

Artist Story

When I began my AHS Capstone project, I expected to work all semester to produce something at the end called art. Instead I began a journey to face a question I had not thought about before, “Why do I draw?” Throughout this process I learned a lot about myself, my art, my mistakes, and remembered something I had lost along the way, that drawing is fun. This is my story.

When I found out about the AHS Capstone project required my Olin, I knew that I wanted to do mine around art, particularly figure drawing. I have always been interested in learning how to draw, especially the human form, and I thought this would be a great opportunity. Unfortunately I tried to approach the art classes I took to prepare for this project the same way I would any other class; I assumed if I did all the assignments, paid attention in class, and put in some extra effort I would do fine. I thought that after my two concentration classes I would have all the skills required to ace my AHS Capstone project and that it would be a breeze.

Boy how wrong I was. When I entered into my first class the first thought that struck me was that art is hard! It felt like there was no learning curve and I had been thrown in the deep end. I had to simultaneously focus on a million different things: lighting, gestures, value, weight, and other basic drawing concepts. By far the hardest was identifying what was wrong with a drawing. Although it was easy to tell that my drawing was wrong, figuring out what was wrong and how to fix that was often hard and frustrating.

I got through these classes by just allocating more time for them. I was constantly frustrated by my lack of progress, but assumed I was just not putting in enough time. I knew something was wrong, as some of my peers could complete much better works much faster than me, but I assumed it was just my lack of experience. Additionally, I stopped wanting to learn

about drawing as much as I desperately wanted to create something of the same caliber as the work of my peers'. I thought if I could just create one beautiful work all my time spent would be justified and I would finally be satisfied. Instead this just lead me to continue to spend a lot of time on my drawings without thinking about what I needed to change about myself to get better and then, once again, being frustrated with my final results. With all this frustration, I was no longer having fun.

This frustration was evident even in the beginning of my Capstone project. I stated that one of my goals for the course was to "create art I was proud of and satisfied with". I also knew I was doing something wrong. I thought maybe I was misunderstanding the fundamentals of drawing, and that was what was causing me so much grief. I knew I needed to look at my mistakes, mistakes I felt I was making over and over again. Unfortunately I did not quite know what these mistakes were. It is one thing to know that your drawing is off, that there are incorrect measurements or the position of limbs does not correctly describe the three dimensional model in front of you, it is another to determine what mistake in measurement or placement you are continually making.

Luckily the AHS Capstone is a self-directed project. I was able to keep these problems in the forefront of my mind while trying to achieve my final deliverables for this project. Over the course of this Capstone I have learnt a lot about myself and how I draw and also I have begun to learn about the mistakes I make and some of their causes. Through work with my mentor, Phyllis McGibbon, and the texts she recommended to me, I have discovered that my previous approach to drawing was all wrong. Not only was I making mistakes when attempting to address some of the major concepts of drawing like seeing, but I was also drawing for the wrong reasons.

As mentioned, I wanted to create art that I thought was worthwhile, beautiful, and would make me proud. But I am not at that point in my art yet. I needed to take a step back, remember that I am still a beginner and that I still have a lot to learn. I had to realize that my learning, progression, and growth in drawing was far more important than my final product, and it is this growth I should be proud of, not the final product. I needed to understand that while practice is great, the right kind of practice is far more important. I had to change the way I see, the way I understand what I am drawing, and I had to admit I was doing this wrong all along.

As mentioned, I had a lot of these realizations with the help of my mentor and texts. I became particularly attached to *The Natural Way to Draw* by Nicolaides, a book that really opened my eyes to a lot of my mistakes. Nicolaides believed that anyone could learn to draw. He advocates rigorous practice, and points out that a large time commitment will be necessary, but notes that if one approaches drawing the right way. In particular Nicolaides' stresses the correct way to interact with one's model. I had noticed a lot of anatomical mistakes in my drawings, yet I felt that I always measured correctly, created gestures to try and capture the pose, and thought about important reference points on the figure. Unfortunately this was not nearly enough. While I tried to capture the pose, I failed to understand it, and my lack of understanding was truly holding me back. "You, whether consciously or not, will draw what you see in light of your experience with those and similar things on earth.... Merely to see, therefore, is not enough. It is necessary to have a fresh, vivid, physical contact with the object you draw through as many of the senses as possible."¹ As Nicolaides said, I needed to do more than just see the pose. I needed to understand each pose, think about how I would position my body in this pose, the twists and turns it would cause, which limbs I was resting my weight on, and all those little

¹ Nicolaides, Kimon. *The Natural Way to Draw*. 1941. Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, MA. P6.

details that knowing lead to understanding the pose. . In fact I began to find it useful to put myself into the model's pose to get a full understanding of the position of each part.

I also realized that I could not possibly fully understand a pose by drawing it from one angle. In my previous two drawing classes we rarely had opportunities to work with the same pose for an extended period of time; instead our professors preferred to give us the opportunity to work with a variety of different poses. While this exposure was great and helped me better develop my ability to rapidly capture the gesture of a figure, it led me to believe that I should fully understand a pose the first time I saw it. While professors had told me to “see through the figure”, I assumed this meant to guess where obscured limbs must fall. I thought I was supposed to, through my pithy two semesters of drawing courses, somehow have gathered enough anatomical knowledge to figure out where all the parts of a pose, even the parts I could not see, were. In fact being asked to “see through the figure” was designed to force me to find out exactly where these limbs lay, something that is much easier when you understand a pose. And, to better understand a pose, it was perfectly acceptable for me to draw the same pose from various angles; in fact it greatly decrease my guesswork of where parts of the pose lay and my whole understanding of a certain pose.

Changing my views towards my own drawings was by far the hardest part of this entire process. Much of what is contained in my sketchbooks is downright ugly. Explorations to understand a pose do not always even resemble the pose being drawn and certainly rarely look “good”. Instead they show ideas being played with, attempts at understanding a form, many mistakes, and even failures to portray a figure. While I now mentally understand this, I do sometimes still look through my sketchbooks with a resigned sigh, thinking that I am not improving as none of these drawings look “pretty”. But then I remind myself that I am still

learning, exploring, and better yet, becoming much better at understanding. I think, when I truly examine my sketchbook, I can see this progress.

While I would not consider my final works are not beautiful or mindblowing, they are drawings I am proud of. I can see an increase in my understanding of drawing in them, and I can certainly see a change in myself surrounding drawing and this project.