



LIFE DRAWING

SUSAN GREEN

“Every mark is an expression of one’s internal voice—the closer I can get to authenticity the better.”

FOR SOME OF US, ARTISTIC TALENT IS LATENT AND SPRINGS FORTH FOR UNEXPLAINABLE REASONS—THIS WAS TRUE FOR STEPHEN PLUME, MD. On a whim in 2002, he took a life drawing class at AVA Gallery and Art Center in neighboring Lebanon and discovered he liked working from a live model, especially in a group with other people making art.

Plume finds that by staring intently at a model he sees depth beyond what’s revealed at first glance. “When I start drawing, I don’t know what’s going to happen. I begin by making a line that represents an edge that has caught my eye.” He then expands the drawing to fit an 18 x 24 inch piece of paper—usually only fragments of the figure constitute a finished drawing. He says, “Full models just don’t fit on my pages.”

He uses graphite crayon, which he likes for its subtlety of tone and line variation, and for not being as fugitive or as messy as charcoal, “Every mark is an expression of one’s internal voice—the closer I can get to authenticity the better.”

People frequently tell the former surgeon that he must have an advantage when drawing live models, but he says that isn’t so.

“Rather than anatomical shapes, I see shadows and light and edges and think about how to rep-

resent them—the more literal an image is, the less interesting it is for me.” Plume generally finishes his drawings in about 25 minutes, which, he says, is as long as most models can hold a pose, “But in that time, I’ve said what I have to say.”

Clifford West, a resident artist at AVA, said to Plume about one of his drawings, “That looks like something Picasso might have done ... but he would have done it on purpose.”

Well, so had Plume.

Stephen Plume, MD, is an emeritus professor of surgery, of community and family medicine, and of the Dartmouth Institute for Health Policy and Clinical Practice at Geisel. He has led several electives—drawing objects from the teaching collection in the anatomy lab, and at times from live models.

Photos of Steve Plume’s artwork provided by Rob Strong.