

Following the classical tradition, The Florence Academy of Art has from the beginning promoted the importance of teaching drawing. The most famous of the early academies, and certainly the first public one, the Accademia del Disegno, was founded in Florence in 1563. This academy was created from a belief in "certain teachable dogmas and certain canons discovered by a few divine artists of the past." (Pevsner) The vast knowledge of artistic techniques coming out of the workshops of artists at that time had been codified into an organized school of art.

In our school we still believe in these values so the Intensive Drawing Program is based on the principles and methods used in the past. The representation of the human figure, which was the focus of Renaissance tradition, is the core of our drawing course, and it will continue to be as drawing, painting and sculpting from life follow the student throughout his studies as the most important experience at The Florence Academy of Art.

In the Intensive Drawing Program, our students begin to learn how and what to search for when drawing a model. The study of the nude is developed in two different ways, long and short poses; in two different mediums, pencils and charcoal; with two slightly different approaches, a line study versus a finished work of values and light. The students spend substantial time in the model room everyday specifically to practice drawing from life and eventually acquire skills and abilities apt to representing reality. A good, correct drawing is not a perfect reproduction of a precise moment of reality but a completely believable drawing. This must inevitably include the understanding and representation of gesture, balance and body type. To achieve this goal, students are stimulated to see proportions using the sight-size method of measurement.

One of the practices that took place in the workshops and academies associated with Vasari was the copy of drawings of contemporary masters of the time and from ancient classical sculptures. Copying is therefore an important aspect of the Intensive Drawing Program. If drawing is a language that speaks about form, as with every language it has a grammar to be learned. For this purpose we use the beautiful series of drawings made in the nineteenth century by Charles Bargue to teach the vocabulary of drawing to beginners. We guide our students to decode these drawings while copying them to understand which solutions were used to solve problems of form in its translation from reality. With the teacher's help they learn to build a vocabulary to be used when alone in front of a nude or a cast. This language of form will accompany them through the advanced parts of the painting or sculpture curriculum. Eventually, they will turn to it in their careers as professional artists to give form to their ideas.

The Intensive Drawing Program is overseen by a group of principal instructors and assistants who accompany students in every aspect of their learning. This constant and supportive presence, and the richness and variety of instruction, form the core strength of our program. We periodically meet to exchange opinions and make adjustments to the program following feedback from the class. It is my intention to continue along this path, to improve as a cohesive team, and increase the quality and efficiency of the method.

In the exploration and representation of reality, students learn how to see their

subjects, and selectively decide what is important to record. Between teachers and students there is constant dialogue about each new pose to understand how weight and balance are distributed, that is, how the human machine behaves in a specific position. Later, they begin to understand how planes and shapes relate to light and values. At this point, students try to understand and represent light, or better, how light explains form. In all of this, the study of anatomy is inextricably interwoven with drawing from the nude, and therefore an intense collaboration with the Anatomy program is maintained.

Our program improved over time with the introduction of pedagogical drawings, that is, a series of drawings made with the purpose to visually explain our method at different phases in the development of a drawing. We intend to do more of these drawings that, together with the academy's collection of student artwork, make our teaching more visual in approach.

A few years ago, we introduced to the Intensive Drawing Program a series of basic lessons in composition. We included gesture sketches alternated with longer analytical studies of parts of the anatomy. The students enjoyed the challenge, and appreciated the change from the daily routine of assigned exercises. The real focus of this experiment was to stimulate students to analyze works of art of the past, and understand and how it is possible to communicate emotions, movements, actions, and stories, through gesture and body language. In addition to sketching narrative paintings and sculpture present in town, we worked with some of our models who have experience in theatre to use their bodies to act out feelings or actions. Students were asked to draw their interpretation of the model's action keeping in mind the language of form in visual communication. The introduction of this experience builds artistic spirit and is a good balance to the development of technical skills.

Although the Intensive Drawing program is a course for beginners, not all of our students are at their first attempts in art; a few come from atelier-style programs similar to ours, and may have a higher level of preparation than the other students. We will take this into consideration, and adjust the curriculum as appropriate. At times, we have to deal with students who are resistant to our suggestions, or anxious to jump ahead and work too quickly. We make sure to spend time explaining the importance of understanding thoroughly each exercise. In general, our students are very motivated, and aware of the choice they have made to study at our school. They arrive expecting a high quality of instruction, and understanding that good training in drawing is necessary to achieve success in figurative realistic art. The reputation of The Florence Academy of Art is based on this.

- Simona Dolci, Program Director, Intensive Drawing Program, 2012