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Paul J. Sachs

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An Experiment in Art Teaching
proposed by Denman W. Ross
Lecturer on Design in Harvard University.

Harold Zimmerman, an art student, now twenty-four years old, has, during a period of two or three years, been teaching two boys, preparing them for the practice of drawing and design.

Under Zimmerman's instructions the boys, Jack Levine, now fifteen years old, and Hyman Bloom, now sixteen years old, have learned to draw the human figure correctly and in good compositions and they are able to do that, following the suggestions of the visual imagination with no drawing from the living model to help them. There has been no drawing from life or from photographs. The attention of the boys was directed to important examples of sculpture or to casts. They were told to look at the object, to study it but not to draw from it. In the same way they were told to look at paintings of the great masters and photographic reproductions of them with the idea of feeding and stimulating the imagination by good seeing as they might by good reading. They were allowed to look over books on anatomy and at anatomical drawings but they were not allowed to make copies.

The idea was to give the boys the visual experience and knowledge which they needed before proceeding to express themselves by drawing. There was to be no "learning how to draw" before drawing. Zimmerman considers it unfortunate, in view of his experiment, that Hyman, the older boy, has been drawing from casts in connection with his work in the high school. Jack, however, has never drawn either from casts or from life until recently with me, when I wanted to find out whether he could do it without previous practice and training. Hyman has been drawing from life in my studio for the same reason.

Zimmerman's idea is that we learn to draw in the proper way by following the suggestions of the visual imagination as they come one after another in the

association of ideas. When, in so doing, the imagination has no suggestions to make it means a lack of visual experience and knowledge. It means nothing to say on the subject. We turn to nature and life to get the experience and knowledge that is required. Zimmerman says we ought to get it by observation without drawing. It is all right, he says, to make drawings provided that they are not used when it comes to imaginative composition and expression. Imaginative expression must proceed simply and naturally, just as it does when we are talking or writing. There are many instances of the effort to combine statistical information and recorded facts with the spontaneous and creative activity of the imagination. The effort is rarely, if ever, satisfactory. The creative imagination must be free to bring the facts of experience into an association of ideas and into forms of expression in which the individual may be recognized. The facts of observation must, of course, be recorded. They are necessary and indispensable and have their proper value, when they are as impersonal as possible. They have no place, however, in works of art in which we are supposed to express experience and knowledge in the form of ideas.

When it came to drawing Jack and Hyman were told to draw whatever they had in their minds and wanted to draw and that is what they did; thinking and expressing themselves in the terms of drawing as simply and directly as if they were speaking or writing in the terms of language. When the boys were unable to proceed in their drawings it was because they did not have the requisite experience and knowledge. In figure-drawing, and most of their drawing was figure-drawing, they were urged to consider themselves as very convenient books of reference. All they had to do was to take a pose and visualize the effect of it. Zimmerman's idea is that we are moved in art not so much by what we see as by what we imagine as visible. Then comes the excitement of working it out and making it visible. There is nothing in the world more exciting than to see our visions coming into sight on a piece of white paper that is set up before us with

nothing on it. When the drawings and compositions produced by Jack and Hyman were finished they were subjected to analysis and criticism, as to the idea and ideas expressed, as to the composition and design and as to anatomical constructions and the truth of representation. In drawing the human figure the boys were told that the whole of it was the first thing to draw; then the parts in their connection with the whole and lastly the parts in connection with one another. Zimmerman has unusual discrimination and judgment in questions of composition and design. He has, also, a thorough knowledge of anatomy; of the relativities and possibilities of the human figure. This knowledge the boys have slowly acquired as a result of criticisms and suggestions and they use it now very successfully.

Jack and Hyman have spent no end of time in the three museums of Boston and Cambridge and in the public library, seeing pictures, ancient and modern and looking over photographs and other reproductions; reading books, also, on art and about artists. In that way they have acquired, beyond the ability they have in imaginative drawing and composition, a knowledge of art in general, with discrimination and judgment, which is simply astonishing, as it is not to be expected in the case of young students only fifteen and sixteen years old. They are already connoisseurs and would like to become collectors! The boys are two or three years ahead of the average student in the art school who has been told that he will find out what art is when he has learned to draw by drawing (artlessly) for two or three years. I have been at the école so I know all about it. I can hear the master's voice: pas mal, pas mal du tout. Ça va bien mais pas tout a fait bien. Le nez par exemple. ; . In leaving me he says: continuez j'leune homme. In those days the master gave his services free of charge. It

was an offering for the advancement of art and civilization. The teaching of the schools goes on, as a rule, without change. The student is left to find out for himself what art is or ought to be and what civilization means.

I met Zimmerman and the two boys during the autumn of 1929 and I saw the drawings that Jack and Hyman had made. I saw, at once, that Zimmerman had worked out a new proposition in art teaching and I was impressed by the idea that he was possibly solving the problem. The two boys are seeing for themselves, thinking for themselves and expressing themselves. They are rapidly getting a knowledge of the world of vision, a knowledge of nature, life and art. In drawing they are achieving the truth of the imagination in remarkably good forms of expression. That is probably all that we can expect as a result of art teaching.

Wondering whether the two boys, instructed as they have been in imaginative drawing and design, would be able to draw what they see as they see it without previous practice and training I had them, one at a time, in my studio with a good model. It was understood that the model was to be used by each of the boys in his own way. They had no difficulty in drawing from life, none whatever. They can draw from life easily and well and their drawings indicate clearly their personal interests and preferences. The model is regarded as a reflector of light. The posing of the model is an imaginative composition and, as such, a work of art. In posing the model they are expressing themselves unmistakably. In drawing from the effect produced they are again expressing themselves. When the drawings have been made they have served their purpose and are not afterwards referred to. The boys remember, very easily, the drawings they have made and are able to reproduce them from memory. Zimmerman said to Hyman "what did you draw when

you went to Mr. Ross's studio last week?" Hyman replied by taking a piece of paper and making three small drawings. When Zimmerman compared the small drawings with the originals he found that they were correct. For that reason the drawings from life, once made, having served their purpose are no longer needed.

Zimmerman is now planning to have his boys proceed from the practice of imaginative drawing and design to the practice of imaginative painting. That means giving up pencils and sticks of charcoal and using pigments and palettes and producing effects of color. That means at least one more year of his teaching to bring the experiment to an end. Zimmerman has no resources and will not be able to carry his experiment through, as it ought to be carried through, unless he has financial aid. He has given no end of his time and attention to his pupils and has made no charge for his instructions. His idea is to give free instruction to those who do well and to get his living from those who persist in drawing when they have nothing to express by drawing and ought to give it up. A generous way of eliminating the unfit! It has not been good business, however, for Zimmerman. The only pupils he now has are Jack and Hyman who pay nothing for instruction. However; the whole undertaking is now in my hands and I shall carry it through and pay the bills unless I can persuade some of my friends to help me out. In that case, I shall give my services as general supervisor and director of the undertaking.

Accompanying this statement are photographs of some of the drawings that the two boys have made in the way of imaginative composition; also, some of the drawings made from life. On the back of the photographs is written what I have to say about them. The drawings will show how the boys

think and express themselves in the terms of drawing and how they propose to inform themselves for further undertakings.

Zimmerman is now employed by me and the boys will be, when they get out of school in June. They have been in school, right along, and what they have achieved in imaginative drawing and composition and in the knowledge and appreciation of art has been achieved between school sessions and on holidays and in spite of school requirements; a fact in the case which must not be forgotten. Hyman graduates from the high school in June and Jack is now in the second year. They are both of them in good standing. They have persevered in their sight seeing and drawing without neglecting their work in school. They have been drawing instead of playing with other boys.

The expense of carrying on this experiment will be considerable. Zimmerman ought to have a workroom where he can work with Jack and Hyman, doing himself what he is telling them to do; reviving, in a way, the apprenticeship system of the middle ages and the renaissance. Zimmerman must have a suitable salary as he is to give all his time and attention to the experiment. As it goes on he will write a full account of it from the beginning to the end; an account which will be published and ought to be of great interest to students and teachers of art in this and in other countries. The boys, also, must be helped out. Money will be required for materials, pigments, palettes, canvases, etc., also for furniture, chairs, easels and tables. Electric light must be provided for dark days. There will be incidental expenses. Models may be required. The cost of the whole undertaking for the coming year will not be less than \$3500. I

should be very glad to be relieved of the cost of carrying on this very interesting experiment in art teaching if, in any way, I can raise that sum of money. I can very well spend it in other undertakings that I have in mind. Collecting works of art for the Fogg Museum is one of them.

The whole problem of art teaching is involved in Zimmerman's experiment and a solution of the problem will be not only interesting but may be far reaching in its consequences.