

UNDERSTANDING ANATOMY:

Drawing the Neck

by Ephraim Rubenstein

The neck is the pedestal upon which the head rests. It not only holds the head upright and in place but also allows it to rotate, tilt, flex, and extend so that it can locate and respond to crucial auditory, visual, and olfactory information. It also keeps the head, with its massive brain, in equilibrium on the torso, making the head “the crowning achievement of the body,” in artist Francis Cunningham’s words.

While the back of the neck is all muscle and bone, the front contains the more vulnerable throat. Because the throat is made up of delicate tubes—including the *trachea* and *esophagus* that carry vital air and food from the nose and mouth to the lower

body—it is poignant that many animals, after losing a battle, will offer their throats as a sign of submission. For the same reason, the throat, with its elegant curves and luminous skin, often has a deeply erotic quality as well.

Bones and Joints

If the spine were one long bone—like a huge *femur*—it would break far too easily, and afford only limited movement. Instead, the spine is a column composed of 24 small disclike bones called *vertebrae*, which are stacked one on top of the other. These boney discs, in turn, have spongelike discs in between that separate them and act as shock absorbers.

With 24 individual segments set up

like a kind of vertical slinky, the spine can move in many directions and absorb a great deal of impact. At the same time, the *facet joints* and *ligaments* that join the vertebrae are stable enough to perform the spine’s most important function: protecting the spinal cord, the key to the body’s central nervous system. The spinal column is divided into three sections, specifically the *cervical*, *thoracic*, and *lumbar*, and it is the uppermost section, the cervical, that makes up the neck. From a drawing standpoint, the most important thing to note is that the vertebral column is located at the very back of the neck. On thin models, it is visible as a small row of bumps directly beneath the skin.



LEFT

Dissection Study of the Neck

1982, graphite, 9 x 12. All artwork this article collection the artist.

The area of the upper throat and underside of the jaw are particularly difficult to dissect because of all of the different organs—such as the thyroid and parotid glands, as well as the lymph-node system—that add to the mass of the neck.

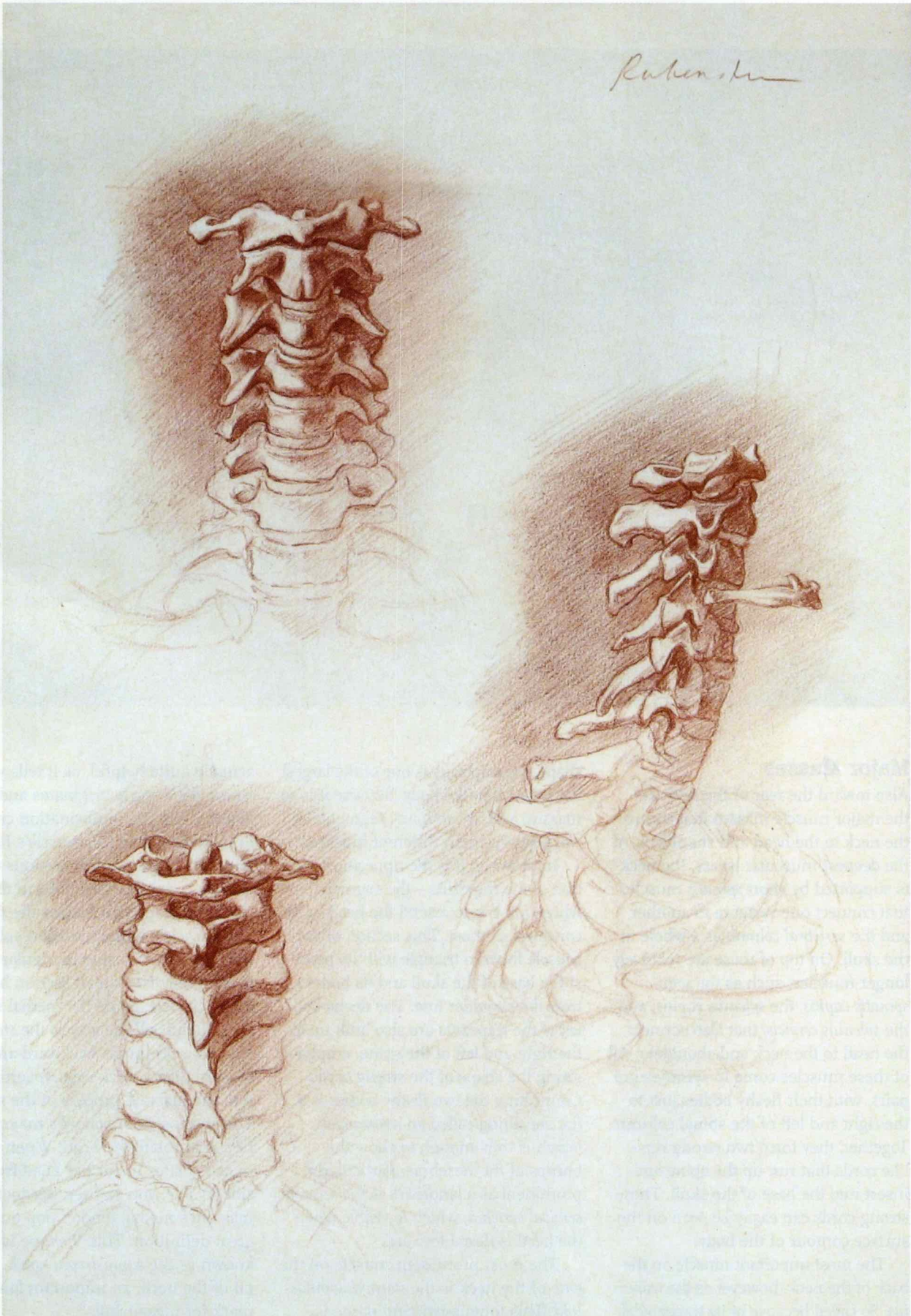
OPPOSITE PAGE

Three Studies of the Cervical Vertebrae

2007, red chalk, 19 x 13.

The first seven vertebrae make up the cervical region. The first of these is called the *atlas* because it bears the weight of the head. It articulates against the bottom of the skull in such a way as to allow the head to flex, extend, and incline laterally. The articulation between the atlas and the second vertebra—the *axis*—allows the head to rotate from side to side. From the side-view, notice the forward curve of the neck, as well as the different angles of the *spinous processes* in the rear. From the side, you can also see the *hyoid bone*, a small horseshoe-shaped bone connected to the spinal column by ligaments.

Robertson





Major Masses

Also toward the rear of the neck are the major muscle masses that connect the neck to the head and shoulders. At the deepest muscular layers, the neck is supported by short *spinalis* muscles that connect one vertebra to another and the *vertebral column* as a whole to the skull. On top of these are relatively longer muscles, such as the *semi-spinalis capitis*, the *splenius capitis*, and the *splenius cervicis*, that also connect the head to the neck and shoulders. All of these muscles come in symmetrical pairs, with their fleshy bodies just to the right and left of the spinal column. Together, they form two strong rope-like cords that run up the spine and insert into the base of the skull. These strong cords can easily be seen on the surface contour of the body.

The most important muscle on the back of the neck, however, is the *trapezius*. So called because of its trapezoidal

shape, the trapezius is one of the largest flat muscles in the body. Because it is so massive and has so many segments, it can perform many different functions.

In drawing, it is the uppermost section of the trapezius—the segment whose job it is to extend the head—that concerns us most. This section of the muscle forms a triangle with its point at the base of the skull and its bottom near the shoulder line. The fleshy bodies of the trapezius are also built up to the right and left of the spine, emphasizing the shape of the strong cords. Connecting the two fleshy bodies is a flat sheathing called an *aponeurosis*, which is thin enough to show the bumps of the vertebrae. Particularly prominent as a landmark is the *seventh cervical vertebra*, which is visible when the head is flexed forward.

The most prominent muscle on the side of the neck is the *sternocleidomastoid*. This tongue-twisting name is

actually quite helpful, as it tells you where the muscle originates and where it inserts—information crucial to understanding the muscle's function. The right and left versions of this muscle come together to form the classic V shape that frames the throat. The muscle's bottom portion splits in two, with a noticeable triangular shape in between. The lateral section begins at the clavicle, while the medial section extends all the way to the *sternum*. This muscle spirals backward and upward, like a thick rope, inserting into the mastoid process of the skull. The sternocleidomastoid's major function is to rotate the head. When the model rotates his or her head from side to side, you can see sternocleidomastoid's medial tendon pop out with great definition. This V shape is known as the *suprasternal notch*, or the pit of the neck, an important landmark for measuring.

RIGHT

Sketchbook Page

1998, graphite, 12 x 9.

Unlike on the female model, the male model presents the shape of the so-called 'Adam's apple,' which is a bulging shape that distinctly changes the contour of the throat. From the three-quarters view, note how the neck is tilted forward, allowing the head to lead the way. From the rear, the neck can get visible crease lines when the face rotates backward due to the bunching up of the skin.

BELOW RIGHT

Flamingos, Providence, Rhode Island Zoo

1997, graphite, 10½ x 16.

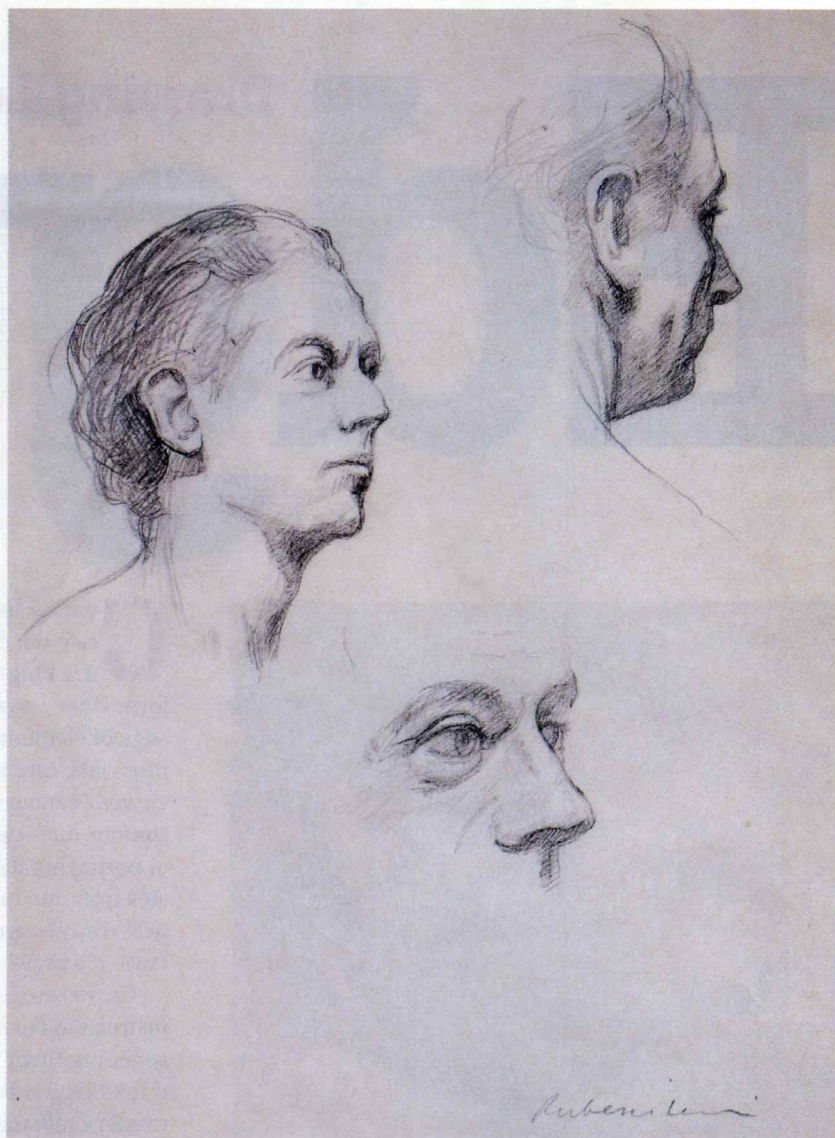
You want necks, we got necks. The incredibly sinuous curves that a flamingo's neck can achieve are truly wondrous. Extremely helpful in reaching to catch shrimp and other small prey in the water, they are also amazing to draw.

OPPOSITE PAGE

Three Studies of Mary Jane's Neck

2007, red chalk, 13 x 19.

On this particular model, the segments of sternocleidomastoid are particularly clear, as are the collarbones—or clavicles—that act as a stabilizing platform for the attachment of the neck muscles. From the front, note the "V" shape of the pit of the neck, or *suprasternal notch*. As the model rotates her head, the sternocleidomastoid on the opposite side pops out as it functions.



Form Concepts

Artist-instructor Robert Beverly Hale conceptualized the neck as a simple cylinder, like a coffee can. When building the form of the neck out of these muscles, it is crucial that they wrap around this cylindrical form and not flatten out. For instance, the trapezius is located toward the back of the cylinder, while the sternocleidomastoid starts at the sides and wraps around toward the front as it descends. From whichever position you are observing the model, it is crucial to keep this cylinder in mind.

In addition, this cylinder does not sit on top of the shoulder like a can on a shelf. It is embedded into the shoulder girdle, with the muscles built up around it, particularly in the back. Furthermore, this cylinder does not sit straight up and down, but is inclined toward the front. This tilt is crucial in getting the proper posture and balance of the figure. ❖

