

June 1st, 1938  
Art Division

Art Division Meeting, Wednesday, May 25th in Bingham Living Room at 2:00 P.M.

Present: Mrs. Brockway, Mr. and Mrs. Hirsch, Mr. Krob, Mr. and Mrs. Moselsio,  
Mr. Smith.

Absent: Messrs. Kilham and van der Gracht

Discussion: A curriculum for Senior Division students in Art. (Each member of the faculty had in hand the attached notes re the Senior Division curriculum.)

Mr. Hirsch opened the meeting with the following three questions:

1. Do we feel that the educational philosophy under which we are now operating is correct or faulty? (Present educational philosophy defined as "learning by doing".) If correct, how can it be applied to Senior Division work?
2. Do we feel that a definite curriculum would be an advantage or not?
3. If it would be an advantage, how shall we proceed to make such a curriculum?

1. Learning by doing as applied to Senior Division work:

In the Junior Division, each introduction (i.e., to Painting, to Sculpture, to Woodcutting and Printing, to Design, to Architecture) includes practical work and training in the relevant skills. But in the Senior Division, where students come to us for a history of art, "Learning by doing" is a difficult problem. How, for instance, can one study Renaissance Art by "doing"? Doing what?

Mrs. Hirsch suggested that it was possible to learn something about Renaissance Art by engaging in certain skills which have the same technical problems as those in which the people of the time were engaged, such as mural painting or fresco. "A student learning fresco uses that as a springboard to a study of the times." Mr. Hirsch pointed out that many of the students who ask for history of art are either 1) non-art majors who do not know the various art skills; 2) art majors who had worked predominantly in one skill and who therefore know little about other skills. For either of these types, the approach suggested by Mrs. Hirsch would not do. Nor would it be satisfactory to put those students into the introductory groups. Question: where should they go?

Mr. Hirsch defined his idea of "learning by doing" in connection with the study of the history of art as follows: "My idea is that the student should do the work instead of the instructor. For this reason I am against a lecture course. A lecture course tends to give the kind of information which, if the student is good at memorizing, she can retain but which is usually forgotten because the student has not actually done the work herself. If a student wants to know about sculpture during the Renaissance, she should go and dig up all the material herself!"

Mr. Moselsio: "My understanding of "doing" in this connection is that the student studies the original work of art and analyzes it. I always do this in sculpture. The history and theory comes into the discussion of the original work and the student is thus brought into active participation."

1) continued Mr. Smith pointed out that if the three techniques of teaching history of art mentioned above had proved successful, there would be no need for the present discussion. "We have been using these methods and they don't seem to have worked as expected. In other words, we are looking for a new technique. The lecture course might be a plausible way of doing it. The students would keep notebooks, read and discuss the material and the instructor would be the director of the study. That's what the students seem to want - an organized and directed survey - when they ask for history of art."

2 and 3 Making a curriculum for Senior Division students in art

Student interest as a basis for a curriculum: Analysis of student demand falls into four categories: 1) students who want to go to graduate school in art; 2) students who want to teach art; 3) students who want jobs in commercial art fields; 4) students who want a general education as a painter or sculptor without any narrowly defined vocational or professional interest.

For students in the first three categories, there are already certain defined requirements. It was voted that Mrs. Hirsch and Mrs. Brockway should study and report to the Division a) requirements for entrance into graduate schools in art and architecture; b) requirements for teachers of art. In this connection, they will report on the curricula of Teachers College in training art teachers, on the undergraduate curricula in colleges (such as Vassar, Smith, Radcliffe, Bryn Mawr, Sarah Lawrence) in art; the requirements for entrance into graduate schools (at Mills, New York University, Columbia, and Princeton.) On the basis of this report, the Division will know more definitely how to prepare students who are aiming either for graduate school or for teaching careers or both. For students in the third category, each member of the faculty will outline what they consider to be the requirements for their respective fields: i.e., Mr. Krob will outline the requirements for commercial work in design, Mr. van der Gracht, Kilham, and Park, for architecture, Mrs. Brockway for museum work, Mr. Smith for book illustration, etc. (Several examples of such jobs are listed in Mr. Hirsch's paper a copy of which is included in the attached notes.)

For students in the fourth category, the Division will not be limited in any way by outside "requirements". "We can give them what we think is right." In this connection it is up to us to imagine an ideal art curriculum and try to give it.

The place of history of art in the curriculum:

What the students want: An example of what the students want when they ask for history of art is as follows: A fourth year student went on a picnic and a Harvard graduate pointed to the sunset and said, "Doesn't that look like a Venetian painting?" The student was embarrassed because she didn't know any Venetian painting. This was a good student. Which raises the question: Should a student graduating from Bennington in Art know about Venetian painting? Mr. Krob pointed out that no one could possibly know all there is to know about art history and suggested that the problem was to give students a little more than they are now getting. Mrs. Hirsch said that she thought it was a question of giving them an education that will cover a certain minimum of content and at the same time give them techniques for working up further information for themselves as they need it. She thinks that as it now

the students feel that they are not being given any information of the sort that is required for graduation in other colleges. Mr. Hirsch felt that regardless of requirements in other colleges, we should still ask ourselves what the ideal would be and work from that.

Revision of standards and testing methods: Mrs. Brockway: I think that we fall down in not demanding more from the students. We do not hold them up to any level, i.e., as regards content. We assume that some of the material and method studied in connection with the detailed study of one period will stick but we do not ever check on this. (The present technique of teaching history in the Division is to concentrate on one particular period in a detailed way in order to train the students in a method of studying the history of art.) I think that if the method is really learned, the content would be remembered also. Since we do not expect them to study all of the periods, we should at least make them responsible for the material they do study. That material should be the basis for either an examination or a report that would be a good mature job, or we should devise some method of holding them responsible for their material. Mr. Hirsch: How would we devise such a test? Mrs. Brockway: Where have we ever tested their knowledge at all? Before whom? Certainly not before this group. Rachel Randolph, for instance, was interested in the 17th century and we let her follow up this interest but she never did produce anything that was at all good in the way of concrete results of this study. Mr. Hirsch: If we required papers, should they be read by all the faculty in the Division, or by a Committee, or by the counselor and one other member of the Division, or by the counselor alone? To whom would they be responsible for this information? It was generally agreed that the responsibility should be assumed by more than one member of the faculty.

History and History of Art: Mrs. Hirsch: I agree with Mrs. Brockway's statement (as written in attached appendix) that when the students ask for History of Art, they are really asking for straight History. They do not know enough general history and therefore cannot make connections between their knowledge of the works of art of a certain period and the social, economic, political aspects of that periods. Mr. Hirsch: Many students rebel when you suggest that they study history. Mrs. Brockway: It may be because of the way history is taught in the schools. It is the one main social studies course that is given in school and students avoid it in college. Mr. Brockway feels that the arts have not used him enough. He feels that students are afraid to come to him just for a brief period and get the information and help they need. He works for brief periods with students in other divisions and thinks that he could do the same with art students. They should not feel that they have to formally enroll in a "course" or "tutorial". He said that he could meet with them three or four times or until a certain task was completed and then drop them. Mr. Hirsch: If this could be arranged it would be of great value. But the problems of scheduling are numerous and might make it difficult. Would a student work with Tom for a regular part of her scheduled time? Would she drop her art work for that time? Mrs. Brockway: I don't think we should let the mechanics stand in the way of such a possible procedure. Mrs. Hirsch: Perhaps Tom could come in twice during a semester and take over a history of art group, give them reading lists, etc. Mr. Hirsch: I am against that idea of "coming in" to a group. There is apt to be no morale to carry it through; there is no faculty responsibility. Mrs. Brockway: Suppose that a student decided that in one term she wanted to study Dutch art in the 17th century. She could go to Tom and find out about Dutch cities, Dutch trade, etc; he could give her help, suggest reading, etc, in about a half an hour. She could then return to him later with further questions, etc. It would not have to be a formal arrangement.

Mrs. Hirsch: I don't think that as a faculty we use each other enough. I think it would be advisable for an art history instructor to go to Tom occasionally for help and reading. I have often wanted to go to various members of the faculty for information. But one feels that this is impossible because of the teaching load. For instance, it would be valuable for us to get help from other members of the Social Studies Division; Mr. and Mrs. Jones might be willing to give some economic history to the group in art; Margaret Patterson could help on the social philosophy of whatever period is in question; Francis Fergusson could contribute to the understanding of Greek art by his knowledge of Greek philosophy. Mr. Hirsch: The mechanics of this, i.e., scheduling, etc., will have to be worked out very carefully. I suggest 1) that we meet with Tom before the end of this term or at the beginning of the next and figure out the possibilities.

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Re registration week in the fall

Mr. Hirsch said that he had talked with Mr. Leigh about the possibilities of having Registration Week lengthened. At that time the Art Division would a) devise a curriculum 2) review all programs of all art students thoroughly, interviewing each student in an attempt to define their real interests and bring them into a program.

Re Senior Division plans

Mr. Krob approved of Mr. Hirsch suggestion (see statement in appendix) that senior division plans might be drawn up for two years, specifically. They would of course be subject to change but a certain continuity might make these plans of more concrete value to the students. Mr. Hirsch said that the students should have expert advice in drawing up these plans and for this the faculty would need more time. It is for this reason that he felt that a longer registration period might help.