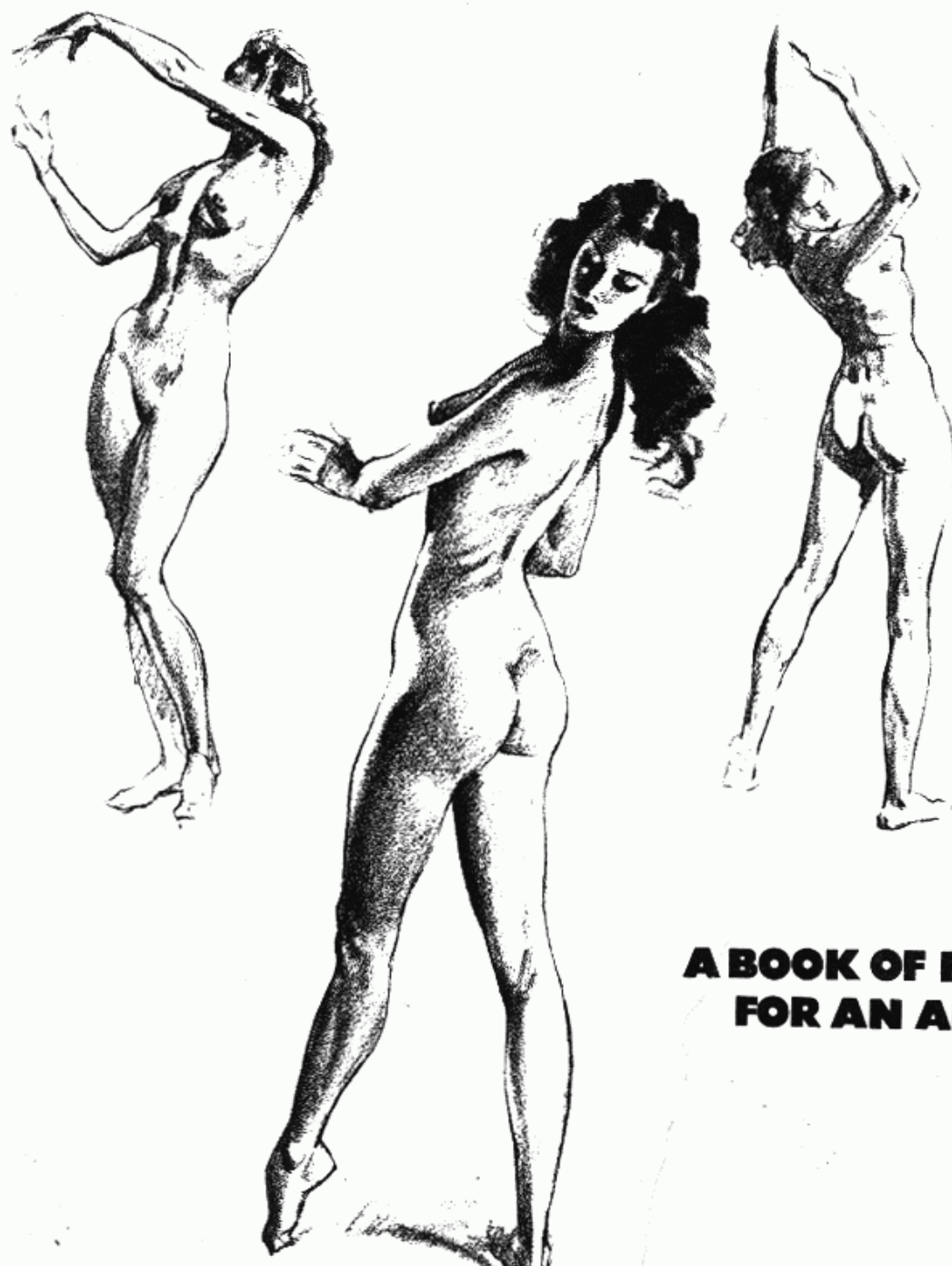


FIGURE DRAWING FOR ALL IT'S WORTH

ANDREW LOOMIS



**A BOOK OF FUNDAMENTALS
FOR AN ARTISTIC CAREER**

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AN OPENING CHAT

DEAR READER:

For many years the need of a further book on the subject of figure drawing has been apparent to me. I have waited for such a book to appear which could be recommended to the many young artists with whom I have come in contact. Finally, I have come to the realization that such a book, regardless of one's ability as an author, could be written only by a man actually in the field of commercial art, who in his experience had met and countered with the actual problems that must be clarified. I recall how frantically, in the earlier days of my own experience, I searched for practical information that might lend a helping hand in making my work marketable. Being in the not unusual position of having to support myself, it was the predicament of having to make good at art or being forced to turn to something else.

Across this wide country there are many of you in that predicament. You, also possessed of that unaccountable urge which seemingly comes from nowhere, want to speak the language of art. You love to draw. You wish to draw well. If there is any chance, you greatly wish to make a living at it. Perhaps I can help you. I sincerely hope so, for I think I have lived through every minute you are now living. Perhaps I can compile some of the information that experience tells me you want and need. I do not pretend to undervalue the fine work that has been done; the difficulty has always been in finding it and sorting out what is of practical value and putting it into practice. I believe that the greater chances of success lie in the mental approach to the work, rather than in sheer technical knowledge, and since the mental approach has not often been stressed, here lies the opportunity to serve you.

I not only assume that my reader is interested

in drawing but that he wishes from his toes up to become an efficient and self-supporting craftsman. I assume that the desire to express yourself with pen and pencil is not only urgent but almost undeniable, and that you feel you *must do something about it*. I feel that talent means little unless coupled with an insatiable desire to give an excellent personal demonstration of ability. I feel also that talent must be in company with a capacity for unlimited effort, which provides the power that eventually hurdles the difficulties that would frustrate lukewarm enthusiasm.

Let us try to define that quality which makes an artist "tick." Every bit of work he does starts out with the premise that it has a message, a purpose, a job to do. What is the most direct answer, the simplest interpretation of that message he can make? Stripping a subject to its barest and most efficient essentials is a mental procedure. Every inch of the surface of his work should be considered as to whether it bears important relationship to a whole purpose. He sees, and his picture tells us the importance of what he sees and how he feels about it. Then within his picture he stresses what is of greatest importance, and subordinates what must be there but is of lesser importance. He will place his area of greatest contrast about the head of the most important character. He will search diligently for means to make that character express the emotion in facial expression and pose that is to be the all important theme. He will first draw attention to that character, by every means available. In other words, he plans and thinks, and does not passively accept simply because it exists. Not far back in the annals of art the ability to achieve just a lifelike appearance might have caused some wonder in a spectator, enough to

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capture his interest. Today with color photography and the excellence of the camera going perhaps even further in that respect, we are surfeited with realism par excellence, until mere lifelike representation is not enough. There is no other course than somehow to go beyond obvious fact to pertinent fact, to characterization, to the emotional and dramatic, to selection and taste, to simplification, subordination, and accentuation. It is ten per cent how you draw, and ninety per cent *what you draw*. Equally defining everything within your picture area, in value, edge and detail, will add no more than can be achieved in photography. Subordination may be achieved by diffusion, by closeness of color and value to surrounding areas, by simplification of insistent detail, or by omission. Accentuation is achieved by the opposite in each case, by sharpness, contrast, detail, or any added device.

I take this opportunity to impress upon you, my reader, how important you really are in the whole of art procedure. You, your personality, your individuality come first. Your pictures are your by-product. Everything about your pictures is, and should be, a little of you. They will be a reflection of your knowledge, your experience, your observation, your likes and dislikes, your good taste, and your thinking. So the real concentration is centered on you, and your work follows along in the wake of what mental self-improvement you are making. It has taken me a lifetime to realize that. So before we talk at all about drawing, it is important to sell you strongly on yourself, to plant that urge so definitely in your consciousness that you must know at once that most of it comes from the other end of your pencil rather than the business end.

As a student I thought there was a formula of some kind that I would get hold of somewhere, and thereby become an artist. There is a formula, but it has not been in books. It is really plain old courage, standing on one's own feet,

and forever seeking enlightenment; courage to develop your way, but learning from the other fellow; experimentation with your own ideas, observing for yourself, a rigid discipline of doing over that which you can improve. I have never found a book that stressed the importance of myself as the caretaker of my ability, of staying healthy mentally and physically, or that gave me an inkling that my courage might be strained to the utmost. Perhaps that is not the way to write books, but I can see no harm in the author realizing that he is dealing with personalities, and that there is something more important than technique. In art we are dealing with something far removed from a cold science, where the human element is everything. At least I am determined to establish a fellowship with my reader, welcoming him to the craft at which I have spent so many years. If I have any blue chips I can pass on to him, I lay them before him so that he may join in the game. I cannot profess to know more than the experience of one individual. However, one individual experience if wide enough might well cover many of the problems that will doubtless come to others. Solutions of those problems may provide like solutions. I can lay out an assortment of facts and fundamentals that were helpful to me. I can speak of the idealizations, the practical hints and devices that will undoubtedly make drawings more salable. Since the requirements are almost universal, and since my own experience does not vary greatly from the average experience of my contemporaries, I offer my material without setting up myself and my work as a criterion. In fact, I would prefer, if it were possible, to subordinate my own viewpoint, or technical approach, and leave the reader as free as possible for individual decision and self-expression. I use my experience merely to clarify the general requirements.

It should be obvious that, first of all, salable

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figure drawing must be good drawing, and "good drawing" means a great deal more to the professional than to the beginner. It means that a figure must be convincing and appealing at the same time. It must be of idealistic rather than literal or normal proportion. It must be related in perspective to a constant eye level or viewpoint. The anatomy must be correct, whether exposed to the eye or concealed beneath drapery or costume. The light and shadow must be so handled as to impart a living quality. Its action or gesture, its dramatic quality, expression, and emotion must be convincing. Good drawing is neither an accident nor the result of an inspired moment when the Muses lend a guiding hand. Good drawing is a co-ordination of many factors, all understood and handled expertly, as in a delicate surgical operation. Let us say that each factor becomes an instrument or part of a *means of expression*. It is when the means of expression is developed as a whole that inspiration and individual feeling come into play. It is possible for anybody to be "off" at any time in any one or more of the factors. Every artist will do "good ones" and "bad ones." The bad will have to be thrown out and done over. The artist should, of course, make a critical analysis to determine why a drawing is bad; usually he will be forced to go back to fundamentals, for bad drawing springs from basic faults as surely as good drawing springs from basic merits.

Therefore a useful book of figure drawing cannot treat one phase alone, as the study of anatomy; it must also seek out and co-ordinate all the basic factors upon which good drawing depends. It must consider both aesthetics and sales possibilities, technical rendering and typical problems to be solved. Otherwise the reader is only partially informed; he is taught but one angle, and then left to flounder.

May I assume that you as a young artist are facing a bread-and-butter problem? Whenever

you achieve sufficient technical ability, there will be an income waiting for you. From that point on your earnings will increase in ratio to your improvement. In the fields of practical art the ranks thin out at the top, just as they do everywhere else. There is not an advertising agency, a magazine publisher, a lithograph house, or an art dealer's that will not gladly open its doors to real ability that is new and different. It is mediocrity to which the door is closed. Unfortunately most of us are mediocre when we start out; by and large, most commercial artists of outstanding ability had no more than average talent at the start.

May I confess that two weeks after entering art school, I was advised to go back home? That experience has made me much more tolerant of an inauspicious beginning than I might otherwise have been, and it has given me additional incentive in teaching.

Individuality of expression is, without question, an artist's most valuable asset. You could make no more fatal error than to attempt to duplicate, for the sake of duplication alone, either my work or that of any other individual. Use another's style as a crutch only—until you can walk alone. Trends of popularity are as changeable as the weather. Anatomy, perspective, values remain constant; but you must diligently search for new ways to apply them. The greatest problem here is to provide you with a solid basis that will nurture individuality and not produce imitation. I grant that a certain amount of imitation in the earliest phase of learning may be necessary in order that self-expression may have an essential background. But there can be no progress in any art or craft without an accumulation of individual experience. The experience comes best through your own effort or observation, through self-instruction, the reading of a book, or the study of an old master. These experiences are bundled together to form your