

## The Atelier Method

# LINE AND VOLUME

In the second part of our atelier-style guide to drawing and painting, Lavender Hill Studios' Nick Bashall explains how to add weight to a figure and fellow tutor Ann Witheridge leads us through an exercise

**Missed part one?**  
Call (01858) 438789  
and order a back issue

*You are in an art class. You are faced with a model. You are inspired. The subtle curves, the dark against the light – the image is so very beautiful.*

*You rush to capture the beauty of the sitter. A professional does the same. But, whereas he produces a drawing that you worship, you, who saw what he saw, produce something that is invincibly repugnant. You go home and console yourself with whisky.*



LEFT Pastel sketch by tutor Ann Witheridge  
TOP RIGHT A charcoal sketch by Lavender Hill Studios pupil Rosalie Watkins

Does that scene sound familiar? Armed with the basics, anybody can learn to do what that professional did – not exactly like him, but with your own stamp on it.

This is the second article of a five-part series in which we outline the basics required to do just that. In last month's issue, we tackled proportion and described the process of 'encasing' the model and subdividing the area with a series of verticals and horizontals.

This article deals with the second of four steps and focuses on what we call line, volume and gesture. We began to describe this second stage at the end of the last article when we talked about diagonals – those diagonal lines helped to summarise both the volume and the gesture.

As the drawings show, diagonal lines describe the overall width of the model's torso against the height of it – in other words, the volume. The photos of the model show her in a relaxed pose, with her weight on her arm. You will notice how sometimes you might get the proportions correct, but fail to capture the gesture. For example, the model may be in a very relaxed or dynamic pose, but you will not be able to convey this unless you get the diagonals right as well.

And it is not the small diagonals of the details but the larger diagonals that will truly convey this gesture. No amount of subtle modelling of the form or detail of the anatomy can correct an image that lacks gesture. It is in the initial stages that this freedom of movement must be captured.

### Workshop 2

In the exercise opposite, Ann takes us from the beginning with the first four lines of the box, the further verticals



and horizontals and then the biggest diagonals. The diagonals are the longest outlines of the subject. This is a similar process to that of a sculptor taking a block of marble and slicing off the largest bits that aren't required.

What you should end up with is an abstract scaffolding that summarises the bulk, volume and gesture of the model. It certainly looks nothing like what you want it to look like at the end. Be patient, this is only the beginning. Your initial sketch probably looks a little Cubist, like something Picasso or Braque might have done.

That is, I am guessing, no coincidence. A Spanish school taught me these early stages of a drawing. Picasso was Spanish, too, and he learnt the basic principals of drawing at the feet of his father, an art teacher. What we have described above, he may have well ingested like cornflakes at breakfast everyday under his father's instruction. By the >

# FIGURATIVE APPLICATIONS

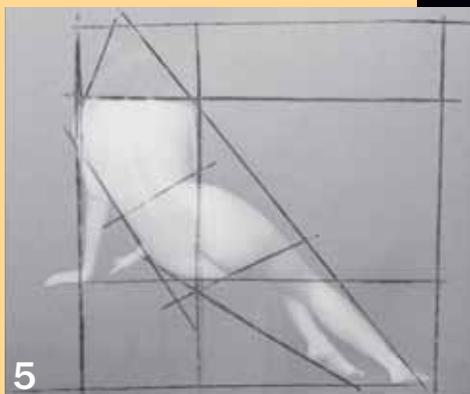
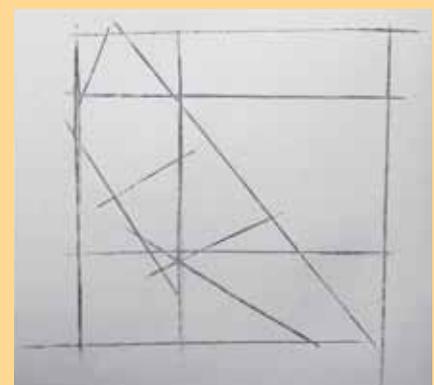
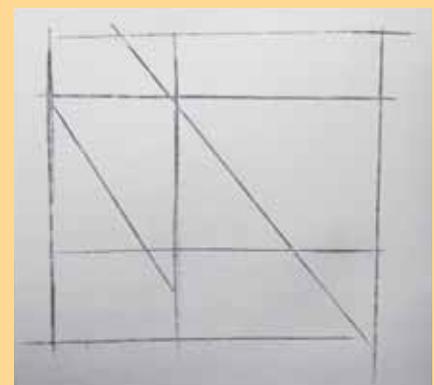
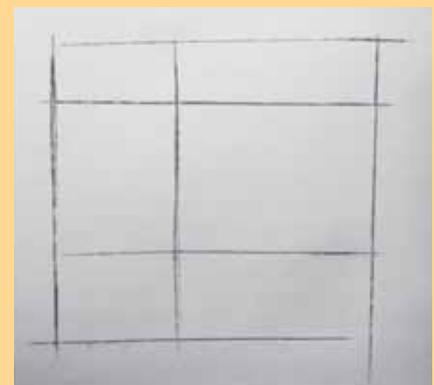
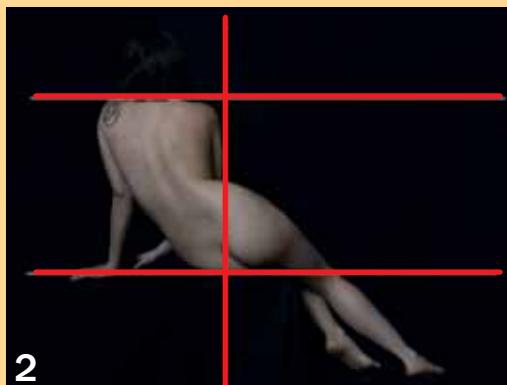
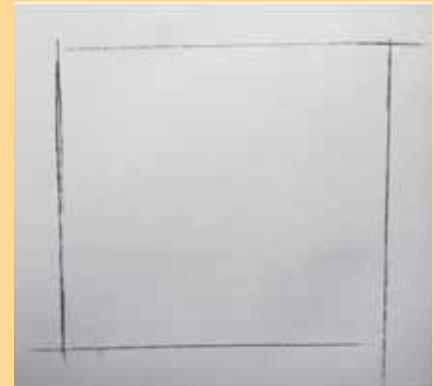
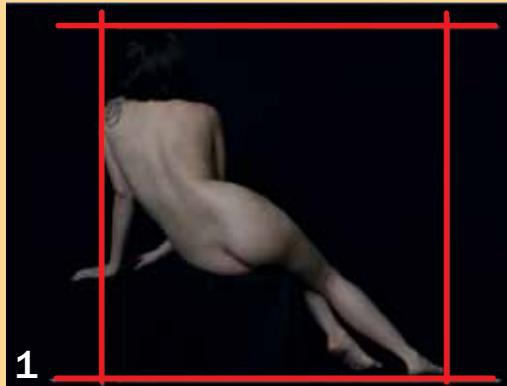
In this exercise, you should begin by laying in the verticals and horizontals that we described in the first workshop last month.

**1** To establish the basic proportions, place the sitter in a box on your page with a top and a bottom line. Everything you are subsequently going to draw will have to occur between those two lines, which you should never change. Next, put in two verticals (which you can adjust at any stage) – you are effectively enveloping the figure within a box, *encasing* her. You should note that the left vertical is along the length of the arm and does not include the hand, which is classed as detail, so does not need to be included in your early scaffolding considerations.

**2** Draw in further horizontal and vertical lines to help establish the basic proportions via this scaffolding, as we described in article one.

**3** Now you put in some diagonals, as we described in the first article (Figure 3).

**4** Now put in a couple of internal diagonals to describe the angle of the shoulders in relation to the hips, the classic *contrapposto* – a counterpose in which the weight is placed on a single foot and the hips twist in relation to the shoulders as a result, such as Michelangelo's masterpiece, *David*.



**5** So you have your Cubist design, your scaffolding. You have successfully reduced your sitter to an abstract of horizontals, verticals and diagonals, and in the process, almost without being aware of it, you have summarised volume and gesture.

## the atelier method

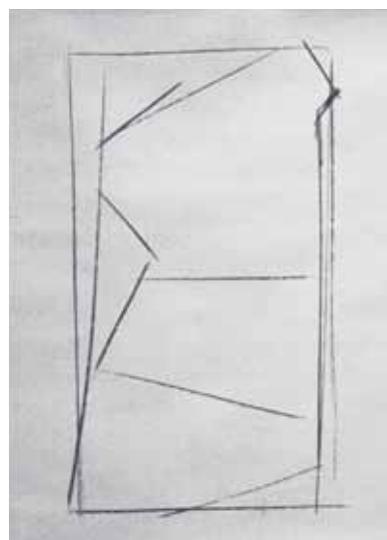
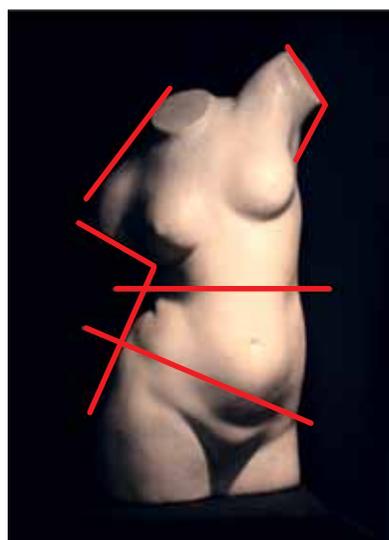
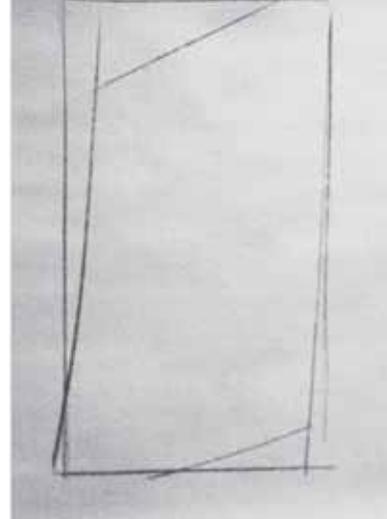
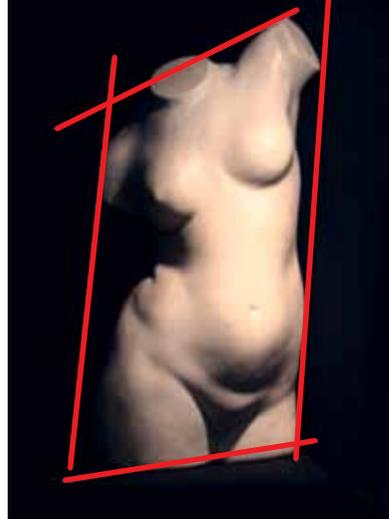
age of 12, he would have mastered the basics and by 16 gone far beyond.

Going further beyond is for later though; first we must be patient. Once you have mastered capturing this basic scaffolding, you will be ready to proceed to next month's workshop in *chiaroscuro*, or light and shade. This is the third of the four basic principles we teach at Lavender Hill Studios, whereby you will delineate within your dozen lines the shadow shapes where dark meets light.

For the more experienced artists, you may already have the ability to head at the outset for the beautiful diagonals, without the need to draw in the scaffolding first. Onlookers might gasp in awe. How did you capture that in three minutes? But remember – it



RIGHT In this second example, you can see how the angles of the cast are quickly rendered as a 'scaffolding' on the page



LEFT This one-hour oil sketch by Ann Witheridge captures the gesture of the sitter perfectly

wasn't just three minutes, it was three years of practice and repetition.

And here is a key word: repetition. The Romans must have understood it 2,000 years ago, because they had an expression: *repetitio educorum mater est*, or "repetition is the mother of education". The popular psychology writer Tony Buzan puts it this way: "You can read something, and understand it, but unless you can remember it, you might as well not have read it in the first place. You remember it by repeating it."

So repeat these early steps. In doing so, you will be repeating again and again this way of looking for the

larger lines at the outset and rendering them in a few simple lines. Through repetition you are training your mind to see the whole when you begin your drawing and avoiding getting caught up in the detail. You are forcing your mind to follow the same path, like a river always forcing the water to flow down the same channel, each time deepening that channel until the water can go nowhere else.

**Next month: add contrast to your figure with our chiaroscuro workshop. For more information on Lavender Hill Studios and the courses they offer, please visit [www.lavenderhillstudios.com](http://www.lavenderhillstudios.com)**

### FOCUS ON THE WHOLE

It can be difficult initially to see the first big diagonal lines of a scaffolding because you can become mesmerized by the beauty of the detail and head for that first.

Look at the contour of the pose we looked at previously. In this photo, we have exaggerated the contour by increasing the contrast of the lighting. In these early stages of marking out your drawing, a single diagonal line is sufficient to summarise that silhouette. Resist the temptation at the early stages of your drawing to follow the details of the silhouette, as sketched out in the second line. Train yourself to see the whole before the parts.

