

The fall of 1998 brought me back to Florence to develop the Sculpture Program at The Florence Academy. It began in purpose and theory with four elements:

- A belief imparted to me that, “all good figurative sculpture has a sense of internal structure”
- A basic curriculum taught to me termed “the box and egg” - a method used to explain human anatomy as it relates to sculpture (box = pelvis/egg = ribcage)
- A belief that art can be taught, something I learned during my time as a student at the Florence Academy years earlier that changed my life as a young sculptor
- A desire to establish a program for students who are interested in focusing on the human figure in sculpture

The first years of the sculpture program saw few students, working hard, with simple goals, making good figurative sculptures. The years that followed not only saw an increase in student numbers, but a rapid development of the program’s curriculum. No longer was “the box and egg” the sole focus, but other crucial factors found their way into the methodology, like building the student’s awareness of the aesthetic vocabulary contained within the figure, seen primarily through linear contour and form. A question we instructors often asked in individual critiques is “what does a taut contour line express?”

Students receive individual critiques four days a week. These daily critiques are guided by what is paramount to this program and influences most decision-making: it is vital that I teach students not to need me. There are two ways to teach this subject. A teacher can either help a student to make his sculpture better, or help him become a better sculptor. I believe the first builds dependence on the teacher; the latter builds self-reliance. In order to ensure that a student becomes a self-reliant sculptor, I make sure critiques encourage dialogue or conversation. I often begin a critique by asking the questions: how are you doing with your work? Is there something that is troubling you? Do you feel confused anywhere with the sculpture? Where do you feel the work is successful? This dialogue allows a teacher insight into the student’s level of understanding.

As a student works towards developing a sound technique, he or she can often get off track. Through dialogue, a teacher becomes aware of how much they are off track (and equally how much they are engaged in the appropriate activity.) Before assessing the aesthetic of a student’s work, the teacher guides him on how to best organize his work, how to understand the appropriate amount of time to focus on each aspect, and when not to focus on others. In the end, the student understands the importance of developing a sound approach before starting a project.

Individual critiques usually last about 15 minutes, so students must develop self-reliance quickly to make the remainder of the three-hour work session productive. The ability to make judgments independently is crucial in order to be able to continue working productively for the remainder of the day.

During our three-year dialogue with students, a teacher sees much progress as the scales tip from being mostly responsible for the development of a student’s work, to the student becoming more responsible, and, hopefully, ultimately, fully responsible

for his success.

Once students complete their training at The Florence Academy of art, they should understand how to approach all aspects of figurative sculpture. They should possess a sound understanding of how the human body works internally, and the observation skills to relate the body's internal workings to its three-dimensional form. This skill should allow them to sculpt any subject, and give them great powers of expression with the human figure. This is how I define the successful training of sculpture students at the Florence Academy.

I would like to see this program continuing to attract the serious art student, and I would like to offer sculptors an expanded facility to allow them to finish their work from beginning to end. I feel the Florence Academy Sculpture Program has come into its own, evolved through careful design and alteration based on the needs of its students. It will continue to do so as new students arrive every year.

- Robert Bodem, Program Director, Sculpture Program, 2012