
Walt Stanchfield 08

Notes from Walt Stanchfield's Disney Drawing Classes

"A Good Impression"

by Walt Stanchfield

A GOOD FIRST IMPRESSION

Try this experiment: look at your surroundings - a panorama of scenery is ideal for this - and direct your mind to slip in and out of some selected modes. First concentrate on color. You should be able to eliminate all the other elements and see just areas of color. Then switch to dark and light, then to masses, then to the 3rd dimensional qualities of things near and far. Now, try to see all of those things at once. Your mind may have to do a little jig, skipping back and forth between them, for it's rather hard to concentrate on more than one thing at a time. But if you keep at it, it will all come together and the totality of the scene will hit you like a bomb. That is the first impression I speak about. It is sometimes referred to as a moment of inspiration; a moment of utter clarity; that instant of pure seeing that Betty Edwards (*Drawing On The Artist Within*) calls the "Ah - Ha!" moment. Actually it's just an extremely vivid summation of all the important elements before you. It hits you so hard and clear it is relatively easy to recall when you need a fresh look at it.

The practical application of the ability to isolate the elements of a scene, or in your case, a posing figure, is to quickly analyze the components of the pose and to put them all back together again into a good, strong first impression, any part of which you can call to mind for reference as your drawing proceeds.

Depending on the purpose, or meaning, or story behind the gesture, you will search the figure for (not necessarily in this order) over all structural personality or character, (tall, thin, graceful, soft, doll-like, comical, etc.), then phase in on the essence of the gesture (the one-pose story, how this particular figure enacts this particular pose, the feeling it evokes you may want to refer back many times to that feeling, it is important), then you will want to phase in on each of the rules of perspective (see my rules of perspective), mentally superimposing them on the figure to locate them there, then file the findings in your short term memory for handy reference. Especially mode in on the all important angles and any, squash and stretch. This may all sound very complex, but it all happens in a split second.

Once these things are established in the mind, you can go back to the whole figure and start drawing. If you bog down in some area, don't fight it - simply switch modes and call up that first impression for just long enough to revitalize your original intentions. This kind of drawing, in a sense finished before you start, so there is less struggling during the crucial periods of drawing and it frees you of laborious deliberations, vacillations, backtracking, and getting sidetracked. This is not to say any new information coming to light should not be considered, but only in so far as it is relevant and will help plus your first impression.

In animation you usually have one thing to say at a time so everything on your drawing should relate to that one thing. Forming a good first impression will establish that one thing and keeping it in the forefront of your mind will keep you on the right path. Simplicity will prove to be one of your best allies, both in your concept of the gesture and in the process of drawing it.

The first impression is the right brain's summation of all that lies before it. Often as the drawing proceeds, the left brain will want to step in and have you start drawing all the details - the buttons, the stitching, the pockets, or some piece of clothing that for no particular reason has formed a little bump. You don't have to waste any energy fighting such temptations - just press the "CLEAR" button and your first impression will flash back on the screen again with all the consequential information, the strong angles, the simple shapes, the squashes and stretches, etc. You don't have to "put the left brain down". Relegate to it a job like switching back to the first impression every minute or two - it is eager to help (it thinks it can draw better than the right brain), but if you allow it to dominate it will copy what is before it, insignificant details and all. Both sides of the brain are eager to help but you have to let them know what YOU want.

A Good Impression

Sunday, while watching the finals of a tennis tournament between Agassi and Anacone, I sketched a little. This is quick sketching at a fairly fast pace. I tried for two things in these drawings, 1. to capture the action itself, and 2. to draw the player's identity in the action (that is, so they could be identified as those two players). I can only guess at the time involved - perhaps one hundredth of a second to analyze the gesture and from between 15 and 45 seconds to draw it. This is good practice for it forces you to lock in on a good solid first impression because in one second the pose has changed and you're stuck with how much information you have gathered in that "Ah - Ha!" moment. In a classroom situation where there is a model to copy from, you often have to remind yourself that it is the gesture you are after.

