The Atelier Tier

Month: July

Project title: The Eye of Michelangelo's David

Expected hour to complete: 12-15

Materials: Graphite pencils (2H-2B), Stonehenge paper (white/cream), kneaded eraser, mono-zero eraser, paper stumps, .3mm-.5mm mechanical pencils.

Recommended scale of project: 6 inches (15cm) from top to bottom of the drawing. Edges of the paper should be at least 2 inches (5cm) above and below that.

Feedback submission deadline: 16th of July

Lesson notes

Background:

First, how did we even come to have plaster copies of such a famous sculpture? The most likely story that I have come across is this one from the Victoria & Albert Museum website: *When Papi's cast (of the David) arrived in London in 1857, Domenico Brucciani, an Anglo-Italian London-based cast maker, took the opportunity to make a mould from the cast. He then made copies of the head, nose, eyes, ears and lips, some of which are in our collection. Remarkably, their corresponding moulds still survive at the British Museum, and have been used to produce multiple copies of David's facial features for sale in their shop. Casts of David's striking facial features can be found all over the world and are continually studied by artists working in a range of mediums.*

Traditionally this project represents the moment when a student will begin working from a 3 dimensional subject. Bargues, being flat, are only a matter of copying whereas casts will contain all of the information available and it is our job then to edit that information down- just as Bargue did before us. So, in our Bargue block in's we needed to simplify from 500 data points into 50. Now we have to take 5,000 data points and sift through them all to get to that same essential 50. This escalation in difficulty level represents the crucial difference in between the two practices.

The 3D asset provided with their assignment will be useful in that it allows you to "walk around" the subject much in the same way you would if you were working from life. The most important part of this is to be able to observe the 3 dimensional features of the subject- what direction the various planes are facing in relationship to the light. This understanding plays a MAJOR role in knowing where and how much to simplify/unify your values. If lit from above, for instance, a downward facing plane will be best unified towards the dark end of the spectrum. We can see this visually, meaning that it will look dark, but observing the model in 3D will also allow us to understand it structurally which in many ways is the great benefit of working fro life.

Concepts:

Envelope shape: A simplification of the silhouette of the subject comprised of straight lines and angle breaks.

Shadow shape: The area of the form of a subject not contacted by light from the primary light source. At different stages this will be illustrated in different ways. At first it will be a linear boundary showing a simplification of the shadow shape (this is similar to the way the envelope shape is a simplification of the silhouette of the subject). As the drawing progresses the shadow shape will be filled with value and the shape of the edges will increase in complexity.

Character of light & shadow: It is one thing to make dark and light values on the paper and another to show the character of shadow and light. Shadow shapes will tend to have continuous edges with a slightly darker concentration of value at the edges. Lights shapes will contain half tone values that do not have concentrated edges and so appear very different from shadow shapes. Their edges are softer and flow into one another. The boundary between the two is of central importance and leads us to the next concept…

Core shadows: the core shadow in a plane on the form which is not influenced by either the primary light source or the secondary light source. This makes it the darkest section of the form in a transition from shadow to light.

Light shape: Light (shape): any area on the form that directly receives light from the light source. You can contrast this with reflected light to better understand the nature of the shadow shape.

Half tone: An intermediate value between light and dark (most commonly used to describe gradations within the light shape).

Dark half tone: Due to the way that light behaves on form we can understand another half-tone concept via the Lambert Scale. A Lambert value scale shows the acceleration of the darkening of value as planes get closer to the definitive shadow edge. This is caused by the form of an object eclipsing different parts of the light source at different points along the form. Once the majority of the light source is eclipsed by the light source this causes an acceleration in the darkening value gradation. (Note: while this phenomenon is better observed when working from a 3D subject it is worth mentioning here just so that we understand it's role.)

Unity: Unity generally refers on the sameness of value. In reference to form it is generally used to indicate the orientation of a plane to the light source. In shadow shape/light shape organisation it generally refers to the grouping, and thus separation, of these two value groups. In this particular Bargue plate the simplifications haven't been made as easy to spot. In this way it is much like working from life or from a photo of life. You will have to learn to see PAST the detail and available information and into the organisation underneath the superficial appearance. In this way you will become a better designer of value shapes.

Gradation: this refers to a progression of value from light to dark or from dark to light. When drawing form a gradation Weill be the way that we communicate the "turning" of a form, meaning that the form is turning towards or away from the light source.

Line quality: There is a variety of lightness and darkness in the counter lines used here. Also, though to a lesser extent, the breadth of the line changes. This can also be referred to as the "weight" of the line. Accomplishing the control of this variety of such a subtle thing as a line will be very valuable to you as an artist.

(NEW) Fall of light: this is most easily described as the relative darkening of value as planes increase in their distance from the light. Let us say that we have two planes, both inclined towards the light source to the same degree. One plane is quite close to the light source and the other is quite distant from the light source. The one closer to the light source, unsurprisingly, will be lighter and the further plane will be darker. A great lighting situation to observe this would be a standing nude model lit from above. In this case the tops of the model's feet will be facing upwards toward the light source but will be darker than the tops of the model's shoulders which also face the same upwards direction.

(NEW) Flow of light: this could alternatively be called the continuity of the light shape. What we are referring to is the continuous and gradient nature of value shifts within the light shape. It is best understood in contrast to the transition between shadow and light which is characterised by a concentrated value edge. Implementing this concept is one way in which we keep the light shape feeling like a light shape thus increasing the natural impression of the subject.

(NEW) Editing: this is a kind of extension of simplification. It starts with the question o what is necessary to make this drawing look like the subject. Is it the surface texture of the plaster? The shapes of light and shadow? The curvatures of the contour? In each case you can answer yes or no depending on the situation your subject finds itself in. By including the information we deem important or necessary and leaving out what is superfluous we will have edited with the aim of showing what is most useful and important about the subject. The aim with which you are editing will determine what is included and left out.

Process/stages:

Preliminary Studies:

1. Making a small thumbnail drawing of your prospective cast composition is a great way to clarify your composition. I can almost hear you saying in response "its only a cast drawing why would I need to study the composition?" The answer is super simple. If its on a paper or a canvas then it is needs a composition to be pleasing. The earlier you start this practice of conception the better you will be at it when the more complex subjects come along.

Block-in:

1. In this cast drawing the envelope shape can be very useful but also has its limits. Most of the information you need to focus on is well inside of the silhouette of the cast. So, we can focus on making accurate the things that the envelope shape reveals but will move quickly on to internal information.

2. A quick note on editing: drawing from "life" or in this case a photo of a real object requires more decision making from you then, for example, copying a Bargue drawing. In the copies you have done so far Bargue has already removed perhaps 50% of the available information from the subject. In this cast drawing you will be the judge of what goes into the drawing and what information Is superfluous. In a small way, this is the beginning of you sharpening your artistic taste.

3. Establishing the eye initially will be best done by using linear notations rather than moving straight into shadow and light information. I bring this up here as it is a frequent misstep made by drawing students. There is structural information hidden within the shadow shape that will help you make considerable headway in terms of accuracy. So, we will block in the internal information of the cast in line before progressing into value shapes.

4. The block in phase of the drawing will not be complete until we add the shadow shapes. At first we will make simplified shapes also with a simple edge hierarchy: 2 kinds of edges. One soft and one hard. Remember here that the shadow shapes that we are looking for are the *actual shadows*, not just areas that are a bit dark.

Value & structure

1. Once the shadow shape has been applied satisfactorily the next step to take is the addition of the darker half tones. These dark half tones, remember, tend to surround the form shadow edges. In some cases, like when a larger plane is facing mostly but not totally away from the light source, we can find dark half tones further from a form shadow edge.

2. We can also , in this moment, incorporate value based notations. These are marks made in the light or shadow shape to mark the change in a plane or significant landmark on the form that may not relate exactly to the value stage of the drawing. For instance, a major plane shift between two very light planes could be structurally important yet also not carry enough of a value shift to merit inclusion on that basis alone.

3. As this stage progresses we will continue to periodically darken the shadow and add lighter half tone values until we have mapped out all of the value shapes present in the cast. The way to choose which value shapes to add first is best communicated through the analogy of an old fashioned photo development process. When the exposed photo paper is submerged in the developing fluid the first values to emerge are the darkest. As time passes lighter and lighter values develop until the very lightest half tones finally differentiate themselves from the white of the paper.

4. After mapping the values it is then necessary to go over again the judgements we made in our first pass. This sort of re-checking should be familiar to you from the block in stage wherein we would make a measurement and a mark and then remeasure to check our estimation.

Refining the Drawing

1. Provided that the work from previous stages has been dome well the refinement of the drawing should primarily involve darkening and smoothing the values and transitions.

2. At this stage the shadow edges should also become more concentrated. This can be most commonly associated with the core-shadow aspect of a form shadow. It is a soft but specific "line" that can vary from very soft to relatively sharp. It is also very important to mention here: just because the edge/line is soft does not mean that it must also loose its angle breaks.

3. Filling the apparent "holes" in the paper is a part of this stage as well. Realistically you should be doing this little by little all the way through the drawing but now we can work on doing it in earnest. The extent to which you are able to fill these "holes" will indicate the resolution of shapes and transitions that you will be able to achieve. Meaning, less "holes" = a higher level of resolution.