

Anatomy through Gestures

Exercise



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—Advisory—

This document has been locked to discourage malicious fiddling with the hyperlinks; however, I still suggest that you trust the links **only** if you downloaded this tutorial from my dA account or personal website.

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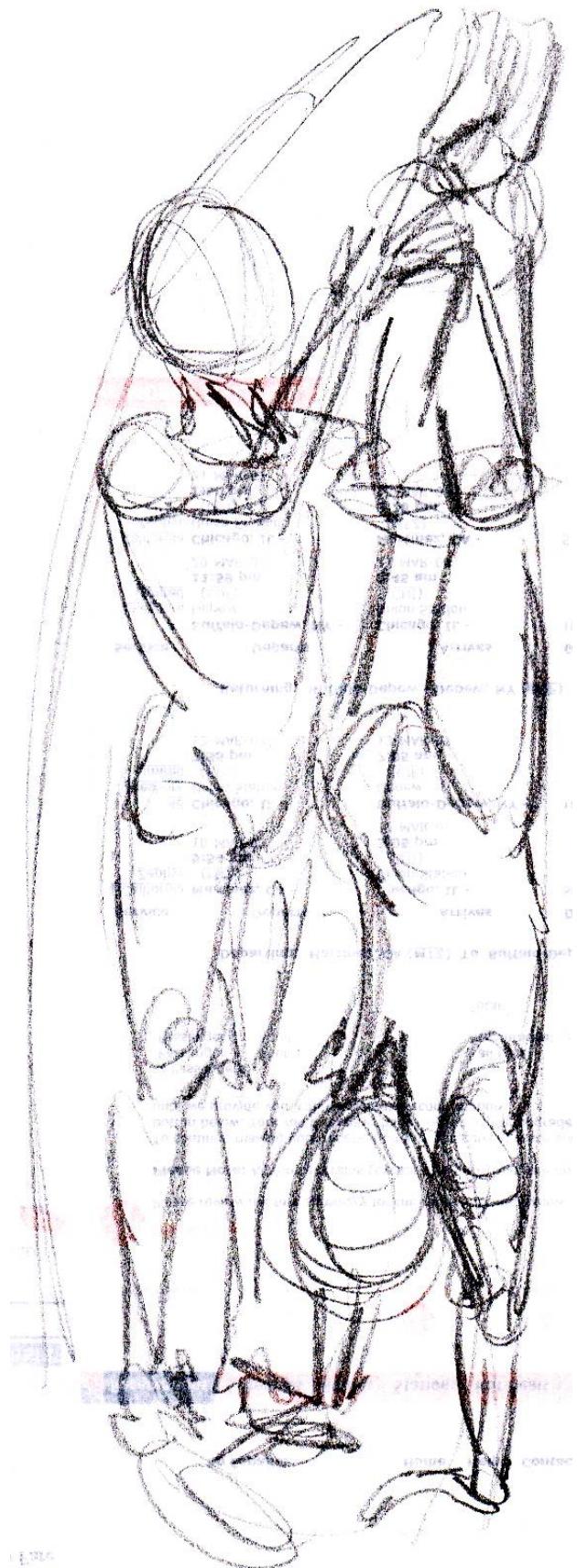


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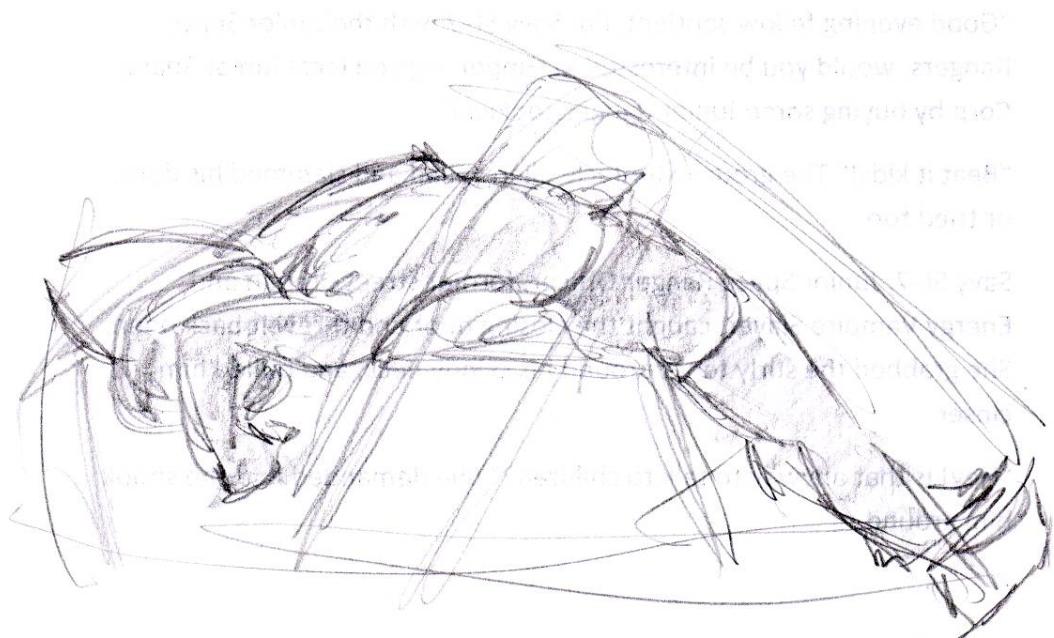
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"I've been stuck on this sketch for a long time because I don't understand enough anatomy..."

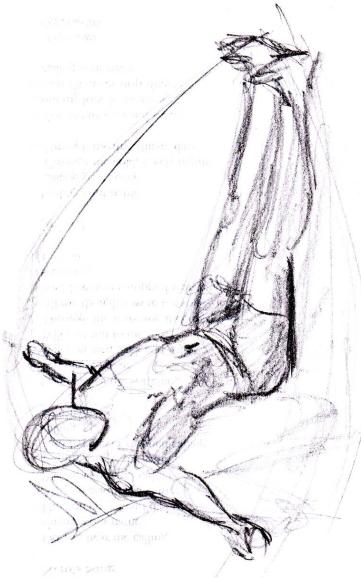
"I really need to know how to draw general anatomy..."

"I have been having extreme difficulty drawing female anatomy..."

"I have been troubled a WHOLE lot by drawing males and females; they always look a little 'off' like how the female doesn't look 'curvy' enough or how the male always looks buffer than I want him to look..."



Human anatomy is the number one subject that people request help with at the [Artists' Hospital](#). It's an intimidating subject, to be sure. Human beings are complicated, the two genders are quite different, and they can all strike a bewildering array of poses. Where do you start?



gesture drawing -

"The act of making a sketch with relatively loose arm movements (gestures) — with the large muscles of the arm, rather than with the small muscles of the hand and wrist of the artist. Or a drawing made this way. Gesture drawing is both widely considered an important exercise in art education, and a common practice artists use in "warming up" at the start of any new work. A gesture drawing is typically the first sort of drawing done to begin a more finished drawing or painting. It is used to block in the layout of the largest shapes in a composition. There are compelling reasons too for artists to make gesture drawings simply for the sake of making them. The act of gesture drawing trains the simultaneous workings of the eyes, the brain, and the hand, especially in the act of drawing from life — from direct observation of a subject. Intensifying this learning experience is the practise of gesture drawing at great speeds — drawings made in as long as five minutes, and as short as a few seconds. Gesture drawing is likely to increase awareness of underlying structures, both in the subject of the work and in the work itself."

-from ArtLex Art Dictionary



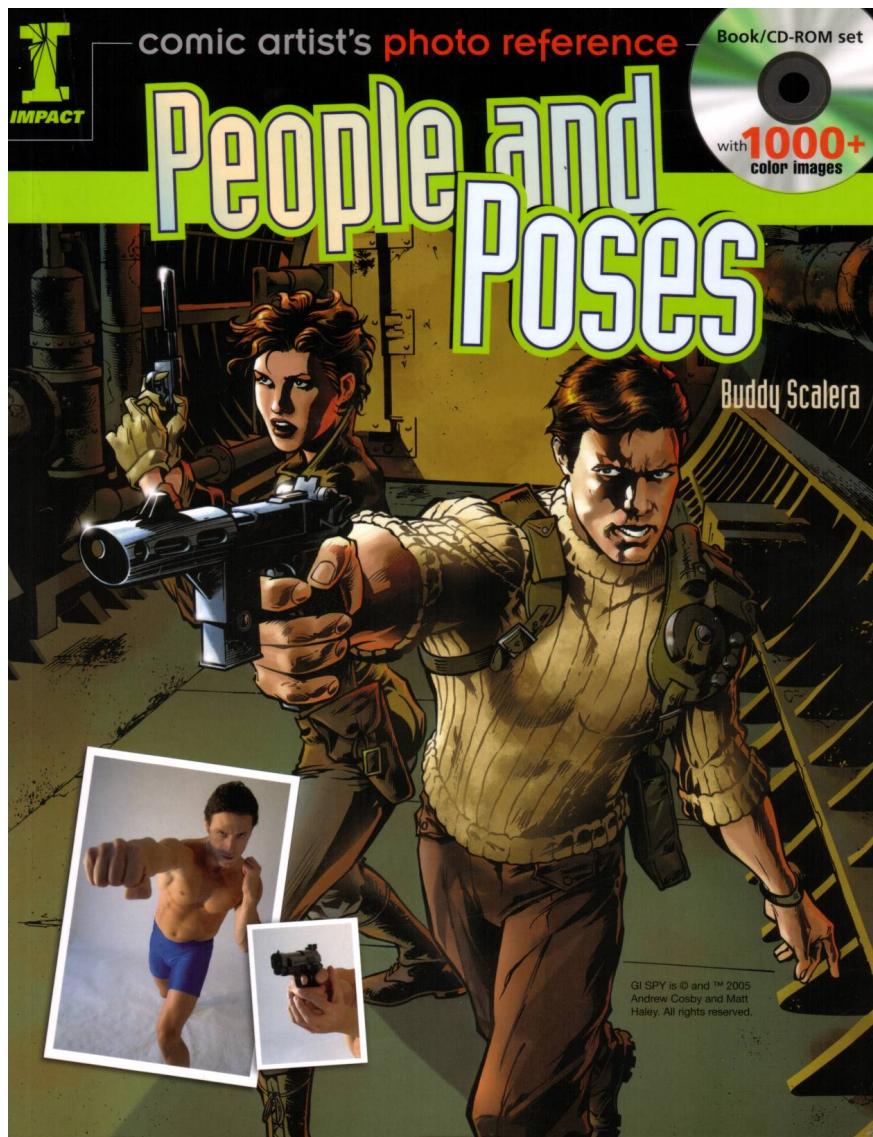


Gesture Drawings

Whether you're new to drawing people or have been doing it for years, you can polish your skills by drawing gestures. It's challenging and fun. All you need is decent reference photos and a willingness to SCRIBBLE. A lot.

This exercise is meant to be a jumping-off point, with plenty of room for experimentation and adaptation. Try it once, then change it around as much as you like.

Ready?



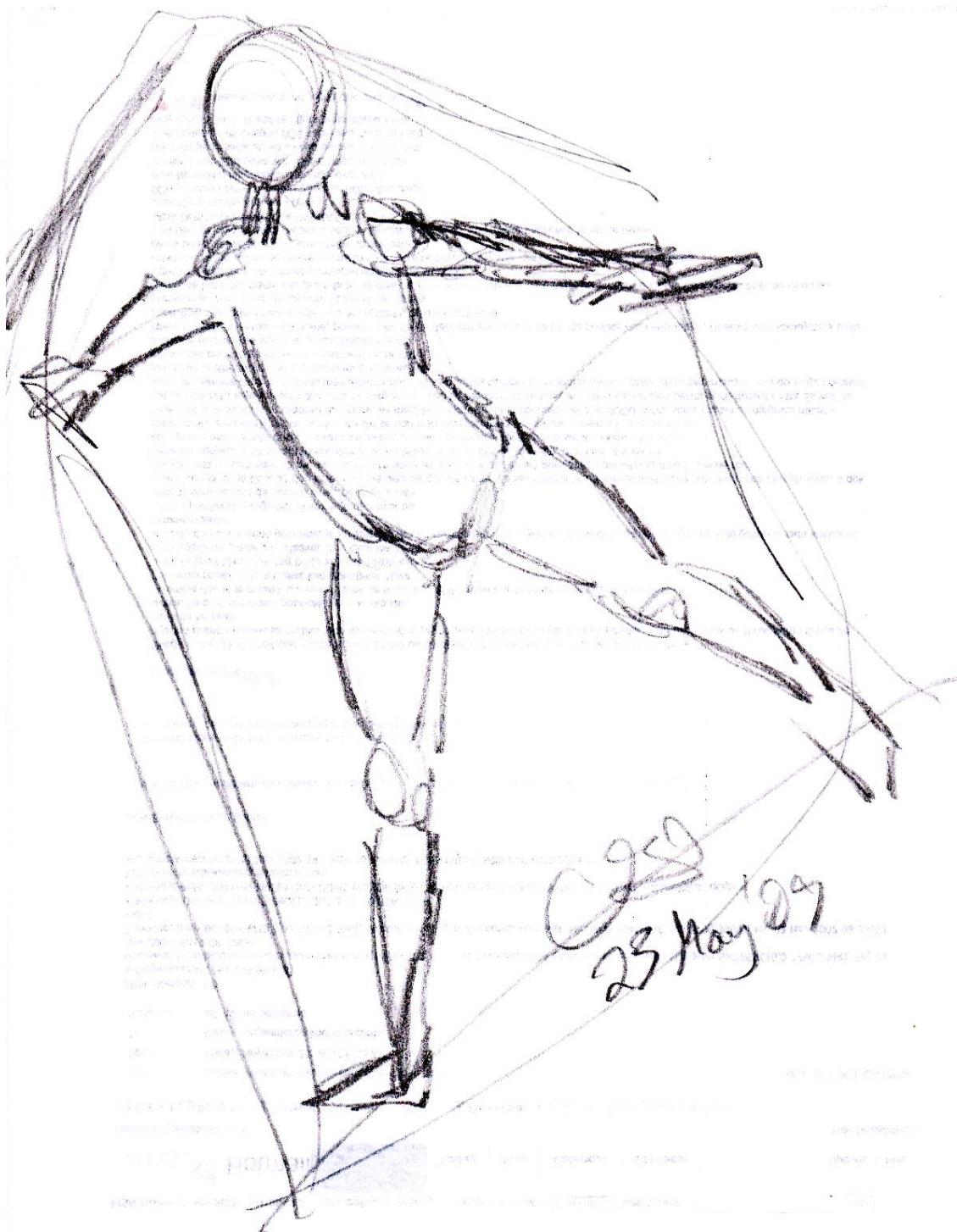
Get a copy of this book, or something like it:

People and Poses by Buddy Scalera

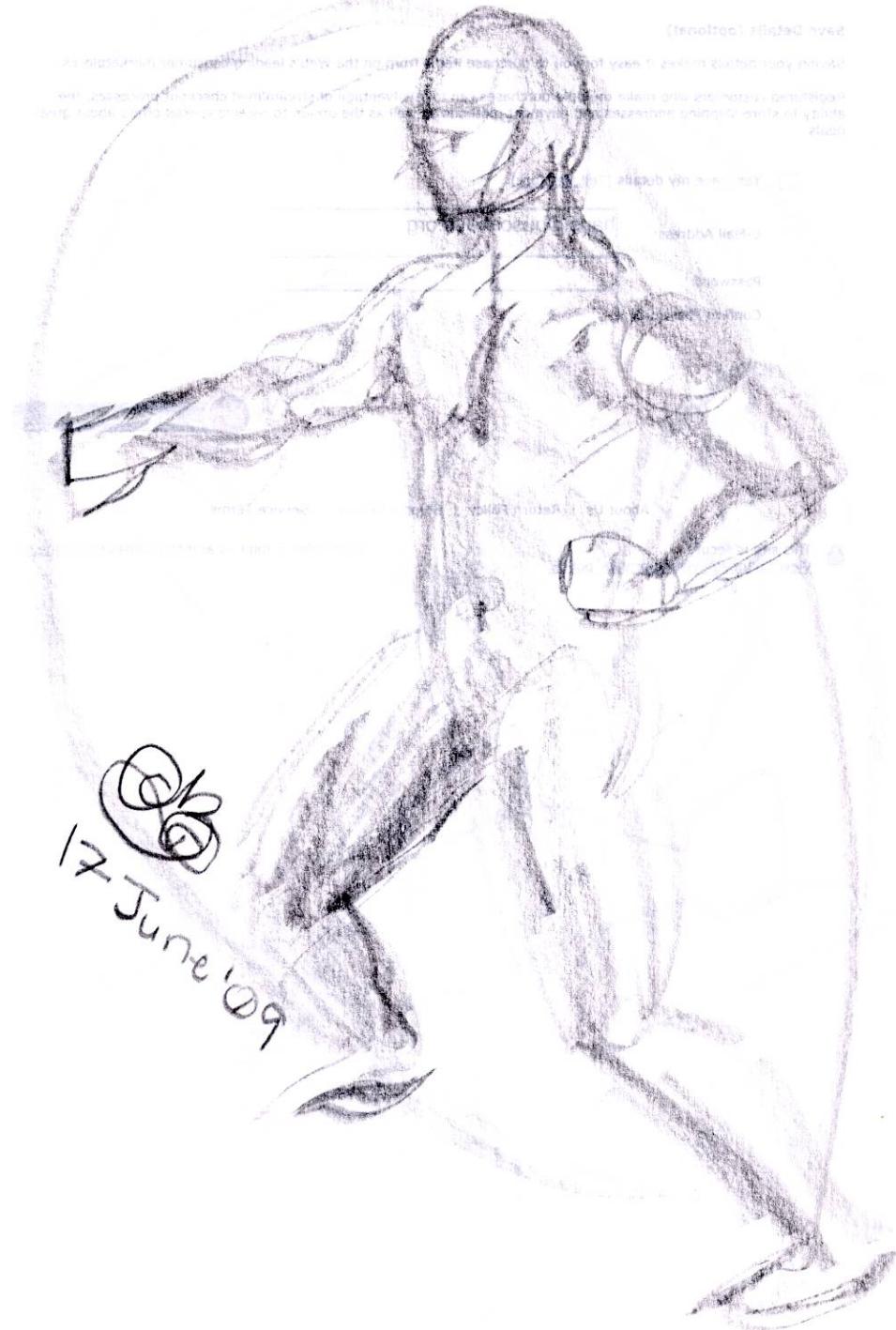
This title has a few hundred high-quality photos of both male and female models in various typical comic book poses — fighting, standing, wounded, etc — plus a CD in the back cover with 600+ additional photos. It contains no nudity, just tight shorts and (for the women) tank tops. You could also try **Women and Girls** or **Men and Boys** by the same author.



You can also try books on gymnastics, ballet, yoga, bodybuilding magazines, and so on — anything that has nice photos of people with close-fitting clothing. Try the [DK Superguides](#) series. Your local library can save you money here, and a reference librarian may be able to help you find suitable books. Nude references are even better, but can prove awkward if there are other people around.



If you can't find a book or magazine with decent photos, I recommend [jademacalla's stock photo account](#) on deviantArt. He has some great pose photos, and his usage rules are very generous. (If you upload any drawings referenced off those photos, be sure to credit him in your drawing description.)



There are many other human stock accounts on deviantArt. You can find a partial list in the Artists' Hospital's [human anatomy library](#). Whatever you use, just make sure to respect the account holder's stock usage rules.

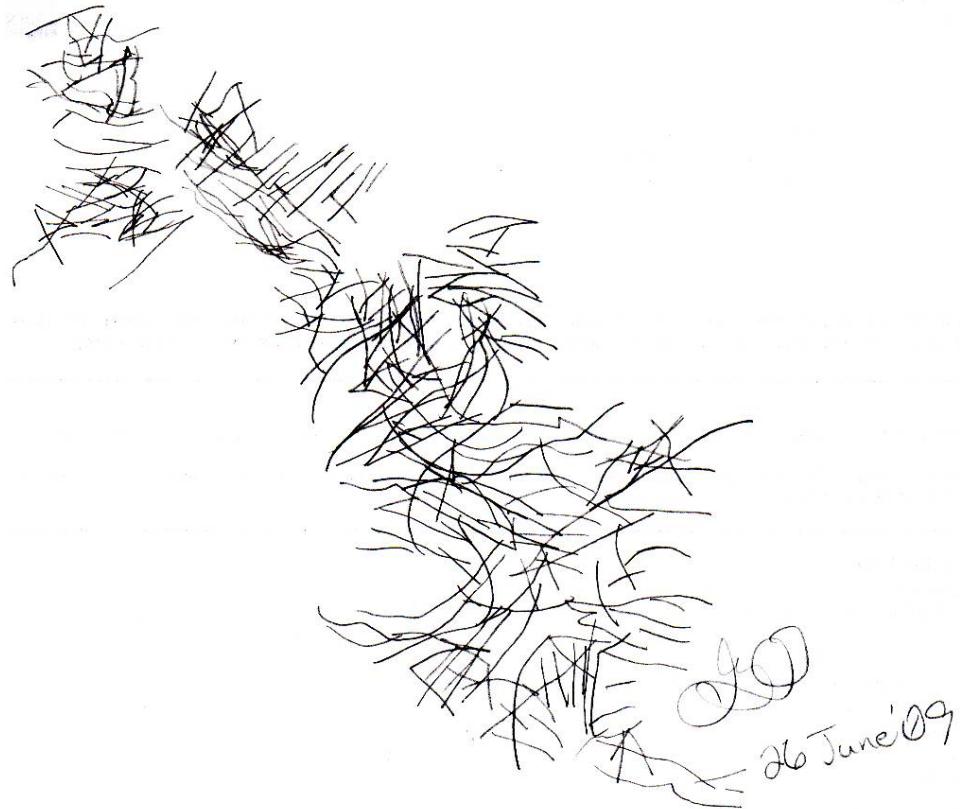


Get at LEAST a) two sketchbooks, recommend letter sized (they don't need to be high quality)

and b) a big stack of scratch paper, or a ream of cheap copy paper, or several pads of newsprint (**newsprint** is very cheap, low quality paper). The sketchbooks are for more developed drawings, so you can see how you're progressing. For the actual gestures, you can use anything cheap — anything you won't hesitate to recycle or turn over and draw on the back of.



Do one practice session a day, if possible. I really recommend doing it as early in the day as you can, for the simple reason that distractions tend to get the jump on you otherwise and you may wind up not drawing at all. Use an ordinary pencil or your favorite drawing tool. (I like to use woodless pencils because they can make bold, relaxed strokes.)



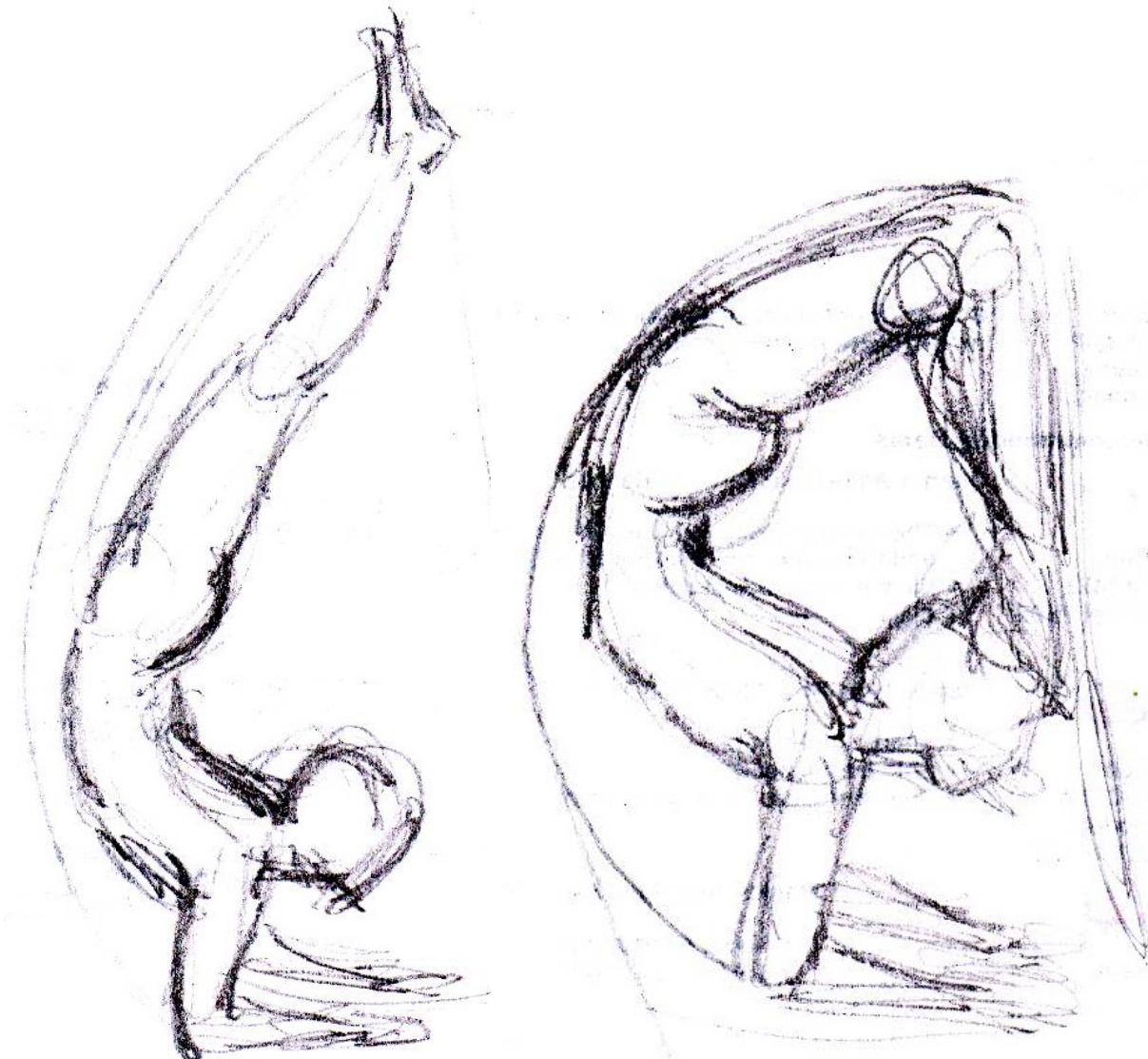
Start the session with a blind contour drawing of whatever's convenient — the wrinkles on your hand, a screenshot, etc.

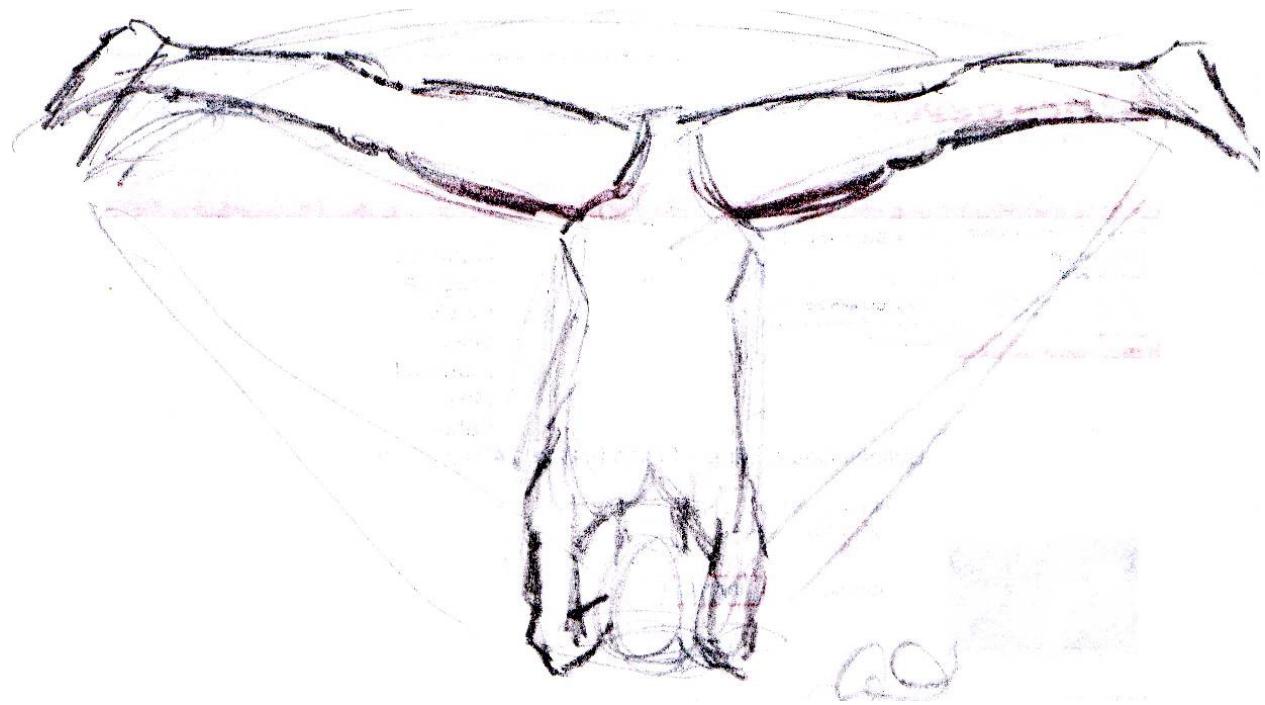
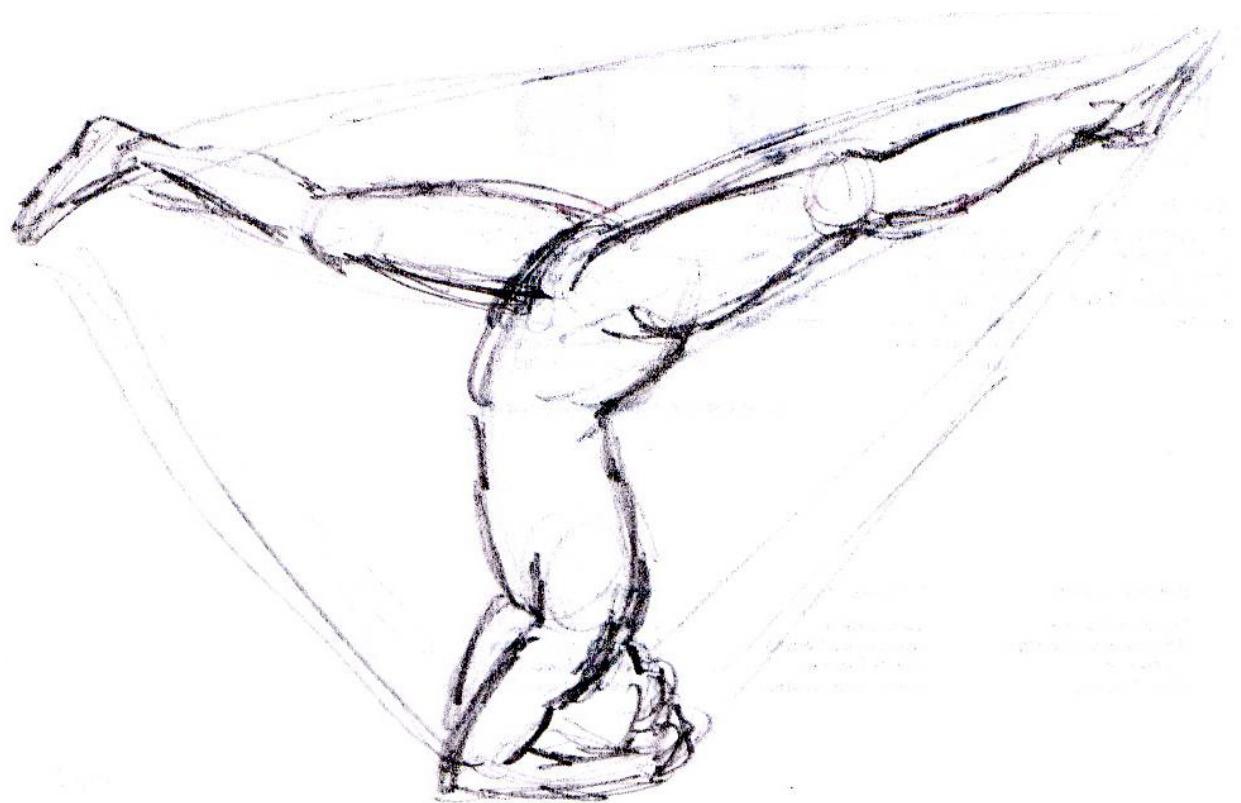
Blind contour drawing means don't look at your paper, only at the subject you're drawing, and only draw the lines and/or edges. ([Here's a tutorial](#).) Twist around or use something to block your view of the paper, if necessary. Do it for at least five minutes, and make yourself draw slowly. I often do this with my off hand.

The result will be a mess, but the point is to shift your mind into "drawing" mode. I used to have to make 3 drawings to really "shift" — the first drawing would be cruddy, the second okay, and the third drawing much more accurate and pleasing. Now, if I begin with a blind contour drawing, the FIRST drawing is good. SO much more satisfying! Don't just work harder — work smarter. =)

Now that you're better prepped to draw, refer to your book or magazine and do some messy gesture drawings on your cheap paper.

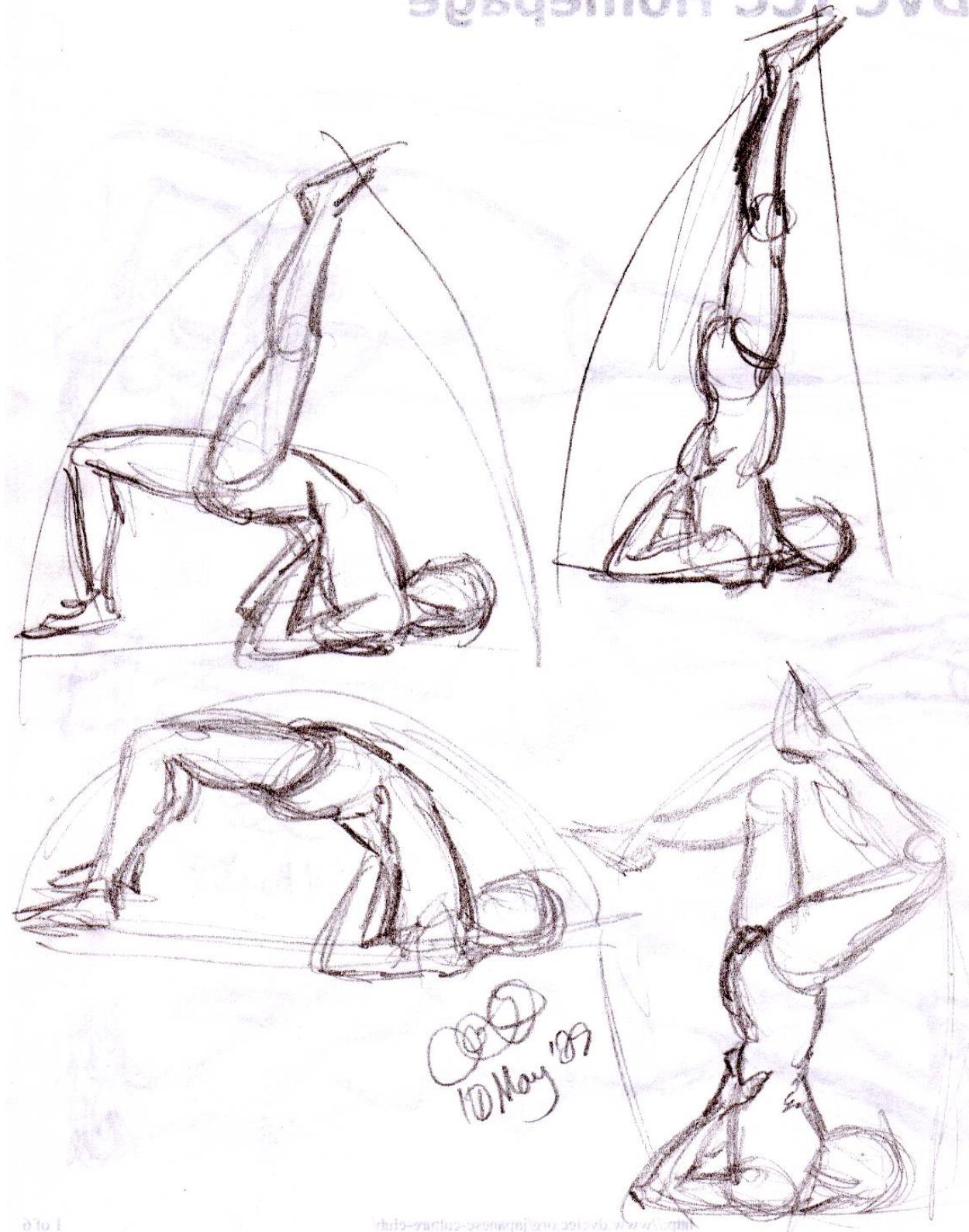
Try doing, say, three pages a day to start with. Work up to 10, 15, 20 pages per day — whatever you can handle without getting burned out. These should NOT be polished drawings. They should look awful. They should look messy. They should look rough. Remember, they're meant for the trash! So there's no pressure; you can even do them with your off hand. But they will help you get a feel for human figures and proportions.







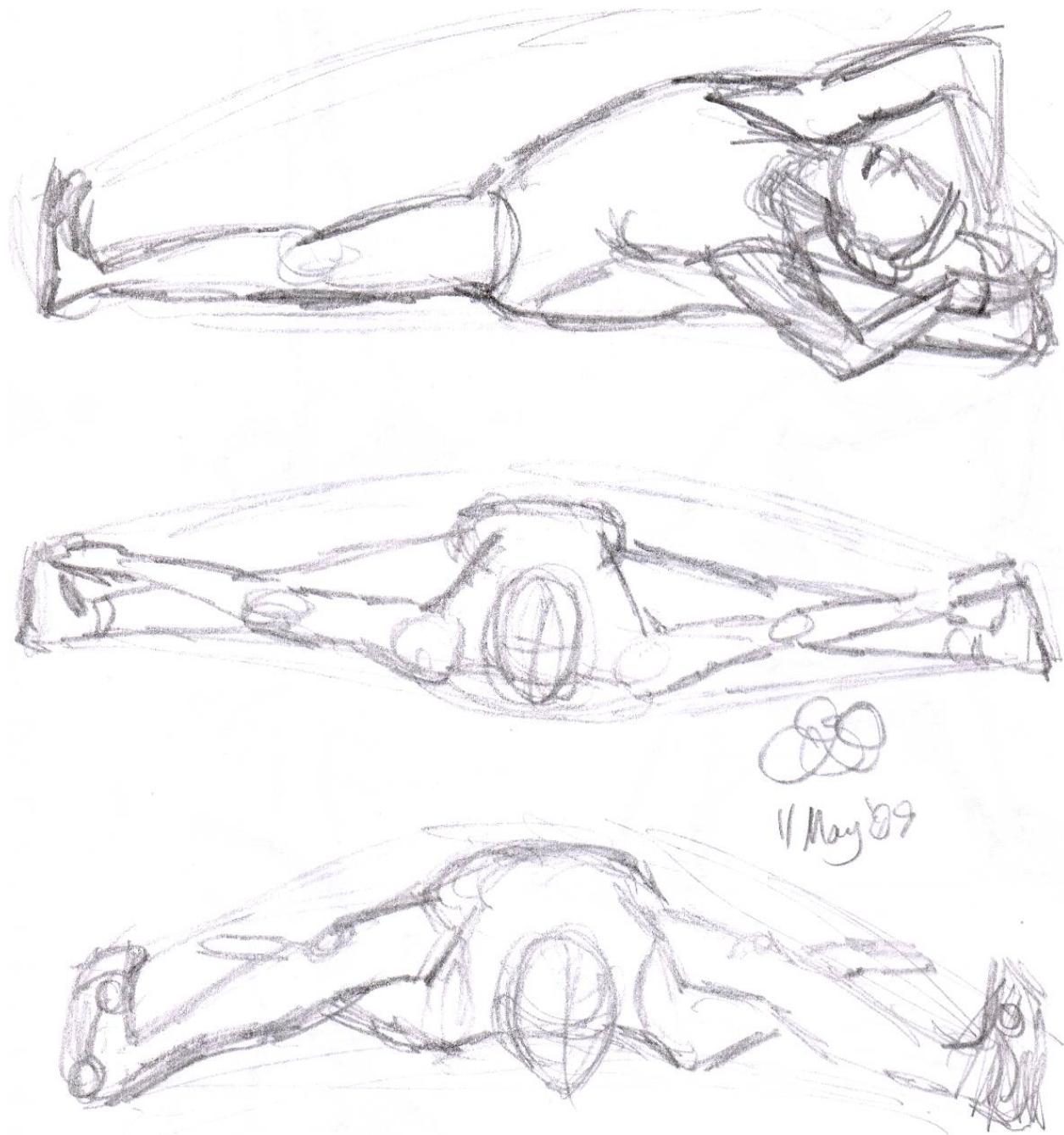
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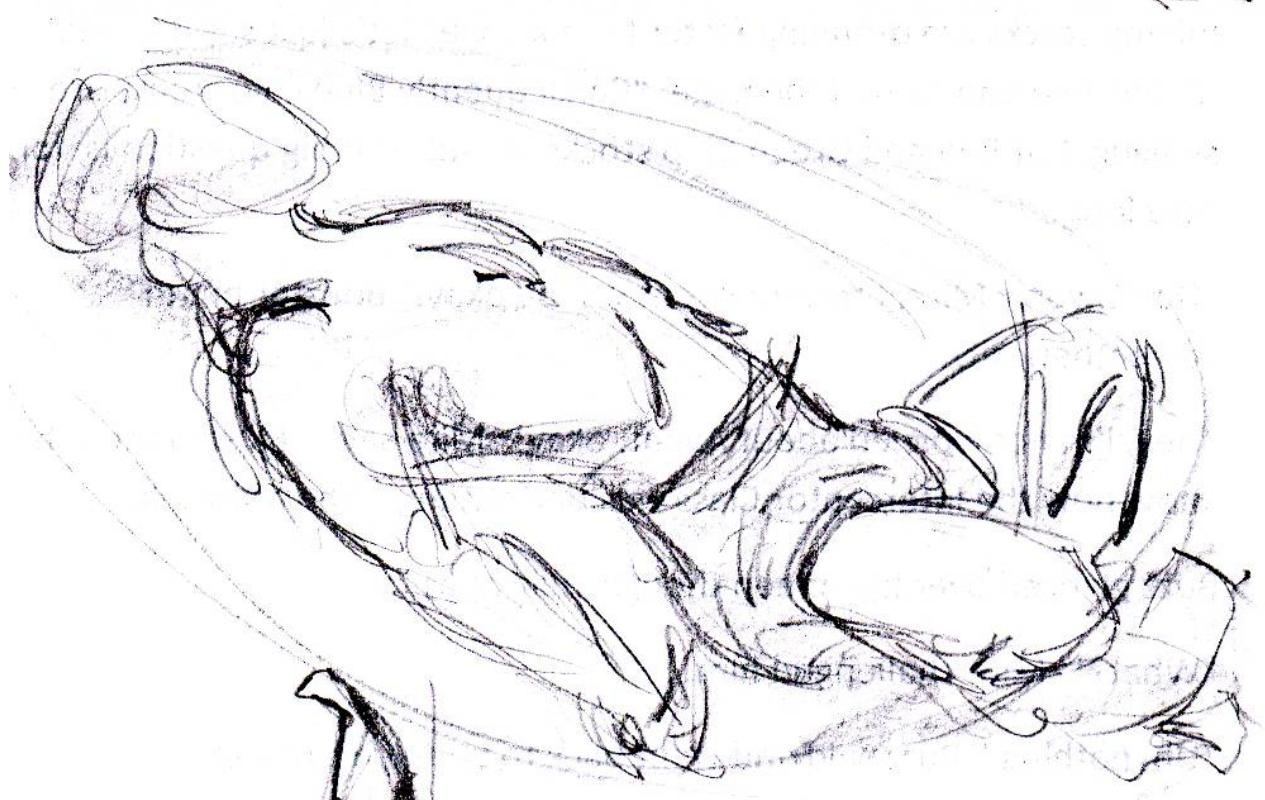
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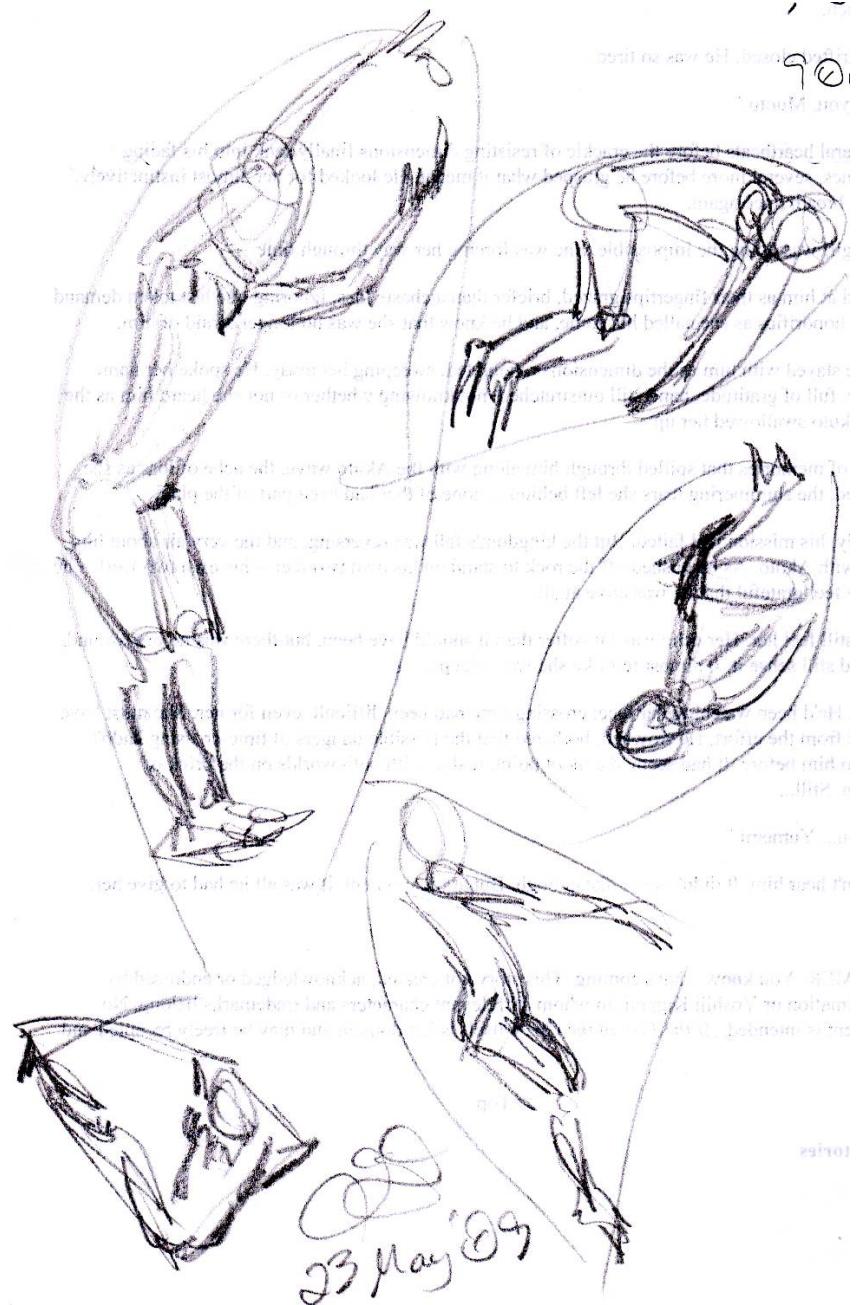
After you have finished your self-assigned number of messy drawings for the day, pick a nice model photo from the book for reference. Open your sketchbook and do just one nice, finished drawing. Or, if you prefer, you can use a [Wacom tablet](#) and your favorite art program. This drawing does NOT need to be perfect, but take your time and put some work into it. Clean it up with an eraser, darken the lines, add shading if you like, & etc. Don't burn yourself out, but just do your best.



A finished drawing is more satisfying than a bunch of gesture drawings. It will also stay in the sketchbook as a record of your progress. Don't forget to sign and date it. =)



Stick with the exercise for at least a week, starting with gestures and ending with a nice drawing. Then go back and compare your newest drawings with your old ones. The newer you are to drawing people, the more of a difference you'll see.



This exercise can be repeated as many times as you like; there's always something more to learn. The ideal setting for gestures is a life drawing class, but if you can't take one right now for whatever reason, gesture drawing from photos is the next best thing. Gestures have improved my drawings more and taught me more about anatomy than any chart. I'm sure I will never outgrow them.



I hope you find this technique as useful and have as much fun with it as I have. =)



Suggested Reference

This list could be endless, so I'll just stick with the better titles I've run across personally. I'm sure there are MANY other good reference books and websites out there.

-Books-

[People and Poses](#)

[Women and Girls](#)

[Men and Boys](#)

[I Love Gymnastics](#)

[I Want to Be a Gymnast](#)

DK Superguides series

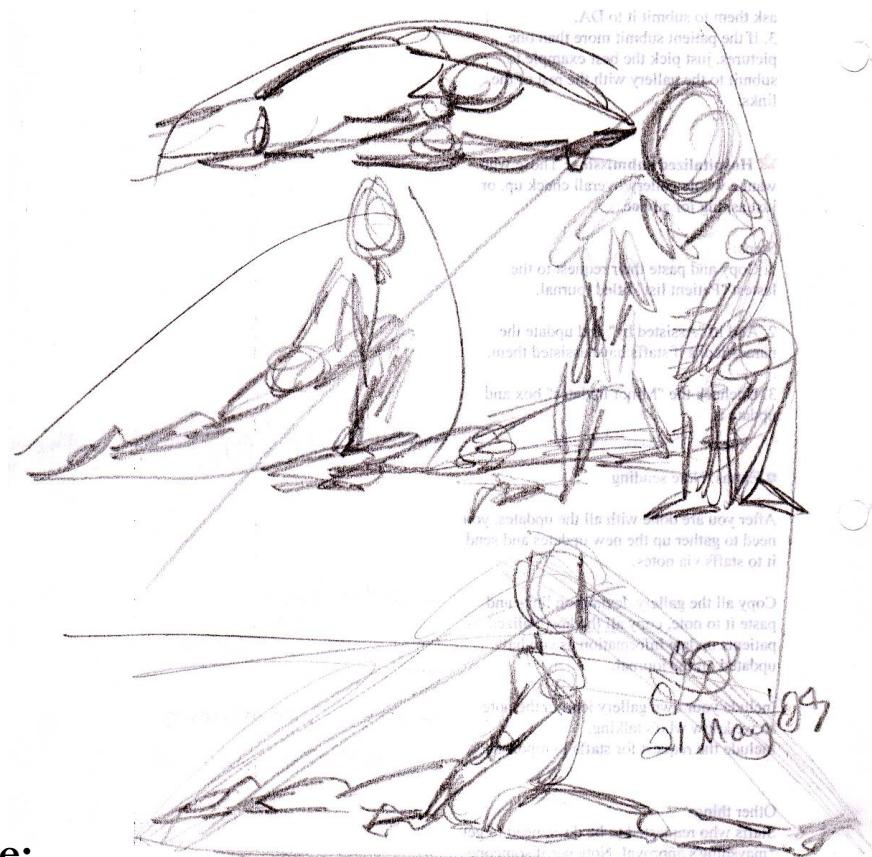
-Websites-

Human Anatomy and Stock Account Listing at Artists' Hospital Library

More Resources:

The Artists' Hospital on deviantArt

Blind Contour Drawing Exercise

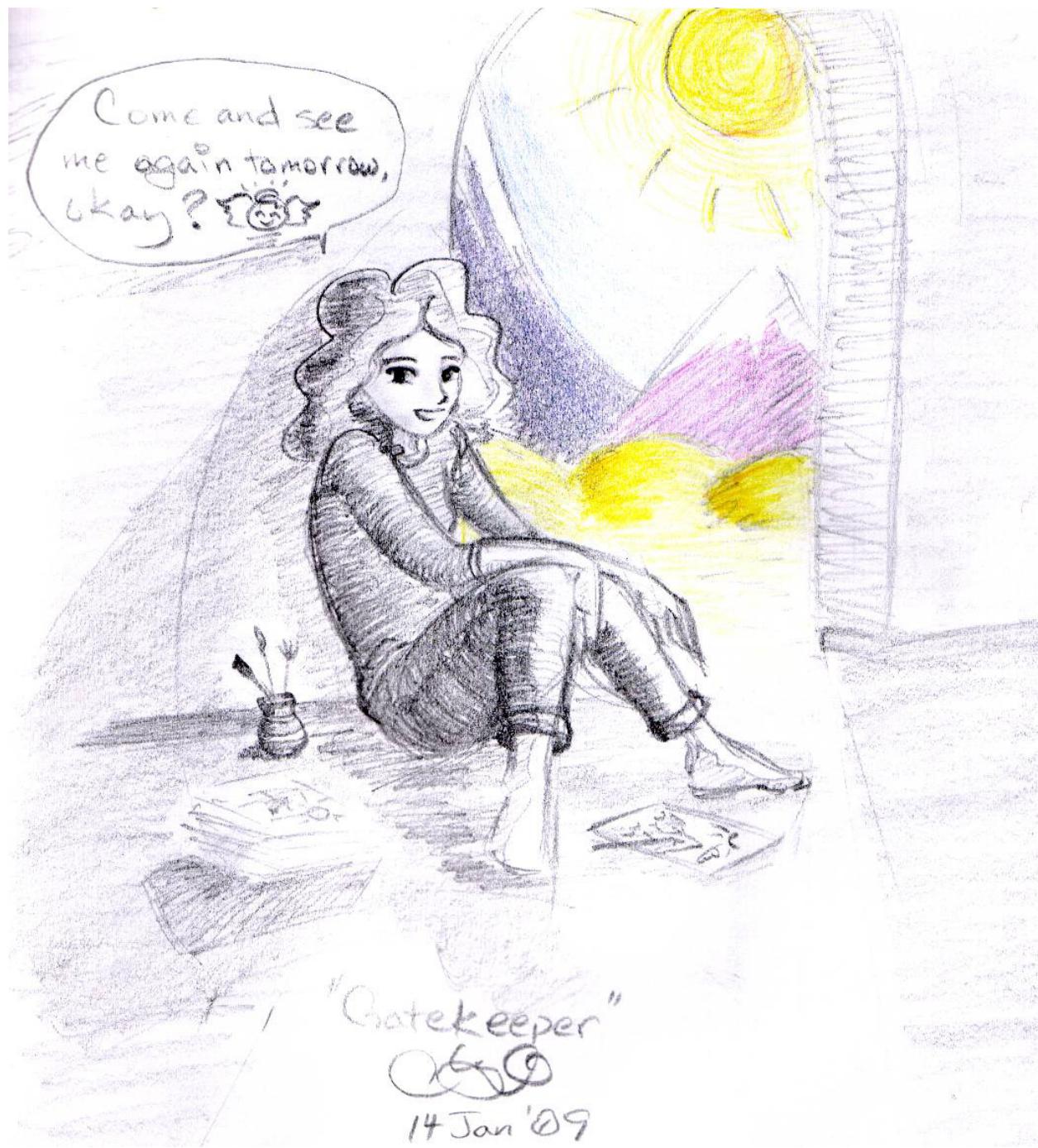


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Bye bye for real now! =)

—California Clipper

13 August 2009