
Walt Stanchfield 55

Notes from Walt Stanchfield's Disney Drawing Classes

"Talk to your Audience - Through Drawing"

by Walt Stanchfield

TALK TO YOUR AUDIENCE - THROUGH DRAWING

I have been trying to find a way of saying, "drawing is mental". I mentioned "positive thinking" a couple of times but received no feedback, so I figured that sounded a little too much like I was trying to sell a religious denomination or something. It is religion but only in the sense that it is a system of belief. Positive thinking comes in many forms.

Some years ago I took a modern painting class at Valley College. The instructor, Danielli, told the class on the first night, "Anyone who wants to paint dew drops on roses, don't bother to come back." I accepted that as a challenge, painted a 'rose with a dew drop on it and brought it to the next session. He said, "That's nice - very tasteful, but I don't want any 'taste' in this class." I said, "What? I've spent 40 years trying to acquire taste and now you tell me 'no taste'." He said, "You've been trying to turn people 'on', now I want you to try to turn them 'off'."

That may sound very anti-social but taken in its proper sense, he was telling me to relax - quite trying to force my paintings into some preconceived mold. We're going to try to be "creative" in this class. We're not going to "copy" the old dew drops on roses thing. We're going to abstract the essences of color and shape and mood and design from nature - release ourselves from the old conventional ways of painting a picture.

The effect on me was phenomenal. I felt a great weight fall from my back. I am still, 29 years later, impressed by that lesson.

You may recall a "handout" a while back, wherein I told of a similar thing with a singing teacher. He told me to quit "singing" to the audience. He said, "You are telling a story - so just talk to them (on the tones of of the melody, of course.)" Again, a "shifting of mental gears" took place. What an eye opener! Singing suddenly took on a whole new meaning. I was able to put aside the concern with voice (anatomy) and began concentrating on telling the message and meaning of the music. So, what's all this got to do with drawing? This you are telling a story in drawing, and you want to tell it in the most enjoyable and creative way you can. You don't want to burden your viewers with how much you know or don't know about anatomy or how well you draw belts and dress seams. Just tell the story with simple, easy to read gesture drawings.

Recently the people in the drawing class were starting off very stiffly, bearing down on tightly gripped pencils, trying to trace the model's anatomical physique. I pleaded with them to stop trying to "draw" the model. They were drawing the muscles, drawing the head, drawing the arms, etc. I had them grasp the pencil farther up the shank, releasing themselves of all the responsibilities of drawing the model. "Let the pencil do the drawing", I said, "Allow it to search out the gesture allow it to tell the story."

What followed was a joy to see. I have reproduced one of the artist's work here to show how quickly and thoroughly he got the idea. This was not a slow transition - it happened on the very next drawing, and continued for the rest of the session. The first two drawings are representative of his first sketches. They are rather stiff, frozen and seem to be an attempt to tell the viewer how the model was built. The ones following are expressive, loose, graceful, and tell the viewer in an interesting way, what the model was doing.

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It's tough having to come up with some nice drawings after having become tired and tight from drawing exacting line drawings all day. But here's where the mental part of it enters in. To continue in the same vein will further tire you. What is needed is some form of release that will be exhilarating and liberating. Again, one of my favorite phrases, a "shifting of the mental gears" into a different mode which will be rewarding both as a study period and for some wholesome relaxation. Try to forget "singing" (drawing) to the audience - just tell the story.

If you were called upon to translate these drawings into Ariel, or any other character for that matter, the later ones would certainly be by far the easiest, for they express a gesture, but without the inhibiting, overpowering influence of the anatomy. In the first type of drawing a gesture is used to show off the figure; in the later drawings the figure is used to show off the gesture.

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