



# Costa Vavagiakis

**THE DRAWING I HAVE SELECTED FROM** the League archives is a good example of nineteenth-century student work by Victor Hecht (1873–1931), who was probably in his late teens or early twenties when he completed it. Hecht was born in Paris and studied with Jules–Joseph Lefebvre and Tony Robert–Fleury at the Académie Julian. Upon coming to the United States, he continued his schooling at the Art Students League of New York. Looking at this drawing, I see the influence of several prominent artists who taught at the League during this period: Frank Vincent DuMond, Kenyon Cox, and George Bridgman.

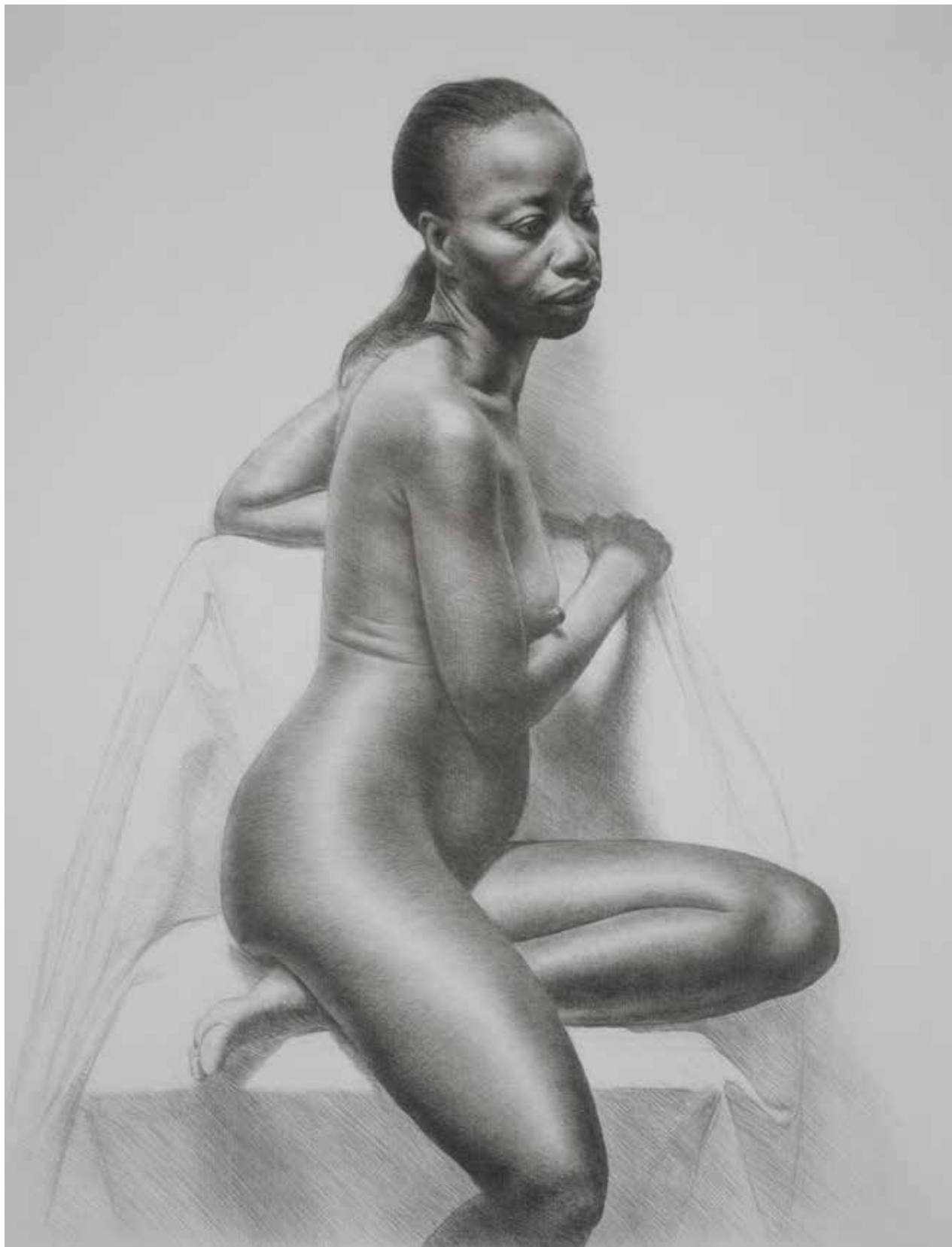
In this drawing I admire the solid construction and the understanding of perspective. Hecht was looking *up* at the figure, which means he was probably seated at the back of the room, several yards away from the standing model. He was almost certainly working in one of the League’s larger drawing studios, perhaps even Studio 1–2 where I teach today. From his vantage point, Hecht saw the underside of the block of the head (beneath the chin) and the underside of the block-like forearm. The torso, from the pelvis upward, has been twisted beautifully, and Hecht fully understood how to depict this rotation. He also recorded the orientation of the ribcage and the angle of the head powerfully. Bridgman may have shown Hecht how to think of the ribcage and the head as two blocks.

Hecht’s understanding of anatomy and his use of line and tone were additional evidence of his superb training. At the League today, my colleagues and I strive to give students an equivalent high level of training. My own training as an art student was much less systematic. As a young artist, I wanted to draw naturalistically, but my thinking was not particularly developed. It was only as I matured that I grew to understand the conceptual complexity of the great early draftsmen—Leonardo, Michelangelo, and Raphael. Of all the aspects of the Classical tradition that inform my own teaching, the study of the masterworks of the past is the most essential. For instance, Leonardo taught me that drawing is a kind of thinking, as is playing a musical instrument. By using a continuous gesture to depict the movement of forms in space, he showed me that drawing is a way of exploring life. And in order to get at life, he demonstrated that intuition is always at the heart of the process. These essential principles have formed the core of my teaching methodology.

**OPPOSITE PAGE**  
Victor Hecht,  
Academic drawing,  
ca. 1892, charcoal on  
paper. Permanent  
collection, Art  
Students League of  
New York.



Costa Vavagiakis, *Gioia VI*, 2000, graphite on paper, 52 x 41 inches. Collection of Noah Simmons.



Costa Vavagiakis, *Connie XI*, 2003, graphite on paper, 25½ x 19½ inches.