

6 Face Dancing - where should you direct your viewer's focus

We spend so much time on the other parts, and often forget this potent tool. We direct people's focus in many ways every day, whether it be insisting a child or co-worker do something your way, or setting a table for a dinner party, or telling a story at a bar. Focus attenuates the information delivered. And I stress that this is more about improving the possibility of getting the message across than it is about trickery or manipulation, which have their place within communication but do best when at the service of the good message rather than instead of the good message.

Technique is what we learn, while creativity is what we live. I'm going to use the example here of a fictional dancer who trains until his/her body can do just about anything. That dancer will amaze people with technical feats of brilliance. Yet if that dancer - who in reality is a very common reality indeed, having trained his/her body and limbs yet never his/her countenance - ever happens to be put on stage near someone who does know how to use his/her face to express emotions... the technician will always pale in comparison to the one who can act emotions with eyebrows and mouth. The fully articulated, expressive face will always steal focus from the technician. This is because life is about emotional investment in the worlds we inhabit: real ones, surreal ones and imaginary ones. The technician transforms into the artist by adding passion and emotive expression to the wizardry of the mastered technique.

Technique has many layers: lift, float, hold, attack, explode, relax, suspend, hold more, stretch, breathe...

But if these are all taken together as one layer of technique, there are many other layers to the artistry that can/should be added on top, until it all fills in the picture to support the entire idea. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's work is often broken down into the basic layers, each of which is very simple, yet all of which blend perfectly in concert. And Mark Rothko, the painter of geometric shapes on canvas, layered countless thin layers of color delicately on top of each other to generate the effect of shapes suspended on top of each other. I've overheard people comment, "I could do that." Look quickly and you might not see how much patience and attention to detail the work required. You'll miss out on the opportunities he hoped you'd discover within his work. It's there for you to discover only if you are open to it. That's another part of the wonder of an artistic creation. The creator is having a discussion with every part of the work, considering every tool available. It must be thoughtful and comprehensive... and not just about technique.

The great choreographer Merce Cunningham worked to create impersonal works that used bodies in space, and required that his dancers be highly trained and not expressive emotionally in the choreography. He did so knowing exactly what he wanted to say and why. In other words it was not just technique because the entire composition - indeed his entire choreographic philosophy - took into account the power of emotion, and actively chose to remove it.

And although it might be obvious, it's worth pointing out that everything I'm talking about here pertains to cooking, cleaning, loving, living at home as much as it does in an art studio or on a theater stage. I recall a conversation I had with a plumber in which he explained his approach to fixing something under people's kitchen sinks: "I get under there and I can see how to do it fast and simple, but I can also tell by where they place things under there how they use the area below that sink, and I can see how I could do it to keep their pipes out of the way. I know not everyone does it that way, and I also know they might never ever notice, but I will know what I've done and that is why I take the extra time... to put things out of the way and hopefully make their lives a bit easier."

For that plumber it isn't just about the job. It is about helping people, and about letting the work speak to a larger message or set of messages. And while he told me, his eyes were wide and full of enthusiasm; and it was easy for me to feel his passion not for plumbing, but for helping people with his technical expertise and big heart.

His message was clear, his vocal inflection and stance convincing, and he "face danced" it to me through his eyes and facial expressions so well I've never forgotten it.

For information on Mark Rothko: <http://www.rothkochapel.org/index.php> and <http://www.wikipaintings.org/en/mark-rothko>.

For information on Merce Cunningham:
<http://www.mercecunningham.org/>

For information on Mozart:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wolfgang_Amadeus_Mozart