

How to draw eyes, not almonds

This is another in a series of lessons on art and drawing by specialist David Mesling. He has taught for eight years and operates an art store, Art Store and More, 18774 Middlebelt, Livonia. Mesling encourages questions and comments from readers. You may write him at his store or c/o Observer Newspapers, 23352 Farmington Road, Farmington MI 48024.



By David Mesling
special writer

Everything in life is relative. For example you can't enjoy winning unless you occasionally lose. Rest is only restful after you have worked. Quietness is only quiet as it relates to loudness, and so it goes, on and on.

All things in life are considered and even judged by how they relate to each other. Don't you hate those charts that relate your weight to your height? I'm sure they were probably designed by a team of very skinny doctors. According to that chart, a 6 foot, 3 inch man should weigh 189 pounds. Well, I never did weigh 189 pounds. At least I don't remember it. I probably was the comely weight for my height, maybe for one hour, somewhere, in high school in the year 1964. It would probably be better to name those charts "shortness charts" because everyone who reads one exclaims, "I am not too heavy, I'm just too short!" For example I am the correct weight for a man 7 foot 2 inches tall.

So if everything in our lives is relative, then how important it is to understand the relativity of our own anatomical features in attempting to draw ourselves. How big is the nose of a man? Where is it on his face? How does it relate to his ears? If his nose is about the same size as his ears, then where are they located on the head? These questions all seem simple but these simple problems of relating and positioning the facial features can give any artist fits of rage and frustration.

INSTEAD OF drawing a skull and showing the features and muscles today, I would first like to look more at just the features. I would like to say, however, that structure is the main objective. Without the structure of bone and muscle and the proper understanding of them, your figures and faces will look like inflated manikins.

This week I will talk about the structure of the features. Usually new artists struggle to get the head shape right or at least humanoid. Then for seemingly hours they shift features all over this shape trying to come up with a realistic face. Of course you must have some sort of an outline of where the head will be, but allow that outline to be merely a gesture. Then go in and locate the features. As you draw in the features, most of the time you will see they do not correlate with your gestured outline of the head. So you then merely change the gestured outline head to fit the better drawn features. You see, as you draw the many lines required to establish the facial features the whole drawing tends to enlarge. So it is better to lightly gesture the head shape and later change it to fit the features.

Artifacts

So let's start with the very important, most looked at features, which are the eyes. The reason many artists have trouble drawing the eyes is because they are drawing what they think eyes look like.

Many times my students will have carefully drawn semicircles, producing almond shapes. I will say "Hey that's a nice set of almonds, but that's not what his/her eyes look like." The eye is structurally more like a rounded parallelogram. I always recommend that students place the iris so that it is partially covered by the upper lid. I find this relaxes the look of the eye. A small clean white dot or catchlight placed in the upper right or left of the pupil adds sparkle and wetness to the eye. Never place the catch light in the middle of the pupil because it creates a frightened or staring look.

SOME WOULD say "Sure I can draw a beautiful eye, but I can't draw both eyes to look the same!" Of course this takes practice, but you should draw them both at the same time. No, I don't mean draw them with both hands. Just sketch the main shape of each eye, then add the pupil in each eye, then the iris, then the catchlight and so on. This way they both develop together. I used to get so frustrated because, I could draw and shade one beautiful and completed eye. But I could never match it up with the other eye. Of course this problem left, as I began developing both eyes together.

One tip to show the thickness of the lower eyelid, another is to shade the upper part of the iris as it is shadowed by the upper lid. There are many shapes and shades to look for as you render any feature, especially in the eyes. For instance you see very little of the eye lashes in the middle of the top lid. Most of the lashes should be rendered at the outside of the upper lid. Also the white of the eyes are really never white and should be lightly colored to an off-white. When the white of the eye is off-white, it also makes the white catchlight look brighter and a sparkle to the eye.

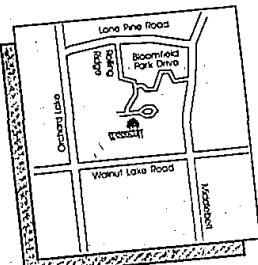
Before I run out of space here I want to mention the second most critical feature which is the mouth. To help understand the basic shape of the lips draw three balls, two on the bottom and one on the top. Now draw a line horizontally and separate the upper and lower ball shapes and you will have the line of the lips. Of course this is merely the basic shape.

Your models lips will be much different than the one shown. Female lips are generally fuller and rounded. Male lips are usually flatter and less shaped, but the same basic structure applies to both.

A FEW tips here would be to always add highlights. A strong white highlight would be for the wet lipstick look and a light highlight for softness and for the male lips. Don't forget to draw the ever present little triangular pockets at the corners of the mouth. As always don't rely on a line to define shape. Make the shape of the lips with shades of gray or with color. Many artists only outline the lips, which doesn't come off as realistic.

If you can draw pretty good eyes and a decent mouth, you should have little trouble creating a

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successful drawing. The rendering of the nose though difficult and involved is less important than the eyes and mouth. The nose has many planes, shapes and shades that can be a problem if you don't know what to look for. The male nose is usually a classic example of these planes and shapes. In drawing pretty women, however, it is best to ignore many of these shapes. I think pretty women forget they even have a nose. I guarantee you won't get a pleasing response if you draw a heavily shaded nose on any pretty face. On a feminine face pay more attention on where the nose meets the eyebrows and the underside of the nose.

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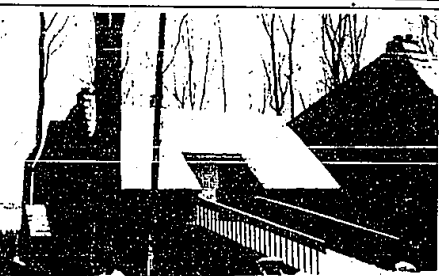
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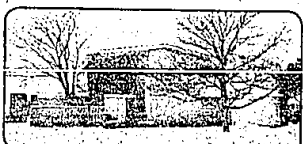
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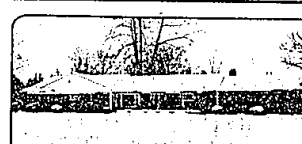
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