

DEEP DIVE

The Mannequin Approach

Building the figure from simple 3D forms — boxes for the torso and pelvis, cylinders for limbs — creates spatial consistency before anatomy is added.

The mannequin approach simplifies the human figure into geometric volumes -- boxes, cylinders, and egg shapes -- that represent the major masses of the body. Before attempting realistic anatomy, constructing a believable mannequin establishes the three-dimensional relationship between body parts and prevents the flat, disconnected figures that plague beginners.

THE THREE CORE MASSES

The figure has three primary masses: the head (egg or sphere), the ribcage (egg shape, roughly the size of the head times two), and the pelvis (wedge or box shape, roughly the same height as the ribcage). These three masses account for the central structure of the body. All limbs attach to and move relative to these three masses. Learning to draw these at various angles and rotations is the foundation of figure construction.

CONNECTING MASSES WITH THE SPINE

The spine connects the skull to the ribcage and the ribcage to the pelvis. Its curvature -- a gentle S from neck to lower back -- determines the posture of the figure. Think of the spine as a flexible rod connecting the three major masses. The angle and orientation of each mass relative to the spine creates the core of any pose. Contrapposto is simply the ribcage and pelvis tilting in opposite directions along the spine.

LIMBS AS CYLINDERS

Arms and legs are rendered as simplified cylinders or box-like forms. Each limb has three segments: upper arm/thigh, forearm/lower leg, hand/foot. These attach with simple ball-and-socket or hinge joint representations. At this stage, anatomical accuracy matters far less than three-dimensional convincingness -- does the arm look like a cylinder rotating through space, or does it look like a flat ribbon?

EXERCISES

Day 1: Draw 10 mannequin figures from imagination, varying the pose dramatically. Day 2: Draw 10 mannequin figures from life reference. Day 3: Take a photograph of a figure and trace only the mannequin volumes without any surface detail. Day 4: Draw a mannequin figure in an extreme foreshortened position (pointing directly at the viewer). Day 5: Draw a mannequin from 5 different viewing angles.