

The Atelier Tier

Month: May

Project title: Venus De Napoli

Expected hour to complete: 9

Materials: Graphite pencils (2H-2B), Stonehenge paper (white/cream), kneaded eraser, mono-zero eraser.

Recommended scale of project: 9.5 inches (24cm) from top to bottom of the drawing. Edges of the paper should be at least 2 (5cm) inches above and below that.

Feedback submission deadline: 16th of May

Lesson notes

Background:

This Bargue plate is in the beginning section of lessons largely because of the nature of the subject/sculpture. The Psyche de Napoli is a Roman copy of a Classical Greek sculpture from the 4th century BCE and as such it has a style well suited for beginning drawing students. It is this kind of Platonic approach to representing of the figure that aims to strip away the particular and focus instead on the ideal in the arts of this era that we want to observe and extract as drawing students.

It is this kind simplification that we want to focus on. In order to get the most out of simplification it is important to understand the nature of this process. "Simple" in this context refers to the essential features and this is how you should think about your block in: what is essential to show the subject at whatever stage. I talk a lot about restraint in my teaching and this is another example of where this quality applies. If we start our drawing by asking, "what is essential?," it will start a process in which each new stage will include only the next essential features. For instance, what is essential to show the proportions? Answer: the envelope shape! What is essential to show the lighting situation? Answer: the shadow shapes!

Admittedly, not all drawing students will take block-in's so seriously and maybe this is okay as well. As an art student myself I am not sure that I understood so well the depths of what makes an ideal block in. As a teacher however I want to do my best to communicate this ideal to you. Not so that you can attain it today, but so that you can use it as a compass to guide your decision making.

Concepts:

Envelope shape: A simplification of the silhouette of the subject comprised of straight lines and angle breaks.

Shadow shape: The area of the form of a subject not contacted by light from the primary light source. At different stages this will be illustrated in different ways. At first it will be a linear boundary showing a simplification of the shadow shape (this is similar to the way the envelope shape is a simplification of the silhouette of the subject). As the drawing progresses the shadow shape will be filled with value and the shape of the edges will increase in complexity.

Light shape: Light (shape): any area on the form that directly receives light from the light source. You can contrast this with reflected light to better understand the nature of the shadow shape.

Half tone: An intermediate value between light and dark (most commonly used to describe gradations within the light shape).

Unity: Unity generally refers to the sameness of value. In reference to form it is generally used to indicate the orientation of a plane to the light source. In shadow shape/light shape organisation it generally refers to the grouping, and thus separation, of these two value groups.

Gradation: this refers to a progression of value from light to dark or from dark to light. When drawing form a gradation will be the way that we communicate the “turning” of a form, meaning that the form is turning towards or away from the light source.

Process/stages:

Block-in:

1. Always start with straight lines and then continue with straight lines. This is called “simplification” and it is a theme that will stretch through all of your work. Your understanding of it starts here.
2. Problem solve using measurements and observation. We are highly concerned in this moment with the shape and size of the subject as it appears from our viewpoint. This means using comparative measurements to check and double check the height and length measurements of passages like the nose, forehead, overall width of the head, etc...

Value & structure

1. Establishing a light and even value is a skill we need to develop. This will allow you to progress through the stages of a drawing with more control.
2. Creating a clear hierarchy of value shapes that are both soft and specific. How do we create an impression of form? Through the use of planes. Those planes will eventually be assigned values and those values should be organised well in relation to their orientation to the light source. We also have to consider their distance from the light source. The further away from the light source the less intensity the light will have.
3. Inside the shadows we are going to have to balance between unity and variety. My suggestion is to start with 1 even value and some slightly darker notations. Once the even tone of the shadow is achieved we can start to use an “accent” value.” This means a series of slightly darker shapes that frame, or reveal, the lighter value areas.

Refining the Drawing

1. Working on evening out the values in all areas. This means eliminating the “holes” in the value shapes caused by the texture of the paper. This will have the effect of creating a higher resolution in the drawing meaning that you can create more detail and the smaller shapes associated with it.
2. Developing even further the impression of shadow in the darker areas. Very often this can be accomplished by darkening and enhancing the concentration of graphite along the true shadow edge.

