

Human Form and the Study of Art

In considering the human form in the study of art, there are two disciplines that need to be addressed: *the references to the human form in art history; and, the study of the human form in studio art.*

The study of the nude form is essential to provide a comprehensive study of art history. From prehistory the human form has been an expression for ideal proportion, human philosophy and religious beliefs, and human emotion and vulnerability.

In choosing images for studies in art history, the professor should exercise discernment. Whether the subject is classical sculpture or contemporary expressions of the human form, the subject can be taught comprehensively without including images that are expressly offensive. Recognizing that a limited number of students may find any level of nudity offensive or a stumbling block, alternative study may be recommended.

Within the studio, the process of learning to draw is sequential, deliberate, and necessitates an understanding of perception.

In an introductory drawing class there are a number of subjects and objectives that must be covered within the given timeframe which include the function and beauty of line, indicating form through use of light and shade and perspective, developing composition, and developing a repertoire of media use. To learn these principles, traditional subject matter including still-life, landscape, architecture, and the human form are presented as each challenges the student and serves to provide a springboard for developing creative interpretation in more advanced studies throughout the educational process and subsequent professional careers.

Within a Christian university studio art program, the study of the human form often brings controversy. It is important for the departments of art to present statements such as this to clarify the importance of the figure in art and outline positions regarding drawing and painting the human form.

With the Italian Renaissance, the development of scientific perspective and the study of human and animal anatomy, a new chapter in Western Art was initiated. Artists had the tools necessary to convincingly represent nature and the man-made environment. Up to and including the 21st century, this type of naturalistic representation has remained a compelling force in the visual arts.

Within upper level art education figure drawing is often taught as a separate course. During that period the student's drawing of the figure is sequential in order to develop a complete understanding of the human form. The student begins with skeletal studies, progresses to the muscular system, then to the nude model, and then logically to the clothed/draped form. It is only from this deliberate sequence that the student gains command and confidence in portraying the human form. The end purpose of such studies is not, as is often perceived, to produce erotic art, but to gain an understanding of the body so that convincing representations can be made.

Within figure drawing and painting classes at Cedarville, it is recommended that the student study as closely as possible to the above sequence. In deference to Cedarville students, faculty members, and our

constituency we choose not to draw or paint from the nude model. Rather, the models wear sports clothing (running clothes, swimwear, or leotards). The class and models are handled professionally and with an academic approach to the subject. As a component of the figure drawing unit professors may ask students to reproduce master drawings of the figure.

If a career choice such as illustration, sculpture, or portrait painting necessitates a command of the human form, it is recommended that the student work with the nude figure outside the university either while enrolled at Cedarville or as part of adult or graduate study.

We recognize the human form as God's highest form in creation, wonderfully made, and should be treated with respect, dignity, and a means of realizing the beauty of design in that creation.