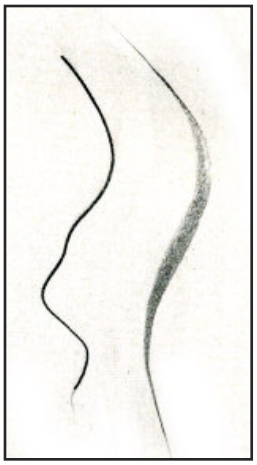
Quick Sketch Part 4: Design

"What makes good design?" The easiest answer to this is balance of unity and variety. I have heard good design called controlled chaos (most often by Jeff Watts), I would define this as the illusion of chaos build on a solid underlying structure. Much of this sounds like a dictionary of art buzz words, so with this in mind lets begin by analyzing the elements of design; line, orientation, and proportion.

BAD! GOOD!



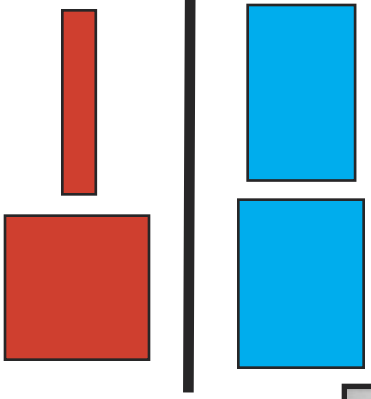
Line: With a simple line a skilled artist can quickly represent a powerful gesture and/or solid structure, but in unskilled hands a line can quickly flatten an image.
Unity and variety can be represented with line in two main ways; straight vs. curved, thick vs. thin. Luckily the aesthetics of these is fairly simple. If your drawing is feeling too stiff and formal add more curves, if too wavering and unstable more straights are needed. If your drawing has a clumsy, heavy feel your lines probably tend a little on the thick side, if conversely your drawing lacks weight and confidence try thickening some lines. Much of this is done by feel, as most things aesthetic are.
The more active you want a form to appear, emphasize the curves. The more structurally important or weight baring, push straights.
Be careful of sloppy overlap in your lines. An incorrect overlapping of form or anatomy is one of the primary examples of bad linear design in figure drawing.
On a personal note I prefer to constantly vary my lines, going from thick to thin and back again. I also try to oppose curves with straights an visa-versa, if I design one side of an arm with curves I will try to balance that with straights on the other side. This creates an active and inactive side to any form.

Orientation: in the context of quick sketch from the live model most orientation is going to be dictated by observation of the model. That being said there is a little room for interpretation. There are three main categories of orientation and each has it's own connotation; horizontal= passive, vertical=strength/balance, and diagonal=active/transitional. If I want to create a sense of movement to something that I see as vertical or horizontal, I give it a slight tilt, it does not take much. To create a sense of harmony push parallels and perpendiculars in your drawing, for a greater sense of variation or chaos emphasize oblique angles.

Too many parallels and right angles result in a mechanical feel to the drawing

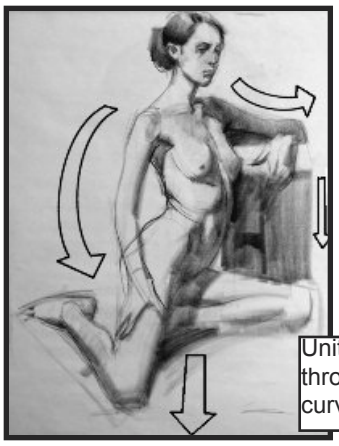
Too many curves and oblique angle can lead to a rubber or chaotic result

BAD! **GOOD!**



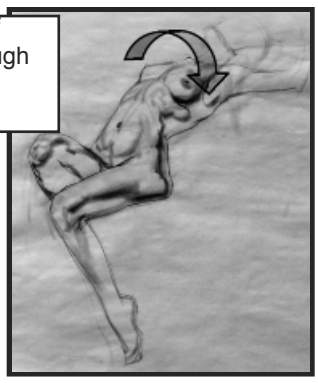
Proportion: The height to width ratio of a shape is very important to it's aesthetic appeal. So much so that thousands of years have been dedicated to the quest for an ideal ratio. All of this research has lead to a very simple conclusion, you want to avoid square blocky shapes, symmetrical divisions (too much unity), and long narrow shapes (too much variety). Ratios like the rule 1/3's and golden ratio, not to mention the 3/4 dimensional ratio have all been established to keep artisans from designing clunky square designs or uncomfortably long, narrow shapes. A good rule of thumb could be defined as, shapes blockier than 3 x 4 = too much unity, and shapes narrower than 1 x 3 = too much variety. Of course function always comes into play to make things difficult. Often clarity and accuracy require less ideal ratios. I generally try to push even the most extreme shapes more towards an ideal ratio, making thin "splintery" shadows a bit more robust and pushing short, squat shapes a bit more wedge like.

Endgame: In short good design is about: A) clarifying the 3D world on a 2D surface, while simultaneously masking your technique for doing so. B) Creating a balance of unity and variety through the use of line, orientation proportion and shape.



Unity and variety through good use of curves and straights

Clarification of structure through cross contour design



Good use of anatomical design to mask technique yet still clarify structure