
Walt Stanchfield 65

Notes from Walt Stanchfield's Disney Drawing Classes

"One Picture Worth a Thousand Words?"

by Walt Stanchfield

ONE PICTURE WORTH A THOUSAND WORDS?

Some friends gave me a book for my 69th birthday called, "Medical Makeover" (gosh, do I look that bad?). My birthday was in July, and tonight, Nov. 27, I opened the book for the first time to peruse it. Peruse means I don't have time to read it now, but at least I can spot some things for future investigation. I always begin a book by starting at the very first page and then reading every word, clear through to the back cover, usually ending up with tons of notes sparked by the text. Anyway, on the 7th page of this book there is a dedication that struck me as a more than ordinary book dedication. It goes, "To my parents who have helped me realize that medicine is more than a profession." Wow! Isn't that a beautiful thought. I don't mean, "hurrah for the parents", or "How thoughtfully thankful the son", I'm thinking, we as artists should realize that drawing is more than a profession. We are privy to a form of communication that many aspire to but few attain.

Man alone in the animal world has developed a language. It is our way of communicating what goes on in our complex minds. Animals have been taught words, but they are not able to use those words to transfer thought. I must qualify that by relating the story of a lonely chimp who was taught some English sign language, and who after a period of isolation from friends, when meeting a friend, said with that sign language, "Please help - out."

Right brained people have developed a language of drawing. Their language is not like the sign language that animals can learn - nouns, and other left brained things, but is an emotional language of emotions, moods, gestures, and story weaving - right brained activities, especially the ability to gather things together, to summarize, and describe the findings in some "artistic" way, visually or graphically, for instance. It is a wonderful area of human activity. An old Chinese adage expresses it very well, "One picture is worth a thousand words." But again, a qualification has to be made - only a descriptive, expressive picture is worth a thousand words. Yours is a unique role in our civilization. With your drawings you reach many thousands upon thousands of viewers who look to you for escape or thoughtful viewing pleasure or maybe some form of impersonal communication.

A friend of ours took their two children, 3 and 6 yrs. old, to see "Oliver And Company. " The kids were so absorbed in the picture they forgot to eat their popcorn. These kids know nothing about following a model sheet, or animation timing, or dialogue sync, or any of the other fine points of animation. They are just right brained little folk who are able to tune into a medium that speaks their "language".

In speech, a lot of words, no matter how perfectly spelled or legible, do not make a sentence. The words have to be arranged into syntax, which helps to clarify the image. So in drawing - a lot of parts, arms, legs, ears, etc., do not make a drawing. Visual syntax (gesture) has to be employed, whether in a still drawing or an animated scene.

I have had many opportunities in my 40 some odd years in animation to not only observe, but to experiment with animation and cleanup drawing. One thing stands out in my mind as an absolutely necessary ingredient in making a drawing or a scene of animation "work". Certainly, many factors go into the making of a drawing or the animation of a scene - faithfulness to the character (model), logical anatomical structure, all the principles of drawing and animation - perspective, squash and stretch, timing, etc. Those are all somewhat mechanical things, things that can be measured with a ruler or a stop watch. You could make charts and diagrams, and use reference material to accomplish that area of animation.

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But the primal thing that sets a drawing or a scene above the "basics" level is sincerity of gesture (acting). If your drawings or your animation is bringing forth the true guts of what you want to say, you can get away with murder regarding much of the other requirements. You could have the most perfect model drawings in the world in a scene, but if the integrity of acting was lacking, the reaction would likely range from detachment to disgust. However, if the opposite were true, the audience's eyes would be much more forgiving than their emotions. A strange thing about the eyes, they fill in for missing parts, they adjust differences and contradictions. They are very chameleon-like. But the emotions are very demanding. They have standards that have taken years to develop and do not, I repeat, do not like to be fooled around with, toyed with, or in any way taxed, coerced or deceived.

So learn all the mechanics of drawing and animation you can. Surround yourself with reference material. But also study gesture — both humorous and dramatic. There is no way in the world that you could collect enough poses and gesture reproductions to cover all your needs. You just must sensitize your ability to see those actions in your mind and with the help of the mechanics of drawing and animation, get them down on paper.

