

Reference, reference, reference.
It's all about the reference!



The Importance of Reference Material for Sculpture

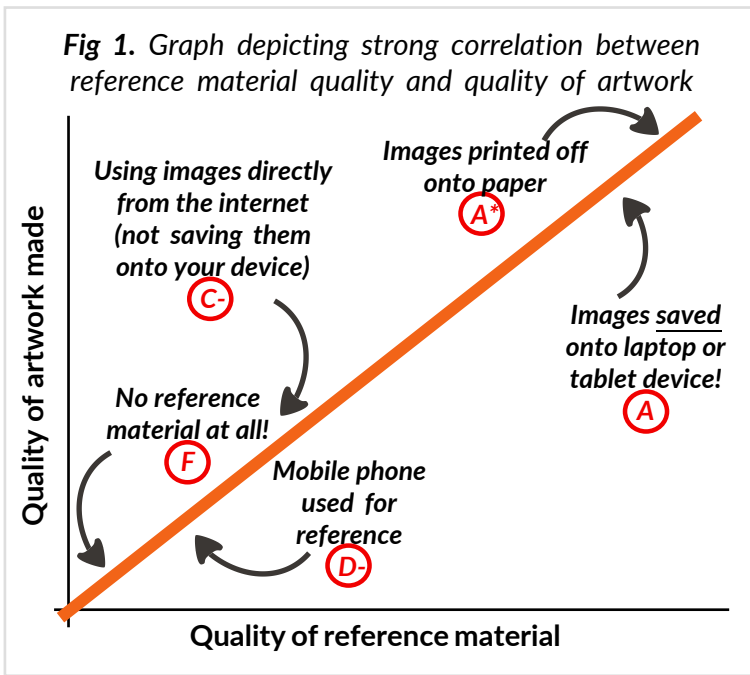
Capturing the subtle observations of your chosen form (the essence as it were!) is what can make your piece of art a masterpiece! You need good reference material to do this regardless of how well you know the subject; whether you intend to work abstractly or be stylised.

After a few years of teaching sculpture, I often find it possible to predict how good a piece will be before the artist has even started working on it based purely on the quality of their reference material! So when doing a course with me or any other time, please gather good reference material - it will help you a lot.

Sourcing Reference Material

Now, it's not always practical to have a live lion or elephant in your studio or dining room - they often don't behave well indoors or sit in the positions you want them to! Fortunately, the internet allows us to gather a wealth of quality images with minimal hassle or danger.

I recommend using **Google Images** to collect images - it's great! Whether you search for 'tiger lying down' or 'tiger's left paw' there should be a plethora of images for you to download or print out.



Other sources of images can also be useful but I always say that Google (other search engines are available) should be the first port of call.

Other reference sources can include magazines, books, photographs & your own sketches.

Gathering images

One photo is not enough when making a three dimensional sculpture. Download multiple photographs taken from multiple angles so that you can make informed decisions about what your subject's anatomy is doing. Get close-ups of heads, arms, feet and even tails.

Anatomical diagrams can also be great as they show the key muscle groups.

Some notes of caution:

Sculpting your beloved pets can be a blessing and a curse. Sometimes it is really useful to know your subject so well. The flip side is that students will sometimes, sadly too often, get frustrated that they cannot capture the 'exact essence' of their loved one. After many years of teaching I feel it's best just to put that out there!

Avoid referring from an existing piece of art work because you will be interpreting an interpretation. By all means use it for inspiration but have other reference as well.

Illustrations and designs are not ideal as they often don't show the distribution of muscle tone, shape and form. Again, they are an interpretation of an interpretation.

