FIGURE DRAWING

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INTRODUCTION

It has been said that to master the drawing of the human figure would enable the student of art to handle any and all drawing problems.

This challenge may have been one of the reasons the human body has played such an important role in the history of art; however, it would seem that man's interest in man is the chief reason.

Because of its complex structure the figure tends to discourage many, causing them to seek subject matter more easily understood, and with many who use the figure as a symbol it is treated only as an area in the over-all composition.

The penetrating depth shown in the treatment of the figure in the works of Rembrandt, Goya and Daumier is rarely shown in the drawings and painting of present-day artists. Of course there are some exceptions.

To use the human figure only as a symbol to satisfy the compositional needs of a picture is hardly sufficient when one realizes the depth of expression of which the figure is capable.

As one views the penetrating psychological studies of man so strongly portrayed in the paintings by Rembrandt one is aware of a depth of feeling that goes far beyond reproducing outward physical characteristics.

There is little doubt that with Rembrandt, capturing the inward expression of his sitter was his foremost objective. Unquestionably he was at the same time concerned with his compositional organization and all that would give a unity to his canvas. However, it would seem that these features played a supporting role to his main goal, an honest revelation of the character of his sitter.

With Daumier and Coys one senses a similar passion in the portrayal of the human race.

This same quality is felt in the studies of the human figure in the paintings of Leonardo, Michaelangelo, Durer, Breughel and El Greco to mention a few of the truly great masters of the past.

Keen observation of his fellow man resulted in an intimate understanding of his innermost feelings and responses. Without this knowledge it is impossible to go beyond a superficial analysis.

Perhaps the problem may be partially solved through a simplified study of the structure of the human body, thus permitting the draughtsman more flexible symbols to work with.

With this structural problems simplified, more time may be devoted to a thorough study of man as he deals with the problems of life.

The purpose of this writing is to present a simplified approach to the complex problem of drawing the human figure.

FIGURE DRAWING

Perhaps the most pertinent question the artist can ask himself as he seats himself before his subject matter ready to begin his drawing is: how shall I begin this drawing? He can be sure that the first half dozen lines of his drawing will determine its success or failure. But to return to the question: "How shall I begin this drawing?" Until the artist has a clear mental image of the problem that confronts him he is not prepared to solve it. There is no question but that the artist must observe and hold in his mind the total form of the volume.

Whether he is drawing the figure, a still-life arrangement, or a landscape study, he should have in mind a clearly defined picture of the space between and around the volumes that make up his subject matter (Plate I). Walking around his subject matter wherever this is possible helps him to get a more complete picture of his subject from all sides (Plate II).

This preliminary inspection then could be one answer to the question: "How shall I begin this drawing?"

A second question--"Where am I in relation to the objects I am about to draw?"--must be answered before the first line is drawn. Many a drawing has been spoiled because the artist did not take into account his point of view.

To demonstrate in a simple manner the conditions imposed by a point of view, he may set a box or block on the floor. If he draws the block from a seat in front of it, his drawing will differ from those he would draw from the top of a stepladder or seated on the floor (Flate III).

With this as an introduction, he may consider his problemthe drawing of the human figure.

The human figure is a most complex structure. Unless the

Lyernon Blake, The Art and Craft of Drawing, p. 58.

EXPLANATION OF PLATE I

Have a clear picture of the space between and around each volume.



PLATE I

EXPLANATION OF PLATE II

Walk around your subject whenever this is possible.

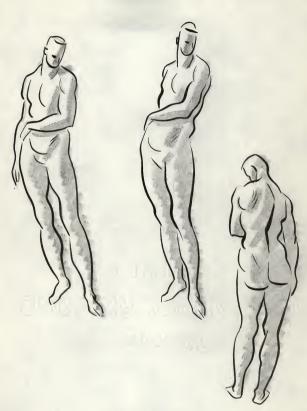


PLATE II

EXPLANATION OF PLATE III

A box looks different as we change our point of view.

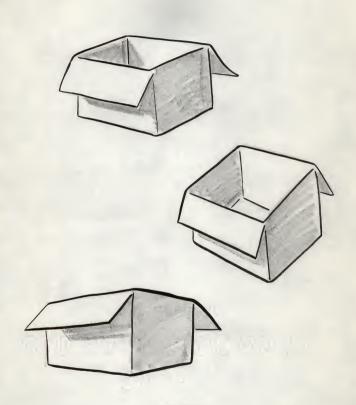


PLATE III

artist can simplify his thinking in solving the problems of perspective and volume relationships it presents, his task is hopeless.

From the very start he must force himself to visualize his model in as simple elements as possible, and at all times he should be entirely possessed by the plastic idea of mass organization; he should be oblivious of all else.

With a few simple planes and volumes to manage, his chances to succeed are much greater than they could be if he were to consider all the complex structures that make up the figure.

The simpler he keeps his problem, the easier the control. The more complex he makes it, the more difficult the control.

The sculptor beginning with a block of stone removes portions of his stone as he works toward his finished study (Plate IV).

The artist too can approach his problem just as the soulptor does by thinking of his model as though he were covered with a piece of cloth or netting so as to appear a solid volume.

The importance of developing his drawing in this manner is that he is thinking from the very start of the entire figure and, if his model be seated on a chair or stool, it too becomes a part of the "block" that contains his model.

Just as the sculptor begins with a block that contains his complete study and then begins to remove portions of his block, so the artist begins to remove portions of his block until the figure emerges.

lvernon Blake, The Art and Craft of Drawing, p. 121.

EXPLANATION OF PLATE IV

The sculptor beginning with a block of stone removes portions until the figure emerges.

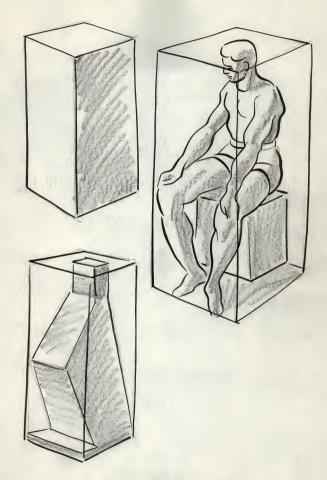


PLATE IV

There is a great weakness in building up a drawing part by part until the unit is complete. Such a drawing can easily become an assortment of many small parts rather than a unit with its parts integrated in the whole.

One point of great importance should be kept in mind: the figure (or any object) obeys the same laws of perspective that the simple block does (Plate V). Forgetfulness of application of perspective laws to the nude or other figure-drawing is a common omission.

The artist knows that when he draws a block from a point of view where he can see two sides at the same time, the edge joining the two planes is closer to him than any other part of the block. By applying the same breakdown to the figure, he realizes that there is a point on the figure that is closest to him and that from this point the planes of the figure recede just as they do on the block (Plate VI).

Thus far he knows that one part of the figure, like the edge of a block, is closest to him. He knows that, just as in the block, the planes recede from this closest edge of the figure.

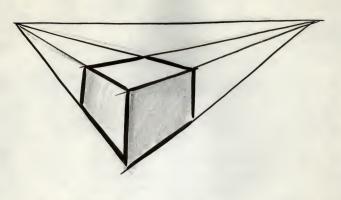
He also knows that, just as the sculptor begins with a block of stone that contains his entire study, by beginning his drawing with the image of this over-all volume he gives equal weight to all the parts and draws the figure as a unit.

When his model assumes a pose, his first question -- "How shall I begin this drawing?" -- presents itself.

Vernon Blake, The Art and Craft of Drawing, p. 121.

EXPLANATION OF PLATE V

The figure obeys the same laws of perspective that the simple block does.



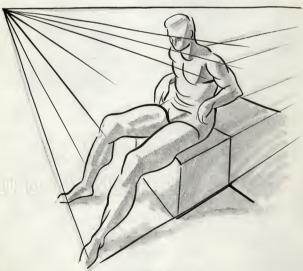


PLATE V

EXPLANATION OF PLATE VI

Planes of the figure recede just as they do on the block.

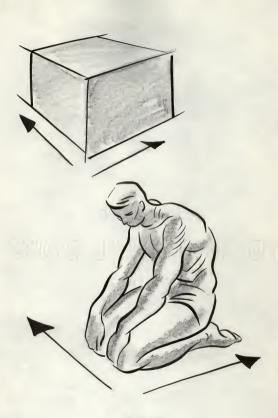


PLATE VI

He walks around the model to view him from all sides. The parts of his model that he cannot see from his front position should be realized as he prepares to start his study.

However, he also must realize where he is in relation to his model before he starts his drawing. Is he standing at an easel, sitting on a stool, or sitting on the floor? The pose takes on different perspectives as he shifts his position.

Having determined where his eye level is (because it is his eye level that shifts as his point of view changes), he is about to begin.

He may assume that his model is seated on a stool. His model's legs are about a foot apart and his hands are resting on his knees.

He too is seated on a stool before his easel; thus his eye level is the same as that of his model. From his position he can see one side of his model as well as the front.

The over-all block that contains his model has for its base an area that includes the feet of his model and the bottom of his model's stool. The peak of this block is the top of his model's head.

Picture mentally a sheet of netting covering his model and the stool, and one has a fairly clear image of the block.

Further study of this block shows that there are two main planes--front and side--with an edge that joins the two. The front plane begins at his model's feet, extends to his knees, then up over his arms to the top of his head. The outline of the side plane may be traced up from his forward foot to his knee to the top of his head and down to the base of the back leg of his stool.

The edge joining the front and side planes may be traced along the leg and arm nearest him to a point at the top of his model's head.

The planes of the block give him edges that he can extend to intersect at his eye level, following the same laws of perspective that he finds in the ordinary block.

Having an enclosed block to work on, he now begins to remove the portions between the arms and the legs, between the legs and the stool, and between the arms and the trunk of his model.

Here the advantage of beginning with the over-all is quite apparent because with this start he is able to establish in space and relate the key points of his drawing from its very birth and to maintain and develop them to its conclusion.

He can also see how vital those open spaces between the volumes can be. The soulptor as he removes these portions must constantly realize that the proportion of the volumes removed must be pleasing if those that remain are to be pleasing.

He can also see how the figure is made up of a series of planes and blocks that change as his model assumes different poses.

At this stage he has the figure represented as a three-dimensional solid of simple though realistic form. By refining the shape and adding detail, he may complete the drawing without losing the coherence of the whole (Plate VII).

EXPLANATION OF PLATE VII

Begin with the over-all block containing the figure.

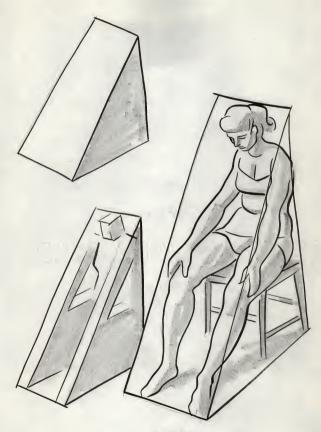


PLATE VII

He cannot stress too strongly the importance of a sound start in the making of a drawing.

This is a healthy approach for the artist in that it makes him aware of the over-all figure from the very start. However, it is just a beginning. From here on, subtle refinements will be necessary to instil in his figure drawing the quality of being alive.

One of the most satisfying qualities of all good drawings or paintings is the dominance of rich flowing rhythms. This grace of line in a landscape, a tree, a thoroughbred racehorse, a flower, or waves in the ocean (and one might continue on and on) evokes in each a feeling of pleasure one is unable to explain. The rhythms nature has created are pleasant to behold, and the essence of all great drawings is rhythmic structural ensemble. 1

These movements the artist finds so enjoyable are to be found to the highest degree of development in the human figure. Is there anything more beautiful than the well-proportioned female or the well-developed male?

Artists differ as to how they should be introduced to these flowing movements of the human figure. Should they be started on a very general study of the working of large surface muscles as they function in groups? Or should they first be shown the possibilities of reducing the figure to large simple planes without reference to the muscular structure? (Plate VIII)

¹ Vernon Blake, The Art and Craft of Drawing, p. 164.

EXPLANATION OF PLATE VIII

Begin with flowing movements or large simple planes.

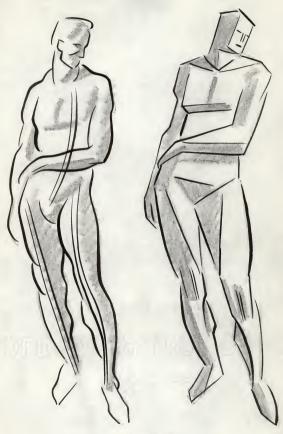


PLATE VIII

It makes little difference what the order be. The artist should master many ways of solving drawing problems, not rely on only one. He will find that certain problems difficult to solve one way will yield readily to another approach.

The artist should develop a sensitivity to the flowing movements of muscle over bone; he should be made aware of the large simple planes of the figure; he must be shown the strength one can give to a figure study through a simplified analysis of the working of large volumes as they function together. He must be encouraged to develop all of these plus any other methods of stimulating his powers of observation and analysis. A great draughtsman chooses, eliminates, exaggerates, simplifies, according to the dictates of his genius.

The wider his experiences in solving his problem, the richer the results.

So his next step--after he has realized the figure as an over-all volume--is to recognize the long flowing movements that are created as muscle blends into bone to give the rippling movements so apparent in the fine-muscled male.

He must realize that these muscle-created movements go from the front around the back of the figure and may be traced in endless patterns that conform as his model assumes different poses (Plates IX and IXA).

One of the most beautiful of these flowing movements is the rhythm that starts at the inner ankle and follows the shin bone

¹ Vernon Blake, The Art and Craft of Drawing, p. 121.

EXPLANATION OF PLATE IX

Muscle-created movements go from the front around the back of the figure.

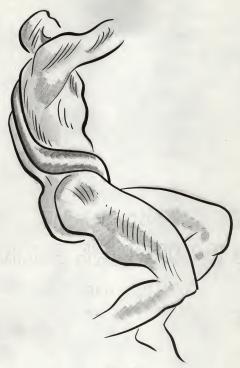


PLATE IX

EXPLANATION OF PLATE IXA

Patterns of movement may be traced from the front to the back.



around the inside of the knee and on up to the pelvis (Plate X). (This line somewhat resembles an elongated letter S.) From the pelvis this rhythm flows around the side muscle where it blends into the large column-like muscle at the side of the spine to extend up to the base of the skull (Plate XI).

This is the largest movement he may find in the figure. Its greatest value to the artist is to make him aware of all sides of his model as well as the one he sees while he is making his drawing.

Many other movements may be traced in various parts of the figure. One begins at the index finger and flows over the inner side of the wrist, diagonally across the forearm to the shoulder muscle, and thence to the base of the skull (Plate XII). He may find others by carefully observing the model.

In establishing these flowing directions on his drawing, he may present to the viewer many pleasing paths for his eye to follow. It is most important that these paths of movement be long and continuous, constantly crossing and retracing their directions. There should be an endless variety of these directions, making it possible for the viewer's eye to pick up any single one and follow it over and around the figure from front to back and from top to bottom, giving him rhythmic curves that unite the different parts of the body.

Such a study (and this applies not only to the human figure but to anything he might draw) gives the viewer the rich intan-

¹ Vernon Blake, The Art and Craft of Drawing, p. 291.

EXPLANATION OF PLATE X

The main movement of the leg suggests an elongated letter \underline{S} .



EXPLANATION OF PLATE XI

A movement may be traced from the inner ankle up the leg, continuing over the side muscle to the back, ending its course at the base of the skull.

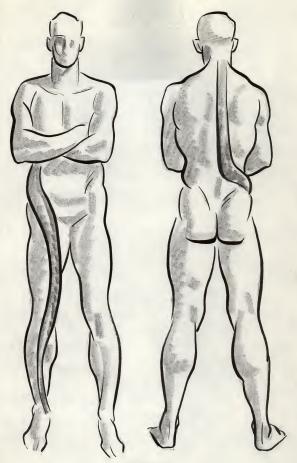


PLATE XI

EXPLANATION OF PLATE XII

Many movements may be traced in various parts of the figure.



gible experience of a most pleasant visual sensation.

The artist's next step is to consider the figure as a combination of large blocks or geometric shapes.

Most of the action in every study he makes of the human figure lies in the region of the torso, or trunk. When he analyzes the makeup of the torso he finds it includes the rib cage and the pelvis joined by a flexible column—the spine. The more important muscles are the abdominal muscles in front, the side muscles, and a column of muscles on each side of the spine.

This makeup is rather complex; he finds his drawing problems increasingly more difficult as the torso bends and twists.

Therefore, he must adopt a simpler approach to drawing the torso so he can visualize its movements without becoming lost in the complexities of its structure.

He may consider that the torso has a front and back as well as two sides. Now if he draws a simple block with a front, back, and two sides, in somewhat the same proportion as the torso, he has a volume that he can bend and twist in much the same spirit that the torso does. But he can control rather easily in this simplified form a problem that would be almost impossible if he tried to think it through in terms of bone and muscle structure (Plate XIXI).

He can use a strip of clay or a kneaded eraser shaped into a block to demonstrate the movements of the torso. By drawing studies from such a block and adding arms, legs, head, and neck, he can show the figure in an endless variety of movements (Plate XIV).

EXPLANATION OF PLATE XIII

The trunk may be reduced to a simple block.

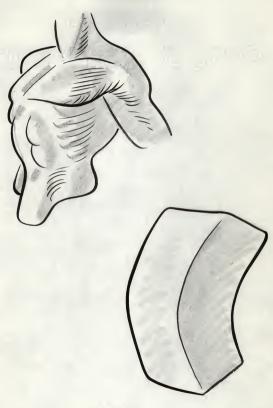


PLATE XIII

EXPLANATION OF PLATE XIV

Think of a block when drawing the trunk.



PLATE XIV

In this exercise, however, he neglects an essential requirement. The body is not an immobile piling up of masses.

Many artists draw parts rather than the whole, especially when drawing the human figure. Drawing arms and legs separately with no direct relation to the rest of the figure results in an assortment of parts lacking over-all unity. By thinking of the figure as a unit, which it certainly is, he will find that he cannot draw an arm or leg by itself without relating it to the entire figure.

So let him extend his four-sided block representing the torso to include the arms, legs, and head. This new block will be somewhat ribbon-like in shape.

For example, let him suppose he is making a study of a basketball player. The basketball player has his arms extended forward with a basketball between his hands. He is bent forward and his legs are somewhat straddled.

To reduce his basketball player to a ribbon-like block, he starts the block at the hands, continues it through the arms, down the trunk through the legs to the floor. This is a simple illustration. The block will become more complex with poses that are more distorted (Plate XV).

The ribbon-like block can be elaborated into a simple figure by the sculptor's process of removing empty spaces.

Throughout these exercises the artist should train himself to visualize the study as a whole and to consider each part

Vernon Blake, The Art and Craft of Drawing, p. 147.

EXPLANATION OF PLATE XV

The figure may be reduced to a ribbon-like block.



always in the over-all picture. When he has so established this habit that it transcends consciousness, the parts of his drawing will achieve a harmony and consistency possible only through the integrity of true oneness.

If the artist is to maintain full control of his drawing at all times, he must simplify the many volumes that make up the human figure. It has been said the human body is made up of levers and joints such as the pivot, the hinge and the ball and socket. The structure of the figure is so complex that, unless the artist is able to reduce it to a relatively few simple, easily controlled volumes, he will find himself confused and unable to cope with the problem.

As he looks at a human head, what is his first impression?

He might say it looks like an egg or, possibly, a block.

(How often one hears the expression, "egghead" or "blockhead"!)

In either case, he finds that the complex structure of the head has been reduced to an easily understood volume. Also, the egg or block volume is easy to draw and, since it can be applied to any head, it gives the artist confidence because he has an immediate control over his drawing (Plate XVI).

Starting with the egg or block gives the drawing of the head a basic, simple solidity from its very beginning. The skull also may be looked on as a sphere balanced on top of the neck. Addition of the features follows quite easily.

¹ George Bridgman, The Human Machine, p. 57.

² Vernon Blake, The Art and Craft of Drawing, p. 298.

EXPLANATION OF PLATE XVI

The head may be compared to an egg or block.

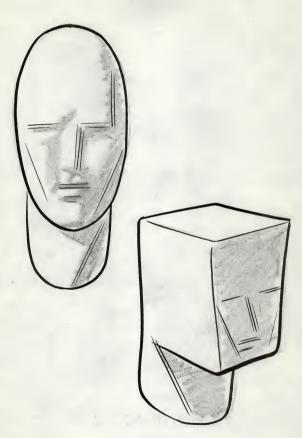


PLATE XVI

As the artist considers the other parts of the human body: The neck becomes a cylinder.

The rib cage may be likened to a truncated cone or a pear shape. The pelvis may be represented as a cup or a cone.

The shoulder muscle suggests a ball or egg shape, the upper arm a cylinder. The lower arm may be reduced to an elongated egg or cylinder with the wrist attached to it, suggesting a block-like volume. The hand he may represent by a block-the palm--with a series of cylindrical shapes--the fingers--attached to it.

A study of the legs shows him that the upper leg closely suggests a cylinder, the knee volume a block, and the lower legthe calf muscle--an elongated egg. The ankle, like the wrist, suggests a block; the foot may be reduced to a triangular block.

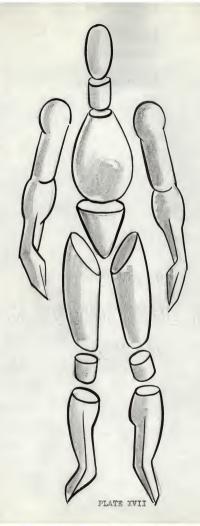
Briefly to summarize, he finds the head an egg- or blockshaped volume, the neck a cylinder, the rib cage a cone- or pearshaped volume, the pelvis a cup or cone, the arm a series of cylinders and blocks, and the leg also a series of cylinders and blocks (Plate XVII).

As he views the well-developed male, he is aware of wide shoulders tapering to a narrow waist, yet a study of the male skeleton shows him that the male rib cage is much wider at its base and tapers as it approaches the skull. The extra width in the upper region of the torso is due to a heavy padding of chest, shoulder, and back muscles, which cover and protect the rib cage. Together they suggest a thick cape-shaped volume within which the upper part of the rib cage seems to be inserted (Plate XVIII).

The abdominal volume may be represented as a ball fitting

EXPLANATION OF PLATE XVII

The figure is a series of simple volumes.



EXPLANATION OF PLATE XVIII

The rib cage is inserted in the shoulder and chest muscles.

The wide shoulders of the male taper to a narrow waist.

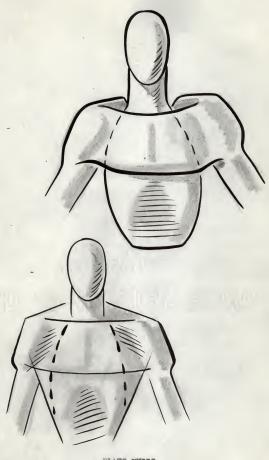


PLATE XVIII

in the cup of the pelvis. The side muscles, which are attached to the rib cage and the pelvis, clasp the abdominal volume (Plate XIX).

Having observed the model's outward appearance, from which the artist can visualize him as a series of simple volumes functioning as one, he is ready to examine the skeleton structure that supports these volumes.

Externally, he has represented the head as essentially a solid resembling an egg or a block. He now finds, in the skeleton, that this solid includes two volumes: the cranium, which suggests a tilted egg, and the bone structure he knows as the face, which resembles a pyramid with its base attached to the lower surface of the cranium (Plate XX).

The sternum, or breastbone, is the flat narrow bone in the middle of the chest. It resembles an ancient sword with a handle, blade, and point.

The ribs are arched bones that form most of the thoracic wall. There are twelve pairs of ribs. The first seven are attached to the sternum in front and to the spine in back. The ribs enclose a volume resembling a truncated cone.

The shoulder girdle consists of the clavicle and the scapula. The clavicle, or collarbone, forms the front part of the shoulder girdle. It is a long, curved bone, resembling the italic letter <u>f</u>. At its inner extremity it articulates with the upper end of the sternum. Its outer extremity articulates with the scapula, or shoulder blade.

EXPLANATION OF PLATE XIX

The side muscles clasp the abdominal volume.



PLATE XIX

EXPLANATION OF PLATE XX

The skull reduced to simple volumes.



PLATE XX

The collarbones may be compared with the handle bars of a bicycle.

The shoulder blade forms the back of the shoulder girdle. It is a flat bone, shaped like a spade or a triangle.

The upper arm bone, known as the humerus, is the largest and longest bone of the upper body. The top extremity is nearly hemispherical and articulates with a cavity in the shoulder blade. The working of this ball and socket allows the arm to move in any direction. The shaft of this bone is almost cylindrical in its upper half, prismatic and flattened below.

The forearm, situated between the wrist and elbow, is composed of the ulns and the radius. When the arm is held palm upward, these two bones are parallel. As the palm is turned to face downward, the bones cross.

Together these two bones form the major part of the wrist joint.

The hand is composed of the wrist bones, the bones of the palm, and the digit bones, which make up the fingers.

The pelvis can be compared to a wheel with only two spokes; the hub is the hip joint, and the spokes are the legs. Also, the pelvis is a bony ring resembling a basin or cup, and is composed of the two hipbones and the sacrum, a triangular bone at the base of the spine.

The spine, or backbone, is a flexible column formed by a series of bones called the vertebrae. It ties the pelvis to the

¹ Ceorge Bridgman, The Human Machine, p. 74.

rib cage and the cage to the skull.

The femur, or thighbone, is the largest and strongest bone of the skeleton. Cylindrical in form, it possesses a shaft and two extremities. The upper extremity is globular and fits into a socket in the pelvis. The lower end articulates with the kneedap and the tibia, or lower leg bone. The entire bone resembles the oroquet mallet.

The patella, or kneepan, is a flat triangular bone lying on the front of the knee.

The tibia, or shin bone, is triangular shaped and broad above, and tapers to its lower extremity. It forms the inner side of the ankle. The fibula, or splint bone, is situated on the outer side of the leg and forms the outer ankle.

The foot is composed of many bones that as a group suggest the shape of a coat hanger (Plates XXI and XXII).

The major bones of the human skeleton are connected by balland-socket joints, which give the body its marvelous flexibility in movement and infinite variety of posture.

The artist at this stage has been introduced to a variety of approaches to his problem of drawing the human figure.

He has been admonished to begin by visualizing the figure as an over-all volume, in order to establish a framework of perspective within which he can maintain a true relationship among all the parts.

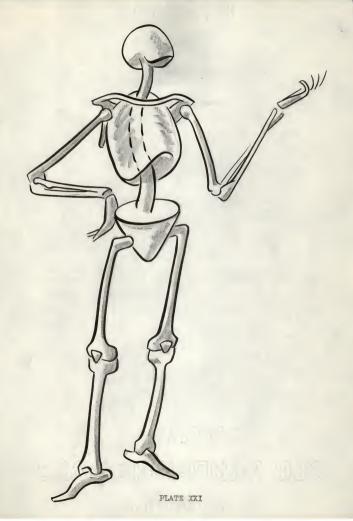
His attention has been directed to the long flowing lines that occur in the figure in any pose.

He has been shown how to represent different positions of

E LIPSARY

EXPLANATION OF PLATE XXI

The skeleton simplified.



EXPLANATION OF PLATE XXII

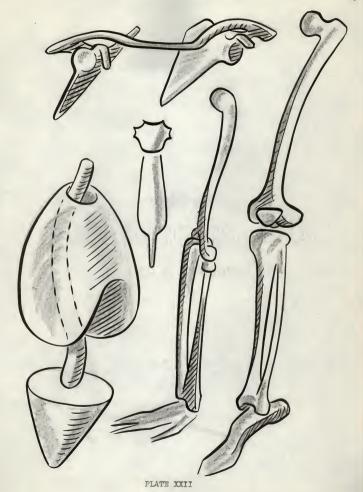
Upper left: Sternum

Lower left: Spine, rib cage, pelvis

Upper right: Shoulder girdle

Middle: Arm

Lower right: Leg



the torso in simplified form, as positions of a flexible block or ribbon.

He has been shown how to visualize, and to represent, the several parts of the body as simple geometrical volumes.

He has been informed of the general shapes and linkages of the bones that make up the human frame.

If all these approaches are valid and lead to true representation, they must be consistent and a relation exist among them.

By this time the artist should begin to discern such a relation.

He should be able to visualize and establish within the simple three-dimensional form the block representing the bend and twist of the torso, and the geometrical volumes giving form to the included parts.

He should be able to recognize how the positions of the supporting bones establish the positions of the volumes relative to one another and how this in turn establishes the patterns of the rhythmic lines in the figure.

As he develops his capacity to comprehend these interactions, he will find that its exercise will become progressively less a process of conscious analysis and ultimately will approach an aesthetic realization of what he is about to portray.

CONCLUSION

This paper outlines an approach to drawing the figure that progresses from visualizing it as a simple volume encompassing the model to representing it as a three-dimensional solid of simple form. This progression from realizing the whole to distinguishing its parts preserves the unity of the whole. The product is an established context of perspective, proportion, and position, within which the artist can deal individually and consistently with a multiplicity of interdependent problems of detail and refinement.

After the artist has been made aware of the importance of realizing the over-all volume, he should be introduced to different methods of observation and analysis as approaches to a variety of problems encountered in drawing the figure. Throughout, however, the artist should be conditioned to dealing with the parts only in the context of their whole.

Having been exposed to realizing the over-all volume of the figure and the flowing movements contained within, the artist may now be introduced to a simplified enatomy of the figure.

Muscles should be studied in groups rather than individually and the bone structure should be reduced to simple volumes which will be more easily retained.

The best way to learn to draw the human figure is by making hundreds of studies from the model.

The purpose of this thesis is to provide an outline of methods that will enable the artist to understand some of the problems he will encounter in the drawing of the human figure.

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FIGURE DRAWING

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Visualizing the figure as an over-all volume helps to establish a framework within which the artist can maintain a true relationship among all parts.

Within this volume he should be aware of the long flowing movements that occur in any pose the figure might take.

To enable the artist to control the difficult problem of drawing the figure in all poses it is necessary for him to reduce the many parts to a few simple blocks which he can bend or twist at will.

The parts of the figure are more easily understood if they are related to cylinders, spheres and blocks.

Also the anatomical structure when simplified is more easily retained.

To make all of these approaches valid they must be consistent and a relation must exist among them.

He should be able to visualize and establish within the simple three-dimensional form the block representing the movement of the figure.

He should also be able to recognize how the position of the bones establishes the position of the volumes relative to one another and how this in turn establishes the patterns of rhythm in the figure.

As he develops his capacity to comprehend these interactions, he will find that its exercise will become progressively less a process of conscious analysis and ultimately will approach an aesthetic realization of what he is about to portray.