

From the Montreal Gazette Archive: Here's looking at you

BY JOHN POHL, THE GAZETTE NOVEMBER 7, 2012



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Photograph by Dario Ayala - The Gazette

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In every art studio, there is always someone who is willing to do what would make most people blush. That person is the model, the man or woman who is there to disrobe casually in front of a group of strangers for a couple of hours, hold a series of poses without a word of complaint about the inevitable chill that sets in or the hard edges of the furniture that make the joints stiffen as the body is held relaxed, but motionless.

Live models are an essential part of an artist's education, and there is a steady demand for them. There's also a steady supply of people offering up their bodies. Samantha Youssef, who hires for drawing sessions at Studio Technique on Ste. Catherine St. W., gets 30 emails a week expressing interest in modelling, but on average, only one of the applications will be taken seriously. Most of the ignored applications are from young people who have a friend who models and think it's an easy way to make money, but have sought no training and don't offer much information about themselves, like references and CVs, Youssef said.

"Some experienced models recommend people and I might try them because I respect the model," she said. "I like people with a performance background and stage presence because they have fluidity to their poses and are athletic."

Modelling is not an easy job. Short poses are as challenging as long ones because they are more dynamic - the model might balance on one leg for 60 seconds, with the other leg and both arms outstretched.

And since they work in the nude, not moving, models get cold, so an electric heater is provided that the teacher or monitor will help the model set up. Models are given privacy to change out of their street clothes into the loose robe they will wear to their place in front of the students, but there's no dressing room - they change in a closet, bathroom or behind a curtain. And they must check the safety of the set-up: it's usually a chair on a platform, with a spotlight or two nearby.

During a session, which usually starts with poses of one and two minutes, the model should be able to do 30 or more poses without any repetitions, said Dominique Gaillard, an artist and model who co-ordinates life drawing studios at the Centre Culturel Georges-Vanier.

It takes time to build a repertoire of poses, and strength to hold them, especially the long ones, said Karsten Kroll, a modern dancer who has been an artists' model for 17 years. "You don't just take off your clothes and sit there," he said.

So where do models learn how to do more than just sit in front of a class, nude?

Antonio Cerdan, a film animator, was drawing in a studio session run by Gaillard when she approached him. She helped him prepare for what turned out to be one three-hour pose (with breaks, mercifully), urging him to relax and advising him to be conscious that everyone in the room must have an interesting view of his

body and be able to see his face.

"I look for people with stamina, presence, dedication and seriousness," she said. "I direct prospective models to look at art books with 19th-century academic drawing as a source of pleasant positions.

Cerdan, who keeps in shape with yoga, swimming and cycling, does dynamic poses that are "kind of like yoga," he said. "You must hold poses without tension."

The people who can best do that and know how to present their bodies to an audience are dancers, yoga teachers, actors and circus performers, Youssef said.

Cerdan said that knowing how to draw helps. "I imagine I'm drawing myself; it helps to keep the pose." He also notes, and learns from, the complaints he hears when he is one of the artists. Typical complaints are that the model lacks energy or doesn't vary the poses.

Marie-Lyne Veilleux, a dancer and model for 23 years, takes her cues from the soundtrack in the studio: "Music tells me what to do," she said. "You have to feel a movement that makes sense."

Veilleux co-ordinates a Sunday open model studio at UQAM and trains models, including Esteban Dix-Parada, who got about five hours of training from **Veilleux** that started by watching another model at work.

"I was taught to make a pose that is attractive in all directions; sides, back and front so everyone in the studio can find something of interest, no matter where they sit," he said. "You must be an artist with your body."

But you must know your body's limitations, **Veilleux** said. She approves of Youssef's attitude: let the models choose their poses. "They know their bodies," Youssef said, "and their personality comes through in their poses."

Most models have learned their job by doing it, with advice and direction from experienced models, but Galerie Synesthésie/Syn Studio on Ste. Catherine St. E. offers a training course for \$35.

Anthony Walsh, the gallery's director, said the process starts by attending - and, preferably, sketching at - a Saturday afternoon session, after which a professional model gives them about 10 short, dynamic poses, plus a few longer ones, to practise at home. A two-hour session follows at the studio, during which the teacher tells the prospective models to imagine what their pose looks like from all angles, and to be able to create many interesting poses. "Sometimes they do gestures (from 30 seconds to 2 minutes) with no breaks in between, so they must think fast or have a large repertoire stored in their minds," he said.

Models must know how long they can stay perfectly still. "Models in great physical shape can hold challenging poses without moving," he said.

In the training session, the prospective models demonstrate the poses they practised. The first time the teacher helps them do the poses correctly, but the second set of poses is a test, which only half the prospects pass. Students who fail can't stay still, ignore part of the room and fail to make interesting poses, Walsh said. The final test is to pose at half-pay for the Saturday session. Those who do well join the gallery/studio's roster of models.

Models must apply to numerous studios, because studio directors don't want to hire the same models more than once or twice during a season. They earn between \$20 and \$30 an hour, but the average is \$25 and some are paid as little as \$18, Gaillard said.

"I wish they would pay better," Cerdan said. Even so, "modelling is a pleasure."

Sometimes, though, a situation makes a model uncomfortable. The teacher introduces the model and disappears, offering the model no guidance on what poses are expected.

Or the students are young and new to seeing a nude model. "Once in a while, you go to a new class - maybe it's mostly girls. I can be shy," Kroll said. "It's like the nervousness before going on stage," he said.

Models see their series of poses as a choreography that expresses their creativity. They feel good about

their bodies and are comfortable posing nude for strangers.

It's not exhibitionism for models, nor is it voyeurism for artists, Galliard and **Veilleux** said. For artists, it's the best way to learn, Gaillard said. "Once you can draw a model, you can draw anything."

Most open model studios charge \$10 for a session that lasts 2½ to three hours. They are open to everyone from professional artists to beginners, but no instruction is provided, so it might be best to first take a figure drawing class at a community centre or studio. Here are a few of the studios that offer drop-in drawing sessions with a model. More can be found on the Internet or by notices on bulletin boards at art supply stores.

UQAM, Judith-Jasmin pavilion at the corner of St. Denis St. and de Maisonneuve Blvd. Seventh floor, room J-7130, Sundays, 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Email: mlveilleux@yahoo.fr.

Studio Technique, Suite 222, 372 Ste. Catherine St. W. Tuesdays, 6-9 p.m. and Saturdays, 2-5 p.m. Details: www.studiotechnique-montreal.com.

Centre Culturel Georges-Vanier, 2450 Workman St. Tuesdays, 1-4 p.m. Occasional drawing marathons (a full day) of drawing from the model. Long and short poses, nude and costumed. Details: www.ccgv.ca.

Galerie Synesthésie/Syn Studio, 94 Ste. Catherine St. E., Suite 7. Social figure drawing workshop with wine and buffet, Saturdays, 4-7 p.m. (\$20). Details: www.galeriesynesthesie.com.

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