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DRAWING AND PAINTING? DEFINITELY!  
THE ROLE OF PAINTING AND DRAWING  
WORKSHOPS AFTER THE FIRST YEAR OF STUDIES  
AT THE FACULTY OF ARCHITECTURE

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RYSOWAĆ, MALOWAĆ? – NA PEWNO TAK!  
ROLA PRAKTYKI MALARSKO-RYSUNKOWEJ  
PO PIERWSZYM ROKU STUDIÓW  
NA WYDZIALE ARCHITEKTURY

Abstract

There is a long tradition of painting and drawing workshops offered after the first year of studies at the Faculty of Architecture of the Cracow University of Technology. In view of the limited number of teaching hours devoted to painting and drawing throughout the academic year, workshops constitute an indispensable element of artistic education and prove useful in the course of subsequent professional activities. Classes are held outdoors, in various spots all over Kraków, and last for five days. For the past several years, plein-air workshops have been organized in Chelmino for groups of ten. During the plein-air workshop, which is not comparable to class-room painting sessions, students work in constant close contact with architects and visual artists, whose professional tips and advice enable them to expand their experience in drawing and painting.

*Keywords: architecture, practice, drawing, painting*

Streszczenie

Praktyka malarsko-rysunkowa po pierwszym roku studiów na Wydziale Architektury Politechniki Krakowskiej ma wieloletnią tradycję. Ze względu na małą ilość godzin zajęć rysunku i malarstwa w czasie roku akademickiego jest niezbędnym elementem kształcenia plastycznego przydatnego w późniejszej profesjonalnej pracy zawodowej. Zajęcia odbywają się w plenerze w różnych miejscach Krakowa i trwają 5 dni. Od kilku lat dla grupy dziesięciu osób istnieje możliwość uczestniczenia w dziesięciodniowym plenerze w Chelminie. W trakcie pleneru niedającego się porównać z zajęciami na sali rysunkowej, pracując w ciągłym kontakcie z architektami, plastykami, dzięki profesjonalnym korektom i rozmowom studenci zyskują nowe doświadczenia w dziedzinie rysunku i malarstwa.

*Słowa kluczowe: architektura, praktyka, rysunek, malarstwo*

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Drawing, graphic art and painting constitute indispensable elements in the process of the development of future architects in terms of their artistic awareness. The teaching programme has been developed over the years by generations of artists. The spectacular results of these teaching methods can be observed, for example, at periodic exhibitions organized at the university. Students' paintings, graphic designs and drawings are also exhibited on the walls of the Rector's office. They can also be found in the offices, halls and rooms of such institutions as the Institute of Paediatrics, children's homes, children's special care centers and schools. Good teaching results are not achieved exclusively through regular classes during the academic year; the limited number of drawing lessons makes it necessary to supplement them with summer training. During plein-air workshops, which are not comparable with classroom sessions, students are enabled to shape their artistic awareness and sensitivity.

Currently, training in painting and drawing is offered primarily in the form of a five-day plein-air workshop in Kraków. The city features numerous picturesque sites perfect for plein-air painting, including landscapes, urban greenery, parks, and bodies of water. Numerous historical neighbourhoods, buildings and beautiful architectural details add to the diversity and richness of plein-air options.

The optimal form of practical training is fieldwork outside the student's academic centre or hometown. This requirement has been addressed for the past several years by the Chełmno Town Hall, which organizes ten-day summer plein-air painting and drawing workshops called National Plein-Air Workshops for Architecture Students. The purpose of these annual workshops is to promote young talent as well as the beautifully situated town of Chełmno, whose numerous historical buildings constitute a valuable cultural heritage. This cultural space is especially attractive for the artistic activities of graphic designers, painters, sculptors, photographers and filmmakers. The programme offers the ten freshman students of the Faculty of Architecture selected for the workshops a unique opportunity to complete their training in painting and drawing in a form that, while slightly different, remains within the curricular framework. Workshop training has been designed so as to enable not only adherence to the curriculum and exercise topics but also a large degree of interpretational freedom in accord with the student's expectations, intuition, and interests. Therefore, it is necessary to adopt an individual approach to each student's work.

Landscapes with which we commune daily may come to be perceived as ordinary and fail to evoke impressions as intense as those created by fresh new scenery. In Kraków, students can work individually and independently, according to their needs and potentials. The opportunity to visit such an interesting place raises university training to an entirely new level. Additionally, better teaching results can be achieved there thanks to students' constant and direct contact with their teachers and supervisors. A ten-day plein-air workshop features all-day sessions which often last far into the night, as opposed to meetings several hours long such as those organized within the framework of classroom training in Kraków-based workshops. This creates perfect conditions for unhurried individual and collective corrections and summarizing of work done over a series of days. Then, participants can draw adequate conclusions and think about and discuss their individual work plans for the following day. Ten days of practical training and maximization of each work day permit the thorough consideration, observation and revision of issues that might be difficult to

address otherwise. Thanks to a relatively small group of well-integrated people, mutual communication is much easier, as is enhancing the students' consciousness and transmitting necessary knowledge. This kind of working atmosphere and common involvement has a huge impact on achieving a higher level of mutual understanding. It results in more mature work. What is more, integration of student groups from various architecture faculties from all over Poland and abroad is also possible, because the plein-air workshops are attended annually by students from the Faculty of Architecture of Lviv University. Contacts with other teachers expand the horizons of these young people and stimulate their imaginations.

Currently, plein-air workshops are offered based on 70 years of experience in teaching painting and drawing at the Faculty of Architecture. An architect's practical skills are developed through improvement of his spatial imagination, among other aspects. The quality of teaching depends on frequent professional correction from experienced teachers, usually artists active in various fields such as painting and drawing, graphic design, stained glass, and artistic photography. Direct contact with a teacher, his personality and experience may take the form and features of a live experience, enabling him to reach the minds of the young people. This is one of the factors that facilitate a transition to mature artistic and professional activity.

The ability to observe and enhance one's artistic sensitivity, richness of perception, and ways of incorporating colour into artistic work are the basic issues the students work on. The opportunity to make independent decisions is an important element of self-development which will have a positive effect on the work of a future designer, architect, or artist.

A way of seeing things is a deliberate act; therefore the ability to look and see comes down to the ability to make conscious choices. We see only what we look at; thus a painting is an image isolated from its original context. It must be processed and interpreted so as to eventually constitute a culmination and essence of many factors. It must be also noted that 'The way we perceive things depends on our knowledge...'<sup>1</sup>. This knowledge does not appear out of nowhere. In this case, it results from experiments and experience in drawing and painting, among others, and is aided by the presence and expertise of a teacher and artist. Intensive training and frequent correction result in the transfer of emotions that emerge within the sphere of life experience into the structure of a painting. These emotions may consist of many elements, such as knowledge of the subject of interest, history, sociology, psychology, or, finally, the entire psychological makeup of the artist. Seeing, as understood and expected, does not come down to a mere mechanical reaction to stimuli. Reactions and recording reactions make up only a small part of the whole process of seeing.

In order to meet the requirements imposed upon architects and artists, students of architecture must become familiar with and acquire skills related to drawing and the use of colour. These skills directly influence the quality and character of an architectural design, along with its details and surroundings. One has to do many exercises to explore one's ability to communicate through colour, and to become familiar with the theoretical and practical aspects and niceties of a given problem in order to be able to propose a mature solution for a given location. The importance of colour in architectural design is as great as the design of the architectural form itself, because the mutual interaction

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<sup>1</sup> J. Berger, *Sposoby widzenia (Ways of seeing)*, Poznań 1997, p. 8.

between form and colour influences the positive or negative perception of the project in question. The inadequate or irresponsible use of colour may have an adverse effect on the perception of the architecture.

In relation to the psychological effects of colours and shapes, Walter Gropius, one of the twentieth century's most outstanding architects, stated that 'Shapes may have a stimulating or calming effect, and the intended result is additionally enhanced through the selection of suitable colours, bright or subdued. Surface colour and texture are indeed independent entities which emit measurable physical energy. They may be perceived as warm or cold, increasing or decreasing distance, light or dark, tense or relaxed, and even attractive or repulsive'<sup>2</sup>.

One cannot resist the impression that our surroundings are dominated by colour nowadays. Colour is a part of a rich range of creative tools, with the concept of communication between the creator and the surroundings playing one of the crucial roles. Used in medicine, it may even supplement psychiatric treatment and disease treatment, among others; therefore only responsible people fully aware of their skills should be allowed to have such a powerful influence on the end users. Architects who lack a thorough knowledge of colour and related experience are thus unable to exercise the considerable power of the artistic medium.

Gropius expands his vision of an architect's education into a proposal to train a student's emotional skills. He claims that he relies on '... reaching towards creative disciplines, such as music, poetry, or visual arts. This action is certainly more than just an addition to thinking – it is basic experience ... This is also the only teaching measure interrelated with our perception and inventive skills'<sup>3</sup>. This view seems to indicate a complete understanding of and appreciation for the importance of the artistic education of architecture students through drawing and painting exercises. The statement by such a renowned architect that 'drawing and painting is certainly a valuable means of self-expression, but paper, pencil, brush, and watercolour are useless when it comes to the development of spatial aptitude, which is indispensable for free expression' arouses a mixture of astonishment, regret and objection<sup>4</sup>. He emphasises making students familiar with materials, their structures and textures, rather than with these experiences. He claims that a student will begin to learn about colour through working with materials.

But learning at this stage and level comes down to knowing that some colours exist, often without realizing how important colours are and how rich a range of possibilities they offer. Using colour in architectural design requires knowledge whose basics can be acquired during architectural studies as well.

It seems that a basic exploration of the secrets of colours does not enable the conscious use of colour. Thus, one's education cannot be completed at the level of a layman's awareness of traffic lights. The ability to recognize red, yellow, and green does not result from education and so does not entitle one to practice serious artistic activity. Within this

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<sup>2</sup> W. Gropius, *Pelnia architektury (Scope of total architecture)*, Kraków 2014, p. 51-52.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 77-78.

<sup>4</sup> W. Gropius, *Pelnia architektury*, p. 79.

context, the notion that All my premises emphasize the importance of the creative factor<sup>5</sup> arouses distrust.

From the perspective of time and experience, it is certain that not all of Gropius's premises were correct. The thesis formulated above diminishes the value of the whole theory. Lacking such an important link as a thorough knowledge of colour theory and the ability to put it into practice, the design capability of future architects is impaired. This may indicate the lack of a crucial professional skill enabling the design of high-quality architectural compositions.

Seeing is the process of looking at one's surroundings at a certain moment in time. The assessment and selection of elements takes place in our consciousness. A category of this consciousness depends on the intensity of artistic experiences gained throughout one's university programme. The image of reality as seen is not created in a single static glance, but through a mental process of looking at it at a certain point in time. This notion is elaborated on by Władysław Strzemiński, who writes that '... we never look at nature by means of a single static glance. Our eyes move from object to object. They stop at some, skip others, move in various directions; our seeing is not a motionless mathematic algorithm, but a mobile physiological activity'<sup>6</sup>.

Our level of knowledge about drawing and experience enables us to transmit selected important content. Transmission via drawing must be done in a professional way. It cannot be done through a naïve drawing revealing educational gaps or defects. Even if the architect chooses to draw in a naïve manner, as has become fashionable recently, of the entire range of their artistic abilities, such naivety might only be apparent. For a professional designer, the quality of such work is relatively easy to determine.

To summarize, it may certainly be stated that training in painting and drawing after the first year of the architecture programme is an enormously important and indispensable element of the education of future architects. Drawing and using colour, due to the role these skills play in an architect's work, cannot be left out of the curriculum. The limited number of teaching hours devoted to artistic education renders such an education incomplete. Summer training fills the gap, resulting in the formation of a different level of awareness, useful and necessary throughout the subsequent years of studies, and an invaluable aid in future professional activity.

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<sup>5</sup> W. Strzemiński, *Teoria widzenia*, Kraków 1958, p. 160.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 160.

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