

 The Florence Academy of Art

DRAWING IN SPACE

A MANUAL FOR FIGURATIVE SCULPTURE



WRITTEN BY

ROBERT BODEM

PRODUCED BY

JOHN ROBERT PECK

DRAWING IN SPACE

A MANUAL FOR FIGURATIVE SCULPTURE

Original text, sculpture, and photographs by
Robert Bodem

Design, illustrations, and production by
John Robert Peck

Copyright © 2004 by Robert Bodem

The Florence Academy of Art

1st Edition
December 5, 2004
Florence, ITALY

This manual was composed using Adobe® InDesign® CS (Version 3.0)
Body copy was set using Minion and Myriad typefaces.
All images were edited in Adobe® Photoshop®, and
all line art was created using Adobe® Illustrator®.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this manual is to visually aid Florence Academy of Art students to understand the process of developing figurative sculpture. The choice of the model and pose was essential to clearly demonstrate the educational goals for the students at the FAA: to study the variety that exists in nature in order to develop a visual vocabulary. Notice the development of the contrapposto pose throughout the manual. It is introduced and gradually adjusted in order for the forms to have more variety or contrast, and can be recognized by comparing the same two muscles on either side of the figure.

It is the responsibility of the students to intellectually understand the development outlined and to physically develop their studies in a similarly responsible fashion. This will better ensure a more useful dialogue between faculty and students during individual critiques in order to reach my goal as an educator: to teach you not to need me.

Many suitable titles and analogies could be used to describe the method in this manual. Yet none is more appropriate than “Drawing in Space” since the student’s task is to develop work using two drawing implements. One is clay for additive observations, and the other is an incising tool used to draw internal information or to correct mistakes in overbuilding.

A warning to students, the initial attempts to photograph the work appear awkward due to the camera angle and height, and are deceiving in regard to proportions and centering.

I would first like to thank The Florence Academy of Art for the time and financial support provided in order to develop this manual. It would be appropriate at this point to also thank Isabel Shedd, who was solely responsible for teaching me the use and understanding of the “box and egg.” I would also like to thank my students from past and present and my colleague Lotta Blokker who have helped me to better understand this curriculum through their successes, mistakes, needs, and questions. Special thanks to all the people who helped produce and edit this manual including Jim Vikstrom, Olivia Kim, Rae Dicks, and Michelle Elkins. This manual would not have existed in its present form without the professionalism that John Peck brought to the project during the two years of our collaboration. Many methods presented in this manual are the result of my own development and mistakes in the studio and my desire to represent faithfully what I was observing.

WORKING HABITS

In creating a figurative sculpture there is an infinite amount of comparisons and questions from beginning to end that may initially lead to confusion. There are some aspects of the process that unless followed carefully can create more confusion and mistakes. It is necessary for students to be aware of the following points AT ALL TIMES.

The student's task is greatly complicated if the sculpture and model are not observed on equal terms.

ALWAYS begin by making sure the sculpture is positioned appropriately to the model. During a model session of 25 minutes, the model will adjust his or her position a variety of times. Reset your sculpture or live model when necessary.

The worst habit students demonstrate is observing too closely.

Every observation and decision need to be made from a distance, until the sculpture is composed, the proportions resolved, and the linear quality of the forms is introduced spatially. Until these issues are completely resolved, the subtle quality or profundity of form that is understood through closer observation is meaningless.

The process of making a figurative sculpture defined here, when followed, allows the student to faithfully answer questions throughout the process.

While working be aware that when you are physically manipulating your work it must be in response to a question you have observed and answered. Simply do not manipulate your work when you are unable to find a resolution to a question. Continue to observe and to compare. Nature is never revealed immediately.

An often-frustrating aspect of the process is that measuring the figure is discouraged.

The primary focus of the student is to train the eye in order to compare the sculpture to the model. Proportions are developed and understood by recognizing the large and small gestures of the model.

Measuring consumes time and often leads to mistakes; it would de-emphasize the need to train the student's eye in being able to observe the gesture

faithfully. Measured work often initially lacks the harmony that is evident in the pose.

When measuring, one seems assured that the proportions will be accurate. During critiques I have often heard: “Well, I measured it.” If one subdivided or exaggerated an angle, tilt, or inclination but measured faithfully its height or width from the base, the measurement would not correspond.

If one employs or pursues measurement later in their studies after the eye is trained, measure from bony point to bony point. Bones will not shrink or grow during a study.

PHILOSOPHY

Lessons from a Golf Course
(A question about nature)

This past summer I was introduced to a completely enjoyable and unexpected activity - golfing. Forgetting the actual frustration of playing the game, the simple experience of spending a day walking outdoors was fun. It is ironic that this pleasurable experience turned out to be a valuable lesson, both to my work as a teacher and as a sculptor.

No one can dispute that studying the human figure from life is a challenge whether the challenge lies in understanding proportions, internal structure, or the quality of the forms themselves. These difficulties are what made me initially reject the study of the human figure, but they became a challenge I chose to confront later on in order to observe the figure accurately and understand its aesthetic range.

To see and understand the human figure, as a whole is the first challenge we face. To retain this while introducing the variety of forms that nature offers us, as evidenced by a softer mass surrendering to a harder one or by a bone surfacing only to escape and disappear under another form, is a greater challenge still. This variety can never be measured, only seen and understood. Studying the human figure on this level, where one can describe in one's work the hardest form in comparison to the softest and the infinite range in between or, equally, the deepest transition compared to the shallowest, should not be understood as being a slave to nature but as a means to a greater goal. To develop an aesthetic vocabulary to help one fully express one's ideas as they develop in one's work. A writer who lacks a full range of vocabulary cannot be fully descriptive. A musician who cannot reach a high E cannot play most music. A painter without the knowledge of the value range from dark to light struggles with the illusion of three dimensions. Taking a brief survey of contemporary sculpture, there seems to be a lack of range of vocabulary in figurative work. One might imagine that pursuit of this vocabulary is suppressed or ignored for the sake of producing pleasant, professional, and manicured sculptures. The lesson I learned, spending summer afternoons walking on a golf course and feeling it a pleasant activity, is that if I could choose, I would walk in the woods where the path might often be unclear, where variety in nature exists and is vibrant and where senses seem to awaken.

CONCLUSION

The three-year Sculpture curriculum at The Florence Academy of Art emphasizes in order of importance: respect for the subject's inherent aesthetic information, whether it be an inanimate object or a model, and development of consistent working habits ranging from being in class on time to those outlined in pages 4 & 5.

Keeping in mind these two points, as students begin their figure studies, starting in their second semester, they should be aware of the principle goals in order of importance:

1. **Internalized structure**, in order for the actual surface forms to emanate from inside.
2. **Gesture**, beginning always with the larger relationship from head to feet.
3. **Proportions**, beginning with the larger relationship of height to width.
4. **Spatial relationships** of the linear information provided by our study of the form.

Focusing on these major points should ensure students competent results so that in their second year they may move on to focus on aspects of figurative sculpture not covered in this manual, including modeling and more complex situations like reclining figure studies and larger scale work.

In using this manual, the student should understand that it does not replace or remove any responsibility for him/her to come to class where the majority of learning takes place, nor does it necessarily accelerate a student's progress. This manual outlines two procedures: the set-up of a standing figure, pages 16-34, and of a portrait, pages 81-90, and includes observations that pertain to this specific model. Students should also consider that every human body is comprised of the same anatomical principles, but every body type will be unique with regard to aesthetic information.

I would like to end by stating the importance of studying directly from nature with a quote from Leonardo da Vinci's *Treatise on Painting**:

“The painter will produce pictures of little merit if he takes the work of others as his standard; but if he will apply himself to learn from the objects of nature he will produce good results. This we see was the case with the painters who came after the time of the Romans, for they continually imitated each other, and from age to age their art steadily declined. After these came Giotto, the Florentine, and he... turning straight from nature to his art... not only surpassed the masters of his own time but all those of many preceding centuries. After him art again declined, because all were imitating paintings already done; and so for centuries it continued to decline until such a time as Tommaso the Florentine, nicknamed Masaccio, showed by the perfection of his work how those who took as their standard anything other than nature, the supreme guide of all the masters, were wearying themselves in vain.”

*Edward McCurdy, *Leonardo da Vinci's Notebooks*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1906), pp.164-5.