

## Introduction to We Are in Eden: The Secretive Work of Artist's Models

Over the past several months I've been working on this book. For the August 20<sup>th</sup> ZOOM meeting I would be glad to offer people a draft chapter to review. Just send an email to [itjohnsp@syr.edu](mailto:itjohnsp@syr.edu) indicating which of the following chapters most interest you and I'll reply with a pdf.

**Chapter 1) Intro.** Mention figure drawing today and most anyone's reaction is raised eyebrows. The outsiders have been programed by society to distrust the relationship between artists and models. The bohemian tales of models as mistresses have been sensationalized and perpetuated. The insiders, the participants, know a different story, the reality of straightforward business, of collaboration that is nonsexual, but the results in an image which may be on the fringe of society's acceptance. In a way, this is a defense of the profession. Setting the record straight is part of my quest, reconciling my experience with our society.

So I'll spill the beans about my underlying premise. Contemporary models and artists work together to create in a very different environment than 400 years ago. Yet there are still inaccurate mythologies concerning their connections. Today's figure drawing is a business run by universities, community groups, and individual artists. The models pose as a service and while it is only a full time profession for a very few, there are professional standards of confidentiality, willingness, reliability and creativity. Models are never touched; they have an unexpected dignity and a sense of privacy.

I have no solid numbers on people who have modeled; they float onto the active model list and then they float away. Writer Peter Steinhart in *The Undressed Art* conjectures they may be a thousand figure drawing groups across the land. If like our there are thirty some active models the total population would be 30,000 active models, but inactive models could easily multiply that number several times over. Most of these models are not recorded, and have no voice. My effort of the past decades is to give models a voice, to hear what they hear, see, and feel. Those are the basis of this writing.

The Biblical reference of the book's title refers to the way that I have come to see studio life. It takes place in a special land much like the Garden of Eden where there is acceptance of human form in magnificent glory, focusing on timeless beauty, and the positive aspects of celebrating creativity. If this sounds overblown, then you may not have had studio experience, studio participants may not use this language but they have felt the joy that comes alive in attempts to represent ourselves. For over 25,000 years humans have sought to create images of ourselves. During the Renaissance the classical ideals of figure drawing were developed and still hold today. In contrast, the secretive work of models is a reaction to society's unacceptance. Even models totally enamored by their work can be reserved about it. This became clear to me over the writing of this book.

**2) The Ideal Model** This was an academic exercise to assemble a perfect model from many pieces of actual stories. The tale follows a hypothetical model from their first contact to their first night modeling. I hope it portrays some of the flavor of the studio while giving the reader insights to the induction experience.

In the **3)The Tender Thrill** some of the issues around nudity will be explored. The tender thrill is the feeling when you break with societies contentions. More important than nudity is the building of passion. Passion is another misunderstood concept within the studio. Passion is also nonsexual and it is the driving force behind artwork and the necessary motivation to learn. Without passion, art loses its power of attraction, the ability to capture the eye and the imagination. The thrill is connected to extending, unwavering observation which is also not condoned in our society at large. The tender thrills found in the studio eventually compound. They become the lifeblood of contact free creativity.

Chapter **4) Remembrances of Models** looks at a series of individuals. I examine 12 models that first come to mind over my career. This came from personal vivid, visual memories. Their stories also offer insights into the general field of modeling. Most people only participate in the process with the model on stage with very little actual interaction. In my role as model coordinator I ushered people into the profession, I saw them repeatedly, and I learned more of their lives and aspirations than most participants. Models each invent their own ways of modeling; this important fact will be examined throughout this book.

Our philosophy at OFD Inc. is to give everyone equal access. Just as we grant artists unrestricted access to a place at the easel, models can take to the modeling platform without audition, portfolio, or experience. Models do not perform equally, yet we have found, at every stage of their development they have a potential to offer artists something valued. The question is what are valued traits in a model? I begin to ask Do these stages happen in a natural way, spontaneously developed, or perhaps in certain predictable ways, occurring with minor variation, omission and exceptions?

Some models I not only drew frequently but also photographed them in one to one sessions. In those intense sessions, there was considerable feedback, direction, and learning. We both emerged inspired, wiser, and rewarded. Part of my work was to educate models and define what the facets of their work could be. Together we made discoveries, we made imagery, and we were creatures of creativity. Models are my coworkers, sharing our talents in a quest to invent something new and beautiful.

In **5)The Minds of Models** the incentives and motivations for models are spelled out. These came from extensive interviews, roundtable discussions, and many informal conversations over many years. I try to answer the question of why do people become models? It is not a profession that is easily understood, one that is typically considered counter cultural, and most people invent their approach with very little outside guidance. I've tried to incorporate artist's viewpoints along with the models perspective. For me, unearthing their motivation was fascinating. The clues were often hidden from the models and the benefits were a surprise to everyone participating. These become a foundation for many other chapters.

Different rewards are found in each phase of modeling. The categories are: Economic, Nudity, Education, Challenge, Expression, Collaboration, Status, Immortalization, and Well-being. At different points in a models career rewards may shift.

**6)Remembrances of Models Part 2.** There are hundreds of models in my memory. After the first chapter I realized there were more floating about in need of recognition. Feedback, if given, needs to be grounded in standards... so we need to know the important features of modeling. Like with artists,

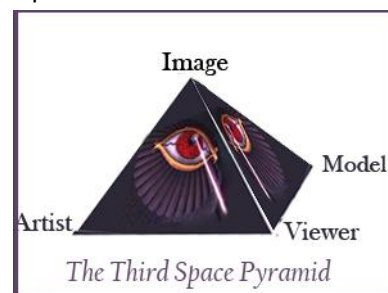
critiquing can be a learning experience and it can also hamper creative development. As an art educator I see feedback as problematic for any self-directed learning. For feedback to be useful it must address models specific needs and be delivered by knowledgeable, caring individuals. (Still outlined)

**7)The Nights of the Roundtable.** After working with models for a decade I realized there was a need to give models a venue for their voice. For the next ten or so years we produced two roundtables a year, spring and fall, so that both models and artists had an opportunity to discuss and explore their perspectives on various topics. Some were based on my suggestions but most were generated from model's comments made at previous roundtables. These meetings were open to the public and attendance varied from twenty to only a handful of participants. No matter the size of the group I felt each roundtable always yielded valuable insights. This chapter is an overview of some of the pertinent discussions such as feedback, spaces, and development. A few of the more intriguing topics will have their own chapters, attention, contemporary issues, and future changes. It is potentially hard to find topics that are honest, fair and encouraging... so I started roundtable discussions and found several topics such as why model?, defining modeling, modeling levels, success in theory and practice (from multiple viewpoints), valuing models, and feedback. This writing is the culmination of a dozen years of investigations.

What is appealing in a natural or contrived stance may indeed be hard to verbalize, only known to the artist when they see it or the model when they strike it. The artists are working in a visual mode, the models are working in a proprioceptive or somatic mode, and neither requires verbal language. This may be the crux of our problem; the non-verbal nature produces difficulties in exploring and explaining modeling.

Chapter **8)What Models See** explores what can be learned from taking the models viewpoint on the stand? I believe that everyone's input is required, the diversity of ideas is important! There are obvious statements; the artist views the model, the model sees the artist at work. Or at least the model sees some of the group working. The artist is not always reacting to the model per say. They are reacting to the materials, to the image under construction. Yet there are other distractions, socializing with others, rest breaks, joy and frustration. How do models react to artists or don't they?

With the unique perspective of the model, the concept of the third space can be visited. The connections between the facets of image production are often considered as one way with a single viewpoint, but we can open a greater resource of information. The first two points to be examined are the connection between artist and image. The third point is the audience that has connection to the viewed image as well as some inferences to the artist. I put forth the exploration with the model also has a place in this conceptualization of representational art, creating the fourth point of a pyramid. Perhaps central to all this is the concept of beauty.



Different points of view will be discussed; how the model view their image both under construction and finalized in exhibit, how they the view the artist at work, how the

audience views the model, how the artist remembers the model beyond the image? How models are seen by the public will be reviewed in the publication. Models Dictionary. Artists are also invited to contribute their model experiences.

**9)Skin Tones or the Color of Flesh** – sometimes societies viewpoints become highlighted in the news. A few interesting 2015 headlines are explored. Erin Andrew's lawsuit brought to light issues of nudity and attention. Playboy's philosophical changes also underscore issues of the business of nudity. I take a look at young fashion models and the way we discuss nudity. In a twist, gesture drawings are being reexamined. A couple of nude images hanging in home studio raise a few questions.

**10)The Coin of the Realm** – This is a look at a book written by a local model, Steve Mazza. Reading into it reveals a finer point of motivation; attention. Model is a unique career that offers a way to alter one's status. The spotlight can follow a model from the modeling stand into everyday life. While many models separate their profession from family, friends, coworkers, church, etc. Steve happily relates stories of how modeling overlaps into common life. He is a person who appreciates the attention modeling affords him. After deciphering the power of attention, I began to see how attention may effect other models as well. Modeling can separate one from the pack with instant collaboration with artists and even provide payment for these privileges.

**11)The Disappearing Profession** covers a grab bag of topics. With academic resources retreating from figure drawing, there may be impacts on model education. Community venues, smaller and nimble, may not be able to take up required number of bookings. Even though modeling may be a self-inventing profession, success in modeling may need redefinition. What traits may be most adaptable? Diverse skill levels may bring diverse standards for each venue. How will the new electronic world impact models?

**12) Education Verses Success** is a chapter in which I attempt to look at different viewpoints of success, not only the models, but artists, model coordinators, and classroom instructors. I unearth a definition of success written thirty years ago and find new meaning within it. The imprecise language such as "willingness, "variety", and "reasonable" lead to a definition of success so wide that fits most outcomes, people, and poses. By this definition most models are therefore successful and formal education may not be necessary. Our attempts to educate may be interference in a process that is better self-directed.

Modeling, for being simply defined as being still and nude, can be defined in complex ways by different groups. Underlying most of the writing is How is modelling learned? There are many different phases of modeling. As we explore the development of models we see modeling progression from reference, to inspiration, to collaboration to performance art.

**13)What modeling Ain't** is a recap. As this first chapter is part of the cue, the bulk of the writing is the action (the do) and the review wraps ups and summarizes the adventure. I have worn many hats, I have been an artists, a model coordinator, a researcher, and even dabbled as a model. I think all these perspectives have influenced the writing. It has been my desire to offer the voices of the models as much as possible, interweaving their perspective into the tales as well.

Aside from setting the record straight about modern modeling to the public, I hope writing about the perks and the rewards, might allow more people to consider modeling. I assume there are not many jobs which have no specific training prerequisites yet yield such a welcomed creative experience.

Please give this some thought; A twist on the Emperor's New Clothes. With my take, instead of being tricked into wearing nothing, the King is given artist's attention and appreciation for being nude. There is no snickering behind his back in my story. He is not only accepted but lauded for his role. In my rewrite the Emperor's New Clothes, the con artists (the two conspiring tailors in the Hans Christian Andersen story) are two artists in the studio. They are interested in creating art and learning. They do not take advantage of anyone. No one is made the butt of foolery. The Emperor on the modeling stage is never embarrassed or taken advantage of, but is a welcomed and vital part of the drawing process.

So back to my opening remark, why do people raise their eyebrows? A few may be titillated by the subject but more I think may be concerned with being offended. From an early age we all are programmed to be private, shielded, guarded about nudity. Society makes laws about our bodies, swimsuits, breastfeeding, and exhibitionism. I have known a very few individuals who have become hypersensitive to these concerns and have become greatly offended by the mention of figure drawing.

And so, my passion may inadvertently be offensive to some. While it is not totally unexpected to be rejected from some shows or galleries for subject matter, I'm usually not prepared for rejection. Similarly, I am always surprised when I inadvertently offend someone. Eventually I made two portfolios, one thin with only portraits, and one robust, thicker portfolio for figures. My problem remained that people that may be offended look the same as those who may praise the work. I am always sorry for the few in these situations for I never wished to offend. The dilemma is insiders admire my work while outsiders may be wary.

I can see how my collaborators may also be impacted by Society's reaction. With this writing I hope to explain figure drawing and modeling to make it been seen as what it is, acceptable. The Secretive Work of Artist's Models may not need to be so guarded or mysterious. Model's reticence to discuss their work may hopefully be put to rest, or at least mitigated.