

ART ASSIGNMENT #27

Introduction to Gesture Figures

Female Nude Sitting, Rembrandt, 1634.

HOW GESTURE DRAWING IS DIFFERENT FROM A CONSTRUCTION-BASED APPROACH

- In our last classes, we've been focusing on understanding body proportions and taking a *construction-based* approach to drawing the human figure.

- **We've been focusing on building up armatures to help us understand proportions from the inside out (skeleton), breaking up the body into simple forms before connecting them, and of course, on communicating a certain level of detail. There's plenty of technical measuring involved with a *construction-based* approach.**

- **When approaching figure drawing in a *gestural* way, we're focusing more on seeing the body *as a whole* since the beginning and on how one body part *flows* into the next. We're prioritizing movement, action, energy and dynamism, and not so much on getting proportions right down to the T (though they are important).**



Charioteer, Domenico Gargiulo, 1609.

- ***Gestural* figures start with drawing lines (usually slightly to quite curved) and we're paying attention to contours (the outer silhouette of the figure) as opposed to starting with the inside (skeleton).**

- **Gestures are done *much* more quickly and we essentially synthesize the information we're taking in through our eyes and only draw *what matters most* in order to describe the action the body is taking. We're focusing on communicating movement and what the figure is doing.**



Two Nude Male Figures, Domenico Gargiulo, 1609.



Rembrandt van Rijn,
Woman with a Child Descending a Staircase,
ca. 1636

- **It's important to know about body proportions and succeed at longer drawings *before* jumping into gestures because we need a certain amount of confidence with our drawing tools and also a basic understanding of anatomy in order to work quickly. Starting with a construction-based approach also helps us understand what's beyond surface level.**

- Even though we're prioritizing movement and action, believable proportions *do* still have to be there. If a leg or arm are way too long, too short, or parts of the body are just not in appropriate places in very obvious ways, it'll throw off the drawing.

- **Not to mention, there are essential pieces that apply that we've already talked about with more construction-based figures, such as acknowledging the main *action line*, the body's *center of gravity*, foreshortened and overlapping parts, and more.**

- The way different body parts tilt and their overall positioning is *essential* to acknowledge as well with both approaches, which requires understanding form and perspective.

- **Drawing gestures implies using our eyes, mind and intuition to create a dynamic drawing, *while* getting proportions and locations of body parts as close as possible. Great gesture drawings feel alive, and to do this, we need to let go to a certain extent and *feel* the patterns of flowing, curving lines in the figure.**

- **Usually, there's a shorter drawing time involved (anywhere from 1 to 5 minutes). You *do not* have time to recreate everything you see and have to make quick/logical assumptions about how the body works as you keep your arm moving.**

- It's helpful to always take a few seconds to observe the figure you're going to be drawing *before* getting started.

Here are some questions to ask yourself as you're drawing a gesture:

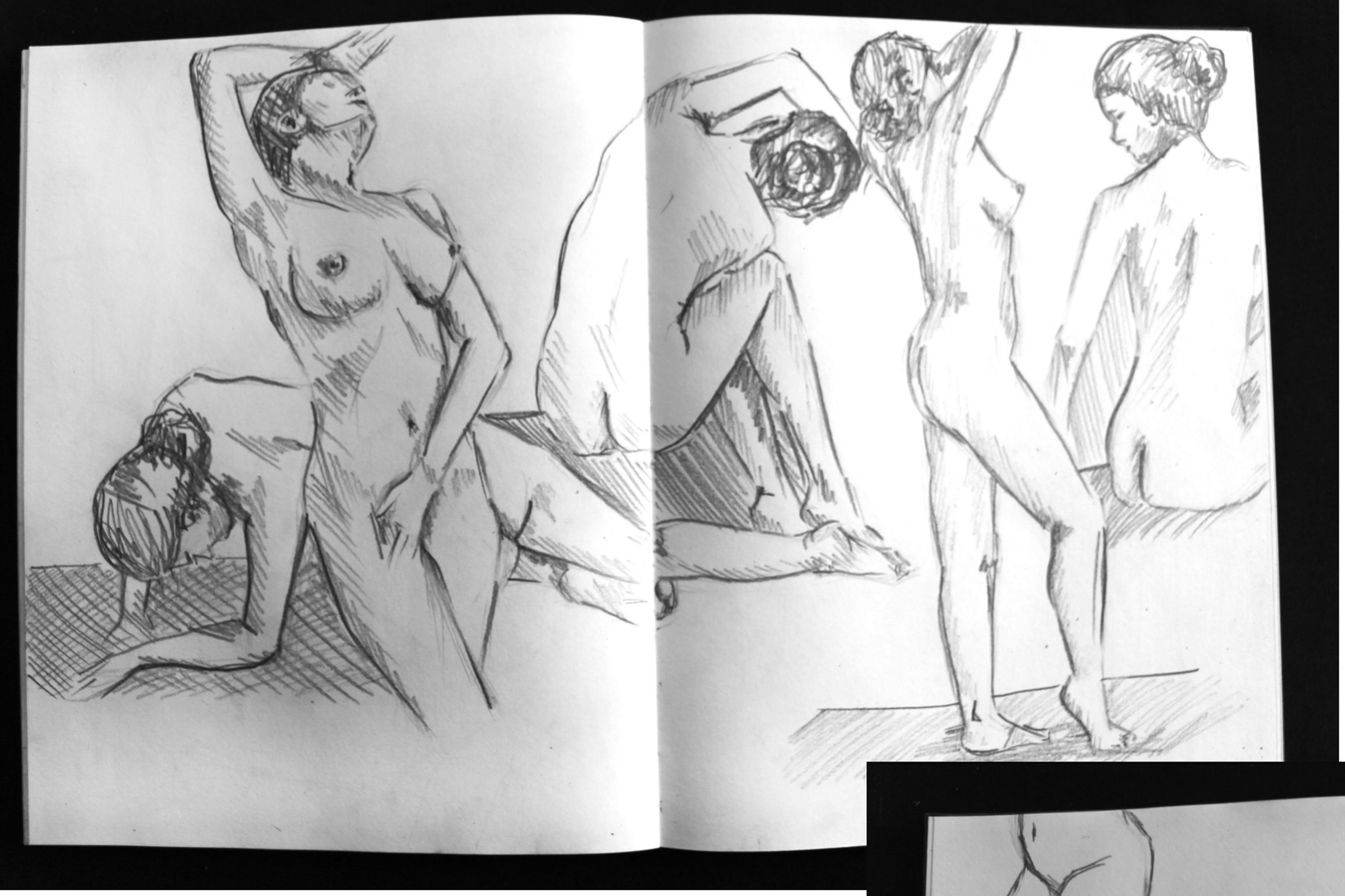
- ***How are these different body parts connected?***
- ***Where are the joints?***
- ***Are there any twists or pinches in the torso?***
- ***Are there areas in which similar kinds of stretching, compression, or twisting are happening?***
- ***What body part(s) is/are closest to me and which is/are farthest away?***
- ***How is force/energy flowing through the different body parts?***



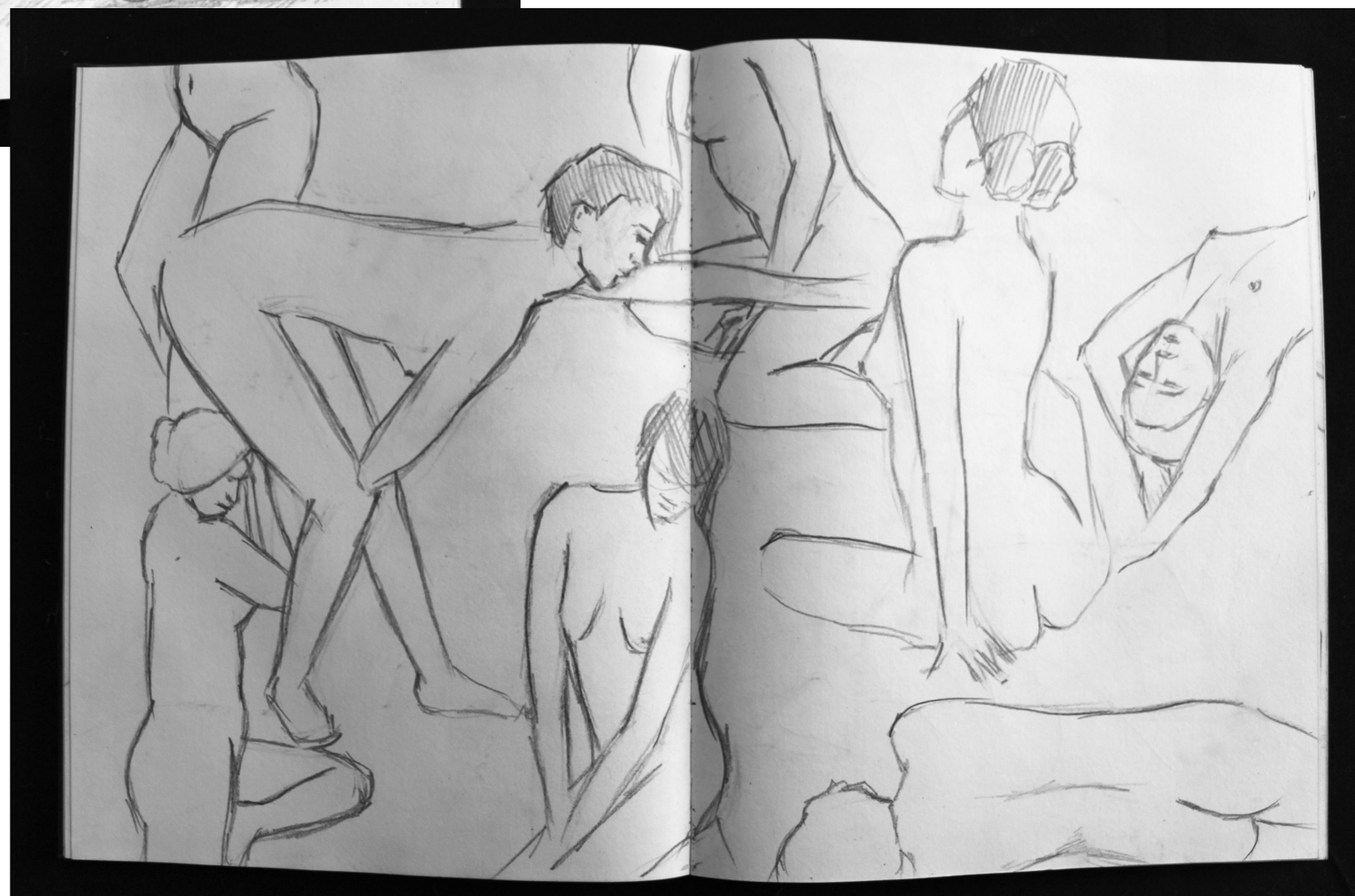
Rembrandt,
Two Women Teaching a Child to Walk, 1635



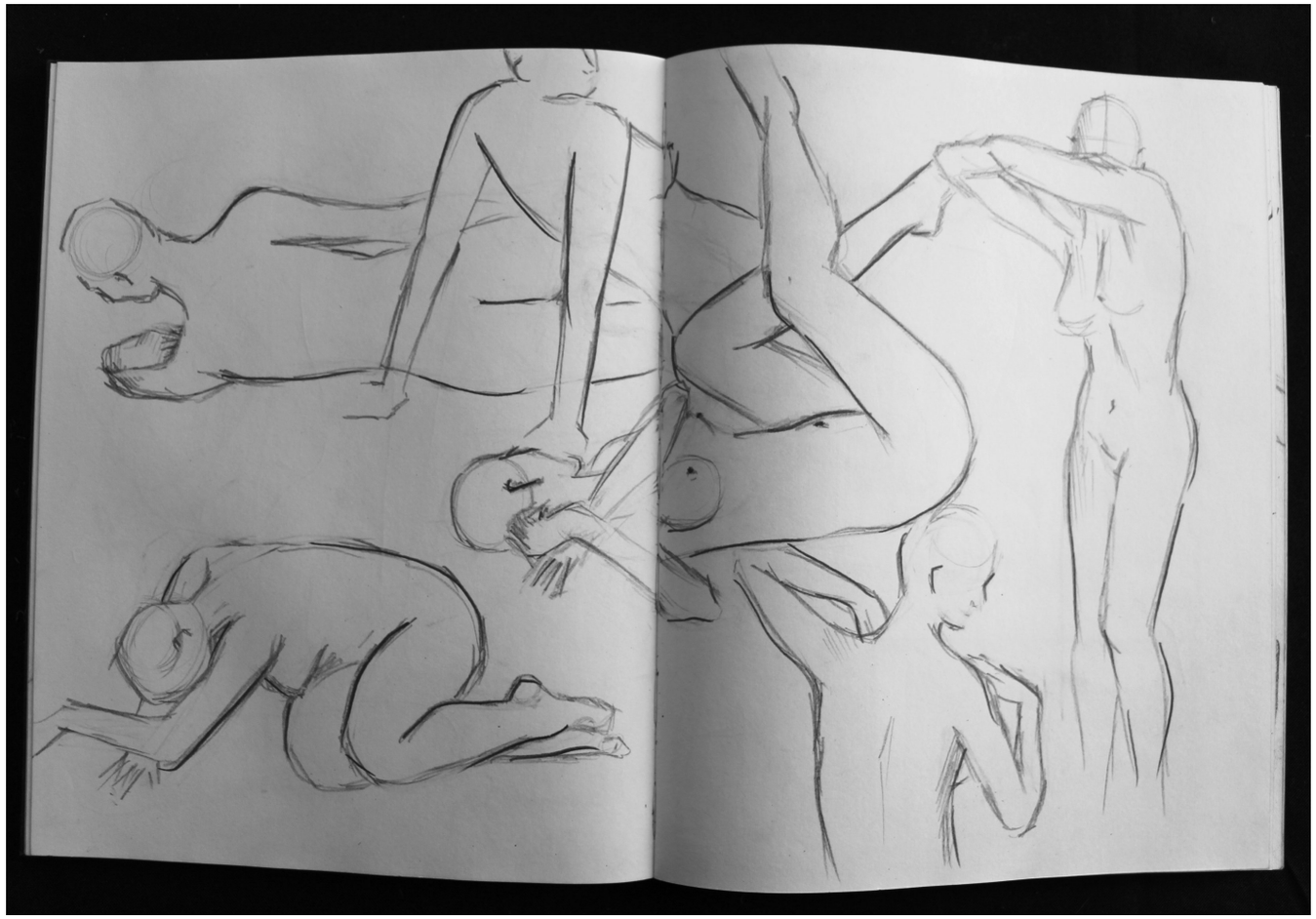
- **It's important to note that there *is* an overlap of the two approaches and that neither is "better" than the other.**
- **Both are important methods to know about when learning to draw the human figure and to continue exploring so that you're able to work on both quicker sketches *and* longer studies (which offer different challenges). At the same time, knowing these methods/ tools enables you to find your own way of approaching figure drawing.**
- **Not only do different artists take their sketches further to different degrees, but some people actually *start* with gestures and use construction *on top* of their gestures.**
- **Some artists believe that gestural figure drawing *has* to be done from life (with a model in front of you), while others believe that it can be done from photos, too.**

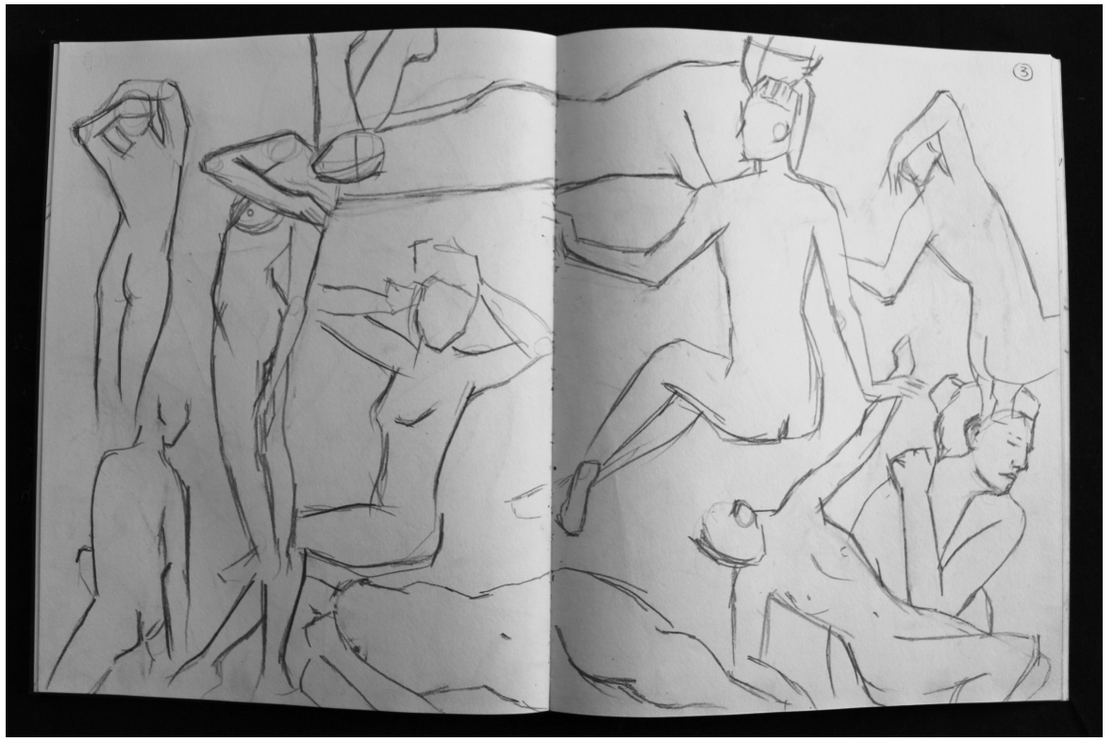


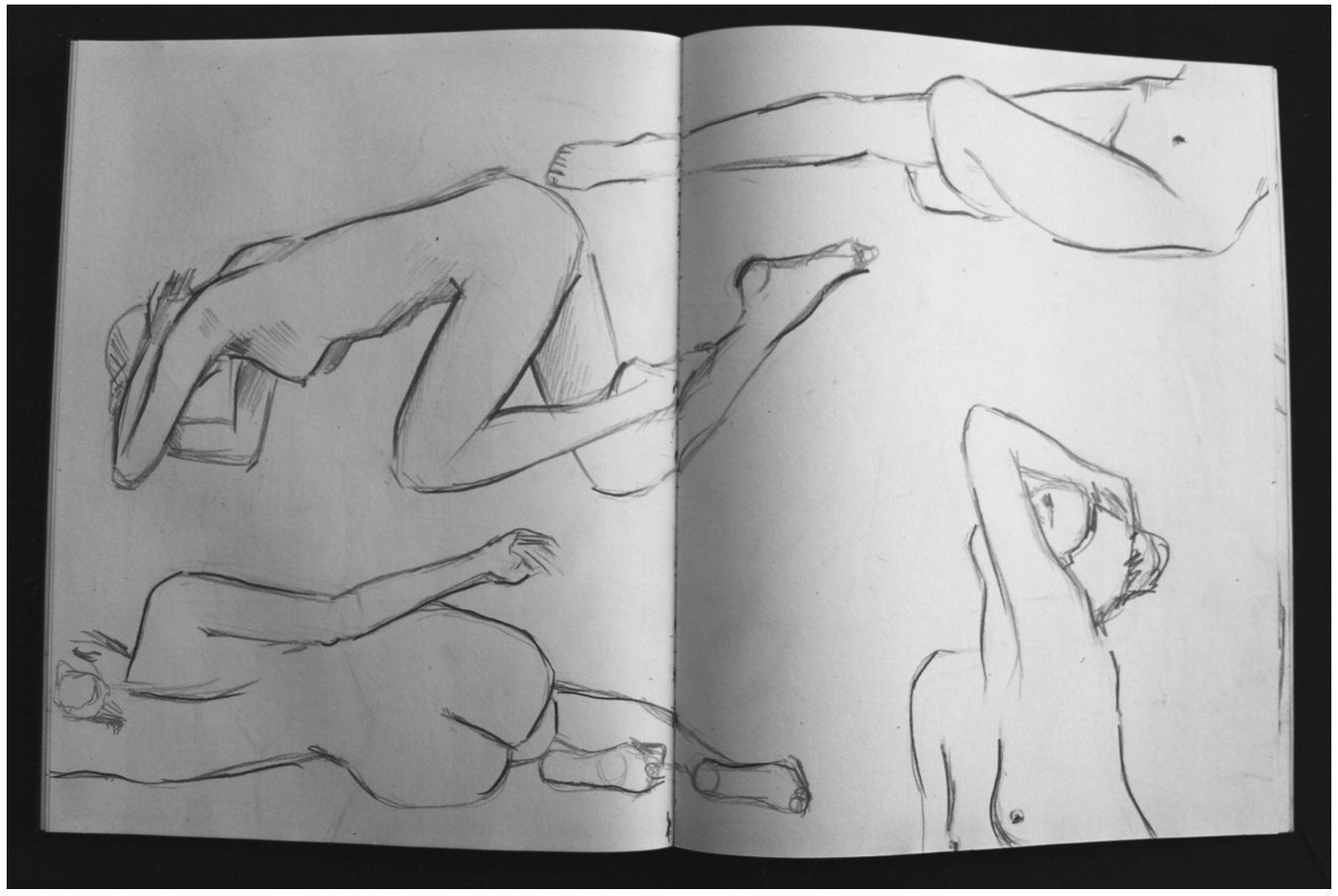
10 minute sketches



5 minute sketches



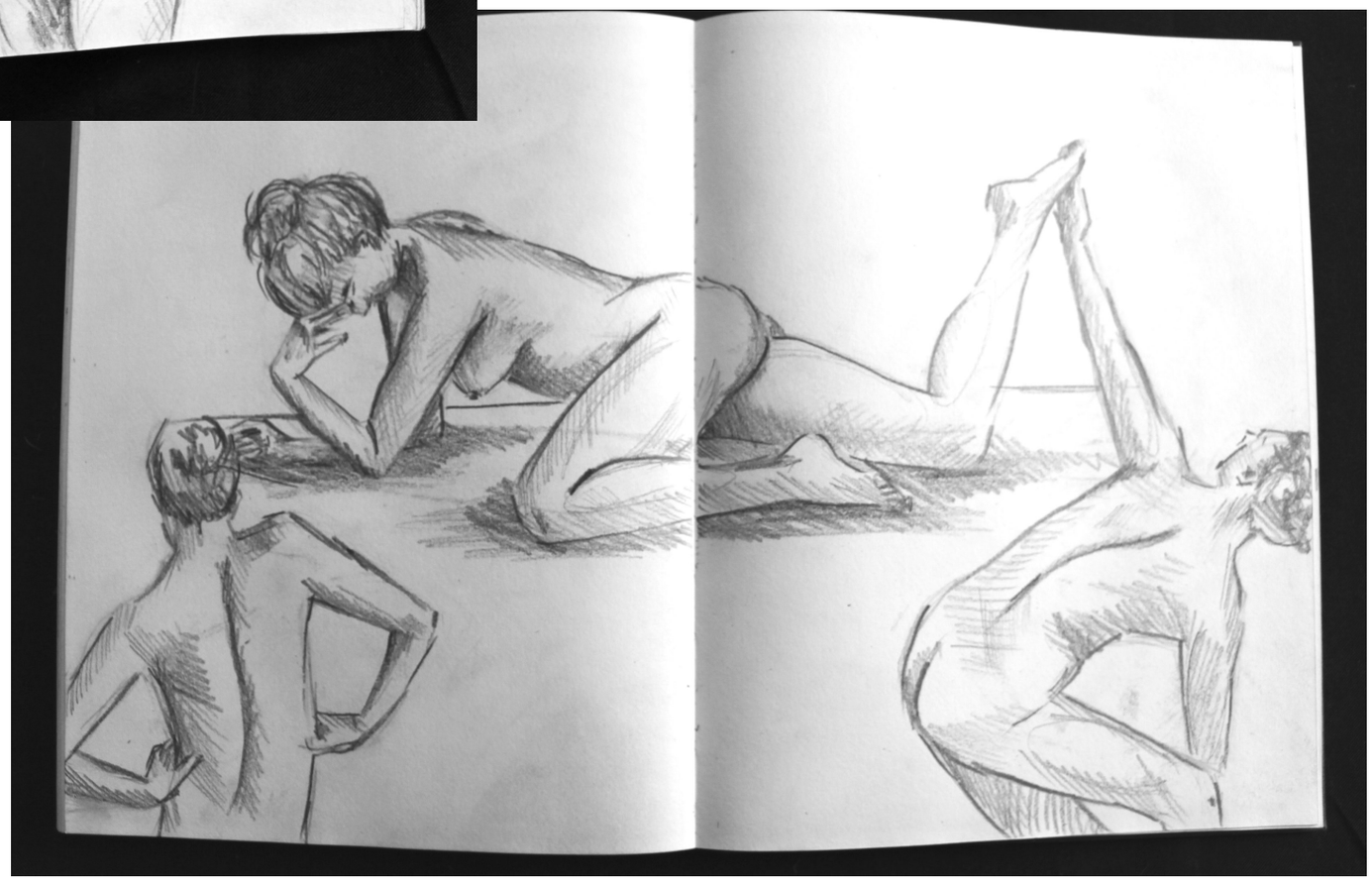




3 minute sketches



10 minute sketches



SUPPLIES & DRAWING FROM THE SHOULDER

- Working on a flat, horizontal surface and way to close to your paper can be detrimental when practicing gestural figures because it's harder to draw from the shoulder and move our entire arm.

- **Drawing from the shoulder, as opposed to having our arm resting on a flat table/desk and only moving our wrist will, in and of itself, help us achieve lines and marks that are *way* more dynamic and flow-y.**

- **Practicing with different pencil grips such as the *overhand grip* is also essential, as this skill helps us have greater control over our drawing tool and we're able to use *the side* of the tip of the pencil to start our drawings with light/thick/fuzzy lines.**

- **It's absolutely essential to start drawings out *lightly*, as the lines you lay down initially aren't going to be perfect. Remember, drawing is a refinement process!**

- I'd recommend getting started with regular graphite drawing pencils (preferably within the 4B-8B range), either a desk or standing easel, and *large* sheets of paper (newsprint or cartridge paper are good/accessibly priced options). A masonite board can offer stability when working on an easel. **Charcoal, pastel or conté pencils are good options after you have practice with pencils.*

- Take time to practice drills using different lines and shapes on an easel/ more vertical position.









FINDING RHYTHMS

- Finding *rhythms* (repetition of lines/shapes) throughout the figure is a *huge* part of drawing gestures.

- **Rhythm *connects* the different parts making up the whole and creates a sense of flow in our drawings. When created successfully, these rhythms lead the viewer's eyes through the figure, from one part to the next. When rhythms are not taken into account and brought in, figures usually end up looking static or body parts can seem disconnected.**

- **The main *line of action* (which we previously found by visualizing the spine and the main supporting leg- with gestures this is left way more open) describes the general movement of the pose and is a good place to start when looking for rhythms in a figure.**

- **Find repetitive shapes interweaving in alternating patterns throughout the figure. You're going to be able to find C's and backwards C's, S's and straight lines.**

- Not every region of the figure needs to express movement. If you see areas in which there's no sensation of stretching/compression/tension present, keep them neutral. This will balance out the figure and give the viewer's eyes places to "rest".

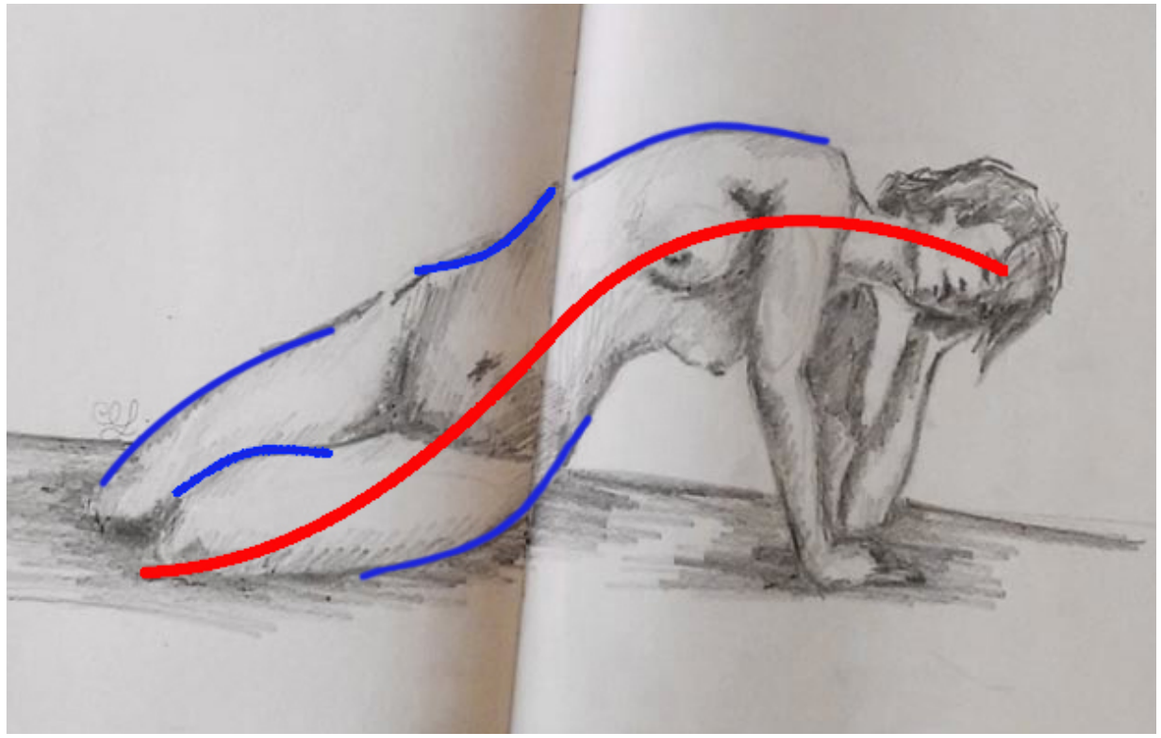




C CURVE, REVERSE CURVE, S AND THE STRAIGHT LINE

There are three main types of lines that will present themselves when drawing gestures:

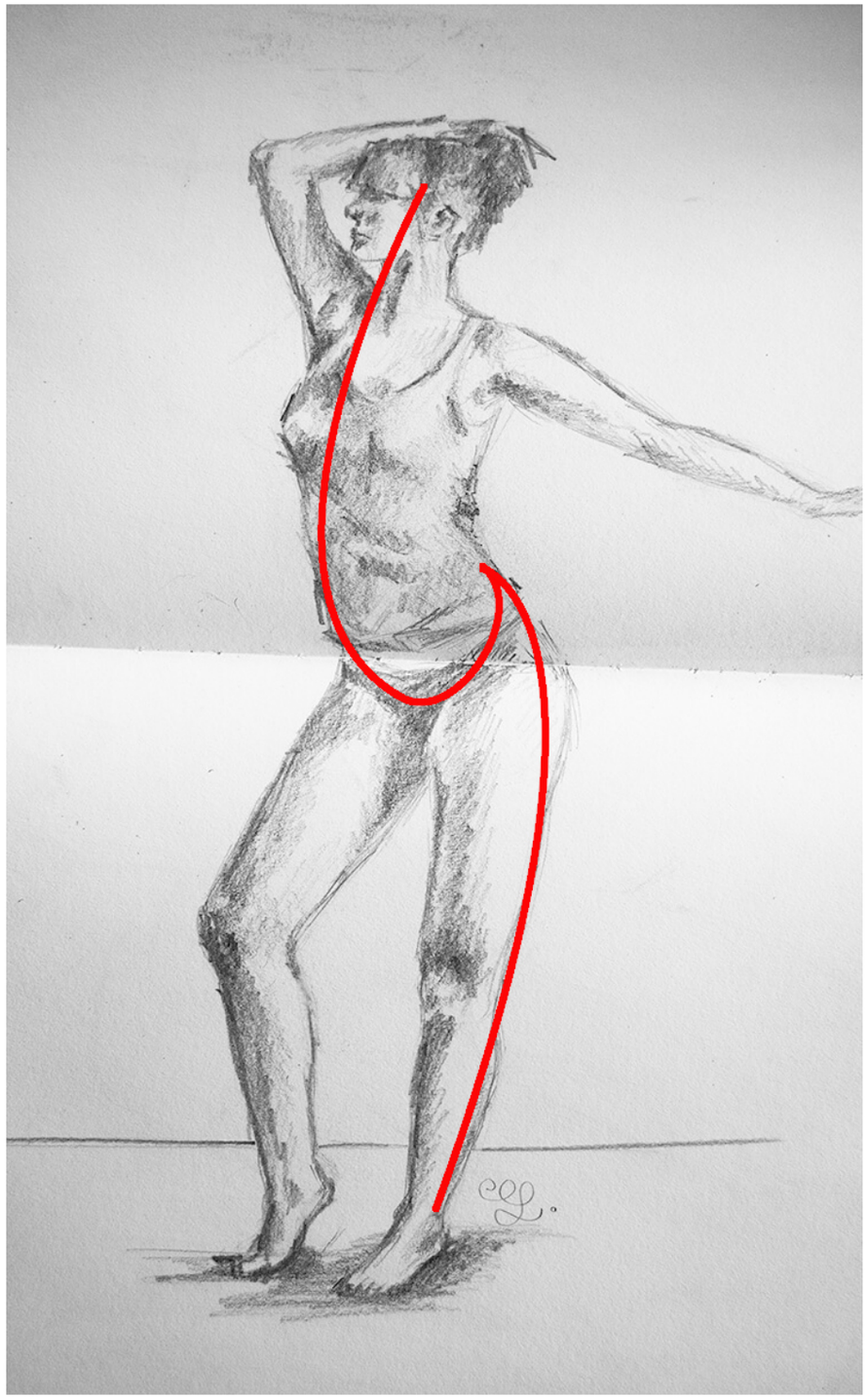
- **C-Curve:** This is a basic curve that can be more or less pronounced and can go in either direction. A C-curve is great for the stretch or elongated side of the torso.
- **S-Curves:** In certain poses, when we want the main action line to be long and run from the head all the way through a leg, an S Curve is what we lay down initially.
- **Straight:** A straight line is commonly used for hard/angular corners and protruding ridges of the body. As mentioned in a previous class, we can communicate bony areas with straighter/angular lines.



- Using a variety of these lines when drawing gestures will ensure interest and a sense of balance.
- Many artists exaggerate curves to emphasize dynamism.

PRIMARY ACTION LINE + SECONDARY ACTION LINES

- **When drawing gestures, the *primary action line* is up to the artist's interpretation. There's no right or wrong way to go about drawing a gestural figure and no "correct" solution for action lines. Usually, it's the longest line of all and runs across (or beside) several parts.**
- One artist might start with a line created by an arm and flow down to the left leg, while another might perceive a stronger and more interesting "flow" going from the head and down to the right leg.
- When in doubt, you can always start at the highest point present (whether it's the head or an arm), and flow it down towards one of the legs.
- Noticing the relaxed and pinched sides of the torso is always helpful when laying down the *primary action line*.





- ***Secondary action lines*** **are created by the movement present in the other limbs and build off the *primary action line* to describe the entire pose. Each limb can have its own action line or, if you feel you can combine them, you can do that too.**
- **Action lines can be either *inside* or *outside* of the figure (whatever helps *you* most with the pose on hand). Focus on *angles* and *curves* created different body parts and try to replicate them to the best of your abilities.**
- When possible, unify different parts of the body via a single line.

OVERLAPPING



- **In a past class on drawing the figure, I also mentioned how important it is to acknowledge overlapping body parts.**

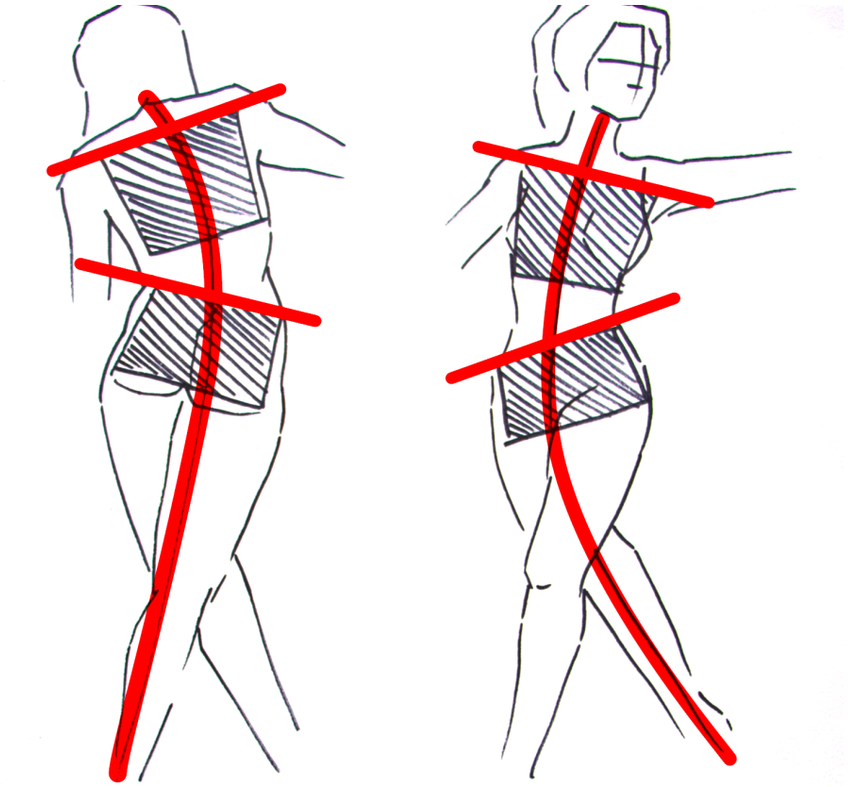
- **When drawing gesture, overlapping is very important too, as contour lines can be pulled *into* the figure with one swoop to transmit an illusion of pinching or contracting.**

- **Remember pinching present between the upper and lower torso?**

- **Overlapping also happens with sitting poses, and when arms and legs are bent. In these situations, body parts partially cover others. Ex.: The lower/upper part of the leg is partially covering another part of the leg, the forearm/ upper arm is partially covering another part of the arm, etc.**

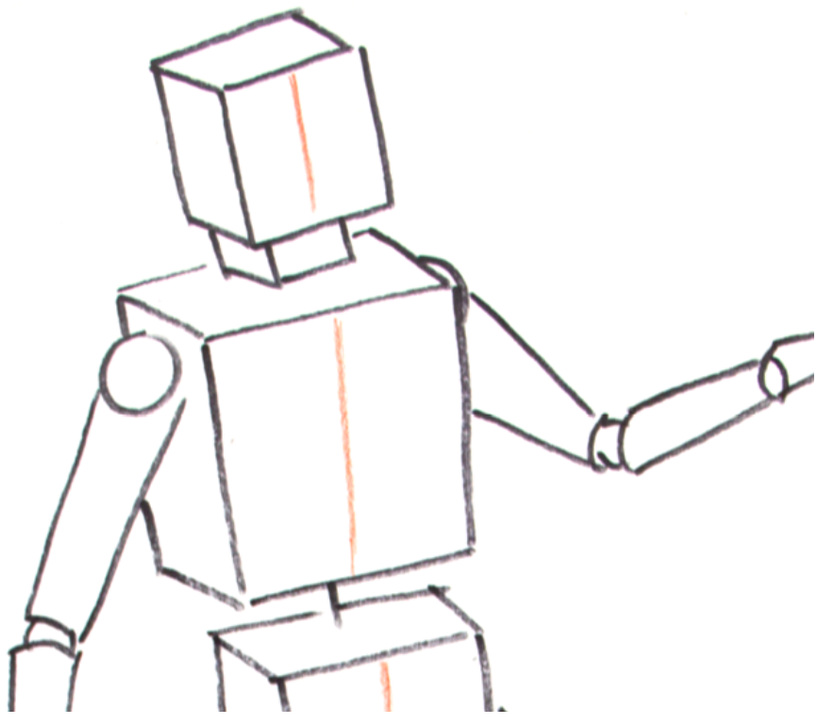
- Always consider pulling lines *into* the body to quickly and easily transmit “pinching" and overlaps present.

AXIS LINES AND CENTRAL LINES



- **In one of our last classes, I mentioned how important it is to acknowledge tilts present in the shoulder and hip lines, as most of us will unconsciously make them horizontal because that's what our brains find comfortable visually. This will lead to a stiff looking figure.**

- **Consider the shoulder line and the hip line as *axis lines* and make sure you observe the way they're tilting since the beginning. They play a huge role in transmitting a sense of movement.**



- **Another key point to have in mind in order to make sure that the perspective and positioning of different body parts is effective, is keeping the *central lines* in mind. Always imagine a line drawn right down the front/middle of the torso (right in between the ribcage), as well as right down the front/middle of each body part. This is essential in order to transmit believable form, positioning and rotation in space.**

LET'S DRAW SOME GESTURES!

- Next, I'll be taking you through a series of exercises to help you get used to holding your pencil properly for drawing and also to loosen up your arm.
- **Then, we'll be drawing five timed gestural sketches, focusing on describing the action present in the figure and on communicating dynamism and movement.**
- **We're *not* worrying about detail and/or anatomy at this point. For these, it's preferable to transmit movement/energy and have our proportions off than to take way too long trying to get proportions right and end up with a stiff-looking figure.**
- The objective is to practice thinking quickly and get the main idea down on paper. Don't worry about making things perfect and embrace the sense of urgency which'll help you arrive at a more expressive-looking gesture.

Here are the main steps:

Take a few seconds to just observe the photo before starting and remember to draw as lightly as possible.

1) **Lay down your *primary action line***
2) **Visualize/sketch in *axis lines***
3) **Add in *secondary action lines* and a simplified head shape (an oval will do)**
4) **Create simplified shapes for the torso, legs, arms, hands and feet**
5) **Add in the *center line* in the torso and head**

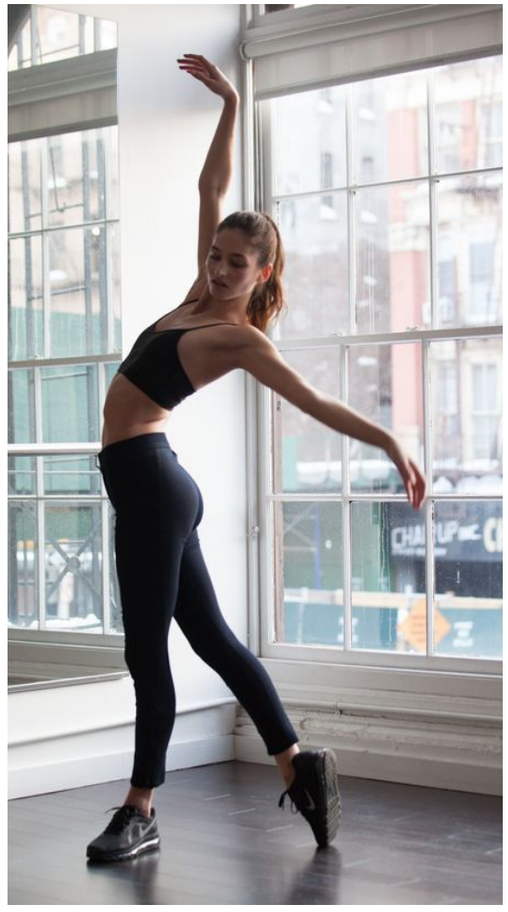
LET'S DRAW SOME GESTURAL FIGURES!











ART ASSIGNMENT #27:

- **Practice creating 10 figure gestures using reference photos. Try timing yourself! I'd recommend taking one to three minutes on each.**

  Links to my own reference photos will be left along with this class but you can also look for full body photos of your own.

  Here are some helpful resources with tons of poses:

  - **line-of-action.com**
  - **sketchdaily.com**
  - **unsplash.com, pixabay.com, pexels.com**
  - **Pinterest (look for "gesture photo pose", "references for figure drawing", etc. boards)**
  - **New Master's Academy YouTube channel**
  - **Croquis Cafe YouTube channel**