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## Experience of Teaching Drawing in German Schools by A. Ažbe and S. Hollósy (on the Example of the Image of Human Head)

### Abstract

The main aim of the paper is to analyze and disclose the methods for teaching drawing of the human head in foreign schools at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries for further application in modern Russian methodology of art education. The relevance of the problem under investigation is due to the structuring and disclosure of the specificity of teaching methods in foreign schools of A. Ažbe and S. Hollósy. The main advantages and disadvantages of these schools are considered. It is stated that modern Russian teaching methodology focuses on the methods of drawing, built on the influence of the German school and applied directly to the tasks of art and art and architectural education. As a result of the research, organizational and content characteristics of the educational process in contemporary art education in accordance with foreign experience, German art studios, pedagogical and creative practice are determined.

Keywords: academic drawing, human head, teaching methods, artist-teacher, realistic approach, German schools

### Introduction

In modern art education, the quality of the professional training of artists should depend directly on the scientific and systematic improvement of teaching methods. A huge role here is given to the artist-teacher not only as a mentor, who conveys own invaluable experience and knowledge, but also capable of providing functional and effective training of students. There is no doubt that classical art education remains important as in many countries it has partially or completely lost the traditions and principles of teaching drawing based on the gradual development of graphic literacy from simple to complex, gaining skills from year to year.

In this regard, we turned to the study of German historical experience of teaching academic drawing of human head as one of the manifestations of realistic and scientific direction. The analysis of previous generations' experience is a valuable prerequisite for the development of new modern teaching methods in the prevailing conditions and the ability for their further creative use. Understanding of the essence and structure of teaching methods changed during the formation of various art schools that combined certain methodological principles of the artist's training.

Among the most well-formed at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it is possible to define West European private art schools by the artist-educators A. Ažbe and S. Hollósy.

The analysis of these schools' experience was conducted by the most prominent scientists in the field of artistic pedagogy for many years. Many studies are devoted to the problem of representing the form and studying the ways of depicting human head on the drawing, developing methods for the effective mastery of graphic literacy. As a part of this study, it was traced to what extent these two schools affected Russian art education, in particular Russian artists who studied abroad. Such a statement of the issue within scientific study of German artists and teachers' heritage has not yet been considered. In this regard, it seems relevant, because, in the Russian teaching practice of human head drawing it was always important to perceive it as a method of studying forms and as an independent type of creativity which experience is built to some extent on the influence of German school.

The empirical corpus consists of the memoirs of contemporaries as well as students who were directly trained in German art studios that are currently represented in the electronic form.

At present, the theory of art education directly approaches scientific methods for the formation and improvement of the system of academic drawing of the human head for their subsequent unification at all development stages of the future artist.

It seems reasonable to consider pedagogical methods of German schools and their relevance in contemporary Russian art education.

### **Pedagogical methods of teaching**

At the end of the XIX century the academic system of artists' training needed to be updated and reformed as shown by the historical review of the development of artistic and pedagogical concepts of the XVIII-XIX centuries European educational institutions. Significant changes also affected the teaching methods of academic drawing as well as painting and composition. In the art academies and studios individual artists developed new forms and methods of teaching the fine arts.

Much attention from the point of our research deserves the private school of the Slovenian artist and teacher Anton Ažbe (1862-1905) that was founded in 1891 in Munich and received further international recognition. A. Ažbe accepted professionally trained artists to his school. The drawing was taught using only charcoal and the attention of the students was focused on the construction of the form as well as competent distribution of the volume elements.

Many students who studied at A. Ažbe's school became outstanding masters of Russian art: D. N. Kardovsky and I. E. Grabar, E. K. Makovskaya, M. F. Shemyakin, V. V. Kandinsky, K. S. Petrov-Vodkin, M. V. Dobuzhinsky and others. Investigation of the methodical system of the author's school alongside with the facts and memories of A. Ažbe's students – I. E. Grabar and M. V. Dobuzhinsky, allows us to apply and supplement the elements of this system in the modern domestic art education of students, in particular when drawing human head.

Over the course of fourteen years of teaching, the "ball system" was introduced into his method of teaching drawing that consisted in the sequential construction of the form using the basic tonal gradations. At the same time, the main emphasis was on the principle of great form. The only important things were the "big line" and the "great form" (Grabar, 2001, p. 119). Organization of the learning process included identification of the development degree of the abilities of young artists and determination of the weak side of the previously received professional training

thereby establishing further way for overcoming obstacles. According to A. Ažbe it was called “knocking off the arrogance” and determined successful completion of the educational work. Thus, the students had to rethink previously obtained methods in their works which they considered to be the only correct ones before acquaintance with the artist and teacher A. Ažbe.

Anton Ažbe’s pedagogical system was based on the realistic approach to the creation of the image, generalization (analysis) and simplification of the form. At the initial stage, depicting the complex shape of the human head, the construction was analyzed according to the principle of the ball, at the heart of which the sum of simple geometric forms was considered followed by the identification of the elements of chiaroscuro, alongside with this a great form was determined, the general proportions of the head were established. Similarly to the same principle students performed all the other elements of the face (eyes, nose, neck etc.).

The main advantage of the following principle of work when drawing the head consisted in the determination of the main large mass – planes (the shape of the nose, cheekbones, forehead) with the subsequent transition to particular details.

According to the memoirs of M. V. Dobuzhinsky when “analyzing the shape of the human head, Ažbe interpreted it as a polyhedron with the front, side and intermediate planes...” (Dobuzhinsky, 1987, p. 149).

Then the young artist got acquainted with the principle of tonal shape modeling. The essence of this principle consisted in the concretization of the represented form, gradual revealing of design features with the help of black and white light and shadow relations. When drawing A. Ažbe attached great importance to the bone base of the head and required knowledge of the muscular skeleton and its anatomical features.

So, A. Ažbe’s drawing of human head consisted of four basic sections:

- representation of a large image;
- creation of the volume of human head;
- identification of the surface structure (tonal shape modeling);
- anatomical justification of the image.

The main disadvantages of this teaching method at school were:

- the absence of gypsum models images;
- the use of only soft graphic materials;
- the work with professionally trained students;
- schematicization of drawings, reaching the degree of mannerism;
- one-sidedness of the method for teaching drawing.

But the abovementioned drawbacks of the methodology do not cross all the advantages of its clearly established author’s methodology.

Alongside with the training methodology developed by A. Ažbe, which mainly shapes professional perception, consistent and systemic drawing of human head (adherence to the correct methodical technique of work), in 1886 a Hungarian artist-teacher S. Hollósy determined attempts to find another way of teaching the student. It is important that in his art school the priority was given not only to the constructive and analytical drawing, but also to the requirements of wholeness and form analysis.

### **Analysis of foreign schools influence on modern domestic methodology of art education**

Pedagogical system of training by Simon Hollósy attracted many young artists who did not receive satisfaction from the generally accepted academic education. One of them was V. A. Favorsky whose method of creative activity and theoretical formation of the laws of fine art were formed in the process of assimilating the basic laws of graphic literacy from the lessons by Simon Hollósy.

V. A. Favorsky studied under S. Hollósy together with K. N. Istomin. From 1906 to 1909 they learned well the method of form and thinking cognition, the principle of wholeness of perception and image from the German school of realistic drawing. Hollósy's methodological guidelines in the system of teaching drawing were based on the deep understanding of the form, careful study and depiction of nature, its true reality, connection with the surrounding space and denied the transmission of illusiveness and copying of objects. From his disciples he demanded a creation of constructive-spatial structure of the head shape, initial stage analysis of the volume as a matchbox with twelve ribs and marking of its visible and invisible planes and parts – eyes, nose, back of the head etc.

In addition to the rigorous analysis of the form design, they were given the opportunity to choose their own methods of work in the future.

From the memoirs of his students it is known that permanent trips to a small Transylvanian town of Nagybánya where summer creative workshops were organised served as an inexhaustible source of creativity for S. Hollósy. Regular plenaries with students provided not only spiritual communication with nature, but also helped to perceive nature and depict it as completely as possible, applying all the methodological provisions characteristic for drawing and graphic literacy.

There is an interesting reasoning by V. A. Favorsky about drawing from nature. He pointed out that the drawing should not be passive in relation to the nature, rigor and freedom from prejudiced opinions about things are needed (Favorsky, 1988, p. 255).

As an example, when depicting human head, at the initial stage we must “free ourselves” from the knowledge that characterizes the given object (face, eyes, nose, lips etc.) and present it as an abstract form. A holistic perception of the form must remain as the most important condition for the transmission of the three-dimensional, volumetric world in the artistic work.

Stressing the importance of the outline, he argued that the graphic art (drawing) is a work of lines that is not a sum of points, but is a result of movement. This very mobility, the stroke that expresses movement, forms the basis of graphics, all the rest is painting. Painting can be static, plastic, spatial, and graphics is an in-depth movement.

At the same time, when analyzing field studies of students who completed Hollósy's training it is possible to conclude that the school paid serious attention not only to the line expressing movement, exploring from different angles the object as a part of an integral space, but also to the transmission of three-dimensional expressiveness and man's inner world. Along with the drawing a special role was given to composition.

It follows that both German art schools proclaimed a method of form cognition based on the principles of addressing nature, studying the laws of nature and

methodological rules of doing work. Personal display of teachers, as one of the teaching methods, was carried out only in the form of various schemes for building students' work at free fields, enabling independent development of graphic technique.

At present, the postulates of the Ažbe and Hollósy's school are represented in the modern method of constructing a linear-constructive drawing, in the concept of the form and laws of its structure, applied directly to the tasks of artistic and architectural education developed by the Russian artist-teacher N. Li, and also in the perfectly adapted method of constructive anatomical analysis of the complex form by the German scientist G. Bammes. In addition, similar to the technique developed by A. Ažbe, N. Radlov provides a detailed description on the essence of the volumetric drawing method in the book "Painting from nature" (Radlov, 1978).

In his opinion, the essence of the academic teaching method was volumetrical drawing during the heyday of academies. This method of teaching remains relevant and is currently the only basic school of system drawing. An outstanding scientist of art pedagogy N. N. Rostovtsev (1981) proposed his method of analyzing the generalized form of head, introduced refinements into the pattern of its formation. To study this method, he gave a detailed description of special exercises and accentuated the main necessity on the reception of "cutting".

V. A. Mogilevtsev in the tutorial "Fundamentals of drawing" (Mogilevtsev, 2007) in the first section "Head" considers the sequence of work, emphasizing the importance of careful study of the Russian academic school of drawing. In the practical part, he represents in detail his own scheme for depicting a complex shape of the live head model, clearly showing the relationship of shape and cutting points of planes, comparing them with the classical works of outstanding masters.

## Conclusion

Thus, the heritage of the teaching experience by artists-teachers A. Ažbe and S. Hollósy is still acute today and one of the strongest in the domestic teaching to draw human head. In the content of the educational process in contemporary art education it is possible to trace a variety of different ways, rules, requirements of realistic drawing of human head. The possibility to use the methodological principles of these schools in the professional activity shows a convincing and expressive nature of the academic drawing of human head. Thorough application of the method of "cutting", as practice shows, allows the students to assimilate the treatment experience by the outstanding masters of the past and gives them an opportunity to think deeply as future artists, analyze the shape of the head and the laws of its construction. Moreover, the German school not only teaches to think, but also consciously approaches the process of depicting a full-scale production.

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