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Notes from Walt Stanchfield's Disney Drawing Classes

"It Ain't Easy"

by Walt Stanchfield

IT AIN’T EASY

Drawing may be compared to driving a car. While driving there are a number of things that need to filter through the consciousness and be constantly monitored: destination, steering, judging distances and speeds of other cars; working the gas pedal, the brakes or the clutch; being in the right lane at the right time; checking the panel for gas, temperature, oil; seat belt, sun visor, etc.

In drawing one must continually run through the list of prerequisites for making a successful drawing. There is the brief study to grasp a first impression, then the start of the sketching--the size, the pose, the perspective (including overlap, diminishing size, surface lines, foreshortening); anatomy, squash and stretch, angles, tension--then back through the list again, perhaps in a different order, depending on the needs of the drawing at that particular stage. But always back to the first impression lest the drawing be allowed to drift off into "just a drawing". So, in driving, one has constantly in mind the destination lest one ends up just driving around.

One must visualize the ideal drawing (gesture) and then monitor the progress and state of the drawing in order to keep steering it in that direction. Hopefully, the analysis of the pose to acquire the first impression was a good one.

Talking oneself through the drawing is one technique. You might say, as your pen or pencil busies itself with your orders and desires, "Let's see, do I have enough straights, enough curves; should I strengthen these angles; what can I do about this tangent? My first impression was thus and so--am I sticking with it? I will stress this tension, accent the lift or the stretch. How can I make this clearer?, etc."

This may sound like an overly involved process just to get a gesture drawing down on a piece of blank paper, but, you see this is not just any old gesture drawing--this is the one you are working on now, at this moment of your life, you don't want to toss it off casually as if it were less important than another. Until all, and I mean all, of these prerequisites for a good drawing become second nature, some method has to be used to make sure each of these things are attended to. Just as you wouldn't think of driving a car without checking the fuel, planning your route, and for sure, tuning the radio to your favorite station.

"It ain't easy", as Ollie Johnston said. It requires a lot of thought and loving attention. Bill Berg said, "I love to draw." Did he not speak for all of us? So in animation there is not just one pose to "lovingly" attend to, but hundreds--eventually thousands of such poses. So added to the above list of prerequisites are endurance, "stick-to-itiveness" and a sustained enthusiasm--things which in themselves require a special nurturing.

It might seem that all this mental manipulation might impede the so-called creative side of drawing, because all these rules and the overseeing is a left brain activity. But left to its own, the right brain may take off into some Picasso-like freedom and we end up with some "creative" but inappropriate drawing. We must be creative within the bounds of our media, so it is legitimate to call upon the left brain to help out in that respect.

Most important to the success of a drawing is that first impression. If it is perceived wrongly, the preliminary sketch will be off and all the work put in it from then on will be a waste. You may think I'm being overly hard-headed about this--after all, if you finish the drawing and it looks nice, what the heck The point is, you want to sharpen your skill and sensitivity to the point where you can express any gesture you are called upon to draw. It is thrilling to see a well done anatomical drawing, but it is deeply thrilling to see a drawing that expresses some gesture, mood, feeling or meaningful action.

Following are a set of drawings that do just that. The artist's knowledge of anatomy has been transformed to conform to the character he was drawing. His adaptation of the anatomy of the human body was only a a tool to attain his intent. His sensibility to the personality of the character and the resultant appropriate gestures are quite phenomenal.

(I would like to interject a word of praise and respect for the cleanup people, including inbetweeners, for many' the time when the sensitivity of the animation drawings came to full fruition in the cleanup department.)

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