

Peter Clements Art Studios

How to Draw Movement

To draw movement in a study is comparatively easy if we can identify its purpose in a study. (Drawing, Rendering or Painting).

A piece of music is quite often described as having a beat or it flows... However, when describing a painting or drawing words such as movement, balance, depth, proportion and the like are frequently used to evaluate its composition.

How to render the perception movement is one of those elements in the composition of a study that can affect the viewer's interpretation of the meaning, or intension of the study.



As a picture cannot speak we have to interpret what we see. Consequently, the composition of a piece of art is subjective, and will probably be seen differently by the next person down the line. What do they say about beauty being in the eye of the beholder?

Below we will review how to draw movement and how it can change or influence the composition of the study. The relevance and to what extent they can be applied will depend much on the study (subject matter) and, or the artist creating that study.

Our perception of movement is influenced by a number of factors. Besides perspective, there is a hidden language within us that is driven by our interaction with daily events and common objects that has a significant affect on our perception of movement and space.

To draw movement we need to arrange the 'components' of the study in such a way that will play to this hidden language and create a sense of movement. As in conventional perspective where the larger object in the sequence is preserved to be in the foreground and the smaller objects beyond are preserved to be in the background.



Left & Right

A major stimulus as to how we interpret lineal direction is directly linked to the way we read. Here we read from left to right. Consequently, the left is preserved as being the start and the right is seen as the finish. This is generally seen as being 'what is expected', normal or acceptable.

For example, if a picture portrays someone walking to the right side on the picture it is physiologically preserved as being progressive. Whereas, if they were walking to the left it can be seen as being regressive or negative.

Above I have placed a drawing of Michelangelo's sculpture of Venus and added a mirrored copy below that. In your opinion, which is positive?

The lineal interpretation of direction is usually not that obvious unless there is a secondary or complementary object (or space) for the subject within the study to interact with.

A typical example of how to draw movement could be of a cowboy on a galloping horse. The study would have a greater impact if the subject were positioned more on the left side on the paper, compared to being positioned in the centre or on the right hand side. The reason being that the open space in front of the cowboy is seen as being a target. The greater the target the greater the, the distance to travel, the greater objective.

In the same light if the cowboy was drawn more to the right side of the drawing, the space behind him could be interpreted as the distance travelled. Consequently, the perception of achievement comes into play.

Past & Future

In the same light, the left is also associated with being the past and the right is seen as being the future. Thus, if a portrait is looking to future, (right) it suggests a progressive, romantic, ambitious, happy or pleasing stance, and the contrary if the portrait was looking to the past (left).

Here again, the interaction of the subject with a secondary object or space is important in how to draw movement. Even if the subject is a little off centre, it will create that impression of being either in the past or in the future. Alternatively, of the subject interacting with either the past or future.

Clockwise

Circular movement is quite often seen as either clockwise or anti-clockwise. Where clockwise is seen as being the norm or 'the acceptable', and anticlockwise being the negative.

This clockwise or anti-clockwise way of drawing movement can be a very effective method to create mood in figure and portrait studies. More on this aspect in practical applications.

Exceptions

There are no hard and fast rules to say that to draw movement be it either linear or circular movement will always seen in this way. Our perceptions are influenced by a multitude of nuts and bolts that can be assembled in a number of ways. I guess we could say that that is fortunate, for it is in part the way we think that makes us so unique.

Gender orientated subject matter is a typical example of how gender tendencies will create a different point of view of how to draw movement. For example in some studies the influence related to the way a male buttons his jacket (left over right) compared to female that button (right over left) could come into play.

Later, I will review specific types of studies to review how to mix and match to create different influences in the composition.

Triangles

The triangle is endemic to perspective. As a road appears to vanish into the horizon, or when looking down on a tall building it appears to vanish into the ground below. In both cases the lines get nearer the further they move from the viewing point towards its vanishing point.

In landscape studies the triangle is used frequently to emphasize distance. Above I suggested that adding free space to the right of the galloping cowboy could create an illusion of distance. This could be amplified with the use of triangles. By rotating him a little to his left, his target or destination could be introduced on the horizon.

The use of triangles in a composition to draw movement can be used in different ways. As in perspective where the road vanishes into the horizon, the same can be said of the lamppost on the side of the road. In this case the first lamppost is perceived as being the most significant and others that follow become less significant.

The same illusion of the most significant and subordinates arranged in a triangle; and not necessarily in perspective, can be used to create a 'point of importance'. More on this aspect in practical applications.