

Christine Pilkinton Fine Art

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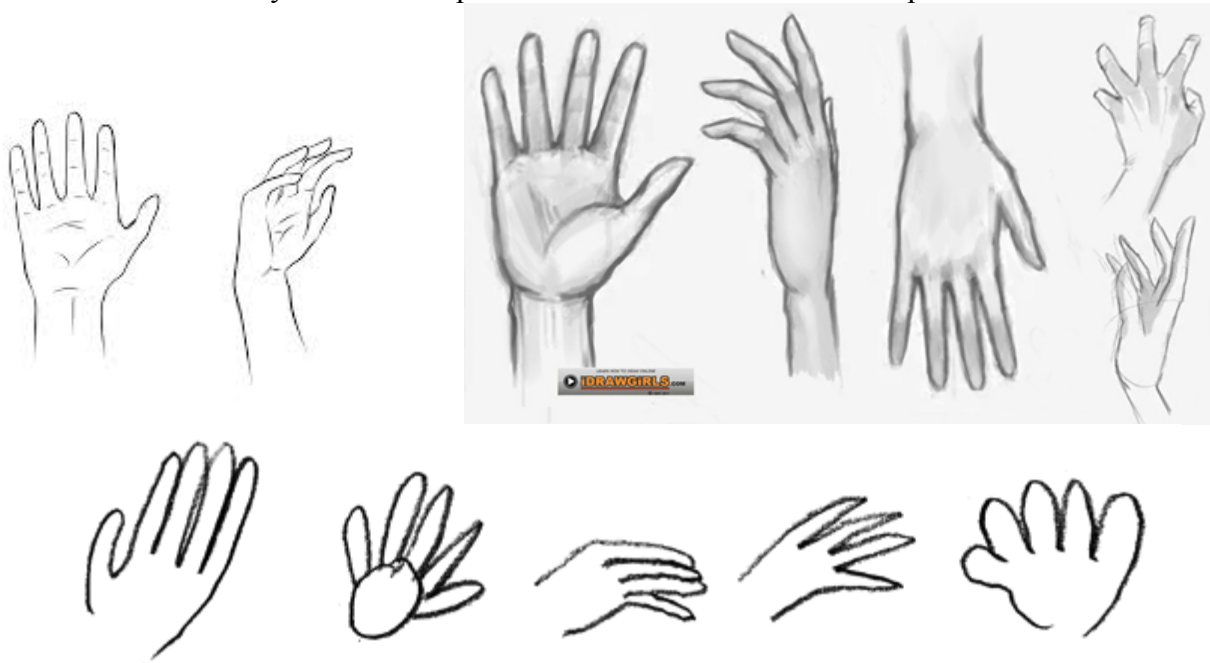
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*To send light into the darkness of men's hearts
- such is the duty of the artist. Schumann*

Drawing & Painting HANDS

It is easy to find examples of hands that are not drawn or painted well.



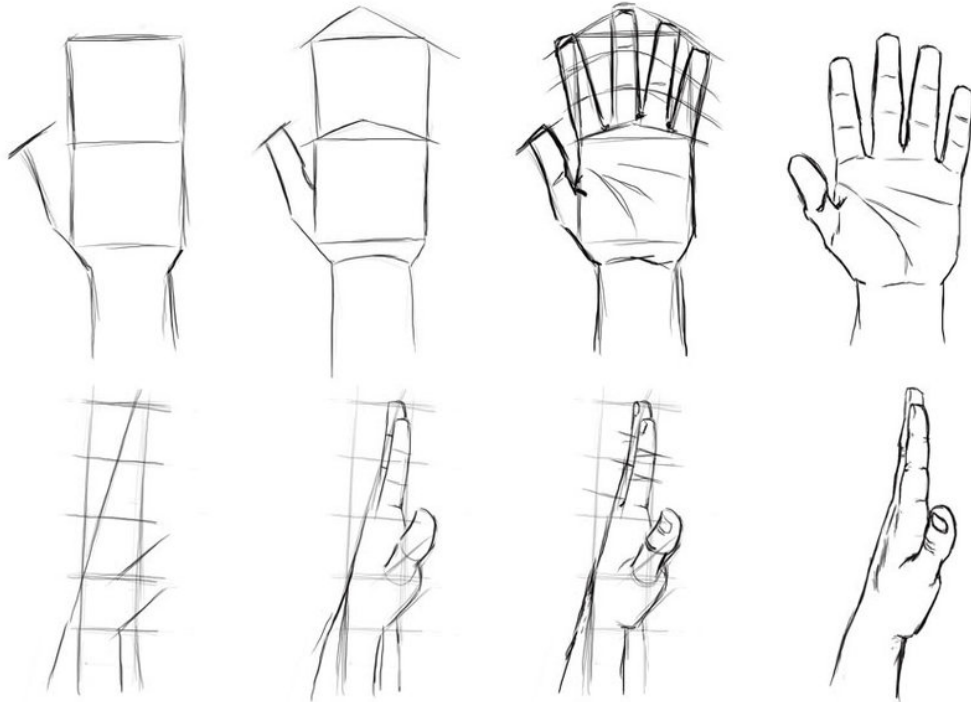
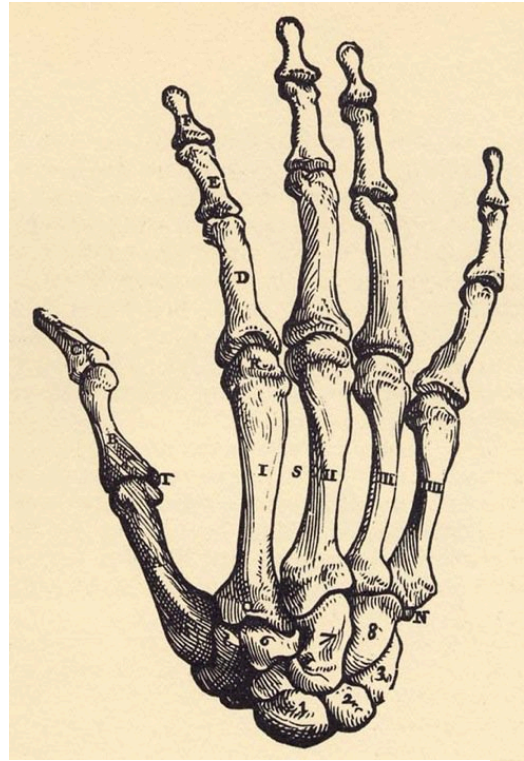
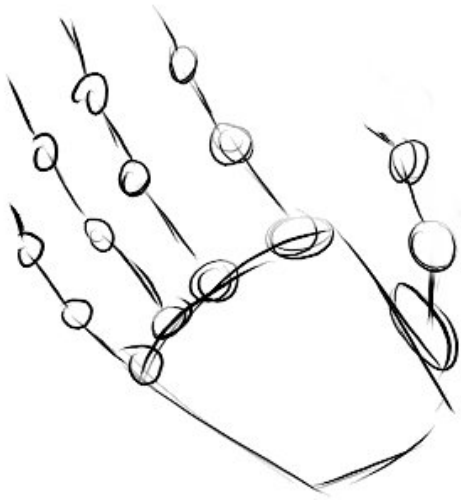
Note the many angle changes you see in the hands below and the range of values from lightest to darkest.



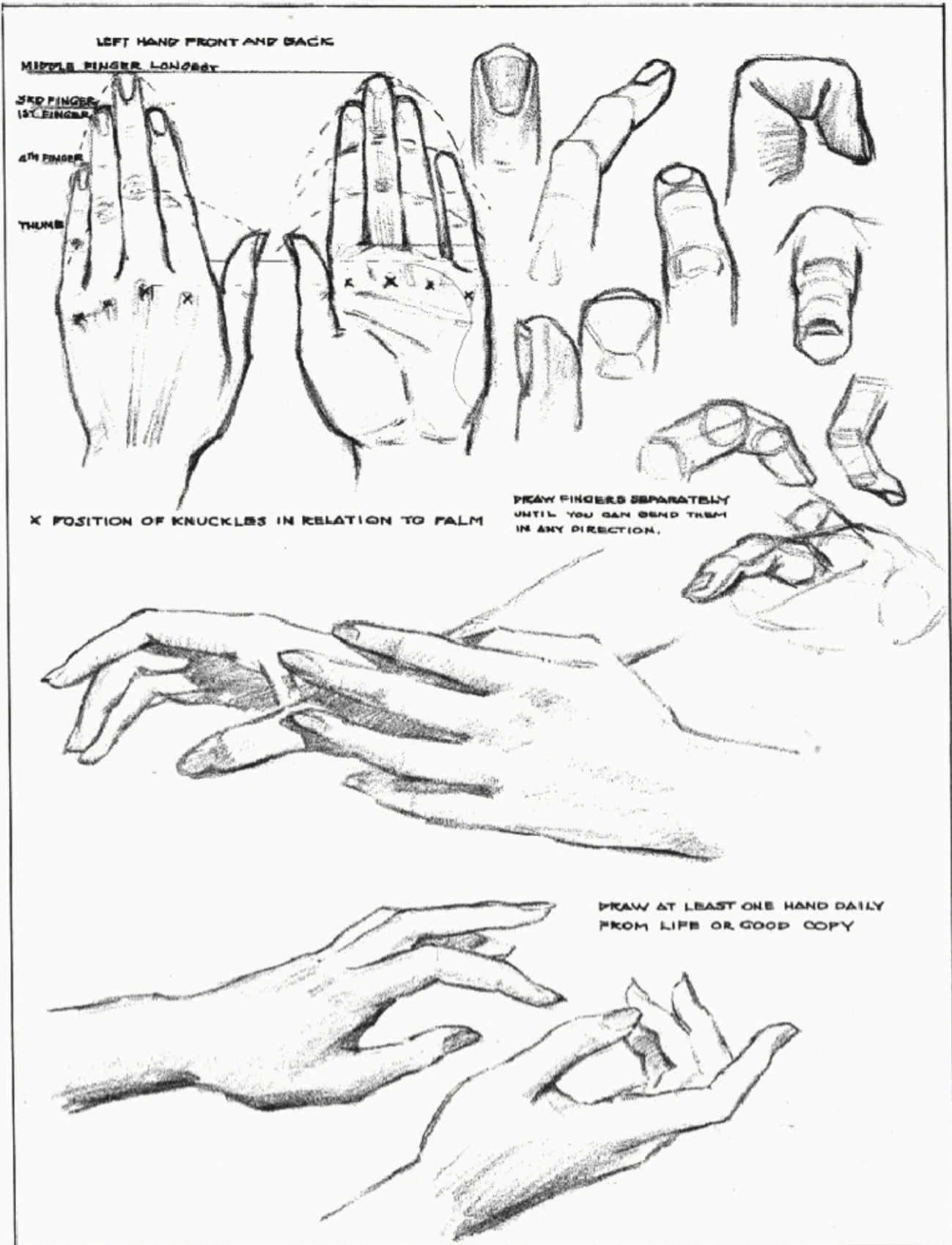
Examples by M.C. Escher

and

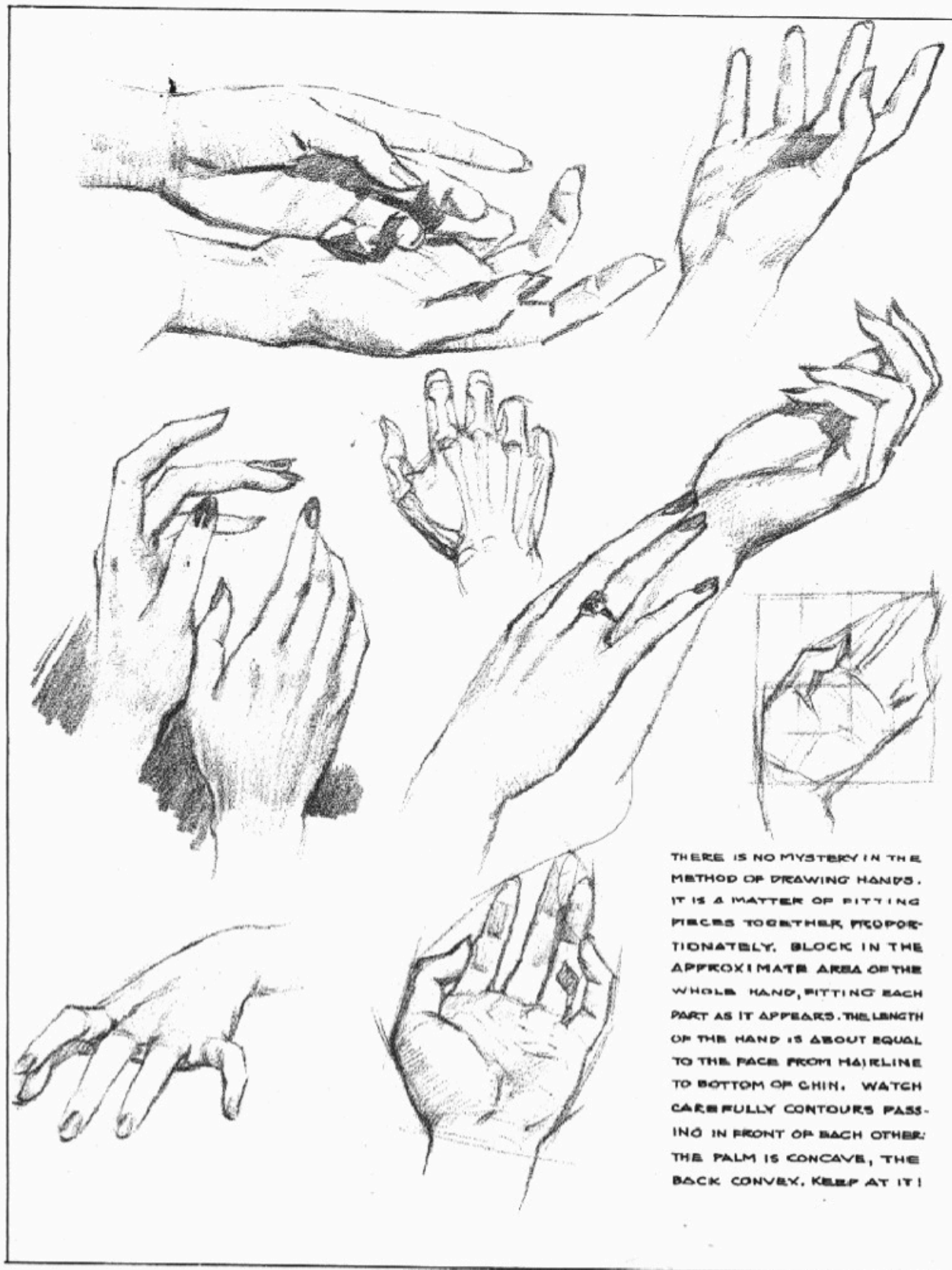
Albrecht Durer



HANDS



HANDS



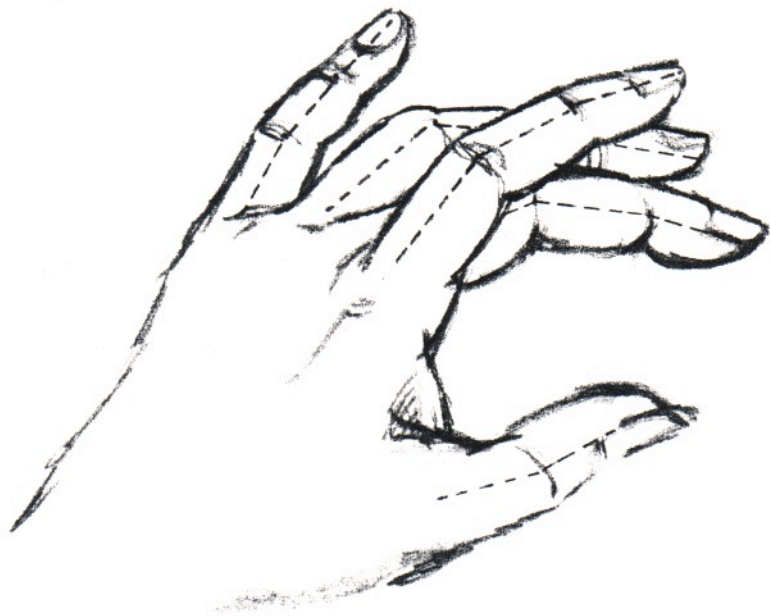
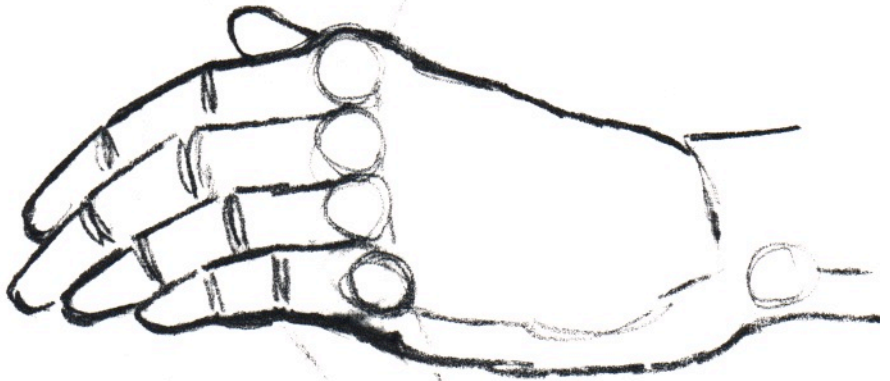
THERE IS NO MYSTERY IN THE METHOD OF DRAWING HANDS. IT IS A MATTER OF FITTING PIECES TOGETHER, PROPORTIONATELY. BLOCK IN THE APPROXIMATE AREA OF THE WHOLE HAND, FITTING EACH PART AS IT APPEARS. THE LENGTH OF THE HAND IS ABOUT EQUAL TO THE FACE FROM HAIRLINE TO BOTTOM OF CHIN. WATCH CAREFULLY CONTOURS PASSING IN FRONT OF EACH OTHER: THE PALM IS CONCAVE, THE BACK CONVEX. KEEP AT IT!

Construction of the Hand

The first section of the finger, starting at the knuckle, is the longest of the three finger parts. The second section, in the middle, is shorter than this, but longer than the third section, the fingertip.

As none of the fingers are of equal length, none of these divisions line up across the finger mass. However, these segments – the longer section from the knuckle to the next longest to the shortest – are still the structure of every finger.

Each section of each finger is always *straight, never curved*. Even when you see the most graceful willowy hand movements, the fingers may curve, but each segment (called a phalange) is straight. Draw these finger sections with straight lines on the top side, and with rounded fatty pads on the lower, the palm side. Think of each segment as a cylinder and you will get the perspective right.

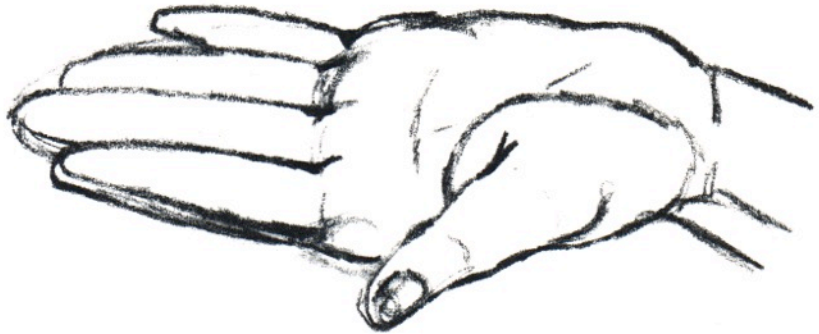


We have been studying the back of the hand. Now turn the hand over, palm up as in the illustrations at right. Looking at the fingers, you can see there are three parts to each finger — three fleshy pads, all quite *equal* on any one finger. Of course, since the fingers are not all the same length, the pads and the folds between them do not line up with each other across the hand.

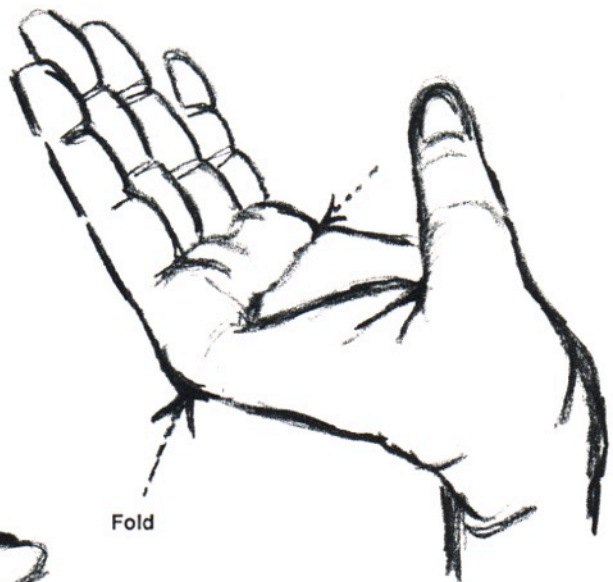
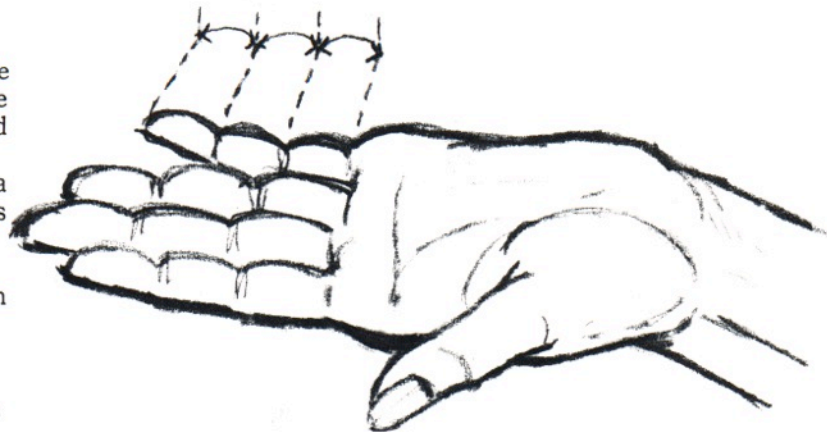
You'd think the folds on each finger would match the joint divisions on the back of the finger, wouldn't you? Study your own hand carefully.

There is the fold at the third joint, the fingertip joint. Then the second section and the second joint. Then the third section and the first joint. On the palm side, this is where the fingers end and the palm begins. Now fold your hand at the knuckles — you are in for a surprise — the fingers do *not* fold at this third joint where they join the hand; the knuckle joint on the back corresponds with a *fourth* fold across the palm of the hand! *This* is where the finger action starts!

Look at your hand from the side to prove that the third fold on the inside is only halfway between the second joint and the knuckle joint on the back. Curl your fingers halfway closed and see this amazing fact for yourself, first from the thumb side, then from the little finger side. There is no movement where the fingers *appear* to attach to the hand, but at the knuckles further down in the hand mass. Knowing this will help you to draw hands in natural positions.



Equal distance



Fold

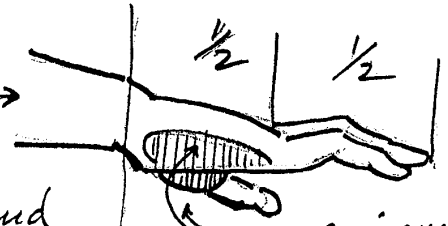


Fold

The Hand

Anatomical observations:

1. The center of the body of the hand is a step below the center of the body of the arm & the wrist

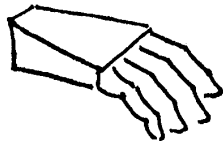
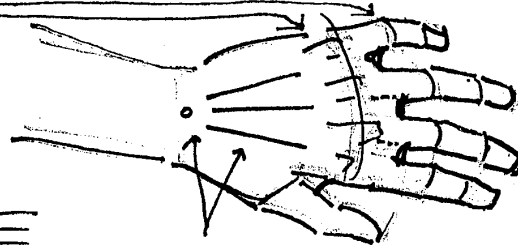


2. The palm is longer than the back of hand

3. The webbing between the fingers is $\frac{1}{2}$ -way between the first & second knuckles

eminence on thumb (3 muscles)
heel of hand (3 muscles)

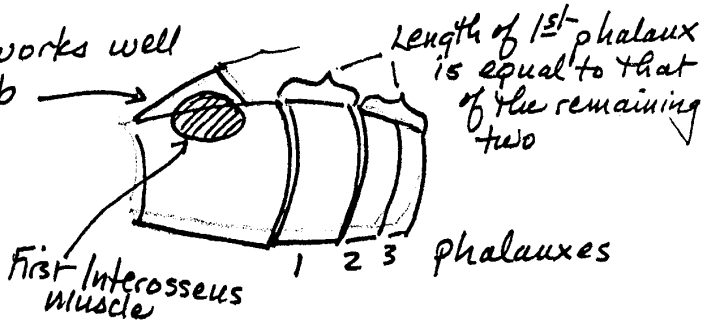
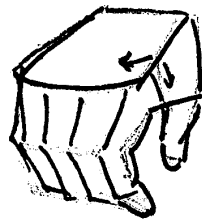
4. The palm is broader at the fingers than at the wrist



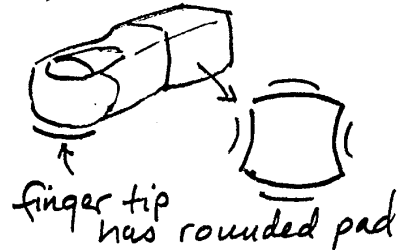
5. The fingers may seem to radiate from a point at the center of the back of the wrist

6. A triangular construction works well for the base of the thumb

7. The length of the fingers proceeds in diminishing thirds



8. The finger is more or less square in cross-section



9. The hand is about $\frac{2}{3}$ the length of the forearm

10. The first knuckle is located midpoint between the wrist & the fingertips (see illustration at 1, above)

Drawing the Hand

Observing the hand objectively, along with understanding its different functions, is key to drawing hands accurately.

ONE OF MY STUDENTS, who was hired to work at a major studio some years ago, told me that he got the job because he'd drawn the hands on his figures well. My student's ability to draw hands communicated that, among other things, he was willing to deal with the human figure in its entirety and that he didn't shy away from difficult things—traits that the studio appreciated and embraced.

It's very common to see a beginning student's figure drawing completely rendered except for the hands. Often the hands are only indicated,

and at other times they're left out of the drawing completely. The complexity of form and movement inherent in the human hand may confuse or intimidate some students and may be one of the reasons many beginning students lack the confidence to draw hands well.

Your Own Hands as Models

Although there are no specific rules for drawing the hand, there are many principles and observations that can help. I tell my students on a regular basis that drawing hands

effectively is largely a matter of teaching yourself and that the secret to drawing hands well lies within your own hands.

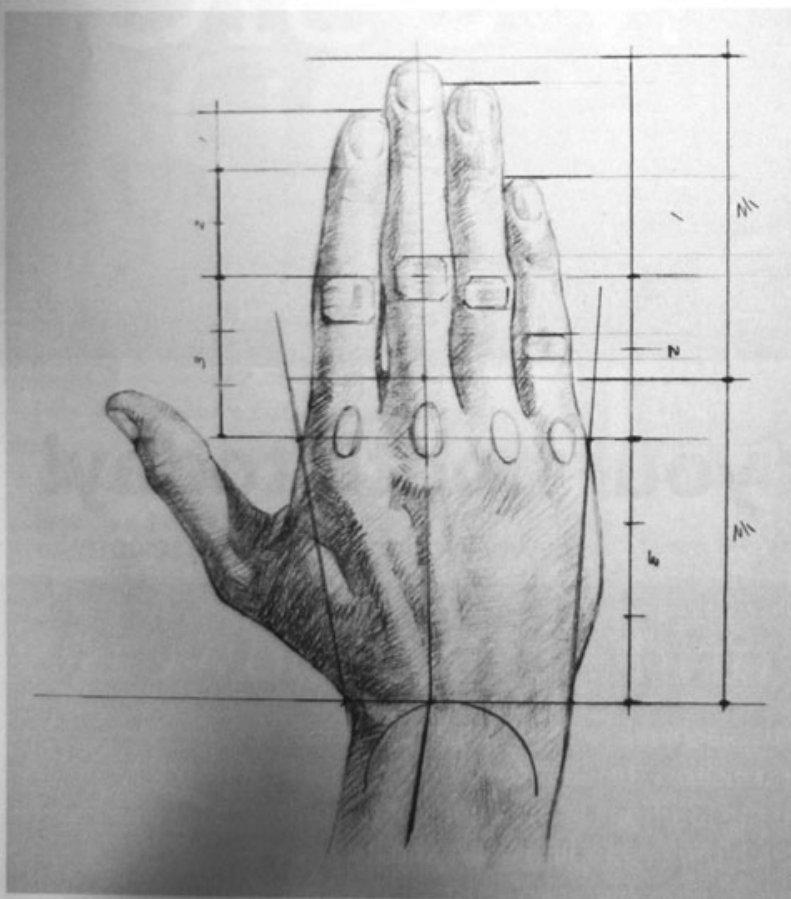
One advantage you have is that your hands are always available for observation and drawing. Your own hands are great models as they exist in space or as they're reflected in a mirror. They can be lit from various angles, moved into a variety of interesting positions, and they're capable of a wide range of expressive gestures. The hands are great agents for communication, second only to the human face.

Seeing Hands Objectively

In addition to the complexity of their structure, hands may be difficult to draw because of their subjective nature. As with the face, it's difficult to view the hand in a dispassionate way. It's important to draw what you see rather than what your brain tells you a hand looks like.

Reducing the hand to concrete terms—by considering separately its component parts and watching how the hand works—is a crucial step to seeing it objectively. All good drawing is a combination of what the artist sees and what he or she knows, so learning some basic facts about the hand is also helpful. Memorizing constructive principles (see *Changing Positions*, page 25), breaking down measurements of the various parts into comparative

Text continued on page 27



LEFT: Keen observation of how the hand works and an appreciation for its comparative measurements are essential to depicting the hand convincingly.

Text continued from page 24

lengths and shapes (see *Measuring the Hand*, page 26) and viewing the hand as a three-dimensional object (see *Geometric Planes and Forms*, below) can greatly help with the accuracy and speed of execution.

Using the Block-in Method

The envelope block-in method, or what I call “mapping,” is another important process to consider. This method entails first drawing an envelope of sorts, made of straight lines, around the object or person to be drawn. This envelope touches the outermost edges of the object or person. Then as you refine the contour, using smaller and smaller lines, you also relate one landmark to other landmarks and compare relative angles and lengths. I measure comparative lengths and angles by using a pencil, held up with a straight

arm so as to maintain a consistent distance from the subject. This discipline of measuring is a transferable drawing skill, applicable on any and every occasion. It can be used painstakingly in the actual build-up of a drawing or in a more summary fashion. It's also helpful in checking a completed drawing done more quickly. (See the Web Extra at the bottom right of the page.)

Generalities and Specifics

Although the individual parts of the hand are generally consistent in their relative dimensions and proportions from one person to another, their actual size and character can vary greatly depending on age and gender. Generally, a male hand has greater angularity; its bone projections and surface textures are more prominent. The hand of a female is typically much finer and more delicate in its

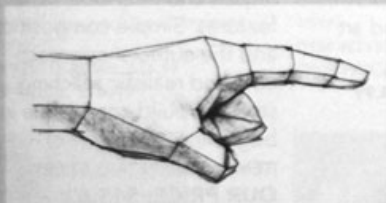
bone structure, with significantly smaller joints. The fingers are usually narrower and taper more toward the nails, the joints aren't so accentuated, and the nails tend to be more oval-shaped and longer. Knowing the average dimension of hands relative to age and gender is important, but always look for the idiosyncratic features of each individual model.

Doing Your Research

Remember, as important as hands are, they're only part of the human figure—and only fully expressive when related to it. Look at the drawings of master draftsmen, whether contemporary or historical, and determine what you can learn from their drawings and observations. Master draftsmen often had a strong idea of the information they were seeking and the way they wanted to communicate it.

When you've learned the proportion, construction and movement of the human hand, you'll find the hand easier to draw and to use as a vehicle for communication and expression in your art. ■

Geometric Planes and Forms



One approach to drawing the hand is to begin with geometric shapes or to envision each of the parts of the hand as a three-dimensional shape, as shown here. The geometric drawing (top left) for this hand (middle left) represents the simple surfaces or planes of the hand. Most planes meet at a definite angle, and every three-dimensional object has a front, back, top, bottom and sides.



Notice the various arcs between the different planes of the hand (bottom left). Rendering these arcs correctly is especially important in communicating the directions of the multiple planes that define a single hand position.



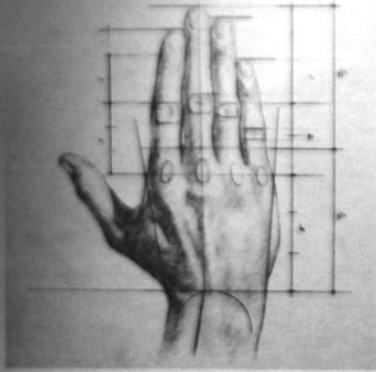
ROBERT T. BARRETT is a drawing instructor at Brigham Young University and an illustrator. He lives in Provo, Utah, and his work is represented by Marshall-LeKae Gallery in Scottsdale, Arizona. He's author of the book *Life Drawing: How to Portray the Figure with Accuracy and Expression*. Find the book at www.northlightshop.com or call 855/842-5267. See Barrett's website at www.roberttbarrett.com.



For a link to Barrett's previous article on mapping or using the envelope block-in method, go to www.artistsnetwork.com/tamonlinetoc.

Measuring the Hand

The human hand is a marvel of design. When drawing the hand, there are some comparative measurements and observations you can consider:



- The length of the hand almost equals the length of the face from hairline to chin.
- The halfway point between the wrist and the tip of the middle finger is just above the large knuckle at the base of the finger.
- The width of the palm is approximately the same as its height.
- Each finger's length is different in relation to the height of the palm.
- The lengths of the individual finger segments reduce progressively by one-third as they taper toward the tips.
- The longest finger is almost the same length as the distance from the wrist to the third knuckle.
- Distances between the knuckles on the back of the hand are greater than between the creases on the inside of the hand.
- The thumb almost reaches to the second joint of the index finger.
- The major joints of the fingers (at the base of the fingers) are oval-shaped.
- The second joints of the fingers are rectangular in shape.
- The fingers tend to narrow slightly between the joints.
- The comparative length of the ring finger varies from person to person.



drawing by Roberto Ferri



LEONARDO da Vinci, Studio di mani, 1474, Royal Library, Windsor

References:

Page 1 M.C. Escher and Albrecht Durer

Page 2 Andreas Vesalius and Hand_Tutorial_by_MasterSS

Page 3-4, *Figure Drawing* by Andrew Loomis page 184-185

Pages 5-6, *How to Paint Living Portraits* by Roberta Clark pages 50-51

Page 7 - Handout from Class with Judith Carducci at Portrait Society of America Conference in Chicago, 2000

Page 8-10 *Drawing the Hand* by Robert T. Barrett, *The Artists Magazine*, July/August 2012