

**A HANDBOOK OF
SYSTEMATIC
INSTRUCTION IN
DRAWING**

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A Handbook of Systematic Instruction in Drawing by Frank Aborn

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Miss E. W. Withy
Cambridge

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Preface

IT is by fine examples and the intelligent execution of drawings of them that the taste for art is most surely cultivated. As the understanding broadens, exercise in design and emotional expression becomes practicable and effective. When drawings are made by a hit-or-miss process they can only be caricatures tending to demoralize taste rather than to cultivate it, and exercise in design is impracticable and ineffective.

The plan for instruction in drawing outlined in these pages aims to indicate methods of successfully bringing about those changes in the understanding of what is required, and in the ordinary methods of procedure which make for skill, and also to make the teaching of drawing a prime factor in true art education, by fostering that prime factor of art, appreciation of excellence.


This system is not experimental. It contains nothing untried or unproved, nothing unpractical, ineffective, unessential. It is believed to be the first real system of instruction in drawing. It has all the essentials of a system, viz.: A definite beginning and progress by orderly stages to a definite ending; provides specific means for establishing intelligence preparatory to execution; prescribes a definite and practical method of effectually utilizing observation

Systematic Instruction in Drawing

and illustration, two potent coördinate agencies in understanding and execution; grades the conditions or forms of subject-matter presentation according to the obviousness of the means and requirements of execution incidental to each condition; and eliminates the element of chance by specific and adequate operations.

September, 1903.

Introduction

YSTEMATIC instruction in drawing is a simple matter. Its salient features and the practicable expedients essential to carrying it on may be comprehensively explained in a very limited space.

A drawing can never be anything but an arrangement of lines.

The arrangement of lines constituting a drawing can never be anything but a copy of another arrangement of lines which constitutes its subject.

The arrangement of lines which constitutes the *real* subject of a drawing can never be anything but an image in the mind.

The image which constitutes the real subject of a drawing can never be wholly original, but is derived more or less from something else, which it is sometimes like and sometimes unlike. It may be derived from another drawing or print, in which case the image which is the real subject of the drawing will be a facsimile of that from which it is derived; it may be derived from an object, in which case it may be no more like that from which it is derived than a straight line is like a circle; or it may be a pure invention, in which case it will be derived from many different things and be a facsimile of no one of them.

But whatever the image which is the real subject of a drawing may be derived from, or whether it is in any respect like that from which it is derived, makes no difference; the real subject of a drawing can, under any

Systematic Instruction in Drawing

possible circumstance, be nothing but an image in the mind, for it is impracticable and impossible to draw anything in the degree that its image in the mind is either wanting or indistinct.

Because it is impracticable to draw more than one line at a time it is necessary in drawing to individualize, or to select individual lines, determine their places and execute them in their places, one at a time. This necessitates deliberation and precision.

These are the fundamental facts upon which everything pertaining to drawing must be based. The complete apprehension of these facts constitutes complete intelligence in drawing. And the ability to execute in accordance with these facts, or to image arrangements of lines and be able to copy the imaged arrangements of lines, constitutes skill in drawing.

The making of a drawing is a process which is at once analytic and synthetic. It is analytic in that it consists, in one part, in selecting specific lines and separately determining their places in the given arrangement of lines constituting the subject. It is synthetic in that it consists, in another part, in arranging lines in their respective places in a drawing.

The teaching of drawing consists in so engineering thought and effort that this ability to image and analyze, and to organize reproduction of arrangements of lines, will develop itself.

The obstacle to this self-development of ability is habitual, disorderly practice; or the habit of planning while executing; or proceeding to execution before definitely determining what is to be done and how it is to be done; or sliding over intermediate steps with the expectation of subsequent correction. The removal

Systematic Instruction in Drawing

of this obstacle consists in the reform of the habit of procedure: the substitution of orderly practice for disorderly practice.

This reform of habitual practice in drawing constitutes the only real difficulty in the way of absolutely successful instruction. It is easily accomplished by simply grading the subject-matter according to the self-evidentness of the requirements, and the adoption of two different and distinctly separate forms of exercise.

The self-evidentness of requirements depends upon the character of that from which the subject is derived, or is incidental to the form or condition of the subject-matter presentation, and has practically nothing to do with either the structural simplicity or complexity of the subject-matter itself. This will be seen on further inspection.

Of the two forms of exercise, one makes for intelligence by affording opportunities for the observation and illustration of the application of the process of drawing under conditions which render both the process and its application comprehensible. The other form of exercise makes for skill by affording opportunities to apply the process of drawing, in independent executions, under conditions the requirements of which are thoroughly understood but the means of meeting which are not so readily at command.

Exercises in illustration and observation are necessarily class exercises and require large wall-drawings especially adapted for the purpose, which are practically provided only in the form of charts or unerasable examples on portable blackboards. Blackboard drawings by the teacher, except occasionally, are impracticable for two reasons: First, because of the accuracy