

I started my career in O&P while working my way through college. After four years of vocational-technical school with commercial art as my major, I was certain of the path of my future employment.

My chosen career would be as an artist of some type, preferably like that of my (then) hero, Frank Frazetta. I began attending the Art Institute of Fort Lauderdale.

As fate would have it, my predestined career would not come to pass. It turns out that commercial art is a very competitive business. It's kind of like playing musical chairs with ten chairs and 150 people. The phrase "starving artist" is based in reality, and I was the kind of guy who really liked to eat.

So the job I took making braces to get me through school started looking pretty good to me. It was paying the bills and my belly wasn't rubbing my backbone. Once I'd mastered the intricacies of sweeping the floor and emptying the trash cans, my boss started looking for more profitable things for me to do.

### From starving artist to carving artist

When he discovered my art background, he stuck a sureform in my hand and set me in front of a plaster cast. I recall it was a very large body jacket. I believe he felt I couldn't do too much harm to it. Besides, I don't think he was looking forward to having to carve down the "pendulous abdomen" on this particular patient.

He showed me the various anatomical landmarks and we discussed what had to be carved and by how much. He carved some and I carved some. He applied some plaster and I copied his technique. In most situations, I simply duplicated what he was doing, but there was one exception.

Over the years it's become apparent to me that nearly everyone who

modifies plaster pushes the sureform away from them. My instructor was one such person. The theory is that you can remove more plaster more quickly this way. I don't doubt that's true, but I do have an issue with it.

If you really want to remove a lot of plaster quickly, you can use a draw knife. It's sharp and can easily slice through plaster to get down to the nitty-gritty. And the name "draw knife" should tell you something. You draw it toward you to use it.

### Learn from the masters

Fade back to art school. One of the things we students of art were taught was a story about Michelangelo, Pope Julius II and the Sistine Chapel. The good Pope wanted to hire the world's greatest artist to adorn the ceiling of his newly constructed Sistine Chapel.

He sent his emissaries across Europe to interview different artists and to collect samples of their work for consideration. When the emissary came to interview Michelangelo, he found him painting in his studio. The man asked the master for a sample of his work to bring back to Pope Julius II in Rome to see if the quality was up to his standards.

Michelangelo stood up from his stool and walked over to a blank canvas that had recently been stretched across its frame. Using the paint already on his brush, he drew a circle with just two strokes of his brush, each stroke a perfect semicircle starting at the top of the canvas and finishing at the bottom. The emissary was aghast at the simple

design but brought the canvas back nonetheless.

When the circle was measured by the functionaries at the Vatican it was found to be absolutely perfect in proportion and dimension. This perfect circle was possible only because Michelangelo knew one small fact.

True control of the brush can be achieved best by drawing it toward you. In other words, speaking anatomically, you have much more motor function control when your muscles are pulling toward your body rather than away.

Artists around the world know this either instinctively or through formal education. You'll never see someone trying to draw while pushing the pencil or brush away from them, so why would an O&P technician expect it to work with a sureform?

You gain a lot more control over your sureform if you follow basic anatomical principles in your sureforming technique. Instead of long cuts pushing away from you, try many short cuts while pulling toward you. It may feel strange at first, but with some practice it will become second nature. 



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# The Art of Sureform Control

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