

Posing naked for life drawing class offers life lessons

Melanie Chambers stands nude in front of strangers in her daredevil quest to get out of her comfort zone.



MELISSA RENWICK / TORONTO STAR

By the third hour of posing nude for a life-drawing class at the Toronto School of Art, Melanie Chambers started to feel liberated and safe.

By: Melanie Chambers Special to the Star, Published on Tue Feb 02 2016

“They need something from you. A type of pose to draw . . . it’s not about you anymore.” This was instructor Megan Williams’ way of calming my nerves before posing naked in front of nine strangers for a life drawing class at the Toronto School of Art.

But when I stepped up onto the stage, in front of a blinding floodlight, then dropped my shirt exposing my breasts, dark pubic hair and white backside, it felt all about me.

Looking into the warm light, I (quite thankfully!) can’t see the artists and the classical music relaxes me. This is art, after all — I’m not posing for a “Gentlemen’s” club. So, why does it still feel so strange?

“After a while it’s like being in a doctor’s office,” says Williams. But a floodlight on my right breast doesn’t ever happen in my doctor’s office.

It’s a three-hour class — luckily, I’m switching off with another model. The first set is a series of four two-minute “gestures,” or quick poses.

Backstage, I ask for my counterpart’s thoughts about standing with one leg back and my chin lifted. “You won’t make it,” she says, smirking.

I do it anyway. With my leg slightly back and head cocked to the side, after one minute my neck is ready to snap and my lower back is going to buckle. A trickle of sweat glides down my back. The alarm goes off and I collapse. I switch off and drink a huge gulp of water — sore and parched after only two minutes.

Related:

[Becoming an artist at the age of 43](#)END

[Stepping out of my comfort zone in an audition](#)END

[At 43, writer decides to find her inner b-girl](#)END

Watching the other model from the back room, an actress and writer, she has a killer body: perfectly proportioned, her stomach is the kind you see in underwear catalogues. Her pubic hair is also light — seems somehow less harsh than my unruly black pubic hairbush. She's the Lady of Shalott; I'm Joan Jett.

Next, I choose to sit on the stool, hug my knees to my chest and hide my face. Two minutes done. Nothing like rolling into a ball to hide everything.

Switching up in the back room, my counterpart pipes up: "Want some advice? "Try facing them this time — you've given them three back poses — think 360.

"Listen to your body and make it playful — give them some good lines to draw, a twist of the hips or one hip above the other."

I default to a yoga pose: the warrior. With fingers splayed out, my arms shake at a minute and a half — but not my legs, which are double the size of most women's.

I've hiked many mountains throughout the world, and biked countless mountains and trails with these guys. I'm proud of these legs — even if they will never, ever, fit into most jean sizes.

I recall Megan's words: "When someone doesn't have their clothes on, filters are gone . . . you come to accept yourself physically." Maybe, but it won't happen overnight, I think.

It wasn't until I was a runner in my late teens that I accepted my small breasts: I can't imagine strapping up to contain the bouncing every time I went for a jog.

And, if we're talking nakedness here, I also support unshaven pubic hair, despite feeling self-conscious about it whilst modelling. Paying someone to rip my hair out with hot wax isn't appealing. Maybe it appeals to my hippie esthetic?

The next set is longer 10-minute poses. By the third hour, sitting facing the artists with one hand on my thigh and another beside my head, I start to think about what I'm going to have for supper. Being naked, here, feels liberating and safe — not a big deal: the beautiful drawings reveal an appreciation for my curves, bumps and especially those legs.

Melanie Chambers is spending her 43rd year trying new things. She's sharing them with readers in this occasional series.