



OUT OF THE COMFORT ZONE: A nude model poses as artworks take shape at the life-drawing class at Go Arty.

Art class imitates life

Rebecca Marshall draws on her creative talent

IT'S not a breast, it's an oval. It's not a penis, it's a cylinder.

It's not a buttock, it's a circle.

There may be a naked person in the room, but when you are standing near an easel and your fingers are stained black with artist's charcoal, having a perve is as ridiculous an assumption as the thought that a six-week life-drawing class could gift me the skills of Rembrandt.

And yet, most people have one response when you tell them you have signed up for such a pursuit: they express some shock, raise their eyebrows and giggle.

That's precisely the type of misconception I wanted to bust out of the water by actually taking part in the experience, first-hand, for myself.

Go Arty runs regular

life-drawing classes in a cosy space up the stairs at its Norval Court, Maroochydore, premises.

Artist Tony Coles takes the classes, which cost \$180.

Admittedly, the first lesson brought with some anxiety, but that was probably driven more by my perceived lack of talent and how poorly it was bound to compare with others in the group than the fact that I would be staring at a naked person for two hours.

The class is small – about six or seven, and the room is dominated by a table positioned directly under bright lights. The model in the first week was a woman, but a different person posed each week.

Without any fuss and in a

blink, the model takes off her robe and climbs gracefully, naked, on to the table.

Instantly, the atmosphere in the room is overwhelmingly one of “so what?”

What was I expecting?

Someone to run from the room, screaming: “Oh my God, she's got no clothes on”?

Instead, it's down to the very challenging business of somehow converting the living, breathing subject before us into a charcoal image on white paper.

What an interesting journey that is: first, scanning with the eyes, then processing in the brain, transmitting those images via various synapses to stimulate arms and fingers, which then grasp charcoal and

manoeuvre it this way and that. Hopefully, the result is an honest replication of that initial vision seen just seconds earlier.

For some (I notice after a few surreptitious glances left and right), that process is smooth and quick; for others, it is frustrating and peppered with mistakes.

Shapes, form, colour, light, shadow, reflection, line, nuance and tone collide at once. This is a beginner's class and the drawings are quick: two or three minutes per pose. Later in the course, they would extend to 15 or 30 minutes, as our skills develop.

And develop they do.

Eventually, I went from completely ignoring the complicated hands, feet and

faces to actually giving them a go.

The shapes that nature is broken into – the ovals, cylinders, circles and others – are finessed with shadows, light strokes and smudges to appear much more realistic.

By the third week, the class was becoming more complicated, but in a fantastic, challenging way.

We tried constructing our drawings, beginning with the negative space – the triangle area in the centre of a bent arm rested on a hip, for example. We drew with our non-dominant hand, and without looking at our paper. Then we shaded out our paper so it was covered in black, and drew “backwards”, using an

eraser to build a white-on-black image that popped from the page.

The effect was remarkable and it was the first time I felt I was worthy of grabbing the Go Arty Holy Grail: the can of hairspray.

That is the signal of a job well done – of a drawing so good, that its creator wants to preserve it and protect against any accidental smudges with a quick spray of the sticky stuff.

My artwork will never hang in the Louvre, but it will forever hang in my memory as proof of a time when I confronted those ever-present “I can't” fears and jumped into the refreshing ocean that churns there always, way out past my comfort zone.