

**FOUNDATIONS in
Portrait Drawing
Volume 3**

Michael R. Britton



FOUNDATIONS in Portrait Drawing

Volume 3

Table of Contents

- Lesson 19:** Drawing into Painting: Sanguine Portrait – Page 4
- Lesson 20:** Drawing into Painting: Sanguine Construct – Page 11
- Lesson 21:** Drawing into Painting: Practice of Tone – Page 26
- Lesson 22:** Drawing the Hand – Page 30
- Lesson 23:** Beauty of Line: Part 1 – Page 37
- Lesson 24:** Beauty of Line: Part 2 – Page 42
- Lesson 25:** Beauty of Line: Part 3 – Page 48
- Lesson 26:** Character Portrait: Building Form: Profile – Page 53
- Lesson 27:** Character Portrait: Plumbing & Spectacles – Page 62

The third volume of **Foundations in Portrait Drawing** is comprised of nine portrait drawing lessons that were originally written for my drawing students and subscribers of my Drawing E-Zine. Over the years they have proved very popular and, more importantly, effective in teaching how to draw portraits.

The lessons of Volume 3 focus primarily on portrait drawing with sanguine conté and the additive/subtractive process of building form.

Lessons 5, 6 and 7 present the linear portrait using both black and sanguine conté.

Lesson 8 and 9 introduce you to the many possibilities of character portraits which, in my opinion, are many times more satisfying for the artist than the commercial portrait.



Tools for Portrait Drawing

Conté is available in a range of colors. The earth red conté, however, is the traditional medium and is available in a range of sanguine tones: natural, Medici, Watteau and XVIII Century. I sharpen my conté crayons to a long tapered point with a safety razor blade and medium grade sandpaper. You will also find a conté holder (also called pencil lengtheners) indispensable.

A kneaded eraser is also needed, but make sure that you reserve this eraser only for your conté work.

Small stumps, or tortillons are also very useful. Again use these specifically for your conté work.

My preferred paper is the Fabriano Ingres ivory or buff colored. You may or may not like this paper too but I suggest trying out a variety of different brands of charcoal drawing paper. At this early stage, though, keep with the light colors.





As the drawing progresses it is important that it proceed with an overall logic. The dark mass of hair next to the face and under the hand is important as its value determines just how far the facial tones will need to be resolved.

With a sharp conté stick I cross-hatched in this dark mass and then stumped it down with my little finger. As an added flourish I used my kneaded eraser to indicate a few locks of hair.

The facial arena is now carefully resolved by cross-hatching in small areas of tone then stumping, or more accurately – painting, them down with a paper tortillion. I also use my kneaded eraser to delicately render the forms.

This is a subtractive/addictive process of applying conté, stumping and judiciously lifting out. This is where the full value of studying from my DVD's is achieved.

This additive/subtractive process of developing the drawing is the emotional compass of the work. When done correctly the drawing deepens in terms of both tone and meaning. However this compass can also steer you onto the shoals of aesthetic disaster. The reason for losing a drawing is usually a failure to grasp the underlying structure and architecture of the head.

The remedy then is slow, but steady asymptotic progression. Don't completely resolve one area before moving onto another. And step back from your work at regular intervals to get an overall view.

Inverting your drawing and looking at it upside down will give you a fresh view. Looking at your drawing reversed in a mirror will give you an unforgiving, but new perspective on your drawing.





In this close-up view note how more resolved the far side of the face (the right side) is than the left. When you consider your strategy of how you are going to develop your work take into consideration that all of the elements must balance out at some point, better sooner than later. To that end it is better to work on resolving corresponding areas rather than working up the eyes together then working up the nose, then the mouth, etc.

I am using very little conté now. Most of the work is done with my tortillon and kneaded eraser.

The tortillon is an excellent training tool for preparing for painting. Hold the tortillon at its end while manipulating and pushing the conté across the form.

In practice you will find that the best approach is to stump in a small area and then further manipulate it with your kneaded eraser.





Building the tone for this hand was a reasonably straight forward progression. (This was a rare instance – quite often building tone requires taking a step back for every two taken forward.) I began by working up the tonal forms in the index and middle fingers. This required lightly cross-hatching in the darker values with a very sharp conte crayon followed by a finer re-working with a small tortillion (paper stump) and re-working further with a kneaded eraser. This process is generally described as drawing with a sculptural sensibility. You are visually carving out the form.

In the middle drawing I began with the fleshy furrowed mass of the palm. The creases in the palm were lightly sketched in and the strong middle cast shadow was worked up first. It is quite easy to lose your place in complex areas, what often happens is that we are looking at one area and working another trying to force ill-fitting pieces together and wondering why things are not locking into place. It is like a jigsaw puzzle, if a piece doesn't snap into place then it doesn't belong there.

Work your tone up in small, manageable, yet logical, pieces. i.e., the index and middle fingers together, the palm, and then the ring and little finger together. The caveat, though, is that all of the various pieces must read together as a whole.

The thumb and thenar eminence are the last to be worked on. I prefer to work from back to front.

The Blind Contour Drawing

An excellent exercise for developing your sense of tactile form is the blind contour drawing. Looking only at your subject draw the contour with one continuous line. The purpose is to **visually feel** the form. Don't worry about the proportions; that will come later once you have developed your hand/eye coordination. The blind contour should be drawn as slowly as possible – think of it as drawing a line with a sculptural sensibility.

Continuous Line Drawing

Similar to the blind contour drawing but this is not just an exercise but a work of art. Each line is rendered continuously to depict a form. Henri Matisse, amongst others, was an absolute master of the continuous line drawing. Matisse's line drawings are deceptively simple; their power derives not only from the exceptional economy and grace of line but also from the subtly suggested volumes of form.



Henri Matisse

Gesture Line Drawing

The gestural line drawing is a quick and spontaneous depiction of a pose or instance. Gesture drawings are also known as action drawings. The focus in gesture drawing is to capture both movement and weight.



Egon Schiele

Many artists begin their day with gesture drawings to loosen up.

The Austrian artist, Egon Schiele (1890-1918) drew many gestural self-portraits with a powerfully expressive angularity. Schiele's modus was not to describe volume and grace but raw expressive emotion.

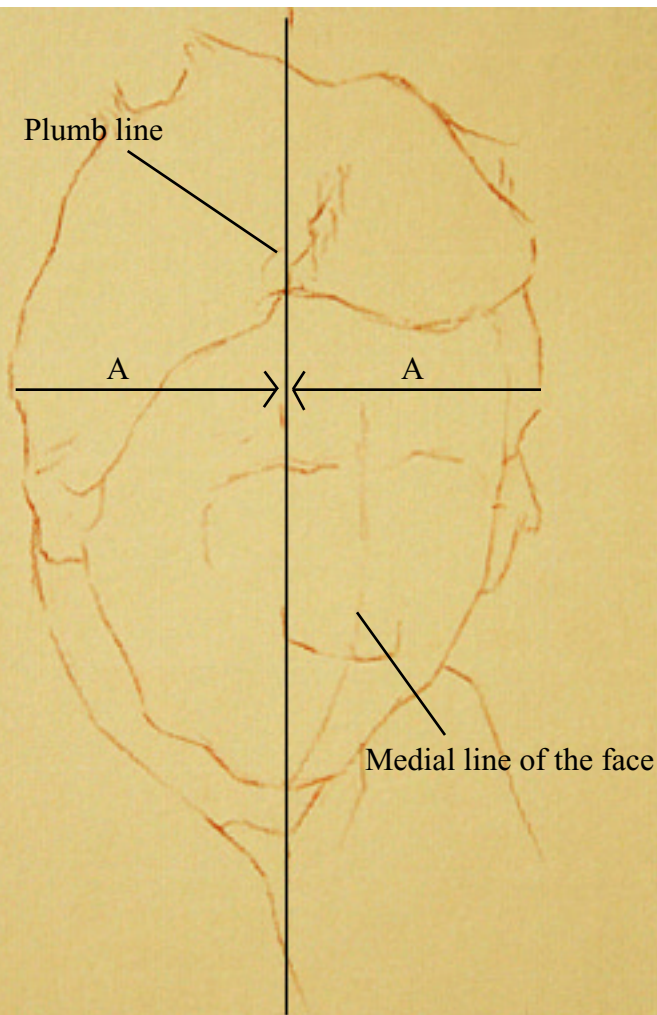
Constructive Line Drawing

The constructive line drawing is generally a preparatory study for a more sustained work such as a painting. It is a traditional study of form and proportion. The drawing by Ingres, the leading artist of the French Classical school of painting, is a preparatory drawing for the larger commissioned painting.

Ingres's masterful handling of black and red conté renders firm contours and delicate tonal nuances of form.



J.A.D. Ingres, *Study of a Portrait of Madame Moitessier*, circa 1844



Determining the medial line of the facial arena in a pose that is neither frontal nor profile or even $7/8^{\text{th}}$'s can be tricky. [The medial line, or facial angle, runs through the center of the face: between the eye brows, the *philtrum* (the trough between the nose and upper lip: *philtrum* is the Greek word for 'to love/to kiss') and the *mental protuberance* of the chin's base.]

The solution is to first find the lateral center point of your model's head and then vertically plumb from the center point to assess how the various elements, i.e., nose, eye, chin, hair, etc. line up vis-a-vis the plumb line.

A plumb line is easily made from a length, about 12", of thick black thread or a thin string anchored with a weight such as carpenter's plumb-bob. A heavy washer will also do.

In my drawing the plumb line met the medial line of the face at the center of the *mental protuberance* of the chin. Also aligned with the plumb line is the wing of the nose and the part in the hair at the hairline. Having at least three aligned elements is extremely useful in accurately placing the facial features. In addition to further developing the base of the nose I have also begun working out the placement of the spectacles.