

# SHOULD THE ART STUDENT THINK? BY PAMELA COLMAN SMITH



ALL you students who are just beginning your work in an Art School. Stop—think! First make sure in your own mind what end you wish to work for. Do you know? Perhaps you have not decided. You will leave all that to the time when you have learned to draw and leave the school—a crippled tool—ready to begin your serious work and have a studio—and all the rest of it. Do not wait till then! Put in a corner of your mind an idea—such as, “I wish to paint portraits.” Just keep that idea in the corner, and do not forget that it is there. Call it up sometimes and review your work in front of it. Thus—“Am I working at the right beginning for this branch of art? Am I studying the faces of all the people I see—trying to find out their character—imagining how I should paint them if I were to do so? Am I trying to show more of their character than appears on the surface? Can I see it? No. But how shall I find it?” Look for it.

When you see a portrait of an historical person, note the dress, the type of face; see if you can trace the character in the face; note the pose, for often pose will date a picture as correctly as the hair or clothes. Remember the date, if the picture is dated; if not, place it in your mind as second half of the fourteenth century, or first half of the eighteenth, and so on. If you are not sure of the period, make a pencil sketch and take it with you to some reference library. Once a week make a point of looking up all the clothes you have seen (or wish to draw in some composition, perhaps). Some day when you may have a novel to illustrate and a character to portray, you will remember, “Oh, yes, a dress of the kind worn by so and so in the portrait by so and so—that type—or—no! Somewhat more lively.”

Go and see all the plays you can. For the stage is a great school—or should be—to the illustrator—as well as to others. First watch the simple forms of joy, of fear, of sorrow; look at the position taken by the whole body, then the face—but that can come afterward.

As an exercise draw a composition of fear or sadness, or great sorrow, quite simply, do not bother about details now, but in a few lines tell your story. Then show it to any one of your friends, or family, or fellow students, and ask them if they can tell you what it is meant to portray. You will soon get to know how to make it tell its tale. After you have found how to tell a simple story, put in more details, the face, and indicate the dress. Next time you go to the play look at the clothes, hat, cloak, armor, belt, sword, dagger, rings, boots,

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jewels. Watch how the cloak swings when the person walks, how the hands are used. See if you can judge if the clothes are correct, or if they are worn correctly; for they are often ruined by the way they are put on. An actor should be able to show the period and manner of the time in the way he puts on his clothes, as well as the way he uses his hands, head, legs.

**T**HIS may be beside the mark, think you! "Of what use is the stage to me? I am to be an illustrator of books! The stage is false, exaggerated, unreal," you say. So are a great many pictures in books, and the books, too, for that matter. The stage has taught me almost all I know of clothes, of action and of pictorial gestures.

Learn from everything, see everything, and above all *feel* everything! And make other people when they look at your drawing feel it too!

Make your training at your art school your a b c. You must learn to hold a brush, to mix paint, to draw in perspective, and study anatomy.

Keep an open mind to all things. Hear all the music you can, good music, for sound and form are more closely connected than we know.

Think good thoughts of beautiful things, colors, sounds, places, not mean thoughts. When you see a lot of dirty people in a crowd, do not remember only the dirt, but the great spirit that is in them all, and the power that they represent.

For through ugliness is beauty sometimes found. Lately I have seen a play, ugly, passionate, realistic, brutal. All through that play I felt that ugly things may be true to nature, but surely it is through evil that we realize good. The far-off scent of morning air, the blue mountains, the sunshine, the flowers, of a country I once lived in, seemed to rise before me—and there on the stage was a woman sitting on a chair, her body stiff, her eyes rolling, a wonderfully realistic picture of a fit.

I believe that in the so-called "composition class" the future of many a student lies. (Professor Arthur Dow, of Columbia University, has proved this, and through his influence I believe a good many schools have begun to teach composition first.)

But let the student begin young, and with all the necessary aids for the broadening of his mind. Composition first, and all the other rules and rudiments, in order as they come. As much literature,

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music, drama as possible (all to be thought of in relation to that idea so safely tucked away in the corner of the student's mind), to be worked at from the vantage point of knowing what they are to aid.

I wish here to say how grateful I am to the writer of an article in an American magazine (*Putman's Monthly* for July, 1907). "An Appreciation and a Protest." An appreciation of Albert Sterner, and a protest against the "ultra-sweetness and oppressive propriety admired alike by the publisher and the public," and "individuality discreetly suppressed."

O! the prudishness and pompous falseness of a great mass of intelligent people!

I do not hold that "the incessant roar of high-power presses" is alone to blame for the stifling of life, but for a lack of inspiration. For it is a land of power, a land of unkempt uproar—full of life, force, energy.

Lift up your ideals, you weaklings, and force a way out of that thunderous clamor of the steam press, the hurrying herd of blind humanity, noise, dust, strife, seething toil—there is power! The imprisoned Titans underneath the soil, grinding, writhing—take your strength from them, throw aside your petty drawing room point of view.

I do not want to see riotous, clumsy ugliness suddenly spring up, but a fine noble power shining through your work. The illustrations that I see in the magazines by the younger people are all dignified and well, carefully and conscientiously drawn, but their appalling clumsiness is quite beyond me,—their lack of charm and grace.

I do not mean by charm, *prettiness*, but an appreciation of beauty. Ugliness is beauty, but with a difference, a nobleness that speaks through all the hard crust of convention.

I have heard it said that half the world has nothing to say. Perhaps the other half has, but it is afraid to speak: Banish fear, brace your courage, place your ideal high up with the sun, away from the dirt and squalor and ugliness around you and let that power that makes "the roar of the high-power presses" enter into your work—energy—courage—life—love. Use your wits, use your eyes. Perhaps you use your physical eyes too much and only see the mask. Find eyes within, look for the door into the unknown country.

"High over cap" on a fairy horse—ride on your Quest—for what we are all seeking—*Beauty*. Beauty of thought first, beauty of feeling, beauty of form, beauty of color, beauty of sound, appreciation, joy, and the power of showing it to others.