

## Chapter 1

# Welcome to the Joys of Figure Drawing

### *In This Chapter*

- ▶ Going over basic materials and techniques
- ▶ Depicting the head and body
- ▶ Taking your skills to the next level

**P**eople surround you on a daily basis (unless you're on a deserted island), yet the art of figure drawing remains full of puzzles and surprises. As someone who draws the figure, your mission (should you choose to accept it!) is to record your reaction to a figure's pose or action.

Whether you're a beginner who's new to drawing the human figure or a serious art student looking to hone your figure-drawing skills, you're in good hands. In this chapter, I introduce you to the fundamentals of figure drawing, including the materials and techniques you need. Sharpen your pencil, get out your sketchbook, and get ready to draw!

## *Finding the Right Drawing Materials*

Like using the correct eating utensil at the dinner table, finding the right materials for figure drawing is important. Why? Nothing is more frustrating than trying to get a certain line quality (such as the fine line of an eyelid) when you have the wrong tool (like, in this instance, a thick charcoal stick).

In Chapter 2, I provide a list of drawing materials for your consideration. Although you don't need to buy all the materials I list there at once, start off by visiting your local art store and trying out some pencils. I recommend starting with softer pencils, such as the Faber-Castell 9000 8B. Depending on how much time you have to draw, you may want to get at least five. In addition, I recommend bringing an 18-x-24-inch sketchpad to your figure-drawing class; it's large enough to let you experiment with drawing various sizes, and it also gives the instructor enough space to make notes or drawing corrections on the side of your figure drawings.



If you're new to drawing the figure, don't worry about splurging on fancy equipment at first. However, make sure your working area is well lit so your eyes aren't strained. I notice many students are used to working in dimly lit situations (perhaps due to the habit of working with computer monitors). Depending on how many hours you work, strain on the eyes can lead to irritation and possible damage in the long run. In my case, I set up two lights on my desktop surface. Check out Chapter 2 for full details on setting up a drawing studio.

## Getting a Grip on Drawing Basics



Before you dive into drawing the figure, you need to warm up your drawing muscles. Flip to the exercises in Chapter 3, which are simple and fun to do; in addition to serving the purpose of loosening up your wrist, you're also training your hand to become more familiar with using your drawing tools. Here's what you can expect:

- ✓ I start with exercises on lines, curves, and basic geometric shapes.
- ✓ I introduce basic principles of lights and shadows. By changing the light source, you change the narrative mood of the figure.
- ✓ The types of hatching and other shading techniques that I apply to the figure enhance the illusion of a three-dimensional object “popping” off a two-dimensional flat surface.
- ✓ Part of what makes figure drawing so spontaneous is that you don't have to completely erase the lines that may appear to be errant. I demonstrate tips you can use with or without your kneaded eraser.

## Drawing the Head

No part of the human figure draws more attention than the head. It's the area we use to recognize one another. The features that incorporate all five senses are also located on the head. In Part II, I give you a heads-up on the following topics:

- ✓ **The head's basic shape:** In its most simple form, the basic head shape is essentially a spherical object that at first glance looks like an egg. As the figure matures from infancy to adulthood, the bone structures adjust to the growing proportion of the body in part by fusing together. In Chapter 4, I walk you through different techniques for drawing the basic shape of the head at different ages and from different views.
- ✓ **Facial features:** When you examine the head more closely, you'll find that it consists of a series of complex interlocking bones covered with cartilage for the nose and ears and multiple layers of muscle groups that control the movements of the jaw and mouth. And don't forget the eyes! I explain how to draw all these features realistically in Chapter 5.
- ✓ **Hair:** Although hair consists of hundreds of individual stands, they cluster together in an organized fashion to form waves and curls (or they simply cascade down like a waterfall). In Chapter 6, I walk you through exercises that explore using different textures to add realism to the hairstyles and types without worrying about drawing every single strand (that's an in-hair-ently insane task).
- ✓ **Facial expressions:** Our facial muscle structure is literally skin deep! Just the slightest twitch or reaction gives away the most subtle thought going through the mind (I, for one, have a terrible poker face!). However, these nuances make the face the center of attention in most figure studies. In Chapter 7, I describe the muscle structure of the face and give you pointers on drawing a wide variety of facial expressions.

## Putting Together the Body

Creating and piecing together the body is similar to a putting together a jigsaw puzzle or playing a satisfying game of Tetris. Individual shapes snap together to form a larger shape. Check out the following topics in Part III, which is all about building the body:



✓ **Bone structure, shape, and proportion:** Understanding the basic proportion of the human figure helps the artist not only measure the head-to-body ratio, but also establish how large or small other figures need to be drawn in situations in which you can see more than one figure. Learning every bone structure of the body isn't important for understanding the overall structure. Rather, identifying certain "landmark" points, where the bones and joints protrude out of the body, is more essential. Chapter 8 explains what you need to know about bones, shape, and proportion.

✓ **Assembling a stick figure:** Resist the urge to think of the stick figure in Chapter 9 as a crutch or symbolic substitute for drawing the human figure (like a hangman). Sculptors create a stick figure (commonly referred to as *armatures*) out of wire as a base around which they build the figure form. In Chapter 9, I also demonstrate how to use the stick figure as a basis to draw and build basic geometric body shapes.

✓ **Muscles:** If you thought the number of bones in the figure was mind-boggling, check out just how intricate the muscle groups are in Chapter 10. My objective there is to group the smaller shapes of muscles into larger shapes.



✓ **Depicting the body in motion:** Regardless of how accurately you draw the figure in a still pose, applying body rhythm and motion is what distinguishes your figure from a stiff mannequin. In Chapter 11, I explain how to draw realistic figures with movement.

## Advancing Your Drawing Skills

In Part IV you go through exercises that address the clothed figure, other fun drawing techniques, composition, and perspective. These exercises are designed to jazz up your figure drawing based on the basic fundamentals you discover earlier in this book. Read on for more detail:

✓ **Clothing your figures:** Becoming familiar with the clothed figure is important, because some fabric shapes not only simplify the complex anatomy, but also help you see how to draw the figure by using different shapes. In addition, the wrinkles and folds that run along the joints, limbs, and torso of the body help you understand the rhythmic flow and energy in a pose. In Chapter 12, I go over various types of clothing from the loose comfortable sweatshirts to the tighter jeans. In addition, I cover how to draw footwear (ranging from waterproof boots to open air sandals).

✓ **Experimenting with fun drawing techniques:** Chapter 13 incorporates various drawing exercises that provide not only a change of pace but also the opportunity to hone your hand-eye coordination. These exercises include contour and cross-contour drawings in which you observe and draw the model without looking down at the paper. In

addition, I provide tips on varying the edges and shading of your drawings, and I get you started with building a photo reference library.

- ✓ **Applying composition and perspective:** Regardless of how well you execute the figure drawing, it needs a frame of reference (where the model is situated in relation to the page). In Chapter 14, I present several basic templates that help plan the positioning of the model (otherwise known as composition). In addition, I go over basic perspective principles (one-point, two-point, and three-point perspectives). Perspective in figure drawing is the art of creating the illusion of three-dimensional figures in a believable environment by using the horizon line, vanishing point, and perspective guidelines to determine which body parts need to be drawn a certain size or position in relation to the others.