

So you'd like to Paint a Portrait?

By Rosa Fedele

"If you see something that inspires or moves you, paint it!"



Alice

THE FIRST SITTING

I'd like to introduce Alice, who has kindly consented to be the subject for this series on portrait painting. Alice is a dancer, and her elegant posture and graceful lines make her the perfect subject to draw.

PLACEMENT, POSTURE AND POSITION

Your subject needs to be comfortable and relaxed – obviously this is better achieved when they're in familiar surroundings. In Alice's case, she assumes various poses that come naturally to her. I observe her from a few different angles then do several quick sketches on large paper with soft charcoal sticks or a pencil. These are loose reference sketches to capture posture, weight-bearing and light. I always tend to draw the weight-bearing leg first then go from there.

When it comes to young children, it may be easier to take many photos and use them for reference.



Quick posture sketches

LIGHTING

Use natural, directional light if possible; say, beside a window in the morning or afternoon. Avoid harsh sunlight and artificial light unless you're after a dramatic look because they distort natural skin tones; they're also better used when you're more confident with the use of colour.

WHAT SHALL I WEAR?

Not you, the subject! Choose plain clothing so you don't get confused by the detail in floral, tartan and paisley fabrics, and try to avoid shocking colours. Often the subject will have a favourite piece of clothing that's flattering to them. The

painting of drapery is an art in itself, one that's taken on as you become more confident and practised.

Alice is wearing a plain blue leotard and skirt. I'll be painting her against a blue wall to create monochromatic layers, which contrast beautifully with her skin and ballet slippers.

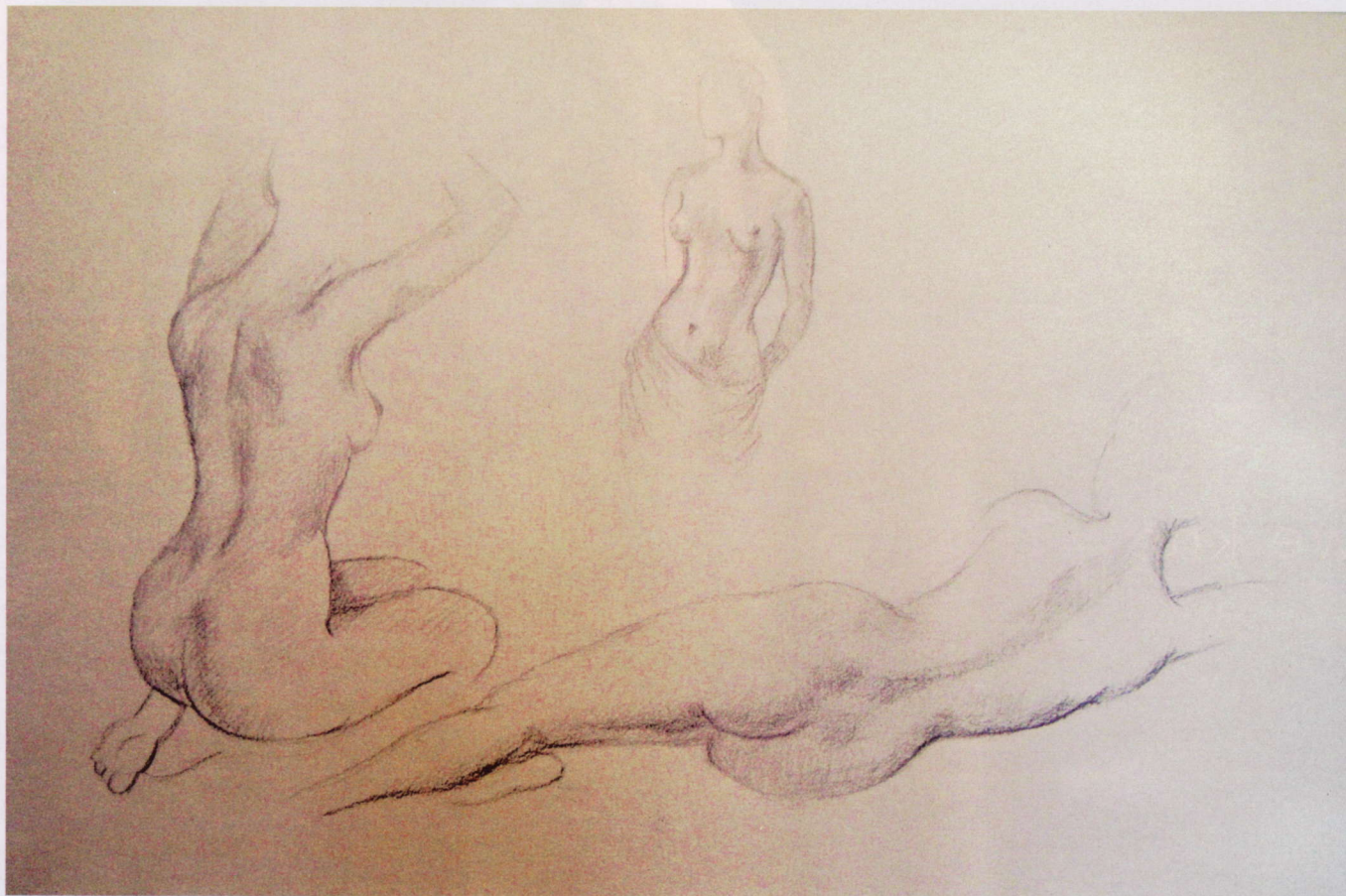
NUDE POSES

Sitters are often very nervous prior to a nude pose. These are my tips for making them feel comfortable.

- Plan the backdrop, lounge and draperies in advance
- Use soft lighting



The Maiden and the Monster



Nude sketches

- Provide an area for the sitter to dress/undress privately
- Provide a robe for wearing between sittings
- Have a throw or pashmina available to drape strategically across the sitter's figure if required. If the subject brings a favourite item, it can be incorporated in the painting.
- Offer a glass of champagne, the ultimate relaxant!

Subjects relax over time, and even start to enjoy the process.

In this painting, my subject brought along her beloved Burmese kitten called Monster. With her permission I exhibited the painting and named it *The Maiden and the Monster*. I used a sheer organza curtain as a wrap!

Try several poses to find the most flattering and comfortable position – there are ways of making torsos look trimmer, breasts higher, stomachs flatter and legs longer.

WORKSHOP TIP

MAKING AND USING A VIEWFINDER

Use a viewfinder to frame your subject, moving it closer or further from the eye to determine the scope of both the subject and the background.

To make your own, take a piece of heavy card and draw two boxes, one above the other, about 5cm apart. The first box is

approximately 15mm x 18mm, the second box about 25mm x 35mm. Cut out and remove the rectangles with a sharp razor, leaving you with your own viewfinder.

USING A CAMERA FOR REFERENCE PHOTOGRAPHS

Use photographs as memory aids. In this day and age, it's almost impossible to ask anyone to sit for many hours at a time, especially children.

Set your camera to the natural-light setting and don't use a flash. Remember, photos don't reproduce true skin and hair tones, and a good portrait needs at least one life sitting.

Next issue I'll discuss proportions of head and body.

Happy sketching!

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