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Peculiarities of depicting the nude human figure in drawing and painting by future artists of lacquer miniature painting

Abstract. The article refers to the significance and specificity of the human nude figure drawing and painting study in the educational process of the lacquer miniature-painting students. The author gives insights of the methodology of the human nude figure depicting during the drawing and painting practical studying hours. The article gives an analysis of the national school of fine arts over the last three hundred years in the field of the nude figure studies.

Keywords: Nude human figure, native school of fine art, proportions, plastic anatomy, drawing, painting.

One of the unique types of traditional artistic crafts is Palekh, Kholuy and Mstyora lacquer miniature painting. Future artists of lacquer miniature painting are required to create highly professional complex thematic compositions on historical and contemporary themes. In such compositions, the main object is a person and their skillful depiction determines the success in creating an artistic image of the narrative composition (Fig. 1²⁶).

In recent times, significant changes have been made in the process of training future artists of traditional art crafts in drawing and painting at the Russian university of traditional art crafts. New principles of teaching drawing and painting were reflected in scientific articles [1, pp. 152-160; 2, pp. 74-79; 3, pp. 300-310; 4, pp. 191-202]. These changes primarily affected the content of educational programs in drawing and painting.

Educational programs became more focused on students' specialization profile. The primary subject of representation in academic drawing and painting is now the human figure. The approach to the tasks of academic drawing has changed, with priority given to studying and conveying the construction, plasticity and anatomy of the figure [5; 6; 7; 8] (Fig. 2).

Assignments for miniature drawing based on life studies have been introduced. This practice helps translate images created using techniques of academic drawing into the scale and technique appropriate for lacquer miniature painting.

²⁶ Figs. 1–4, 10. Photos from the methodological fund of the department of drawing and painting at the Russian university of traditional art crafts.



Fig. 1. Gerasimovich N. Graduation qualification work.
Plate "Artistic crafts of Northern Dvina". 2020.
Supervisor: Yu.A. Besshaposhnikova

The curricula for fine arts education have incorporated assignments focused on small-scale painting techniques. These tasks enable students to work with images of reduced dimensions, acquire skills in miniature painting, and enhance their competencies during design-oriented classes and skill development sessions.

Despite significant changes in the content of drawing and painting curricula and positive outcomes achieved in professional training of students, several problems persist regarding depiction of human figures by students:

- inaccurate representation of proportions in depictions of the human figure in both drawings and paintings (short legs paired with a long torso, short thighs contrasted with overly elongated calves, etc.);
- lack of plastic interrelation between clothing and the form of the human body;

- errors in proportionality when depicting the interconnection between different parts of the human body (arms and torso, shoulder girdle and arms, lumbar region and pelvis with lower limbs).

These deficiencies can be partially addressed through courses in plastic anatomy, primarily at the theoretical level. However, without practical exercises, it is impossible to consolidate knowledge acquired from studying human plastic anatomy. To address this issue, completing assignments involving sketches and painted studies of nude models will prove beneficial. Palekh, Mstyora and Kholuy lacquer miniature painting emerged based on the ancient Russian iconographic tradition. Icon painters did not study the human figure or portray it from life. The training of iconographers involved repeated copying of original icons that were executed with fairly accurate rendering of proportional and anatomical features of the human body.

A contradiction arises between the iconic depiction of humans and academic representations of the human figure drawn from live models.

Inheriting the main compositional, coloristic and plastic principles of icon painting, masters of lacquer miniature art began to approach the interpretation of figure plastics more diversely and freely. When depicting secular themes dedicated to human labor, military feats of the people, sports, etc., they started representing human figures in motion and various perspectives. This approach no longer fully corresponded to the icon-painting tradition, although certain folds of clothes, gestures and angles of human figures still aligned with Old Russian painting (Figs. 3, 4).

Turning to the history of national Russian schools of drawing instruction, one can note that since the beginning of the eighteenth century, during Peter I's reforms, secular drawing schools were organized where not only copying samples was practiced but also works were created from nature. For teaching the depiction of the human figure, the book by J.D. Preusler titled "Fundamental rules, or Brief guide to drawing art" was published, which gives considerable attention to methods of construction, depiction and analysis of nature. The book is richly illustrated with tables proposing the use of anthropometric laws for depicting the human figure.

In 1757, the Academy of arts was established, where at the initial stage of education, drawing instruction included three stages.

Stage one consisted of copying sample drawings depicting heads and parts of the human body; stage two involved drawing from nature using various plaster casts



Рис. 2. Учебное задание по рисунку
Fig. 2. Draft of a standing female figure. Contrapposto

such as Antinous, Apollo, Germanicus, etc.; and stage three entailed drawing from life an unclothed human figure.



Fig. 3. Outline drawing of a female figure



Fig. 4. Painting solution of a female figure in Moscow style.

Technique: tempera painting

The methodology of teaching drawing was structured so that a student could progress from the plaster class to working from life only after achieving specific successes. This informal approach allowed for reaching a high level of artistic training, including the depiction of the human figure. It influenced the formation of professional qualities among renowned artists like A.P. Losenko (Fig. 5²⁷), G.I. Ugryumov, A.I. Ivanov, A.E. Yegorov (Fig. 6²⁸), V.K. Shebuyev (Fig. 7²⁹), et al.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, further development took place within the national school of art. In the Academy of arts, there was an increase in assignments related to the depiction of the naked human figure. Drawings began to be made in various techniques, not just linear manner, but also using soft materials. In 1873, teacher of the Moscow drawing school, A.T. Skino, together with Febryni, released a manual entitled "School of drawing, drafting and perspective for all ages.

²⁷ Fig. 5. Anton Pavlovich Losenko (1737–1773) // Museum of drawing: [website]. – URL: <https://all-drawings.livejournal.com/288836.html> (accessed May 12, 2025).

²⁸ Fig. 6. Yegorov A.V. Drawing. Nude female figure. 1800 // Pushkin state museum of fine arts: [website]. – URL: <https://collection.pushkinmuseum.art/entity/OBJECT/127269?index=3&paginator=entity-set&entityType=PERSON&entityId=66085&attribute=objects> (accessed May 12, 2025).

²⁹ Fig. 7. Shebuyev V.K. "Baptism of the Russian people under grand prince Vladimir," 1804 // Virtual Russian Museum: [website]. – URL: <https://rusmuseumvrn.ru/data/collections/drawings/r-5979/index.php> (accessed May 12, 2025).

Theoretical and practical exposition of rules". A large section of the guidebook is devoted to drawing the human figure, including nudes.

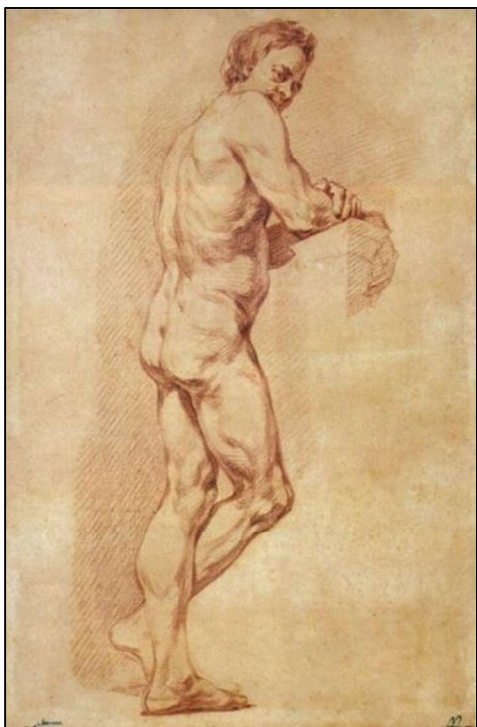


Fig. 5. Losenko A.P. Drawing.
Life Model. 1770

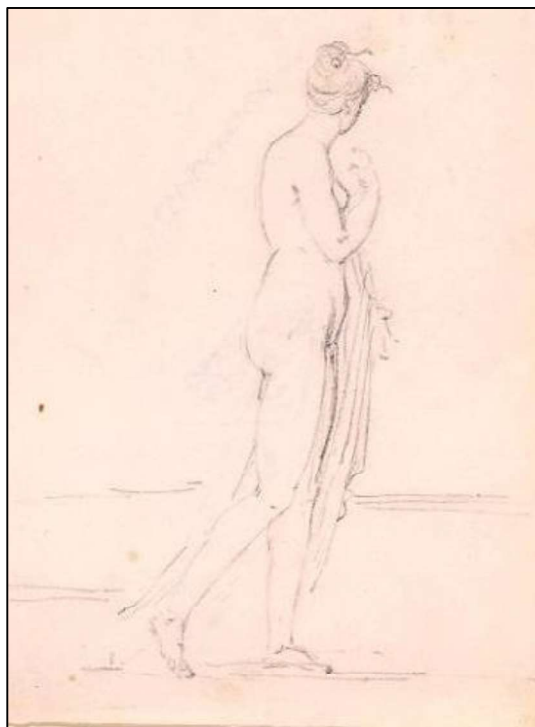


Fig. 6. Yegorov A.V. Drawing.
Nude female figure. 1800



Fig. 7. Shebuyev V.K. "Baptism of the Russian people under grand prince Vladimir", 1804.
State Russian Museum (Saint-Petersburg)

Despite the rapid development of the native drawing school by mid-nineteenth century, stagnation became evident in the academic school. During studio sessions,

students relied heavily on memorized idealized patterns derived from drawing antique molds, leading to unnaturalness and conventionality in their nude model renderings.

Attitudes toward drawing changed significantly once P.P. Chistyakov commenced his pedagogical activities at the Academy. Under his guidance, students' works became more realistic, capturing characteristic details of the subject matter. According to Chistyakov's view, "first and foremost, we must teach them how to truly observe nature; this is almost the most important aspect and quite challenging" [9, p. 134-135].

At the beginning of the twentieth century, with the emergence of new art movements — impressionism, pointillism, post-impressionism and others — academic principles of studying nature moved into the background. Numerous art schools appeared where drawing from life, including nude models, was no longer considered primary and could be replaced by other types of assignments.

The spread of formalistic trends in art led to rejection of the academic school and realistic depiction of nature. Nevertheless, the principles of drawing from life continued to be upheld at the Academy of arts in St. Petersburg. Continuing the traditions of the realist school was I.Ye. Repin. His method of teaching drawing and painting emphasized the principle of studying the nude human figure. Students worked from life, creating both male and female figure drawings and painted studies.

I.Ye. Repin believed that studying the nude human figure should begin with the female model, though this assertion may be debatable because the structural characteristics and plastic interrelations of various body parts are better discernible in the male model. Among his pupils were prominent Russian artists and teachers, such as F.A. Malyavin (Fig. 8³⁰), B.M. Kustodiev (Fig. 9³¹), I.I. Brodsky.

Amid the revolutionary events of 1917-1920 in Russia, artist-teachers abandoned the principles of drawing the human figure from life, marking the onset of a period characterized by formalistic and abstract explorations in the teaching of visual arts in native schools. By the late 1930s and early 1940s, the national school of visual arts began to adopt the principles of socialist realism. In 1937, the Leningrad institute of painting, sculpture and architecture and the Moscow institute of visual arts were founded. Within these educational institutions, academic drawing holds a central position. Depicting the human figure from life, particularly nude models, is regarded as the most effective method for mastering the fundamentals of representational literacy, enabling understanding of the underlying principles governing the structure of the human body.

Drawings and painted studies depicting nature are required to demonstrate complete finish, mutual subordination of individual elements and thorough analysis of light-tone solutions in shaping the human figure.

³⁰ Fig. 8. Philip Malyavin. Contours. Graphic work from the collection of I.I. Brodsky // Museum of the Academy of arts: [website]. – URL: <https://artsacademymuseum.org/exhibition/filipp-andreevich-malyavin/> (accessed March 12, 2025).

³¹ Fig. 9. Girl combing her hair // Gallery: [website]. – URL: <https://www.artcontext.info/modern-art-galleries.html?func=detail&id=8361> (accessed March 12, 2025).

After the end of the Great Patriotic War, the realistic school of drawing and painting underwent further development. An educational reform was implemented, culminating in the 1947 decree issued by the Council of ministers of the USSR transforming the All-Russian academy of arts into the Soviet Union academy of arts. As a result, starting from the 1947-1948 academic year, drawing lessons featured casting and drawing of human heads from plaster and life, along with depictions of torsos, full bodies, individual body parts (such as hands and feet), figures in perspective, nude figures, double models and portraits. Special emphasis was placed on detailed execution in extended setups. A unified system for training fine-art painters was established, with the study of nude models conducted at the levels of art colleges and secondary art schools in Leningrad and Moscow.



Fig. 8. Malyavin F.A. Drawing of a female figure. 1912. Museum of the Academy of arts (St. Petersburg)



Fig. 9. Kustodiev B.M. Drawing "Girl combing her hair". 1917. Vyatka art museum named after V.M. and A.M. Vasnetsovs (Kirov)

This approach enabled maintaining a high standard of realistic art and nurturing generations of artists who could not only flawlessly depict the human figure but also apply their acquired knowledge in thematic paintings, murals and mosaics.

At present, the contemporary evolution of the national art school continues to uphold the traditions of Russian and Soviet realistic visual art. Despite modern challenges and the penetration of digital technologies across all fields, including visual arts, studying the human figure remains a crucial step in the professional training of contemporary easel painters, monumentalists and applied artists.

Analyzing the experience of the national art school over the past 300 years leads us to conclude that one of its foundations lies in the study of man, both in drawing and painting, including the nude model. Without knowledge of human

plasticity, proportions and distinctive features, it is impossible to create a convincing artwork reflecting man's life and activity in all its complexity and diversity.

The accumulated experience and teaching principles developed for future painters cannot be entirely "copied" and directly applied to train artists specializing in traditional art crafts, specifically lacquer miniature painting. Artists face distinct objectives, differing approaches to composition building, technical implementation and form interpretation. Nonetheless, incorporating some methodologies, notably the study of the human figure in drawing and painting, as elaborated by the academic school, would neither contradict the unique aspects of lacquer miniature painting nor hinder the creation of highly artistic pieces.

When working on contemporary narrative compositions in lacquer miniature painting, students face a complex challenge—the need to develop compositions on current topics that require depicting clothed individuals whose attire accentuates the plasticity of the human body. Without profound knowledge of figure plastics, it becomes impossible to create a highly professional piece of lacquer miniature art.

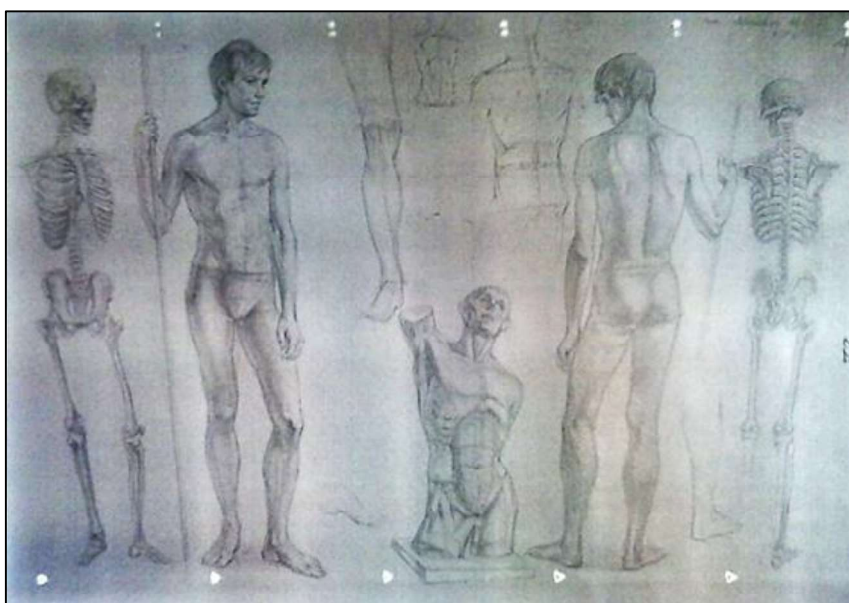


Fig. 10. Educational assignment in drawing: "Nude figure in two rotations with anatomical dissection"

Assignments aimed at studying the nude human figure should become the foundation that facilitates the depiction of human figures in lacquer miniature painting compositions. For studying the nude human figure, the best practice involves executing drawing and painting tasks featuring male models.

The constructive features of male physique allow for clearer observation of particularities and interconnections between different parts of the human body.

Curriculum programs in drawing and painting for students specializing in lacquer miniature painting include assignments focused on studying the nude model. Particularly useful is the task "Drawing of human figure in two rotations with anatomical dissection" (Fig. 10), which entails studying the anatomy of the nude human figure and analyzing the structural peculiarities of the body. On painting classes, studies of the nude figure are also carried out.

To summarize, it can be concluded that the number of hours allocated for studying the nude model by aspiring lacquer miniature painters is insufficient, especially concerning drawing. More effectively, assignments focusing on studying the nude male figure should be closely integrated with the study of plastic anatomy.

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