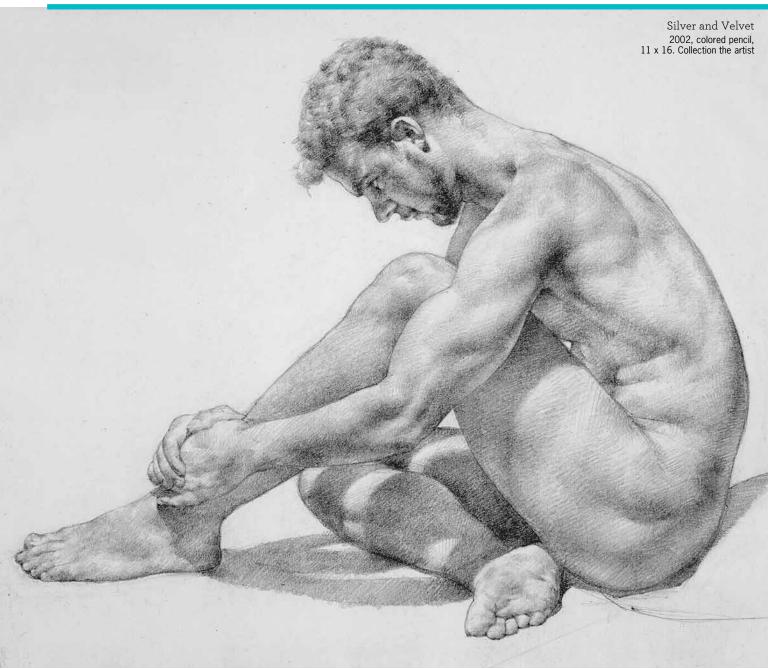


LEARN HOW TO DRAW PEOPLE:

Expert Tips on How to Draw a Person





DRAWING BASICS

by Michael P. Kinch

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apturing the human form in graphite drawings may seem intimidating, but Tony Ryder believes artists can create masterful drawings

by taking a three-step approach toward taming the barrage of visual information presented by the human figure.

Envelope, Gesture, and Block-In

Ryder begins with an envelope of lines connecting a few widely separated points on the figure. The envelope establishes the drawing's general proportions and institutes what the artist calls "point-to-point measurement," the analysis of the relationship between two points as defined by the length and tilt of the straight line that connects them.









Paintbrushes 1998, graphite, 18 x 24. Courtesy John Pence Gallery, San Francisco, California. All images this article from *The Artist's Complete Guide to Figure Drawing*, by Anthony Ryder (Watson-Guptill Publications, New York, New York). ©2000 by Anthony Ryder. At the same time, or even before he draws the envelope, Ryder is conscious of the gesture of the model. He asks, "When do we really begin to draw the figure? I think we begin before the pencil touches the paper, with a response to the pose of the model. More than anything else, at this stage I respond to the action or gesture of the model. It is the fundamental energy that patterns the whole drawing."

In reality, gesture is an immaterial and invisible energy, but Ryder looks for what he terms "the inner curve," an imaginary line that flows like a river through all the forms of the body, never making angular, abrupt changes of direction. "Capturing gesture," he says, "brings the drawing to life. The figures in drawings should appear as if they were breathing, as if their hearts were beating. Gesture is the heart and soul of figure drawing."

Gesture guides the anatomy of the body into the shape of the pose. This shape, expressed in its simplest form in the envelope, is more fully defined in the block-in. Constructed within the envelope, and according to the same principles, the block-in is the elaboration and continuation of the envelope. It is a complex shape approximating the appearance of the figure. The blockin shapes are strung along the inner

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LEFT

Ramona 1995, graphite, 24 x 18. Private collection. As shown here, the gestural currents in this drawing alternate from side to side, spiraling around the central inner curve.

ABOVE

Cynthia's Daffodil 1997, graphite and pastel on gray paper, 25 x 19. Private collection.





Thought Form (detail) 1999, graphite, 18 x 24. Private collection.

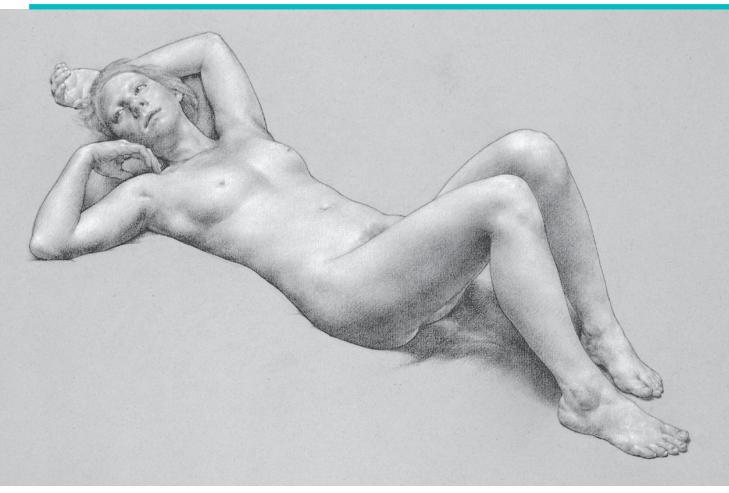


curve. They "progress and merge into one another along its invisible path," Ryder describes. "They conduct the curve as if it were a kind of electricity, a gestural current, expressed in the fluid interconnection of shapes as they progress into one another." He refines the blockin until there is a rough but delineated outline of the figure, always keeping an eye on the flow of the gesture by establishing large axial relationships, such as the pitch of the arms and torso.

Ryder pays special attention to the hands, which he proclaims as "the gestural organ par excellence. Hands are one of the most expressive parts of the body and, due to their mobility, are similar to a little body in themselves." That mobility and complexity can make drawing a hand intimidating, so Ryder recommends that artists regard the hand as an outgrowth of the gestural shape of the arm. He suggests first drawing the mitten-shaped envelope of the hand, looking at the fingers as a unit, and then noticing how they taper and overlap. "Fingers don't look like sausages neatly lined up on a meat counter," Ryder remarks. The second step in Ryder's figure-drawing method is contour, which is the

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Contour

refined outline of the figure. He notes, "The contour of the body is extremely subtle, difficult to describe accurately, and quite fascinatingly beautiful. When the contour is sensitively handled, it can stand alone, like a violin solo." Contour consists of convex curves that delineate the horizon of the model's body. Ryder works along the block-in section by section, imposing the curves on the straight-line segments, though not necessarily on a one-to-one basis. The artist routinely corrects the contour, erasing and redrawing small (and sometimes not so small) sections.

Ryder refers to the final stage as "inside drawing," by which he "sculpts" the

Inside Drawing

form of the body within the contour through gradations of tone. These gradations of tone, or tonal progressions, represent the flow of light and shadow across the figure. The most challenging aspect, says Ryder, is learning to see light and form. "Given that we process visual experiences every moment of our waking lives, it seems we should be entirely familiar with the nature and behavior of light. Strangely," he remarks, "when it comes to drawing its effects, students discover that the action of light is almost entirely unknown territory." Therefore, inside drawing is developed in tandem with the understanding of the actions of light.

Ryder divides the technical aspect of drawing light and shadow into two basic skills: applying graphite to the surface of the paper in a controlled manner and developing washes of shading in a logical sequence. The control is in the deliberate work of hatching and crosshatching. "Hatching is a rhythmic activity," he says. "The pencil moves like a sewing-machine needle. The trick is to get the lines evenly spaced, gradually increasing or decreasing in length, and in the right value range and progression. Crosshatching is hatching on top of hatching, with the layers of hatching crossing at an angle.

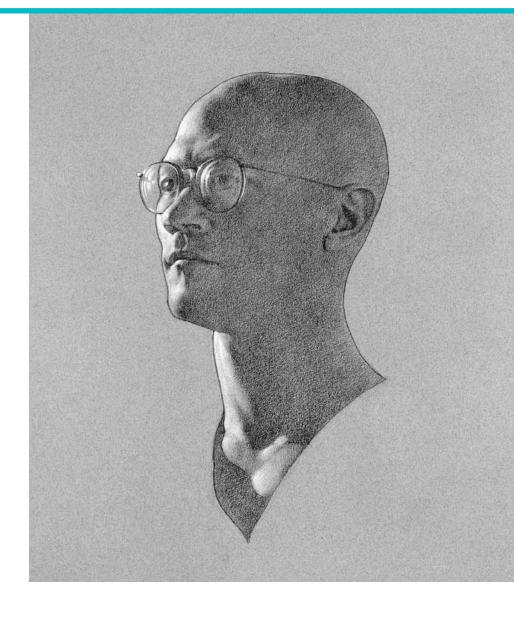
There's no limit to the number of layers of crosshatching that can be applied in a

Aurora 1998, graphite and pastel on gray paper, 19 x 25. Private collection.



ABOUT THE ARTIST

ANTHONY RYDER studied at the Art Students League of New York, the New York Academy of Art, both in New York City, and with Ted Seth Jacobs. He has distilled his drawing techniques in his book *The Artist's Complete Guide to Figure Drawing* (Watson-Guptill Publications, New York, New York). The artist lives in Santa Fe. For more information, visit his website: www.TonyRyder.com.



drawing. To mist a drawing with value, crosshatching can be done very softly, as if you were applying washes of value with a brush rather than individual lines with a pencil."

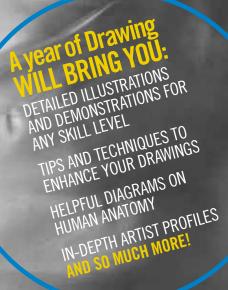
The second skill, shading in a logical sequence, is not so much manual as it is procedural. After creating a finely tuned contour drawing an artist may be eager to start shading. But Ryder tempers zeal with an understanding of and respect for the order of the form. "The body on the inside is subtly structured, simultaneously orderly and complex. So it should be in our drawings. But," he says, "ordering the form on the inside must be done without lines. There are no lines in nature."

Ryder locates landmarks on the inside with nearly invisible micropatches of shading, organizing them into pathways of form that collectively create a network. These networks guide Ryder through the development of the tonal progressions. For example, in Scott's Back the landmarks created by muscle and bone catch light and cast shadow to create links within the contour. The artist used shadows, cast-shadow edges, and downturns in the light to organize the model's back. Ryder realizes that learning to draw is not an easy process. "I always feel like apologizing to my students for breaking the news that drawing the figure in this way is really a lifelong work of Phases of Dane Crescent

1998, graphite and pastel on gray paper, 25 x 19. Courtesy van de Griff/Marr Gallery, Santa Fe, New Mexico.

devotion," he says. "The most important thing is consistent effort. It is also crucial that students learn to pace themselves, to work at a reasonable tempo. Insofar as possible, they should try not to judge themselves too harshly. Progress comes imperceptibly."

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