Professional Development Grant 2008
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I received a 2008 Professional Development Grant to engage in intensive study of the human figure, via an art school life drawing class and private study on my own. As life drawing has long been considered a foundational skill for artists working in the realist tradition, I wanted to immerse myself as fully as possible for the summer. At the time of writing the application, I noted that I would likely be teaching our own life drawing class, ART 115, upon the eventual retirement of a department colleague. A shuffling of the course schedule in the late spring meant that I ended up taking on this class this very fall semester of 2008, much sooner than I had ever anticipated. So, this time of dedicated study ended up being very timely indeed.

The class I took at the California Art Institute in Westlake Village, CA, taught alternately by artists Mark Schwartz, Tim Gula, and Glen Orbik, was tremendously fulfilling and a highlight I looked forward to each week. The class was designated as a “quick-sketch” class, meaning most poses from the live model were five minutes or less. This kind of approach is one that I have imitated in my own ART 115 class this semester, as it A) pushes students to make decisions quickly and authoritatively, rather than obsess over detail, B) creates an emphasis on rhythm and design of the human form, and C) results in a much greater volume of completed drawings than a long-pose class. While there are benefits to long-pose sessions as well, I have found that the quick-sketch class model results in faster growth in overall skill.

When not in class, I worked diligently in my sketchbooks on doing copyist work, a tradition that dates back to the French Beaux Arts movement, where students would create careful studies from master drawings. An essential resource for copyist studies is the wonderful Drawing Course by Charles Bargue (ACR Edition Internationale, 2003), a volume that I am still steadily making my way through. Thanks to copyright permission explicitly given in the book to make copies for educational purposes, I have been able to utilize the plates in this book as a resource for my own students as well.

While not funded by the grant per se, I was also invited to be a guest lecturer at the 2008 Illustration Academy held at the Ringling School of Art and Design in Sarasota, Florida. There is a dedicated figure drawing component to the curriculum at the Academy, and I benefited greatly from learning firsthand about their own unique approach and technique for drawing the figure. This too has been adapted into my own course.

Study of the human figure is a lifelong pursuit, not something that can be mastered in a summer. I look forward to continuing along this path of study for many years to come, and this professional development grant was an excellent boost along the way. The drawings completed this summer are proving very helpful in starting to shape a body of work for eventual gallery display, a key professional goal for me. My sincere thanks to the college and the Professional Development Committee for the important assistance that was provided by this grant.