
CHAPTER 12

Criticisms and answers

Introductory

This short chapter brings to an end “Drawing with Feeling”, the first of the two books in this volume. The drawing lesson described in it has been developed over my lifetime as a teacher, but more particularly in the years since I left the University of Stirling and started up the Painting School of Montmiral. Although it refers to: (a) ideas used by artists within the Italian Renaissance tradition, (b) the watershed teaching of Lecoq de Boisbaudran, with its twin emphases on rigour and memory, and (c) various more modern ideas and approaches, it is unique in many ways. However, before re-emphasising what I believe to be its merits, it seems important to face up to what some people have put forward as criticisms.

Three criticisms of the feeling-based drawing lesson:

Criticism one: When students submit themselves to the drawing lesson described in *Chapters 9 - 11*, the demands made on them are totally unexpected. Every line produced is guided by instructions that are unfamiliar both in terms of their nature and, in all probability, in terms of the rigour required for their implementation. When we compare outcomes of submitting to a straightjacket of this kind, it should be no surprise to find that the drawings produced have a great deal in common, lack individuality and bear the signs of battling with underdeveloped capacities. Since previous skill-levels have little effect on the outcome, one result is that the productions of experienced professionals are not so very different from those produced by beginners. In view of the fact that I start the lesson by assuring students that submitting to its requirements will help with personal expression, this conformity might seem to provide evidence against me.

Criticism two: When new methods are tried out, it is normal to compare them with old ones. One uncontrovertible bit of evidence in favour of previous ap-

proaches is that between them they have been used by all the artists of the past have achieved their universally admired masterpieces, despite the fact that none of them could have benefitted from any of the science-based ideas made available in this volume for the first time. Clearly this proves that my method is not necessary for achieving the best results. If so, why bother with it?

Criticism three: I have made three claims made for the drawing lesson:

- That it helps *accuracy*
- That it helps *speed*
- That it helps *personal expression*.
- That it helps *self-understanding*

All three claims can be questioned.

Three answers

First answer: My answer to the first criticism is that appearances can be deceptive. In the early days of trying out my lesson, I myself worried about the conformity of outcomes. However, my anxiety was calmed by experience for, it turned out that keeping faith with the method was all that was needed. Despite the fact that I start starting with a demand for blind following of instructions inevitably leads to conformity of outputs, the lesson rarely fails to open up doors of personal awareness and personalised ways of approaching image-making.

Second answer: My answer to the second criticism is that having a grasp of the ideas and suggestions to be found in the pages of this book can help people of all stages of development. On the one hand they can profit from in-depth explanations as to why established methods work as well as they do. On the other hand, the same explanations both reveal their intrinsic limitations and suggest practical ways of making significant improvements on them. These not only help those whose objective is improvements in ‘*accuracy*’, but also those whose aim is more ‘*expressive mark-making*’ or increases in the speed of both ‘*information pick-up*’ and ‘*line output*’ skills.

More generally speaking, anyone who submits to the discipline of the lesson and who absorbs the ideas that lie behind it, will find that they have furnished themselves with a kit bag of conceptual tools that will help them to make the leap beyond the ‘*known*’ and into the ‘*unknown*’ that is the basis of all creativity.

Third answer: While improvements in accuracy can be virtually guaranteed (I cannot remember a single student for whom this was not the case, including pro-

fessional artists for whom accuracy is a selling point), there are other methods that can achieve just as good, or even slightly better results. However, all of these bypass the need for training the '*feel-system*' and, accordingly, put a barrier between '*mark-making*' and the '*feelings*'

Where speed is concerned, a more nuanced reply is necessary. First, that speeding up line-production, depends both on speeding up *information pickup* and on speeding up *line-production*. While small increments in both can be virtually guaranteed, larger ones require sustained training. In other words, increases in *speed* and *expressiveness* require more time achieve than does *accuracy*. This is inevitable. As everyone knows, overriding old habits/skills and developing new ones can be quite a challenge. To triumph over it requires a lot of dedicated practice.

But not just any old practice. It is well known that practicing wrong ways of doing things in is worse than useless because it just reinforces bad habits. The same applies in drawing from observation. One of the main messages of my book is that the old teaching methods train to many bad habits that get in the way of progress, while the method advocated in this book shows a way of training habits that do the opposite. On the one hand, training the *feel-system* in the way suggested will do no harm. On the other, it cannot fail to help artists whether interested in accuracy, personal expression or creativity.

Implications:

Despite many issues raised in the first of the books in my volume, "Drawing with Both Sides of the Brain", they leave unanswered many questions relating to drawing the outlines of objects from observation. A good proportion of these will be dealt with in the second book in this volume, "Drawing with Knowledge", which comes next.

*Its starting point is what should be familiar territory, namely **knowledge** of the rules of **linear perspective** and **human anatomy**. However, the underpinning theme concerns the differences between "**measured reality**" and "**experienced reality**" and the problems that these engender for all who seek **accuracy** in drawings from observation.*

*The conclusion reached is that **knowledge** used as a guide to **doing** leads to all sorts of problems, while **knowledge** used as a guide to **looking** can be of inestimable help, not only because it opens up new ways of **looking** at the world*

*around us, but also because it has a good track record with respect to promoting new ways of **feeling** about it.*