

# GESTURE DRAWING

**Gesture is one of the most important elements in drawing.**

Many times gesture drawing is thought of as being “loose” or just “making an expressive drawing”. While these things are true there is more to gesture drawing than just that aspect. If you only think in those terms when creating a gesture drawing you will never really learn what a gesture is and what to be looking for when drawing one.

The primary purpose of gesture drawing is to facilitate the study of the implied motion and rhythm of your subject. Ultimately, you learn to see the whole mass of the subject before its parts (the general to specific theory). This study also is helpful in understanding the basic forms and acts as a foundation upon which a more sustained drawing may be based. In addition, when you do a drawing within a short time span you become aware of more elaborate actions that may be missed when working on a sustained drawing. Overall this approach is based on basic lines of rhythm within the subject, which may be expressed through contour, mass and drawing through the forms.

In looking at the whole you will capture the essential movements and attitude of the subject. It is “body language” and all of the subtle differences that characterize one subject from another.

## **When beginning a Gesture Drawing:**

Start the drawing with simple lines that take in the total action of the subject. Look for the central axis that represents the tilt and lean of your subject. The hardest part of this study is to resist the urge to make a neatly refined drawing of the model. Build on volumes and movements through the form, not only the contour! When you only look at the contour there is a tendency to look only at the outline of the parts, rather than the whole at once and the movements that run through the figure. Only focusing on contour ultimately results in a drawing that is very flat and stiff. It is not wrong to look at the contour, but don't let that be your only focus of the gesture drawing. Let the contour as well as the thrusts and rhythms within the subject connect with each other. Try to keep your pencil on the paper for the entire drawing. You can use differing amounts of pressure on the pencil throughout the pose to call attention to more extreme areas of movement. Just do not make a dark outline around the entire gesture after you have finished drawing through forms. Remember you are not making a mere copy of what is in front of you, you are analyzing and interpreting it into a two dimensional representation.

Don't get frustrated with yourself when doing gesture drawing. Just like any other subject it takes a lot of practice and study.









Here is an example of a drawing by Michelangelo, created as a study for the Last Judgement fresco in the Sistine Chapel.

The image below shows the drawing with the major gestural rhythms over top. You can see that there is a gesture moving through each figure individually, as well as one that runs through them as a group.

The figure on the right side of the drawing can clearly be seen as having an "S" like gesture.



The drawing to the left is by Vincent Van Gogh. Although not as broad in his mark marking as the gesture example above, you can see that all of the landscape has been described in a very gestural way. Every mark is showing the major direction of the forms within the scene. The trees, leaves and bushes all show a sense of movement with the elements of the environment - the wind. The roof of the house is displaying the feeling of a sweeping motion that is consistent to the form while remaining fluid and rhythmic with the surrounding space.





Remember to ask yourself, “what is the object doing?” This means what implied movements are present? What directional shifts are dominant? Look for rhythms and patterns of implied movement. In the plant above, the vines and leaves have a sense of moving out from a circular, cylindrical center. The directional shifts from this center are going in a zigzagging fashion, unlike some other plants which might have leaves that are shifting in a straight out or curved motion.

Keep your pencil on the paper throughout the entire drawing. Do not get caught up on details and specifics. You are looking for rhythms and the overall whole shape of the subject before the parts. Relating the subject to general geometric solid shapes such as a cylinder, sphere, cube or cone can be a helpful way of getting a handle on the overall gesture. (refer to the geometric form handout for examples)



