

A Reflection on the Use of Nude Models in the Augustana University Art Department Curriculum: Theological and Academic Underpinnings

Inspired by Lutheran scholarly tradition and the liberal arts, Augustana University provides an education of enduring worth that challenges the intellect, fosters integrity and integrates faith with learning and service in a diverse world. The university is committed to the education and enrichment of the whole person including exposure to enduring forms of aesthetic and creative expression. In the great tradition of the humane sciences in western civilization, the Augustana Art Department takes it as axiomatic that knowledge of drawing the human form is fundamental to the serious study of art and the training of professional artists in a liberal arts education. The art department has established a long and distinguished tradition in liturgical and figurative art studies, including the installation of liturgical works of art by Augustana Professors Emeriti Palmer Eide and Robert Aldern in churches throughout the upper Midwest and establishment of the permanent home for the Hovland Center for Liturgical Arts in Augustana's Center of Visual Arts, which was dedicated in 2006.

As a church-affiliated university, Augustana takes seriously the religious and spiritual dimensions involved in the process of self-discovery, expression and creating lasting works of art. The university seeks to educate its students in the life-long appreciation of all forms of art and to develop within each individual an understanding of her own code of values and ethics as she seeks to live her life both fully and imaginatively. A Lutheran understanding of grace suggests that God is revealed in the unexpected and overlooked, that through vulnerability and generosity we come closer to knowing what we can not see, and that balance and beauty are necessary to knowing a manifest, creative, living, loving and compassionate God. To be able to see, one must remain open to the world.

The Augustana Art Department is a custodian to the time-honored traditions of our discipline and to conveying the great contributions of the artists of the past. One could no more study 19th- and 20th-century European continental philosophy without a foundation in Kierkegaard or even classical Greek philosophy than one could study 19th- or 20th century European art without looking to the Golden Age of Athens or the Renaissance for antecedents. The expressive potential for the human form realized in the Renaissance resulted directly from the study of ancient Greek and Roman art. Ever since, the human figure has remained the principal focus of study in western art and art education. Augustana is committed to teaching the fundamentals of art and design and has included the nude model in our art curriculum for decades. The university requires all art majors to successfully complete Drawing II: Intermediate Drawing (ARTS 2100). This course focuses on the theory and practice in the elements of drawing with an emphasis upon the human figure.

To study art is to discern what makes us uniquely human. Genesis begins this way, with man and woman created in God's own image. Augustana acknowledges the inherent beauty of the human form and that it is indeed a worthy subject of study. The lessons learned in drawing the human form teach us to recognize each individual's uniqueness and worth and for the need to treat the human form with dignity and respect. Great drawing refuses stereotypes and pre-judgment. To look at the model means to see

another person in the flesh for who they really are: a sovereign, living individual. Errant conceptions become painfully obvious. Nothing is comparably as difficult, or as expressive, or as finely tuned as our experience of seeing and drawing the human form. The trillion gestural possibilities and seemingly infinite subtle structures of the human body suggest that new discoveries are still possible and that drawing as a discipline is as much a visual process as it is a practice. Balance, proportion, movement, gesture, economy, harmony and vitality of form all extend from the study of drawing the model. You must constantly question what you see, leaving behind what you think you know, take risks, and try to see things fresh again like a child filled with wonder each time you draw.

Augustana's classroom protocols are highly professional and appropriate. The university does not hire students to serve as models; Augustana employs professional models from outside the university as temporary employees. Models are given a private room in which to change; students are not allowed in this room when the model is present. Students do not see a model changing into or out of his or her clothes. Models wear robes or other clothing during breaks. Models are not used in first semester foundation classes, only in advanced studio classes. Before drawing the model's image, students study the forms and functions of the osseous and muscular systems of the human body, similar to students of pre-medicine. The models do not wear skimpy or other suggestive clothing, which could change the understanding of the classroom as a learning environment. The drawing studio has examples of master drawings of the nude displayed. Skeletons, skull casts and écorché figures are also on display to further a serious academic and investigative tone. Windows are covered and doors are closed when classes are in session; visitors are not allowed.

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