

The figure is something we travel upon daily with pencil, brush and clay during the time of our studies at the Florence Academy of Art. To me it is of great value for each and every student to have a map in their heads, knowing how to travel this ever changing landscape, where every person's body is different, but still the same. We all have hands, ribs and hipbones. These are points we can use to make sure we don't get lost; they are landmarks, information that keep us aware of where we are in the big picture.

To me, the most important part about studying anatomy is to understand the form of the human figure in terms of line, mass and planes. This knowledge will strengthen drawing, sculpture and painting, but the knowledge is only useful when kept in memory. Drawing bones or muscles for the sake of drawing them is not a worthy goal. The artist must be able to feel the anatomy of the figure while drawing the figure; to act on intuition when he describes the information offered by the human body. A good student to me should have the skill to be able to visualize the skeleton and muscles in his or her mind while observing the model in front of him, and not fall into mindless copying. As the model changes, he should also be able turn the shapes in his mind to know what information to include in his work.

During the first year, I begin by teaching the students how to study the figure from the outside, and to identify the important landmarks of the skeleton. As the academic year proceeds, they study the skeleton in depth and later apply the muscles on top, going through the body step by step, learning the important characteristics of the different body parts and at the same time staying vigilant to the big picture. By the end of the course, the student has a clear understanding of the challenges presented by the human body.

In the second year, students are invited to join the Ecorché Sculpture course. Here we build the human figure from the inside out, without the use of a model. We begin by constructing the skeleton and then layering the muscles on top of it. This is a great challenge for the student, to try to recreate the form of the human body in his mind. This is where the student sees if he has learned the different parts of the body by heart, not only abstractly, but also in three dimensions, filling in the gaps that the anatomy books leaves out with his own knowledge of the figure.

In the third year the students who have successfully finish their ecorché sculptures have the opportunity to construct their own figure from memory, and using the information they acquired by analyzing and studying the human body during the previous two years. After completing a figure from memory, they will have a clear understanding of how to use visual information from observation and the construction from knowledge.

This is where I think the Anatomy Program fills an important role in our school, by building the bridge between a flat abstract image of a figure and a figure that breaths and moves in its own space with believability. The challenge is met with success when the student applies the acquired skills: accurate observation of form, knowledge of anatomy, and intelligent decision-making.

- Per Elof Nilsson Ricklund, Program Director, Anatomy and Ecorchet Sculpture, 2012

