

CANVAS & MIND



STRUCTURED OBSERVATIONAL DRAWING

8 WEEK PROGRAM | HANNAH COOK

**“Assess without compromise;
preserving the depth of traditional drawing.”**



Advanced Program

Part of the Canvas & Mind Observational Drawing Programme

Building on the perceptual foundations introduced in the earlier sessions, this course explores the structural principles that organise form in drawing. Each week introduces a focused study designed to deepen observation, strengthen structural thinking, and refine the relationship between line, value, and form.

Topics explored include:

delayed curves and structural line
structural measurement
shadow discipline
plane relationships
tonal organisation
integration of drawing principles

The emphasis remains on learning to **observe structure and visual relationships clearly**, allowing drawings to develop through careful analysis rather than imitation.

Student Name: _____

Date: _____

Advanced Programme

Canvas & Mind

Canvas & Mind is a structured perceptual approach to learning drawing, designed to reduce overwhelm and support sustained engagement. It builds on traditional drawing practice while introducing structure, pacing, and sequence, allowing learners to engage more clearly with what they see.

This approach does not replace traditional methods. Instead, it supports a different way into them, one that focuses on perception, organisation, and understanding.

The focus is not on producing finished drawings, but on developing a more stable and responsive way of seeing.

Throughout this stage, you will move through a series of structured steps that prioritise observation, clarity, and decision-making over detail or completion.

Drawing is approached as a process of careful looking, comparison, and gradual refinement.

A common challenge in observational drawing is copying what is seen without fully understanding it.

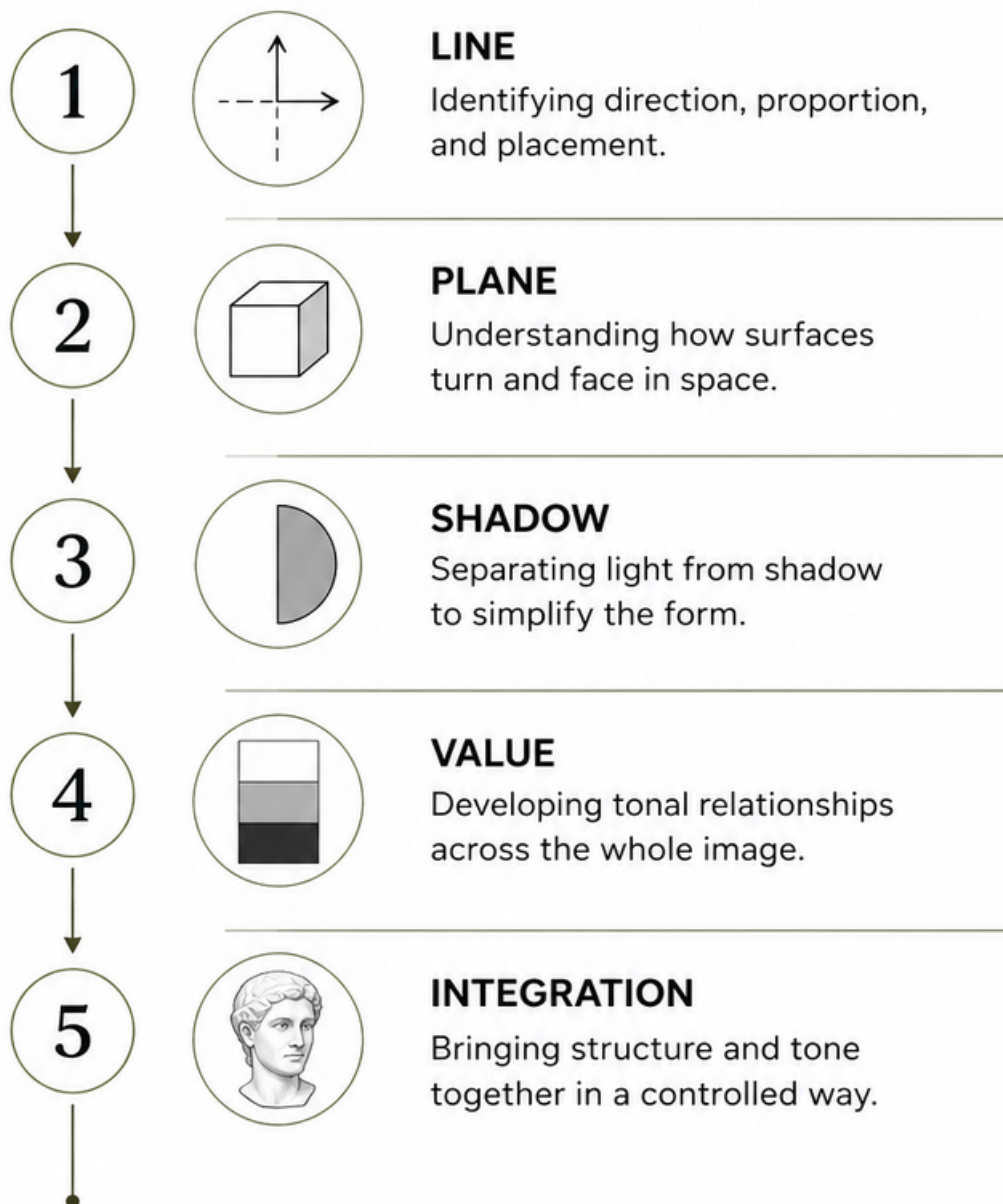
This programme supports a shift from copying towards seeing, helping you to understand form, light, and spatial relationships more clearly.

Over time, this develops greater confidence, control, and the ability to sustain practice.

***There is no requirement to complete any drawing.
You will continue to work slowly.***

STAGES OF SEEING

Drawing develops through a sequence of perceptual stages. Each stage builds on the previous one, allowing understanding to develop gradually and clearly.



Each stage supports the next.

Clarity at each step provides a stable foundation for increasingly complex observation and controlled refinement.

Core Principles

This programme is built on three core principles: structure, pace, and tone. These are introduced gradually and revisited throughout, helping the drawing process remain clear and manageable.

Structure

Structure organises what you are seeing.

It focuses on placement, proportion, and direction, allowing forms to sit correctly on the page.

A clear structure supports everything that follows.

Pace

Pace relates to how you work.

Some areas may remain quiet and simple, while others develop more actively.

Not every part of the drawing requires the same level of attention.

Working at a steady, controlled pace helps maintain clarity and prevents overworking.

Tone

Tone describes how light and shadow define form.

Rather than covering the page evenly with tone, tone is used carefully to support what is observed.

Allowing some areas to remain light helps the drawing remain clear and readable

These principles work together.

Structure organises the drawing, pace controls it, and tone describes it. Each stage of the programme focuses on one principle at a time, allowing understanding to develop gradually.

Advanced Week 1 | Structural Line & Delayed Curves

Step 1:

This stage reflects principles associated with Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, where line is used to analyse structure rather than describe surface detail. The focus is on structural line and measured observation. Ingres' drawings use line as a tool for analysis, not decoration.

Observe:

Allow your eye to move slowly across the whole form.

Notice:

- the overall tilt of the head
- the angle of the forehead and nose
- how the jaw turns toward the neck
- where the neck emerges beneath the jaw
- how the shoulder slopes away from the head



Try to see the head not as separate features, but as a **single structure made of connected angles**.

Step 2: Exercise

Trace directly over the reference image to identify the major structural angles.

Focus on:

- the outer silhouette
- the forehead angle
- the nose direction
- the jaw shape
- the neck
- the hair as one unified mass

Ignore internal details and avoid shading.

The aim is to understand the structural relationships before refinement.



Step 3: Reconstruct the Drawing

Using the central vertical axis and horizontal reference line, redraw the simplified block-in on a blank page. Keep your lines light and straightforward.

Step 4: Develop the Linear Drawing

Gradually refine the structure. Introduce curves only after the major proportions and angles are stable.

Avoid shading at this stage. Curves should only appear after angles are established.

Perceptual Guidance

- Slow your eye down.
- Look for the largest directional lines
- Ignore curves until the structure is stable.
- Compare angles rather than drawing from memory.
- Check proportions frequently before committing.

Optional Tool: Measuring Stick

A simple stick is included to help you explore measurement.

You can use it to:

- compare angles
- check proportions
- observe relationships between parts of the form

Hold it at arm's length and keep your position consistent. This is optional, if it feels distracting, you can continue without it.



If you feel stuck:

Return to observation.
Begin with the largest
shapes.

You can pause and return at any point.

Step 4: Reflection

Look at your drawing as structure, not features.

When you finish the drawing, **pause and observe** your work.

Consider:

- Did establishing the axis help **stabilise the proportions?**
- Which angles clarified the structure of the head?
- Did delaying curves change the way you observed the form?
- Where did the drawing feel most structurally clear?

You may find 1.5 “Why Structure Precedes Refinement” audio clip interesting.

Drawing develops through careful observation and gradual correction.

Take a moment to notice **how analysing structure first changes the way the image is understood.**

There is no requirement to complete the drawing.

Research Focus:

This stage strengthens structural perception through directional line, supporting spatial organisation and measured observation.

Advanced Week 2 | Plane Logic & Value Hierarchy

Step 1: This stage reflects teaching traditions associated with Léon Bonnat, where shadow is understood as a unified visual mass. This study introduces the idea that value emerges from structure. Before tone can describe form, the planes of the head must be understood. Rather than seeing the head as a face, observe it as a series of connected directional surfaces.

Understanding the relationships between these planes helps organise tone clearly.

Each plane either:

- faces the light
- turns gradually away
- enters shadow

Observe:

- the main planes of the head
- where surfaces change direction
- how light moves across each plane

Notice:

- where the forehead changes direction
- how the cheek turns toward the side plane
- where the jaw shifts downward
- how the eye socket sits within shadow

Try to see the head as **connected surfaces**, rather than individual features.



Step 2: Exercise

Keep the system simple. Avoid small value changes at first. The aim is to establish, clear value hierarchy before refinement. Only once **separation is clear should smaller tonal variations begin to appear**. Shadow should be treated as one unified family.

Focus on:

- Identify light-facing planes
- Locate the turning planes
- light and shadow family



Perceptual Guidance

- Think in planes, not features.
- Ask: is this surface facing light, turning, or in shadow?
- Keep transitions simple — avoid soft blending too early.
- Separate planes clearly before refining.
- Use tone to describe the direction of surfaces, not detail.



If this feels unclear

Look for where the
surface changes
direction.

You can pause and return at any point.

Step 3: Reflection

When the drawing is complete, **pause and observe.**

Concider:

- how **planes organise the form of the head**
- how value clarifies the direction of surfaces
- how hierarchy strengthens the drawing

Structure comes before refinement.

You do not need to complete the drawing.

Research Focus:

This stage develops planar perception, supporting the organisation of form before tonal refinement and reducing perceptual fragmentation.

Advanced Week 3 | Shadow Discipline

Step 1: This stage draws on principles from the Charles Bargue course, where structured repetition supports perceptual accuracy. In the previous stage, you learned to organise form through planes. Here, the focus shifts to controlling value by containing shadow. At this stage, the reference and outline are not exact, as the drawing has been blocked out using lines and planes rather than refined curves or detail.

In traditional atelier training, drawings begin by separating light and shadow clearly. These are treated as two distinct families. Shadow is not blended or modelled, but observed as a single visual mass.

Maintaining this separation strengthens the structure of the drawing and establishes clarity before more subtle tonal relationships are introduced.

Observe:

- where the shadow begins
- where the shadow ends
- how the shadow edge follows the planes of the head
- where the darkest areas sit within the shadow mass

Notice:

- light and shadow as two separate families
- shadow as one connected shape
- no blending or modelling

Try to see the shadow not as shading, but as a single connected shape.

Cours de dessin,
emphasising light–shadow
separation as structured
visual masses.



Step 2: Exercise

Using the structural guide **focus on:**

- Identify the **shadow boundary on the reference.**
- Outline the shadow shape carefully on the drawing.
- Once the boundary is understood, **fill the shadow as one even tone.**

Light areas should remain **completely untouched.** The goal is **clear separation between light and shadow.**

Avoid:

blending
gradients
mid-tones



Perceptual Guidance

- Squint to simplify the image.
- Try to see only two values: light and shadow.
- Do not look for detail inside the shadow.
- Focus on the outer boundary of the shadow shape.
- Keep the shadow as one unified mass.



If you feel stuck:

Return to observation.
Begin with the largest
shapes.

You can pause and return at any point.

Step 3: Reflection

After the exercise, **pause and observe** your drawing.

Consider:

- Is the shadow clearly separated from the light?
- Are the shadow edges deliberate and controlled?
- Did working with a single tone change the way you observed the form?

Strong drawings begin with **clarity and restraint**.

Shadow containment builds the control needed for later tonal work.

There is no requirement to complete the drawing.

Research Focus:

This stage develops perceptual organisation through the separation of light and shadow, supporting value control and reducing premature detail.

Advanced Week 4 | Structural Measurement Through Drapery

Step 1: This stage reflects principles associated with Albrecht Dürer, where form is understood through underlying structural relationships. Rather than relying on appearance, learners analyse proportion, alignment, and the internal logic of form. In the previous stage, you learned to control light and shadow.

Here, the focus shifts to understanding the forces that organise drapery.

Although cloth appears soft and flowing,
every fold follows physical conditions:

- suspension
- gravity
- compression
- release

The aim is to observe **how these forces organise the folds.**

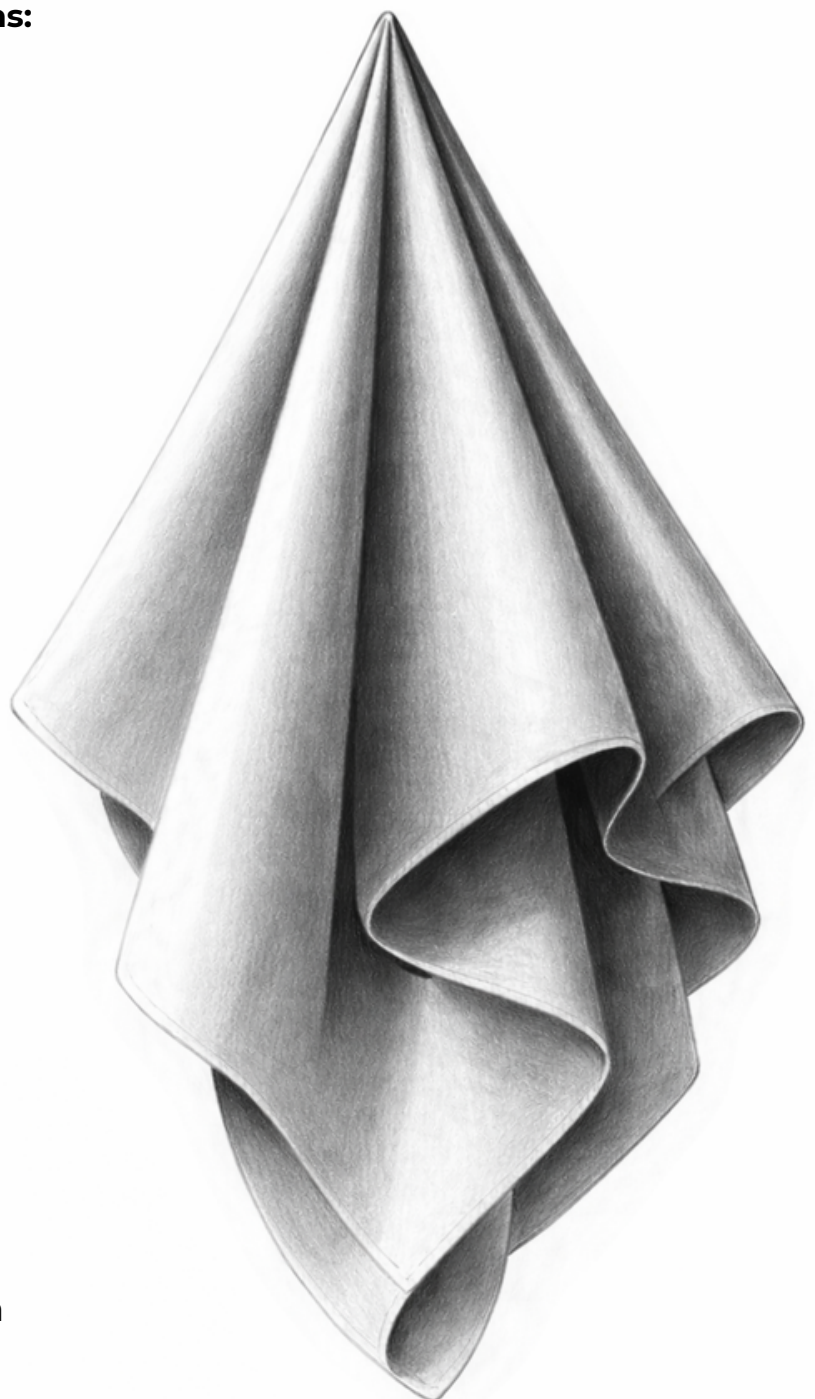
Observe:

- where the fabric is suspended
- how the folds descend from this point
- where the folds compress tightly
- where the cloth opens and widens

Notice:

- the direction of the main folds
- how the cloth gathers and releases
- how movement is shaped by structure

Try to see the drapery as directional movement rather than a collection of separate shapes.



Step 2: Exercise

Use the faint guide to **construct the primary folds**. Work slowly, focusing on the **largest structural shifts first**. As introduced in Foundation, marks are left visible to organise tone clearly. Avoid blending at this stage.

Focus on:

- the primary direction of the cloth
- the steepest folds
- where one fold overlaps another
- straight segments to establish



Perceptual Guidance

- Follow the direction of the fold, not the outline
- Identify the main flow before smaller folds
- Avoid copying shapes - study the drawing to understand the forces behind it.



If you feel stuck:

Return to observation.
Begin with the largest
shapes.

You can pause and return at any point.

Step: 3 Reflection

When you finish the exercise, **pause and observe** your drawing.

Consider:

- how folds follow gravity
- how compression sharpens angles
- how structure supports complex forms

Drapery helps develop the ability to organise **irregular shapes through structure**.

There is no requirement to complete the drawing.

Research Focus:

This stage introduces structural analysis through physical forces, supporting proportional understanding and the organisation of complex form.

Advanced Week 5 | Tonal Relationships & Light Perception

Step 1: This stage focuses on understanding how tone describes form. Drawing from the teaching approach of Kimon Nicolaïdes, learners are encouraged to observe tonal relationships rather than rely on outline. By working gradually between light, mid-tones, and shadow, the drawing develops structure and volume through careful observation.

This process builds sensitivity to tonal relationships before more defined structure is introduced.

Observe:

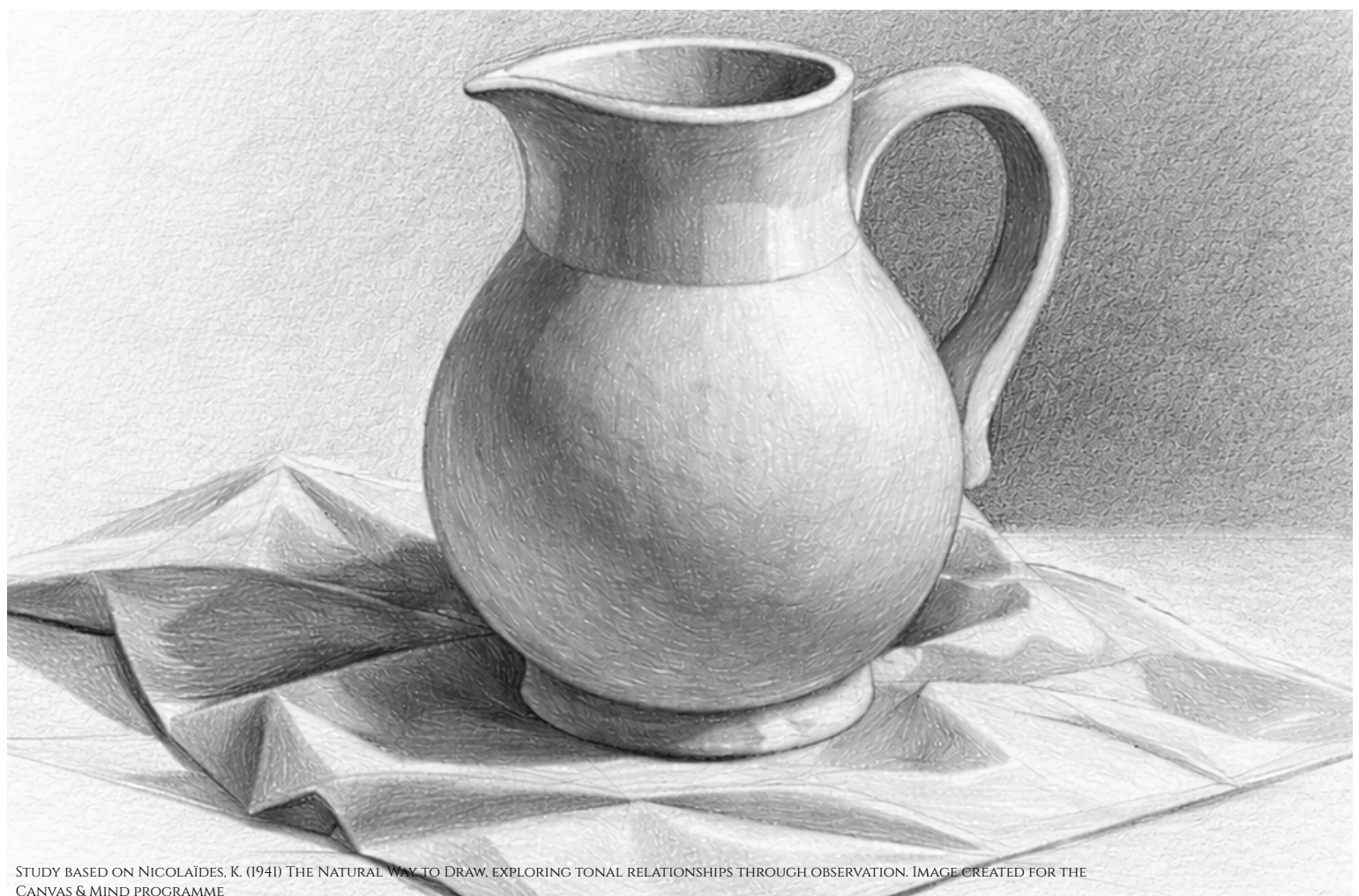
Take a moment to look quietly at the image.

Allow your eyes to move slowly across the surface of the jug and the folds of the fabric.

Try to see the image as connected areas of light and dark, not separate objects.

Notice:

- where the light appears strongest
- where the form begins to turn away from the light
- where shadows deepen
- how the folds of the drapery create gentle tonal shifts



Step 2: Tonal Relationships

Sometimes an area appears lighter because of the tone beside it.
The surface does not always need to remain white to appear bright.
Often the contrast between light and shadow allows the form to become clearer.

Drawing develops through observation rather than speed. As introduced in Foundation, tone is organised through clear, visible marks before any softening begins.

Exercise:

Do not shade areas in isolation — always relate one tone to another.
Move slowly between observation and drawing.
Build tone by comparing each area to what sits beside it.

- Moving between looking and comparing, then drawing.
- Allowing the eye to guide the hand.



Perceptual Guidance

- Squint often to compare values.
- Look for the darkest dark and lightest light first.
- Compare tones relative to each other, not in isolation.
- Build tones gradually through constant comparison.
- Focus on relationships, not perfection.



If you feel stuck:

Return to observation.
Begin with the largest
shapes.

You can pause and return at any point.

Step 3: Reflection

When you finish the exercise, **pause and observe** your drawing.

Consider:

- Where did **tone describe the form most clearly?**
- Where did comparing one tone to another change what you saw?
- Which areas appeared lighter because of surrounding shadows?
- Did slowing down change the way you observed the image?

Drawing is a gradual **process of learning to see through comparison.**

Research Focus:

This stage develops sensitivity to tonal relationships, supporting the perception of form through connected areas of light and shadow.

There is no requirement to complete the drawing.

Advanced Week 6 | Integration & Controlled Refinement

Step 1: This stage reflects atelier practices associated with Jean-Léon Gérôme, where cast drawing is used to bring structure, proportion, and tonal observation into a unified process. The aim is not to produce a finished drawing, but to recognise how these elements work together to describe form.

This final study allows these principles to operate together within a single drawing.

Before drawing, spend a moment observing the cast ear carefully.

Allow your eye to move slowly across the surface of the form.

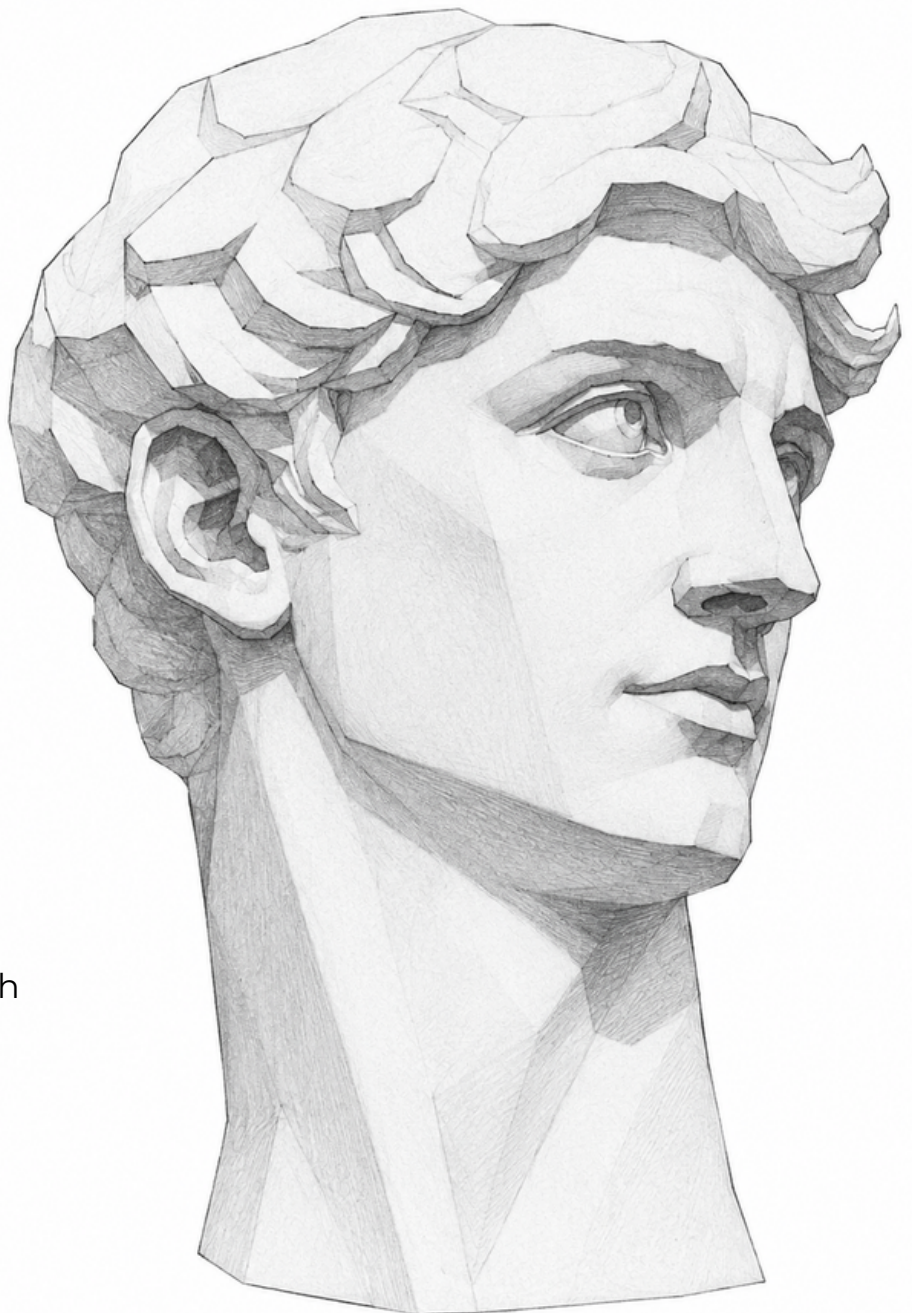
Observe:

- how the form moves forward
- where it recedes
- where shadow begins
- how the planes change direction

Notice:

- structure before detail
- how form is built through planes
- how light and shadow support the structure

Try to see structure first, rather than as small details.



Step 2: Warm-Up Integration Study

Work directly onto the faint guide. Use the guide to support structure. Keep your attention on light and shadow relationships.

Try to see the image as relationships of light and dark, rather than separate objects. Use the guide to support structure. Keep your attention on light and shadow relationships.

Begin with the largest shapes

Look at the plaster cast and identify:

- where the **light appears strongest**
- where the form begins to turn away from the light
- where shadow deepens inside the ear

These areas can be simplified into three tonal groups.

Step 3:

Build the values slowly

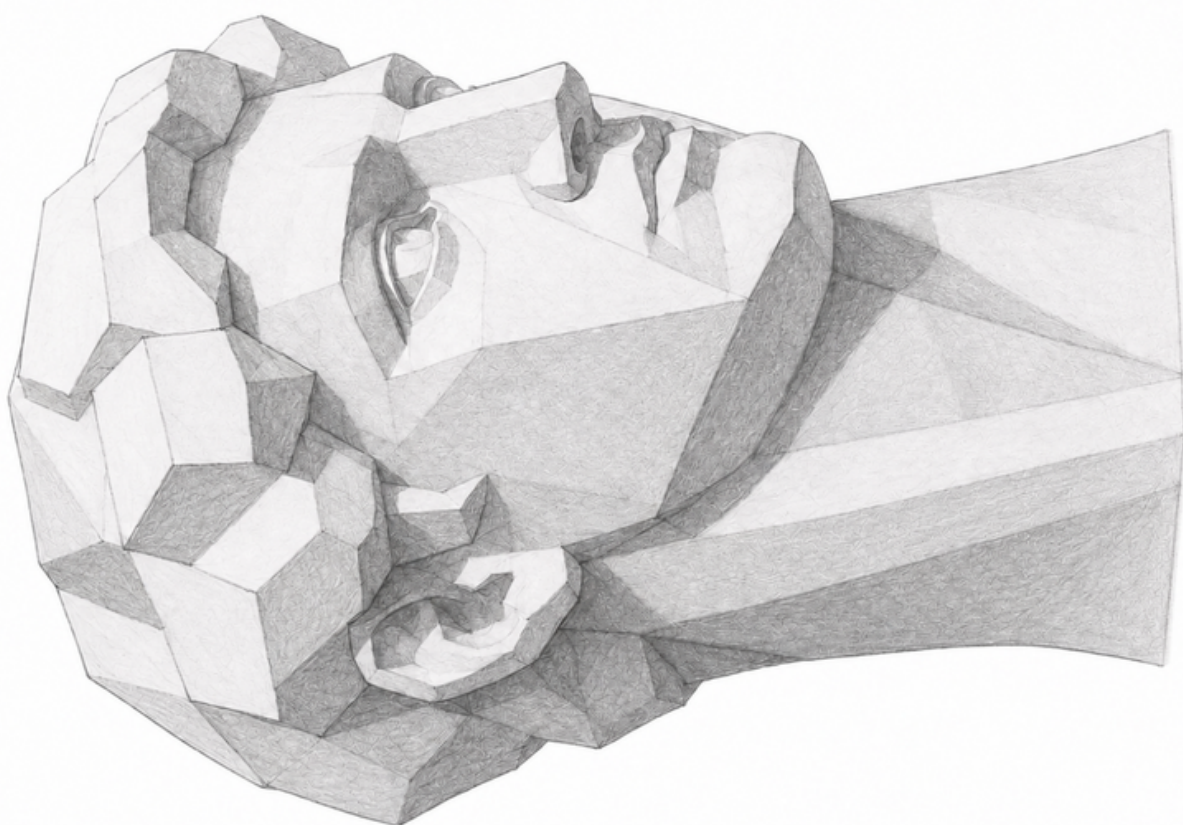
Using the guide as support:

- establish the light areas
- place the mid-tones where the form begins to turn
- deepen the shadow areas where the surface recedes

Allow tone to describe the volume, do not add tone without a clear reason.

Compare each area before adjusting, do not refine automatically.





Main Exercise | Full Head Integration Study

Step 4: Apply the same principles to a larger plaster cast study.

Using the David head reference, work through the same stages:

1. Establish the major structural lines.
2. Transfer the largest proportional relationships.
3. Organise the drawing into simple light and shadow groups.
4. Build tone gradually.
5. Refine only where the structure is stable.

The purpose is not to complete a polished drawing, but to observe how structural line, proportion, and value operate together within a more complex form.

Research Note

This study demonstrates transfer of learning. Structural and perceptual principles developed through focused exercises are applied here to a more complex subject.

Perceptual Guidance

- Step back regularly from your drawing.
- Ask what is working together, not what is wrong.
- Avoid overworking small areas.
- Balance structure, tone, and proportion.
- Stop before the drawing becomes over-refined.
- **Refine only what strengthens the whole drawing.**



If this feels unclear

Return to one simple question:

Where does the light stop?

Let everything else remain
quiet.

You can pause and return at any point.

Step 5: Reflection

Take a moment to pause and observe your drawing in relation to the reference.

Consider:

- What did you choose not to develop further?
- how the **structural lines relate to the light**
- where the deepest shadow sits
- how the planes describe the volume of the ear

The purpose of this exercise is not copying, but **understanding how structure and tone work together to organise form**. Not everything needs to be finished, only what strengthens the whole. This stage integrates perceptual and structural skills, supporting controlled refinement and cohesive visual decision-making.

Closing Reflection | Learning to see

You have now completed the Advanced studies.

Closing Reflection

As you reach the end of this programme, take a moment to reflect on how your way of seeing may have changed.

Over these six weeks, the aim has not been to produce perfect drawings, but to develop a clearer and more structured way of observing.

You have practised simplifying complex forms into directional lines, proportional relationships, planes, and organised light and shadow.

As each stage built upon the last, these individual skills began to work together as one integrated process.

This approach is rooted in traditional observational training associated with artists such as Charles Bargue and Jean-Léon Gérôme, where careful observation and repetition were used to strengthen perceptual accuracy and visual organisation.

The purpose of this programme has not been to teach you to copy mechanically, but to help you build a more stable and deliberate relationship with observation.

You **have learned to:**

- recognise proportion more clearly
- simplify complex forms into manageable parts
- identify where light ends and shadow begins
- organise tone with greater control
- refine only what strengthens the whole

Whether your drawings feel complete or unfinished is less important than the perceptual skills you have developed.

If you now observe with greater patience, organise what you see more clearly, and approach drawing with more confidence and control, then the programme has served its purpose.

Drawing is a practice of sustained attention.

It asks you to slow down, observe carefully, and make decisions with intention.

These are skills that extend beyond drawing itself.

Thank you for taking part in Canvas & Mind.

Your experience and reflections contribute to the continued development of this research and to a broader understanding of how structured observational drawing may support perception, confidence, and wellbeing.

Final Thought

Clarity develops through observation. Structure creates confidence.
Progress comes through practice.

References

This programme is informed by established drawing traditions and research into perception, attention, and learning.

Drawing Practice and Pedagogy

- Cours de dessin — foundational academic drawing plates emphasising proportion, structure, and value organisation.
- Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres — studies demonstrating structural clarity and disciplined line.
- Léon Bonnat — academic cast and figure studies.
- Four Books on Measurement — principles of proportion and geometric construction.
- The Natural Way to Draw — observational exercises focused on perception and embodied seeing.
- Giorgio Morandi — tonal simplification and subtle value relationships.

Psychology and Perception

- The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception — perception as direct interaction with environmental information.
- Thinking, Fast and Slow — attention, judgment, and cognitive processing.
- Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience — focused engagement and immersive learning.

Image References

Historical and study images used throughout this programme are drawn from established drawing traditions, including:

- Bargue drawing course plates
- Academic studies after Ingres, Bonnat, and Dürer
- Tonal studies informed by Morandi
- Observational exercises influenced by Nicolaïdes

Some instructional images have been created specifically for this programme, including AI-assisted study images used as neutral educational references.

Closing Statement

Canvas & Mind does not replace these traditions, but restructures their perceptual foundations into an accessible contemporary learning framework.