

PROBLEMS *in* DRAWING

the HUMAN FIGURE

In any given era, learning to draw the human figure, whether nude or clothed, is perhaps the foremost goal of any painter. The nude is the most beautiful and complex of subjects, and is often considered the artist's greatest challenge. Although drawing the nude figure is widely considered to be very difficult, it is in fact generally easier than a portrait, because it does not require that the artist focus on facial details.

Figural Problems

Drawing the human body requires the artist to gather all of her skills in working with real form and volume. As a subject, the human figure requires that we put into practice an entire set of representational skills as we arrange the limbs in a proportional relationship to the body; it also requires the representation of volumes, articulations, planes, and simple forms and their combination into more complex ones. Once we can accurately render the human figure, it is safe to say that we can also take on any other subject, no matter how complicated it may appear.



Synthesis, or reducing forms to their essential content, is a key factor in drawing correctly.



In order to understand the figure, it is first necessary to understand its inner structure. We must observe and infer what is hidden underneath every pose.



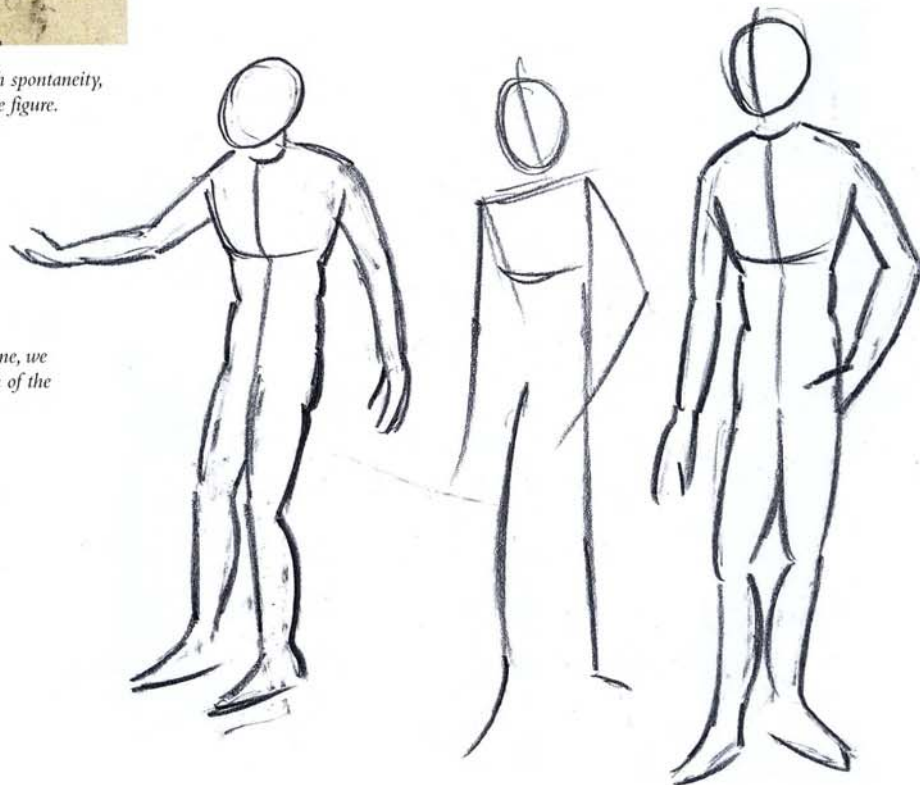
By combining synthesis with spontaneity, we achieve a more expressive figure.

The Secret of Simple Forms

Here's a strategy for approaching the challenges of representing the human figure: first, figure out a starting point for the figure based on simple forms that adjust to the contours of the body (we will see this in the following chapters); then, work with these forms until you arrive at a convincing and recognizable structure. From there, the proportions must be carefully established, making sure that the figure has a proper equilibrium; this is especially important when drawing standing figures. Don't be discouraged by your first drawings, which will most likely look like crudely made dolls—a jumble of sketchy, ill-fitting forms. The best way to start is to reduce complex forms into simpler ones.



A drawing of the human figure should start with an oval representing the head, and then a vertical line for the body. We then add the thorax and the line of the hips, which connects the upper and lower extremities.



Starting from a simple outline, we can make a geometric sketch of the human body.

BASIC HUMAN PROPORTIONS

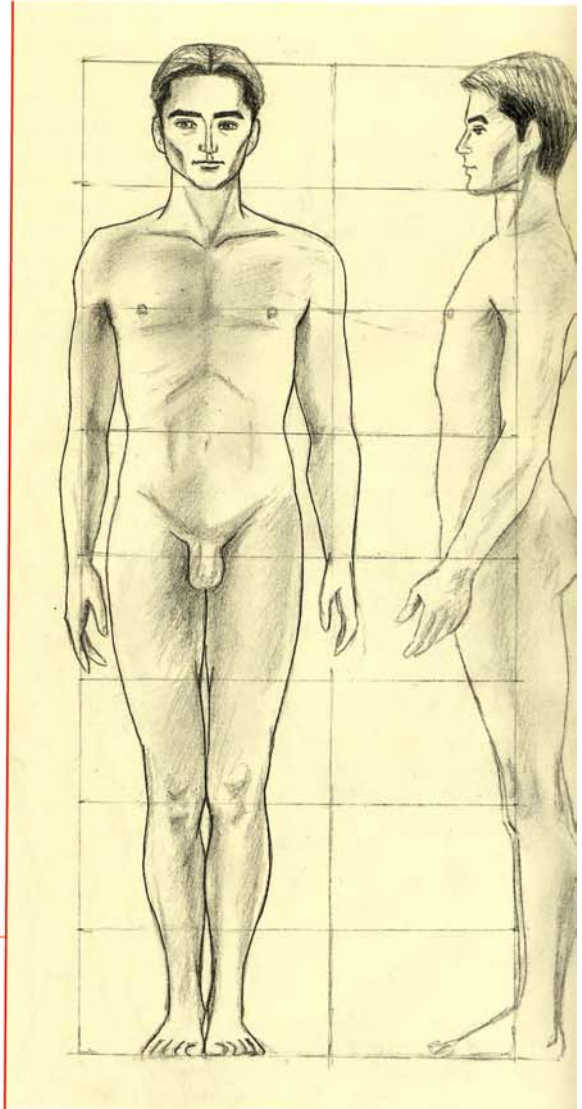
A drawing is considered ill-proportioned when the figure's head appears larger than normal, or when the arms seem too long or too short—in other words, when the figure deviates from what we consider normal. To avoid disproportionality, we look to the laws of proportion as represented in an idealized, conventional drawing of the human form, in other words, one which possesses a perfect relationship between the body's measures. The way we represent the human figure today is based on a Greco-Roman model, the classical Greek law of proportion, which was adopted by the Romans and later resurfaced during the Renaissance after centuries of disuse.

Body Height

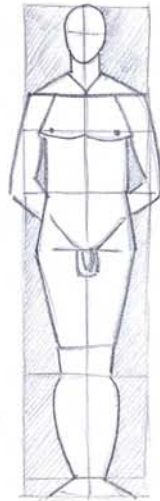
The law of proportion for the human figure is based on a unit of measurement that corresponds precisely to the measurements of the head. According to the classical laws of proportion, the total height of the human body should be equal to seven and a half heads, or seven and a half units. Praxiteles's law established a new idealization of the human body: according to this model, the total height of the human body must equal eight heads. In the early twentieth century, scientific analysis set the proper height of the human body at eight and a half heads. All of these models are valid, but for our purposes, we will use the measurement of eight heads to simplify our study of the academic figure.

The law of proportion based on eight heads yields a proportionate representation of the human body. The division of the body into units serves as a reference for correctly distributing each element of the body.

Often, artists will use a law of proportion based on ten heads for the human body, suggesting a more stylized, elongated figure with a more expressionistic character.



The same imaginary line that divides the frontal view of the body into two halves can also be seen in the rear view of the body. The line is more visible in the rear view thanks to the ridge of the spine.



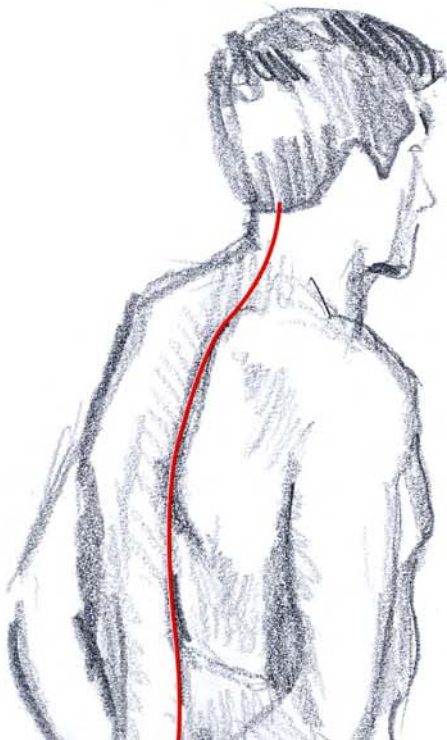
The Back

When a figure is pictured from the back, the first feature that we notice is the clear definition of the figure's vertical axis. The line marking the vertical axis is accentuated by the backbone, by the ridge that the spine forms, by the separation of the buttocks, and by the line describing the inside of the legs.

The Outline of the Body

The outline that marks the limits of the body is described by the muscular reliefs of the body. Muscles are fleshy masses that mold the body, made up of a special tissue that has the property of contracting and changing shape when the figure performs an action. The forms we appreciate on the surface of the body result from the volume of all the muscle masses, including the deepest ones, but the ones closest to the surface are of greater interest to the artist.

The line that marks the spine should be drawn as the axis of symmetry; this way, it will serve as a reference for placing the parts of the body on either half of the body.



The curve that describes the spine, and the extension of this line down to the feet, is a guide for capturing the figure's gesture as viewed from the rear.

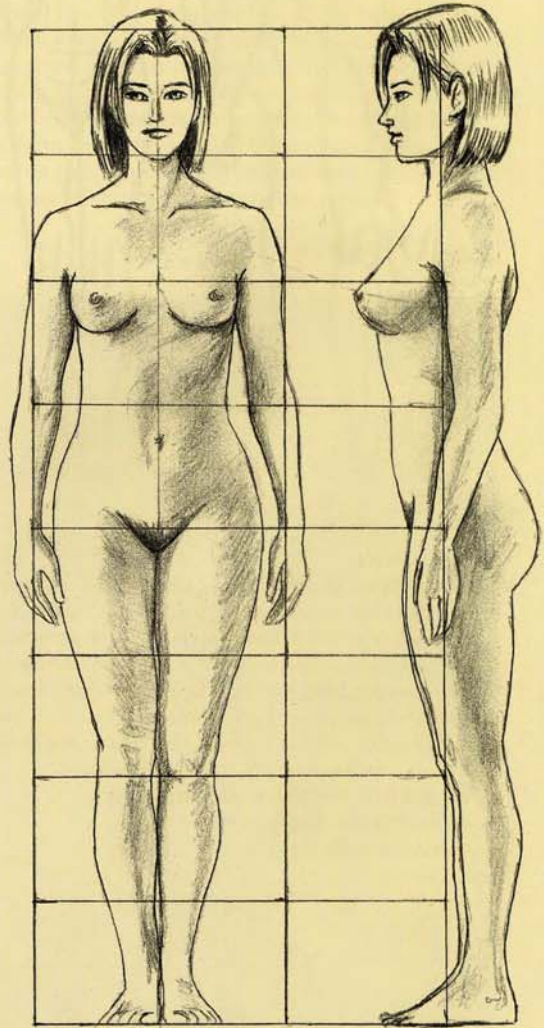


PROPORTIONS *of the* FEMALE FIGURE

The proportions of the male and female body are not much different. The main anatomical difference lies in the female body's narrower shoulders and wider hips.

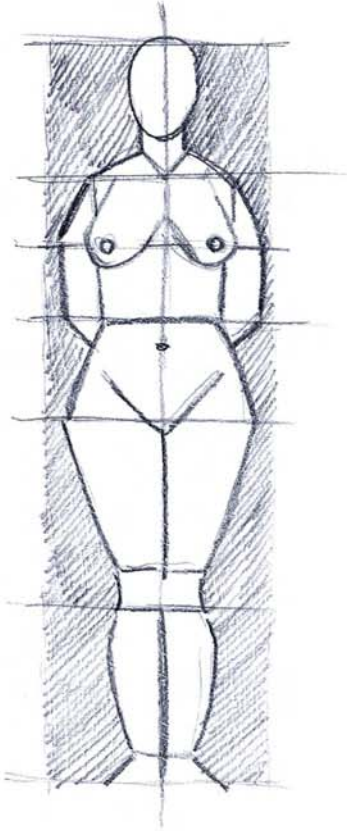
The chest is slightly lower in the female body than in the male. Like the male's, the female's waist is located on the dividing line between the third and fourth units, although a woman's waist is narrower and closer to the chest than a man's. Viewed from the side, the arch of the back is more pronounced than a man's, and as a result, the buttocks appear more prominent. One of the most important factors in making a good drawing of the female figure is placing the waist at the right height, somewhat lower than a man's; this is one of the anatomical features that gives the female body its characteristic form.

Despite the differences between the male and female anatomy, they both follow the eight-head law of proportion, although the configuration of the female's anatomical relief is noticeably different from the male's.



The Outline, Back and Front

The female outline is softer than the male in its transitions between one area and another. The buttocks protrude beyond the vertical line marked by the shoulders, and the outline of the legs describes a diagonal that is less pronounced than the male's. Viewed from behind, the most outstanding characteristic of the female form is the clear contour of the back and hips, which is clearly defined by the waist. The relief of the female torso is far less dictated by the shape of the muscles.



The Female Head

There are several features that clearly distinguish the female head from the male. A man's head is usually more angular than a woman's, which is generally rounder. The bone structure, especially the frontal bone, is more pronounced in a man's face; a woman's profile has softer features, an oval face, and a more bulbous forehead. Furthermore, a man's neck is robust, while a woman's is more delicate.



Drawing from oval shapes is useful in establishing the main features of the female body, and is an important skill to practice.

Drawing the female form based on geometric schemes makes it easier to determine the size and position of each part of the body.

A layer of subcutaneous fat gives the female body voluptuous, rounded forms dominated by curves and a sinewy outline.



Drawing from the General to the Particular

When drawing the head, one should work from the general to the particular. You must first sketch the basic structure of the head; search for its generic form, its most pronounced or prominent angles. It's enough to draw a set of lines marking the location of each of the elements that will make up the face.

The Face

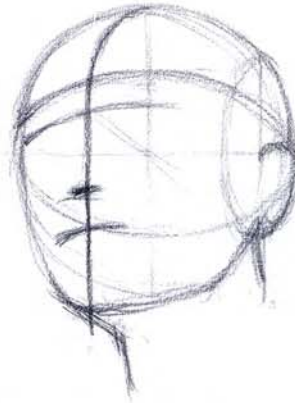
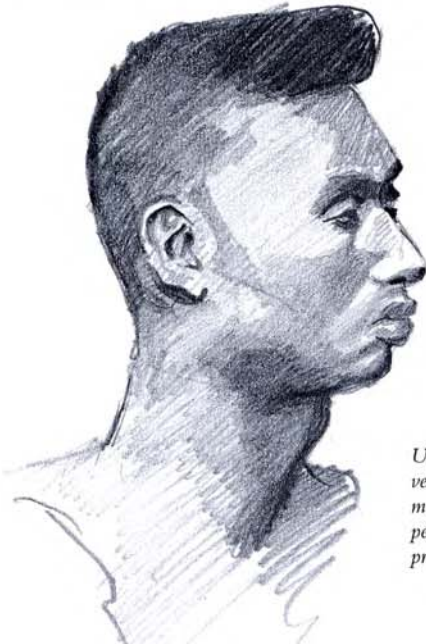
If you draw freehand, the shape of the face from the front should fit within an oval.

If you trace a vertical line to divide the face in two, you can establish an axis of symmetry that will allow you to place the facial features in a proportionate manner; of course, this is only possible if you draw the face from the front.

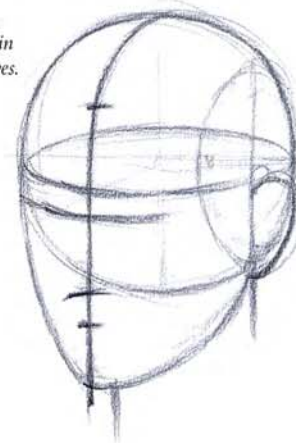
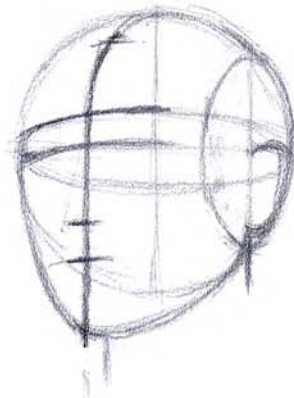
The base of the nose is located on a line dividing the face down the middle, and the mouth is somewhat above the chin line. To these lines, you can then add a line for the eyebrows, which will then give you an adequate outline for drawing the head and facial features.

The Head in Profile

The established proportions for the head in frontal view can also be used for drawing the head in profile. All you have to do is extend the horizontal lines and draw each element of the face, only this time, from the side. The same horizontal divisions used for the frontal view also match the placement of the parts of the face in profile.



These four drawings of the head in different positions show the changes in the face's measurements when it moves.



Understanding the law of proportion for the head in profile can be very useful when drawing portraits such as this one. It is then a matter of simply adapting the features and proportions of the person you are drawing to the initial measurements of the law of proportion.

It's a good tonal exercise to draw a head using flat tones. This practice consists of observing the model attentively and attempting to divide the different tonal areas into imaginary geometric shapes and then coloring them in.



The **TORSO:** FRONT *and* BACK VIEWS

If you analyze a frontal view of the torso you will find that this part of the body comprises the pectoral muscles, a set of thick, wide, pentagonal muscles set in pairs, which expand or contract when the arms are raised or lowered. Notice the distribution of volumes, the profile and expansion of the thorax, from the front and the back, and how the shoulders insert themselves into the thorax in different positions depending on the view. The neck gives the torso a great expressive quality, and its musculature implies the flexibility of the head, so it must always be shown breaking from the symmetry marked by the spine.



The sketches below show how to begin a drawing of the male torso. Begin by establishing a vertical axis. From there, use synthetic forms to fit the rectangular form of the torso within this schema; the curve of the torso depends on the position that the figure assumes. For a frontal view, sketch the more prominent muscular textures, such as the pectoral muscles, the abdominal muscles, and the pubic line. In the rear view below, the spine marks the body's axis.



The Body's Axis

If you analyze the rear view of the torso, you will notice that the spine describes the body's axis: it is a line of symmetry from which the fundamental measurements of the body are established.

Starting from this straight perpendicular, we have constructed a rear view of the torso, taking into account the following factors: the distance between the shoulders and the spine should be equal, even if there is a slight incline; the shoulder blades are the part of the back that stands out most, and its relief is most evident when the model has his arms open. The shoulder blade is triangular and should be accentuated with a light hatching. It's important to notice that the waist is more clearly marked in the frontal view than in the rear view, because from the

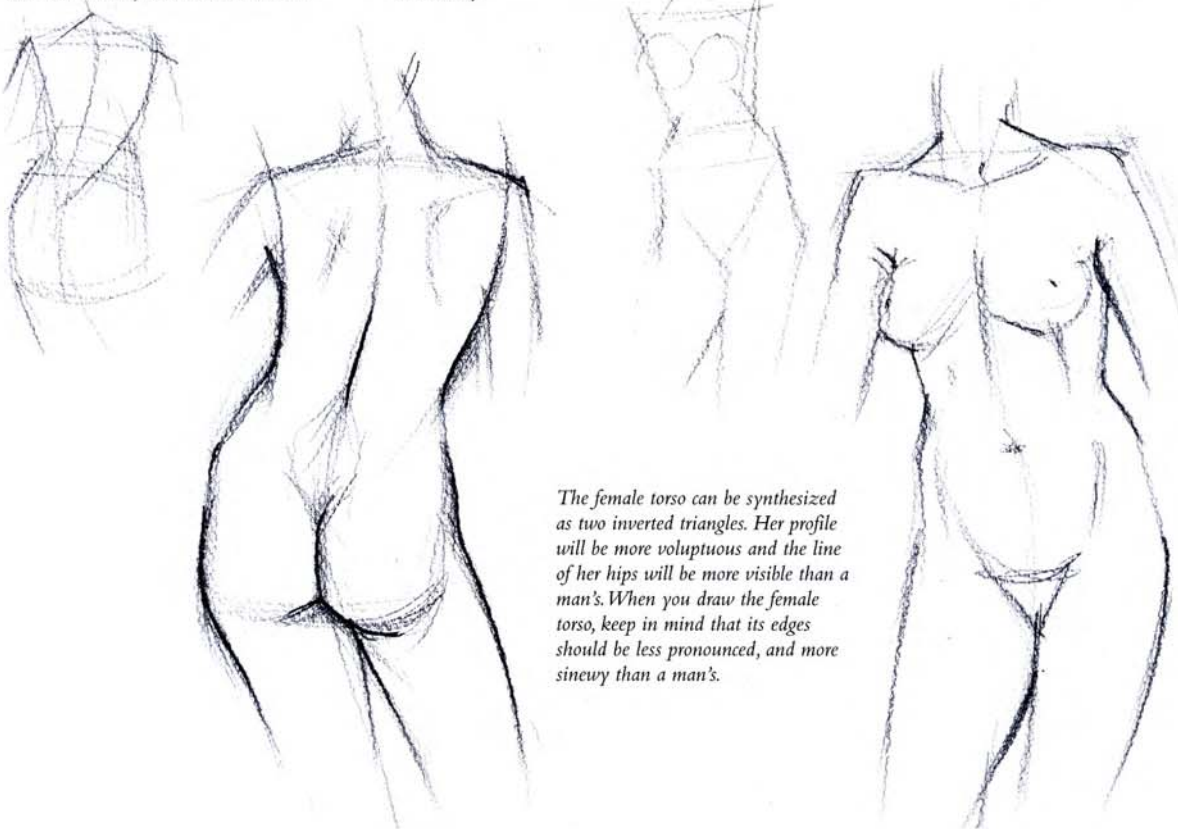
rear, the surface of the back is a continuous whole from the shoulder blades to the lower part of the lumbar area, where you can appreciate the flesh of the buttocks.

The Female Torso

From both the front and the rear, the relief of the female torso is less conditioned by the muscular structure than the male torso; in it, the transitions between volumes are smoother. Two of the distinguishing features of the female torso are the lower shoulders and more prominent hips. This contour can be easily represented by two triangles joined by their vertices. These triangles should then round out their profile to achieve the curved lines characteristic of the female anatomy.



A good exercise is to find images of figures, seated or standing, nude or dressed, put a sheet of tracing paper over the images, and find the location of the spine and the line of the hips.



The female torso can be synthesized as two inverted triangles. Her profile will be more voluptuous and the line of her hips will be more visible than a man's. When you draw the female torso, keep in mind that its edges should be less pronounced, and more sineuy than a man's.