

Chapter 1

Art Models and Figure Drawing

What is figure drawing?

Figure drawing refers to drawing the human body. Life drawing specifically refers to drawing the nude figure. In general usage, the terms figure drawing and life drawing are used interchangeably. Likewise, nude figures are the subject of figure paintings and figure sculpture.

Art classes may use nude or clothed models. Draped and undraped are commonly used synonyms for clothed and nude respectively. Some classes use costume models. In this case, the model provides an interesting wardrobe to pose in.

The majority of figurative art classes hire nude models. Thus nude modeling is the primary focus of this book.

What is an art model?

Art models provide inspiration and visual reference for figurative artists.

Art modeling is not like fashion modeling. Art students need to learn to draw real people, not just the idealized human form. So, just as there are roles for actors of all ages, races, shapes, and sizes, the same is true for art models.

Artists need to develop observation skills in order to draw such a variety of figures. A mantra heard in art classes is, “draw what you see, not what you know.” This means that artists should rely on observation rather than memory in order to avoid making

every drawing look like the generic human body found in an anatomy book.

All that said, models in good shape may be more in demand because they are likely to have more stamina to hold long or difficult poses. Additionally, lean models with well-defined musculature offer better visual reference for anatomy instruction.

Dancers and yoga practitioners can be great models. Their dance repertoires and yoga postures can inspire graceful, interesting poses. They also tend to be limber and in shape, enabling them to hold the more difficult poses.

Some schools and workshops book only female models. Others are more balanced, alternating males and females. Overall, female models are more in demand than males.

The majority of art models are in their 20s and 30s, but others model well beyond that age. A Los Angeles area model by the name of Lalla Lezli still had bookings at the age of 92, when she died after an automobile accident.



Sculpture of Lalla
© 1995 Auguste Haboush.

Ronald Eyre has been modeling for artists' groups since retiring as an art teacher. However, at the age of 70, he is scaling back the number of modeling jobs he will accept. "I'm getting a bit stiff in the joints these days. I can't give the full range of poses now that I used to be able to do." He adds, "Despite my age, the Edisbury artists group still assures me that I am an excellent

model. This does my confidence a world of good! One has to remember that we as models are not there for artists to view us as perfect physical examples of the human species in its prime, but as fellow human beings, regardless of age. A good model, I feel, would try to portray him or herself *as* a human being with its inheritance of frailty and emotion, and leave artists to make of it as they will. A model can be just as creative as any person with a brush, despite his or her age.”

The ranks of art models include Sean Connery, who modeled for the Edinburgh College of Art in Scotland before his movie star career as James Bond.^{1.1} However, most art models are not motivated by fame. They tend to play anonymous supporting roles for the artists they serve. The best art models are motivated by the enjoyment of collaborating in a creative environment.

Why do artists draw figures?

I asked some figurative artists to share their views on why the human figure is an interesting subject to draw. Their answers covered a number of themes.

Narrative:

As an artist I express myself best by drawing or painting and the figure helps tell the story. — Dorothy Wagner

Honesty of the nude:

I often ask myself that same question. I think because there is nothing more sensitive, powerful, and honest than the nude human figure. — Antoine de Villiers

Aesthetics:

The human body is a very interesting form. No angle is ever the same. For me, it is the most natural form of architecture.
— Aletheia Rio

Expressiveness and emotion:

Our bodies are so expressive, able to communicate the tiniest nuance of our emotions. — Terry Rafferty

Empathy:

The human figure is a subject we can all relate to. It speaks a language that all humans understand. — Joseph Larkin

One of the important qualities of a painter who does figurative work is empathy. The nude can be especially evocative in its removal of all defenses. It allows for a wide range of possibilities, beauty, ugliness, self-consciousness, pride, embarrassment, exhibitionism, freedom of spirit, joy—the entire spectrum of human experience. — John Crowther

Complexity and challenge:

Human creatures are the most versatile beings on earth, and probably the most difficult to capture onto paper. Therefore, the human figure becomes the most exciting for me to try.
— Dee Overly

Others speak of figurative art as the ultimate subject:

For me, it is the highest form of art. Even when I paint an abstract piece, the shapes, rhythms and contours of the human form are what my brushstrokes follow.
— Royce Deans

Anyone who can master drawing the human body well has achieved the highest pinnacle in art, in my opinion.

— Art Krummel

As you can see, figure drawing is about so much more than skin and bones. By understanding the significance of figures in artwork, the model can be a more informed source of inspiration to the artist.



© 2008 Dee Overly. Ink pen sketch. 20 minutes.



“To wait for a cardinal” © 2007 I.T. Hammar.
Oil on gallery wrapped canvas.