

TRADITION IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Daniel Graves

I. INTRODUCTION

Having devoted much of my life, as both an artist and a teacher, to the representational arts, I am very pleased to see that, once again, a growing number of people are finding more traditionally rendered images meaningful to them.

Indeed, after seventy years of relative neglect, the representational art movement is flourishing. Those of us who trained years ago and met with little support today find more opportunities for exposure, and more and more young people want to train in what I would term the “traditional approach to realism.” Many have found their way to The Florence Academy of Art, and, for them, the training we offer does not seem out of date, but, rather, the only training that will set them free to work with confidence as artists. Many people involved in the arts at all levels are pushing to support the expansion of this movement – at the grass roots, where I witness the changes daily, at galleries and museums, and even at some universities. The current exhibition at the Panorama Museum is testament to these changes.

Interestingly, however, within this seemingly cohesive group, a multitude of diverse styles and points-of-view are represented. It is not within the scope of this article to comprehensively discuss everything that is going on in the world of representational art, but, to give an example of the diversity, a group exhibition might include realist works in the academic style, as well as those that are more impressionistic, expressionistic, photographic, surreal, and/or naïve – just to name a few. A layperson might cast all of these styles together, but this exhibition brings to light an important distinction: some of us are *consciously* working in the spirit of “the

tradition,” as it is called, and some of us are not. The work in this show¹ has been done by artists who were trained, and are working, in the spirit of this tradition.

The tradition I refer to is that of the humanist spirit in western art. It has its origins in the Greek sculptors and painters who tried to faithfully capture the forms of nature, in so doing expressing ideas of beauty and significance. The tradition is continually evolving, changed and fortified by the many generations of artists who have searched and shown us visions of what they found meaningful and of crucial importance to human life. The desire to be connected to the tradition at a time when it was no longer whole, when it was considered passé to want to do so, and when its language was being forgotten, is what brought me to Florence in 1978. It is what brings most of our students to The Florence Academy of Art today.

To say that we are all working in the tradition does not mean that our subject matter and artistic interests are the same. As I hope is evident from the work itself, each of us is creating a unique body of work based upon our individual artistic paths. But, we all received many years of academic training directed at learning the same visual “language.” That is, we have all learned, to the extent that we could, the language of the tradition, which as artists we utilize to express our vision – just as poets, for instance, use words, rhythms, and forms to craft poems.

One of the most important things I have come to realize over the years is that, amongst those of us working within this tradition, our knowledge and resources need to be shared, not only to further our understanding of our own work, but so as to better equip the next generation of artists to carry it into the future. We are all working with parts of what was once a more complete body of knowledge. This is something I began to discover as a young art student and that I continue to face now,

¹ The selection of paintings for inclusion in this exhibition was made by the [director of Panorama Museum](#) based on the submission of slides.

as a working artist and director of an academy focused on teaching students the craft of working in the realist tradition.

For many reasons, as we approached the turn of the 20th century, western society began to question, reject, and in some cases destroy much of what it had inherited. I like to believe that our mission as the 21st century begins is to fit together fragments of the humanistic tradition so that we might contribute meaningful images that will inspire future generations to it. I feel the success of The Florence Academy of Art and the work in this exhibit is proof that we are on the road to doing that.

II. A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE ACADEMIC TRADITION AND MY TRAINING IN IT

I am often asked by students, “What was it like when you were training? What schools or studios taught traditional drawing and painting? Where did you study and why?” Most students have heard that opportunities 30 years ago were scarce. In his book, *THE TWILIGHT OF PAINTING*, published in 1946, R. H. Ives Gammell warned that painting was in a state of near “catastrophe” because traditional approaches to learning the craft were falling by the wayside – that was 22 years before I became an art student. Thankfully, though, even at that dark age, there were a few dedicated teachers remaining who carried the torch and passed it on – people to whom (as I now think of it) a shard of the tradition had been given, which they in turn passed on to the next generation. As a young art student, and, later, as a young painter, I was fortunate enough to meet and learn from some of those people. Because I believe it is important to understand how this tradition was kept alive, and, further, to understand just how deep these roots go, I would like to briefly summarize where some of what I learned and am now teaching has come from.

Even in the United States, where I began my studies in 1968, most, if not all, of the information that was saved can be traced back to the 19th century ateliers of Europe, wherein generations, literally, of European knowledge about painting were housed. This information had been passed down since the Renaissance, first through individual artists who took on apprentices, then through the academies whose function it was to educate artists and maintain a tradition of craftsmanship. Because there were few such institutions in the United States, most American painters traveled to these European ateliers to learn the principles and techniques critical to their vocation. While it would be impossible to trace the pure lines of Europe's academic tradition and its impact on American painting in just a few pages, it is important to note that American painters trained in France, Germany, England, and many other countries; a number of them then returned to the United States, knowledge in hand, not just to paint but to set up studios and schools of their own.

For many complex social and artistic reasons, this traditional system of training began to break down in Western Europe at the turn of the century. It was then that the comprehensive body of knowledge that had been passed down in an unbroken chain through the centuries was interrupted. The academies and ateliers of Western Europe all but disappeared, leaving only individual artists/teachers behind, who, with each passing generation, possessed a less complete body of knowledge.

R.H. Ives Gammell, whose book I mentioned earlier, is an example of one such painter. When he was born in Providence, Rhode Island in 1893, the ateliers in western Europe were already in decline. However, in 1911, he enrolled in the School of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, where he was fortunate enough to meet many painters whose training connected them to the academies of Europe. Most notably, he studied with William Paxton, who in turn had studied with Jean Léon Gérôme at The

Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris. Gammell's place in the history of American realism is significant not only because of this, but also because he was an author and teacher: in his writings he documented the values and teachings of the previous centuries, as he had received them; as a teacher, he passed them directly on to his students.

Many of his students became fine painters and, just as importantly, teachers of the tradition themselves. Some, such as Richard Lack, opened their own academies. Lack's atelier became one of the leading ones after Gammell's and continues even today. Located in Minnesota, it is now directed by his former students, Dale Redpath and Cyd Wicker. Other ateliers, past and present, with links to Gammell or one of his students include those directed by Allen Banks, Charles Cecil, James Childs, Robert Cormier, Stephen Gjertson, Gary Hoffman, Don Koestner, Robert Douglas Hunter, and Richard Whitney. Having myself studied with Lack, The Florence Academy of Art is a blend of his teachings and those of other artists/teachers who greatly influenced me.²

The lineage through Gammell that I have briefly traced gives only an abbreviated sense of how the traditions of Europe were passed down. He was not the only one who carried these traditions forward. In the first quarter of the 20th century, many talented painters in the United States maintained studios where they taught variations of the tradition. Those with the greatest influence were run by Robert Brackman (1898-1980), William Merritt Chase (1849-1916), Frank Vincent Dumond (1865-1951), Frank Duveneck (1848-1919), Robert Henri (1865-1925), Jacques Maroger (1884-1962), Howard Pyle (1853-1911), Edmund Charles Tarbell (1862-

² Currently there are numerous ateliers in addition to those linked to Richard Lack offering traditional types of training. The ones I know of include those run by Ted Seth Jacobs in France, Jacob Collins in New York, and Jeffrey Mims in North Carolina. For a more extensive listing, I would refer you to the Art Renewal Center's listing of ateliers, art schools, programs, and workshops: www.artrenewal.org.

1938), and N.C. Wyeth (1882-1945), just to name a few. They, their students, and so many others, helped to keep the torches burning.³

I was fortunate enough to come across some of the people with direct connections to the tradition, beginning with my undergraduate years as a student at the Maryland Institute of the Arts. It was there that I encountered for the first time painters of real caliber, including Joseph Sheppard and Frank Russell, both of whom influenced me very much. Russell offered a class called “Intensive Realism,” which introduced me to the value of close observation. Sheppard taught me a rapid technique based on Jacques Maroger’s method of painting and emphasized anatomy. He had spent a number of years in Europe and it was from him that I first heard about Pietro Annigoni.

With my interest in Italy and Annigoni awakened by Sheppard, I chose to attend graduate school in Florence at the Villa Schifanoia, where I met Richard Serrin, one of the great influences on my life. It was he who taught me how to “read” a painting, thereby opening a door that is crucial to developing a deep and on-going dialogue with past masters. He demonstrated a profound technical understanding of Rembrandt and 17th century painting, but, just as importantly, he “communed” with the world of painting and talked to me about the significance of what he saw

³ A few institutions in the United States supported a more traditional curriculum, as well, namely, [the Lyme Academy College of Fine Arts](#), the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, The National Academy in New York, The Art Students League, and the Schuler School of Fine Arts in Baltimore. There were others, but, of the great number of accredited schools in the country, only a fraction offered a traditional program of any substance.

Ironically enough, in western Europe fewer direct links to the 19th century academies survived than in the United States. Already under barrage because of aforementioned artistic and social changes, many closed during the chaos of the Second World War; most of those that remained open adapted to the more modern approach. As in the United States, Western Europe supported a few stubborn individual artists/teachers who refused to join the modernists. They were scattered all around the continent, from Sweden to Spain. Although it is really outside my expertise to talk about [them](#) at any length, the academies of Eastern Europe and Russia did continue to teach traditional methods, but in relative isolation from the West.

embodied in the work of the great painters he admired. What I learned from Serrin was of psychological and philosophical depth; he demonstrated how to sink below the surface of a painting to find its meaning.

Later, I went to Minneapolis with Serrin to help him on a mural project, and it was there that I met Richard Lack, with whom I studied for almost a year. From Lack I learned many of the academic traditions of the Boston School, which had been passed on to him by Gammell, and the sight-size method of drawing and painting, which is said to have been used by many of the portrait painters of the nineteenth century, including John Singer Sargent. I then returned to Florence and studied with Nerina Simi, “Signorina Simi,” as we called her. The daughter of Filadelfo Simi (a Florentine painter in the Macchiaioli Style who had studied with Gérôme), Signorina Simi maintained her father’s atelier from his death in 1923 until her own in 1987 at the age of 97. I returned to Florence to study with her because the work coming out of her studio had strengths that I wanted to acquire.

I was still looking for pieces of the puzzle, shards of the tradition, which I hoped to fit together to make my own work more complete. I had become aware that technical laws of craft existed and had to be learned, that they were separate from individual artistic styles, and that they could therefore be boiled down into principles and passed onto students without the burden of mannerisms and styles. These principles, such as “light is form; shadow is atmosphere,” are often known *subconsciously* by painters and are embodied in their work. But because the knowledge so often is subconscious, many painters find it impossible to isolate, distill, and pass on to students.

Both Lack and Simi offered a connection to Gérôme, which was meaningful to me. Lack inherited his through Gammell’s lineage, Signorina Simi gleaned hers

through working in the studio with her father. Both going back to Gérôme, there were many similarities in what they taught but quite a few differences, as well. One was the Italian version and one the American of the French tradition. The American version was more regimented and controlled, the Italian more “artistic” and spirited in its approach – there was less organization in Simi’s studio and far more emphasis on developing the hand, and “the movement,” and the idea of beauty and other things that were rarely spoken of in the United States. But at the end of the day, they both had the humanist element as their standard and admired some of the same great painters: Velasquez, Titian, Rembrandt, Gérôme, Sargent, and others.

Italy – with its museums, churches, and natural beauty, and as a place where the Arts have traditionally flourished – has always been a magnet for artists. The presence of Signorina Simi and Pietro Annigoni in Florence drew not only me but many young painters looking for the frayed threads of the realist tradition to this city in particular. We desperately wanted to feel connected to the tradition, and it seemed that nowhere else were artists working as they had in the past – with an attention to craft even at the most basic material level. In Florence, one did not call oneself an artist, but a painter; and when one earned the respect of others, as Annigoni had, one was given the title “maestro.” These things made us feel that painting was a noble profession, deeply rooted in craft, culture, and community. Some of those who came stayed for only a few months; others, like myself, have remained, caught by the beauty and the culture.

Although I did not study with Annigoni, who died in 1988 at the age of 78, I came to know him quite well. He was, as some called him, “the Patriarch of Realism.” Setting the standard for draftsmanship, he gave us hope because he could draw and paint as artists had in previous centuries. Although many young painters from all over

went to his studio hoping to gain admittance, only a handful, to my knowledge, were taken on as apprentices for any length of time. His first apprentices were Italian – Romano Stefanelli, Nando Bernardini, Antonio Cicconi, Luciano Guarnieri, and, lastly, Gianni Cacciarini. Later, a group of foreign students studied with him, including Nelson White, Ben Long, and Rob Wraith. I visited his studio many times to show him my paintings; he was always encouraging but never gave much praise. Not much for small talk, he enjoyed discussing the deeper meanings of life. Of course, art was always in the forefront of our discussions.

As I would leave the studio after visiting with him, he would always encourage me. *“Buon lavoro. Forza e coraggio”* (“Work hard and well. Strength and courage”), he would say, in the tone, I imagine, of a Roman warrior.

III. CURRICULUM, TEACHING METHODOLOGY, AND PROGRESSION OF STUDY AT THE FLORENCE ACADEMY OF ART

“In a school of fine arts, it is one’s duty to teach only uncontested truths, or at least those that rest upon the finest examples accepted for centuries.” H. Flandrin’s words, printed on our brochure, are the closest we come to articulating a mission statement at The Florence Academy of Art. With Flandrin, and so many others we could quote, as our guides, we teach the craft of working in the realist tradition similarly to how it was taught in the 19th century ateliers of western Europe – not so as to produce 19th century work, but because, as I mentioned earlier, *our most direct link to the traditional values and teachings of the past, which are known to have produced professional-level artists in the realist tradition, are through those studios.* Because, as I also mentioned, I picked up pieces of the tradition from many different people,

what we teach at the Florence Academy is a blend of what I received from many of those I mentioned earlier, necessarily interpreted in my own way.

In looking to the atelier system of training as a model, The Florence Academy of Art is different from most other art schools, where students go to a variety of classes and are often taught by many people. In art schools as they are commonly structured today, projects of multiple degrees of difficulty are thrown at students all at once, often by teachers with different agendas and points of view – there are too many “bosses” and no clear method of training in fundamental aspects of the craft, such as learning how to draw. Accomplished painters may give demos on how to paint a portrait, for example; however, it remains a mystery to those watching who have not received training in basic principles. In such an environment, students do not have a clear sense of how to progress and have no chance to develop confidence.

When students walk in the door of the Florence Academy, they are assigned a studio space and settle into a rhythm of working that will remain constant throughout their years of study. Urging them to become, as John Constable said, “patient pupil[s] of nature,” half of the day is spent working from the figure, half of the day in their studios, working on specific exercises. We demystify the training of an artist and break the vastly complex task of learning to draw, paint, and sculpt from life into gradual steps. In the most general terms, students spend their days trying to see and put down exactly what is in front of them, for, as Leonardo said, “The painter will produce pictures of little merit if he takes the works of others as his standard; but if he will apply himself to learn from the objects of nature he will produce good results.” To do this, however, is not easy: a step-by-step progression through the school’s curriculum, from learning to draw accurately to learning to use precise color values in

oil or – for the sculpture students – learning to use correct structure in clay, generally takes students four to five years.

Drawing students receive individual critiques twice a day five days a week, painting students four (which we found more optimum than five, as they tend to require more time on their own to digest feedback). All of our instructors were trained here. They all spent years mastering the same visual language they pass on. I give them all the freedom to connect with students in their own way, but, regardless of how teachers express themselves, they are passing on a consistent and clearly delineated body of knowledge, concepts and principles that will set students free to express their ideas, not manneristic techniques.

Intensive Drawing and Painting Program⁴

Our painting program, which begins with a year of intensive drawing, is designed to take four years to complete. Students fall into one of five categories: beginner, intermediate, advanced, student teacher, or artist-in-residence.

The first year student faces the daunting task of adjusting to what may very well be an entirely different way of training. Working with discipline within the framework of an atelier system, making the most of daylight hours, and becoming accustomed to the sight-size method of drawing are some of the challenges they face. With few exceptions, students focus exclusively on drawing their first year at the Florence Academy, which has traditionally been and will always be, I believe, the foundation of the realist tradition. Initial studio assignments help to acclimate students to our standards; accuracy and the skillful use of drawing mediums are the first technical hurdles they are asked to overcome. Using pencil, they must faithfully

⁴ Our drawing program is headed by Simona Dolci, our painting program by Ramiro Sanchez.

reproduce lithographic drawings developed as preparatory study for art students by Charles Bargue, a 19th century academic painter and Gérôme's assistant. The drawings range from simple to complex, and once students demonstrate technical expertise in copying an advanced drawing in pencil, they move on to copying a larger, more complicated lithograph, which must be reproduced in charcoal. Throughout the program, lessons and techniques learned through studio exercises such as copying Bargue's drawings are applied when working from the figure, which is the determining factor in being able to analyze the advancement of every student and level at which they are working.

Students move from copying the drawings of Bargue to drawing from casts in charcoal. Having gained confidence in their ability to be accurate, they are now asked to develop, in preparation to become a painter, a sophisticated understanding of gradations of value – hence, the use of charcoal, whose range makes it an effective medium for exploring light and dark. If students are struggling with drawing issues, I feel it is always best to hold them back. There is no point in throwing technical problems at them related to other mediums if they do not see the values in a cast or cannot perceive subtleties of proportion. Better that drawing problems be resolved before students move on to the next set of challenges.

Intermediate students have achieved a strong foundation in drawing, both in pencil and charcoal, and, usually by the beginning of their second year, they begin to draw with charcoal and white chalk on toned paper, a step closer to painting. The students' cast drawings begin to look like the actual casts, and their figure drawings have the weight and balance of a living person. With these drawing skills well in-hand, the first painting projects are assigned. Gaining control over this new medium takes time and experience, and, as with drawing, we move step-by-step. We soften the

transition from drawing by starting students off with painting *en grisaille* – that is, with painting in gray. This gives students a chance to become familiar with using paint to study values without the added complexity of color. Only a few projects are given *en grisaille* (usually two casts and one five-week figure painting) before a project in limited color is assigned.

“Color,” John Singer Sargent said, “is an adornment of form.” While that may be true, most painters spend a great part of their lives trying to understand it! We start students off with three colors, not including white – yellow ocher, English red, and black. This is the most traditional and basic palette there is – students have started with it for centuries, and, surprisingly perhaps, many great painters, such as Titian, are thought to have used it to produce some of their finest work. Focusing on building confidence with experience, the first subjects students paint are simple, often a single piece of fruit against a dark background. Students paint the same fruit three times – the first time, they have as long as they wish to finish their painting, the second time just three hours. When they begin their third painting, the fruit is removed, and students paint from memory. The last exercise may seem odd from a school devoted to working from life and the close observation of nature, but, in fact, the memory of a visual artist can and should be developed, much as that of an actor or poet, and has its place in working from life. In the nineteenth century, Lecoq de Boisbaudran, the teacher of James McNeil Whistler and Henri Fantin-Latour, developed a system for training his students’ memories. Whistler writes of going for long walks, looking intensively at scenes, and returning to his studio to make etchings from memory of what he had seen.

Once students have discovered the potential of these basic colors, others are added as they need them: naples yellow, vermilion, cobalt blue, etc.

Third year students are given time to absorb and practice the material given to them in the second year, along with a greater degree of difficulty in subject matter. Portraiture is introduced, first in drawing, then in painting. Many students begin to show a proclivity towards certain kinds of subject matter and may begin correspondingly to spend more time developing their skills in the area that most fascinates them.

By the fourth year, students have mastered drawing in two mediums and are familiar with the methods *and materials* of oil painting, the latter as important in the studies of a painter as the former. Now is the time to refine skills, to identify and tackle lingering weaknesses, and to begin to put technical knowledge to the test. Most of our fourth year students begin to teach at the Academy. What they have acquired in ability they are forced to put into words, which is when they become more conscious of what they know. Along with giving them increased responsibility, we expect them to push the technical skills they have acquired further to solve more complex problems (e.g. to paint hands). We ask them to begin seriously considering issues of composition (e.g., to place emphasis on the gesture of the figure and to paint with an indication of the mood and personality of the model), and we guide them in developing their voice. The kinds of problems they begin to solve this year are the ones they will face as emerging artists: what do I want to paint? Why? What emotion do I want to convey and how? What areas of technical competence must I strengthen so as to not be held back in the articulation of my vision?

Although we demand that students work hard and progress, we do not put pressure on them to master the material within a predetermined length of time; students advance at their own rate. Again and again, we have found that the amount of

time it takes to master the material varies from person to person – many of our most gifted students got off to slow starts. Students work on projects for as long as it is fruitful, starting with their copy of the simplest Bargue drawing, and they are ensured that, “time does not matter” at the Florence Academy. This emphasis on careful, albeit efficient, study is crucial, I believe, to mastering the critical aspects of the craft. But, as with so many things, there is always a balance to be achieved: for students must also be urged to push themselves and must learn to work efficiently.

With that in mind, one of the most beneficial policies we have instituted in the past ten years is the final critique. At the end of each trimester, students individually bring all the work they produced before their assembled teachers. The purpose of the critique is to let students know if they are on course, to give them a clear indication of what we feel their strengths and weaknesses are, and to give them *personalized* suggestions on how to improve. They are given a pass/fail grade based on how they have done in five different categories: progress, performance, attitude, effort, and attendance. Out of a maximum score of fifteen, a student must get a minimum of 10 to pass. This grading system, with performance only one of the issues by which a student is assessed, was instituted with the awareness that *some students just don't get it at first*. They struggle and struggle, sometimes even for years; for those who don't give up it eventually clicks. On the other hand, this system also allows us to ask students who are not really motivated to be at the Florence Academy to either demonstrate a desire to be here or to leave – it is critical that all our students be truly dedicated and want to do well. This creates an atmosphere of healthy competition at the school in which students are encouraged to share.⁵

⁵ This is not the right environment for people who are hoarders. I feel very strongly about this. All the information, technical and otherwise, needs to be shared because we are all in lack of knowledge

I suspect that for some students, the days sometimes seem slow and tedious, but when they leave after having been here for a few years, they know how to follow a procedure that works. EVERY ART IS ABOUT CONTROL: If you cannot follow specified movements of ballet, you cannot dance ballet; you cannot play classical music unless you have control over all the scales and your fingerings. You cannot paint and sculpt in a traditional manner unless you have learned the necessary principles and techniques.

An indication of just how successful this method of training can be is that roughly 80% of our students go on to become working artists, a statistic that makes us very proud.

Sculpture

Robert Bodem directs the sculpture department at The Florence Academy of Art and has built a sound program based on academic values. It utilizes a philosophy of building the figure from the inside out. Students both draw and sculpt throughout the program. The drawing they do has been adapted especially for sculptors, based on a system blending sight-size and anatomical points. First projects include sculpting a bone from a cow and enlarging it using plaster; then copying parts cast from Michelangelo's David. When moving to life, students begin with a life-size portrait, where the emphasis is on understanding the underlying structure of the skull.

The primary focus of the remaining two years is the figure. Beginning work emphasizes the internal structures of the human body that give it its range of movement, gesture, proportion, etc. When students demonstrate a sound grasp of fundamental principles in standing poses sculpted approximately half life size,

related to the craft in this day and age. And, it is impressive to see how knowledge of craft grows and develops in an atmosphere of generosity.

projects are introduced on more complex levels, including reclining poses. Students gradually work up to sculpting a full figure life size and are responsible for every aspect of the process, from creating a maquette, to establishing the pose, learning to weld, to build a rigid armature, and casting the work when completed. Casting is taught to students and is reserved for the last week of every trimester. Students begin with waste-mold casting, then move on to silicone mold making. Currently all work with the figure is done with water-based clay.

The sculpture program, developed in the past 4 years, has recently expanded, and is now functioning at capacity.

Curriculum Outside Of Daily Studio Hours

We have a range of activities focused on broadening our students' educations and acquainting them with the artistic treasures of the past. Lectures on Friday afternoons focus on subjects related to mythology (to stimulate ideas) and art history, which is a critical area of study for the would-be artist. Being in Florence, we take tours of museums, and introduce students firsthand to great works of art. Lectures on *all aspects* of the technical side of painting, from stretching canvases to hand-grinding paint and making one's own medium, are given. Our recently expanded anatomy program includes a year-long *écorché* class, as well as a weekly lecture followed by an anatomy-focused drawing class. There is a Saturday sculpture class for painters.

Our continuing education session in July gives students who are unable to attend the Florence Academy for the full year an experience of what we do. We offer intensive courses on a variety of subjects, many of which are not part of the full academic program, including fresco and landscape painting. We are always enrolled to capacity several months in advance.

IV. STUDENT BODY

Who are the students who come here to Florence to study painting and sculpture, some to stay for many more years than they had planned? It is impossible to generalize about the student body, other than noting that most came to the school after having looked extensively for this kind of training. As of this writing, we have 75 students, some of whom are also instructors. They come from 24 different countries (most from the United States or northern Europe). They range in age from 17 to 60 (most are in their twenties), and possess varied levels of prior training. What holds this diverse group of people together is that they are all struggling to become representational painters and sculptors when they arrive and that they are all working towards the same – or similar – goals while here.

There are generally two types of students: those who seem to have a special gift for seeing and then translating quickly and fluidly from three dimensions into two, and those who struggle for each new skill that they acquire. Both make excellent painters and sculptors, as well as excellent teachers, for different reasons. The former are often admired role models; they quickly perceive the students' mistakes and the reason they have made them. On the other hand, those who have struggled have a keen grasp of the difficulties; they serve as examples of progress, and can sympathize with the frustration of those who are struggling.

Within the mass of new students each year, there is always a core group of talented ones who pull the rest along. Of this core group, one or two very talented and hardworking students go on to become my student teachers, passing on the baton, so to speak, year after year. From the genesis of the Academy in 1991, they include, in the painting department: Paul Brown, Nicole Alger, Charles Weed, Simona Dolci,

Kevin Gorges, Maureen Hyde, Andrea Smith, Anthony Ackrill, Ramiro Sanchez, Hunter Eddy, Rupert Atkinson, Joakim Ericsson, and Dana Levin. In the sculpture department: Cessna DeCosimo, Robert Bodem, and Lotta Blokker. I would also like to mention here that two former instructors made contributions to the early stages of the school: John Angel and Jim Ostlund. Some of these talented people may no longer be at the Academy, but they have been influential in its development, helping to make it what it is today.

What seems to be common in those who are successful, the ones who survive, is their passion and hard work. I believe anyone can achieve success, no matter what their level of talent, if they are totally passionate, involved and assiduous. As Michelangelo said, “If people knew how hard I worked, they wouldn’t like what I do.”

V. PERSONAL STATEMENT

Although pieces of the tradition were saved and passed down, I worry about the current state of this body of knowledge, which is one of the reasons I have devoted part of my time over the years to teaching – first with Charles Cecil at the Cecil-Graves studio, which we jointly ran from 1982 to 1990, and, since 1991, as director of The Florence Academy of Art. Despite the lack of financial reward and the need to devote many of my own resources to it, directing the Florence Academy is a choice I consciously made and one I rarely regret. I feel a duty to both past and future generations to pass on what I learned and to foster an environment where more pieces of the tradition may, perhaps, be discovered, and this overrides the personal sacrifices involved. I could not, however, have developed The Florence Academy of Art on my own, nor could I even begin to hold all the elements of what is required to run it

together. I would therefore like to take this opportunity to thank those people whose hard work, dedication, and vision have brought us to this point. I could not possibly begin to mention everyone, but would like to bring special attention to the staff members who are here every day and have been for years: Susan Tintori, Rosemary Galli, and Ellen Sutherland-Daddi. They have devoted much of their energy to the Academy's growth and have been committed, as have I, to the quality of education above all other things.

I chose when developing the program at the Florence Academy to emphasize those aspects of the tradition that seemed vital to me. In so doing, it was not my desire to manipulate the tradition to fit my personal vision, but to strengthen it, build on it, and give a generation of students the tools they need to devote themselves to what I consider one of the greatest and most challenging occupations of all, the creation of images that have emotional resonance and technical skill, and that convey, in their truthfulness and beauty, ideas of great significance.

Toward this end, as I mentioned earlier, I blended what I learned from the influential artists/teachers I met during the course of my own studies. I have necessarily interpreted their teachings in my own way, fitting the pieces together as has seemed most right. In the spirit of passing on to students that which is "pure" or "true" – that is, to ensure that we are teaching principles and not imposing styles, mannerisms, or techniques – we necessarily focus on practicalities of craft at the school. For an artist who wants to work in this humanist tradition, to learn these classical techniques of drawing, painting and sculpting is to learn the "language" one needs to know in order to "speak" in a way that will be understood. I want to pass this language on to students not so that they will then go into their studios and produce work in imitation of the past, but so they can go into the world and create works of art

in a language which has long been used by artists, and which has long been understood by people of all levels of society, be they working artists or otherwise.

All that being said, I am most aware that the tradition is much greater than the sum of all the elements of craft. We are indeed standing on the shoulders of giants. John Ruskin points out that we have generations of people behind us helping us to make works of art. I would add that those generations of artists have raised the technical and psychological significance of painting to such a high level that anyone taking on the baton faces the toughest competition there is. “Why can’t we produce Leonardos today?” one might ask. I do not believe it is just because we lack technical knowledge and expertise. I believe it is because there is something *in addition* to the technique that is also part of the tradition. I hope that by having the school in Florence, by exposing students to its great masterpieces and culture, that they will pick up more of the essence of the tradition, that they will have more than technique behind them to motivate them.

Given that we do not want to just repeat the work of past centuries, I think one of the great challenges we all face is that of discovering what we are going to paint and sculpt. The narratives that artists tapped into for centuries, the timeless stories from mythology and the Bible, seem less meaningful to people than they once did. To merely record the surface appearance of “reality” has never been the province of painting, whose language is far deeper. From the beginning, artists have painted, sculpted and drawn things that had meaning for them, and the images they have left behind are a living testament, a record of their consciousness on earth. We can read even in the first cave paintings what was sacred to the people who painted them, what they loved, feared, mourned over, wished for, and found beautiful.... It seems to me

that the greatest masters of the craft have always had a clear sense of what they found meaningful in life, which they then transposed into their art.

I believe that to make paintings with the same significance of the paintings I most love, one must have craft, yes, but one must also, in the most basic sense, “have something to say.” To continue the testimony of what humans have seen, believed, felt, and thought, we must have the courage to ask ourselves what we really care about, because if we do not know we cannot express it. We must develop our capacity for deep feeling, for what we know with our minds is only part of what we have to give to our art – we also have our hearts to give. Today many of us are adults in our minds but children in our hearts. We must grow wise in our hearts, in tandem with honing our craft, in order to express ourselves in a way that will both touch and be meaningful to others. To seek beauty and meaning in our lives is to bring it into our art.

Because he so eloquently articulates what I myself believe, I would like to close by quoting at some length from Ruskin’s essay “All Great Art is Praise:”

6. Fix, then, this in your mind as the guiding principle of all right practical labour, and source of all healthful life energy, - that your art is to be the praise of something that you love. It may be only the praise of a shell or a stone; it may be the praise of a hero; it may be the praise of God: - your rank as a living creature is determined by the height and breadth of your love; but, be you small or great, what healthy art is possible to you must be the expression of your true delight in a real thing, better than the art. You may think, perhaps, that a bird’s nest by William Hunt is better than a real bird’s nest. We indeed pay a large sum for the one, and scarcely care to look for, or save, the other. But it would be better for us that all the pictures in the world perished, than that the birds should cease to build nests.

And it is precisely in its expression of this inferiority, that the drawing itself becomes valuable. It is because a photograph cannot condemn itself, that it is worthless. The glory of a great picture is in its shame; and the charm of it, in expressing the pleasure of a loving heart, that there is something better than a picture. Also it speaks with the voices of many: the efforts of thousands dead, and their passions, are in the pictures of their children to-day. Not with the skill of an hour, nor of a life, nor of a century, but with the help of numberless souls, a beautiful thing must be done. And the obedience, and the understanding, and the pure natural passion, and the perseverance... as they must be given to produce a picture, so they must be recognized, that we may perceive one.

7. This is the main lesson I have been teaching, so far as I have been able, through my whole life, - only that picture is noble, which is painted in love of the reality. It is a law which embraces the highest scope of Art; it is one also which guides in security the first steps of it. If you desire to draw, that you may represent something that you care for, you will advance swiftly and safely. If you desire to draw, that you may make a beautiful drawing, you will never make one.

Ruskin's ideas about art may seem to run contrary to the value system we have brought into the 21st century, in which importance is placed on art work that shocks, that sells, that is "new" and cutting edge. But the values he upholds are the very ones many of us are finding to put into our art today. In 1946, R.H. Ives Gammell saw approaching "the twilight of painting" and the death of a revered tradition. Today, with the words and lessons of Gammell, Ruskin, and so many others behind us, I see a dawn of new, deeply felt, and richly envisioned representational work. I also see the vigor of a living tradition – one that is being drawn from, and added to, by new generations of committed sculptors and painters.