

Week 12 Notes: An Introduction to Portraiture

A few thoughts on looking to draw rather than looking to see

“Every time I paint a portrait, I lose a friend.” John Singer Sargent

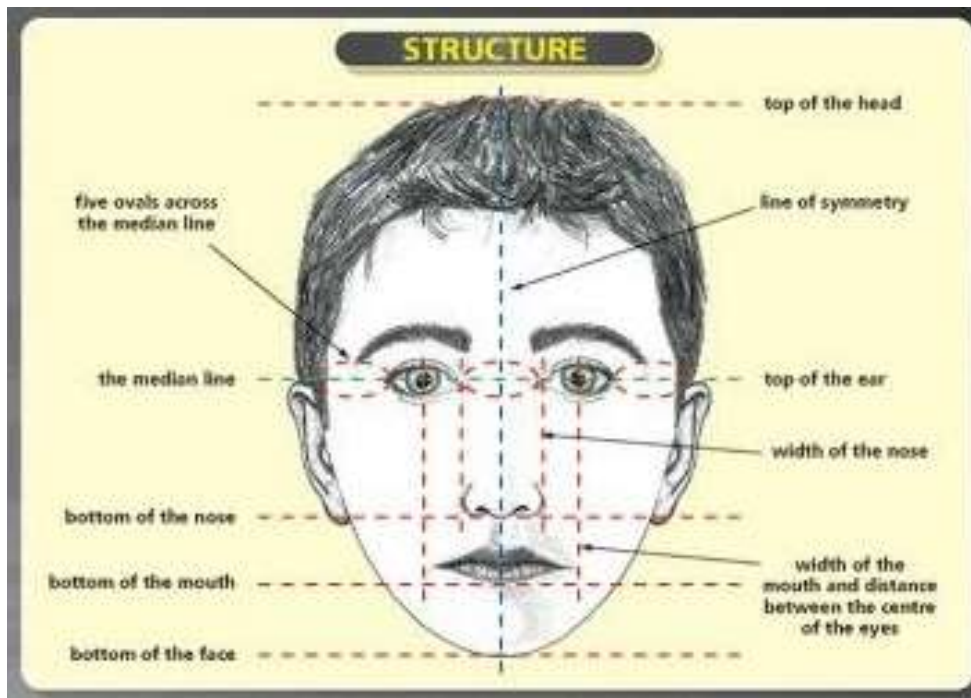
Taking on the challenge of portraiture can be daunting. No matter how hard you try, you feel your drawing just doesn't look like your subject or capture an essence of them. When we are drawing, we need to look and direct our attention in a different way. Usually, when we're looking at an object in our everyday lives to see rather than draw, our eyes flick over it, pausing briefly on points that we find interesting or important. When we're looking at faces, this tends to be mainly around the eye area and also the nose and mouth. The brain is picking up bits of information it needs, to gain a feeling of what the face looks like. A lot of time is spent on looking at the eyes in our interaction with people on a day-to-day basis. Being the window of the soul, they give us so much information about a person. Think about those you know who smile with their mouths but not their eyes!

When we are looking to draw, our eyes flick around less. When I'm trying to capture a tricky image, I initially find it extremely useful to think about seeing the subject as a series of shapes and almost trying to disengage from what is actually is. Did you feel that you didn't get the shape of the head right this week? Perhaps the mouth was too high up or the nose too low? Perhaps you made the common mistake of placing the eyes too high in the head instead of half way between the top of the head and the bottom of the chin.

Drawing accurately is about relationships; it's about being able to relate the part of the drawing we're concentrating on to the whole. Comparing is key. When mapping out facial proportions, don't fixate on a small area at a time – compare the area you're drawing against the entire image and other features. This is where the grids we drew and discussion about facial proportions can be so important – they allow us to compare shapes and relationships, and both positive and negative spaces. Look for things lining up in the subject. Look at the shapes they create around them. Draw the major, larger parts first – once the big shapes are right, then concentrate on detail.

Facial Proportions

The image and information below is for generic facial proportions but remember that there are ***always*** exceptions to the rules! Always observe your subject. Note that in the image below, the top of the ears are quite low down. Often the top of the ears line up with the brow line.



- The centre of the eyes is in the middle of the face, halfway between the top of the head and the chin. The bottom of the nose is found half way between the middle of the eye line and the bottom of the chin. The mouth line is found approximately half way in between the bottom of the nose and the bottom of the chin.
- The width of one eye usually fits five times across the face.
- For most people, the width of the nose will align with the inside corners of the eyes.
- This measurement varies from person to person, but for most folks, the width of the mouth aligns with the inside portions of the iris or the centre of the pupil.
- Usually, the top of the ears line up with the brow line. The bottom of the ears conveniently align with the bottom of the nose.
- The neck extends down from the bottom of the ears. For females, this lines extends inward a bit - resulting in a smaller neck. For males, this line still comes in a bit, but to a lesser degree. It's nearly straight down from the bottom of the ears

The use of chiaroscuro

We looked at the use of chiaroscuro this week when undertaking our portraits. This is an Italian term meaning 'light-dark'. In drawing and painting, it refers to clear tonal contrasts used to suggest volume. Leonardo da Vinci and Caravaggio both used the technique to great effect; the former to suggest form and the latter for dramatic purposes.

