

DAHESH MUSEUM OF ART

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CHARLES BARGUE: THE ART OF DRAWING
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New York, NY – Charles Bague (1826/27–1883), an obscure and somewhat mysterious figure in nineteenth-century art history, is now the star of a new exhibition at the Dahesh Museum of Art. Although his name is unrecognized today outside a small circle of connoisseurs, collectors, and students, his work shaped the skills and taste of generations of artists, reaching beyond the academic traditions of his time to nourish the roots of modernism in such figures as Vincent van Gogh and Pablo Picasso.

Charles Bague: The Art of Drawing, which opens Tuesday, November 25, 2003, in the Museum's new home at the corner of 57th and Madison, is devoted to the painter/lithographer Charles Bague and his extraordinary publication, the *Drawing Course* (*Cours de dessin*); produced with the collaboration of Jean-Léon Gérôme (1824–1904), France's greatest academic master; published by Goupil & Cie, Paris; and designed to prepare beginning art students to draw from "nature", that is, objects, both natural and man-made, in the real world. When the *Drawing Course* was first published (Parts I and II beginning in 1868; Part III in 1871) it was assumed that the imitation of nature was the primary goal of the artist, and that the most important subject was the human body.

This is the first time ever that the majority of the original plates from the *Drawing Course* are on public view, along with a selection of Bague's exquisite paintings and drawings. *Charles Bague: The Art of Drawing*, organized by the Dahesh Museum's Chief Curator Stephen R. Edidin, is an homage to and exploration of one of the most significant documents of the last great flowering of figure painting. The exhibition celebrates the groundbreaking re-publication, by ACR Édition, Paris, of the complete Bague-Gérôme *Drawing Course*, researched and written by Professor Gerald M. Ackerman, the world's leading Gérôme and Bague scholar, with the collaboration of the artist Graydon Parrish.

The original *Drawing Course* contained 197 loose-leaf lithographic plates of drawings after casts, master drawings, and male models. These sheets, which were widely disseminated and very affordable when first published in the late 19th century (either individually or bound) are now quite rare. The 160 original plates featured in the exhibition have been generously loaned by Bordeaux's Musée Goupil, which possesses two complete sets of the *Course*. Important paintings and drawings that characterize Bague's artistic career have been loaned to the exhibition by the Metropolitan Museum of Art; the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; the Walters Art Museum; Princeton University Art Museum; The National Museums and Galleries of Wales; the National Museum of Sweden; and a number of other public and private collectors.

Bargue's own paintings and drawings confirm his skills as a master artist, skills which he himself refined as he produced the *Course*. Bargue, therefore, can justly be called the first graduate of the Bargue-Gérôme *Drawing Course*.

A CRISIS IN ART EDUCATION

The *Drawing Course* was a response to widespread dissatisfaction with the skills of French commercial art students in the mid-19th century. The root of the problem was believed to be a deficiency of taste—which in turn reflected the inferiority of models that students had been given to copy, a basic element in drawing education. In 1865, French critics called for “a complete reorganization of the teaching of drawing” that would explicitly redress the dearth of appropriate models, and help French students of industrial design and decorative arts compete in an international market. Goupil & Cie, Paris, the most important art dealer and publisher of its time, seized the opportunity to develop a new curriculum for this market and quickly developed the *Drawing Course*, a series of lithographic plates that would foster the evolution of taste through the study of classical form, which was defined by the style of antique statuary. The work was advertised as a collaboration between Jean-Léon Gérôme and Charles Bargue. While Gérôme certainly contributed his celebrity to the enterprise, his actual role may have been supervisory. The drawings were executed by members of the Gérôme circle, and *all* were copied onto stone by Bargue.

THE ART OF INSTRUCTION

The three parts of the *Drawing Course* correspond to a widely accepted sequence of art education in the 19th century. Part I, *Drawing After Casts (Modeles D'Après la Bosse)* and Part II, *Copying Master Drawings (Modeles d'Après Les Maîtres)*, began publication in 1868 and were intended for students of industrial and decorative arts—the very ones whose deficiencies argued so forcefully for the *Course's* necessity—as well as beginning fine arts students. Part III, *Charcoal Exercises in Preparation for Drawing the Male Academic Nude or Académie (Exercices au Fusain Pour Préparer a l'Etude de l'Academie d'Après Nature)* presented charcoal sketches of the male nude. It was completed in 1871 and intended for fine art students only—drawing live models was discouraged if not forbidden in most European and American schools of design.

Published without instructive text because they were meant to be used primarily in art schools, the *Drawing Course* sold briskly from its first publication, and continued to do well for at least three decades, with individual plates made available by Goupil & Cie and its successors until the firm's final dissolution in 1921. Its primary purchasers were institutions: the city of Paris ordered a special printing for its schools almost immediately after the first plates were finished, and the *Drawing Course* was adopted in Great Britain by the extensive system of schools and academies supervised by the South Kensington Museum (now the Victoria and Albert Museum). Its influence was also widespread in America -- the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, for example, bought Parts I and II of the *Drawing Course* in 1876, the year Thomas Eakins began teaching there. Self-trained artists could also easily make use of the plates, progressing in an orderly, rational sequence through a program designed to develop their technical skills, while mature artists would use the plates to hone their skills, as a trained pianist might return to the discipline of Czerny's piano exercises.

THE EXHIBITION

PART I: DRAWING AFTER PLASTER CASTS

Mirroring the selection of casts found in the collections of the best European and American art schools, most plates in Part I of the *Drawing Course* are copies after famous antique sculptures. They were meant to guide a student through a pedagogically-grounded sequence from plates depicting separate body parts – eyes, ears, noses, feet, arms, and legs, with great emphasis on the head – to partial, and then complete male and female figures. Key to understanding this section are Barye's angular schemata that lie to the left of the finished drawings in most of these plates, simplifying the composition of the cast, suggesting reference lines and geometric configurations that the student might use in organizing the contours of his own drawing. Several of Pablo Picasso's student copies of Part I are reproduced in this section of the exhibition.

Nineteenth-century art schools considered a collection of plaster casts a necessity; students were required to draw from them before they were allowed to turn their attention to live models. Museums likewise considered such collections essential to their mission. Within 30 years of its founding in 1870, the Metropolitan Museum of Art had amassed more than 2,000 plaster casts, which they kept on continuous view until the late 1930's. For pedagogical purposes, casts offered ideal drawing models for the student. They were immobile, and their white or light coloration allowed easy reading of light and shadow.

Three life-size plaster casts of classical Roman marble statues after Greek bronzes in the exhibition (on extended loan to the Dahesh from the Metropolitan Museum of Art) allow visitors to see some of the sources from which the Barye plates were derived. The *Diskobolus* in the stairwell, which serves as a prelude to the show, *Aphrodite Crouching after the Bath*, and a *Diadoumenos*, are typical of the plasters from which students worked.

PART II: COPYING MASTER DRAWINGS

The drawings in Part II were selected both for their aesthetic value and their demonstration of specific techniques that could be learned in practice. Barye made most of the plates for this part of the *Drawing Course* from copies rendered by artists again chosen by Gérôme from among his colleagues and students. The originals include works of the Old Masters—Michelangelo, Raphael, Filippino Lippi, and Hans Holbein the Younger, among them—as well as Barye's contemporaries – academic luminaries such as Gérôme, his teachers Paul Delaroche and Charles Gleyre, and other artists represented or employed by Goupil & Cie.

The copying of drawings by distinguished artists had a long history. Under the guild system that predated the French Revolution, apprentices copied drawings, studies, and travel notations from their masters' portfolios. Beyond its advantages to the master—students thus trained could assist in his projects without noticeable discrepancies in style—the practice allowed the apprentice to develop a personal repertoire of subjects and poses for eventual use in his own work. This practice continued in the studios of the academic masters of the nineteenth century, and, of course, was famously reinterpreted a century later in Andy Warhol's "Factory". Twenty-eight of the 70 drawings are after Hans Holbein the Younger

(1497/98–1543), said to be a favorite of Gérôme's. Like all Old Master drawings in Part II, these are "interpretations" of Holbein, rather than precise facsimiles. They have been freshened and made whole: faded lines have been strengthened and fading coloration translated into lines so that they are easier to copy.

PART III: DRAWING THE NUDE

Charcoal Exercises in Preparation for Drawing the Male Academic Nude or *Académie* (*Exercices au Fusain Pour Préparer a L'étude de L'Académie d'Après Nature*) or Part III of the *Drawing Course*, contained 60 plates. Published in 1871, it is Barye's work alone. As the plates of Part I prepared the student to work from plaster casts, the drawings in Part III represent the final step *before* depicting the nude male model in a "noble and classic" pose. (As the most representative product of the academic curriculum, such drawings, or *academies*, became synonymous with their institutions.)

Seen as preparatory notations to assist in the creation of polished drawings, rather than finished works themselves, these plates show the student how to capture a figure's most salient points. The models assume traditional poses that express a catalogue of human emotions – thinking, beseeching, sincerity, melancholy, despair – emotions that all academically trained artists were taught to render through specific poses and expressions. Such poses as taught by Barye were often reused by figurative painters throughout their careers.

Vincent van Gogh, for example, copied the plates of Part III many times during his career. Excerpts from his letters to his brother Theo, reproduced in the exhibition's wall text, underscore the hold that the "Baryes" had on the artist. In 1881, he wrote to Theo, "*Careful study & repeated copying of Barye's Exercises au fusain have given me a better insight into figure-drawing. I have learned to measure and to see and to look for the broad outlines so that, thank God, what seemed utterly impossible to me before is gradually becoming possible to me now...I no longer stand as helpless before nature as I used to do.*"

Both Picasso's copy and van Gogh's interpretation of Barye's *Seated Man, hiding his face in his hands* (Part III, plate 39) are reproduced in this section.

FROM OBSCURE LITHOGRAPHER TO MASTER ARTIST

Little is known of Barye's early life, although it seems likely that he received much of his training at home, within a family of professional lithographers. While working as a lithographer for Goupil & Cie, he became acquainted with Gérôme and his circle, and was soon included in a group of talented painters employed to make smaller copies ("reductions") of popular paintings. After Barye received the commission for the *Drawing Course*, the next five years of his life, from 1865-1870, were almost entirely devoted to that single project. The final section of the exhibition presents a rare assemblage of Barye's original works, almost all dating from his mature period, following the completion of the *Drawing Course*.

A sizeable group of Barye's drawings, oil sketches, and paintings depict Orientalist scenes. The Orient (encompassing North Africa and the Middle East) was a destination for many

nineteenth-century artists, most famously Barye's master, Gérôme. Barye's detailed images of Arab soldiers, merchants, men relaxing or at prayer, which appear to have been inspired by a trip to North Africa 1871-72, just after the completion of the *Drawing Course*, demonstrate an intimate understanding of North African ambient light and textures.

Barye's other great interest -- Baroque and Rococo costume -- is revealed in a number of works, particularly his masterpiece *The Chess Players* (1882), bought by William H. Vanderbilt in 1883 for 75,000 francs. Thomas Eakins's friend and colleague, the famous art critic Edward Strahan (a/k/a Earl Shinn) wrote about this painting: "It is the most elaborate composition of the artist and represents toil almost incredible." In fact it was Barye's painstaking approach to painting -- illustrated in the exhibition through a number of preparatory sketches -- that limited his output (and thus his income). He produced only one painting a year over the last five years of his life, many of which are on view in the exhibition for the first time. Just as Barye was beginning to enjoy international success as a genre painter, his career was tragically cut short. In 1883, at the age of 57, he suffered a debilitating stroke, was institutionalized, and soon after died in a Parisian insane asylum.

CONCLUSION

While the teaching of traditional academic practices almost died out between 1880 and 1950, Barye's curriculum helps us reconstruct what generations of traditionally trained representational artists were taught to copy and admire. But the *Drawing Course* is no mere dusty artifact in the archeology of art education. The explosion of figurative work being made today by young artists; the energy of new academies, ateliers, and other institutions for training artists; and the growing critical appreciation of the importance of drawing for artists, illustrators, and even animators, promise a new life for Barye's comprehensive curriculum. With the republication of this groundbreaking work, a rich and vibrant tradition will be sustained. The Dahesh Museum of Art is honored to play a role in bringing the *Drawing Course* to a new generation.

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CATALOGUE

The exhibition celebrates the groundbreaking re-publication of the complete *Drawing Course* (*Cours de dessin*), now entitled *Charles Barye Drawing Course, with the collaboration of Jean-Léon Gérôme*. Bordeaux's Musée Goupil gave permission to reproduce their complete edition of the *Course*, and to copy and enlarge the plates for study purposes. The re-publication project was initiated and authored by Professor Gerald M. Ackerman, the pre-eminent Barye and Gérôme scholar, in collaboration with the artist Graydon Parrish. Ackerman's incisive interpretations of each plate afford the artist/reader a clear understanding of how the teaching manual was meant to function and how to use it today. His lushly illustrated biography of Barye, with commentary on his entire *oeuvre*, is the first ever published. The *Drawing Course* is available in the Dahesh Museum of Art Shop (\$50 soft cover; \$70 hard cover). It may be ordered by phone: 212.759.0606, ext 235 or on-line at www.daheshmuseum.org

PUBLIC PROGRAMS

As part of its public outreach for *Charles Bague: The Art of Drawing*, the Dahesh Museum of Art has designed a series of programs during the run of the exhibition that includes discussions with art critics, scholarly lectures, curator-led tours, gallery talks by contemporary artists, intergenerational tours, a Victorian magic-lantern show for the holidays, weekly sketching on Thursday evenings in the galleries, drawing classes, a video presentation of films about making art, hands-on art activities, guided tours for schools, families, adults, and more. See detailed information at www.daheshmuseum.org.

EXHIBITION SUPPORTERS

Promotional support for *Charles Bague: The Art of Drawing* has been provided by *American Artist Magazine*, *The Art Newspaper*, and the *Parker Meridien New York*. The Museum thanks them for their enthusiasm and generosity.

GENERAL INFORMATION

The Dahesh Museum of Art, located at 580 Madison Avenue at the corner of 57th St, is open Tuesday-Sunday, 11 am –6 pm, and closed Mondays and all legal holidays. Admission: \$9 adults, \$4 students and seniors (62+). Free to Museum Members and children under 12. Pay-as-you-wish 6 – 9 pm on *First Thursdays*. For more information, contact 212.759.0606 or www.daheshmuseum.org

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