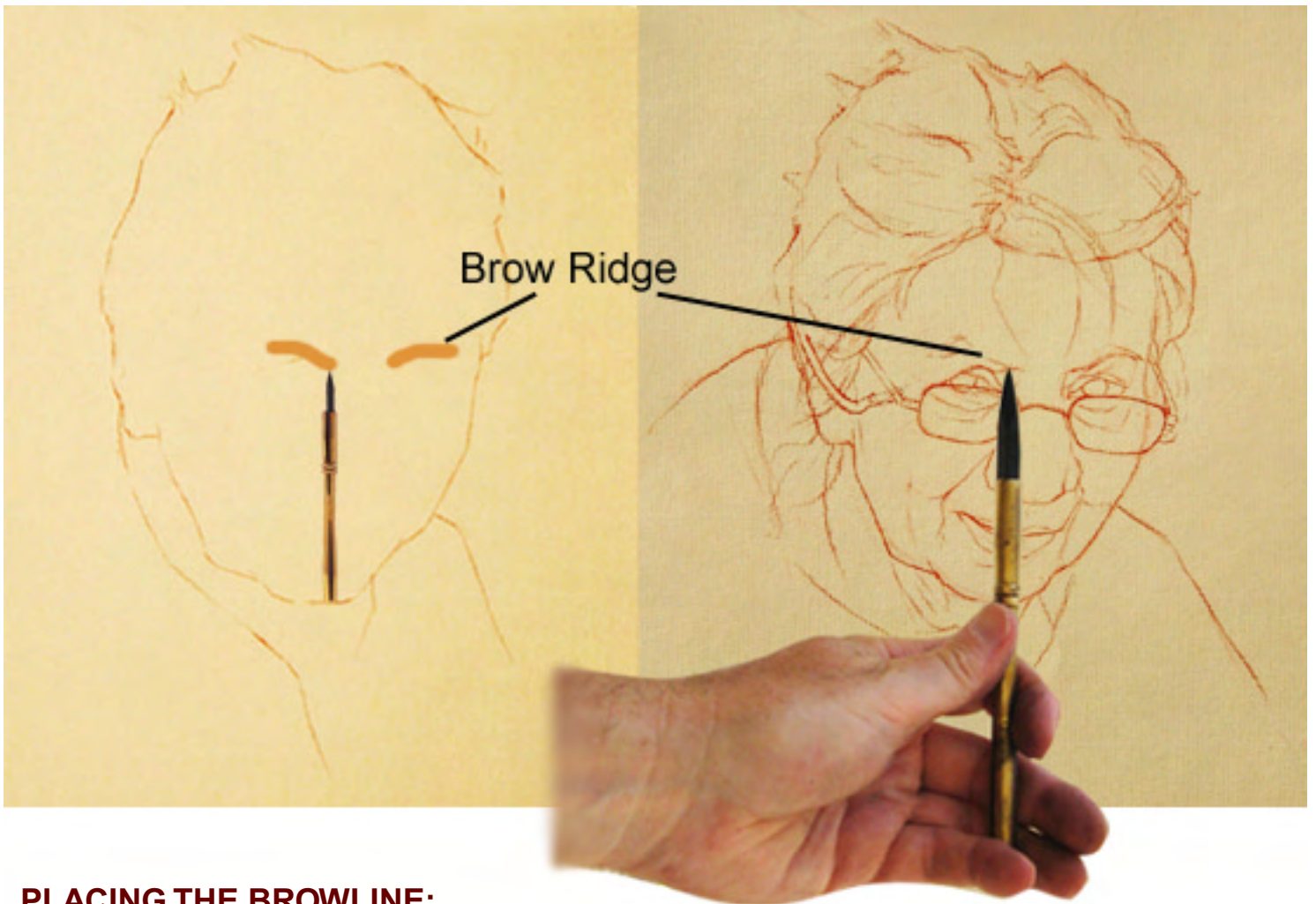
In portrait drawing the first and most important landmark is the brow-ridge. This is the large, lateral skeletal structure (called the *Supra Orbital Eminence*) upon which the eyebrows lay. Generally you are looking for a specific point on the brow ridge that you can readily refer back to. Every portrait drawing will have a slightly different reference point depending upon the model, the pose and even the lighting.



The greatest fallacy that the beginning portrait artist is presented with is that the eyes are placed at the vertical midpoint of the head. Often this is the case if you are looking straight-on at eye-level at your model, but if your model tilts their head either backwards or, in my case, forwards, then all bets are off. And the facial proportions of children are significantly different than those of adults.

Every portrait states its own specific proportions. Establishing the browline first and then relating the interior geometry of the head to the browline is the surest and most efficient practice for achieving the likeness and expression.

Incidentally there is an optical illusion at work here between the 'finished' line drawing and the arabesque. The arabesque drawing appears smaller even though it has exactly the same dimensions as the finished line drawing. Rather than expend verbiage on explaining the science of this optical illusion suffice it to say that this is another reason for beginning with the arabesque rather than starting with, say, an eye and growing out the drawing from there. Sure, you can get way with it for a single portrait but what if later you want to do a mother and child? A 150 lb. infant would be a sight to behold indeed! And pity the poor mother.



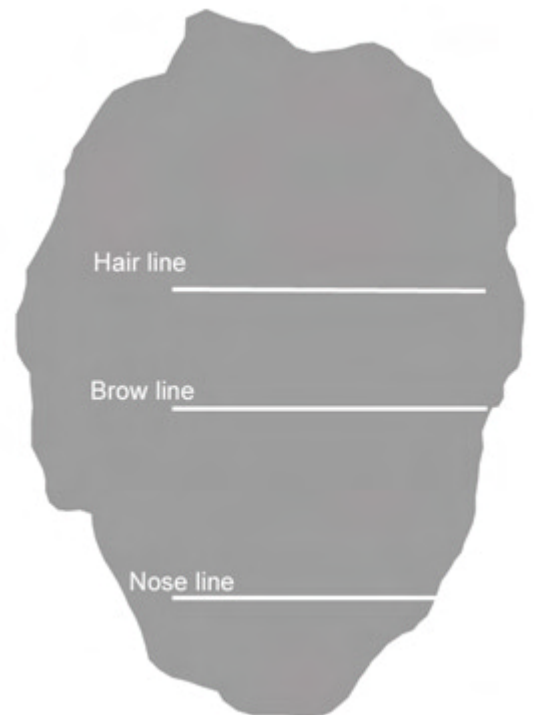
PLACING THE BROWLINE:

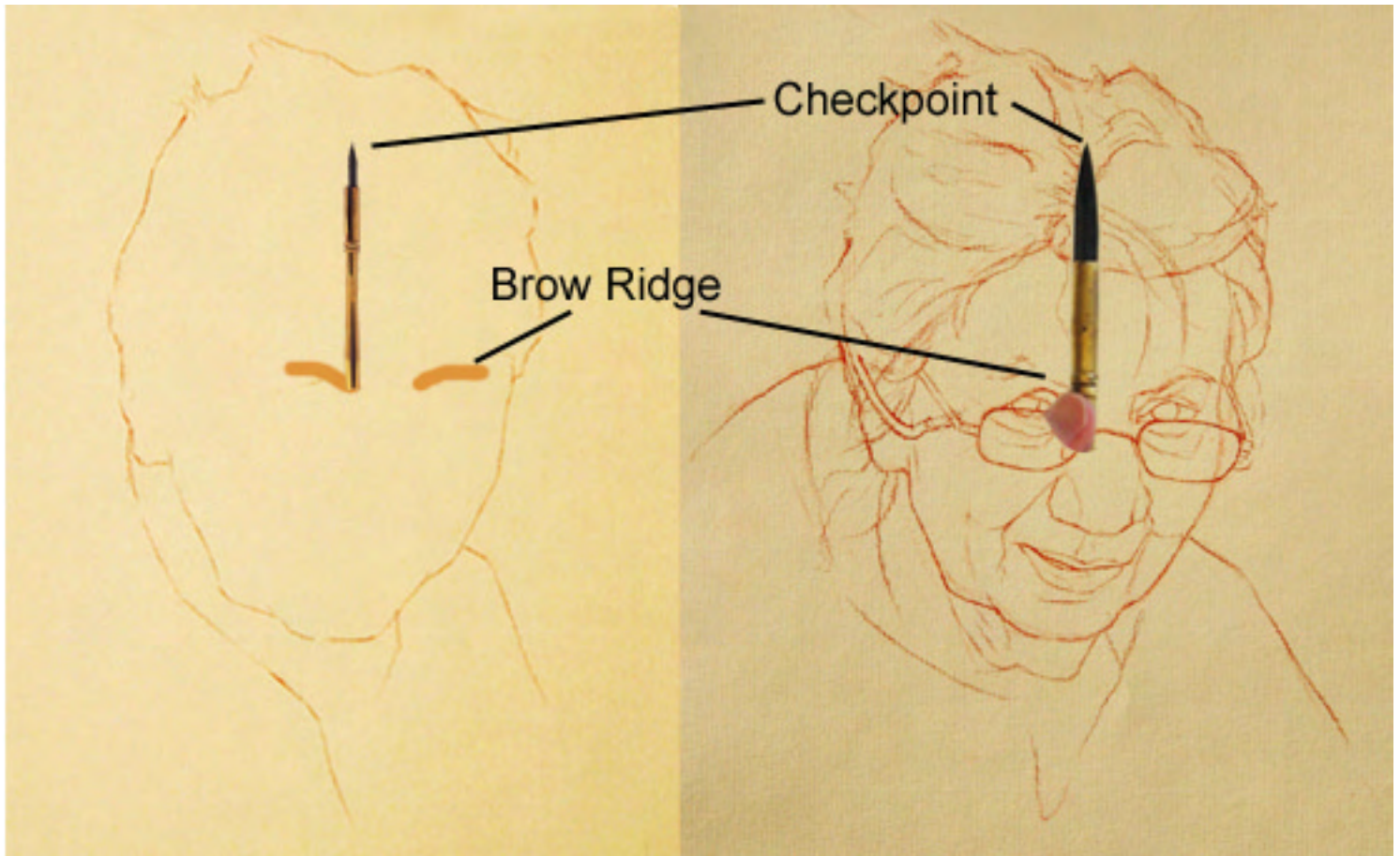
Tape the PDF Exercise 2 sheet onto your wall – this will serve as your model. Once you understand and feel comfortable with the process of placing landmarks you can then work from large printed version of my linear sketch.

Step 1: Let your eyes fall into soft focus (see Lesson 2: Striking Shape) and take your best, now well trained, guess at where the brow line is on your plexiglass and make your mark. Again, it is important for your training that you do not pre-measure.

Step 2: To check the accuracy and, if need be, correct the placement of your brow line sight from the base of the chin to the browline. I have chosen a specific point on the browline, for the time being I would recommend using my same reference when you are working from the linear sketch.

Note that my thumbnail is at the base of the chin. The practice of sighting is taught in [Lesson 1: Basic Proportion](#).





Step 3: Keeping your arm straight move your knitting needle, or pencil, so that your thumbnail is now at your reference point on the brow line. Your checkpoint is now established.

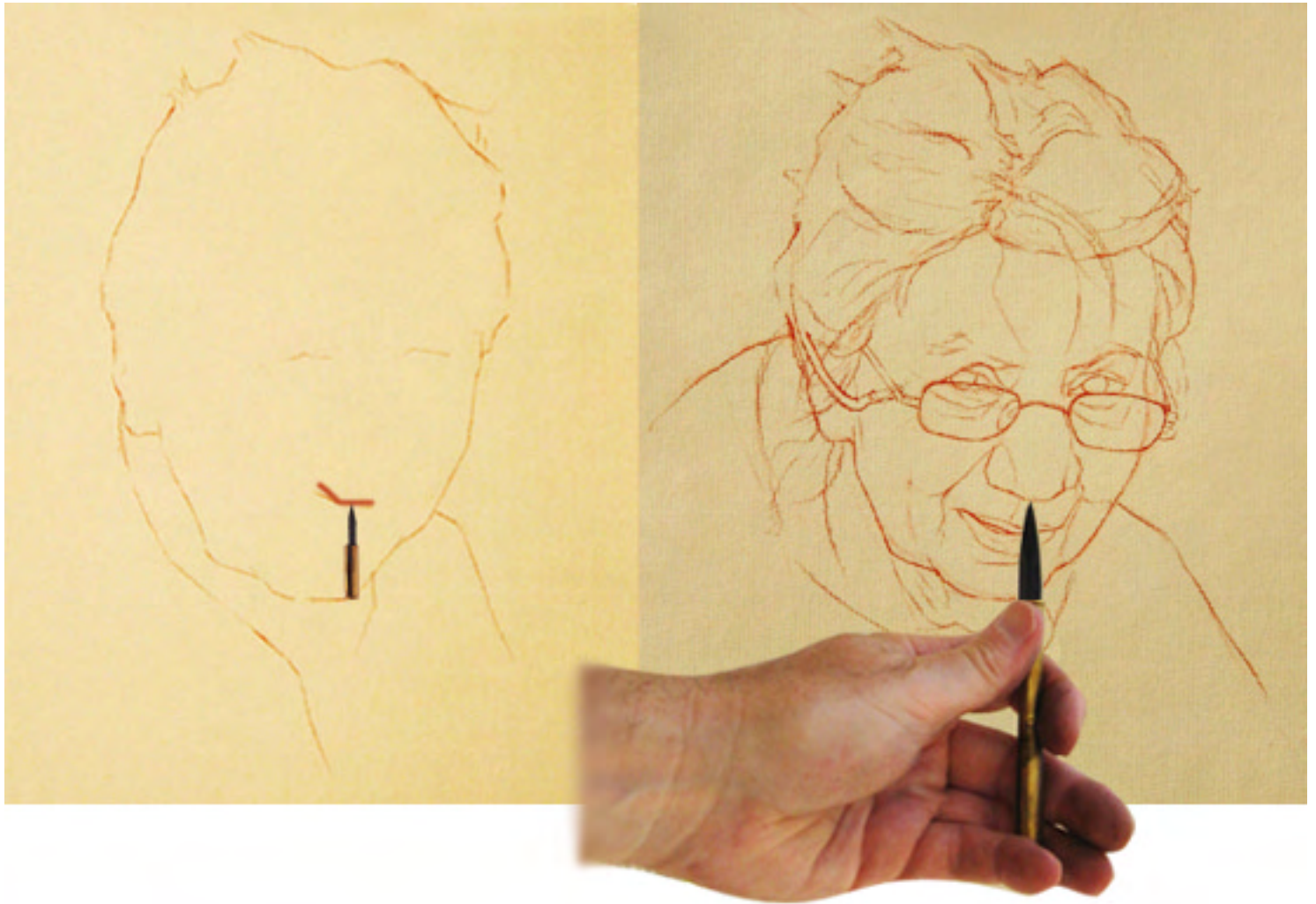
Make a small mark (pin prick) on your plexiglass where you best feel the checkpoint is. Again, this is taught in [Lesson 1: Basic Proportion](#). Remember, gauging the shortest distance will always prove the most accurate.

Your brow line should now be halfway between the base of the chin and the pin prick of your checkpoint. If it isn't then now is the time to correct it.

Step 4: To ensure that you have placed both your checkpoint and brow line accurately hold your plexiglass exercise up to the Exercise taped onto the wall. This is the Litmus test.

PLACING THE BASE OF THE NOSE:

The second landmark to be placed is the base of the nose. First, let your eyes fall into soft focus and ask yourself if the base of that nose is (a) midway between the brow line and the chin; (b) above the midway point; or (c) below the midway point.



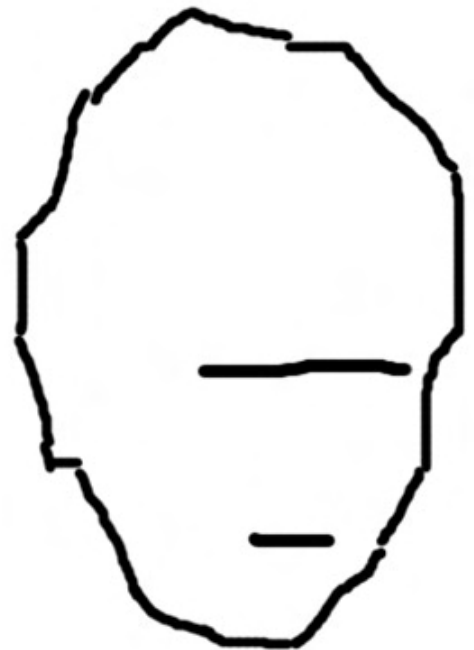
If you chose (c) Congratulations! The base of the nose is significantly well below the midpoint. Another portrait drawing fallacy has been dispatched with. Unless you intend to spend your portrait drawing career focused on mug shots the sooner you discard the standard cookie-cutter template of portrait drawing the better.

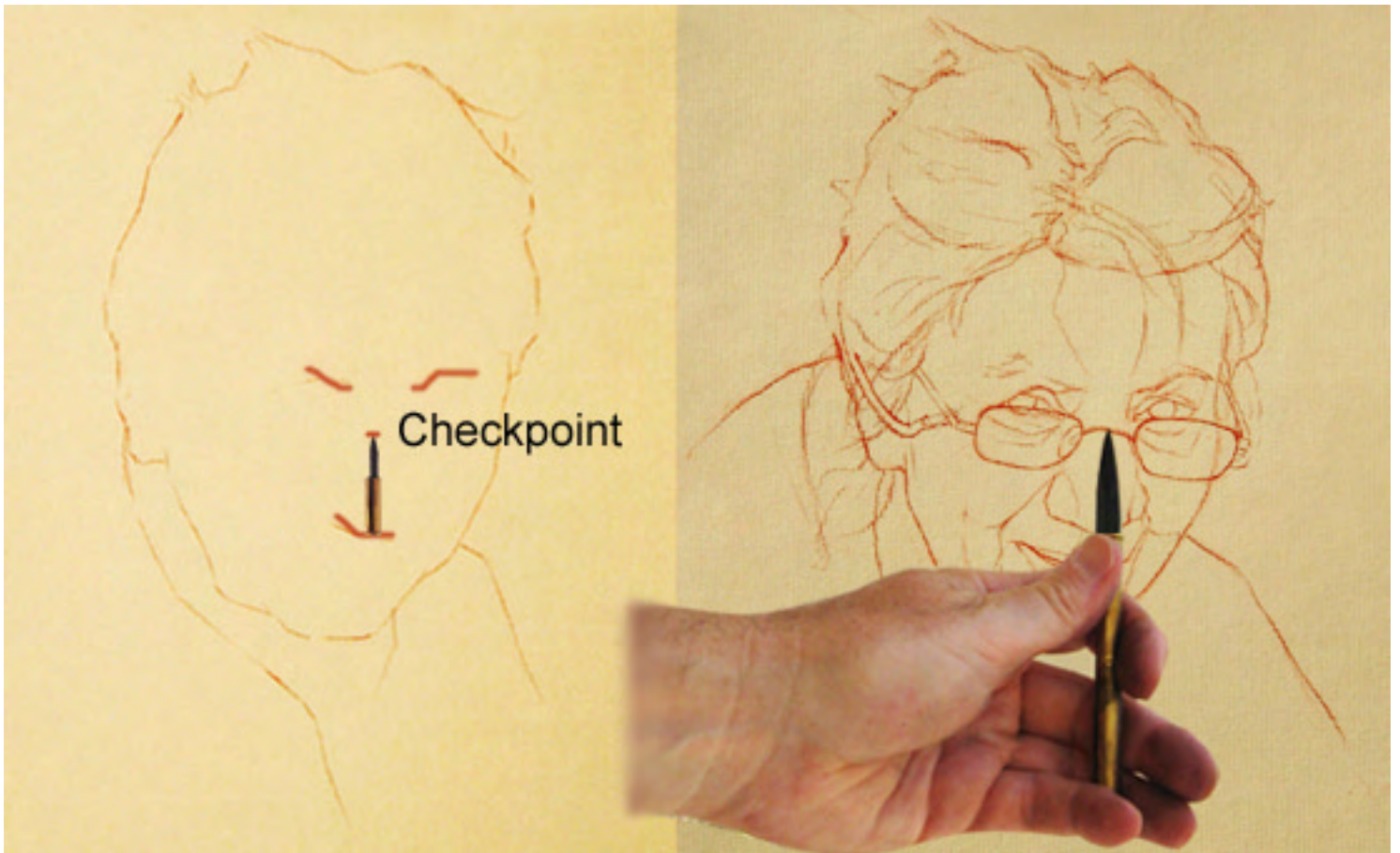
Place a mark on your plexiglass where you best feel the base of the nose lay.

As with checking the brow line first sight the distance from the base of the chin to the base of the nose as I have illustrated.

Admittedly, without the benefit of the 'finished' drawing the arabesque and its two lonely landmarks is looking a bit strange. You might even say weird. Well, in the learning process feeling weird is good. It is a strong indicator that you are breaking down your preconceptions.

Your plexiglass drawing should be somewhat similar to the one shown here.





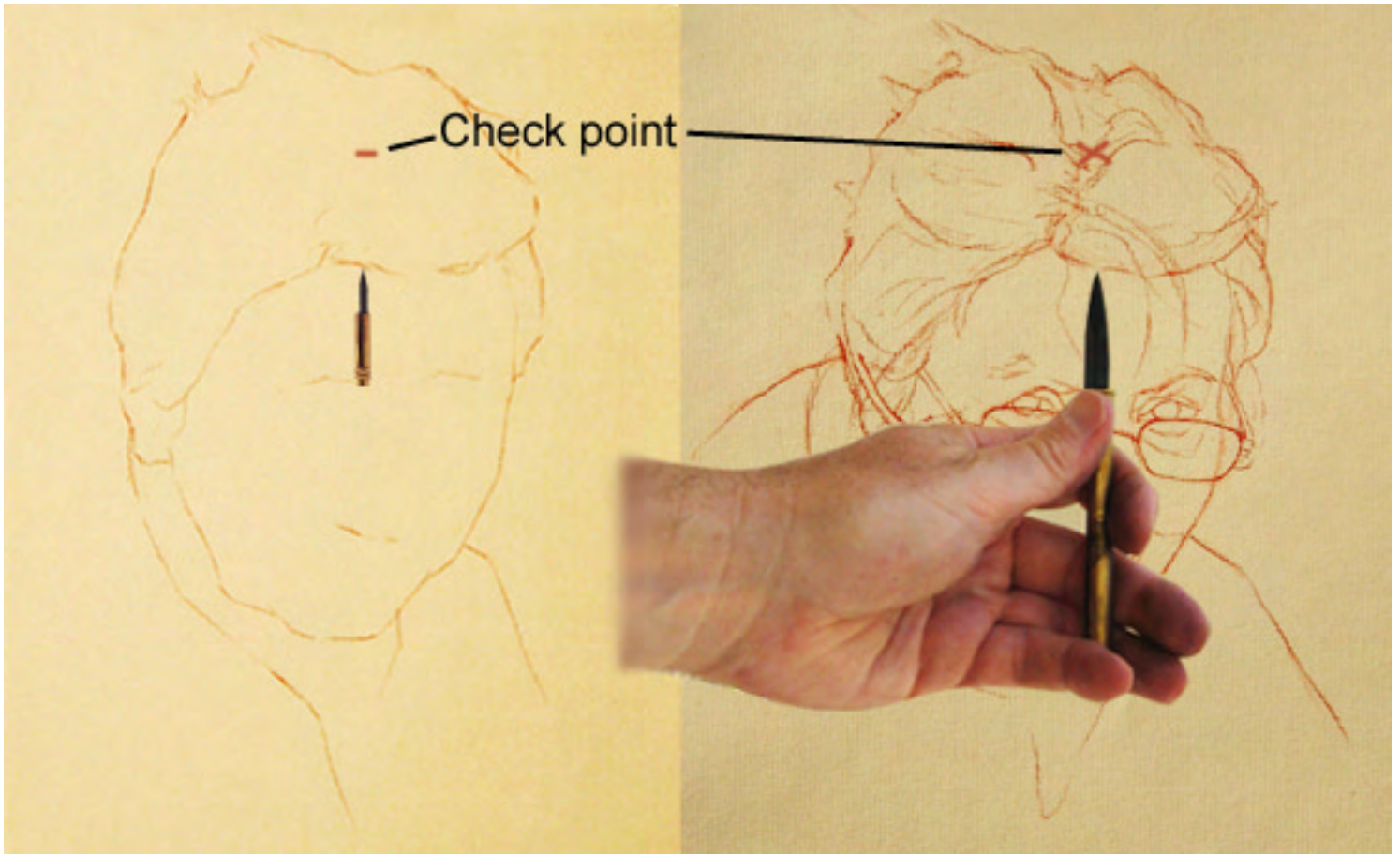
The measure from the base of the chin to the nose is surprising small. This is due to the forward tilt of my model's pose.

Pedagogically presenting an advanced portrait gesture in a beginner drawing course is a risky business and, presumably, I will be castigated for it in some blogger's critique. In my defense let me just state that I present multi-layered courses: not only are you learning how to place landmarks, but also I am breaking down your symbolic preconceptions of what one 'thinks' a portrait drawing should look like. i.e., the eyes are halfway, the nose is again at the midpoint between the eyes and chin, etc., etc.

Less I digress further ... To place the checkpoint for the nose gauge the small distance from the brow line. Having now assiduously studied all of the exercises in the previous lessons of this course you will have little problem placing this checkpoint.

The base of your nose should be exactly halfway between the base of the chin and your checkpoint.

To verify that you have done so correctly hold your plexiglass drawing up to the exercise sheet taped onto your wall.



PLACING THE HAIR LINE:

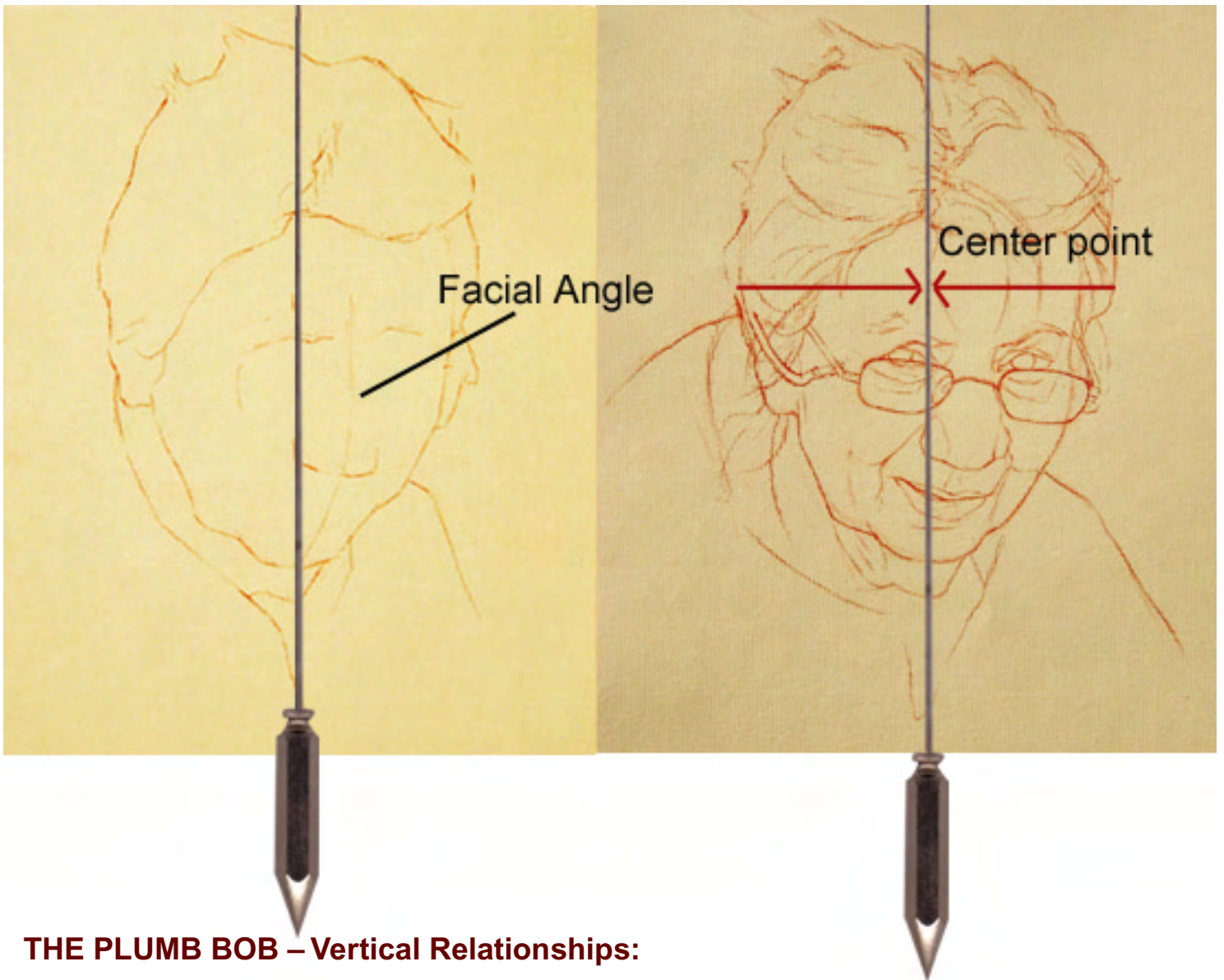
Generally you only need two or three landmarks to map out the facial arena. Using more than three landmarks in your initial drawing, however, is not to your benefit – a multitude of landmarks will only serve to stiffen your drawing and stifle your learning process.

In many instances the hair line can also be quite useful. Again, take your best guess and then sight from the brow line to a point of your choosing on the hair line. It should be perpendicular to your brow line reference point.

As with the brow and nose line first take your best guess, then establish your checkpoint by sighting and gauging the shortest distance and, if all is well, the hair line should be halfway between the brow line and your check point.

Your plexiglass drawing should now reflect the same curious proportions as shown here.





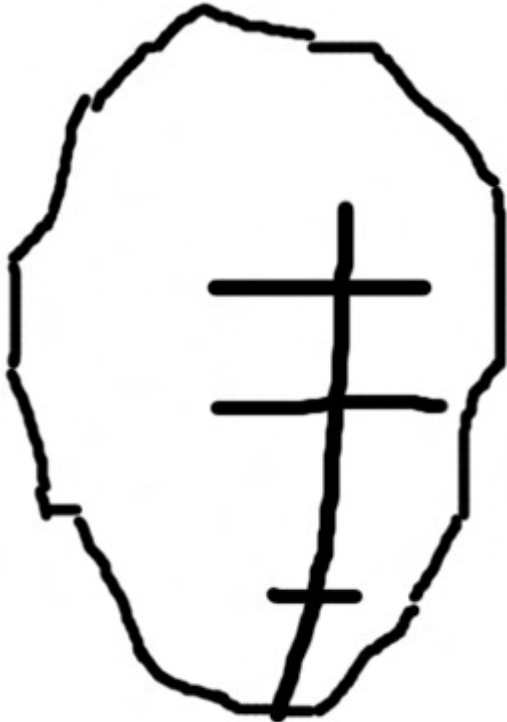
THE PLUMB BOB – Vertical Relationships:

With three readily distinguished horizontal landmarks placed we now need to ensure their overall vertical placement. When drawing a frontal or profile portrait this is a straight forward endeavor. However in a 3/4 view you want to ensure that your features correspond correctly. Imagine a 3/4 view portrait drawing where the features are centered! This is an incongruity that is common to many beginner portrait studies.

A very useful tool to add to your kit is a plumb bob. A plumb bob is easily made from a length, about 12", of thick black thread or a thin string anchored with a weight such as carpenter's plumb-bob. A heavy washer will also do.

Using a plumb bob is quite similar to sighting. At arm's length hold out the plumb bob. You will need to still its swaying so that you can get an accurate reading of the facial angle which is the medial line of the face.

Determining the medial line of the facial arena in a pose that is neither frontal nor profile or even 7/8th's can be tricky. [The medial line, or facial angle, runs through the center of the face: between the eye brows, the *philtrum* (the trough between the nose and upper lip: *philtrum* is the Greek word for 'to love/to kiss') and the *mental protuberance* of the chin's base.]



The solution is to first find the vertical center point of your model's head by sighting. Then vertically plumb from the vertical center point to assess how the various elements, i.e., nose, eye, chin, hair, etc. line up vis-a-vis the plumb line.

In my drawing the plumb line meets the medial line of the face at the center of the *mental protuberance* of the chin. Also aligned with the plumb line is the wing of the nose and the part in the hair at the hairline. Having at least three vertically aligned elements is extremely useful in accurately placing the facial features.

To practice plumbing and placing the facial angle first take your best guess on your plexiglass drawing and compare it to the PDF print out of my drawing.

This is as far as you need to go for setting up the architecture of a portrait. The next step is to proceed with blocking in the primary light/dark pattern.

EXERCISE 1



EXERCISE 2

Hair line



Brow line



Nose line



EXERCISE 3



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Lesson 4: Elements of Form

Form is the 3-dimensional shape of an object. A more accurate term, though, is plasticity. Plasticity is the illusion of 3-dimensionality rendered on a flat plane (the 2-dimensional pictorial surface, i.e., your paper).

There are numerous approaches to rendering plastic form: Value (the relative lightness and darkness of one area to another); color; line (perspective, for example); and tone (or shading) are some of these.

For this lesson tone shall be the considered approach. Tone can be applied by direct application of drawing material (such as charcoal) and then smeared, or stumped, to describe the form of an object or by manipulation of the sharpened pencil.

The historical approach to rendering plastic form with the sharpened pencil is by cross-hatching. Cross-hatching is the marking of a series of parallel lines within a given area. To further darken, or tone down, that area another series of parallel lines are laid down over the previous series. And so on and so on.

Cross-hatching is a learned skill. It looks easy to do until you actually attempt it. Quite often, uncontrolled cross-hatching reads as flat, unconvincing and, worse, a helter-skelter mish-mash of chicken scrawls.

The beginning artist should always learn to render tone using a single light source. The intensity of light on a subject diminishes astonishingly quick. In my graphite portrait drawing of a dancer (Siobhan – and, yes, her sternal notch was really aligned as I have drawn it. I don't **fix** portraits. In my practice that is a correspondence of integrity between artist and sitter.) I have cross-hatched the full stretch of tone from highlight (the paper) to accent (the darkest dark).

The following four exercises will develop your cross-hatching skills to a competent level. But you do have to practice diligently.



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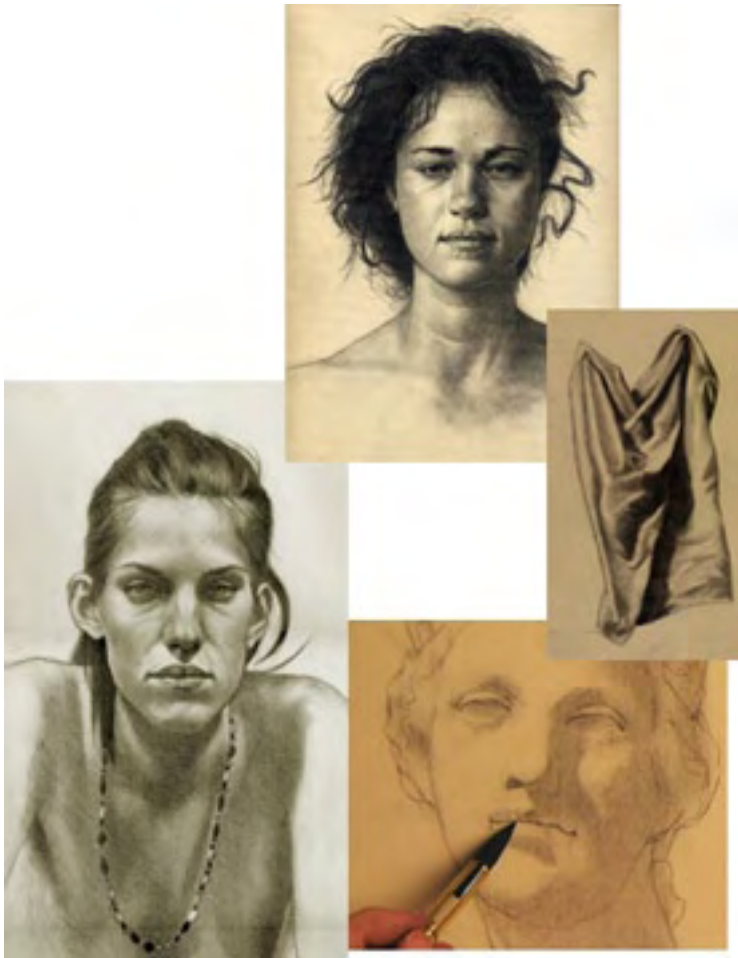


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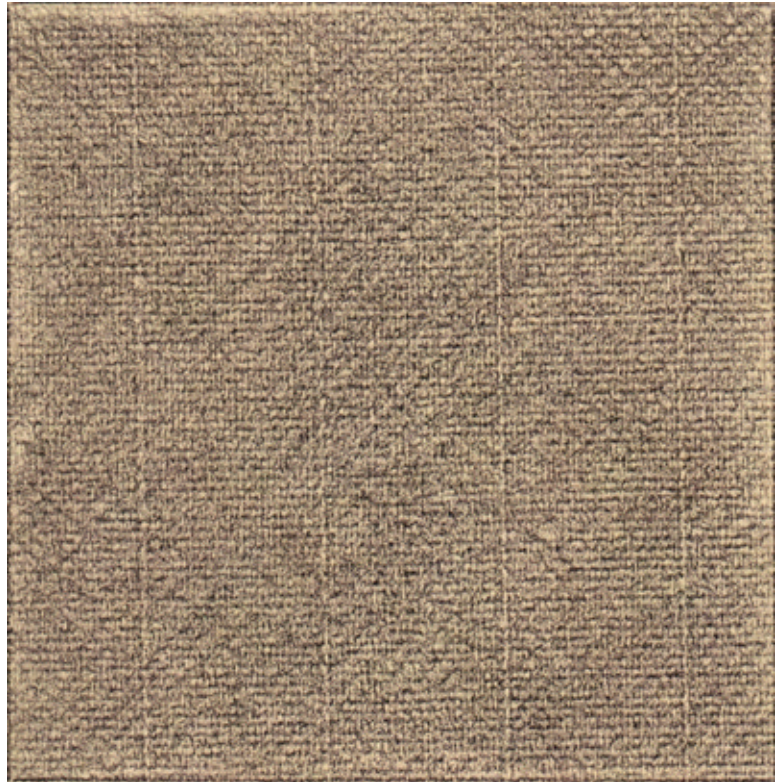
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Cross-Hatching: Exercise 1

Using a small piece of Ingres ivory or buff colored paper sketch out a square that is approximately 4 x 4 inches.

Within this square using super sharp 8B pencils (any type of pencil will suffice. In fact, you should gain experience with many different types) tone the square evenly with cross-hatching as demonstrated on DVD 1 of my [Beginning to Draw Workshop](#).

The objective is to develop your skill so that you can lay down an even tone. Be prepared to do this exercise about six or eight times before you really get the hang of it.



Cross-Hatching: Exercise 2 – the tone strip



Begin by using a ruler to draw a strip about 1½” high and 9” long and divide this strip into 9 equal rectangles. To maximize your learning use the same kind of paper that you use for your portrait and figure drawing. In this case I am using Fabriano Ingres ivory colored paper.

Using a Staedtler Mars Lumograph 8B pencil that is super sharp cross-hatch rectangle #9 until it is as dark and even as you can possibly get it. This will be Black, your deepest value, Rectangle #1 will be your White, your lightest value. Rectangle #5 is your middle value. This needs to be halfway between your lightest value in Rectangle #1 and your Black in Rectangle #9. Each rectangle between #1 and 5 are your light to middle values and rectangles #2, 3 and 4 should proceed in logical tonal sequence.

Rectangles #6 to 9 are your darks and, again, must proceed in a logical tonal progression.

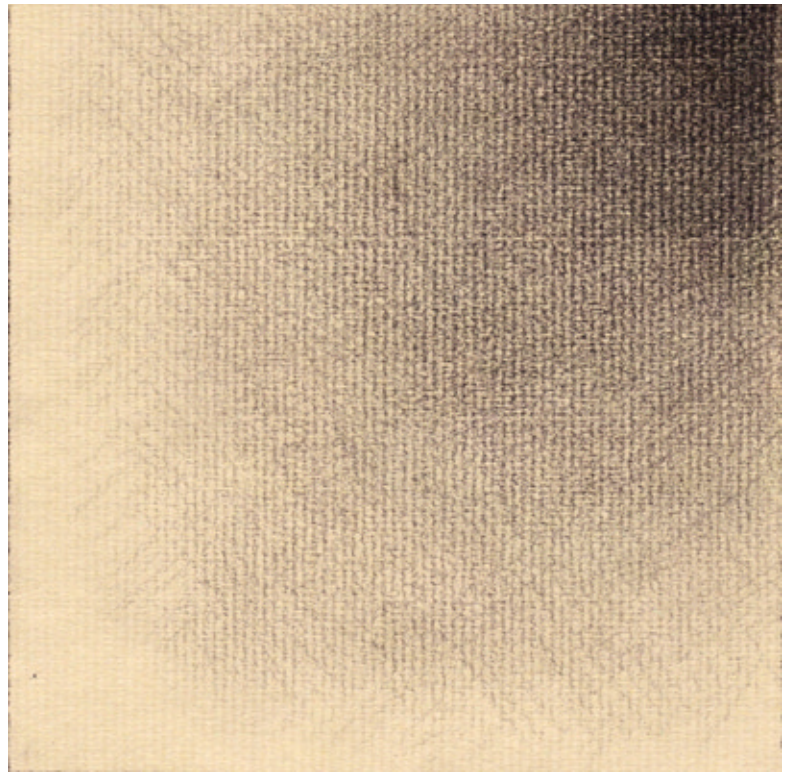
Your 8B will dull quite quickly and it is imperative that you always work with a sharp pencil. Therefore you might want to have at least six 8B’s sharpened up and ready to go. You will be using only the 8B throughout this exercise. Frankly, it is not that easy but in your struggle you will learn a lot. Expect to have to adjust your values as the exercise progresses.

Cross-Hatching: Exercise 3

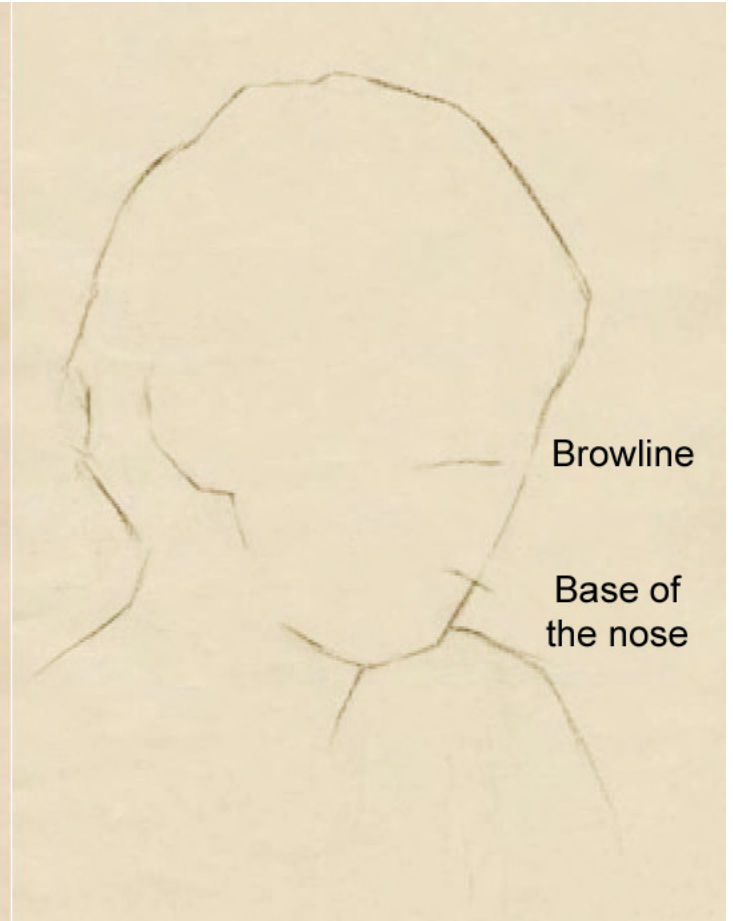
Using a small piece of Ingres ivory or buff colored paper sketch out a square that is approximately 4 x 4 inches.

The objective here is to develop the skill of graded tone using cross-hatching. This skill is essential for rendering plastic form.

The example shown here is a gradation from dark to light radiating from the upper right corner. Once you have gained a competency with this, try a variety of patterns, such as dark to light radiating from the center and vice-versa.



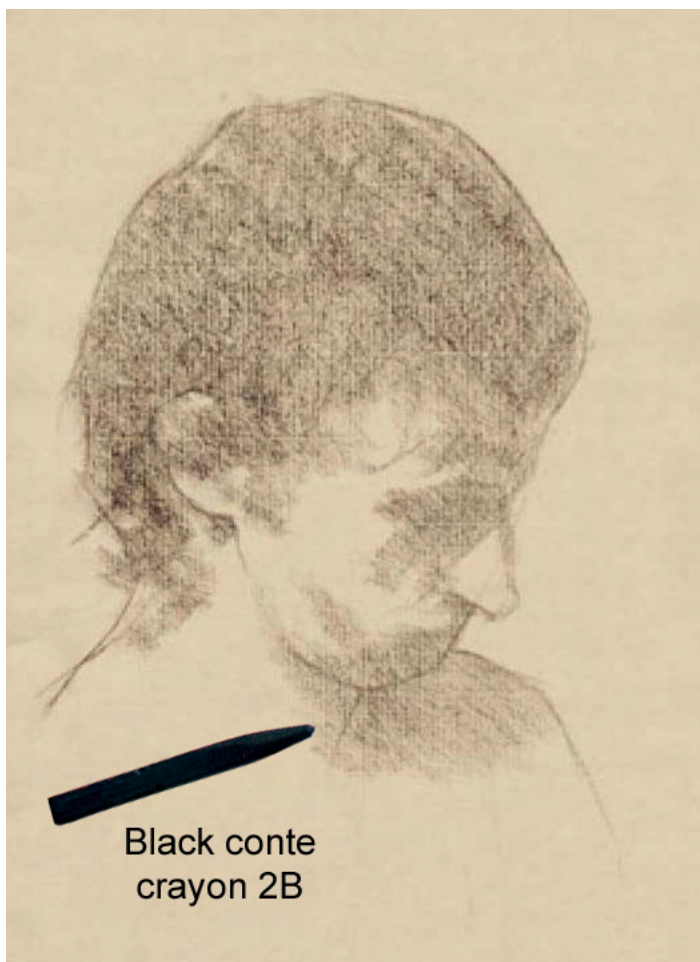
Carving Form with a Sculptural Sensibility



A 2B or 4B (soft) black conté crayon is an excellent media for pushing tone. You can also use charcoal for this exercise. My preference is conté sharpened to a point which is purely a personal choice. If your portrait drawing is not your chosen genre you can apply this process to both still-life and landscape. I've chosen this pose for its tonal and sculptural qualities. Also, in this forward canting pose the specific elements of portrait drawing are obviated.

In the previous lessons of this beginner's drawing course you learned how to accurately strike the arabesque and establish the major landmarks. The three major landmarks for this drawing are the brow ridge, the base of the nose and the Condyle (the hinge of the jaw where it meets the ear lobe). The full anatomical term for the Condyle is the *Temporomandibular Articulation*.

On an 11 x 14" piece of good drawing paper (I used a buff colored Fabriano Ingres – working on newsprint or a heavily deckled paper will only give you grief) strike the arabesque and landmarks using either black conté or charcoal. **Note:** They do not readily mix so choose one or the other. At the end of this lesson I have included a photograph of this pose that you can use for this exercise.



Blocking In

Using the flat edge of a small piece of conté or charcoal lay in the overall dark pattern of the head with a singular and even midtone. #3 on the tone scale is a good choice. This is called **blocking in**.

The worst thing a beginner can do is to begin by working up a small area to completion (usually the eye) and growing out the form from there as if it were a fungal growth. That is a poor practice.

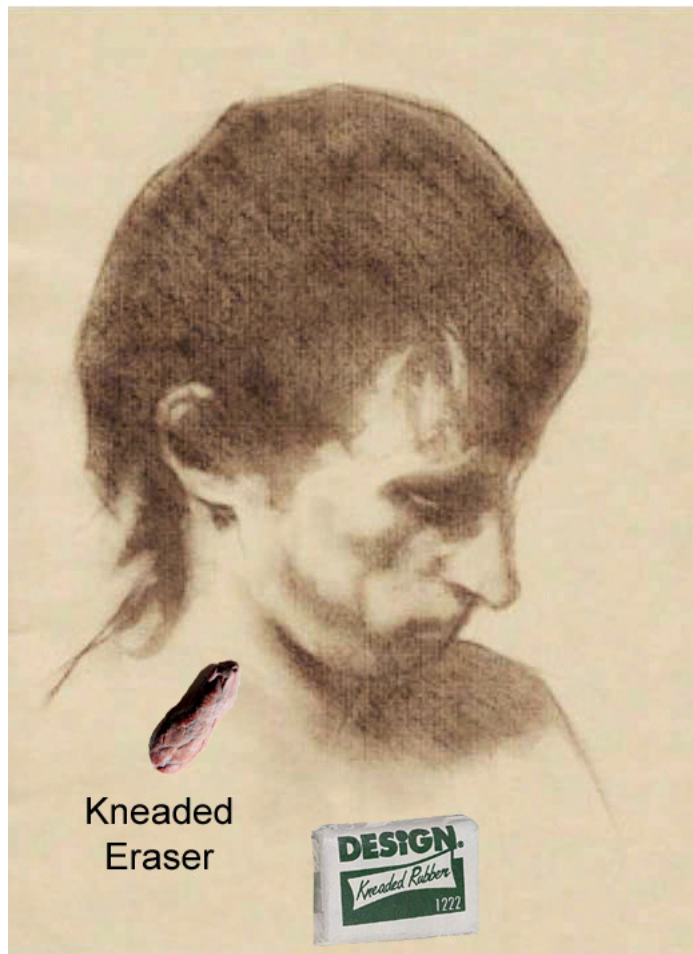
Instead you want to envision the overall dark pattern as a single unit. With the training you have acquired thus far in this course accurately blocking in this head should present only a manageable level of difficulty. Expect at least three attempts to achieve a satisfactory result. And with each attempt I strongly recommend beginning anew.

Stumping Down

With your little finger held betwixt your thumb and ring finger stomp down the dark pigment so that you effect a solid unified tone. **Note:** Using a tortillon or paper stump at this initial stage will literally kill your drawing.

This stumping down is very much akin to scrubbing in with a large bristle paint brush. Because we are using our little finger it is more useful to think of stumping as carving out the dark pattern. Much like punching and kneading form in clay.

Stumping down is not precision work. It will get a little messy – edges will soften and your more delicate areas will become lost – and that is part of the process. It's best to think of this as a controlled mess. The emphasis is on **control**.



Kneaded
Eraser

The Kneaded Eraser

Kneaded erasers are sold as gray, cellophane wrapped rubber squares. First, remove the wrapping completely and, second, manipulate the flat square of gum into an elongated ball.

The kneaded eraser is used primarily for lifting out (or better still, painting out) the light forms.

You can knead the eraser into a variety of brush shapes as the need dictates: for large flat areas of light a $\frac{1}{2}$ or $\frac{3}{4}$ " bright brush shape (short and squared-off) works best. For small, thin light lines such as the light on the eye lid you can pinch the kneaded eraser into a sharp chisel edge.

As you did with the overall dark pattern use your kneaded eraser to paint out the major light forms as one tone.

ADD + SUBTRACT

Working up form is an additive/subtractive process of applying pigment and lifting it out. Having now established my primary light/dark pattern I return to the darks and begin the process of carving out the shadowed forms by cross-hatching with a very sharp 2B black conté crayon.

This is both a practice of observation and acquired knowledge. What you want to look for are the shapes of cast shadows – a dark that is formed by the shadow cast upon it by an object such as the shadow cast by the brow ridge into the eye socket area – and form shadows. Form shadows are those whose planes turn gradually away from the light source.

The edges of your darks are important. Generally, cast shadows have a hard edge; form shadows have soft edges.

Acquiring the skill of modeling form is not easily learned from books. Unfortunately the theory of light and shading comes up short in describing the actual *how-to* of building form. The additive/subtractive process of modeling form is something that needs to be observed quite a few times.

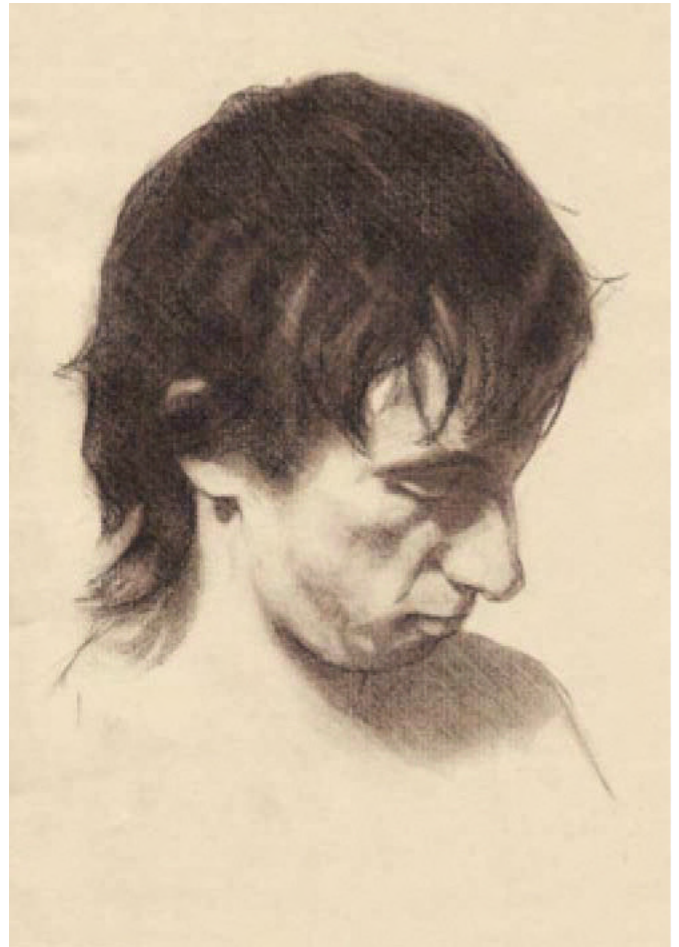
Within the limited time constraints of a classroom/studio it is nigh impossible for an instructor to present a comprehensive demonstration. The few who do attempt long, detailed in-class demonstrations can usually count on being summoned to the faculty administration office to answer the inevitable complaint of a disgruntled student: ***I came here to draw, not watch him draw!***

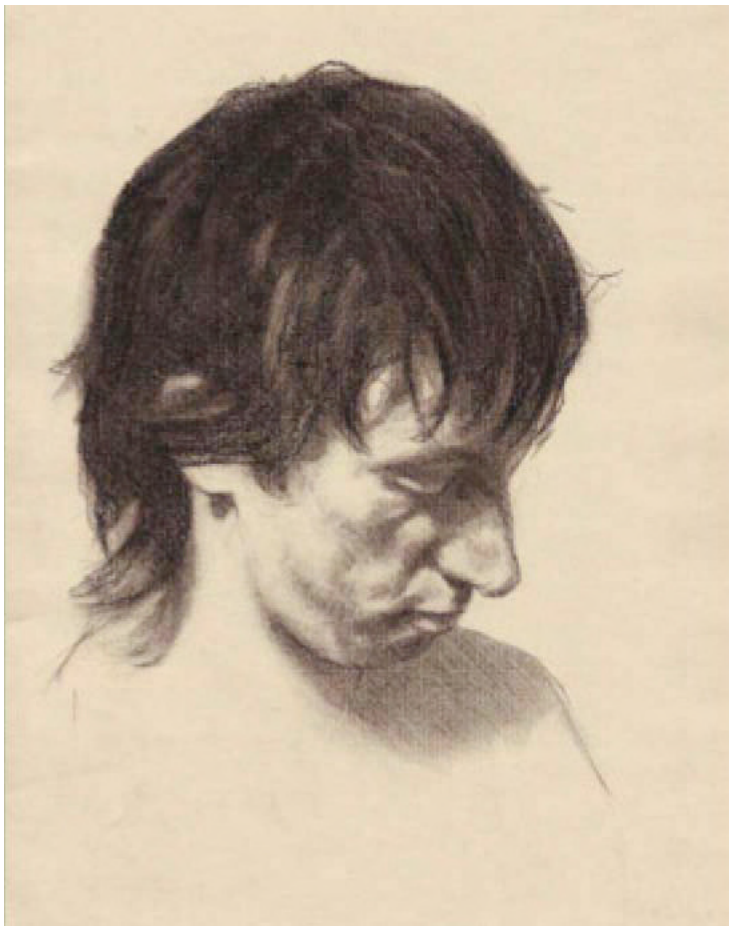
A case in point: as a student all too many years ago a well-respected instructor corralled all of us into a corner of a studio on the third floor of the Art Students League in New York and set up a single large canvas on an easel. For the next three Saturdays – 18 hours all told! – he drew and painted and said nothing. We were instructed to watch and learn.

Needless to say, within the first four hours of this sustained demonstration murmurings of mutiny rippled through the class. The instructor stuck to his brushes. By the afternoon long break a chorus of unhappy students chimed their collective displeasure and chagrin in the registration office.

Still the instructor continued and the class dwindled in size. By the third Saturday of the never-ending demonstration only three of us remained. Admittedly this was tough going and I was starting to get peeved. The slow, interminable process of applying and manipulating pigment to build form was to us, the captive audience, akin to watching paint dry.

The result though was that the lessons learned just by watching and absorbing were immense. Those three Saturdays spent observing how form is methodically built up, and admittedly some grumbling on my part, actually saved me years of study.





There are no short cuts to learning how to draw and model form. I believe that it is truly a matter of respecting the art.

One of the many benefits of studying from video is that you can actually just sit back watch the additive/subtractive process of building form without having to endure sitting on a hard bench in a poorly heated studio nursing a tepid cup of coffee. Plus you can watch the pertinent lessons over and over again.

I filmed my **Practice of Tone Workshop** precisely for those who want to really learn how to model form. This is a 4-hour program that focuses on the facial arena of a 25 year old. The media I used is sanguine conte which is more difficult to use than black conte but produces exquisite drawings.

In a dramatically lit pose such as this it is a fairly straight forward process to knit the dark pattern into the light thus articulating the middle darks and lights. In portrait drawing there will come a time, sooner rather than later, when you will feel compelled to understand the anatomy.

Beginning and intermediate artists often fail to go for the full tonal stretch. Quite often the reason for this is the fear of ruining the drawing and also because they have read, or been told, not to overwork the drawing. My feeling on this subject is that as a student you should take a drawing as far as you possibly can. Even to the point of collapse; that way you will learn exactly how far you can go. If you always stop short you will never know what jewels might lay ahead.



**NOW YOU TRY!
HERE'S YOUR COMPLIMENTARY MODEL SHOT OF THE
IMAGE USED IN THIS TUTORIAL.**

Foundation in Drawing for the Beginning Artist

Lesson 5: Qualities of Line

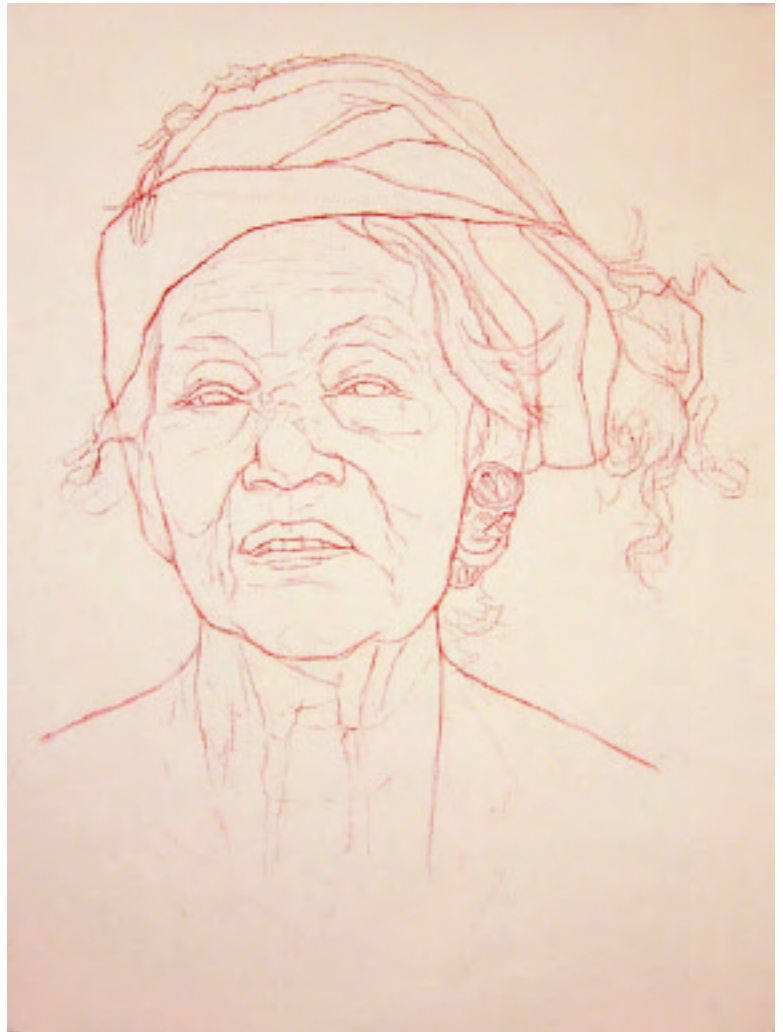
There are, generally speaking, five types of line drawing: contour, blind contour, continuous, gesture and constructive. Each type of line drawing expresses its own language in terms of movement, rhythm, proportion and density.

A line drawing is not meant to fully describe an object's form (whether it be a still life, landscape or portrait), but instead serves to capture the distilled elements and characteristics of the subject.

Contour Line Drawing

The contour line expresses weight by using a heavier line and, conversely, delicacy with a light line. Perspective is also suggested with line weight: heavier lines advance while lighter lines recede. At more advanced drawing levels you can express both bold and delicate form with a single dynamic contour line.

Picasso's drawing, *Les Moissonneurs*, expresses voluptuous volume using contour line. The exaggerated thickness of the figures denote a heaviness that well suggests the torpor of a midafternoon nap.



The Blind Contour Drawing

An excellent exercise for developing your sense of tactile form is the blind contour drawing. Looking only at your subject draw the contour with one continuous line. The purpose is to **visually feel** the form. Don't worry about the proportions; that will come later once you have developed your hand/eye coordination. The blind contour should be drawn as slowly as possible – think of it as drawing a line with a sculptural sensibility.

Continuous Line Drawing

Similar to the blind contour drawing but this is not just an exercise but a work of art. Each line is rendered continuously to depict a form. Henri Matisse, amongst others, was an absolute master of the continuous line drawing. Matisse's line drawings are deceptively simple; their power derives not only from the exceptional economy and grace of line but also from the subtly suggested volumes of form.



Henri Matisse

Gesture Line Drawing

The gestural line drawing is a quick and spontaneous depiction of a pose or instance. Gesture drawings are also known as action drawings. The focus in gesture

drawing is to capture both movement and weight. Many artists begin their day with gesture drawings to loosen up.



Egon Schiele

The Austrian artist, Egon Schiele (1890-1918) drew many gestural self-portraits with a powerfully expressive angularity. Schiele's modus was not to describe volume and grace but raw expressive emotion.

Constructive Line Drawing

The constructive line drawing is generally

a preparatory study for a more sustained work such as a painting. It is a traditional study of form and proportion. The drawing by Ingres, the leading artist of the French Classical school of painting, is a preparatory drawing for the larger commissioned painting. Ingres's masterful handling of black and red conté renders firm contours and delicate tonal nuances of form.



J.A.D. Ingres, *Study of a Portrait of Madame Moitessier*, circa 1844

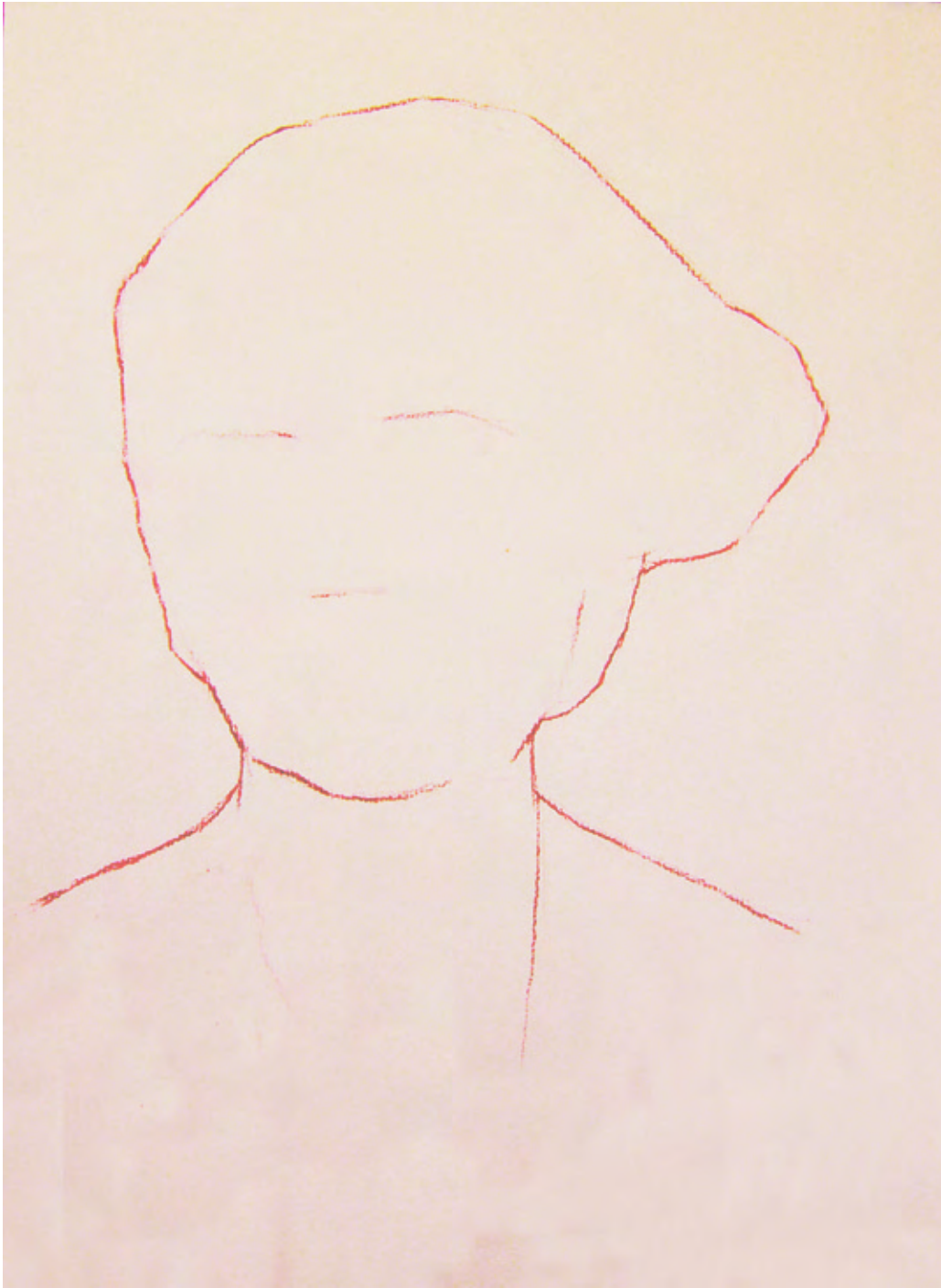


A linear drawing can be a work of art in and of itself; the linear drawing can also be directed as a preparatory drawing for a more sustained work such as a painting. The term for a preparatory drawing is cartoon. The cartoon is transferred onto the painting service using either graphite transfer paper or pumicing the back of the cartoon with charcoal dust and then using it as you would carbon paper. A cartoon is quite often a constructive drawing where the focus of line is on determining form rather than expressing movement.

My intent for this contour drawing of a young girl was to impart a sense of fluidity and movement with a deliberate economy of means. This meant that I had to draw with both sureness and accuracy.

I simplified and stylized the locks of hair to reinforce the *in sinistra* movement and also to reinforce the sense of a fleeting moment.

The contour line portrait drawing relies heavily on one's ingrained training in the fundamentals of drawing. You have to make rapid decisions and rely on both your training and intuition.



Working with sharpened sanguine conté on a quarter sheet of Fabriano Ingres drawing paper I quickly established the Arabesque. The Arabesque is the entire outside shape of the head including the headress, it is better not to include minor elements such as the dangling locks of hair. After checking that my overall height/width proportion was correct I then lightly indicated the placement of the brow-ridge and the base of the nose.

When striking the arabesque architectonically succinct lines proffer a sense of solid form. What I mean by this is that I employ short straight lines to describe rounded shapes. Keep your initial lines quite light, my lines shown here are significantly darker than I would normally use; the reason for this is so that you can see what I have done here.

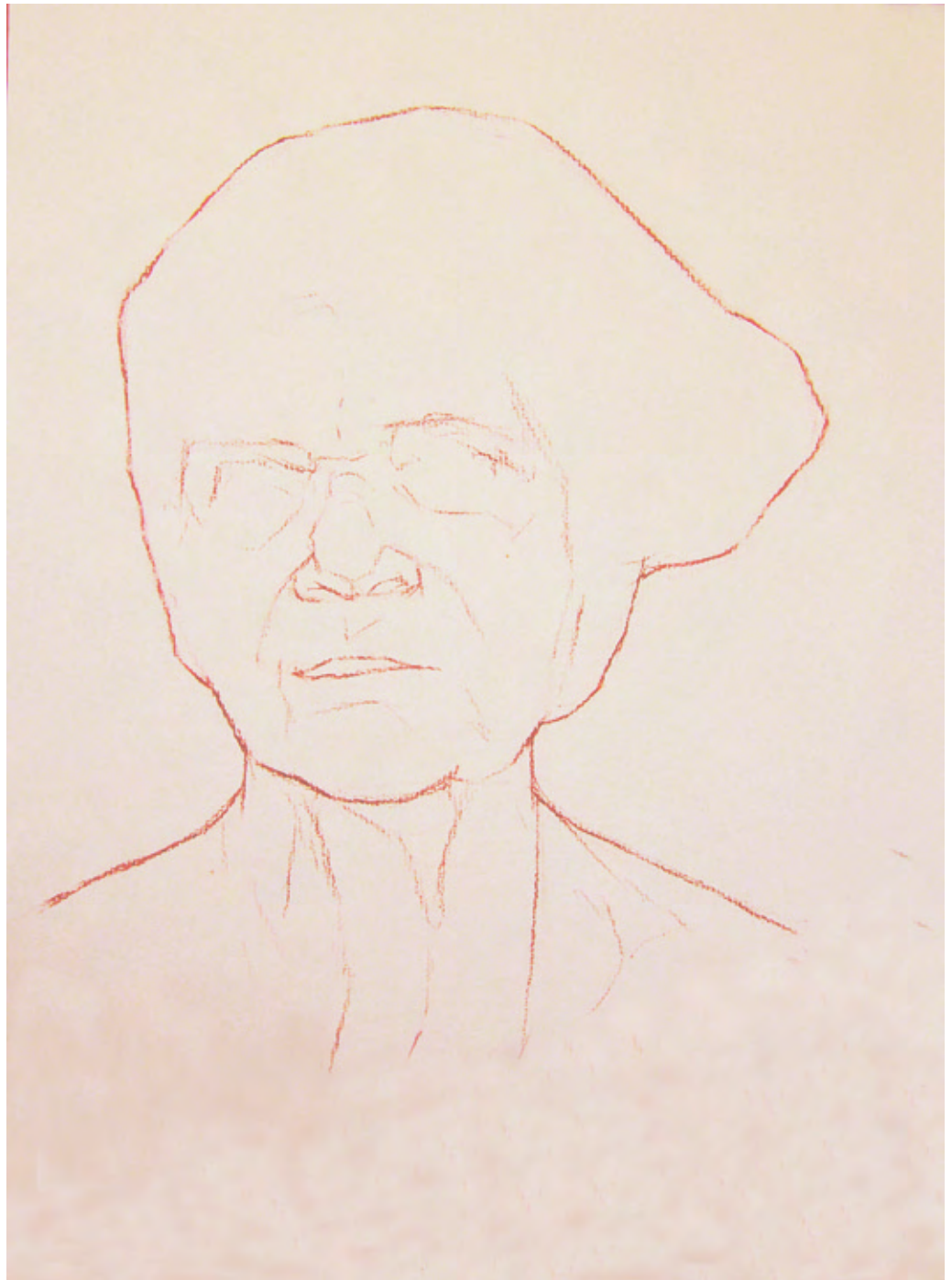
With the constructive line drawing the structure of forms only need be suggested rather than fully rendered. Suggesting form accurately in portrait drawing requires a solid understanding of anatomy and facial structure. True, one can travel a fair distance without the anatomical knowledge but there will come a time when you cannot progress any further without it.

I lightly sketched in the nose first (this is the largest facial feature and its correct placement makes it much easier to place the eyes and mouth), followed by the eye sockets (not the eyes! This is important), the cheeks and the interstice of the mouth. I strongly suggest not drawing the borders of the lips at this point; save those expressive lines for later.

When drawing the mature portrait you need to consider the aging process of the skull and musculature.

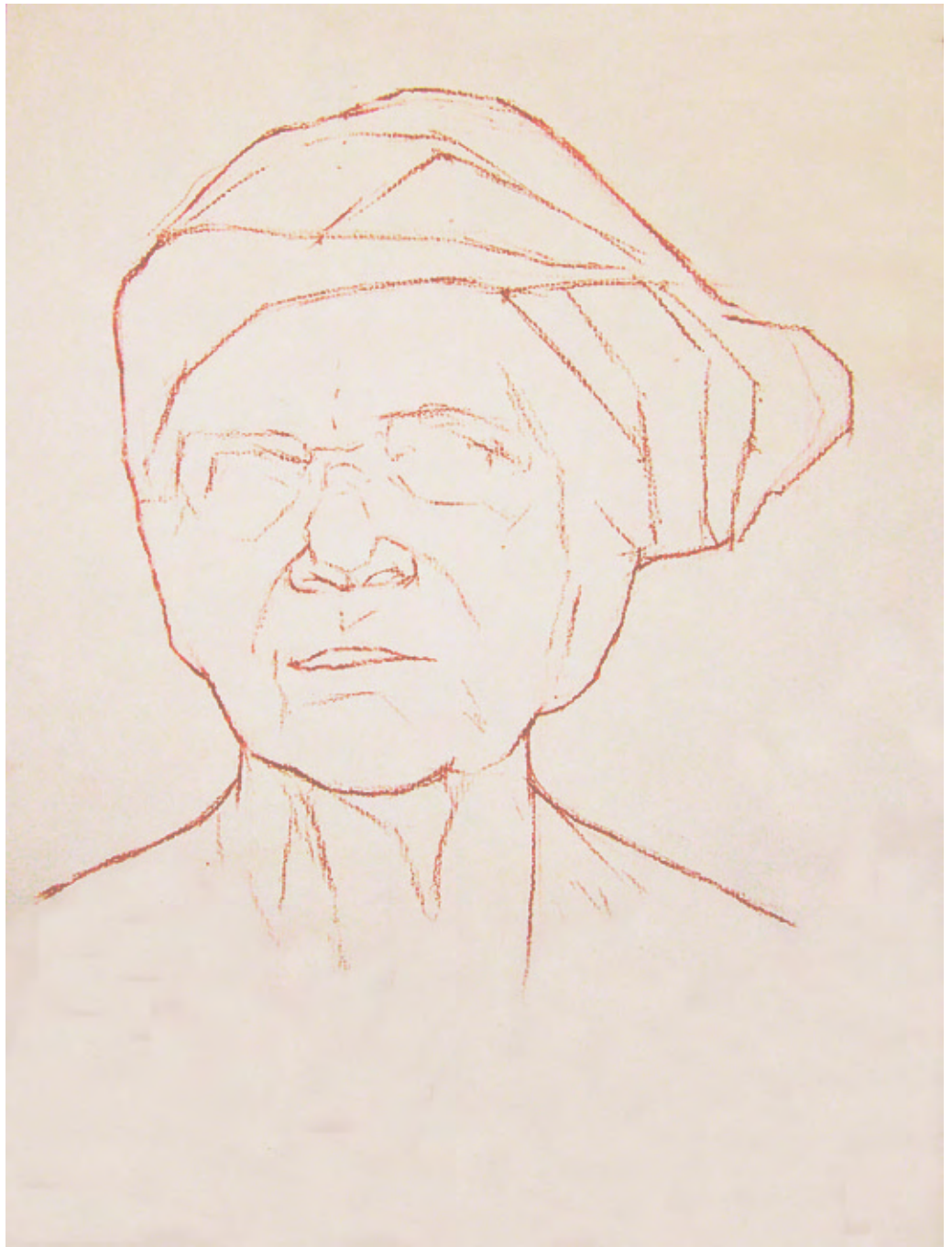
The facial bones contract and their edges appear sharpened. The musculature thins (there are exceptions, of course, with larger people) and gravity extracts its toll.

When it comes to drawing the wrinkles I am usually faced with a dilemma: overdo the wrinkles and you end up with a shrivelled potato look. Avoiding the wrinkles altogether leaves you with a 'cosmetic' portrait. A cosmetic portrait is one whose only purpose is to flatter the sitter – historically an important consideration especially when in centuries past an unhappy and unflattered client had the means and disposition to imprison you or worse. But today conveying a strong sense of character and lived history is more important than a pretty picture. And that is the deciding factor in how far one should take the wrinkles. Suffice it to say that wrinkles follow and define the underlying skeleto-muscular structure of the face and neck.



My next decision, drawing and painting is really a series of decision making – good and, sometimes, bad, is to sketch in the various folds and twists of the head-dress.

Drapery can be distilled into seven types of folds, each with their own distinct characteristics and logic. These seven folds are the pipe fold, the twopoint fold, the zig zag fold, the halflock fold, the spiral fold, the drop fold, and the inert fold. The headdress is comprised of all the fold types except for the drop and inert folds.



An understanding of the characteristics of drapery goes a long way towards drawing and painting believable clothing. If you find yourself making up folds as you draw then you are significantly weakening your work.

Setting up a 'drapery' still-life – that is, pinning a cloth to the wall or a large board and doing a study of it will do wonders for your powers of observation and skill development. Begin with a light-weight piece of canvas and then move on to a plain white cotton cloth. When you are sufficiently skilled you can then try your hand at patterned drapery.

As with the facial features each component and fold of the headdress should relate to the whole head in terms of shape and proportion.

The stage is now set; the eyes can now be accurately placed by plumbing up from the nose to determine each eye's inner canthus (the inside corner of the eye). The horizontal placement of the eyes is determined from the browridge which is 'felt' more than measured.

A well-trained artist feels measures much like a master cabinet maker; it becomes ingrained. The vermilion borders of the lips are now carefully observed and lightly sketched in. Other elements of the drawing such as the hair and money roll that my laundress carries in her ear are added.



I have also made a number of decisions to rework my lines. To soften the minor folds in the headdress I lessened the intensity of a few lines with my kneaded eraser. Within the facial arena I also slightly lightened a few lines that I felt detracted from the overall sense of three dimensional form. Lighter lines recede whereas heavier lines advance. With practice and experience you will find that your linear drawing becomes more fluid and expressive.

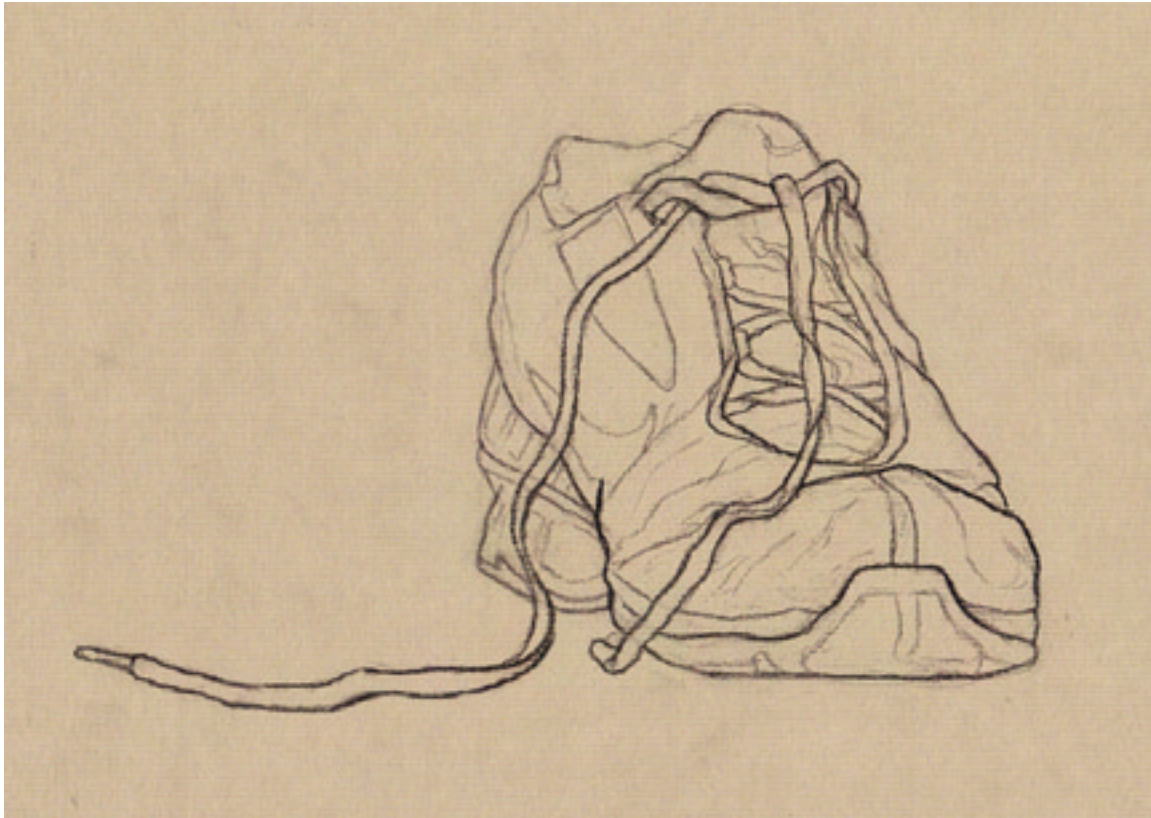


Now that I have a solid foundation I can add the flourishing touches such as the focus of the eyes, wisps of hair and further elaborate upon the roll of money that Made carried in her ear lobe. Establishing the focus of the eyes, or the gaze, is a delicate matter of trial and error and decision making. Like me, you may decide to have the drawing's gaze directly meet the viewer's. This creates a more engaged portrait. On the other hand you may want to have a deferential gaze where the focus is elsewhere.

My practice is to lightly sketch in one eye's iris taking care that it is accurate both proportionately and shape-wise. Then lightly sketch in the other eye's iris. Step back a few feet from your drawing and check the gaze. Be prepared to have to erase your first, and perhaps even second and third, attempt at the iris. Getting the gaze right is a matter of millimeters.

Turning your drawing upside down is a good way to gain an overall sense of your drawing's balance.

Exercise 1: Drawing an Old Shoe

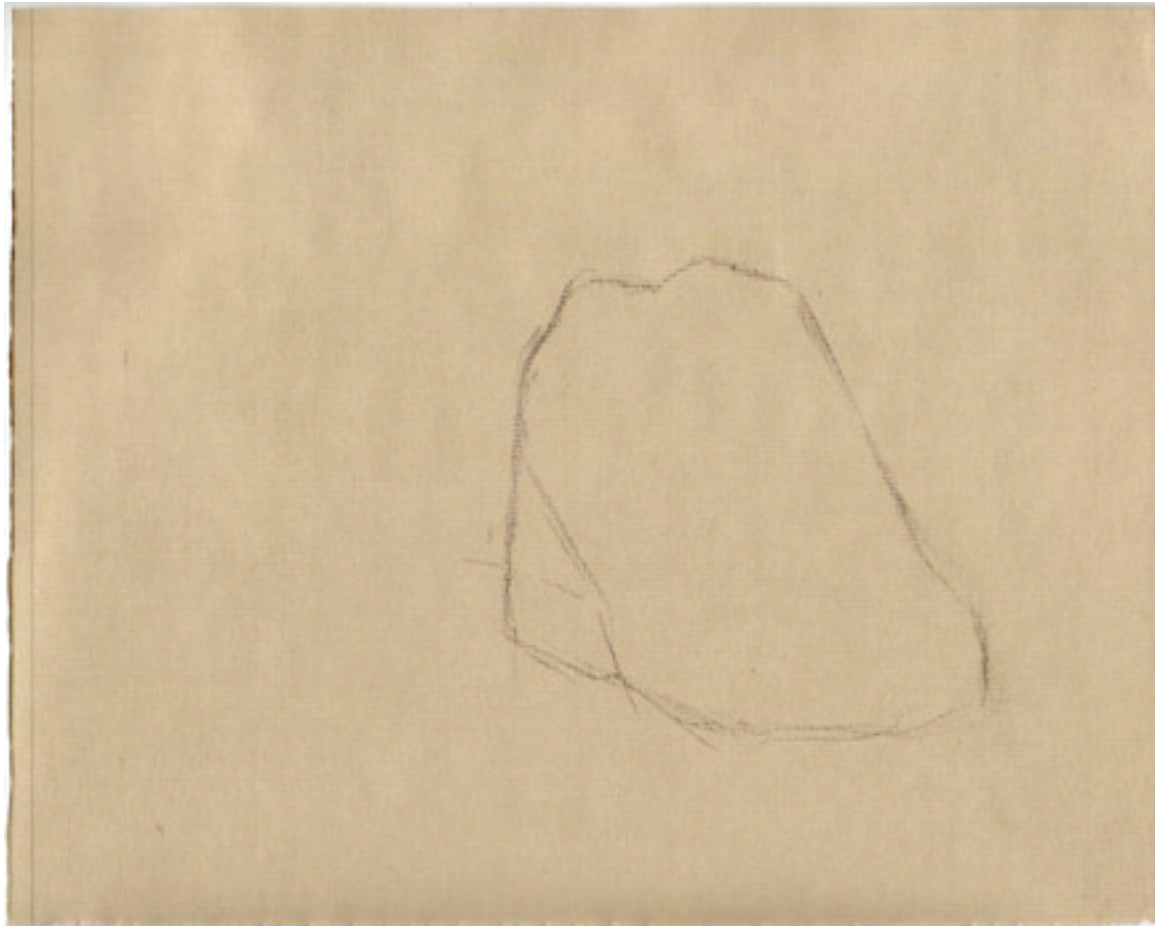


Drawing an old shoe is a time-honored training exercise. This lesson, taken from my [Beginning to Draw Workshop](#) encompasses three important elements in drawing: foreshortening, line quality and composition.

The Post-Impressionist artist Vincent van Gogh painted numerous studies of old shoes. One anecdote speaks of van Gogh as buying an old pair of boots at a flea market and feeling that they were still in too usable condition wore them outside in the rain where he did his utmost to destroy them and thus making for a more interesting subject to paint.

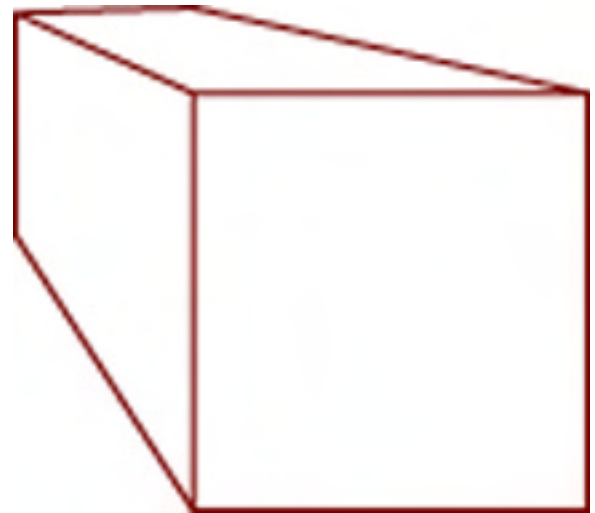
The material in this exercise used is black conté on ivory colored Fabriano Ingres drawing paper. You can also use charcoal or graphite. We will not be using tone in this exercise. Instead the focus is on using line both structurally and expressively.





Foreshortened objects can be a vexing problem for the beginning artist. The primary culprit for this is our preconceived notion of what a given object should look like. Consequently many beginning artists will struggle to combine what they see and what they think an object should look like. The result is generally not a good one.

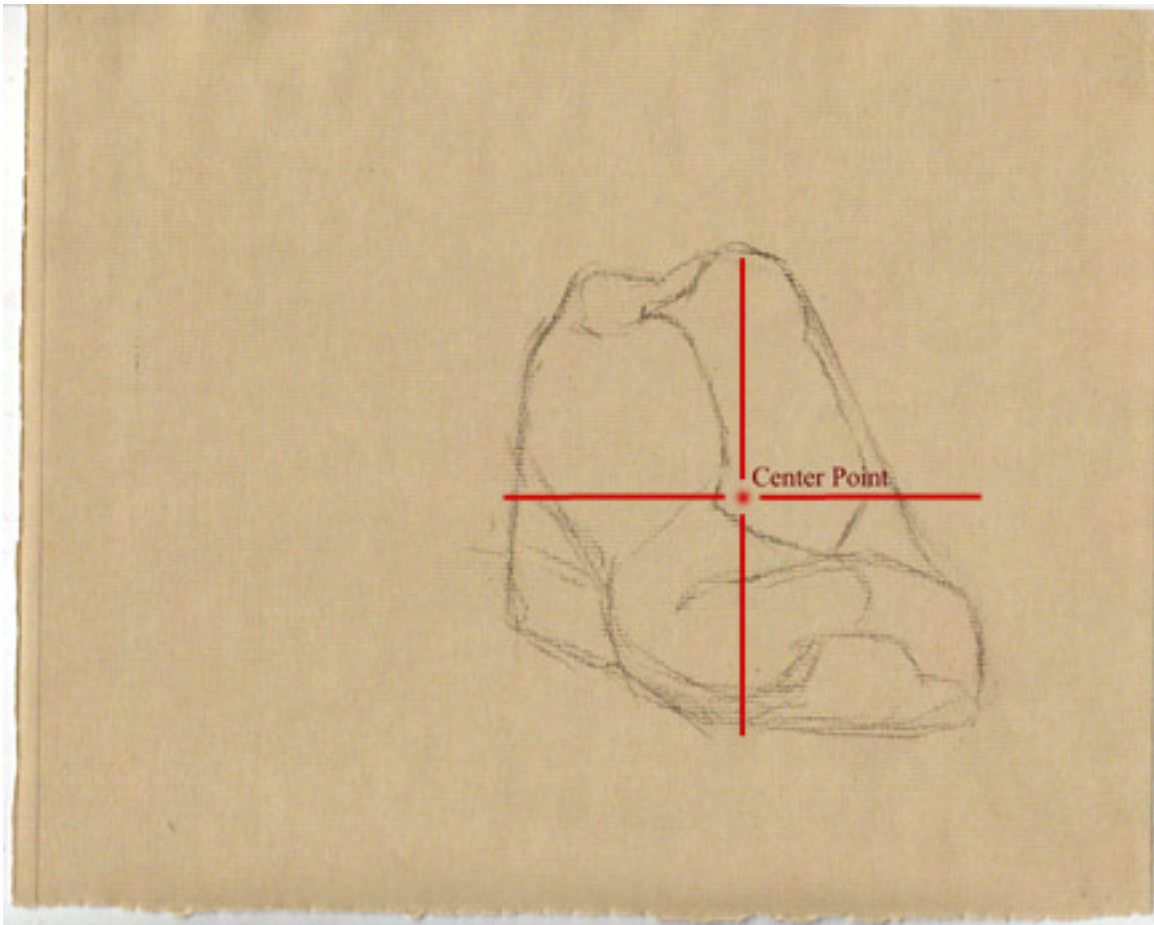
An easy way to understand foreshortening is to envision your shoe in a, well, shoe box. A simple box in perspective is readily understood. The same principle applies to the shoe, or any object for that matter.



However, rendering a foreshortened shoe vis-a-vis a perspectal drawing is a daunting task. There are simply too many planes and variables to be dealt with.

The most efficient approach to drawing a foreshortened object is by accurately striking its arabesque. This encompasses both the shape and proportion. I prefer the term Arabesque as it implies gesture and dynamic relationships rather than Contour which implies a flat outline.

Drawing an accurate arabesque immediately expresses the foreshortened character of the shoe. As I have mentioned many times before striking the arabesque is a learned skill that once acquired establishes a solid foundation for your growth as an artist.

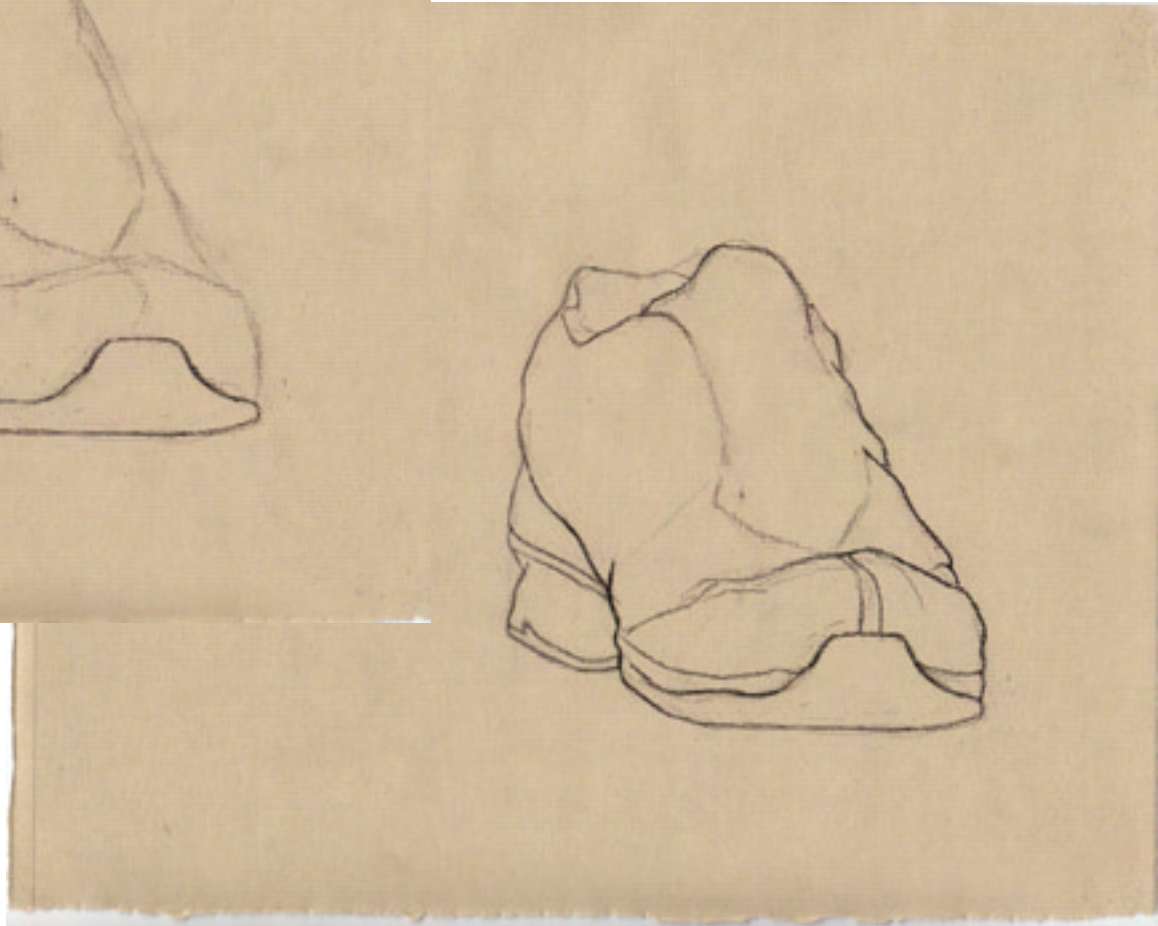


Once the arabesque of the shoe is accurately established the major elements of the shoe (i.e., tongue, heel, toe) need to be placed. These major elements are generally referred to as landmarks.

To accurately gauge the placement of the landmarks I need to establish a checkpoint. The primary height/width proportion of my shoe is a square, thus by using the center of the square as my checkpoint I can more easily relate the placement of the major landmarks.

Lightly sketch in the internal structures of the shoe carefully noting the directional changes of line; this is drawing architectonically.

It is important not to get overly caught up in details, the focus is on establishing the overall character of the shoe.



Drawing linearly requires both an understanding and sensitivity to line quality. The topic of line quality is a large one that will concern you for the entirety of your art career. Suffice it to say that how you handle line plays a major role in how your drawings and paintings are read.

Line can be used to create a sculptural sense of 3-dimensionality. A heavier, darker line will advance while a thinner, lighter line will recede into the picture plane.

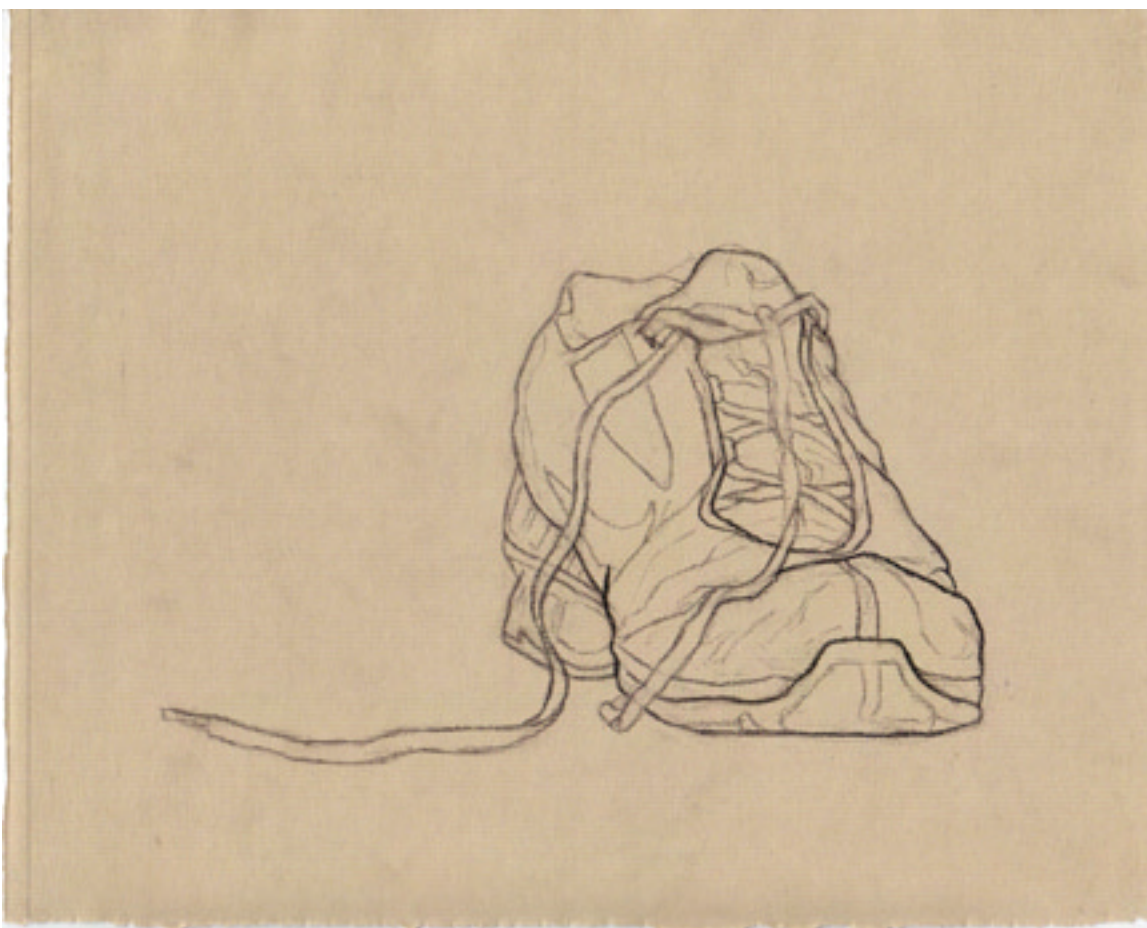
Line also plays its role in conveying the character, or personality, of both the object and the artist. An old running shoe is generally best rendered with short angular lines that express worn and creased leather. Drawing an Art Nouveau vase, on the other hand, might be better expressed with a graceful, serpentine line.



Running shoes require laces. Until now you may have been wondering why I have been drawing the shoe in the right-hand side of my paper: the reason for this is now apparent. Drawing is as much about planning ahead as it is applying contè to paper.

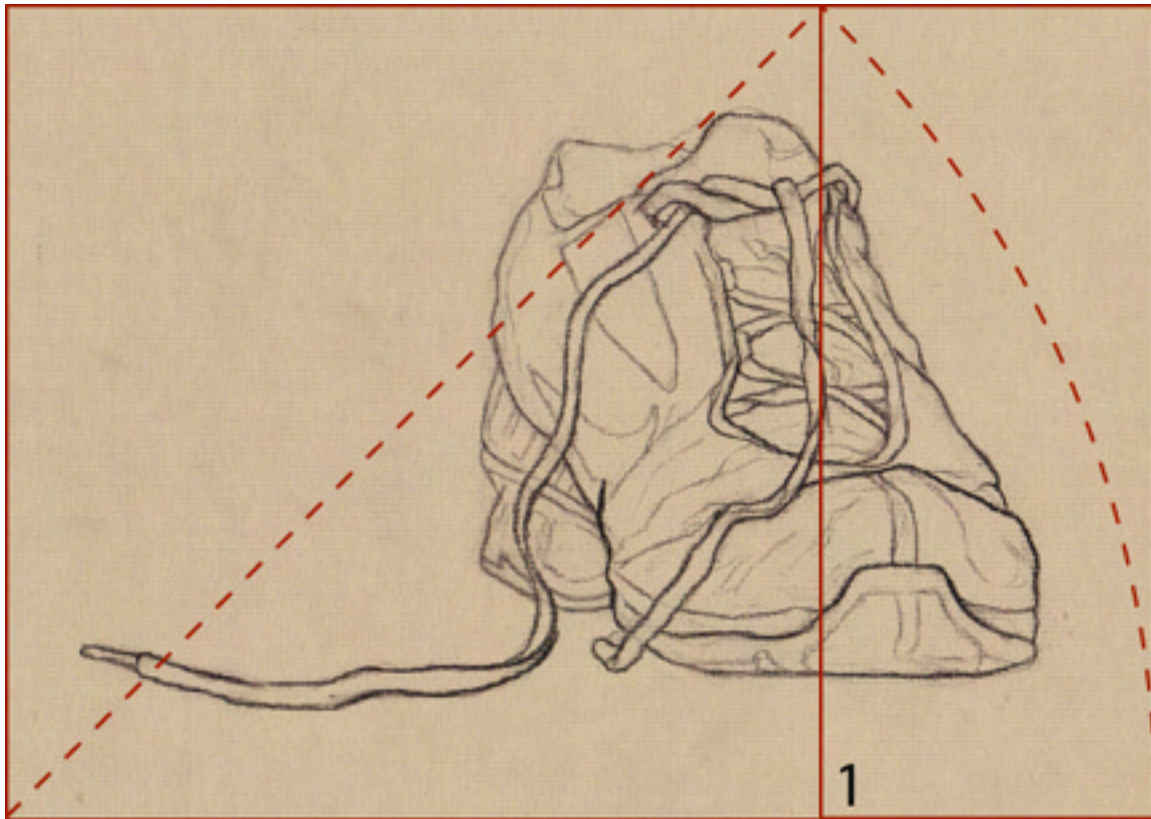
Don't wait until the shoe proper is fully rendered and then adding the laces as an afterthought. These laces, a trifle frayed and twisting, play a large role in this 'drama' of the shoe. It is the diegetic elements such as the shoe laces that tell the story. [Diegetic is a contemporary art term, initially used in film and photography critique, It refers to the interplay of all the components of a scene (image) to the narrative as a whole. Diegesis means "recounted story".]

Initially sketch in the shoe laces lightly taking careful note of their placement, proportion and rhythm. Contè, while a beautiful medium, can be quite temperamental when it comes to erasing – it smudges and can be the devil to lift out cleanly.



Now that the shoe laces are placed I return to the body of the shoe and work up the secondary elements such as the design and logo. Running shoes can proffer indepth discourses on contemporary consumerist culture. Drawings and paintings of old shoes can also express political sensibilities. An example of this is Van Gogh's painting of old work boots that speak of poverty in 19th Century northern Europe. A more contemporary example is the urban American practice of throwing tied shoes onto an overhead electrical line: this is a definite political/cultural statement.

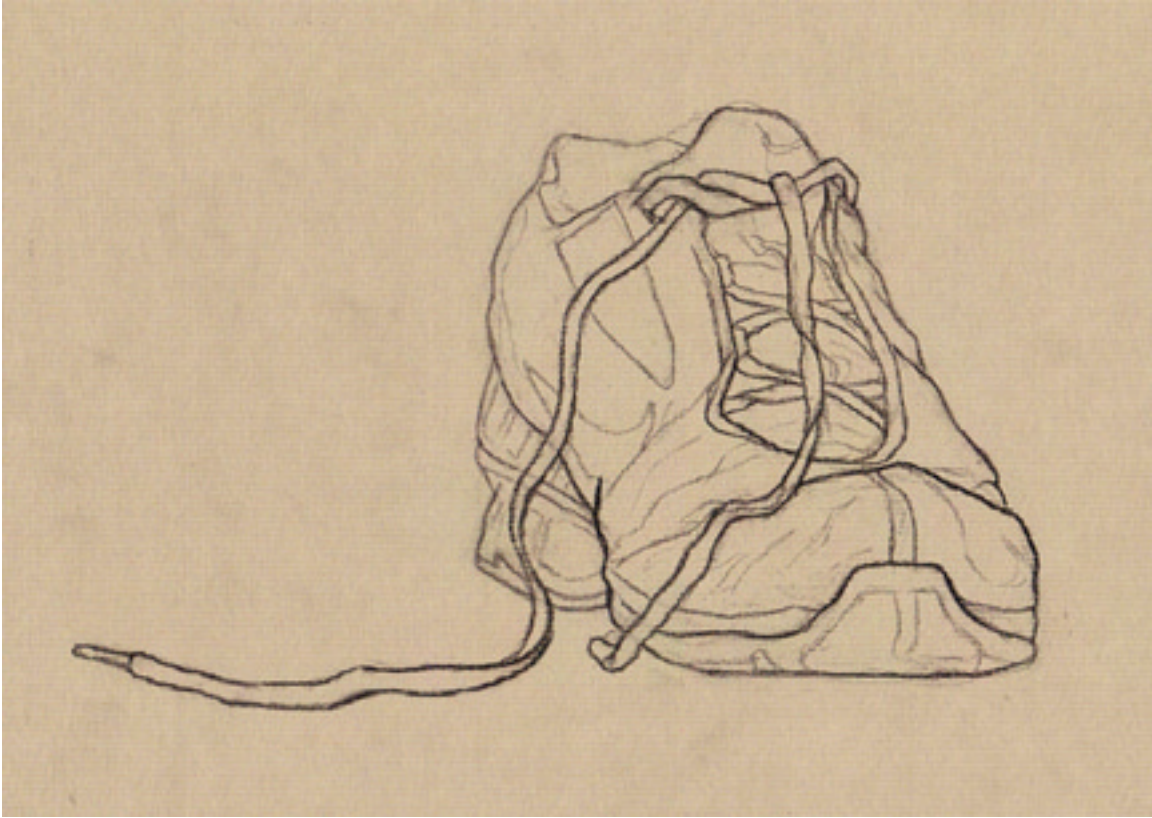
Note how I have used lighter, more delicate lines to render the creases of the shoe's leather. For the shoe's toe I used a heavier line to bring it forward thus creating an illusion of concrete 3-dimensionality.



The external framework of a drawing's composition is also a critically important consideration. A drawing where the object(s) appear to be floating and unanchored is a considerably weakened artwork.

By applying a dynamic $\sqrt{2}$ rectangle the drawing is significantly strengthened. Using dynamic rectangles is a centuries old method of composition known both as Dynamic Symmetry and Symphonic Composition.

A $\sqrt{2}$ rectangle is constructed by first drawing a square (note how I have placed the square – this is called a rabatement (1) and then using the square's diagonal as a radius to determine the length of my composition.



This is the final, resolved drawing of my old running shoe. For your drawings start off by drawing one shoe, then attempt the challenge of drawing a pair of shoes; one shoe foreshortened, the other on its side, for example.

Working with line alone will develop both your visual acuity and sensitivity in terms of handling contè. Be sure to experiment and play with other drawing mediums also such as charcoal and graphite.

My teaching methods are not medium specific. Your development of a solid foundation upon which to grow as an artist is the paramount focus of my instruction.

Foundation in Drawing for the Beginning Artist

Lesson 6: Drawing a Portrait with Sanguine Conté

The urge to leap directly into painting is universal. Painting is the show. The problem, however, is that jumping into painting before understanding how to relate and carve out form is that things will quickly get bogged down. If one cannot handle form in drawing then the myriad challenges of working with pigment, color, temperature, relative values, etc. will completely overwhelm.

In this lesson I will show you a working method that bridges the gap between drawing and painting – a tonal approach to the portrait.

Using an ivory colored sheet of Fabriano Ingres drawing paper, sanguine conté, a couple of paper stumps (or tortillons) and a clean kneaded eraser I will approach this drawing as if I were painting.

Sanguine conté is my favorite drawing medium. It has an expressive quality that appeals to my sensibilities. But it is challenging and somewhat unforgiving – errors are not readily dismissed. For intermediate and advanced artists I would suggest giving sanguine conté a try. For beginning portrait artists charcoal is a much more forgiving medium.

My model is Sonya whom many of you will recognize from my **Mastering Portrait Drawing 1: the frontal pose** Workshop. For those of you who would like to really delve seriously into drawing with conté I have given extensive demonstrations in this medium in the **Beginning to Draw: Foundation of Art Workshop**. Here I cover how to use the medium like a professional, sharpening and handling, using a mahl stick, and how to dig yourself out of a hole without losing your drawing.





Using a sharp conté crayon I strike the arabesque. Keep these initial lines light. You want to encompass the entirety of the head while ignoring superfluous details. With practice and experience your initial strokes will skim across the paper accurately establishing the overall proportion and shape.

This is an acquired skill that takes time and practice. I teach this skill in my **Beginning to Draw** Workshop. It is the first and foremost drawing skill that every realist artist needs.

The common error of beginning with an eye and growing out the portrait like a fungus is a surefire recipe for disaster and frustration. The better, classical approach, is to alternately draw from the outside in and then the inside out.



Once the initial arabesque has been struck and the primary height/width proportion checked and, if need be, corrected the major landmarks are now established. These landmarks are the brow ridge, the base of the nose, the placement of the ears and the overall shape of the face and hair.

I am looking up at my model, hence, the brow ridge is a little higher than I expected it to be plus the lower face appears superlatively larger than one would normally suppose.

This is the reason for using the brow ridge as a major landmark. Attempting to draw a portrait using the generalized anatomical guidelines (i.e., the eyes are at the vertical midpoint, the nose half-way between the eyes and chin, etc.) is a sure-fire prescription for failure. Worse still, relying on generalized anatomical guidelines will seriously limit your growth as an artist.



Holding a small piece of conté with my finger tips I block-in the major dark pattern using the broad side of the conté crayon. It is important that your major dark pattern is only one value. You do not want to start differentiating the range of dark values at this point. The key is to always work from general to specific.

Now the real fun begins. Using my fingers (make sure that they are oil free) I stump down the blocked-in conté so that it is smoothed out and ground into the paper. This stumping-in is not a willy-nilly madness but a careful modeling of form. The result will not be particularly pretty and that's OK.

Using a clean kneaded eraser (in fact, one that has never been used with another medium such as charcoal, graphite, etc.) the lights are first painted out and the forms of the features are further suggested. Ideally you want to be painting out the lights with a sculptural sensibility.





Once you have finger-stumped and painted out the forms to a generalized yet somewhat unresolved state is a step that most beginning and intermediate artists neglect. This is what I refer to as placing the pinpricks.

Using small, succinctly measured marks I fix the features into their exact locations. I find these pinprick spots by sighting and plumbing each feature in relation to the overall head and to the other corresponding features.

This stage of the drawing is equivalent to what is called an underpainting in, well, painting.



Now that the foundation is set the drawing/painting progresses quickly. The features are readily articulated and the light/dark pattern is developed into its relative values of lights and darks.

The forms are now too small to be stumped down with my finger. Instead I use a small number of paper stumps (tortillons) to push and pull the forms into shape. I use the stumps like paint brushes.

This is an additive/subtractive process. I add in a shape of conté, manipulate it like paint with the stump and then remove some it with my kneaded eraser. It is a back and forth process as form is pulled and manipulated into a coherent whole. Books cannot relate this process and, except in very rare cases, there is not sufficient time to demonstrate this in the class-room.



J.E.D. Ingres, *Portrait of M.F.C.H.L. Pouqueville*

In the beginning of this lesson I discussed the problematic issue of using generalized anatomical proportions (i.e., placing the eyes at the vertical midpoint) in your portrait drawing. At best the generalized anatomical proportions work only for portraits drawn straight on – artist's eye to model's eye. In the earlier drawing on the left the brow ridge and base of the nose is indicated. At first glance these proportions look to be off. The lower face in particular seems overly massive. These proportions are seriously conflicting with our symbolic pre-conceptions of what the facial proportions should be. However, in the semi-resolved drawing on the right the same proportions remain but now read as correct. Remember, I am sitting slightly below the model looking up at her.

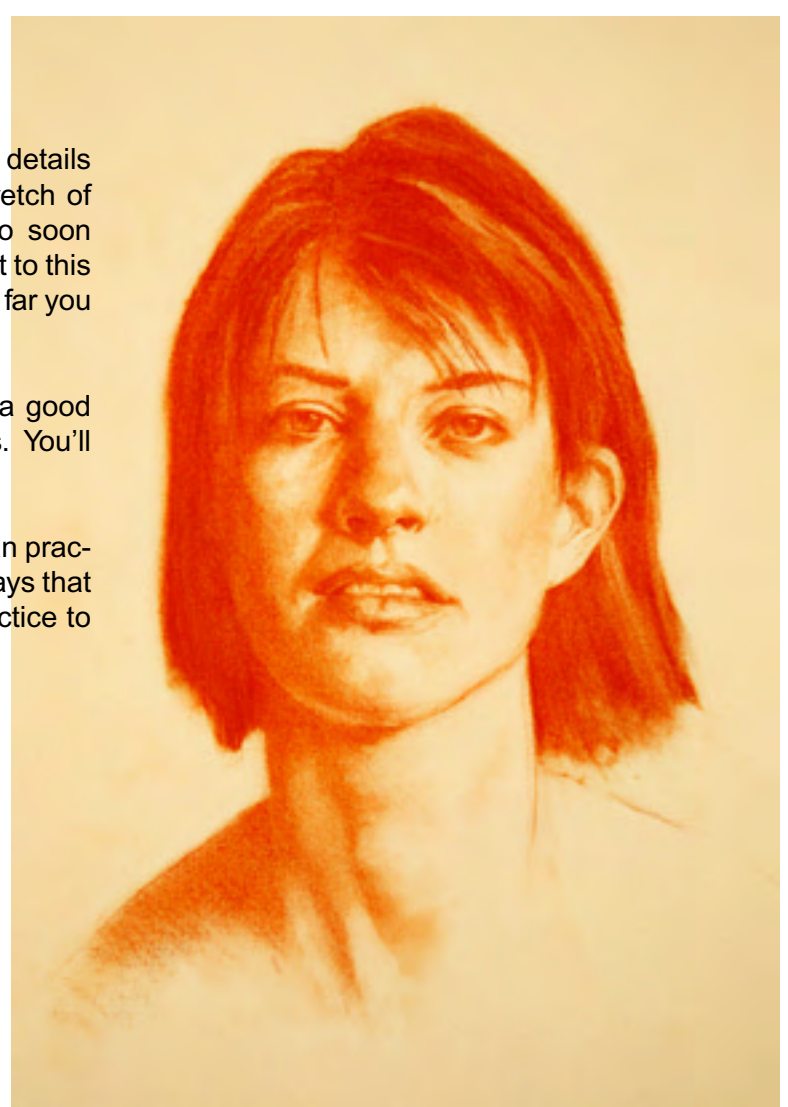
The point that I want to stress is that the proportions for every portrait is subtly different. The *Portrait of M.F.C.H.L. Pouqueville* by the 19th Century French master J.E.D. Ingres illustrates the facial proportions seen when the artist is standing a little above the model. The ferret-like gaze of this model is further enhanced by the 'tucked-in chin' gesture.

All in all using a cookie-cutter approach to portrait drawing is a poor method.

Finishing the portrait is more than the articulation of details such as the nostrils. It is striving for the full value stretch of darks and lights. Most artists quit their drawings too soon afraid that they will overwork them. There is a valid point to this fear, but there is also the issue of failing to discover how far you can go.

Frankly, I think that it is better to lose a few, perhaps a good many, drawings by pushing them far beyond their limits. You'll soon learn where the precipice's edge is.

Following is a larger image of my drawing so that you can practice your drawing skills by copying it. In fact, for those days that you don't have a model to draw from it is excellent practice to draw from master drawings.



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Another truism is painting mistakes are generally drawing mistakes. As a figurative painter, I can tell you this is an infallible truth. Master your drawing now and save yourself heartbreak later. It is quite disillusioning to spend weeks and months on a painting and as it nears completion all of those drawing errors begin to emerge and take center stage.

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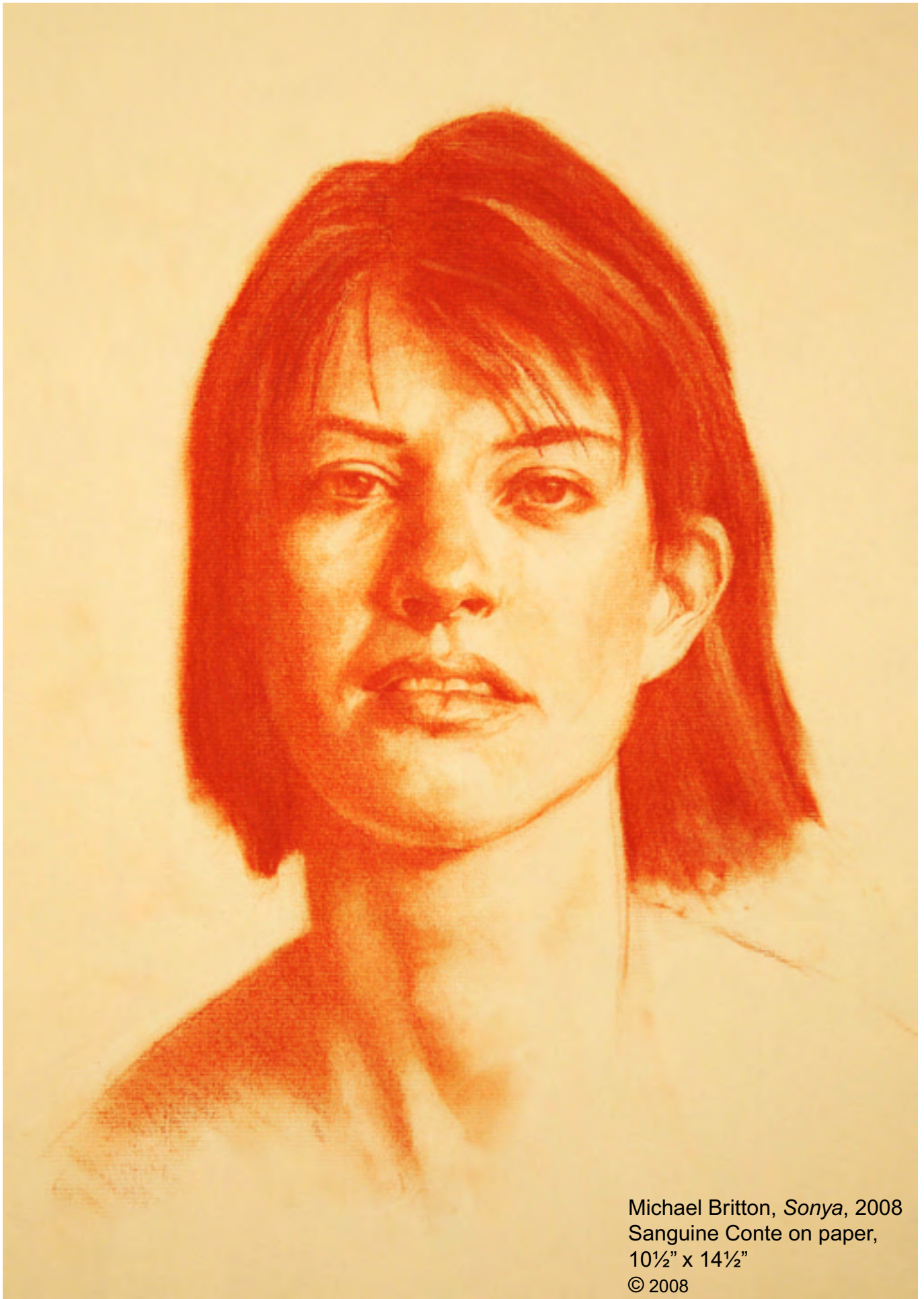


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Michael Britton, *Sonya*, 2008
Sanguine Conte on paper,
10½" x 14½"
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