Chapter 5
Reportage with Character

Drawing “on location,” or what I like to call reportage, allows you to really build your reservoir of information for creativity. The different personalities, faces, clothes, and architecture out in the world are truly inspiring! There is nothing better than watching people when it comes to the vast richness of characters that live in our world.

Watching people’s mannerisms and gestures informs you for your own character designs. Keep a keen eye for human behavior. An excellent book about human behavior is called Man Watching by Desmond Norris. This book is a must buy for any artist drawing characters that communicate humanity.

One of the most fun places for me to draw is Epcot in Disney World. Half of the park is dedicated to giving its guests the experience of traveling around the world in a day. Imagineers went and created environments mimicking different countries around the world. So they have the architecture, food, music, costumes, and more to let you feel the experience! Plus you get to observe real tourists from around the world enjoying the theme park. Granted, if you want China, it’s better to go to China, but for one-stop drawing this is a great experience!

Explore your own neighborhood. The supermarket, mall, movie theater, or park are great places also. You don’t need to go far for humanity. Look at yourself and watch what you do, when you do it, and why! The best place to learn is within yourself.

The last quarter of a century of my life has been pretty constantly and faithfully devoted to the study of the human race—that is to say, the study of myself, for in my individual person I am the entire human race compacted together.
Mark Twain

This has been said a million times so pardon the cliché, but bring a sketchbook with you everywhere and draw a lot. Practice makes perfect! Great work takes skill, in your mind and in your hands. The more time you put in, the faster you become skilled.
FINDING CHARACTER

The easiest way to start reportage is to observe one person at a time. Watch the person. Look at the mannerisms, clothes, and personality.

These are some little caricatures of people I drew while eating lunch at the zoo. Shape is my method for executing what type of character I feel they are. One thing that can help you is thinking about an imaginative occupation and history for the people you are observing. There is the librarian with her little glasses and deep cut neckline in the top left corner. Under her is the tough guy with a beach hat.
Here is the unhappy, middle America Dad. His children were causing some problems at the playground and this was his internal reaction to them. Look at how forceful shape is still involved. His head, body, and arm are clear examples of the shape. The drawing on the right is another caricature.
As soon as you have more than one person, you have a new dynamic. The relationship is what you are after. Notice how the characters define the relationship. How do they act toward one another? What is truly amazing is how we can read each other if we only pay attention. So much lost is lack of connection in a moment.

The top drawing is a father and his daughter sitting on a bench at the park. She was talking and he was not paying attention to their conversation. Below them you can see a mother screaming at her child. Lastly, there was a tall thin man that struck me because of his interesting posture while strolling. He rested all of his weight on the back of his heel.
MIKE DALEY

This is my neighbor who walks his dog around the block. He is easily spotted by the pipe sticking out of his white beard. He always looks a little suspicious of his surroundings and walks with his toes pointing outward, so I decided to push those qualities in this drawing. Everyone is surrounded by great characters in life, it may just take a bit of careful observation to recognize them.
This was a fun moment. This father had an incredibly large baby carrier on his back while his child had no interest in being carried in it. I pushed the size of the carrier and the child to contrast the two.
The next few drawings were done while sitting on a curb at a farmer’s market in my neighborhood. I found it intriguing that one woman was pulling her hair as the other was selling the products on the table. The first woman seemed either nervous or insecure in this conversation.
This woman was bent over at the counter, inspecting the cookies on display. She had quite a lot of questions and the person helping her behind the counter seemed to have been through this routine a thousand times. “Are these cookies organic?” “Yes.” “Are these gluten free?” “No.” She had a thin, pointy nose so I pushed that a bit to accentuate her pointing. Her back and butt also make a great triangular shape with her face to emphasize this even more.
The drawing on the left was about an awkward moment with this tall father and his tiny baby. Then I drew the bicyclist stretching and using the toll meter to do so. Lastly, I like the way this brother and sister were sampling from one of the tables.
Here is another father and son both eating an apple on the curb. This is a moment of mimicry. Ever notice how a small group of people will copy each other’s poses? Yawning is probably the most famous case of this idea. Sometimes you can actually mimic a person and then lead them into copying you! Try it out, and notice how connected we are to each other.
I love when little children are trying to push their own carriage. I think about adults attempting to push their own cars. In the lower image, the father is with his two daughters. Notice how the one daughter, the youngest, is in between the others, protected. Kneeling down allows the father to more closely connect to his youngest daughter.
This is a clear example of a frustrated person. This man is impatient in waiting for the elderly woman to choose and pay for her items. The crossed arms and backward lean indicate his judging of her.
What I find of interest here is my note, “too cartoony, and not satirical enough.” At the time I drew this, that meant that I needed to bring forth more of the reality to feed the design. I made up too much of the story.
This musician was a great character! As you look through the drawing, be sensitive to all of the decisions you see. Notice the sloped-in chin, look at his fingers playing. These are all reactions I had in the moment.
Here were some tired parents. I took full advantage of drawing them while they were sleeping. Great story moment. I love that the woman was resting on the man’s shoulder and that he had his legs and fingers entwined.
This drawing was purely about story. I wanted to get the idea across of the adults and children each having their own conversations. Notice they are created with line and the background in black. This helps silhouette the main ideas of the drawing.
In this image, two story moments connected into one through the abstract shapes of the floor and the umbrella. The top image is of another artist diligently illustrating the vast scene in front of her. The other shows two men in thought during a conversation. Interesting to see how neither is looking directly at the other.
In this section of the chapter, you will see how I am composing the image along with the people that reside within it. I want you to see the bare bones to drawing environments and placing people in them. See how simple and abstract the shapes are that define the space. I try to draw in long vertical or horizontal frames. This already begins a strong and contrasted design. I choose if I am going horizontal or vertical depending on what I want to say. I use the same rule of thirds that I described in Chapter 3. See people as shapes, individuals, or crowds.

MIKE DALEY

A group of people in line at a popular café by Dolores Park in San Francisco. It’s interesting to see people stand next to each other and organize themselves in a line while doing everything in their power to not look at each other. I also notice that most of the chairs seem to be empty, which tells me that this group of people are sophisticated urbanites on the go, getting their quick caffeine fix and leaving.
A few years ago I was asked by Beijing University to come out and launch their masters program for animation. I was there for two weeks and had fifty students to inspire and prepare for their projects. We all went to The Forbidden Palace (by taxi with fifty students, an interesting site) for a day to inspire cultural concepts for their short animated film ideas that they were going to pitch to me a week later.

The two weeks I spent in China were a great experience. In between classes, my close friend Russ took me site seeing. This finally leads me to the illustrations below.

In the top left corner, you can see that I wanted the length of the Great Wall so I could go after its stairs, so vertical was a better choice. In the top two images on the right I was figuring out the relationship between the two buildings in the frame. Notice how I changed their sizes and how I inverted the curve between them to change the composition. The bottom two drawings are about the relationship between the two people. Notice the change in the level of intimacy in each. The far shot gives us location where the horizontal shot tells us a more intimate story.
So here is another page from my China sketchbook, which by the way was bought in China. It is an accordion-style book that I believe Chinese write in, vertically. For me this book was great because it was thin and long so it already was a great shape. It can be opened in different widths and ratios because of its accordion-styled structure.
This is a study to feed my brain. My thought in this design was to look at the detail of the roofline and see how it defined the awesome silhouettes of these beautiful structures! This is about big to small and detail to big shapes.

Here is the second image from the Lamma Temple. This visual was from a walkway between many different buildings in the complex. I loved the little bells that hung from the roofs and played with them for design. They represent contrast and affinity. I broke up the vertical shape of the frame with the soft horizontal curves of the roofs. If I were to go back to this design to improve it, I would enlarge the negative space in the top of the frame. Why? Because the roof line on the right cuts in close to the halfway mark of the vertical distance of the frame.
This was executed while standing on The Great Wall of China! Again, I used flat shapes to help me compose the image. I placed the next guard station at the peak of the design to describe the height of the mountain the wall was constructed on. The stairs in the foreground curve in one direction and I then placed the wall to the left as if it had been pushed out of the wall. All of the detail and time were placed within my initial abstract thumbnail.
Here is another example of looking at reality and extracting design. This lets me then use it for more ideas. I boil it down. These were done in MGM Studios in Florida. So, besides me looking at shapes, with line, I also played with black and white shapes. I love the image in the bottom right. After concentrating on shape, I turned my focus on this story moment of tourists walking the streets in raincoats and umbrellas.
This image started off as a black line drawing. At this stage I am thinking about the design based on story. I later brought the drawing into Photoshop and added this monochromatic color scheme all based on tonal contrast. I pushed my idea of making the mother the focal point by making her the lightest area in the design and placing that light color next to the father, who is the darkest red in the design. I also cheated in a shadow shape on the back wall on a diagonal right into the mother’s head. You are now forced to look at her. I also left my palette on the side for you to see how simply this is painted.
This image is a compositing of different moments at a Lama temple. I drew it at the front gate to the temple and added the monks to the image. Their variation in size defined the vast sense of depth.
During my stay in Beijing, I went to the Summer Palace. This is its entrance. The stamp in the right hand corner is my name, which in Chinese means long stride, ironic since I am 6’2”. My point to this information is pushing culture and personalization into this reportage drawing. Space or depth is indicated by the ratio relationship between the people. The larger ones are in the foreground and smaller in the background.

ARCHITECTURE WITH CHARACTER

All of the different methods I have shown you for seeing and designing with opinion to clarify character also pertain to inanimate objects. In the case of reportage, this is usually architecture.

I went to The School of Visual Arts to become a comic book penciler. I struggled for years far beyond school trying to figure out how I would draw architecture and backgrounds. I hated drawing them. It was abstraction and design that led me to a method that I found intriguing and satisfying enough to draw anything. I went down the professional path of animation but I still want to and will illustrate comics.
This was done at the China Pavilion at Epcot in Disney World. The architecture was my primary character. I wanted to get the sweeping rooflines and rich colors. The crowds of vacationers were secondary here so they are drawn in a thin gold line, along with some of the architecture. Therefore, they become part of the background but not as important as the red and green areas. I try not to make a big deal out of materials. After learning your trade with basic tools like china markers and smooth newsprint, go and play with what you think feels right to your experience. In this case, the sweeping rooflines were drawn with the ink dropper tip from the Dr. Martin’s dye of the color I was using. On top of that, I drew with a gold pen and marker.
Simply curving the street adds a fun, animated feel to the design. The trick is understanding perspective well enough to make all of the street's elements fit into this pushed grid of perspective.

These designs are of the African section of Animal Kingdom. Notice how all three images are designed in thirds.
This page is full of studies of the Germany pavilion at Epcot in Florida. The page is a composition of moments to reflect the feel of the location. All of this information feeds the illustration on the next page.
Simple curved lines caricature the architecture. I also played with the ratios, stretching the roof against the base of the building. The building is basically a triangle sitting on top of a rectangle. Reality sets into the drawing with the shingles I drew on the roof. Detail on top of pushed design makes it believable.
The top drawing of this Viking boat is my study. You can read my notes about the details and character of the boat. The adjectives I use to describe it feed my desire to push beyond pure analysis. The second drawing is my reaction to my study. It almost fights its way out of me after studying the boat. My desire is to get my opinions down on the page.
This is a drawing of the Haunted House in the Magic Kingdom. The idea here of course was to go after the eeriness of the environment. I silhouetted the house and made it feel as if the black were either dripping or grabbing at the tombstones below. In a way, it reveals the death that resides under the ground at the base of the house.
I love this drawing. Remember at the beginning of the chapter how I explained I had found a way of drawing architecture that is satisfying to me? Here it is. This is all abstract shapes to me. Look at the chimney tops. Notice that they are flat boxes of varying heights and widths with some tone. The windows and bricks of the building are the same. I then contrasted all of this line with the black gutters and overhang.
Here is a great example of using the ratio bounding box. You can see how I stretched the car vertically and kept the headlights low. In the top right corner you can see my initial thumbnails. The most important part of this design is that the slogan, “A Tall Order,” is why I applied the vertical stretch.
This last design was a rough concept illustration. All of the abstract ideas for this design came from the prior knowledge discussed in this book. I wanted skewed perspective, like the main building. See how the building gets larger as it moves into the sky. It should get smaller. The seams on the sidewalk move in haphazard directions. See how with tone, I brightened one side of the building for focus. I also made the street lamp point toward that building. Notice the rule of thirds from left to right and top to bottom.
Exercises

1. Travel small and light. It is fun and exciting to work on location. I have found that it helps me to plan a bit before I go out. Have a backpack or shoulder bag filled with sketchbooks, pads, scissors, pens, markers, and water.

2. Bring a reference book with you to inspire some direction in your work in case you don’t feel it on location. This book can also be predetermined. For example, you might go to Chinatown and bring a book on China or on Germany and combine cultures!

3. Draw three hundred and sixty degrees around you. This is a great challenge! Look for the multiple points of perspective.

4. Add something from the environment into your image. For instance, glue down a menu from a cafe you are sitting in or a train ticket from a location you are traveling to.

5. When looking at people, imagine their personality, lifestyle, occupation, and family. Use these ideas to feed the design.

6. Be an excellent observer of the humanity you are a part of. Take nothing for granted.