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Original Article

Development of Human Figure Drawings from Gesture Drawings to Shaded Drawings - Analysis of Selected Drawings by Second Year Students at Kenyatta University

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Date Published: ABSTRACT

08 Jul 2022 Human figure drawing or life drawing is a fundamental requirement for all art students. It is applied in all disciplines of art from basic line drawings, to all aspects

Keywords: of design work as well as sketching in painting, sculpture, and ceramics. This paper examines selected work of second year students to determine whether they are able

Gesture Drawing, Life Drawing, Model, Observation, Proportions, Pencil Shading. to progress from gesture drawings to developed shaded drawings and achieve this objective within the prescribed unit duration of a semester. The paper also seeks to determine the extent to which observation in life drawing is significant as a formative strategy in helping students create their drawings and whether the drawings created meet the standard of drawing required at University level. Ultimately the purpose of life drawing is to enable the students to confidently engage in other related units where their figure drawing skills are required. The students were required to use pencil for all stages of creating their drawings in order for them to focus on the sequential development. Pencil is a foundational tool and is easy to use and affords the students adequate manoeuvrability both in terms of basic sketching and shading. The use of other media would follow in subsequent related units after the students have achieved the prescribed level of foundational skills. In this series of drawings, the students used a female studio model but also drew each other as temporary or stand-in class models in order to add alternate variety in body shapes, attire and other adornments presented by using both male and female students. This approach to life drawing created an enhanced sense of enjoyment and engagement. This interest and enthusiasm in drawing each other was presumably caused by the fascination with trying to capture each other's body shape as they already perceive it, since they spend significant time together. The female studio model, however, provided them with the opportunity to visually interact with the specific model without the inherent pressure

to produce undistorted drawings as in the case when drawing their colleagues. Both approaches were designed to help the students collectively draw inspirational drawings as well as make the drawing exercises methodical, enjoyable, and purposeful. The drawings were analysed using an analytical framework suitable to the approach applied in this study.

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INTRODUCTION

Use of Gesture Drawing as a Formative Strategy in Life Drawing

Gesture drawings can vary in duration from less than a minute to up to 10 minutes depending on the nature of the gestural pose. However, for beginners it is preferable to focus on shorter durations of up to five minutes since the idea is to quickly capture the gestural pose. The purpose envisaged in gesture drawing is to be able to capture the transient figure in situations where an artist wants to sketch unfolding circumstances in real time. The artistic purpose of gesture drawing in a class setting, is to harness the attention of students towards the essence of proportions of the human body and its anatomy. This is because human figure proportions remain constant in whatever pose the body is presented. What students draw in quick gesture drawings are, therefore, not amorphous forms; they are forms that *should* be suggestive of accurate proportions of the model despite the fact that they are captured rapidly, are devoid of detail and are fundamentally geared to

show movement and capture the pose. The essence of speed in gesture drawing exercises is to focus the eye upon the pertinent proportions of the human body segments and how they interlock at the joints and therefore, relate in the emanation of body movement and mobility. Scott (2018), says the purpose of gesture drawing "is primarily to study human form and anatomy. It allows you to explore the way the body moves and is connected. You will start to get a feel for the contractions, joints, twists, pulls and curves demonstrated by the human body."

Gesture drawing occurs in timed phases. One may wish to begin with very quick one to two minutes studies and progress towards slightly longer durations of about five to nine minutes that help you to consolidate your figure drawing without applying any details. This could be stretched up to 15 to 20 minutes depending on the level of consolidation of line but still with minimal details. The use of time limits in the drawing process is designed to determine the time frame that is suitable for each student to achieve the full figure without detail. This might seem confusing to some students at first but

the concept is simple; when you make quick drawings of a model in a gestural pose within a designated time limit, you are in essence trying to capture the pertinent parts of the form and blocking out those details that are not immediately necessary in helping you achieve that objective. This means that one needs to capture basic suggested shapes and distances quickly to build up accurate proportions that outline the form and movement. For example, the head is quickly captured as an oval shape followed by the neck and shoulder blades; the arms do not need to have the details of muscle shapes but may capture only the distances between the shoulder, elbow, and wrist joints.

The hands do not have to capture the details of the palm and fingers but only a suggestive shape that represents them. The torso does not need to show the details of its shape and muscles, only of how it connects to the pelvic area and creates a sense of body mobility, weight distribution and stability. This does not happen at once and needs constant practice. Once this concept of interrelated body segments that jointly constitute synchrony of movement is inculcated in the mind, the greater concept of related proportions becomes more apparent. This in turn leads to a much more focused approach to human figure drawing where details are gradually introduced including filling in actual shapes of body parts including the articulation of muscles. Gesture drawing is extremely useful as a beginner's foundation to life drawing because it bears significant manoeuvrability and one does not have to be afraid of initially making mistakes. Once a student has learnt the connectivity of body parts, the distances between them, the functionality of joints and the instigation of mobility, they begin to understand the constant nature of proportions and the beauty of anatomy. Woodie (2018), notes that "Gesture drawings are a better way to build a drawing because they show both the pose and the proportion of your figure (like an armature does), but they also give your drawing a rhythm and flow." When this is later augmented by the addition of details of muscle/bone structural anatomy, and the wider skeletal structure (musculoskeletal structure), ligaments, tendons and holistic body shape, life drawing experience becomes complete and fulfilling.

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

In examining human figure drawings using a clothed model as in the case of this study, the following points are pertinent:

- The distribution of weight as a tool for the study of balance, posture and pose.
- The suggestion of movement.
- Body proportions, shapes, and their interrelationships.
- Evidence of focused observation.
- Execution, accuracy, and finish

Distribution of Weight as a Tool for the Study of Balance, Posture and Pose

The human body is already a very well-balanced creation where all body parts or limbs are functionally aligned. This alignment is associated with the distribution of physical weight which has a direct relationship with the perception of visual weight. This visual weight distribution is what underscores the precision of the human figure which artists must internalize. This alignment also means that all parts of the body have their physical proportions which make them not only interrelate but ultimately bear functional synchrony. Subsequently, this implies that careful study of this functionality contributes to the correct visual study of the human form that artists engage in. A good point from which to start is the quick examination of the bone structure of the body through the study of the skeleton. Indeed, in many life drawing sessions, students often begin, to their amusement, by drawing a skeleton model, to draw their attention to the human bone structure. When students examine a live model before them, one of the major initial drawbacks as they start to draw is that they do not know exactly what they are looking for. What they should be looking for is proper weight distribution and body alignment that creates the correct posture; and good posture is intricately associated with correct proportions.

Suggestion of Movement

A human body is designed to emanate movement and mobility in all its joints that underscores its functionality. It is imperative that any depiction of a human form bears this suggestion of movement and flexibility that is shown, firstly, through initial gesture drawings, gestural poses and various drawing possibilities that present the body in various positions. Secondly, movement itself is closely related to the notion of intricate gestural expressions that communicates specific visual messages and emotions such as in dance, and which embrace all other aspects of human expression including facial expression. Hence, the human body is not static and can only be studied in the context of its own emanation of movement.

Study of Proportions and Their Interrelationships

Drawing the human form is based on the depiction of correct body proportions mainly because the human form is a very precise creation with a very well-defined structure. When one embarks on drawing of a human figure, the main objective is to get the proportions correct unless any other deliberate objective like abstraction, informs any distortion. This accurate depiction of proportions is ultimately made easier by a basic understanding of human anatomy and how body parts interrelate in terms of their functional roles.

Evidence of Focused Observation

The idea of having a model as a real-life referent, is to provide an opportunity for the students to observe, first-hand, the human figure proportions as they actually appear. Therefore, a well-executed life drawing is always testimony of the application of good observational skills. These skills manifest themselves differently in the work of different individuals and, hence, the varied quality of drawings. Just like in any skill, there are individuals whose observation skills are well developed and are able to pick out and depict certain aspects that make their drawings outstanding and more convincing. Good observational skills are augmented by a fair understanding of the interrelationship between parts of the body, particularly the bone structure and the functional role of joints.

Execution, Accuracy and Finish

Depending on the objective of the particular life drawing exercise, the quality of execution, accuracy and finish can be varied. Some exercises are more concerned with spontaneity of layout and students may undertake a number of drawings and spend a bit of time at this stage. They may also use different materials and tools. As they draw and gain confidence, they become more aware of the need of accurately portraying the body proportions since these proportions remain constant and cannot be changed. Once they have focused on a particular drawing, however, they may embark on developing the finer details such as attire, tones and shadows that help to enhance their work and give it a three-dimensional appearance. The quality of finishing a human figure drawing depends on the level of individual artistic skill including pencil shading, observational acumen, and overall personal style.

Study of Likeness

Depending on the objective of the class study, the application of the notion of likeness may be either necessary or redundant. In the initial stages of gesture drawing and preliminary line sketches, the focus is movement, gestural poses, and figure layout. This gradually develops into the study of actual shapes of parts of the body where the students start to propagate certain details like stooping or straight shoulders, muscles of the arm, chest, legs, waistlines, and hips that form the recognizable 'body profile.' Some students may feel that they are ready to develop their studies further into finished drawings and that is where the concept of likeness becomes apparent. It is always appropriate and advisable for students to learn to study the likeness of the individual model because they are dealing with the specificity of this individual and, therefore, the endeavour to get facial likeness and visual description of body 'character' becomes part of their artistic challenge.

ANALYSIS OF DRAWINGS

Preliminary Sketches



Plate 1a



Plate 1b



Plate 1c

Source: Author's drawings

After the initial gesture drawings where the students learn to capture movement, body posture and important indicators of body proportions, students are now introduced to the standing figure which is fundamental in comprehending human proportions. All other postures and gestural poses are based on how well students relate the proportions of body parts as they are configured and synchronize with each other in their functionality and visual logic. This is best demonstrated in a standing posture. The concept of *visual logic* as coined in this paper and as applied to proportions, refers to the basic notion that the human body, for instance, is already a very well sculpted form whose proportions are well known and follow a very precise functional purpose. In this functional precision, the size of the head is

supported by a commensurate size and strength of the neck muscles; the neck is held in place by the stretch of the shoulders and its muscles, the arms stretch down to a given point just above the knees; the waist line or pelvic area is very defined; the knees are strategically placed to support the torso and the feet bear the entire weight of the body (*Plates 1a-c*). This precision is translated into the way the human eye then scans over the human body and internalizes this relationship between parts. The precision is so defined that it follows a certain visual logic that cannot be changed or interfered with. Any interference with this configuration would lead to a physical malfunction which in turn translates into some form of visual inconsistency which the artist will notice and seek to rectify in his/her drawing.

*Plate 2a**Plate 2b**Plate 2c*

Source: Author's drawings

The standing figure sketches are designed to help students capture the pertinent proportions of the body with rapid pencil lines that accurately study the related proportions. Unlike gestural poses, they emphasize less on movement and gestures and more on segment demarcation that underscores human body proportions as indicative of how the various body parts relate to each other. The ability of students to observe these relationships become important in attaining this accuracy. *Plates 2a-c* demonstrates the need for observational accuracy. Without too much calculation, the students should be able to lay out the figure using free hand by carefully observing how each body part relates to the other to form the holistic form that appears accurate and pleasant to the eye. Often students are instructed to fit the figure within eight segments relative to the size of the head, (counting heads is part of the formulaic approach) but while this helps

some students, others still struggle to place an accurate figure within the lines of segmentation since they have still not attained the observational acumen to fit in the proportional relationship between parts. This study posits that this development of accurate figure layout is more about good observation and free hand movement, than it is about the notion of measurement. Indeed, when students are consistently aware of the proportions of body parts relative to each other, they can handle any pose without measurement, since limbs fold or bend at the joints in accordance to their functional synchrony. As has been observed, visual 'accuracy' in human figure layout is sharpened by keen observation, and is closely related to the concept of visual 'logic.' For instance, the figure drawings show the relationship between the head, neck and stretch of shoulders; the length of the arm compared to the waist and knee; the positioning of the hand;

the positioning of the waist line, the buttock line, the knee cap line, the ankle, and the feet. When the students learn to observe and capture these relationships, they always get the proportions

correct because they can determine when their figure is incorrect and therefore, necessitates self-rectification.

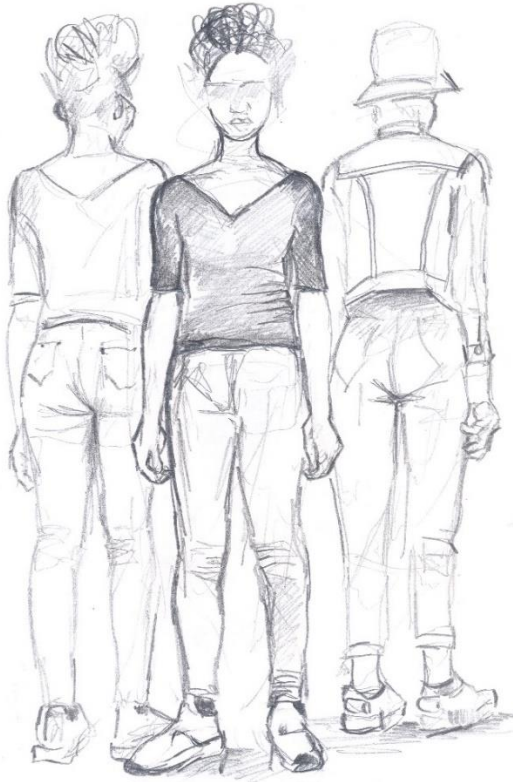


Plate 3a

Source: Author's drawings

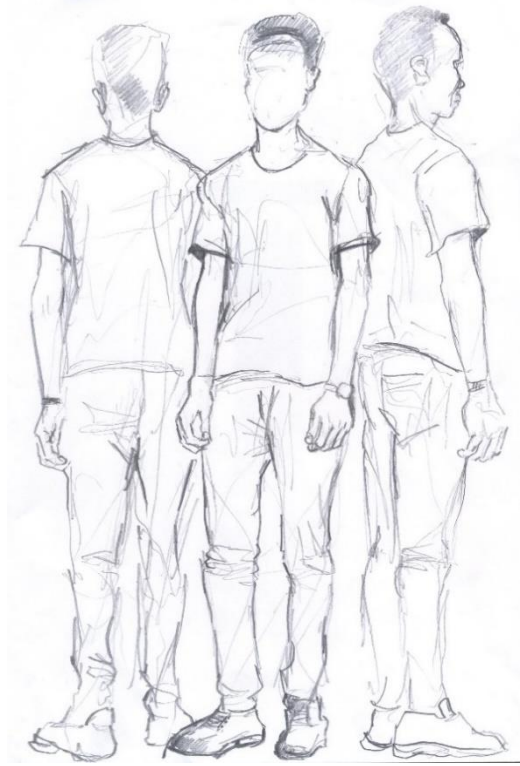


Plate 3b

In *Plates 3a and 3b*, the set of drawings capture the essence of quick line drawings that seek to capture proportions in a quick but accurate way that lay the ground work for further detailed study. The students should, at this stage, be able to define the figure of the model in a quick and systematic way within 5-9 minutes. Within that time, it should be easy to define not only the proportions as they appear, but the unique figure that is descriptive of the respective individual model from whatever angle; front, back or side. It is important that the students capture the flowing figure where the body parts are captured as they relate in a standing posture since that is the only way to comprehend the relationships between them.

They do this successfully by noting points of emphasis. This study noted that those students who were more aware of the spontaneous relationship between parts of the body as they are designed to physically synchronize, and were able to capture this spontaneity, were able create better drawings and gained their confidence faster than those students who were not aware of this spontaneity. It was also apparent that after this comprehension, the students were subsequently able to draw and study any other posture, whether seated, reclining or action oriented, referred to as 'action poses' that the model resorted to.



Plate 4a



Plate 4b



Plate 4c

Source: Author's drawings

In *Plates 4a-c* which is the study of the same model in three poses, the quick sketches show the beginnings of the consistent study of body shape, in this case of a clothed female figure, which should be spontaneously articulated as the rest of the proportions are carefully observed. The fact that a female figure should appear like a female and a male figure should look like a male is because their body limbs, though they play the same functional roles, are different in outlook. This anatomical awareness

is important to help the students internalize what they are articulating as they develop their drawings. For instance, in drawing the female figure, the emphasis of a slender neck, shorter shoulder length, slender slightly inward leaning arms, a bosom, smaller hands, a compressed waistline, protruding hips and buttocks are characteristic of the female figure which should be taken into account as the rest of the proportions are worked out.

Study of the Model



Plate 5a – 5d ‘Study of standing model’ – by students (front and side views, pencil)

Source: Department of Fine Art & Design

Plates 5a-d are sketches by students that show that to a large extent within the course of the study, the students were able to lay out the female figure with relative accuracy, observing the pertinent parts that underscore the model’s shape. The exercises involved drawing quick line sketches using each other as stand-in models. They seemed to enjoy this constant change of model since it created new challenges and reduced monotony. Although they were not required to insert details, they were required to observe certain parts of the form that are enhanced by the nature of the attire. For example, in *Plate 5b*, the waist line of the student model is emphasized by the tightened belt of the trouser and the folds created by the knot on the blouse which the student captures quite well. The knees are suggested by the folds forming on the trouser, and the sleeves of the blouse helped the student to work out the length of the arm. In *Plate 5c*, the student displays good grasp of how to lay out the figure but shortens

the arms and enlarges the hands. In *Plate 5d*, the figure is well laid out but the hands and shoes are slightly small. This study concludes that students had a consolidated idea of what they were observing but certain details still needed to be observed more keenly. For instance, slight elongation or compression of the body frame, or the insertion of small hands and feet are not unusual and are indeed expected at this stage; but they are gradually self-rectified with more practice. The students did not use the eight segment lines and did not, therefore, feel they needed to fit their figure within these designated spaces. They instead used their observation skills and spontaneous freehand sketching and control of pencil, starting from the head and working their way downwards all the way to the feet. In order to determine whether their proportions were developing well, they were instructed to constantly hold out their drawings some distance away from their eyes. This provided

a better leverage to detect any emerging flaws in their drawings.



Plate 6 'Study of model' – (side view, pencil)

Drawing by author - 2021 (size, A3)

Source: Department of Fine Art & Design



Plate 7 'Study of model' – (front view, pencil)

Kazungu Wanje – 2021 (size, A3)

Source: Department of Fine Art & Design

After a series of drawings of the standing figure, students embarked on drawing the seated figure. It was presumed that after adequately internalizing basic proportions as they appear in a standing figure, they would now observe how the body parts relate as they fold in a seated position and how the proportions then interact. They were instructed to use free hand and apply careful observation with very focused eye movement as a basic strategy. They were also asked to particularly observe how the body structure itself bends and adjusts at the joints and how proportions fit within that adjustment. These pivotal joints that facilitate the seated posture were identified as the elbow, the wrist, the waist or pelvic area, the knees and the ankles. In drawing with the students, the author made a sketch of one of the stand-in models (*Plate 6*) to demonstrate how the human form appears in a seated position and why the careful study of the

joints is important in drawing a seated posture. The drawing became a reference point for the objective of the drawing exercises. Focus then was placed on the role of joints and it emerged that in whatever pose, joints were important not only as facilitators of the movement of body parts but were also essential in constructing proportions. Medlej (2013), notes that “A well-proportioned figure, regardless of variations due to gender or such, is defined by *the alignment of the joints*, which is invariable (that is, we perceive something odd if it does vary).” *Plate 7* shows that the student was able to draw the proportions of the seated model quite accurately using simple lines and with only the necessary details that describe the figure. This was significant because it demonstrated that careful observation alone was adequate to construct a good figure drawing and render proportions relatively accurately. It was also evident that the initial gesture

drawings and standing figure drawings were an important basis upon which proportions were internalized by the students in general and,

subsequently, applied in life drawing in whatever other pose that was presented.



Plate 8 'Study of model' – (side view, pencil)

Fidel Castro Ahuba- 2021 (size, A3)

Source: Department of Fine Art & Design

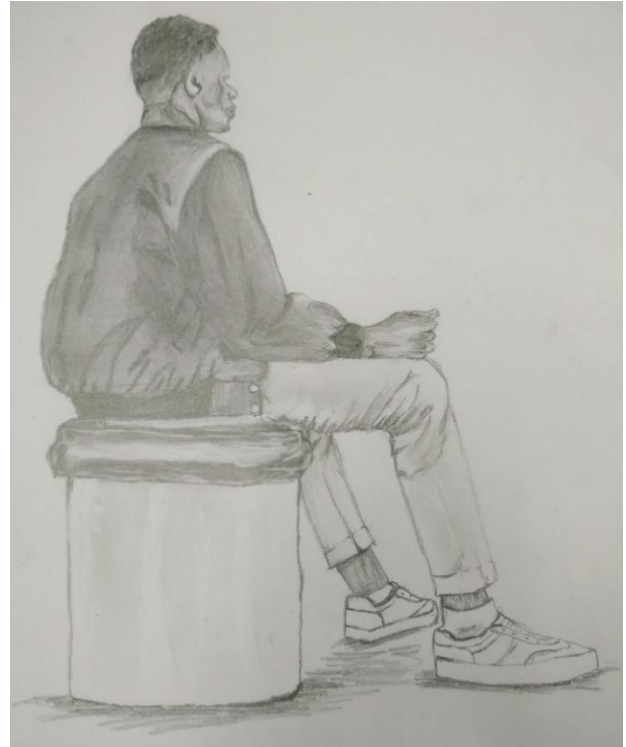


Plate 9 'Study of model' – (back/side view, pencil)

Adhiambo Ode – 2021 (size, A3)

Source: Department of Fine Art & Design

Plates 8 and 9 demonstrate that the students were increasingly aware and keen on the need for accurate portrayal of proportions as they continued with studies of the seated human figure using stand-in models. It is emphasized that the students executed their drawings spontaneously with the use of freehand pencil drawing and application of observation skills that were meticulously followed up with their instructor. They started to comprehend

that careful observation of proportions as presented on the model was crucial in laying out the form; in the way the joints folded into the respective posture without losing the proportionate length between the limbs. The students also became increasingly aware of the functional role of each body part and how joints play a significant part in this functionality and creation of movement and mobility, even in a seated position.



Plate 10a ‘Study of model’ – (front view, pencil)

Rochester Otieno - 2021 (size, A3)

Source: Department of Fine Art & Design

Plate 10a shows the study of a complete seated human figure with well executed shading that shows light and dark tones as they manifested upon the folds of the attire. Pencil tones, in this case, have an uncanny way of suggesting folds on the attire which underscore the physical folding and bending of limbs and the interaction of joints. In seated figures, joints are, subsequently, important in creating related distances between folded limbs which underscore their proportional relationships. For instance, the bending of the body at the pelvic area that creates the seated posture also creates a distance that stretches between the waist area and the knee joint. The bended knee joint creates a distance between itself and the ankle. Likewise, the bending of the elbow creates the distance between the elbow and the shoulder joint and from the elbow to the wrist and hand. It was observed that the more students were able to observe these distances



Plate 10b ‘Study of face’ – (close-up, pencil)

Rochester Otieno – 2021 (size, A3)

Source: Department of Fine Art & Design

correctly, the more they are able to render accurate drawn forms. The whole of this relationship between pertinent body limbs starts from the head and neck, down to the shoulder joint and shoulder blade and eventually down to the feet (*Plate 10a*). The student also demonstrated that he understood why an element of facial detail that suggested facial likeness was important not only as an end to itself but as a way of emphasizing posture, poise and character (*Plate 10b*). This study postulates that the notion of facial likeness is more crucial in rendering the holistic and complete human figure drawing than has been otherwise argued; that facial likeness is necessary as a component of the developed human form that gives the (particular) model his or her identity. The artistic portrayal of likeness is, therefore, akin to giving that individual an identity and character which underscores the whole purpose of life drawing.



Plate 11a ‘Study of model’ – (front view, pencil)

Rochester Otieno - 2021 (size, A3)

Source: Department of Fine Art & Design

Using the regular class model, the students embarked on a series of drawings where they were required to study more details of the posture, face and attire to demonstrate that they understood the functional value of proportions and how they artistically relate in whatever pose. In *Plate 11a*, the model is presented in a seated position on a flat surface with the torso propped up at an angle and supported by one hand. The student captured the pose as well as the shape of the model quite accurately including an element of foreshortening on the left leg. This was deemed important because it demonstrated that the more accurately one observes the model and lays out the proportions well, the more the form is convincing and captures the personality of the individual model, particularly



Plate 11b ‘Study of model’ – (side view, pencil)

Kimathi Mnoti – 2021 (size, A3)

Source: Department of Fine Art & Design

when the face is also captured. The student went ahead to study textural details of the attire and the tonal variations that defined both the attire and skin of the body. In order to have students study the model from multiple poses and angles, the model posed in a variety of challenging positions. In *Plate 11b*, the student draws a side view of a clothed model seated on a pouffe. The drawing shows that the student not only studied the proportions from this angle but proceeded to study textural effects and folds on the model’s dress that enhanced the form. The study of the pouffe itself became part of the holistic composition. These drawings indicate a significant development and consolidation of human figure drawing from the earlier gesture drawing.

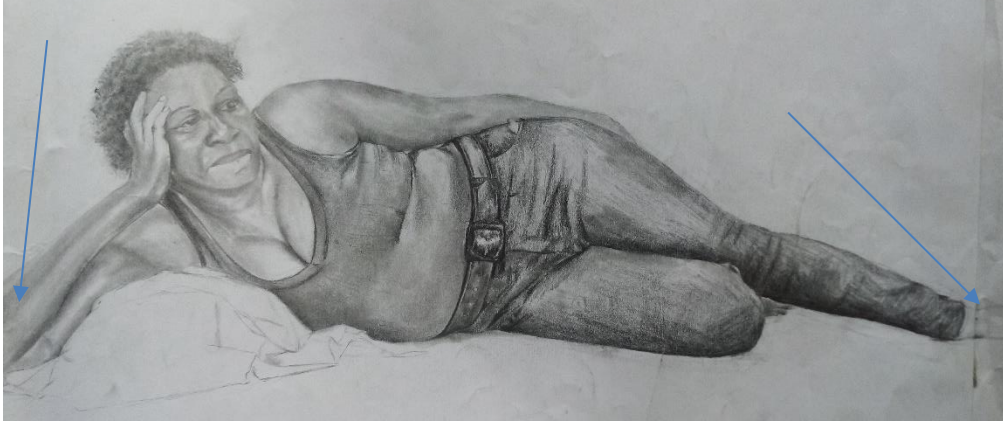


Plate 12a ‘Study of reclining model’ – (front view pencil)

Rochester Otieno - 2021 (size, A3),

Source: Department of Fine Art & Design

The reclining figure offered students further opportunity to study proportions from a different pose and from different angles. The aim was to continue the focus on how parts of the body relate in terms of their functional use and how that affects how they are visually articulated such that the drawn form is not only artistically accurate but would be functional were it to spring to life. At this stage, the students were required to include the amount of detail that they perceived adequate to show this effect. In *Plate 12a*, the student shows the study of the model lying on a flat surface with her head propped up by her arm and supported by a pillow. The student studies the model’s body posture using pencil tones to depict the folds on her attire that enhance this posture. The face is well drawn

capturing the likeness of the particular model, adding life and presence to the drawing. However, there are a few compositional errors which also relate to proportions; the elbow and the foot are cut off at the edges on either side of the picture plane and the foot itself is too small compared to the size of the body. In *Plate 12b*, although the drawing is well done, with adequate pencil shading and facial likeness, it shows the same errors. As observed before, students often become engrossed with capturing the body itself and fail to integrate the entire composition within the picture plane. They also tend to misalign the proportions of certain parts such as hands and feet that also tend to be pushed off the edge of the paper.

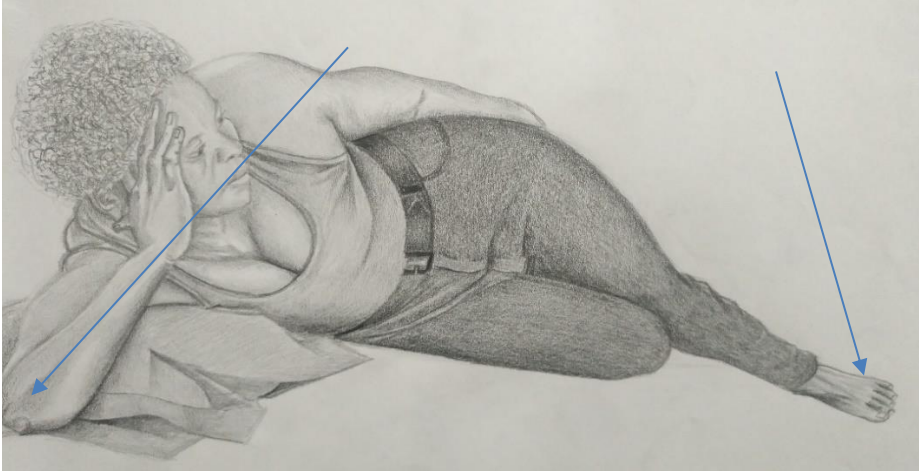


Plate 12b ‘Study of reclining model’ – (front view, pencil)

Kimathi Mnoti – 2021 (size, A3)

Source: Department of Fine Art & Design

However, the drawings show that the students were able to create good studies of the form itself as a result of careful observation of the model. This demonstrates that the spontaneity of observation,

when well directed and focused, and where students bear a clear inclination of what they are looking for, is critical in the development of an accurate human form.

Study of the Face



Plate 13a ‘Study of face’ – (front view, pencil)

Rochester Otieno - 2021 (size, A3)

Source: Department of Fine Art & Design



Plate 13b ‘Study of face’ – (side view, pencil)

Rochester Otieno – 2021 (size, A3)

Source: Department of Fine Art & Design

Though in this series of studies, the detailed study of the faces was not a paramount objective, students went ahead to capture some element of detail of the fundamental aspects of the model's face in order to develop a likeness. Since an open smile is difficult to sustain for a prolonged period within normal facial expression, students were allowed to take a photograph of the smiling model and then continue with the rest of their observation

In *Plate 13a* the student studies the face of the referent individual classmate with admirable detail, including the expression on the eyes and the glow of the smile. It is noteworthy that the student captures the perceived character of the individual with the sparkle on the wide eyes. The student also captures the description of the facial structure itself, the braided hair, the nature of the teeth that culminate in the break of a smile, as well as the attire around the neck. These attributes of the study make it possible to identify the peculiarities of the referent individual. In *Plate 13b*, the student gives the drawing a sense of feeling and expression; the smile is ecstatic and human, expressing a sense of

unbridled joy. This is indeed the essence of facial drawing; or the essence of holistic life drawing since the face gives the entire form its dramatic presence. There can be no other reason for studying the face other than revealing its human characteristics which, by extension, depict the individuality of the referent person. In facial studies that form part of human figure drawing, students are encouraged to study the individuality of facial character of the referent person in order to capture the uniqueness of that individual. In so doing, students learn that their individual drawing skills play a part in capturing the essence of the peculiarities of one individual referent's face against another that becomes essential in portraiture. Faces always tell a story; a triumphant story, a sad story, a glowing story, a story of hope and expectance, a story of gloom and despair, whichever the case may be. Within class drawing, students are given time to capture certain individual attributes of their different referent individuals that contribute to this description; and the exciting part is that they all bring out different studies that make the class discussions very engaging.



Plate 14a 'Study of face' – (front view, pencil)

Shirley Adema- 2021 (size, A3)

Source: Department of Fine Art & Design



Plate 14b 'Study of face' – (side view, pencil)

Shirley Adema – 2021 (size, A3)

Source: Department of Fine Art & Design

In *Plate 14a*, the student depicts a face that bears the expression of an element of sobriety. The essence of human facial drawing as part of life drawing is to capture what the face might tell us about the character of the individual. The ability to capture facial expression and emotion, hence, becomes uniquely important in the student's acquisition of drawing skills since there is no face without expression, and even a 'blank' expression is still an expression. The eyes of the referent individual gaze with a degree of melancholy into the viewers face

as if pleading for understanding. In *Plate 14b* the same student studies the same referent individual from the side view and captures the same interesting gaze from the side. At the point of studying the referent face, it was observed that many students did not immediately realize the extent to which they were delving into the essence of facial expression or what the face might be communicating; they remained much more engrossed in capturing facial features as a matter of getting the likeness as correct as possible.



Plate 15a 'Study of face' – (Side view, pencil)

Castro Ahuba - 2021 (size, A3)

Source: Department of Fine Art & Design

In *Plate 15a*, the student makes a study of the face that can be interpreted in two ways. Firstly, the drawing itself is well executed, describing all the pertinent features of the face; the style and texture of the hair, the gaze, the smile, the spectacles, and the pose. The student also executes the shading well, bringing out the physical aspects of the referent individual. Secondly, the student captures the perceived character of the referent individual in terms of physical characteristics that are readily observable; the happiness, youthfulness, and exuberance. The expressiveness of the face suggests character; it has, however, been controversial



Plate 15b 'Study of face' – (front view, pencil)

Rochester Otieno – 2021 (size, A3)

Source: Department of Fine Art & Design

whether an individual's character can be derived or inferred from drawn expression but it is evident that it can be suggested.

In *Plate 15b*, the drawing is well executed and the student proceeds to study a face with an intriguing expression that tells a story. As earlier observed, faces do indeed tell a story; a story of calmness, of despair, of deep thought, of hope and even perhaps of sadness. This drawing demonstrates that students are indeed capable of studying the face in detail in order to extract the fundamental essence of facial expression whether or not they are critically aware of it. This suggests that in life drawing, the essence

of facial study and the study of likeness goes beyond capturing the likeness but delves into possible expression of character and human emotions. This is, firstly, evident through the study of the eyes in what is called the gaze; the gaze is very important because it implies the manifestation of inner thought; and the notion of inner thought delves into what could be going on in the individual's mind which might suggest their individual inclinations including emotions. It is amazing that these associations can be made by just looking at the

drawing. Secondly the student studies the tightness of the lips which suggests the seriousness of the circumstances; tight lips imply a certain tenseness or sobriety of the moment. The student does this through well executed pencil shading to depict facial tones that help to depict the major attributes of the face. It is possible that even in forensic art, the nature of the character of an individual, his or her inclinations and possible emotional state might be suggested through the artistic study of the face.



Plate 16a 'Study of face' – (Side view, pencil)

Castrol Ahuba - 2021 (size, A3)

Source: Department of Fine Art & Design



Plate 16b 'Study of face' – (front view, pencil)

Nimrod Mwhia – 2021 (size, A3)

Source: Department of Fine Art & Design

Students took time to study the face as an integral part of life drawing and each approached it in his or her own individual way particularly in view that they were studying each other's faces as part of the exercise. The students derived great keenness and enthusiasm as they undertook the study of faces as if they were trying to underscore the character of the individual referent; or perhaps just to get the face right. This study posits that often the motivation to get something artistically right may translate to added impetus, for instance in this case, to get proportions correct. In *Plate 16a* the student studies

the face of a colleague from a side angle capturing in an artistic but simple way the pertinent facial details such as the scanty beards, texture of hair, spectacles and cap. In *Plate 16b* the student studies the face of a colleague from the front view capturing the rather serene face accompanied by a mild smile and sparkling eyes, suggesting that the individual might be a 'happy' or approachable person. The drawing is enhanced by thick, textured hair and facial pencil tones that define quite accurately the nature of the face and perceived character of the person.

Close-Ups and Textural Effects



Plate 17a 'Study of face' – (Side view, pencil)

Bill Ombasa - 2021 (size, A3)

Source: Department of Fine Art & Design



Plate 17b 'Study of face' – (front view, pencil)

Lubuya Hablyltone – 2021 (size, A3)

Source: Department of Fine Art & Design

During the study of the face, students are regularly encouraged to incorporate certain details since the face and the head in general are important components of life drawing and should attain a certain level of detail in order to add a little character to the form. Life drawing is not just about getting the proportions correct but ultimately to capture the form in its entirety including the concept of facial likeness. Students were given more time to incorporate these details. In *Plate 17a*, the student observed certain intricate textures of the woven hair using a variety of pencil tones to show the textural effects as well as the nature of the hair style. In *Plate 17b*, the student studies the textural effect of the curly hair using intricate pencil tones. In this drawing, the student not only draws the textural effect on the hair but makes a careful study of the face itself; a pleasant smile that certainly defines the personality of the individual to an extent that it is easy to form a mental association of a happy,

pleasant woman. When such facial details are incorporated into the rest of the form itself, then the audience is left with no doubt as to the holistic description of the model and his or her suggested character. In both drawings, the eyes play a significant role in the description of facial character. In *Plate 17a*, the deliberately cut off face (by the author) helps to emphasize the role and importance of the eyes in facial composition; that even without the lower face that includes the nose and mouth, the face still has some element of identity. The eyes are very important in emanating a gaze, which gives them exuberance and a sense of life. In *Plate 17b*, the eyes focus downwards, gazing intensely with an obvious sparkle that gives life to the face. Students may not immediately notice these effects and what they do to transform a face since their initial focus is to get the face as accurately as they can, but are later amazed at their own work when the drawings are critiqued in class.

Study of the Feet



Plate 18a *Preliminary Study of feet*

Cynthia Kariuki 2021 - pencil

Source: Department of Fine Art & Design



Plate 18b *Preliminary Study of feet*

Cynthia Kariuki 2021 *pencil*

Source: Department of Fine Art & Design



Plate 19a *Preliminary Study of feet*

Awinner Oluoch 2021 - pencil

Source: Department of Fine Art & Design



Plate 19b *Preliminary Study of feet*

Nicole Ohawa 2021 – *pencil*

Source: Department of Fine Art & Design

Since feet are located at the lower tip of the human body frame, students often perceive them only as 'insertions' and initially fail to appreciate the role of feet in the holistic presentation of the human form. Even in an otherwise well laid out figure drawing, feet are usually presented smaller in comparison to the rest of the body and often, attention has to be re-focused on the feet in order to adjust them accordingly. For example in *Plate 12a*, although the figure is well drawn, the foot is diminished and goes off the edge of the paper, implying that the student was engrossed in getting the main form correct but did not factor in the foot as an integral part of that form, hence the almost minute insertion. In *Plate 12b*, the foot is small relative to the size of the body and hence, from a physical point of view, the feet would not be able to carry the body weight. The feet and hands are, therefore, important functional tools; the feet basically aid locomotion and weight balance and the hands aid in grasping and gesturing. However, students in their formative stages of human figure drawing, do not often readily relate this functionality to the concept of correct body proportions; that small or oversize feet would indeed hinder smooth physical functionality. Feet are subsequently crucial in terms of visual weight balance. Physical weight balance is intricately related to visual weight balance as a matter of perception.

This study postulates that when people do not associate these two weights, the physical/functional and the visual/artistic, the artistic outcome suffers significantly; that if feet are not perceived to physically support body weight, then they cannot be perceived to support the artistic presentation of the same. This then brings about a physical/visual conflict that must be aligned. Students then realize that when feet seem to support regular physical

body weight of the model, then by extension, they support the visual body weight as is perceived and *observed* in the drawing and, therefore, the proportions in the drawing are seen to be correct. In this regard, it is important that students study the anatomy of the human foot; firstly, the bones and joints, followed by muscles, tendons, and ligaments. Other aspects such as the arches of the human foot are also important and they may also wish to note as a matter of interest, neurovascular structures. Students of art are, however, not overly enthusiastic about the scientific descriptions of the above, particularly because they are underlying and hidden under the skin. However, even without delving too much into the scientific principles of anatomy, it is important that students delve into aspects of surface anatomy or visual anatomy of the feet and ankle as descriptive science, in order to understand the synchrony of functionality and, by extension, the artistic configuration and construction of proportions. Student can then translate this knowledge by making focused artistic studies of feet that help them understand their own individual construction of proportions and, therefore, how the feet fit into the holistic body proportions. In *Plates 19a* and *19b*, the drawings are quick sketches by students showing what they immediately visually perceive as pertinent aspects of the anatomy of the foot. Preliminary studies may be a little exaggerated because of the element of spontaneous interpretation; but these preliminary studies are very important for students' artistic development. Firstly, they observe and draw initial layouts as they appear to their eyes; secondly, they then build functional relationships, that is, they begin to comprehend why the foot is shaped that way; thirdly, they make anatomical references to consolidate these functional relationships. Finally, they synchronize all these to rectify and construct correct proportions.



Plate 20a 'Study of feet' – (underneath of foot, pencil)

Nicole Ohawa - 2021 (size, A3)

Source: Department of Fine Art & Design



Plate 20b 'Underneath of foot'

Kimathi Mnoti – 2021 (size, A3)

Source: Department of Fine Art & Design

In *Plate 20a* and *20b*, the students were instructed to draw a study of each other's foot as they actually viewed it to see whether they were able to capture aspects of the foot that make it functional yet visually convincing. In *Plate 20a*, the student captures the underneath of the foot using spontaneous pencil lines which show the forefoot, the mid foot, and the hind foot. The forefoot shows the five toes (phalanges) but does not show the five longer bones (metatarsals) which would be visible on the inverted upper face of the foot. The drawing also shows the mid-foot from the underneath, the opposite of which would be the pyramid-like set of bones that form the arches of the feet which are the cuneiform bones, the cuboid bone, and the navicular bone. The drawing also shows the hindfoot that, in this case, shows the underneath of the heel. Ordinarily the hindfoot forms the heel and ankle; the ankle is formed by the talus bone which supports the leg bones while the calcaneus bone forms the heel bone. It is probable that at this stage, most students do not yet know these scientific details but they capture the foot visually anyway, like the very finely done drawing (*Plate 20b*); and when they eventually do their referencing, they are able to make the necessary associations emanating from

their drawings. It ultimately becomes clear to them that anatomical configurations are intricately related to visual interpretations both of which are important in drawing.

Study of the Hands

Just like in the study of feet, hands are often inserted at the bottom end of the arms almost as if they were mere embellishments. In the formative stages, students usually draw them small and unproportional to the size of the body, often with small, diminishing fingers. The students' attention has to be drawn to the functional role of hands in order for them to comprehend this functional value and that hands must be proportionally compatible with the size of the arm, whether in the case of a female figure or a male figure, and ultimately to the size of the entire body. It will be noticed that in the preliminary drawings by the author, (*Plates 3a-3b, 4a-4b*), the hands and fingers are somewhat emphasized to ensure that students note their presence and importance in the visual construction of the human figure structure. In order to enhance the feel and presence of hands, the flexibility of fingers and their functional role, the students

embarked on the study of hands in various gestures. This drew their attention to the basic anatomy of the hand and how the hand ultimately fits in as a part of the arm. The flexibility and sense of movement of

the hands from the wrist (*Plate 21a* and *22b*), demonstrate how fingers in particular contribute to grasping objects, operating tools and equipment as well as execution of expressive hand gestures.



Plate 21a ‘Study of hands’ – (Side view, pencil)

Victor Musisi - 2021 (size, A3)

Source: Department of Fine Art & Design



Plate 21b ‘Study of hands’ – (front view, pencil)

Rochester Otieno – 2021 (size, A3)

Source: Department of Fine Art & Design

The students had the opportunity to further study the hand in order to concretize their functional possibilities. It is always advisable that students have an idea of the bone structure of hands because the bone structure is what translates into proportions, functional ability, and correct artistic layout. Other scientific anatomical details hidden beneath the skin are good to note but are not necessary for ‘above skin’ visual interpretation. For instance, in drawing the hand, it is notable that the fingers fold, flex and relate with the palm and wrist joints (carpus) in a very precise way. Even without dwelling too much on the scientific perspective, the student or any other artist, need to show these articulations in an effective visual way. The fingers fold and operate because of the hinge joints between the finger bones (Interphalangeal articulations). There are also joints where the fingers interact with the palm (Metacarpophalangeal joints) and those

where the palm connects with the wrist (Intercarpal articulations). These are basic articulations that are obvious to note even visually as seen through the bone structure itself.

Students should be familiar with the basic bone structure of the hand which includes the phalanges (proximal, middle, and distal phalanges) as well as the metacarpal bones of the palm. *Plates 22a* and *22b*, demonstrate how students viewed and laid out the hands and how they were able to spontaneously study and interpret the articulations in an artistic and pleasant way. The other aspect of the drawings was the application of various pencil tones to articulate these joints, folds, movements, and gestures. For quick identification purposes students opted to use the terms they are familiar with to describe the fingers such the thumb, index finger or forefinger, middle finger, ring finger and little finger.



Plate 22a 'Study of hands' – (pencil)

Kimathi Mnoti - 2021 (size, A3)

Source: Department of Fine Art & Design

Plate 22b 'Study of hands' – (pencil)

Wainaina Warurua – 2021 (size, A3)

Source: Department of Fine Art & Design

In these separate feet and hand drawings, students continuously learnt the functionality of these limbs, but more importantly, why and how they fit into the rest of the human figure, in order for the eventual form to be accurate and pleasant to the eye. It was evident that the separate studies of hands and feet were crucial in the understanding of the functioning of the human body and were also uniquely useful in the layout of body proportions particularly because of their placement at both the tip ends of the body structure.

OVERVIEW AND GENERAL OBSERVATION

Study of the Logic of Body Structure

It was observed that students tended to draw the human figure better when they paused to relate the functional essence of various body parts to their 'commensurate' artistic proportions; and hence they tended to increasingly rely on a certain element of functional/artistic logic. For instance, it is obvious that a prolonged arm that stretches from the shoulders to the knees is certainly not physically tenable since it does not meet the functional role of a normal human arm and hand. Hence, it does not bear artistic 'logic' because human beings do not bear the physical attributes of elongated limbs like those in apes. Similarly, small feet that cannot logically support the body weight cannot, in the

same breath, be artistically correct; the size of the feet is adjusted until it is proportional and compatible to the size and weight of the body. When the feet are visually seen to be able to support the body weight of their form, then they are most likely going to be seen to be artistically correct. When hands, including the palms and fingers, appear capable of grasping something and to emanate a gesture, it is most likely that the hand shall appear to be proportionally compatible to the rest of the arm. It was noted in this study that those students who were more aware of this functional/artistic logic in the drawing of a human figure were able to create better drawings than those who did not immediately relate the two.

Self-rectification

It was observed that when the students started to relate the functional essence of the various body parts, they tended to want to rectify their glaring mistakes that were obviously artistically inadmissible. This tendency to self-rectify was particularly important in improving the quality of their drawings. Those who did not fathom this relationship continued to create drawing which were obviously unproportional since they were not able to self-rectify. Self-rectification is an integral part of artistic development since it denotes the ability to pick out mistakes in a drawing, without those mistakes being pointed out by a third party, and

having the impetus to correct them accordingly. In life drawing, students who are not immediately able to 'see' their own mistakes, take commensurately longer to develop an accurate drawing of the human form.

Study of the Face

It was observed in this study that at the point of studying the referent face in human facial drawing, many students do not actually realize the extent to which they delve into the essence of facial expression; they are much more engrossed in capturing facial features as a matter of artistic accuracy as required in the class exercise. However, at the end, they become captivated by the outcome of their drawings in terms of each drawing's unique expression which epitomizes an element of human appeal and sense of emotion that gives it its meaning. The face then transforms from just a mere facial study to that which describes poise and 'character.' Students make fundamental mistakes in

drawing facial features but these mistakes are considered insignificant in the process of learning since they self-rectify with experience. For example, in *Plate 3a*, it is obvious that the right eye and ear are placed below the left eye and ear and, therefore, do not seem to be placed at the same level, but this does not affect the overall facial expression and the student may not have immediately noticed that the eyes and ears are not symmetrically aligned. Students are, however, encouraged to enjoy free hand drawing that emanates from their observation and not be too engrossed in mathematical calculations since it is also observed that facial features do not always necessarily strictly conform to these measurements and faces are created each in their uniqueness. The beauty of drawing is not in measurement but in the skill of observation. Students acknowledged that the face fits almost accurately within an oval base within and around which other features are built based more or less on symmetrical balance (*Plate 3b*).



Plate 3a 'Study of face' – symmetrical balance

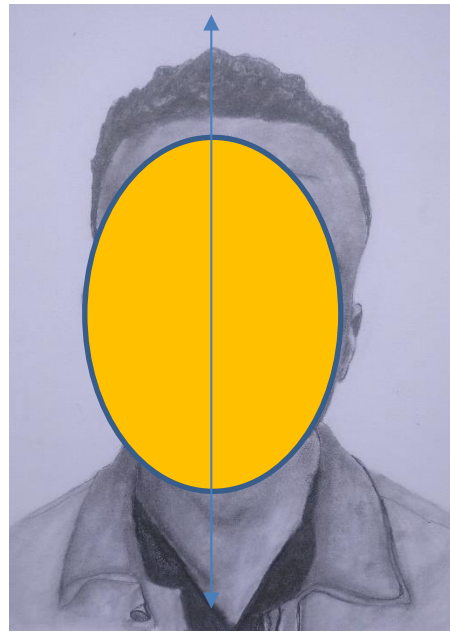


Plate 3b 'Study of face' – oval base

Observation

Observation was critical in drawing the human figure during the course of this study. The advantage of observing a real breathing human

being is that one acknowledges and appreciates that the proportions are presented as they physically exist. Very often in life drawing, as students' eyes oscillate between the model and their drawing, they are not immediately able to carry the necessary

visual translation from the physical model to their flat drawing in front of them; they, at times, do not know what they are looking for and, therefore, end up having a session where the nature of observation and act of drawing are not very well coordinated. Some do not immediately make out the inherent distances, shapes, proportions, movement, and interrelationship between body parts. Hence when they draw, they still make fundamental mistakes that they should be avoiding in the first place. This is not unusual and students become better in making these associations as they develop their observational skill. The essence of observation in life drawing is to help students concentrate on certain pertinent areas of focus. It became apparent that with introductory guidance on the essence of observation, particularly the interrelations between body parts and their movement at the joints, shapes and distances, students demonstrated in this study, that they were able to translate their observation into tangible results.

Role of Model

As has been observed before, the role of a model is critical in human life drawing. It is derived from this study that observation as a strategy for accurate rendition of proportions of the components of the human form is more focused and enhanced when viewing an actual living person or real-life referent than otherwise. Jordan (2017), notes that “Live drawing sessions with models are a popular and rewarding way of keeping basic figure drawing skills sharp. Such occasions also allow an artist to make a series of work in a relatively short period of time.” It was observed that students were increasingly able to relate to the model as the focus of reference and accuracy. They were also able to relate the concept of body movement to actual moving parts and not to a static entity. Hence the live referent was a reminder that proportions are directly related to the functionality and movement of the body parts they represent. To underscore the importance of the model, body movement and artistic association, Mitchel (2013), notes that ‘Human movement requires a lot of cooperation from each of the body parts, and seeing this in motion during a life drawing session can give an artist a sense of what actually goes into a movement.’

Finishing

Though the focus of this study was not necessarily the detailed finishing of the human form but rather on the study of its fundamentals, it was notable that the students themselves were very attracted to the idea of pencil shading of certain details as a spontaneous reaction to observation. They wanted, for instance, to capture facial likeness with which they sought to augment their work which helped them relate to the model. Other students were fascinated by the effect of pencil tones as they applied them to the folds of the model’s attire, helping them to emphasize body posture as well as light shining on the skin. In *Plate 11a*, the student draws a convincing holistic form that includes facial detail and frills on the model’s dress and the form is presented as a convincing complete study of the model’s individuality and personality. Good finishing is about giving the figure drawing a sense of energy and dynamism beyond the technicalities of anatomy and intricacies of proportions. Woodie (2018), observes that, “Anatomy and proportion are important. But alone, they do not make for an interesting drawing. A figure drawing that feels like it has personality or appears dynamic is going to be more interesting than one that is technically correct.” In *Plate 12a*, the student studies the reclining figure in remarkable accuracy including the facial details; the student, however, concentrated so much on getting the body itself correct that he did not give the same attention to the diminishing foot. In the facial studies, the students went out of their way to study likeness which added impetus to the notion of facial character and personality that was refreshing (*Plates 13b, 15a, 15b, 16b, 17b*)

CONCLUSION

It can be concluded from the findings of this study that students learn how to draw the human figure in a multi-faceted way that is both *systematic* and *cumulative*. The initial stages that involve quick gestural studies are useful but not necessarily conclusive; they have to be followed up by a logical way in which human proportions relate to each other and are then holistically assembled into a cohesive form. This implies that there is a certain element of understanding required of the composition of the human anatomy, including the study of the musculoskeletal structure that students need to

comprehend and bear in mind as they draw the human figure. Woodie (2018), observes that, “To draw a realistic figure, you need to pay attention to accurately capture the figure’s proportions and anatomy. This comes from both studying anatomy and having good observational skills.” Contrary to what has often been propagated, the drawing of the human figure is not just an execution of an artistic exercise, it is an understanding of human physical components and their functional interaction. A systematic approach implies that the student must comprehend the systematic and rhythmical way in which the functional mobility of the various human body components relates to the physical proportions as they appear in anatomy. Hence, by extension, their logical *artistic* placement then leads to the unique ability for the student to self-rectify towards the correct drawing of a human form. Cumulative means that when this is applied and observed in subsequent and multiple drawings over a period of time, then the student attains the acumen necessary to reach a level of skill that is admirable and enduring.

It can also be concluded in this study that the ability to carefully and purposefully observe the model during a life drawing session is significant in helping the students develop accurate drawings. However, it can also be concluded that in such sessions, students need to be guided in this process of observation in order for them to build a clear inclination in their minds of what they are looking for and why. This is particularly important because it has been argued before that the ability to ‘look’ does not necessarily translate into the ability to ‘see’ and, hence, although all student observe the model in equal measure, not all are able to make out certain pertinent points of focus and their drawings can, therefore, turn out to be significantly different. In underscoring the importance of observation, Li (2019), notes, “Looking is different from seeing. Looking at things is easy, but seeing is harder. We can easily look at a model and know that it is a model. But seeing means understanding the model’s body.” In terms of developing a clear visual coordination when looking at a model and subsequently drawing what one sees, Li observes that it is a matter of “knowing where the muscles are, how the body is rotated, where the shadows and lights are, the proportions and relationships of parts

of the body, the angle at which the head is tilted etc. By seeing, we can draw with more detail.”

This study further concludes that observation is all-encompassing and is not confined to a particular method or technique; that even beyond contour drawing and line drawing, observation as a skill and as a strategy towards a holistic life drawing is critical. This means that observation of certain details of the model, such as pencil tones, attire, likeness, textures, and facial expressions as well as their subsequent suggestive emotions are equally important in the essence of figure drawing.

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