

Hungarian University of Fine Arts, Doctoral Institute

From plates to live models –

Changing practices of figure drawing

from the beginning of Hungarian vocational education to the present
day, focusing on contemporary possibilities

Theses of DLA dissertation

Franciska Szabó

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Consultant: Dr. Habil. Frigyes Kőnig, DLA

Professor, head of department, rector emeritus,
Chairman of the Doctoral Council of the Hungarian University of Fine Arts

Research objectives

As a visual educator at the Secondary School of Visual Arts, Budapest, Hungary, I have been observing the diversity in methodology of figure drawing used by the faculty of drawing teachers. My aim in carrying out this research was to take a closer look at these methodologies in order to reveal the tradition behind them. I was also curious as to when, and what kind of methodological intent it was, that brought us the educational tools and equipment that we still have today. Finally, I focussed on the strategies that can be used for drawing the human figure in accordance with current practices, on how we can keep the tradition alive and useful, and on finding which concepts and methods have largely remained the same over the centuries.

It is essential to highlight that my research objective was, through analysis, to establish a framework which indicates territories where the research may be continued. The purpose of this thesis is then to use this analysis in order to define tendencies rather than to reconstruct the teaching method itself. Furthermore, I would like to carry on from the research of the Schola Graphidis Art Collection, a collection which "Conserves, collects, studies and presents all the fine arts works, applied arts works, and technical objects which can be connected to Hungary's oldest national art education institution and their successors"¹

Research methodology

I began my research by giving the whole drawing collection the once-over, and selecting the figurative drawings (consisting of around three thousand). To select the drawings, my criteria were:

- presumably that the drawing had been made by a student during their attendance;
- that the drawing had depicted a human figure or any part of the human body (including the drawings after plaster casts);
- that the drawing must have served as a foundation subject, having had no direct vocational purpose (e.g., sketches for fine art pieces, design work for applied arts).

After this process, I categorised the works into different methodological groups and continued by studying the Hungarian educational regulatory environment, followed by previous research on the institution's history. I then collected data on educational tools and equipment, as well as comments on their usage (plates, plaster casts). I tried to reconstruct the institution's methodology through the publications of educators and education specialists. Finally, with a better understanding of the current practice, I relied heavily on my colleagues' oral statements.

¹ <http://www.scholagraphidis.org/#>

Thesis: The current legal background determines the methodology of drawing education at the Secondary School of Visual Arts and its predecessors.

Under my research methods I examine the approach and the tools used by the drawing teacher for students studying as part of their profession. However, to understand the methodological possibilities of a 19th or 20th century teacher, I needed to come to know the framework provided by the contemporary legal environment. Since the 1783 Vienna Order, the purpose and context of vocational education was set out in law – this has the potential to narrow or broaden the limitations of state-run institutions. Throughout the centuries, we have been able to follow the development of the institutional system of vocational education as it has changed in accordance with the goals and tastes of the craftsmen, and how this has affected the training of the future artists and designers. The aim of this specific field of studied drawing education was always determined by the educational level of the school. In addition to the curriculum for individual professions, the law also provides regulations for the number of weekly lessons. In the case of the drawings from the Art Collection, it includes valuable information on whether or not some work was done as a result of 4 or 40 hours of work.

Thesis: Based on the Schola Graphidis Art Collection's Graphics Collection, we can define four distinct methodologies. These four units include sample plate copying, freehand drawings of plaster casts, drawings of live models, and the teaching of anatomical knowledge.

Although I have arranged different approaches to drawing a human figure into four methodological units, they are not mutually exclusive; for example, plaster casts of anatomical models (known as *ecorché*) and sample templates made of antique plaster sculptures.

In the 18th century, and the first half of the 19th century, the primary tool and method of drawing education were not drawings of directly observed nature, but the copying of sample plates. In today's (artistic training) education, the use of sample drawings has been almost completely abandoned. The primary reason for this was the decline of the academic age (at the end of the 19th century) as the twentieth-century artistic aspirations swept it away. Sample plates have been carefully prepared by trained artists, and in some cases, were drawn by a teacher at the school. At the same time, the order of loose-leaf plates for educational purposes was determined to increase the student's knowledge. Throughout the history of the institution, there were also Austrian, German and French templates. The earliest copy of this kind of figurative drawing is from 1806.

The plaster casts are the products of re-producing antique art again and again. Plaster sculptures were not only used for practical reasons in the ateliers of the drawing schools (because they do not move as living models do). The sculptures are primarily replicas of outstanding Greek and

Roman culture, castings of mythological figures and historical portraits of European culture. Still, their drawing was equal to the means of shaping the taste. The 19th century belief was that industrial products could only compete on the international market if their designers and technicians have a sophistication acquired through their drawing. The excellent taste was equal to the sophisticated form of antique sculpture. The plaster casts, which could be ordered from a catalogue in 1905, were gradually replaced by artistic trends of modernism. In today's practice, however, they have a role to play (at least those who have survived the devastation or have since casted). In addition to antique plaster casts, the likes of Renaissance portraits, significant personalities of the 17-19th century and Endre Ady's death mask can also be found.

Examples of drawings based on live models are steady at the beginning of the 20th century, but there are some examples of this kind of drawing in the Graphics Collection from the earlier decades as well. As far back as the 1860s we can find the first portraits and later some nudes. The difficulty of drawing live models directly, rather than from sample templates, is the same as that of the gypsum; imaging the three-dimensional view onto a two-dimensional surface. However, this is made difficult by the fact that a live model is moving, breathing, and can come into contact with the spectator.

My research also touches on anatomy books for artists, as they give a new perspective on the human body and its understanding. In the Collection we find an Italian anatomy book printed in 1811, more German from the 1870s and the first Hungarian artistic anatomy book published (handwritten) in 1881, transcribed by Bertalan Székely's student. We occasionally find evidence that they have been used in education as well, probably as preparation in arts studies at higher education.

Thesis: The 21st century drawing teaching methodology is heterogeneous, but all four methodological units continue to live in some form. Contemporary drawing pedagogy should have constantly renewing methods, enriched by the knowledge of historical methodologies.

Each of the four methodological approaches appear in some form in today's drawing practice, but at the same time drawing through direct observation, specifically of live models, is dominant. From the 1970s onwards, the framework of drawing education has loosened as it adapted to the needs of socialist realism, a continuous legacy of academic tradition. The diverse use of drawing tools has developed and the spread of photography, especially digital technology, has given a new perspective to imaging, and its impact on education is apparent. Various forms of work appear in line with contemporary pedagogical endeavours.