

While no one knows when an artist first used a model to create art, there can be no doubt that it was many thousands of years ago. Certainly, the creators of the statues of Greek antiquity used the human form as a guide, even though the result was an idealized figure.

A person need not be a stunning beauty or muscular Adonis in order to qualify as a model. Rather, just as art is said to imitate life, artists need models over the full spectrum of humanity, of age, weight and race.

#### **A model can be considered 3 things:**

- A tool for the instructor
- A template for the artist, and
- An inspiration to the process

As a tool for the instructor, the model may be called on to present all or only a portion of the body for specific lessons on the anatomy. It isn't uncommon to spend an entire session on arms and legs, for example, or to break the body down into various parts for concentrated study. Portraiture is often a class unto itself, not only because the face has so many difficult features, but also because it represents a good market for artists to earn an income.

If all it takes to be a good model is to show up, be on time and hold still, then it follows that to be a better model depends on what you do when modeling. That is the real challenge for the model and the object of this effort, for modeling can be an art form in its own right.

#### **Professional models are:**

- Dependable
- Punctual
- Inspiring
- Knowledgeable of their bodies and their limits

Dependability is to show up when you say you will. A dependable model can be relied on for a majority, if not all of the sessions for which they are scheduled. Often, a model may be selected for a specific characteristic or for an ongoing project so it is important to be there.

Punctuality is more than just showing up on time. In the strictest sense it means to be on the model stand and ready to perform at the scheduled time. A professional model arrives in time to change into a robe, find out what the focus of that session is and thus have time to consider what kinds of poses would be best.

Inspiration is a subjective issue. For portrait, some may prefer a face of experience or character while others may seek the face of youth and beauty. In figure posing, the pose itself is key; but the manner in which the model can evoke

the implied narrative or emotion will determine the extent of inspiration to the artist. The models attitude, charisma or persona can be inspiring, just as a negative emotion can detract from even the best of poses. Don't ever bring your bad day stories to the studio.

#### **The Basics**

To begin, there are some basic rules to follow.

1. Keep appointments or find a suitable replacement
2. Be ready to model at the given time
3. Good hygiene is essential
4. Dress and undress in designated place
5. Always wear a robe when not on the model stand or when not modeling
6. Never stare at an artist when posing; find a neutral spot to focus on
7. Do not make negative comments on student work
8. Maintain professional conduct at all times

Some may have other rules, but these are the basics.

#### **The Model Bag**

Most models find it helpful to bring items along to use when modeling. Of course, it varies from model to model, but the following items are useful, if not essential:

- Robe
- Appointment book
- Timer
- Prescribed medication/aspirin
- Solid colored bath towel/blue
- Sandals
- Props/pads
- Book or magazine

Some type of bag is useful, but in general it is wise to select things that are lighter to carry. That is less important if you drive, but many models use public transportation and it can get a bit heavy. Bags with a shoulder strap are very convenient, as is a bag with separate pockets or partitions.

Terrycloth robes and towels are heavy, so consider something lighter. The use for a towel is to sit on. Ladies robes are generally available in lighter weight material, but it's difficult to find men's robes that are that light. Often, a plain ladies robe can work for a man as a unisex garment.

An appointment book is crucial to all models. A missed session is an embarrassment and a disservice to the party that expected a model. You often will get additional bookings on the spot as you meet other teachers/artists throughout the day.

Timers are also very important. It is up to the model to time each pose, unless the teacher or monitor wants to control it. Short poses of 30 seconds to two minutes can

be timed by counting silently, whereas a timer is useful for longer ones. Radio Shack has several styles that are adequate and reasonably priced in the \$15 range.

Props vary, but include items that can aid in developing a broader range of poses. A pole and a rope (for tensing muscles) are common props for males. Some models specialize in costumes from ethnic to historical, even hats and wigs! Discuss with the client beforehand.

#### **Types of Sessions**

Sessions can be grouped into three basic categories: educational, avocation and private. If the session is a class at a college or school the teacher may determine the pose. If it is with a group of artists that meet regularly, the format may range from short poses to longer ones and the pose is generally up to the model. In private sessions with one or two artists, the artist generally sets poses, perhaps in consultation with the model. A professional model would be prepared to perform whatever the situation required and should say if the pose is too difficult for the time or if there are physical conditions that need consideration.

#### **The Pose**

This area represents the best opportunity for models to distinguish themselves for the greater repertoire the greater the chance to stimulate the artists' creativity and thus become a much sought after commodity.

In general, poses may reflect activities of daily life. Often, natural or relaxed poses are preferred, although a dramatic pose with a lot of stress can be very stimulating.

Perhaps one of the best ways to develop a good pose repertoire is to study the work of the great masters. Many of these are reflected in the pose guide that is available separately. It will be well worth the time to study—and practice—as many of these as possible.

Poses may be held for short to long periods of time, depending on the type of session. Shorter poses fewer than 3 minutes are called gesture poses. Many sessions begin with a series of 60-second gesture poses then progress to 5, 10 and 20-25 minute poses and longer.

The term gesture has several meanings, but for the model, it generally means short poses that artists use for warm-up. For longer poses, the term gesture is still used to discuss the general balance or sensibility of the pose. The term also applies to the gist or flow of the artwork as a whole.

Shorter poses offer opportunities for more exaggerated, less balanced and dramatic poses. As time increases, however, more stable poses should be chosen. Standing on one leg, for example, may be

fine for a 60-second pose but is counterproductive for longer poses. Not only is it difficult for the model to hold it is also distracting to the artist to see the model strain and waver to hold it. If you take a pose you find you can't hold for the time, you should break the pose and change to another so you don't hurt yourself. This is what knowing your body and its limits is all about and it comes with experience.

Longer poses require different considerations since the model can be in one position for an entire session. It is difficult to hold a pose in the same position sometimes without the use of cushions and supports. They are usually supplied. A method to help maintain the pose is to pick parts of the body as reference markers against stationary spots on the wall or floor. For example, the tip of your nose may line up with an easel base. Periodic checks can determine whether that part is still in the same position—or if not, to help return it to the correct position. By selecting two or three such points, the pose can be held in the right position. Navigators use this to get from one place to another: the term is called triangulation. To help you return to a pose, the client will often mark around you with chalk or tape and work with you to find the correct pose. Be careful to not move the cloth when you get up.

#### **Breaks**

The number and length of breaks varies with each pose and model. Not all models can hold the same pose for the same time so it is difficult to set standards for breaks. One common practice is to take a five-minute break every twenty minutes. If a pose is too difficult to hold for longer than 20 minutes at a time, then it shouldn't be used for long poses. Rather than set specific time limits, it is better to take a break based on the pose and the individual model. For a series of gesture poses, the model should be able to work longer periods, typically 50 minutes, without a break. After a 50-minute set, there is usually a 10-or-less minute break. As the length of the pose increases, then the difficulty of the pose becomes a factor. A good model would take this into account at the start and not take a pose that is too hard to hold without frequent breaks.

One reason for this is that the longer an artist has to work on a pose without interruption, the greater the creativity, thus, a better result. The model will benefit as word gets around; it will add to their reputation and to being considered a better model.

#### **Don't Change a Thing**

For poses that are to be held for several sessions, it is important to

maintain the same appearance. To wear the same clothing, not get a haircut or change ones hair style are important for obvious reasons. Note what you wore in your date book. In summer, avoid getting a suntan.

### **The Performance**

In reality, modeling is a performance and as such it begins when the model first steps onto the model stand. If a session begins with comments from the client to the class, the model should take a comfortable stance and avoid distracting movements. When the session actually starts, the robe should be removed and placed off the model stand. Let the client know if you need a heater or if A/C is blowing on you.

A session may be a series of gesture poses then on to longer poses. A good model treats it as a dance with smooth transitions between the gesture poses, always having the next pose in mind so that there are no delays, other than to hold each pose for a few seconds longer to allow artists to change paper. There are 3 levels of poses. Standing, crouching and kneeling, and reclining. Include them all during a session. Upon completion of the set of shorter poses, the model should announce that fact and go gracefully to the next set.

### **Facial Expression**

The face is more important than most may think. It is arguably the most prominent feature and the first that the artist will see. Within the face, the eyes are most visible so it is important that they be held steady for it can be distracting if the eyes dart about while posing, or turn to the direction of someone entering the room. Find a spot to focus on and keep the eyes there most of the time. It is not good for your eyes to glue them to one spot. Glancing away now and then is fine. Many models neglect this, but roving eyes can diminish even the best of poses. Above all, do not stare, or look directly at an artist, for it is distracting to both model and artist.

Facial expression is so important that entire books have been written to describe the various moods that may be displayed. Briefly, these range from sadness to anger, from joy to fear to disgust, pain and surprise. "Of the twenty-six or so muscles that move the face, eleven are responsible for facial expression." (from Facial Expression by Gary Faigin).

It is well worth the effort to become familiar with expressions and how they relate to the pose. A dramatic pose with tensed muscles would be less appealing if the face were relaxed, or worse, if it contained a smile. Expression adds to your power to inspire

### **Avoid Repetition**

Even models with the broadest pose repertoire can find it hard to not repeat a pose or series of poses for the same group over time, but it is something for models to consider. A good model adds new poses to their routine on a regular basis so that it doesn't become predictable. Failure to do this may result in a diminishing interest in a model by individual groups or teachers.

### **Miscellaneous Tips**

While hands are visible in most poses, they generally don't play a significant role in the composition. Fingers close to each other, rather than spread apart fanlike, are easier to draw. Hands look better when they relate to props or to the body itself.

Posing is similar to Zen, yoga and other meditation exercises, so it is useful to become familiar with them. Much of it is learning tricks of self-control; many are equally useful in modeling. For example, it is possible to "scratch" an itch without moving a muscle. It is distracting for the model to physically scratch an itch, but it can be dealt with mentally: An itch can increase in intensity if one focuses on it; ignore it and it will go away.

In long poses, parts of the body may become sore or fall asleep from poor blood circulation. There are several ways to deal with this. Flexing muscles can relieve tension. Often, only one part of the body is tense or sore. By moving only that part, the artist can work on other parts of the pose. Tell the client you will relax that part but keep the rest of the pose intact.

Pay attention to where your main arteries are and don't lean in ways that cut off the blood flow (such as crossing legs). The same goes for nerves, especially in the pelvis. Use cushions for long poses. Never put all your weight on one joint in a pose longer than 7 minutes. Do not lock your knees for standing poses (you'll faint). Always rise slowly after a long pose. A leg may have fallen asleep, or you may feel light-headed.

### **Transportation**

The Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority web site, WWW.WMATA.COM, is an extremely useful tool for models that use public transportation. By entering a start and end point and when you have to be there, the system tells you when to leave and the route to take. For operator assistance call 202.637.7000.

### **Keep Your Day Job**

It is difficult to make a living from modeling alone so most models have other jobs. Colleges and universities use the most models, so jobs vary to their schedule, being low during summer and

winter breaks.

The economy plays a part also. During low peaks, there are more models in the model pool while at the same time fewer jobs are available due to lower class enrollment. When the economy is good, the model pool diminishes while modeling jobs increase.

The rate of pay varies from \$10 to \$20-25 an hour - some are cash, others may include standard deductions. Many groups pay a set fee: for example, \$40 to \$45 for a 2 1/2-hour session. But pay rate can be misleading, for some jobs at \$20 per hour may only be 2-hour sessions. Travel time may make the effective rate low, not to mention that it may interfere with scheduling other jobs that may pay less, but be worth more due to longer hours or proximity to the site.

### **Shameless Self Promotion**

As much or more than a model's talents and merits, it takes salesmanship to get a lot of jobs. One begins with finding all the places that hire models, meeting the model coordinators and learning what their schedules are. Then above all, making the phone calls at the right time. The *Figure Models Guild* maintains lists that give the names of those that hire models, as well as pay rate, location and other relevant data. But above all, it takes a good reputation and diligent efforts to get the jobs and be recommended to others.

*David R. Quammen – July 2003*