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## Figure drawing reference pinterest

Figure drawing is a fundamental skill for artists, but one of the hardest to truly master. In this article, I explain my personal process and offer some advice to help you improve your figure drawings.On this page we'll walk through how to draw a female figure. Jump to page 2 for a step by step guide to drawing male figures, or page 3 for a closer look at gesture drawing.Although having knowledge of the proportions of a human figure is important, bear in mind that these are only a guide. Trying to shoehorn every person you draw into an eight-head-high ideal is a shortcut to uninspiring figure drawing.To achieve style we need to work with gesture, the spirit of the pose, the fluid nature in line. If we take gesture too far, though, our drawing will look wobbly. To counter that we need to also work with a solid structure, but too much structure can make for a stiff drawing. Therein lies the great balancing act of figure drawing that we will explore here.For a more basic guide, see how to draw a person. Above you can watch one of my-depth video tutorials where I explore how to get the most from references. For step-by-step written instructions on how to draw a female figure, read the tutorial below.After more drawing tips? Take a look at our guide to how to draw pretty much anything, or check out our essential advice on foreshortening in art or even these charcoal drawing tips. Alternatively, get yourself kitted out with the best pencils around.With that out of the way, let's get started on how to draw the female figure...Click the icon in the top right of each image to enlarge it.01. Start with simple shapesFirst establish your basic proportions Start with your attention level set to high. I use a small, two-finger wide piece of charcoal for my initial sketch. Draw the basic proportions, making any adjustments required - especially if you're working from a photo.02. Add more sophisticated linesUse a gestural grip for this stage Starting your figure drawing with basic shapes makes it easier to draw more sophisticated lines on top. Here, I've drawn the face using small shapes inside a big shape. This is two of my disciplines in action at once: big to small; and simple to sophisticated.Note the gestural grip in action. Drawing with our gestural hand enables us to use the rhythm of our arm rather than our stiff wrist to make our marks. It gives us the freedom to draw long fluid lines on the paper (for more advice, see this article on how to hold a pencil correctly).03. Exaggerate the curvesYou don't need to copy exactly what you see I'm constantly analysing the photo reference. On closer inspection, what appears to be a foot is actually the ankle twisting. I decide to draw the classic shape of a foot to make the drawing more clear. I'm improving what I observe in the photo in terms of artistic mark-making. Note how many times I exaggerate the curves to make the drawing more lively.04. Lay in broad tones in charcoalTime to add some depth At this stage I step back from the art to check the drawing has solid structure. I lay in broad tones with my charcoal. Remember, our goal here is to interpret the reference. If we gauge success on how close we copy, we'll end up with a stiff drawing that looks like a distorted photo.05. Blend tone into formBlending the drawing means you can adjust anything you want to Up until now I've juggled gesture with structure. It's an okay drawing, but nothing stylish. This is the journeyman stage, from which we can stamp our own style. Using tissue, I blend tone into form, this also fades the drawing and gives me a second chance to draw better on top.06. Add more tonal gesturesMake some final tweaks to your figure drawing Here I'm making small structural adjustments and adding more tonal gestures. This second time around goes quickly - just a matter of minutes, which is a small investment for an hour-long drawing. From this point onwards, my quest is to further explore style in the drawing.07. Remember, if it looks wrong, it is wrong!Sometimes parts that are anatomically accurate will look incorrect I use shadows to push the gesture, but omit the shadow of the xiphoid process (the small bone under the pointed arch of the ribcage). It looks odd here. Even though it's correct, it violates one of my art laws: If it looks wrong, it's wrong, even if it's right!08. Use a paper stump for adjustmentsPush charcoal around rather than adding more Using a paper stump, I push around the charcoal that's already on the paper rather than lay more charcoal down. This keeps the drawing light and fresh. I'm also mindful to always be drawing even when blending. I use a sheet of paper to prevent me smudging the drawing.Struggling with to make the medium work for you? Check out our ten expert tips for charcoal drawing.09. Create highlights with an eraserThink of the eraser as another drawing tool I 'draw' highlights with a kneadable eraser. I think of the eraser as a drawing tool rather than a correction tool. Slowly does it, especially in the early stages. Drawing fast is a false economy - if we rush a drawing then we inevitably spend most of our time fixing mistakes.10. Take a breakTaking a break means you'll spot inaccuracies more easily I take a short coffee break away from the drawing and come back with a fresh eye. A break helps me see the bugbears more clearly when I return. I see the breasts are too close in shape while the lower rib cage is too smooth. I make minor changes to both bugbears and am ready for the big finish.11. Add in a backgroundA chamois leather is useful for creating abstract marks I lay down a large swath of charcoal, then smudge it with a chamois leather cloth, playing with textures as I go. I learned of the chamois from Glenn Vilppu a few years back and it's been part of my drawing arsenal ever since. Here I use it for abstract marks to ground the figure and add style.12. Introduce the elements of fantasyThe figure here is reimagined as a vampire For my image, I imagined a vampire in a bloodlust trance. With large charcoal sticks I draw abstract shapes then pencil in the breast plates and jewellery using hard erasers for highlights.Next page: How to draw a male figure Page 2 Now let's focus on how to draw a male figure. Our figure here is in a contrapposto pose - this Italian term means counterpoise, or counterbalance, and refers to a figure balancing more weight on one side, usually the straight-leg side of the body, in a standing pose. The most famous contrapposto artwork is probably Michelangelo's David.Art terms like this are a great way to get your head around the creative process. Check out our art terms glossary for more explanations of commonly used terms.Above is an in-depth video tutorial, or read on for a step by step guide to how to draw a male figure.Click the icon in the top right of each image to enlarge it01. Start with basic shapesAt this point you need to identify the weight-bearing leg For this drawing I'm using sanguine pastel pencil on toned paper. Sanguine means blood and sanguine pencils can range between dark brown to almost pink. I've chosen a dark sanguine and a flesh-coloured paper. As usual, I start with basic shapes. I then identify the weight-bearing straight leg and tilt the shoulder towards it for more balance.If you're curious about working with pastels, read our guide to getting started with pastels.02. Find the rhythm in the poseStart to build out the basic shapes I draw smaller shapes inside the big simple shapes. Notice how I treat the rhythm of the legs; I'm drawing from one side to the other. Study how the knees have a low, overlapping curve on the inside and how the calves are high on the outside. This is the natural rhythm of the body, and cannot be ignored by the figure artist. 03. Smooth out the paperPastel paper has a 'tooth' I'm using a high-grade pastel art paper, which can be bought in large individual sheets. Pastel paper has a smooth and a rough side. I choose the smooth side, but it still has a 'tooth', meaning that it has micro pits that hold the pastel pigment. I blend with tissue to smooth out the grain and then ghost the image back.It's better to make your head too small than too large to start with I stand back from the art and see with a fresh eye that the head needs to be bigger. Best to err on the side of a smaller head to start with, rather than a big head, which can look comical. If the head looks small you can try adding to the skull rather than drawing all the features bigger. Usually this works fine. Once I'm happy with the new head size and basic proportions, I start to detail the anatomy. 05. Reshape the figure with a paper stumpThink through each change you make at this point I blend the edges with a paper stump, improving as I go by reshaping and pushing the pigment around. Be careful not to mindlessly render as it will make the drawing worse. Always think as you render: your drawing will reflect your inner feelings and energy in every mark. I recommend keeping two sets of paper stumps and kneadable erasers so as not to dirty your drawings - one set for sanguine and one set for charcoal.06. Use an eraser like a drawing toolA kneadable eraser is useful for building up form As with the blending stump, I use the eraser with the same mindset and think of it as a drawing tool. Kneadable erasers are pliable, and can be moulded and shaped to pull out highlights. Note how the knees are changing from simple shapes into something more sophisticated. Going from simple to complex is the best approach.07. Keep your hand off the paperNatural oils can make blots on the paper As I soften edges with tissue I keep a piece of paper under my hand. This prevents oil transferring to the paper. Natural oil from our hands can be invisible initially, but then appear as blots when we blend later. This is not a big deal on a textured background, but it could spoil the flawless skin tone that you had hoped for. 08. Use white pastel for highlightsMake sure you're happy with your figure before adding highlights It's been a long time coming but here it is: the white pastel pencil for the highlights. It's important to make sure that the art is already strong, because the white effect shouldn't be used as a crutch. It's also crucial not to mix the sanguine with the white, because the midtone paper represents the midtone flesh of the figure.09. Blend and pushBlend the white pigment into the paper surface Using all my tools, I blend and push the white pigment into the surface. Note how fleshy everything has become based on three simple values: the darks of the sanguine; the midtone of the paper; and the highlights of the white. My pencil eraser with the brush end comes in handy for brushing away eraser debris.10. Tackle anatomical detailsPersonal details will give your figure character Time to address the small stuff and explore the beauty of anatomy and form. Constant study of the knees is important because everyone's knees are different due to variable 'bursa' shapes. These are little fatty pads that protect the joints. Note that I'm using a clean paper stump for blending whites.11. Sharpen your linesIt's tricky to achieve crisp lines on textured paper Using a mono eraser, I thin down some of the lines. Pastel paper is wonderful to work with, but due to the grain it's a fight to achieve thin lines when working on a relatively small scale. This drawing would be easier to work with at twice this size, but there are always workarounds.12. Add texture in the backgroundA background helps give the figure context Using erasers, tissue and paper stumps for background texture draw the eye to the contrasting tones of the smooth skin. Sanguine on toned paper is slow, but worth the effort. I spend over three hours pushing and blending into the grainy surface. Take time over your sanguine drawings and you'll be rewarded.Next page: A guide to gesture drawing

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