DEEP DIVE

The Head & Facial Landmarks

The Loomis head construction method — breaking the skull into a sphere and a plane — places all facial features in consistent spatial positions.

The head is the most scrutinized subject in all of drawing. Every viewer has a lifetime of experience reading faces and will detect errors instantly that they would miss in any other subject. Artist-anatomists have developed systematic approaches that allow any face to be constructed accurately from any angle.

THE LOOMIS HEAD METHOD

Andrew Loomis's head construction method begins with a sphere (representing the cranial mass), then slices a flat plane off the side and front to represent the face plane. The ear falls at the halfway point of the sphere. The hairline, brow line, nose base, and chin divide the face into equal thirds. The eyes fall at the exact vertical halfway point of the head. These proportions apply to all faces.

EYE PLACEMENT AND PROPORTION

The most common head proportion error: placing the eyes too high. The eyes sit at the exact midpoint of the total head height (from top of skull to chin). Hair makes the top of the head look farther away than the skull top, which fools beginners into drawing eyes too high. The eyes are one eye-width apart from each other, and one eye-width from each eye to the nearest ear.

THE PLANES OF THE HEAD

The head is not a smooth egg -- it has distinct flat planes. The front plane contains the face. The side planes wrap around to the ear. The top plane slopes from forehead to crown. The bottom plane forms the chin and jaw. Understanding these planes allows you to shade the head convincingly and to draw it from any angle. The Asaro head (a mechanical model) makes these planes explicit and is an essential drawing reference.

EXERCISES

Day 1: Practice the Loomis head construction in 10 different three-quarter angles. Day 2: Draw 10 heads using only the four major planes -- no facial features. Day 3: Draw a portrait from reference, building from Loomis construction rather than copying contours. Day 4: Draw the same face from five different angles using construction rather than reference for each angle. Day 5: Draw a portrait entirely from memory 24 hours after studying your reference for 10 minutes.