



# Illustration

## Using Reference Photos

(Use reference photos as a guide not a crutch.)



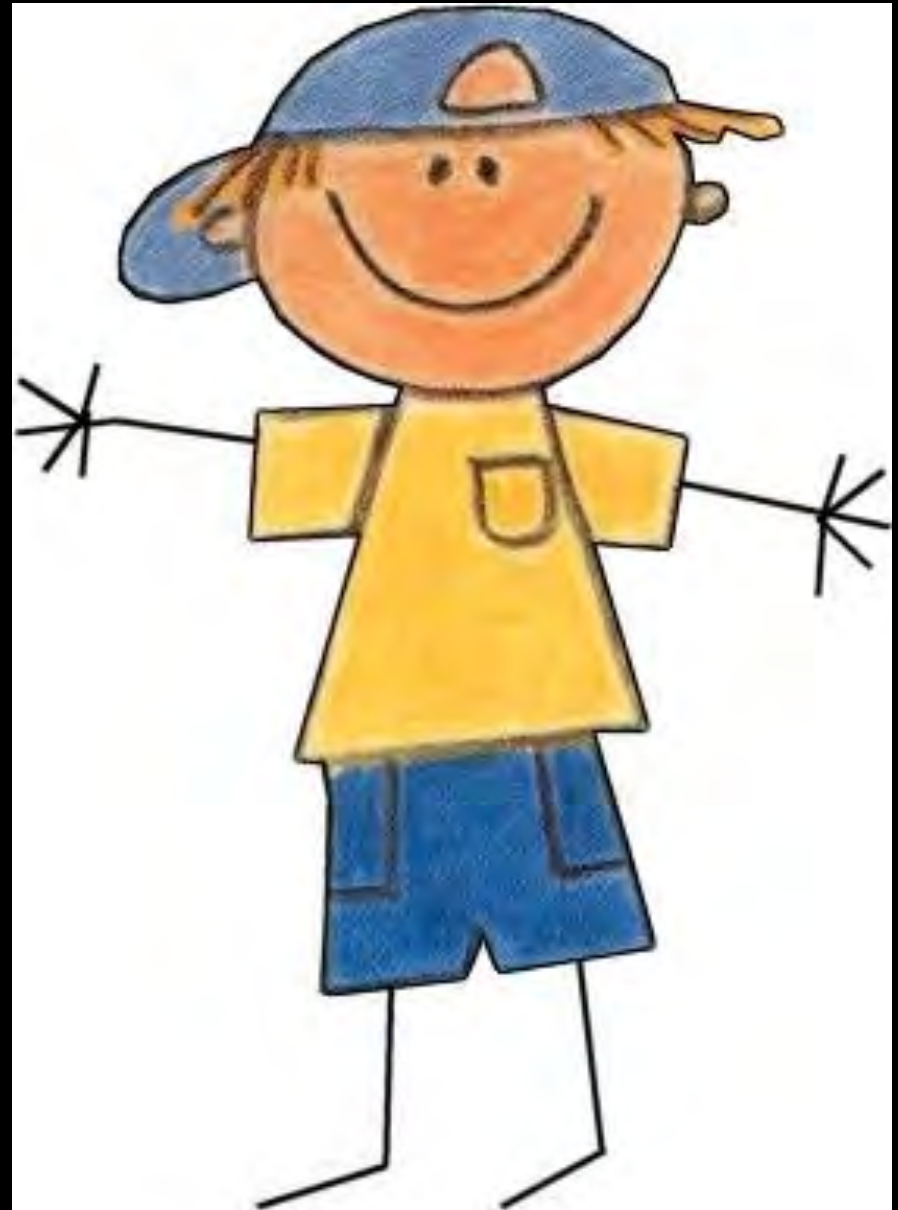
It's an inescapable fact, if you want to be an artist you have to observe real things.

Whether you're painting fantasy figures, classical studies, still life, or architecture, **you need to have a good solid understanding of how things actually look.**

## Referencing from Photos

Most people, when they first begin to draw, use symbols to represent the things they know, not the things they actually see: a curved line is a mouth, a pair of circles are eyes, a ball with five sticks of varying lengths attached is a hand.

Now, we all know that these things are far more complicated than that—it's how well you are able to perceive and then recreate that complexity that will measure your abilities as an artist.

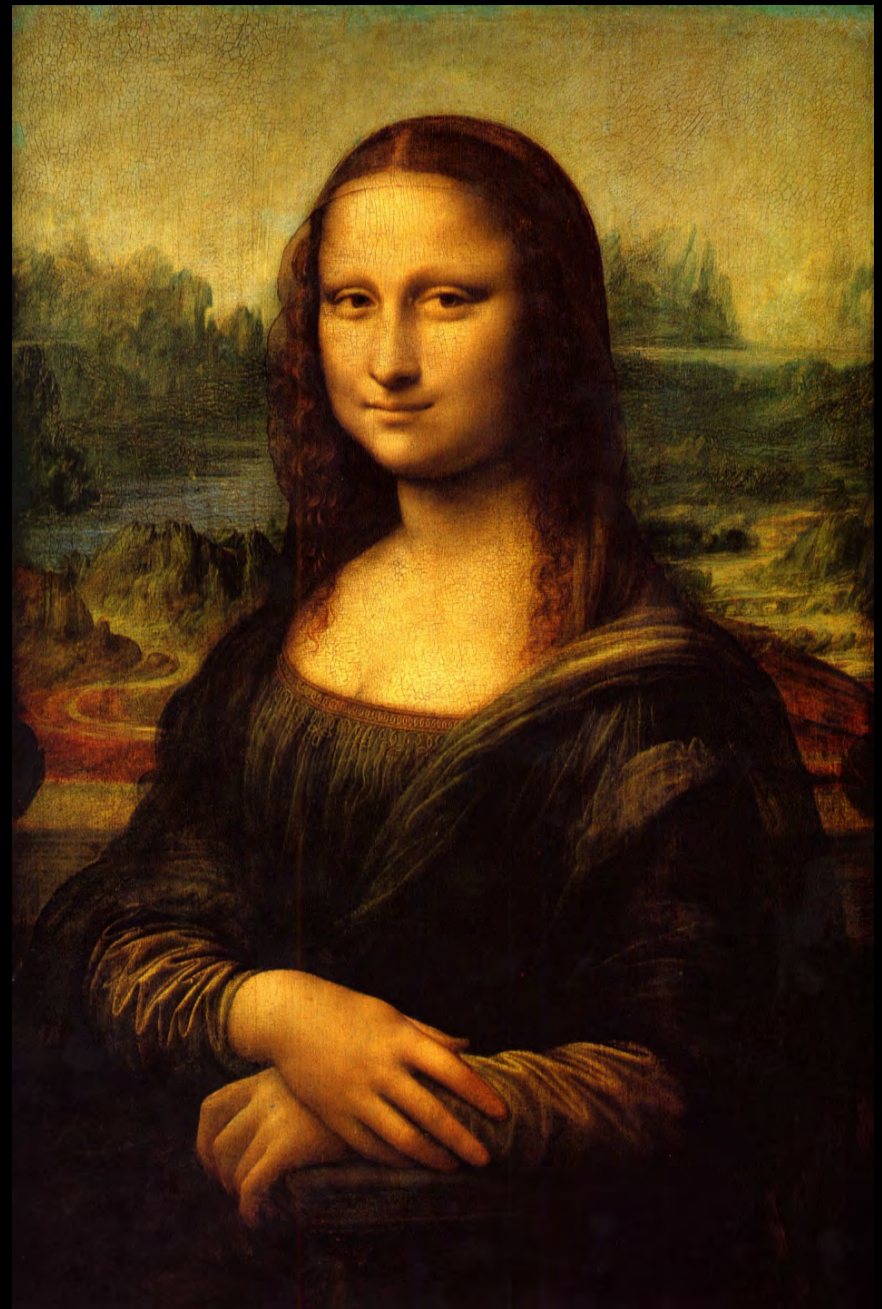


## *The Use of Photo Reference in Art.*

**Reference photos** are one of the greatest tools available to the **artist**.

Before the invention of the camera, a would-be **artist** had to find a model willing to sit hours on end in a single pose while working on his or her masterpiece.

However, while the invention of **photo reference** has been a huge blessing to artists everywhere, it has also been a curse to the **beginner**.



Leonardo Da Vinci , Mona Lisa (*La Gioconda*)

When it comes to **drawing** the human **figure**, **photo reference** is a major convenience.

No longer (although highly recommended) does an **artist** have to find a live model to sit and pose for a project.

Simply find an appealing picture of a **figure** and go to work!

But it's not that simple. Many students can form bad habits from improper use of **reference photos**.



Henri Matisse 1869-1954

## *Before the invention of the Camera*

Prior to the invention of the camera artists had to work directly from the model in optimal lighted conditions.

They spent many years training to create a believable representation of nature and the human form.

Fine results were obtained by concentrating on purely observational work.



*Mars Being Disarmed by Venus* (1824), Jacques-Louis David

## Pascal Dagnan Bouveret



Some realist artists, including artists in the academic tradition, have been using photos for nearly a century and a half.

Many of these artist's used photo reference the same way they would use a study sketch, to record information that could be used at various times, freeing up the artist to work as he chose.

When **Pascal Dagnan Bouveret** painted "Breton Women at a Pardon" in 1887, he took photos of women sitting outdoors.





In this photo you can see that Bouveret drew each of the figures on a separate piece of tracing paper.



Color studies for final work.



But in his final composition he clearly didn't use the photo literally, and was in control of the design of his picture.



According to art historians, forty percent of all photographs taken in Paris in the later part of the nineteenth century were commissioned by artists, usually taking photographs of nude models for figure reference studies.

Alphonse Mucha:  
Original photo taken by Mucha used as a reference for this decorative illustration.



**Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec**





Vincent Van Gogh



## Paul Cezanne



## *A Moment in Time.*

Another benefit of photography is its ability to “freeze” a moment in time.

The way artists painted running horses changed forever once artists saw photos by pioneering photographer **Edward Muybridge**.

Horses move their feet so quickly when they’re galloping that it’s impossible to isolate an individual phase of the action by observation alone. So it’s understandable that artists painted them with their legs held out hobby horse fashion.

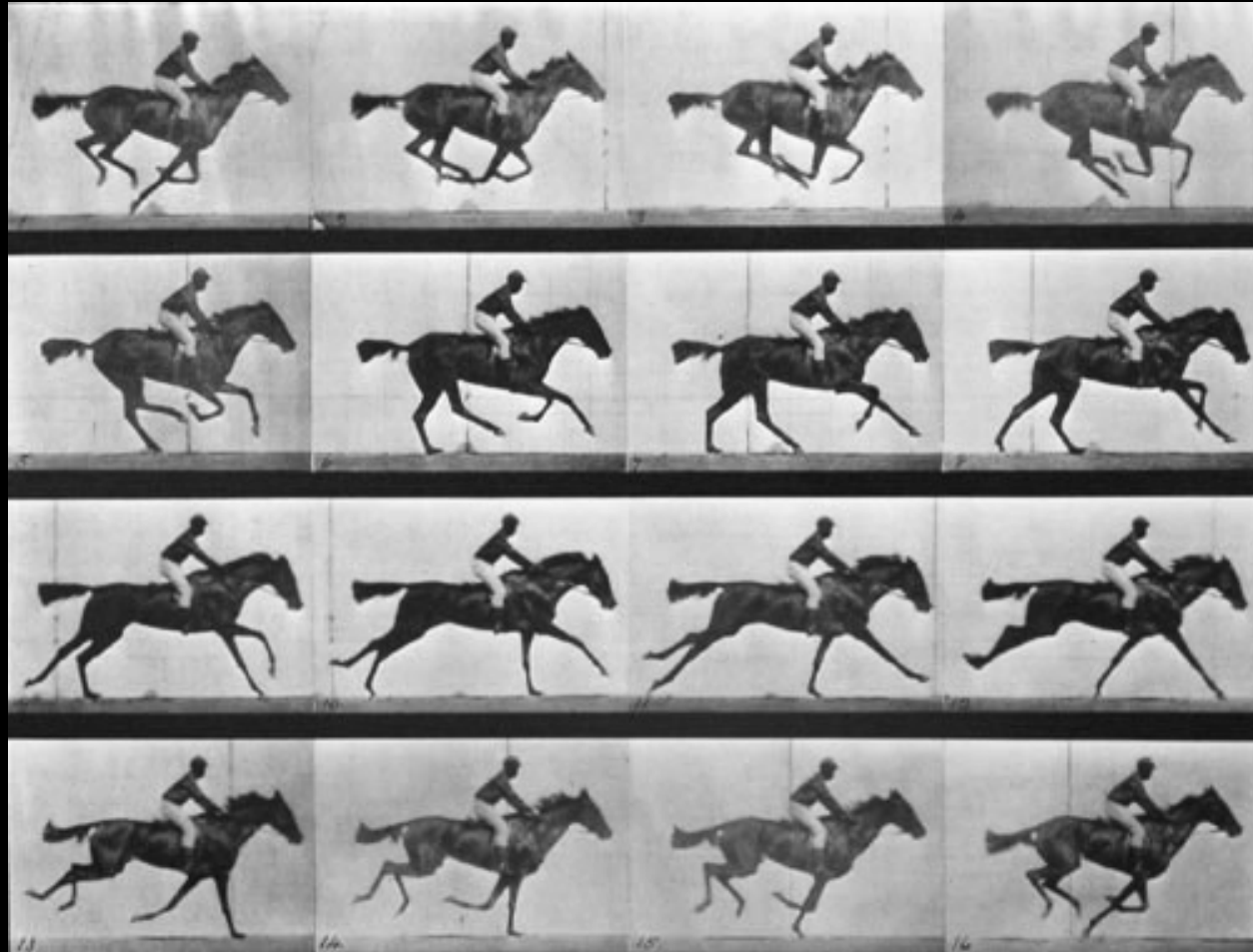


Alfred de Dreux (1857) oil on canvas.

**Muybridge** took his first fast-action photos in 1878.

After that time, artists changed their way of seeing things forever. It's impossible to "un-see" something as visually compelling as Muybridge's photos.

Today, the way we see and imagine the world is bound to be influenced by time lapse, slow motion, movie visual effects, and MRI photography, just to name a few ingredients of the visual stew we consume daily.





## Frozen Time

Some artists use photo reference extensively and unabashedly, especially for action poses and effects that are difficult to observe, such as water effects, explosions, or action poses.





## Norman Rockwell

Beginning in the mid 1930s, Norman Rockwell adopted photography as a tool to bring his illustration ideas to life in studio sessions.

Working as a director, Rockwell carefully staged his photographs, selecting props and locations, choosing his models, and orchestrating every detail.

He created an abundance of photographs for each new subject, sometimes capturing complete compositions and other times combining separate pictures of individual elements.



*The Tattoo Artist, 1944. Oil on canvas,*

Rockwell combining separate pictures to create an illustration.



The earliest known reference photo commissioned by Rockwell for the novel *Tom Sawyer*, showing Huck Finn presenting the dead cat to Tom, was taken by Richard Wyrley Birch.

According to Birch, Rockwell was “having trouble finding a photographer.” Learning that Birch could handle a camera, the artist commissioned him to help on the Tom Sawyer project.

When Birch delivered the reference shots, made with the benefit of reflectors and lit like a movie shot, “Rockwell flipped. He’d had no pictures like this before. The detail was beautiful. I was his man from then on.”



THE PHOTO of Huck Finn in red and white (page 100) is the kind of thing that excited Tom to transform the photo into a delightful picture of Tom Sawyer meeting a cat.

## Norman Rockwell

“There were details, accidents of light, which I'd missed when I'd been able to make only quick sketches of a setting.

For example in Rob Shuffleton's barbershop in East Arlington, Vermont: where Rob hung his combs, his rusty old clippers, the way the light fell across the magazine rack, his moth-eaten push broom leaning against the display cases of candy and ammunition, the cracked leather seat of the barber chair with the stuffing poking through along the edges over the nickel-plated frame.

**A photograph catches all that.”**

Photograph for *Shuffleton's Barbershop*, 1950





*Shuffleton's Barbershop, 1950.*  
Cover Illustration for *The Saturday Evening Post*, April 29, 1950. Oil on canvas,



Norman  
Rockwell

Smallest details...





Details...  
The Cat Story.



This illustration for an article on the changing racial profile of America's suburbs offered Rockwell an opportunity to again feature children—favored subjects throughout his long career.



*New Kids in the Neighborhood, 1967. Look magazine, May 16, 1967.*



Photographs for *New Kids in the Neighborhood*, 1967.



Norman  
Rockwell



S U M M E R



Norman  
Rockwell









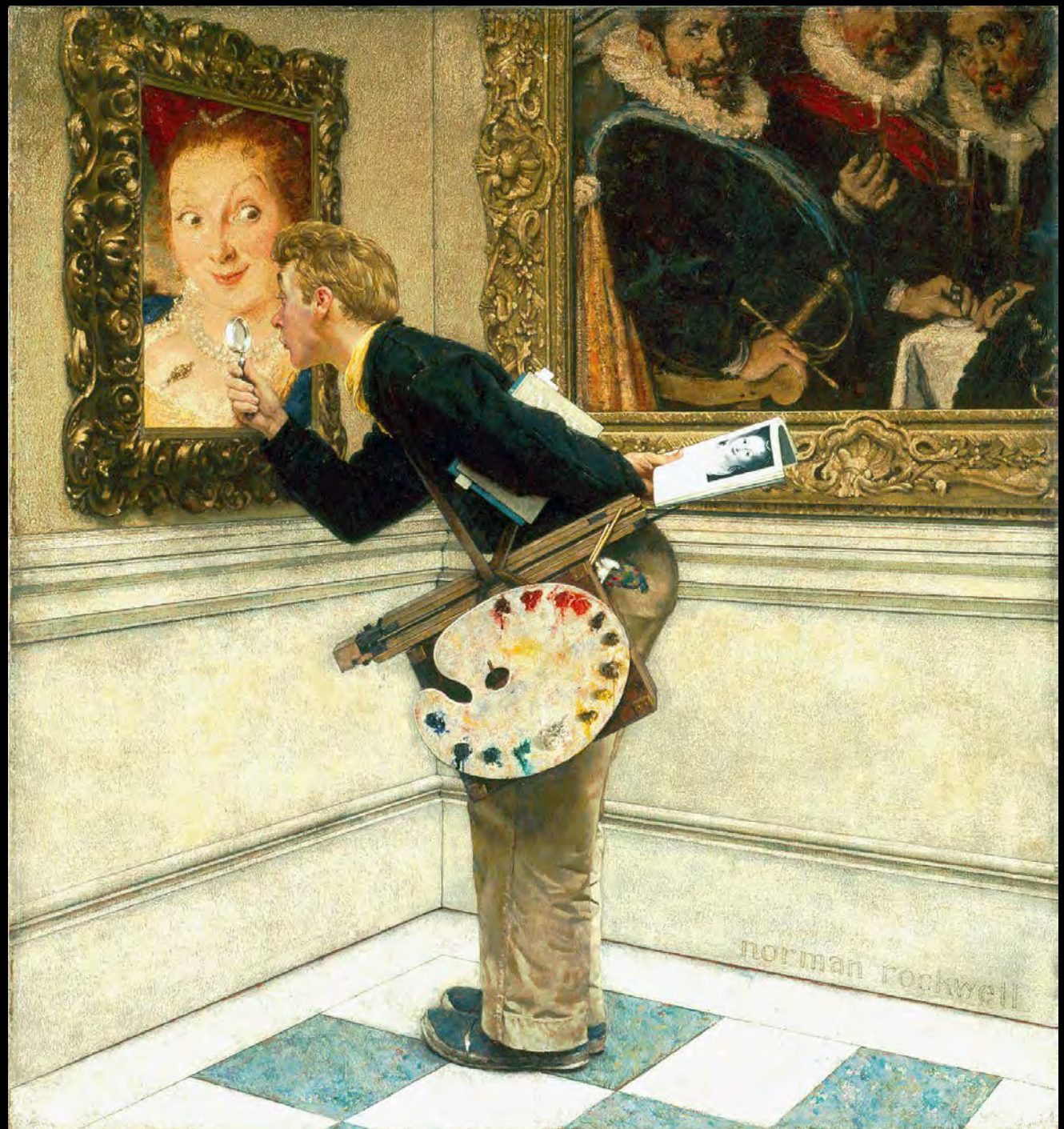






Norman Rockwell working in his Stockbridge, Mass., studio on preliminary studies for "The Art Critic" in 1955.





Norman Rockwell,  
*The Art Critic*, 1955









**Gil Elvgren**



Gil Elvgren

Photo overlay on original art.



Gil Elvgren



Maxfield Parrish



## Maxfield Parrish

Photo overlay on original art.  
This shows that the artist traced  
his photo reference.



“My work looks the way it looks because I shoot reference.  
I need that information, then I can play with it.” — Jeffrey Jones





Daredevil' Artist **Paolo Rivera's** Reference



Since the final product in the world of comics is illustrated, reference photos doesn't need to be perfect or exhaustively time-consuming.

Using a Sony Cyber-shot digital camera, I'm able to rapidly snap hundreds of photos when working with a model.

Setting and lighting also isn't crucial, so long as the photos are clear and there is space enough to move around.

- **Terrance Zdunich** (Illustrator of REPO)







*Stuart Immonen* - for DC, working reference for Legion of Superheroes and Superman.

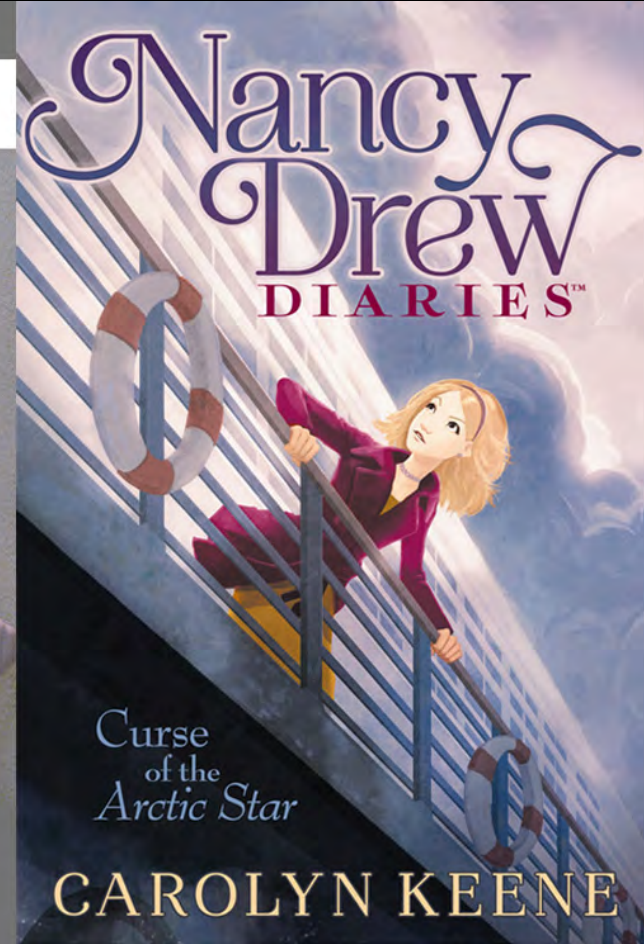
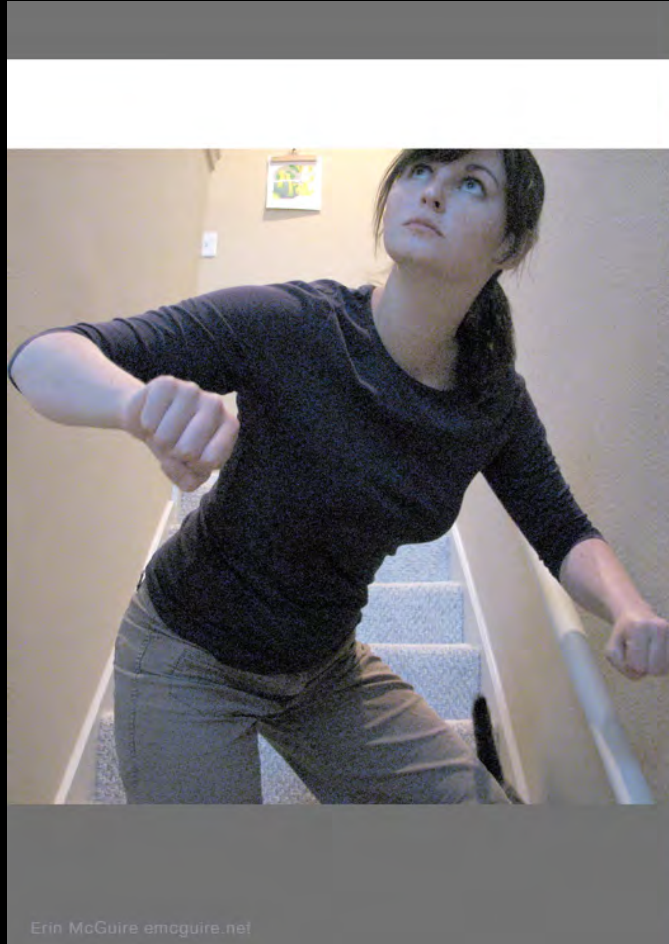
## Erin McQuire -

Now, my work isn't as realistic as some illustrators, but I still need good reference for most assignments.

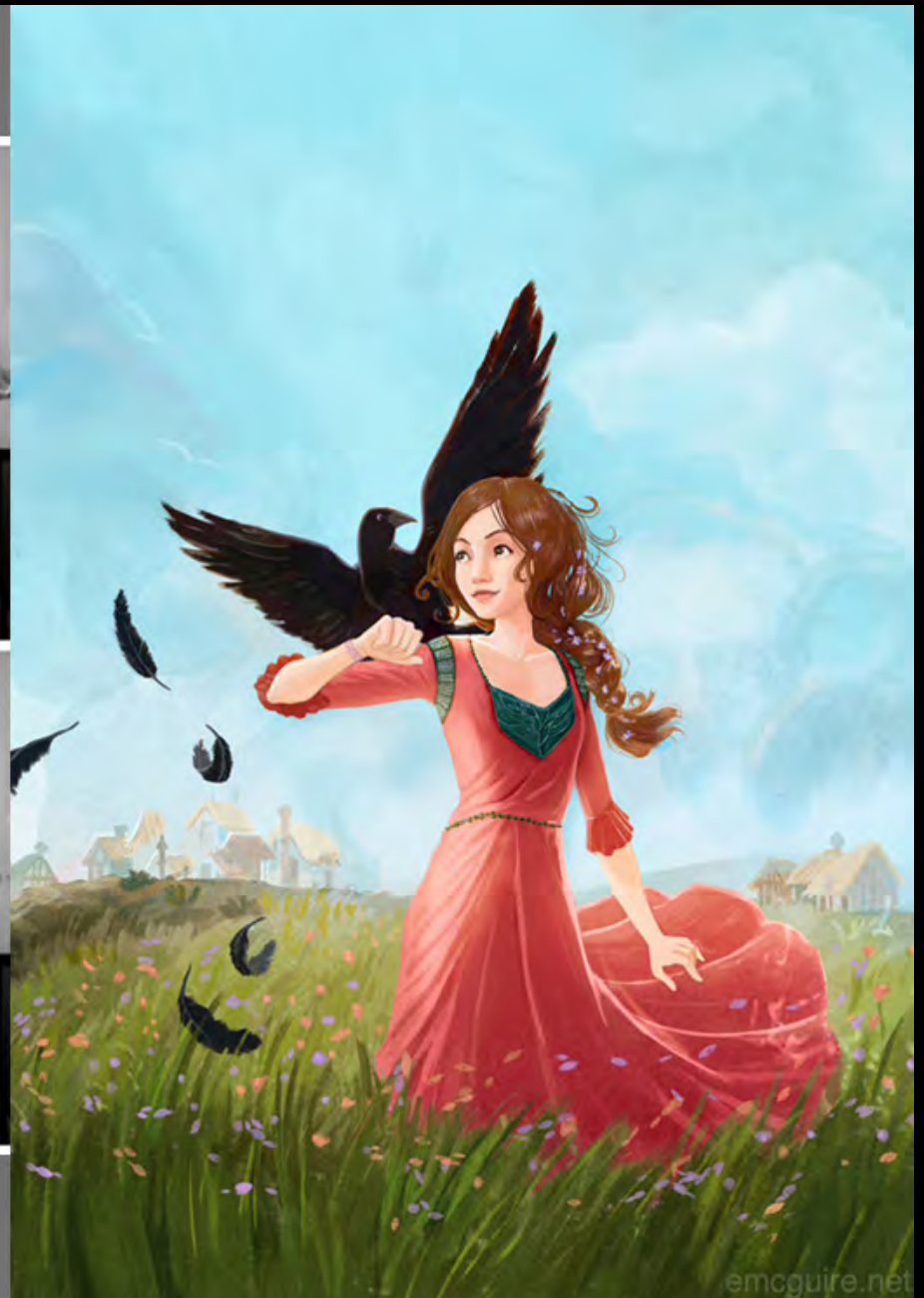
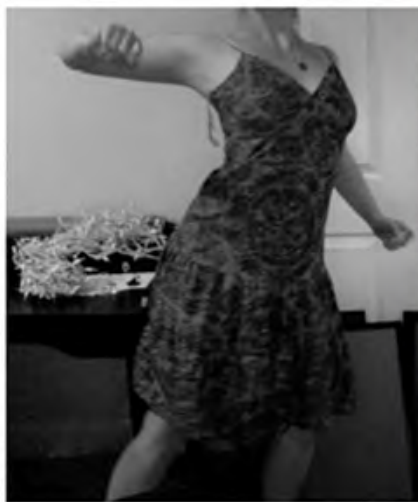
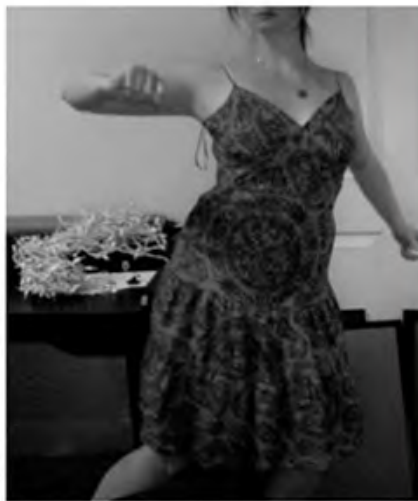
I'm not so hardcore that I need to hire a model and professionally shoot them, but sometimes Googling reference just doesn't cut it.

Even my mediocre photos help with checking proportions, lighting, clothing folds, etc.

For my purposes, I just need *pretty good* reference pretty quickly.







It was a common practice at **Disney Studios** for animators to sketch directly from life. Here are some Disney animators sketching from life for Bambi.

To create their movies before the computer age, the Disney studios also used a technique called **rotoscoping**, also known as **live-action reference**, which was a process wherein a scene was filmed with real actors and sets, and animators would use this footage to draw from.

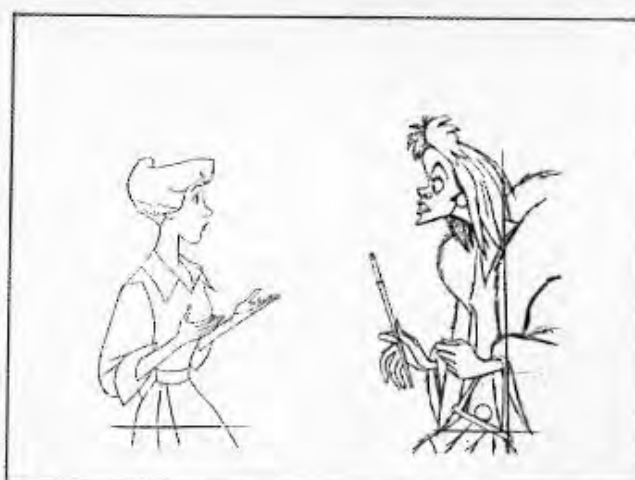
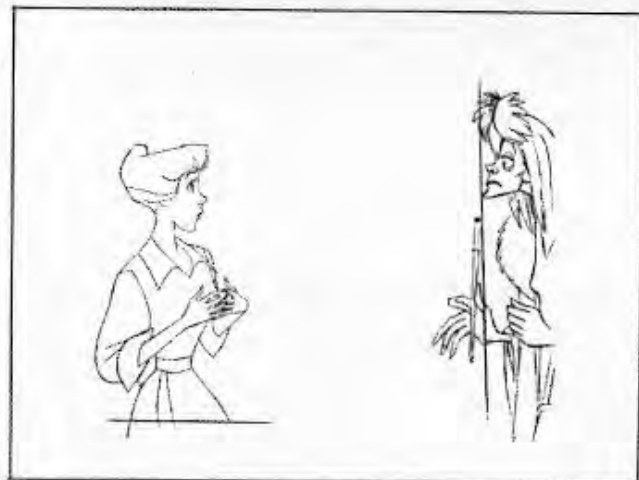


These images were then used as references for the Disney animators to help them visualize the scenes, postures and movements to draw.



Here is a series of images and videos from this technique, overlaying the images shot with drawings created by animators!





Helene Stanley (left) and Mary Wickes act out a scene as reference for Disney animators for **One Hundred and One Dalmatians**.



Disney Classic Films Spliced With Their Reference Photography.







