

The Florence Academy of Art emerged from a collection of ideas based on my own search for information on master techniques, my personal experiences or frustrations with art education during my formative years, and my knowledge of the past. After co-running Studio Cecil-Graves for eight years, I had come to some important realizations about what was effective and what was not. Years of trial and error followed, with more successes than failures, and now it is my students who are carrying on the tradition, adding in kind their own improvements to it.

There was no exact educational model for me to draw from; the ateliers of the 19th century were an inspiration to be sure, but they were limited in their scope, often based on the personality of a single master painter. True, they produced great artists, but eventually died out. This was a formula I did not want to repeat.

With this firmly in mind, I first of all envisioned a school based on the time-tested principles that had produced the great, varied body of realist art. It would not promote a specific style rather offer a complete classical education including humanities, art history, anatomy, ecorché, composition, and perspective, all at the service of drawing, painting and sculpture.

The Florence Academy of Art would inspire and encourage the individual, whatever the level of talent, and promote individuality and original thought.

It would embrace open dialogue within the studio, and among other artists and institutions that share an interest in the development of classical realism.

It would one day be permanently established in a single location so that future students of classical realism would have a place to study.

These thoughts have greatly influenced all my decisions over the past 21 years. The momentum to realize them has only grown thanks to loyal and dedicated students who continue to search out the Florence Academy as their school of choice.

I knew to make my vision take shape and grow I needed someone to add a perspective that was practical and logistical. An artist can remain deep in his art, in his own world. I could have had all the theory, but needed a colleague to make it real. When I met Susan Tintori I found another educator who shared my dream for a great school based on high standards. We made many sacrifices through the years to stay on course; thanks to this, we have never needed succumb to lowering our standards or diluting our mission in order to survive.

The Academy's curriculum is designed to take a student at any skill level and advance their ability to represent nature. More specifically we teach, what we refer to as "structural realism;" this means we stress observation and an accurate translation of nature. We endeavor not to copy nature mindlessly, the result of this is often banal and lifeless, but rather truthfully engage in the representation of our personal vision of the subject or idea. Individuality is paramount in the final work; to underestimate this would be a failure at the most profound level.

I also envisioned a school based on selfless education, where no single individual's ego would influence a student's outcome. I felt one of the things that was so essential to the school environment was professionalism between teachers and students, where the importance of every individual had to be first priority. From the start, I sought to form a group of likeminded artists, trained at the Florence Academy, who have a profound understanding of its mission, and can continue the ethos of the studio environment as I had originally envisioned it. At various stages, key faculty provided invaluable innovations to the curriculum and methodology that have enriched the program and enhanced student progress.

Finally, I sought to create an institution that would live beyond me, and for this reason, The Florence Academy of Art does not bear my name. For this reason, too, I believe our mission is not only to train fine artists but also to actively prepare the next generation of teachers. This is how our culture is passed from one generation to the next. I see proof of this everyday as I walk through our studios.

The Florence Academy of Art needed to be a place where I would have wanted to study. I felt sure

that if I could offer the kind of training in the environment I had sought as an art student, then it would be the right place for others, too. I believe we have achieved this; we have taken the technical and intellectual standards of the small atelier system, with its emphasis on individualized instruction, and applied them with success to an institution with over 100 students.

When asked to speak about the Academy, I find myself telling the story of its development, or the daily routine of studio life. What I cannot describe but see so vividly are the faces of the hundreds of students who have studied with us, and the many more hundreds of drawings, paintings and sculptures they have made. This is for me is the true value of The Florence Academy of Art.

- Daniel Graves, Founder and Director of The Florence Academy of Art, 2012