Flexibility and Spatial Fluidity

*Drawing: Structure and Vision* by Fritz Drury and Joanne Stryker
pp. 237-241
The second role that knowledge of the skeleton can play in drawing the figure is to establish the flexibility of the form. This might seem odd; the bones in the body are there to give rigidity against the pull of gravity and to provide firm anchors for muscular structure. Perhaps a more accurate way to put it is to say that the skeleton can help define the flexibility of the rigid parts of the body in relation to each other, for the skeleton is flexible at specific points and in specific ways.

The core unit of flexibility in the skeleton is the spine, which connects the head, rib cage, and pelvis. The spine is flexible because it is composed of many small parts, like a train, which can move slightly in relation to each other. The result is a structural element that provides a combination of rigid support with a remarkable ability to turn, twist, bend, stretch, and compress. Sensitivity to the orientation of the spine is one of the most important ways to breathe life into a figure in your drawing. The spine seen from the side is an S curve, like a swimming snake. This shape is an inspirational one; it connects the form of the figure with natural phenomena of fluid movement.
The spine is important structurally in that it allows for the compression and extension of the column supporting the head and gives an opportunity for bending, particularly at the cervical curve of the neck and at the lumbar curve in the lower back. The convex curve surmounting the rib cage and the sacral curve attached to the pelvis do not flex so much. Their convexity helps instead to establish the volume of these forms, which represent the major units of skeletal mass.
Drawings by Egon Schiele and Peter Paul Rubens show importance of the spine to the flexible sense of the figure in action. The physicality of the figure is expressed in relation to its capacity for springy, energetic change.
Egon Schiele, Austrian, 1890-1918
*Standing Nude in Black Stockings*
1917
Watercolor and charcoal on paper
H. 18-1/8, W. 11-5/8 inches
Egon Schiele. (Austrian, 1890-1918)

Egon Schiele. (Austrian, 1890-1918). *Standing Male Nude with Arm Raised*. 1910. Watercolor and charcoal on paper, 17 1/2 x 12 1/4" (44.5 x 30.8 cm). Gift of Jo Carole and Ronald S. Lauder
Egon Schiele

Kneeling Girl, Disrobing, 1910

Gouache, watercolor and pencil on paper

Initialed and dated, lower right, and numbered "92" by another hand, lower right

17 5/8" x 12 1/4" (44.8 x 31 cm)

Kallir D. 561
Egon Schiele  
*Nude Girl with Arms Raised, 1910*  
Pencil on paper  
Initialed and dated, lower right  
17 3/8" x 12 1/4" (45 x 31 cm)  
Kallir D.579
Egon Schiele
*Reclining Woman with Black Stockings*
drawing- gouache and black crayon
1917
Standing Female Nude in Black Stockings, 1912
Watercolor and pencil on paper
Signed and dated, lower left
19 1/8" × 8 1/2" (48.5 × 21.5 cm)
Kallir D. 1059
Crouching Man Seen from the Back, ca. 1610
Peter Paul Rubens (Flemish, 1577–1640)
Black chalk, with brush and gray-black wash, heightened with white
Peter Paul Rubens  
Title: *Hermit and Sleeping Angelica*  
Date: c. 1626-1628  
Painting: oil on oakwood  
Measurements: 43 x 66 cm
Paul Cézanne, French, 1839 – 1906
After a painting by Peter Paul Rubens, Flemish (active Italy, Antwerp, and England), 1577 - 1640
Title: Allegorical Figure of War Series
Page XXXIX (verso) from Sketchbook II
Date 1885-1900
Location Made in France
Material Graphite pencil on wove paper
Measurements Sheet: 8 1/2 x 5 inches (21.6 x 12.7 cm)
Paul Cézanne, French, 1839 – 1906
After a painting by Peter Paul Rubens, Flemish (active Italy, Antwerp, and England), 1577 - 1640
Title: *Mercury*
Page XLI (verso) from Sketchbook II

Date 1885-1900
Location Made in France
Material Graphite pencil on wove paper
Measurements Sheet: 8 1/2 x 5 inches (21.6 x 12.7 cm)
The skeleton is flexible in many other ways, of course, especially the joints of the arms, legs, and fingers. In beginner’s drawings, however, the flexibility of the torso is the factor most often underestimated, even though it can contribute most dramatically to a sense of living movement in the figure.
The S Curve

The S curve in the side view of the spine might be called the symbol of flexibility: side-to-side fluid movement, a curvilinear waving motion around a central axis, an exploratory search of balance.

motion defined by line

Applied to the S curve, the principle of linear motion is one of the most powerful concepts available to suggest fluid, flexible movement in the human figure, or in fact in any form.
There is good evidence that this side-to-side undulation is inherently soothing for people; think of the motions that calm a baby or those of a rocking hammock. Few sights are as graceful as the meanderings of a stream; the S curve represents contained continuous movement with soft changes of direction and a constant return to a balanced state.
The drawing of the crouching woman by Amadeo Modigliani uses a sweeping S curve to describe the luxurious stretching of the body. From a starting point in the lower left hand corner, the curve moves from the contour of the hip into the spine, between the shoulders, connecting with the upper contour describing the hand, wrist, and forearm of the figure. It is almost a perfectly balanced reverse S, but something else happens here. The figure is twisting – extremely so. The lower half of the body faces you, but by the time your eye gets to the upper torso, you are looking more at the woman’s back. The forearm folds back toward you from the furthest point of the pose. It is an elaborate and contorted pose that brings your eye around the back and out again. The effect is to increase the physicality of the action with stretched tension complementing folded compression, making an intriguing visual configuration for your eye to explore. The drawing takes you on a spiraling roller coaster ride across the surface of the composition, but also around and behind the imagined form of the figure’s body and the space that surrounds it.
Amedeo Modigliani 1884-1920

Caryatid 1913 pastel and watercolour 53x44cm
Musee d Art Moderne, Paris
Caryatids were statues of women that were used as columns to support a building or an entablature and were also used for decoration.

The male form of a Caryatid which came later was called a Telamon or Atlas.
Amedeo Modigliani (Italian, 1884–1920)

**Reclining Nude**, 1917

The Mr. and Mrs. Klaus G. Perls Collection, 1997 (1997.149.9)
Ernst Ludwig Kirchner
Ernst Ludwig Kirchner
*Erich Heckel and Dodo*, 1909
Black crayon on paper
Estate stamp, verso
12" × 17" (30.5 × 43.2 cm)
Private collection.
Ernst Ludwig Kirchner

_Two Bathers Near the Woods, 1911_

Watercolor on paper
Signed, lower right
10 5/8" x 13 3/8" (27 x 34.1 cm)
Spiral and Contraposto
The S curve principle is also at work in the drawings by Michelangelo showing curving spirals that draw your eye around the pose in implied depth. These powerful drawings have other elements that raise new issues. Unlike the woman in Modigliani’s drawing, these figures are very sculptural, with developed sense of 3D form. This aspect of drawing is a tribute to the ancient Greek sculpture, one of Michelangelo’s primary sources of inspiration. Despite an extremely convincing sense of solidity and movement, this is not a “realistic” drawing in the sense that it represents an everyday person form the artist’s time. It is instead a heroically idealized image, modeled to emulate ancient Greek or classical tradition. Renaissance artists including Michelangelo looked to Greek art for guidance in attaining a certain visual and ideational perfection. The Greeks made a careful study of the body from life, but always in connection with geometric principles. Some of these principles had to do with ideals of proportion and symmetry, but the Greeks also developed techniques to express movement including **contraposto**.
Contraposto means “placed in opposition” and implies the shifting of weight to one side or the other of a standing pose. The Greeks discovered that this asymmetry of weight distribution created a series of alternating angles in the skeleton as it balances itself against gravity. It also creates a sinuous curve (an S Curve) in the centerline of the figure. The effect is to give a sense of movement or life to even the most subtle pose. As a result, after a certain point in Greek art, few figures stand with equal weight on both feet. Think of contraposto as dynamic balance.

Contraposto can be almost unnoticeable, or it can be quit extreme as in Michelangelo’s twisting figures or in many Greek sculptures. In all these works, the fundamental issue is the figure’s physical flexibility.
MICHELANGELO

Study for the battle of Cascina (1504), pen, brush and warm grey ink, heightened with white, 16 5/8x11 ¾ in. (The Trustees of the British Museum/Art Resource, NY)
Greek Sculpture
The two figures from the collection of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney were presented to her by Rodin during a visit to his studio in Paris at the Hôtel Biron in 1911.
Gian Lorenzo Bernini was the heroic central figure in Italian Baroque sculpture. The influence of his father, the Florentine-born Pietro, can be seen here in the buoyant forms and cottony texture of the Bacchanal. The liveliness and strongly accented diagonals, however, are the distinctive contribution of the young Gian Lorenzo. Although about eighteen when he made this work, he already displayed what would become a lifelong interest in the rendering of emotional and spiritual exaltation. The Bacchanal reveals the young Bernini's intensive study of bacchic subject matter.
The model for this bronze, traditionally called *Dancer Looking at the Sole of Her Right Foot* (fourth state), was a plaster cast of an earlier sculpture probably modeled in wax. The plaster cast is known to have been made by the founder Adrien Hébrard about 1900. The figure is one of four in a series of surviving figures—each in a slightly different position but all doing the same thing—that exemplify Degas' fascination with subtle changes in the dynamics of movement. This one was long thought to be the final one in the series owing to its relatively finished surface, but one of Degas' models asserted that in 1910 she was asked by the artist to assume the difficult pose of the plaster cast while he modeled another small figure. So it seems that, in fact, the less finished versions are likely to be the later ones.
The goddess of love stands in an exaggerated hipshot pose, wearing a thin chiton girded just below her breasts and dropped off her left shoulder. Her himation (cloak), which falls in thick folds between her legs in front, must have been draped over her missing left arm. The underlifesize figure is one of many variants created in the Hellenistic period of a type known as the "Tiepolo Aphrodite." A major overlifesize version and numerous statuettes have been found in Athens, and many examples have also come from the island of Rhodes.
Anita Huffington
Sculpture: Stone and Bronze

Anita Huffington's history includes a long period in New York City starting in the late fifties when she came to study dance with Martha Graham and Merce Cunningham. She became acquainted with a circle of artists of the New York School, such as Kline and de Kooning, as well as a diverse and individualistic group of painters, sculptors, musicians, and poets in this vital idealistic period. These experiences and her later choice to live in the woods of the Arkansas Ozarks sowed the seeds for the sculpture she makes in stone, bronze, wood, and mixed media. Her work reflects both the world of art and the spirit of her life in the woods.
I do direct carving in stone and make bronzes, often using the stone as part of the process. My sculpture is usually based on the human form, primarily the female nude. I often carve torsos or fragments of the body, believing that the part can be as expressive as the whole. The sculptures are in a sense totem objects that celebrate our ordinary every day life. Their function, as in prehistoric or primitive sculpture, is to reveal and revere -- to make magic.
We can see in nature an organic energy and essential beauty, a power that has the force of a religious experience: an illumination, an intuitive flash wherein we glimpse our original nature. In my sculpture, through reduction and simplicity of form, balance and tension, and interaction with the material, I seek this revelation. To name it always falls short. One must use contradiction and paradox, freely choosing elements from the rational and the intuitive, classical and romantic, abstract and figurative, beginning each time with the unknown.

Anita Huffington
My sculpture is my response to nature and art. There is a long struggle to develop the skill and vision that allows the freedom for a spontaneous response. It is based on intimate experience with the sensual, tactile images of life, but not solely dependent on the visible. Working through the known to the unknown, I use the human form, and sometimes animals, to penetrate the mystery and express spirit. What interests me most is the timeless element in the art of all periods and places. My sculpture has always been a composite and synthesis of elements drawn from nature and the history of art. With sandstone in particular (perhaps affected by their rude nature), I seem to move backward through time from classical to archaic to prehistoric-- to the unknown form in the formless. Through more and more reduction, down to elemental forces of rock and earth, I seek a unity that expresses something more than the visible.

--Anita Huffington
Earth
1990
Bronze
24 1/8 x 9 1/2 x 6 3/4 inches
Astarte
1992
Bronze
11 x 4 x 4 inches
Mars
1992
Bronze
16 3/8 x 5 x 4 3/4 inches
Grace
2000
Bronze
24 x 9 x 8 1/2 inches

http://www.anitahuffington.com/