



Swedish  
Academy  
of Realist Art

# Traditional Realist Drawing & Painting Program *Course Breakdown*

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## *Year 1:*

### **Foundational Drawing**

#### **Foundational Drawing Techniques and Methodology**

This course lays the foundation for essential drawing skills that students will build upon throughout their education. Students will develop a structured working method and be introduced to terminology that supports clear communication throughout the program. A primary focus will be placed on developing an understanding of the high standards of accuracy required in realistic art practice.

Students will complete individual assignments such as master copies (2D studies) and observational drawings from three-dimensional subjects, including plaster casts and simple geometric forms. Materials will primarily include graphite and charcoal.

#### **Foundational Figure Drawing**

This course introduces students to the fundamentals of figure drawing through gesture studies, master copies and studies from the model. Students will participate in regular gesture drawing sessions, complete a series of figure copies in pencil and a more developed master copy in charcoal, preparing them for the transition to accurate and structured figure drawings from life, working on shorter poses in pencil as well as one long pose from the live figure model. The primary objective of this course is for students to develop a working understanding of the human figure's construction, typically using line-based drawing without shading.

#### **Intermediate Cast Drawing**

This course introduces students to the discipline of cast drawing through direct observation of plaster casts, using charcoal on white paper as the primary medium. Through a series of progressively challenging assignments, students will develop the ability to closely replicate the visual impression of light and form as perceived in nature. Emphasis is placed on accurate proportion, tonal relationships, and edge sensitivity to effectively translate three-dimensional form onto a two-dimensional surface. Particular emphasis is placed on rendering the effects of light and creating a sense of form and atmosphere. The aim of this

course is to provide students with a solid foundation in realistic drawing from life. Students will develop and apply a systematic working method, enabling them to analyze and construct complex forms through simplified visual elements. The course also fosters technical mastery of charcoal, along with discipline, patience, and the ability to manage long-term drawing projects effectively.

### **Intermediate Figure Drawing**

In this course, students will develop their observational and technical abilities through daily figure drawing from life. The main focus is on long figure poses rendered in charcoal over 2–4 week periods, complemented by shorter pencil drawings and gesture studies. The primary aim of this course is to strengthen students' ability to depict the human figure with structural clarity, proportional accuracy and sensitivity. Emphasis is placed on accurate gesture, proportion, and construction, while also developing line quality and edge control. Students will develop their understanding of the tonal relationships that convey form and light, while still representing the figure convincingly within a limited value range, without relying on backgrounds or full rendering.

### **Creativity and Composition I**

This course introduces students to creative visual thinking and composition through a series of idea-based image-making exercises, “The Seed”, as well as specific classes in composition, perspective and anatomy, that all serve to support the creative development of the student. The aim of this course is to cultivate creativity, conceptual thinking, and compositional understanding. Students are encouraged to move beyond technical execution and focus on meaning, narrative, and personal expression within their work. The course also provides foundational tools for idea development, such as thumbnailing and reference gathering. Personal voice and interpretive freedom are highly encouraged.

### **Art Theory and Workshops I**

This course supports the first-year core studio curriculum through theoretical instruction, practical workshops, and professional development. The course is structured around four central components:

- 1: *Knowledge of Art Materials*: Topics during year 1 include the historical use, physical characteristics, and handling of drawing materials. The aim is to establish a foundational understanding of the tools essential to a professional drawing practice.
- 2: *Art History and Artist Appreciation*: Students will be introduced to different major periods of Western art history, from the Renaissance to the present day, with a particular focus on representational art. The course includes lectures, museum visits, local excursions, and an optional international study trip.
- 3: *The Business of Art*: Students gain practical experience in organizing and presenting exhibitions. Lectures cover foundational concepts in career development and professional conduct in the visual arts.
- 4: *Workshops and Guest Lectures*: SARA faculty and visiting artists provide focused project weeks, specialized lectures and intensive workshops. Topics vary but commonly include portraiture and an intensive one week course in intaglio printmaking (etching).

## *Year 2 :*

# **Advanced drawing and foundational painting**

### **Advanced cast drawing**

This course builds on the foundational skills acquired in earlier cast drawing instruction, guiding students through more advanced and extended projects on toned paper using chalk and charcoal. Students complete three major assignments over the term: an introductory cast, a sustained and complex cast drawing over several months, and a timed test cast designed to assess accumulated skills under time constraints. The use of toned paper introduces a new working method and serves as a transition between drawing and painting, as both light and dark needs to be added to a toned surface and controlled.

The aim of this course is to further refine students' observational skills and deepen their understanding of value relationships, form modeling, and visual hierarchy. Students are expected to produce drawings that demonstrate not only high technical precision but also compositional thoughtfulness and artistic selectivity.

### **Advanced figure drawing**

The course is designed to challenge students' ability to work independently, manage time efficiently, and execute structurally sound, visually compelling figure drawings from life. The core of the course is the daily practice of drawing from the live model, with the main focus on long poses lasting 2–5 weeks, executed in charcoal and chalk on toned paper. These extended studies are supported by gesture studies and short pose studies in pencil. Emphasis is placed on deepening the students ability to correctly capture proportions and structure as well as developing a more artistic approach to drawing through the use of tonal mass, refined edge control and compositional thinking.

### **Foundational Cast painting**

This course introduces students to oil painting through grisaille cast studies, using a limited palette of black, brown, and white. Building on drawing accuracy developed in earlier courses, students focus on painting form, value, and light with increasing subtlety and control. The course follows a structured progression: beginning with a simple cast painted twice (once as a long-form study and once in a single day), followed by one or more intermediate cast paintings, then a complex long-term project, and finally a test cast completed under time constraints.

Through this sequence, students gain experience managing the medium, refining their technique, and developing artistic judgment. The grisaille approach emphasizes value relationships and spatial depth without the additional complexity of full color.

### **Foundational figure painting**

This course focuses on figure drawing and painting from life, guiding students through an in-depth study of the human form. The core of the course consists of a number of four-week-long poses, where students first complete a finished drawing and then develop a painting from that same pose. This extended work is supported by complementary exercises such as shorter figure studies in pencil and gesture drawings. The aim of this course is to strengthen the student's ability to work from the live model with both precision and sensitivity, combining technical accuracy with compositional awareness. Emphasis is placed on gesture, proportions, value structure, and a confident working method. Students should become increasingly independent in their ability to begin and develop a figure painting from observation, using a solid preparatory drawing as a foundation.

## **Creativity and composition II**

Students will further develop personal and conceptual approaches in a number of creative “Seed” assignments. Emphasis is placed on refining artistic expression, pushing creative boundaries and on becoming more comfortable presenting personal work and ideas. The course includes visits to museums, artist studios, and local cultural institutions, as well as an optional international study trip aimed at deepening contextual awareness and creative reflection. The goal of this course is to elevate students’ ability to communicate meaning through a developed visual language. Students are expected to critically engage with the conceptual development of their work and to demonstrate an evolving understanding of visual storytelling, symbolism, and compositional nuance.

## **Portrait Drawing**

The portrait drawing course builds on foundational skills to help students develop a confident and systematic approach to drawing the head from life. Students will work primarily from the live model during evening portrait sessions and dedicated portrait workshops, supplemented by studies from plaster casts and at-home assignments. The focus is on achieving accurate structure and likeness through controlled use of proportion, construction, and tonal design. The primary goal of this course is to establish a clear, repeatable portrait drawing process that enables students to capture both structural accuracy and likeness. Emphasis is placed on the construction of the head, spatial relationships, and a disciplined approach to light and form. Students are expected to integrate anatomical knowledge with visual observation to produce resolved, lifelike portraits.

## **Art Theory and Workshops II**

This second-year course expands upon the foundational knowledge gained in year one, offering deeper engagement with theory, materials, and professional practice in support of the core program. The course is structured around four central components:

*1: Knowledge of Art Materials:* Lectures explore the use of painting materials in greater depth, including traditional oil painting mediums, pigments, binders, brushes, supports, and archival practices. Students are introduced to more advanced material handling, including canvas and panel preparation and making oil paint by hand, with attention to studio safety and historical usage.

*2: Art History and Artist Appreciation:* Students continue their exploration of Western art history, with a primary focus on representational art. Students examine how artists across time have addressed issues such as narrative, symbolism and the role of the artist in society. The course includes lectures, museum visits, local excursions, and an optional international study trip to further support creative growth by exposing students to diverse artistic and cultural environments.

*3: The Business of Art:* This course introduces students to different professional skills needed to maintain a sustainable studio practice. Topics include contracts, pricing and gallery relationships. Most importantly, students will take a greater role in curating and managing group exhibitions at official institutions, such as galleries and museums.

*4: Guest Lectures and Workshops:* SARA faculty and visiting artists provide focus weeks, specialized lectures and intensive workshops. Topics vary but typically include landscape studies and a sculpture workshop.

## *Year 3:*

# Advanced Painting

### **Still Life Painting in Limited Palette**

This course introduces students to the foundational principles of still life painting using a limited palette. It emphasizes accurate drawing, value control, understanding of color temperature and saturation and developed paint handling techniques. Assignments increase gradually in complexity, beginning with small studies of individual objects and progressing to more developed small and medium compositions. A theoretical component includes the study of different still life genres and contemporary still life artists. Each student selects an artist to analyze and write about in a formal essay, followed by a presentation.

### **Figure Painting in Limited Palette**

This course introduces students to the fundamentals of painting the human figure from life using a limited palette, known as the “Zorn palette”. Each pose spans 2 to 5 weeks and includes a structured workflow: preliminary color/value studies, preparatory drawings, and the final painting. The limited palette simplifies the challenge of color mixing, allowing students to focus on drawing accuracy, tonal values, volume, and paint handling while developing their color sensitivity. Students also complete shorter pencil studies and gesture drawings to reinforce gesture, proportion, and anatomical understanding. A master copy assignment introduces historical approaches to figure painting within a restricted palette.

### **Advanced Still life Painting in Full Palette**

This advanced still life course expands into the use of the full color palette, challenging students to manage more complex compositions, subtler color relationships, and varied surface qualities.

Students explore painting with a broader range of techniques, including impasto, glazing, and scumbling, depending on their subject matter and personal painting style. The focus is on deeper artistic interpretation, material specificity, and expressive control of color, value, and edges.

Working more independently, students complete two medium-scale compositions and one ambitious large-scale still life. This extended format encourages thoughtful planning, refined execution, and deeper engagement with compositional design and personal aesthetic goals.

### **Advanced Figure painting in Full Palette**

This advanced figure painting course continues the study of the live model using a full palette, with a focus on achieving lifelike skin tones, accurate color relationships, and efficient paint handling. Students work with 2 to 5 week long poses, beginning with a preparatory drawing, followed by painting directly on canvas in full color.

Building on the limited palette foundation, students refine their understanding of light, color temperature, surface quality, and atmosphere. The course includes regular gesture and short pose sessions.

The goal of this course is to bring the student to a high level of control and expressiveness in figure painting with a full range of colors. Students should gain confidence in creating naturalistic skin tones, achieving a strong likeness, handling complex poses, and developing atmospheric and compositional sensitivity in their paintings.

### **Portrait Painting**

This course offers an in-depth exploration of portrait painting from life. Students work from

the live model in both short and long poses, as well as independently through homework assignments. The course culminates in a sustained 48-hour portrait painting, completed over a 4-week period.

A theoretical component includes the study of different portrait genres and historical or contemporary portrait artists. Each student selects a portrait artist to analyze and write about in a formal essay, followed by a presentation. Two portrait master copy paintings further supports the student's understanding of historical techniques, structure, and expressive decisions.

The objective of this course is to enable students to paint portraits from life with confidence and sensitivity, using sound technique and a deepened understanding of form, light, and character. Students are encouraged to combine technical precision with artistic expression, building their ability to compose thoughtful and compelling images of the human face and figure.

### **Major Creative project**

The Major Creative project is meant to be representative of everything that the student has learnt over the three years and therefore show a high level of technical execution as well as a strong focus on narrative and composition. The accumulated skills in and technical excellence should be utilized to full potential, with the purpose of supporting and lifting forward a personal vision and creative voice, rather than being the main goal. This project serves as a transition from structured teacherled exercises to an increasingly independent artistic practice where students are expected to demonstrate maturity in both skill and thought.

A theme will be given upon which to build a personal work. The painting should be large, executed in oil on canvas and finished to a level where it is worthy of exhibition in a gallery. Students receive mentorship through scheduled faculty consultations and participate in group critiques at key intervals. The process includes concept development, compositional planning, and critique of their technical execution. The culminating presentation of the work is held at the graduation.

### **Art Theory and Workshops III**

The third-year course of Art Theory and Workshops concludes the components of Art Materials, Business and History with written exams, while providing students with specific knowledge of materials and business practice needed to begin their independent artistic practice. Students also apply their learned competences from previous years in workshops and the presentation/exhibition of their own artwork.

The course is structured around four central components:

*1: Knowledge of Art Materials:* Lectures provide additional insights into oil painting materials applicable in students' third year of studies and beyond to support their artistic practice as advanced painters. The emphasis lies on paint grinding and painting ground preparation, with studio safety and historical uses in mind.

*2: Art History and Artist Appreciation:* Students continue to attend lectures on Western art history, gaining a nuanced perspective on historical art practices, artistic movements and how to understand their own practice as artists in the context of history. The course also includes museum visits, local excursions, and an optional international study trip to further support creative growth by exposing students to diverse artistic and cultural environments.

3: *The Business of Art*: Students build a greater understanding of how to begin their professional art practice after graduation, developing competence and confidence in regards to entrepreneurial business practice and through applying their experience practically and independently in exhibitions at official institutions, such as galleries and museums.

4: *Guest Lectures and Workshops*: SARA faculty and visiting artists provide focus weeks, specialized lectures and intensive workshops. For third-year students, workshops are chosen primarily to provide new perspectives on a specific field of practice.

## Program Overview

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The 3 year certificate program includes Intensive & Advanced Drawing programs, Foundation & Advanced Painting programs, and all lectures, events, workshops and excursions. The three consecutive years of study build a significantly beneficial momentum that has immense value in a student's development and growth.

The curriculum is based on the best and most effective training techniques used in 19th-century European academies and private ateliers, the apprentice system of the renaissance and our faculty's own extensive experience both as students and instructors. SARA uses the comparative method of measurement and stresses working only from life and the imagination. The overall result is a rigorous and demanding training program that also offers great flexibility to meet the specific needs of each student to ensure their progress.

Students begin with learning and practicing drawing fundamentals, which include analyzing the subject in order to break it down into its simplest, largest forms and masses, before refining those masses into increasingly more complex forms and details. While drawing, students will consider line weight, edge quality and value relationships that are all part of the overall accuracy they strive for. This is practiced through drawing static models such as master copies and plaster casts, as well as the challenges of somewhat more fluid and dynamic (i.e. changing) models in the figure room.

These intensive and rigorous drawing studies provide the solid foundation upon which the painting program is built beginning in a student's second year.

Painting studies are also practiced from static and dynamic models, including master copies, plaster casts, still lives and figure models. Painting is begun in monochromatic grisaille (black & white) and brunaille (brown & white), in order to simplify the intimidating challenge of painting in oil. Next, students work in a limited palette, with as few as four colors, before eventually moving on to a full palette with an unlimited choice of colors.

The three years of study are complemented and strengthened through lectures, nearly every week, on art materials, techniques, art history, and the very important, but often ignored aspect of being an artist, which is the business of art. Business lectures touch on such things as résumés, artist statements, gallery contracts, pricing art, marketing, etc., that are essential to a successful career as an artist.

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