



artist daily
presents

PENCIL DRAWING LESSONS

27

Ways to Use Values
to Create Dramatic
Pencil Drawings

Conceal & Reveal:

CAREFUL USE OF LIGHTS AND DARKS WITHIN AND AROUND THE FIGURE CAN GIVE YOUR DRAWINGS MORE POWER AND DYNAMIC FORCE.

by Dan Gheno

Some draftsmen will do almost anything to create drama in their figure drawings. They will exaggerate a pose to give their figures more gestural excitement. They might encase the figure with expressive linework. Perhaps they will surround it with unusual background shapes or even resort (gasp!) to the use of color to excite the eye. But all too often, they wait until the last moment to make use of their most powerful tool—value—hurriedly filling in their drawings of the figure with gradations of light and dark as if it were an afterthought pasted onto the paper.

In fact, value can be the most important instrument in your artistic toolbox. Neither line, shape, nor color exist without value. Without value changes, those other elements would look dull, flat, and boring. But with great power also comes grave consequences: If values are used unwisely or as an add-on, drawings will look overmodulated, muddy, and indecisive.

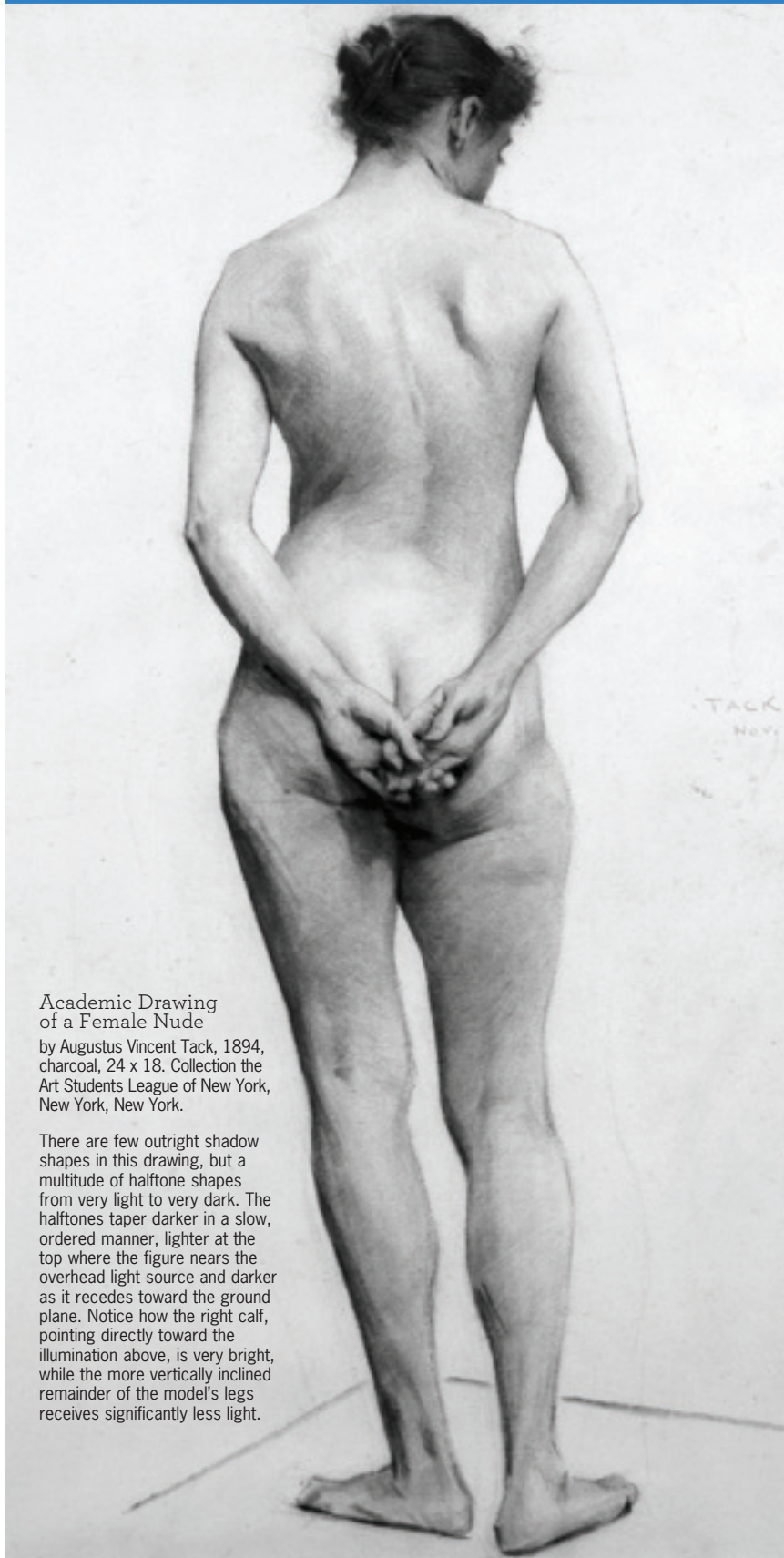
In this article, we will explore how you can use values to invigorate your drawings and give them more excitement. We will investigate how you can use value rendering to manipulate your halftones, highlights, reflected lights, and shad-



ABOVE

Floretta (Portrait of Agnes Doggett) by Lilian Wescott Hale, 1914, black chalk over charcoal or graphite on cream laminated paper, 29½ x 23. Collection Princeton University, Princeton, New Jersey.

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Academic Drawing of a Female Nude

by Augustus Vincent Tack, 1894, charcoal, 24 x 18. Collection the Art Students League of New York, New York, New York.

There are few outright shadow shapes in this drawing, but a multitude of halftone shapes from very light to very dark. The halftones taper darker in a slow, ordered manner, lighter at the top where the figure nears the overhead light source and darker as it recedes toward the ground plane. Notice how the right calf, pointing directly toward the illumination above, is very bright, while the more vertically inclined remainder of the model's legs receives significantly less light.

ow shapes to give depth and volumetric dimension to your figures. We will see how you can use value contrasts to design exciting compositions through the spotting of darks and lights, how to create atmospheric depth with halation, how to charge your figures with lost and found edges, and how to use value to enhance the already inherently strong, expressive qualities of line, gesture, and abstract shapes.

Light and Shadow

Each object, whether as simple as a sphere or as complex as the human figure, is composed of millions of tonal value changes. These range from your brightest bright, where the object most directly faces the light, to your darkest dark, where the object turns farthest away from the light source. Once you start drawing the human figure from life, it's very easy to get lost within the specifics of its forms and the multitude of value shapes, sacrificing the essential nature of the volumes that will add energy to your drawing. Most of the basic human forms can be categorized as spherical, cylindrical, boxlike, or barrellike tubular shapes, either singularly or in any number of hybrid combinations. **You'll find it more effective to evoke a figurative form, surround it with an air, and give it gestural energy when you think of its underlying volume or "form concept."** The chest is both barrel and boxlike at the same time. **Imagine an axis running through its boxlike core to get its basic, fundamental tilt in space. Then look for the big-plane breaks between the front, back, and side planes to find your major divisions of light and dark. Major value changes tend to occur at these locations, but they are not limited to the major planes.** The chest also has a barrellike quality to it, superimposed over its more squared-off forms. **In the case of a drawing of the chest in front view, such as *Laocoön* by Baccio Bandinelli, the light often tends to diminish gradually as it rolls across**

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Male Nude With a Banner

by Francesco Lorenzi, ca. 1745, black chalk on white paper, 18¼ x 12½.
Collection Fogg Art Museum at Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Lorenzi used the receding cast shadow, zigzagging up the steps, to create definable, palpable, retreating layers of depth. He rendered the rear portions of the figure in a harder, more contrasted manner to bring the figure forward while minimizing the contrasts in the flag to push back the distant areas and create a sense of spatial atmosphere.



Laocoön

by Baccio Bandinelli, red and black chalk, 21 x 15¼.
Collection the Uffizi Gallery, Florence, Italy.

After drawing for decades, artists often return to cast drawing to upgrade their understanding of values. Many Renaissance and Baroque artists, such as Bandinelli, did this as well, drawing from the recently excavated Greek and Roman statues, including this Laocoön fragment. Like plaster casts, marble statues are nearly white and devoid of the colors that normally confuse the artist's study of values.

the slightly curving front. It eventually disappears into the *terminator*, or the area where the light terminates and the shadow begins, which is often found along the abruptly turning corner of the side plane break.

As you may recall, the overall volume of the head resembles a sphere. Look for a crescent-shaped glow or group of highlights that span the curve of the head. This semicircular shape is reminiscent of the one that curves over the form of an egg, except that it is broken up by the mounds and depths of the features. When the light is above the model, this general glow is large in shape and bright in value toward

the top at the forehead. It seems to taper, nearly disappearing, as the face narrows and curves away from the light within the barrel of the mouth and chin. If you doubt the importance of this curving glow, try an experiment: Find a newscaster on your TV set and turn down the brightness so that only the highlights on the newscaster's face remain. You will find that the curved collection of highlights will tend to remain in place as the newscaster turns right and left, up and down, in much the same way the glow on an egg would act if you twirled it on its axis while holding it in one spot below a single light source. Even so, try not to stick a doll's head on

your figure's shoulders. Within its general egg shape, the head squares off into more extreme front, side, top, and bottom sub-planes that provide the strongest and most dramatic value breaks.

Let It Glow

Of course, this exciting glow is not limited to the face. You'll notice a similar effect running throughout the body, helping to reinforce the larger, global plane changes of the body. Most people mistakenly believe that all highlights are bright and sharply focused. Indeed, harsh highlights do occur on the body.

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These sharp highlights—simply glaring reflections of the light source bouncing off the oils of the skin—tend to take place at severe form changes, such as at the corner of the nose and on many of the bony points of the body. Many artists miss the far subtler general glow that dimly flows across the oils of the skin throughout the body. Or they erroneously believe it is a lightening of the surface form. Far from it! The values within the glow are luminescent and slightly brighter as a group—or a softer, broader type of highlights—rather than the slowly graduating set of values that you might find on a dry, oil-free surface such as a plaster cast. This glow was

very important to Leonardo da Vinci. Calling it “luster” in one of his many notebooks on light and shadow, he strongly advocated its observation and use, while at the same time acknowledging how difficult it is to differentiate the glow from normal form light. However, he hints at a solution when he states that highlights and luster are not fixed and stationary as are the other normal, surface-form values but “move as and where the eye moves in looking at them.” I find that if I shift my head back and forth a foot or two, I can usually isolate the subtle group of glowing highlights as I watch them undulate across the model’s skin. **You should keep your**

eyes fixed on the shifting glow, one block of luster at a time, staring at its shape as you slowly move your viewpoint back into its original position.

Planes and Values

Once I’ve loosely laid out the figure and I think I’m happy with its general proportions and overall silhouette, I start blocking in the interior shadow shapes. I take my time, finding the shadow shapes gradually, drawing the terminator at the edge of the shadow with a very light, thin line. **Too many artists spend the majority of their drawing time trying to find the perfect propor-**

Andrea

by Dan Gheno, 2007, colored pencil and white charcoal on toned paper, 16 x 18. Collection the artist.



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Self-Portrait

by William Page, 1843, black chalk and charcoal heightened with white chalk on tone wove paper, 18 x 14½. Collection the British Museum, London, England.

Observe how Page used white chalk and the value of the paper for the lighter half-tones. He used black chalk and charcoal for the darker half-tones and shadows.

refers to the overall hue or color name of individual objects, such as a pink shirt, blue jeans, or even very small local color differences such as a red nose, ears, or fingers. **To better gauge the differences between your light and dark masses, try placing a transparent piece of colored acetate in front of your eyes to create a monochromatic view that will minimize the distracting color differences camouflaging the values in front of you.** When you do this, also notice the local value of the objects you're drawing. Ask yourself what the overall value of that pink shirt you're drawing is, or the overall value of the model's blue jeans. Ask yourself the same question about the model's hair and you will probably notice that blonde hair is not as light overall as you might have originally thought. Each object or local value will have its own major light and dark shapes, but the lights on the dark-blue jeans will be less bright than the lights on the model's pink shirt. There will be a corresponding difference in the shadows as well, with the shadows on the jeans looking deeper in value than the dark shapes on the shirt.

tions before they finally start sketching in the terminator. For me, blocking in a preliminary terminator line is part of the process that helps me find the overall proportions. Imagine trying to draw a box by only drawing its outside silhouette. You would find it confusing if you didn't also draw some semblance of the inner planes as you construct the box. **As I work with this inner terminator line, I try to avoid the temptation to fill in the shadow shape with dark value until I'm fairly certain about its position, similar to the way R. Tweedy laid out and began rendering *Academic Drawing* (p.13). I keep this initial line very faint so that it is easily correctable if I notice a mistake, and so that when I later fill in**

the shape with a dark value, the original sketch line will merge into the underlying shadow value. There's nothing more stiffening to a drawing than having a rigid, dark line ringing your internal shadow shapes.

Local Value

It's not easy to see these large light and dark value masses, especially for the novice. Sometimes it helps to squint as you look at the model, blurring out all of the distracting details so that only the two major value shapes remain visible. Local color differences are another distraction when trying to analyze your larger tonal relationships. *Local color*

Half-tones

Most artists are pretty happy with the dramatic effect that results from blocking in the major light and dark masses on their drawing of the human figure. It's when they begin working out the details within the big light and dark patterns that they see success slipping away like water through grasping fingers. Rendering half-tones, or the subtle variations of value from your lightest light to your darkest dark within the illuminated side of the figure, can be confusing for even the most advanced artist. Many artists draw them too dark, muddying

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The Virgin and Child and the Young St. John
by Giambattista Tiepolo, 1760, pen and brown wash over black chalk,
9½ x 7. Collection Mr. and Mrs. Jacob M. Kaplan.

Notice how the dark of one figure merges into and joins the dark of another—one person blending with another and then melting with cloth and ground—making one large shape that’s dramatically abstract and illusionistic at the same time.

up the lights in their drawing. Others draw them too light, creating a washed-out drawing. **It will help you to see the subtle differences within the light side if you categorize these complex value modulations into two groups, “light halftones” and “dark halftones.”** Although only words, the knowledge of these labels allows you to better sort out the visual information in front of you. **The halftones are brightest where the form turns most directly toward the light source and darkest just before the form falls into complete shadow.**

The most common area of halftone trouble for artists occurs when they



Young Man
by Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, 1816, graphite, 11½ x 8¾.
Collection Museum Boymans-Van Beuningen, Rotterdam, the Netherlands.

Best known for his delicate, finely rendered narrative and portrait paintings, Ingres also produced a large oeuvre of quick portrait drawings. Usually, the artist homed in tightly on his subjects’ heads and hands. For the most part, the artist skimmed lightly over the details of their attire and surroundings, rendering them with a dry, almost deadweight, doodling kind of line.

make the value modulations on the light side of the face too dark, aging the model beyond his or her years. For instance, many artists will look at the dark halftone below the eye or the fold below the nose (called the nasolabial furrow) and make them as dark as or darker than the shadow on the opposite side of the face. **As hard as it is sometimes to believe, such halftones only seem equal to the shadow because they are surrounded by the brighter values of the rest of the face. When I encounter students unable to believe me, I tell them to punch two small holes into a piece of white paper. Then, I have**

them hold up that paper in front of the model, shifting it back and forth until they see the halftone detail isolated behind one of the holes and the full force of the shadow behind the other hole. That way, they can estimate the actual relative differences between the two values as abstract shapes, unencumbered by previous assumptions.

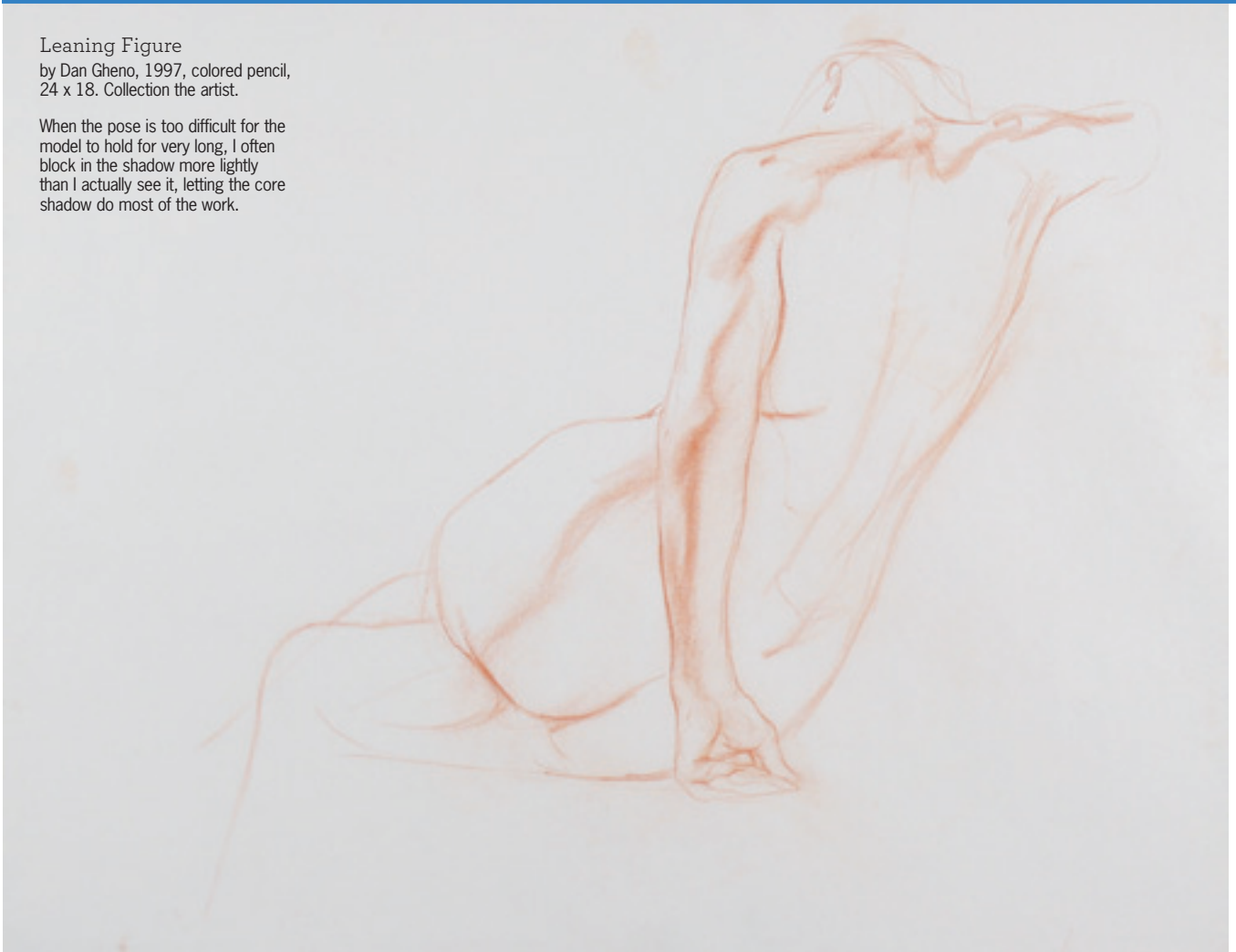
It is just as difficult for us to see the value relationships within the dark side of the human form. As with the facial halftone that only seemed super dark because of the surrounding light values, many of the dark subshapes will appear inordinately bright and sharply focused

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Leaning Figure

by Dan Gheno, 1997, colored pencil, 24 x 18. Collection the artist.

When the pose is too difficult for the model to hold for very long, I often block in the shadow more lightly than I actually see it, letting the core shadow do most of the work.



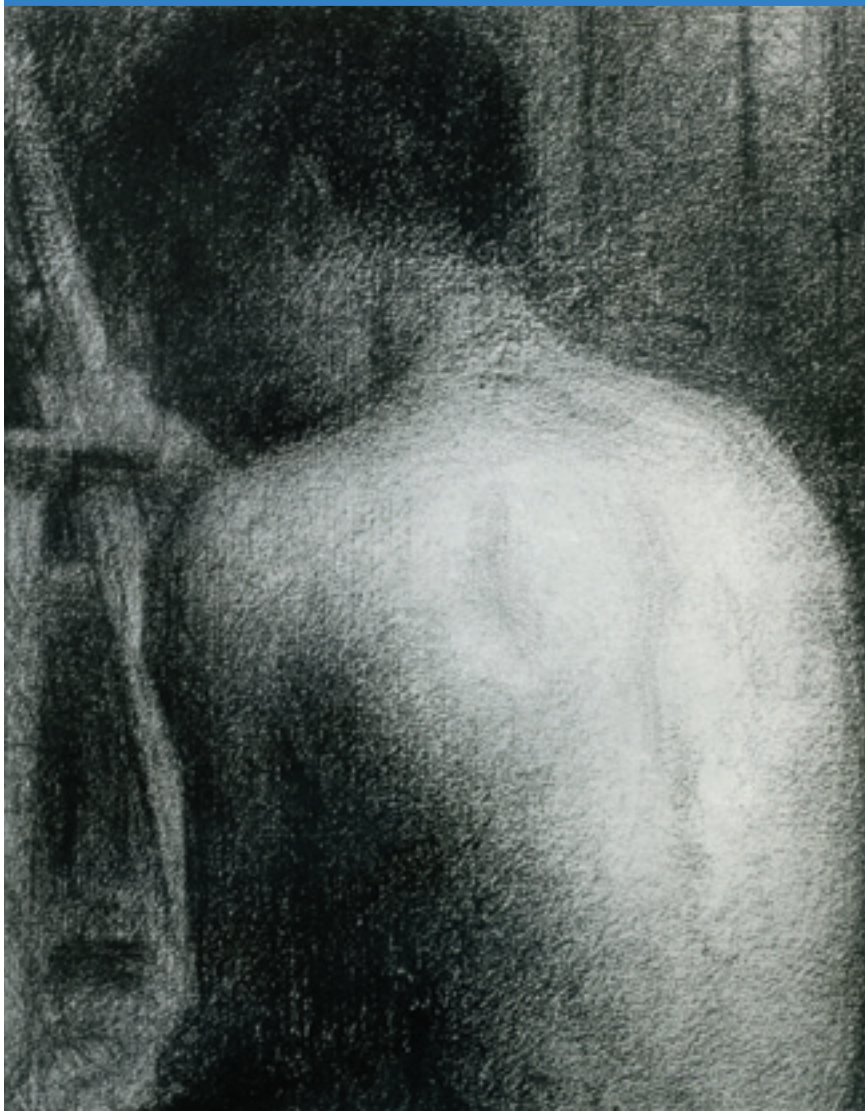
the longer you stare at them. It's actually an illusion: When you fill your entire view with shadow, the pupils in your eyes open up, seeing additional details and perceiving them more sharply. **You should use extra caution when drawing the particulars on the shadow side, recognizing that the lack of light obscures detail, acting as a veiling screen that blurs specifics within the shadowed form.** "One conceals and the other reveals," said Leonardo, referring to shadow and light. **Remembering that light brings out or illuminates detail, it's more logical and dramatic to draw greater detail on the light side of the figure—so long as you keep them bright enough as a group.**

Although you will certainly see some reflected lights in the shadow, don't

make them too bright. As the 19th-century artist Howard Pyle often explained to his students, shadows have no color or light of their own. **Shadows are "more or less black and opaque," he said. The only reason we see any detail in the dark is because of the reflected light bouncing off of adjacent surfaces. Therefore, the indirect, reflected light bouncing into the shadow can never be as bright or distinct as the direct light hitting the model.** Value-oriented artists such as Rembrandt, Guercino, and Caravaggio often kept their shadow shapes passive to better replicate the human experience of sight, since less information is available for the brain to process. Still, there is nothing wrong with seeing an abundance of detail in the shadow. Just keep their

shapes soft and keep the value differences within the shadow shapes closely rendered. **Save your dramatic contrast for the larger value differences between the bigger, overall light and dark patterns.**

Along with Howard Pyle, artists such as Robert Henri, Charles Hawthorne, and many others talked a lot in their own teachings about the importance of finding the big value and color contrasts. They knew that you couldn't replicate the full range of actual values and colors given the limits of our pencils, paper, and paints. Henri advocated looking at the model, not just to observe individual areas, but to compare pairs of opposing light and dark shapes to better judge their relative value and color relationships, then trying to replicate



Nude Figure by an Easel

by Georges Seurat, 1883–1884, Conté, 12¼x 9½.
Private collection.

Remember—in reality, there are no clear divisions between the figure and the background. Edges are a manifestation of the mind. Air envelopes and visually softens everything, especially as the forms and background objects recede farther into the atmosphere. Notice how light backgrounds often brighten when they pass behind foreground forms, as they do in this Seurat drawing. Sometimes called “halation,” this effect is used by Seurat to push his forward, imparting air and distance to his backgrounds.

and very little reflected light. Looking at Tiepolo’s *Study of the Back*, notice how the shadow shapes tend to darken as the form underneath gradually turns away from all sources of reflected light. This normally results in a darkened band that’s sometimes subtle and other times very obvious, but almost always situated near the terminator or shadow edge. **When short on time, magnify your initial terminator sketch line into an imagined, softly rendered core shadow, as if there were a powerful reflected light bouncing onto the model.** With *Leaning Figure*, I knew that the model couldn’t hold such a physically demanding pose for very long. I blocked in the shadow more lightly than I actually saw it, emphasizing its core, so that I could retain the strong, overall shape it made as it flowed through the figure.

this proportional relationship in your artwork. In other words, to evaluate an overall dark value on the model, stare at a lighter area on the model—or nearby in the background— and out of the corner of your eye ask yourself how dark the shadow is compared to the brighter shape. According to Pyle, you may need to go a little lighter with your lights and a little darker in your shadows to create the same proportion of value contrast in your artwork that you see in reality.

Core Shadow

No matter how quickly you work, sometimes you know you won’t have time to

“fill in” all the darks. The only answer is to plan ahead. Sometimes, I like to concentrate dramatic value in the areas of focus where I want the viewer to look. I frequently leave the other areas of the drawing devoid of or lightly skimmed with value, being sure to gradually taper off on the rendering—letting the value shapes progressively fade into the white paper, as Ingres did in *Young Man*. But what if you really like the big graphic shape that the shadow presents as it travels through the overall figure? Often, it’s best to simplify the dark shape into something called a *core shadow*, a term that refers to the darkest area of the form shadow that gets no direct light

Value as Design

Often the light and dark shapes can look rather complex when they travel across the model’s form, seeming to the untrained eye as if they were a random collection of isolated blobby forms. A strong and powerful design is founded on a balance between complexity and simplicity. Look for some sort of unifying shadow pattern within the human figure you are drawing. **Your model is not just a random collection of dark spots.** You can usually find some sort of pattern of light and dark shapes that run rhythmically throughout the body, imparting har-

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mony and a dynamic sense of design, as in the rather obvious but elegant block of darks running through *Nude Woman With a Snake*, by Rembrandt. Don't freeze up when faced with a more elusive set of value shapes such as those Cézanne faced in *Academic Nude*. Look closely and let the model guide you. The human body is an elegantly designed machine on its own, with each dark and light value shape synchronized to the anatomy underneath. Look for a tapering that often exists at the ends of each light and dark shape. Just as each body part is intertwined, one into another, each value shape will point toward or interlock with another, creating a powerful pattern of unity no matter how seemingly detached the individual forms may first appear.

Spotting

Be sure to keep track of where you're placing your lights in the drawing—not just your darks. Engage in some contemplative “spotting,” balancing your lights and darks throughout the surface of the drawing for compositional harmony. For instance, when you render the highlight on your subject's nose with a bit of white chalk, try to distribute a few more spots of white throughout other outlying areas of the drawing. Don't be fearful of the white pencil. It's really no more dangerous than your dark pencil, and when applied to toned paper can be used in the same way to indicate form, in the way Raphael did in *Saint Paul Rending His Garments*, using more pigment to create brighter lights and less pigment to indicate fainter illumination. When doing your own drawing, try to think of the white pencil as the tool that represents the light half-tones, while the dark pencil is the tool that generates the dark half-tone and shadow shapes.

Much depends on the value of the



Nude Woman
With a Snake
by Rembrandt, ca. 1637,
red chalk heightened
with white bodycolor,
9 $\frac{1}{16}$ x 5 $\frac{7}{16}$. Collection
J. Paul Getty Museum,
Los Angeles, California.

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Male Académie

by Théodore Géricault, ca. 1816–1817, graphite, pen and brown ink, brush with brown and blue-gray wash, heightened with white gouache on brown paper, 8¼ x 5¼. Collection the British Museum, London, England.

Halation

Many artists find it fulfilling to concentrate on the drama of value contrasts, locating the strong dark and light patterns that course through the figure, but wimp out when it comes to working on the “negative shapes” or the so-called empty, passive areas surrounding the model. A strong, dramatic figure drawing still looks powerful against a blank background. But think of the graphic potential available to you when you position some darks against the light side of the figure, or place some light halftone behind the shadow side of the figure! Originally called *simultaneous contrast* by the scientists and philosophers in the early 19th century, each value shape—dark against light and light against dark—will enhance the power of the other, making the lights brighter when juxtaposed against dark and the shadows darker when placed near a lighter value, as in Seurat’s *Nude Figure by an Easel*. The next time you draw from life, take a close look at the background surrounding the dark side of the model. You may notice the background value seeming to lighten up slightly as it approaches the shadow side of the figure, or a shadowy background turning darker as it nears the illuminated portions of the model. Called *halation* by most scientists, this effect is often exaggerated by most artists to create a more dramatic interchange between the background and figure shapes. Many artists, such as Seurat, use this effect extensively, while others use it selectively to harden and accentuate certain edges on the figure that they want to pop forward in space, or details that they want the viewer to notice more quickly, a technique Guercino uses in *Seated Youth*.

paper: If it is bright enough, you can consider its base value as part of the light halftone, and if it’s dark enough, consider it part of the dark halftone. **Either way, before you get into detailed rendering, it’s helpful to apply a slight dusting of white chalk broadly across the light-half-tone areas of your drawing**

to reserve it for further manipulation. Often if you wait to apply white to your drawing until it’s nearly completed, you’ll find that you’ve invaded too much of the light half-tone areas with dark pencil lines or value masses, leaving no room for the white pigment and generating a very dull and muddy drawing.

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Environment

Try not to go overboard, however, in constructing a floating figure that doesn't seem to want to live within its own setting. To give your work greater depth and dimension, look for the atmosphere that envelopes your model as you work from life. Try to notice and exploit the areas where the lights and darks of your subject melt into similar values in the environment, incorporating the figure into a bigger, sometimes more exciting, abstract shape. Likewise, you can apply this idea to two or more figures, finding light and dark value patterns that span and unify multiple figures in a complex composition, as Tiepolo often did in his drawings.

At the very least, even when you're drawing a singular figure against a blank background, you should be able to merge the figure at the floor plane, where the feet project a cast shadow across the floor in a standing figure, or where the model's body touches the chair of a seated figure. The simple existence of a cast-shadow shape receding backward, forward, or across the floor plane or chair will help create a sense of enveloping space. Even if the cast shadow is hidden behind the legs that are casting it, you can always draw a very light sketch line or a couple of lines behind the figure to indicate a floor plane, a hint of the back of a chair, or some other wall detail beyond the figure. Another point to remember about the environment: **Just as light often graduates slowly across the turning form of the figure, it will also vary as it travels across the floor, wall, and furniture that surround the model.** Notice the atmospheric depth that is created in your drawing when you make the surroundings slightly darker as they pull away from the light—or vice versa.

Figure Versus Background

It's natural to feel fearful of the background. Perhaps you're afraid you



Nude With Baton

by Georges Seurat, 1877, charcoal, 25 x 19. Collection the Louvre, Paris, France.

might go overboard with the darks behind the model and overwhelm the figure. As you know, once the paper is stained with tone, it is often impossible to go back to clean paper before trying again, resulting in an indecisive look to the drawing. **You might find it liberating to obediently draw the background exactly as you see it, relying on the existing values of the objects behind the model to lend contrast to the figure in the drawing. You will probably need to reposition yourself a little in order to maximize the contrasts between your model and the background.**

Frequently, moving your head only a little is enough to, for instance, see a light-flooded nose—which was initially lost against the luminosity on the front plane of the doorframe—against the dark shadow of the frame's side plane.

But what if you are primarily interested in drawing the model for itself, as a singular entity, as does a sculptor who is mostly captivated by the model's internal rhythms and volumes? In your heart, you know you need to place some contrasting values in the background to better activate and dramatize the value patterns within the figure. But you

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hesitate—what if you make a mistake? **If this is you, try out your background value shapes on a piece of tracing paper laid over your figure drawing. That way you can audition various shapes until you are convinced that a particular design works with your figure, and you can then apply the winning shape to your drawing with abandon and knowing confidence.** Take your task seriously as you test different background shapes with the figure. Unless you are a master, it's usually not enough to simply surround the figure's silhouette with a shape that mirrors its own. **In a practice that I call "point-counterpoint," I tell artists to look at the large light and shadow patterns that course through the figure, or the overall tilt of the figure's gesture. Analyze all these directional movements and ask yourself which one is stronger—and then try to design a background shape that works in opposition.** Perhaps in the case of a model leaning forward to the left, you might counter it with a right-leaning background shape.

Once you decide the best counterpoint shape for the background or "negative space," try not to be afraid of breaking into the figure's "positive shapes" as you begin laying tone onto your paper. **A little straying of the background value over the figure won't hurt. In fact, it might even simulate the feel of atmosphere breaking into your figurative forms.**

So many artists-in-training put all of their efforts into learning anatomy and drilling their sense of proportions. I don't know how many students have attempted to brush me off with the excuse that they'll learn how to observe and render values when they've mastered the "more important" basics. I try to explain to them that seeing in value is part of the process of learning, that it is hard to perceive correct proportions and anatomy without also looking at the value shapes within and around the figure. I feel it's very important to practice everything if you are a beginner art-

ist, doing a little bit of value rendering even if your sense of proportion is still slightly off. That way, you develop your understanding of all aspects of the drawing process, equally advancing in your understanding of values and your grasp of proportions. Then, as your understanding of proportions becomes more sophisticated, you won't have to go back to square one to play catch-up. ■

Academy Drawing of Standing Male Nude in Profile

by R. Tweedy, charcoal, 24 x 18. Collection Art Students League of New York, New York, New York.

Even today, many artists-in-training spend days working on "academic" sketches like this one by R. Tweedy, who studied at the Art Students League in the 19th century. Over the course of five or six days, they would systematically map out the proportions of the figure and carefully outline the edge where light and shadow met. Then they would gradually fill in these shapes with subtle modulations until they finished their task—or the clock ran out.



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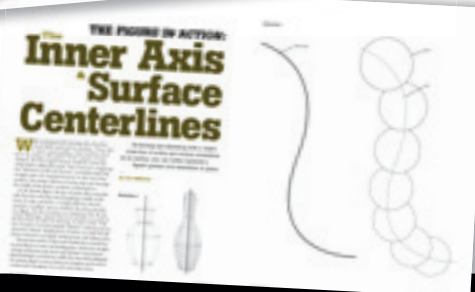
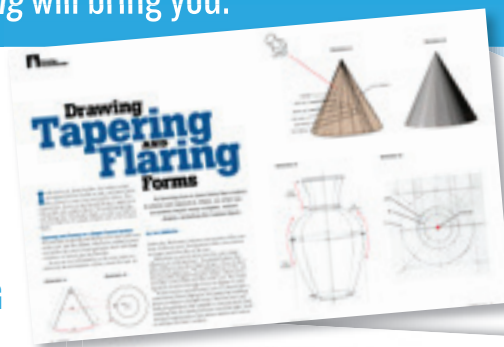


William Rose



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