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SKETCHING PEOPLE

LIFE DRAWING BASICS



JEFF MELLEM

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"By learning the essential principles of drawing you will be able to not have to think about how to draw, but instead be free to express your life through your art."

Sketching and drawing from life can be a powerful tool for recording everyday observations, experiences and ideas. In this richly illustrated book, Jeff Mellem covers everything you need to know to turn a moment's inspiration into an entry in your sketchbook, including:

OBSERVATIONAL SKILLS

GESTURE DRAWING

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jeff Mellem is a professional artist and graphic designer who's worked in many industries over the last decade. Among others, he has designed for magazines, video games and theater. He earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from California State University, Fullerton, and studied drawing at the American Animation Institute in Hollywood, California. Using traditional drawing techniques to create character and story is the foundation for Jeff's work. For more on his work, visit www.jeffmellem.com.

METRIC CONVERSION CHART

TO CONVERT	TO	MULTIPLY BY
Inches	Centimeters	2.54
Centimeters	Inches	0.4
Feet	Centimeters	30.5
Centimeters	Feet	0.03
Yards	Meters	0.9
Meters	Yards	1.1

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"My hope is that by learning the essential principles of drawing you will be free to express your life through your art."
—Jeff Mellon

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All drawing begins with careful observation. Whether you are looking at a subject's contours, a person's clothing, someone's body language or studying anatomy, careful observation comes before drawing.

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Gesture is the first step in creating lifelike sketches. The observational skills you developed in the last chapter can be applied when you see an action you want to capture.

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If you think of a drawing as a building and gesture as the foundation, the basic forms—the sphere, cube and cylinder—are the roof, floor and walls.

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We don't encounter very many nudes walking around in public, so understanding the dynamics of cloth becomes important to sketching people from life.

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Chapter Five

66 | **EXPRESSIONS**

When we look at another person, we usually look first at his or her face. Not only is it how we identify that person, but it is also how we try to determine whether he or she is angry, sad, elated, disgusted or mischievous. It will show in facial expressions.

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78 | **BODY LANGUAGE**

Drawings begin to take on a life of their own when a figure begins to act out emotions.

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For a visual artist, choosing how to depict an event—what parts are emphasized and what are downplayed, the angle the scene is depicted from, how close the viewer is brought to the action—is done through staging.

Chapter Eight

110 | **VALUE**

Light's vibrant energy is what creates the subtle shades on a form for our eyes to see.

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Chapter One

OBSERVATIONAL DRAWING

All drawing begins with careful observation. Whether you are looking at a subject's contours, a person's clothing, someone's body language or studying anatomy, what you see comes before what you draw. That isn't to say that you are limited to only drawing what you see, but because art is a visual medium, everything relates back to what can be seen. Even abstract art that is completely nonrepresentational relates to the world in color harmonies, contrast or texture, but it all begins with the artist's observations.

The challenge of representational drawing is being able to translate a three-dimensional object onto a flat surface and make it seem real. It's quite amazing that lines on a page can create the illusion of depth, but by re-creating the values, edges and size relationships as they are seen, the mind will perceive space where it doesn't exist.

Whether you are drawing from a model or sketching in public, keen observation is a vital skill to possess, and is the basis for all representational drawing. Eventually, your observational skills will be applied to analyzing how something is put together, and while you will be building your drawing in a different way, the tools in this chapter help lay the foundation to unlock these additional techniques.



WHAT YOU SEE SHAPES YOUR ART
Art is a visual medium. It begins with observation and ends with what the artist makes visible. A realistic drawing like this is a direct translation of an actual thing.

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STUDIO SKILLS

Drawing from a model in a studio is the best way to learn to sketch people from observation. Because the model stays relatively motionless for a period of time, you have an opportunity to study the figure's contours and accurately translate them into a drawing.

This fifteen-minute sketch gave me time to study the model's form. I could focus on one area for a few minutes without worrying that the pose would change unexpectedly.

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POINT-TO-POINT

Point-to-point is an excellent method for exactly re-creating a subject in a drawing. It allows you to "grow" a picture by starting with one small element and using that as a reference to add additional lines. By plotting where corners and plane changes occur in relation to other lines and objects already established, the drawing will expand from one small part to a complete image.

The key is to look at the subject as if it were two-dimensional. Ignore the fact that you are drawing something you recognize and just draw the contours as you see them. Many people run into trouble when they try to "correct" the drawing by forcing the lines to conform to the way they think it should look instead of how it actually looks. Instead, look at how the contours relate to each other two-dimensionally, taking measurements from parts already established in your drawing. If you don't take the time to measure, you will draw what you think the subject should look like and not how it actually appears.

USING POINT-TO-POINT

When you are drawing something complex, you may be overwhelmed by its many parts at first. Just start with something that has a clear length and width that will establish a unit of measure in the drawing. Then look for other lines that are parallel, that intersect or that align with that edge and continue with them. You may find it helpful to actually place dots on the page where lines begin and end to help you analyze the line's length, angle and how it intersects with what's already established before you draw the line. You can also use the point-to-point technique with loose lines. Resist the temptation to be too rigid.



USING A MODEL

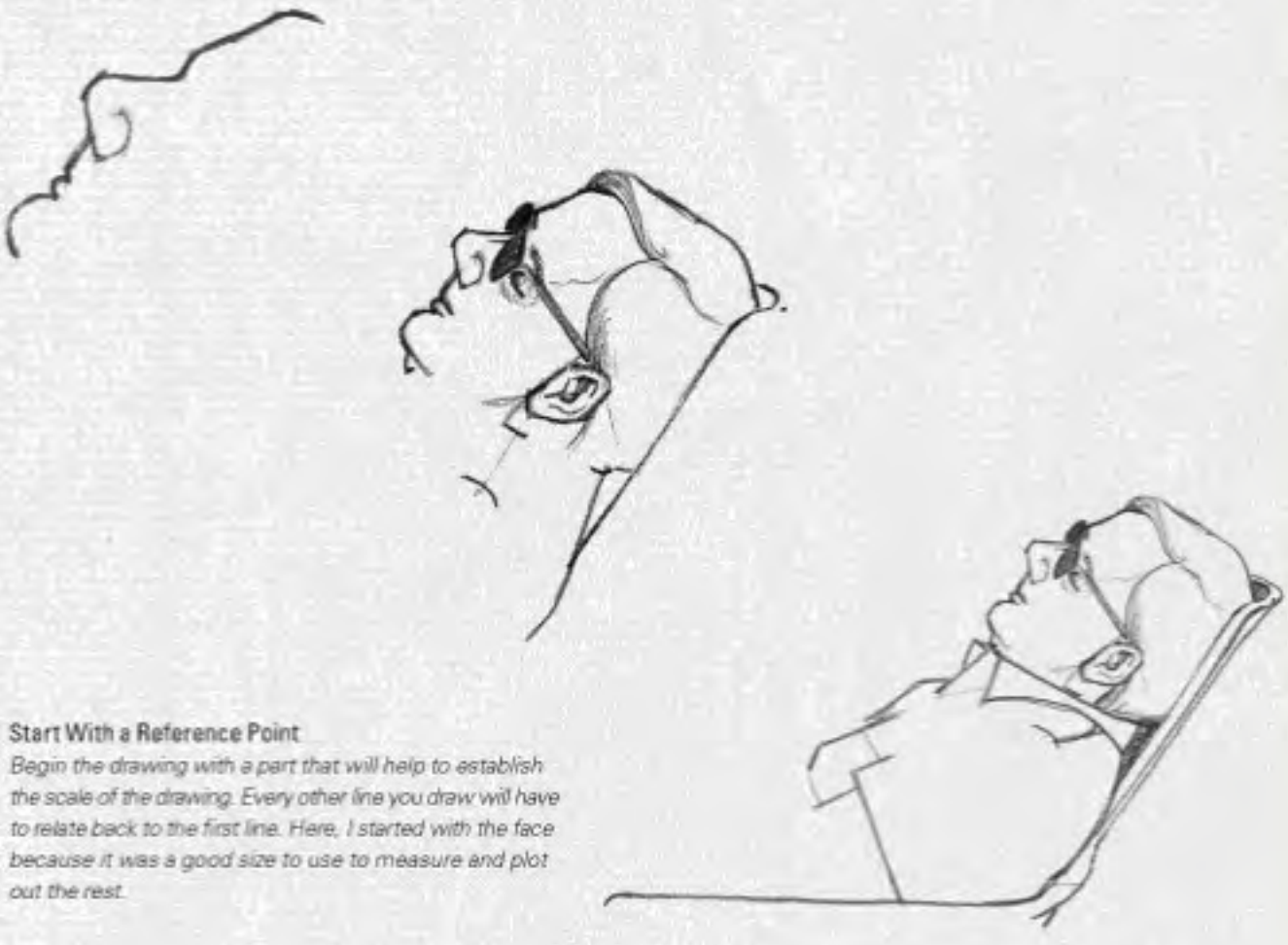
While people out in public won't hold still long enough for you to be able to use the point-to-point technique, a model will. In this drawing, I had time to carefully plot out and construct the figure. I had time to check alignments, measure distances and widths, and make corrections as the drawing developed.

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SKETCHING POINT-TO-POINT

Point-to-point drawing is a real test of your observational skills. It requires a lot of concentration and analysis, and will help you to strengthen your mental focus. Try the point-to-point method for yourself, either following along with the demonstration or using your own subject.



1| Start With a Reference Point

Begin the drawing with a part that will help to establish the scale of the drawing. Every other line you draw will have to relate back to the first line. Here, I started with the face because it was a good size to use to measure and plot out the rest.

2| Build Out From the First Lines

You can now use your first lines as a reference to build out more of the drawing. The length of the face is the same distance from the top of the nose to the back of the chair. You can see a few dots and measure marks that will help as I add more to the drawing.

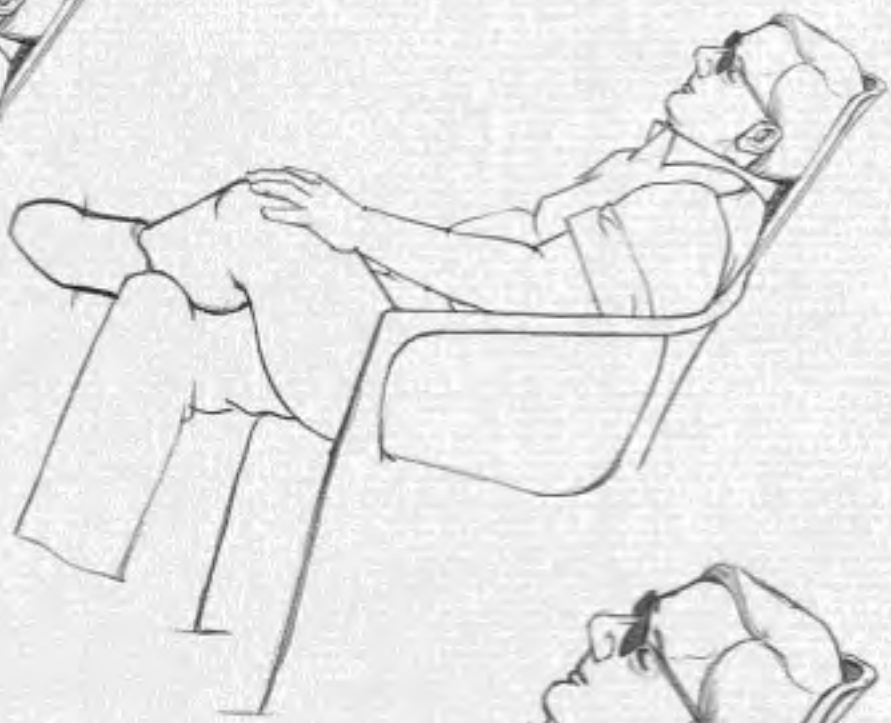
3| Pay Attention to Angles, Distances and Placement

Each line has three components: length, angle and placement. Measure distances by comparing the length of a part already drawn to a part you are adding. Once you know the length, figure out what angle it is relative to in the lines already established. Finally, make sure the line is placed correctly by looking for alignments and intersections.

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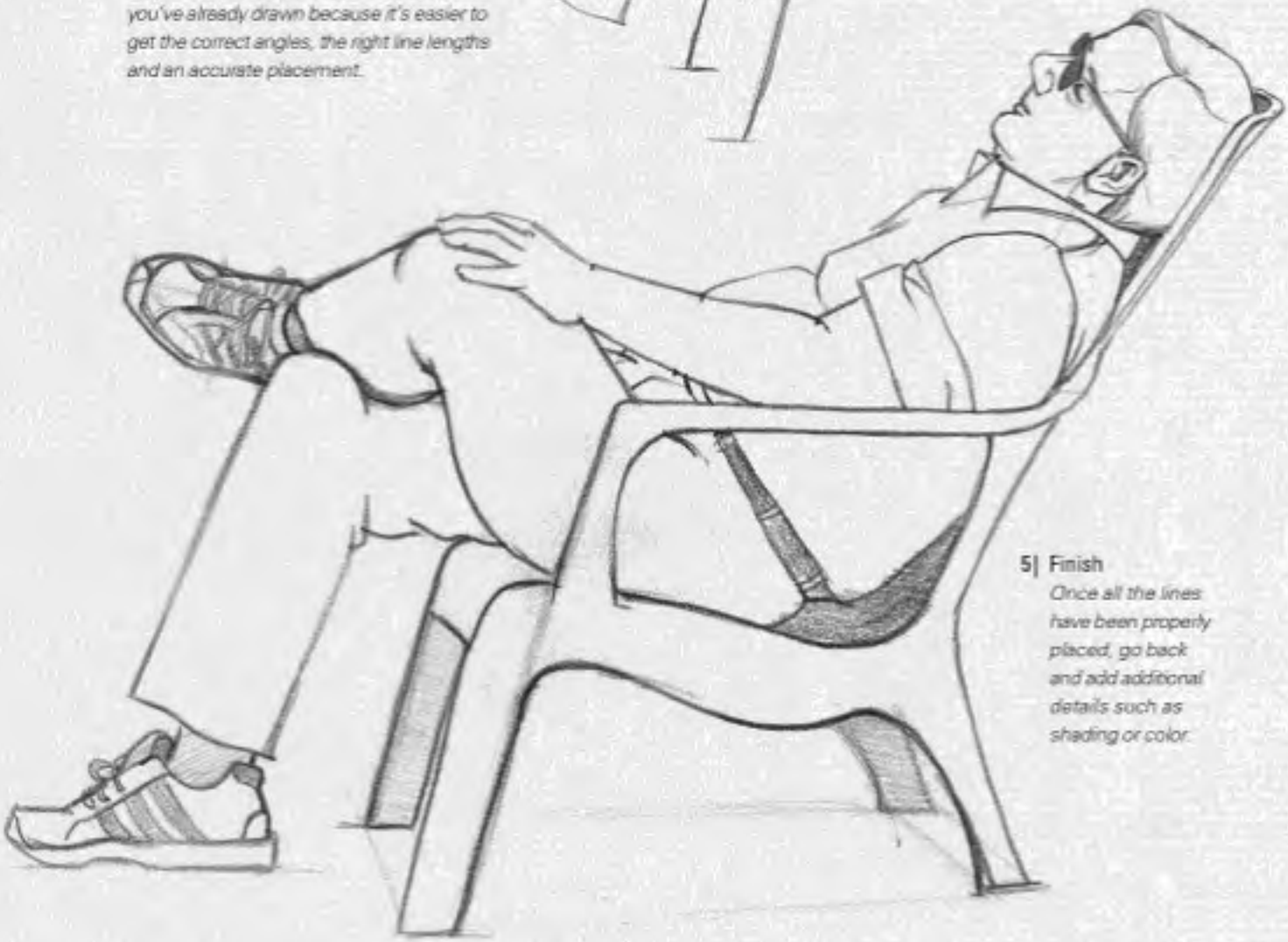
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4| Grow the Drawing

Use what is already developed in the drawing to help you add more lines. Don't jump to a new area and then try to connect the parts later; it's better to build onto what you've already drawn because it's easier to get the correct angles, the right line lengths and an accurate placement.



5| Finish

Once all the lines have been properly placed, go back and add additional details such as shading or color.

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CONCLUSION: ON CREATIVITY

Some people believe that creativity is like magic, that it is a mysterious force that reveals itself to the lucky few. This couldn't be further from the truth. Creativity comes to those who have nurtured the traits that encourage inspiration.

1| **Curiosity.** Creative people wonder what makes something work and why. Why people act the way they do. Why the world is this way and not that way. Curious people innately seek out new experiences that add to their knowledge, giving them the raw material to create ideas.

2| **Having fun.** Creative people also have fun. They play. They use objects as they weren't intended and make up games just for their pleasure. They joke around, break the rules and draw outside the lines. Playfulness encourages the mind to find connections between things that seem dissimilar. This blending of ideas is the engine of creativity, and it's powered by fun.

3| **Optimism.** Creative people are optimistic. They aren't critical because criticism kills emerging ideas as well as all the fun. They never say "no" to an idea, they just play around until they find a better one. They enjoy the energy of discovery and the prospect of new ideas.

4| **Courage.** Creative people are courageous. They dare to question the status quo. They risk rejection from people who are afraid to see things in a new way. They risk embarrassment by championing an idea that may not ultimately work. They do something when it is easier to do nothing.

Understanding the traits of creative people also tells us what to do if we can't seem to find any ideas. If the problem is that you keep repeating the same idea, nurture your creativity and seek out new experiences to expand your knowledge. If you've studied your topic and can't find a new idea, play around with it and see how some of those ideas might connect with something entirely different. If you still can't find what you're looking for, wait. Put it out of your mind for a while. If you've explored the idea well enough, you will have a lot of "hooks" out that will snag on any new experience that brushes by and you will be blessed with an "Aha!" moment.

Creativity isn't a step-by-step procedure like learning a technique—it's more organic. Sometimes you have a clear idea of the concept you want to express, but often you will discover it as you're working and refine the idea through successive revisions. The creative process is reciprocal: You act to create but you also react to what you're creating. Your work will help you discover new things as you think through the problem. That is the process of idea making.

Topics can be approached in an infinite number of ways, and your tastes, skills and experiences will help you decide how to best communicate your thoughts. The final step in the creative process is deciding which idea to pursue. Creating a hundred ideas isn't as hard as choosing one to spend time developing and letting go of the other ninety-nine. The key to the answer is in the question. You have to figure out which idea best fulfills the goals you want to accomplish.



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RECOMMENDED BOOKS

Below is a list of recommended books. In addition, I recommend any book of sketches by a famous artist whose skill you appreciate.

VILPPU DRAWING MANUAL

BY GLENN VILPPU

One of the best books on basic figure drawing.
(1997 Vilppu Studio)

BRIDGMAN'S COMPLETE GUIDE TO DRAWING FROM LIFE

BY GEORGE B. BRIDGMAN

A classic text on intermediate to advanced figure drawing.
(2002 Sterling)

STRENGTH TRAINING ANATOMY

BY FREDERIC DELAVIER

Designed for bodybuilders to learn basic anatomy, but is a great reference for muscles in motion.
(2005 Human Kinetics Publishers)

HUMAN ANATOMY FOR ARTISTS: THE ELEMENTS OF FORM

BY ELIOT GOLDFINGER

An in-depth book on anatomy.
(1991 Oxford University Press)

THE ILLUSION OF LIFE: DISNEY ANIMATION

BY FRANK THOMAS AND OLLIE JOHNSTON

Written by two of the greatest Disney animators of all time, the book is both a history of the studio and an instructional guide to getting life and attitude into your drawings.
(1995 Disney Editions)

FIRST STEPS: PAINTING WATERCOLORS

BY CATHY JOHNSON

Watercolor is one of the easiest ways to get color into your sketchbook because it is so portable, and this book is an excellent guide that seems tailor-made for sketchbook painting.
(1995 North Light Books)

AFRICA: AN ARTIST'S JOURNAL

BY KIM DONALDSON

A beautiful and inspiring book that demonstrates the sketchbook as a work of art in its own right.
(2002 Watson-Guptill)

DINOTOPIA: A LAND APART FROM TIME

BY JAMES GURNEY

This is a children's book that is illustrated as if it were a sketchbook kept by adventurers going through a fantasy world. It is a great example of a how a sketchbook can tell a story.
(1992 Turner Publishing)



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GALLERY

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