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The role of thematic compositions in academic drawing teaching for the professional development of Fedoskino lacquer miniature painters

Abstract. The article examines the traditions and current state of teaching the discipline "Academic drawing" in the training of artists specializing in Fedoskino lacquer miniature painting. Particular attention is paid to the historical continuity of drawing teaching methods from the Lukutinsky period (19th century) to the implementation of higher education in this field of traditional applied art in the 21st century. Special emphasis is placed on the relationship between "Academic drawing" and other specialized disciplines, such as "Design" and "Performance skills". It is shown that systematic execution of drawings of thematic compositions contributes to the development of professional skills, analytical thinking and the formation of artistic taste in future masters of lacquer miniature painting.

Keywords: Fedoskino lacquer miniature painting, drawing, thematic composition, small-format drawing, two-figure composition.

The development of a continuous professional education system has made it relevant to update the content of training programs for future artists specializing in Fedoskino lacquer miniature painting. This necessitated a systemic analysis and theoretical generalization of established educational practices. In this context, an urgent task becomes the creation of new curricula taking into account the specifics of bachelor's degree training [9, p. 4].

An update is also needed for the content of such a fundamental discipline in higher education as "Academic drawing". The necessity to modernize the curriculum and clarify the assignment system was repeatedly highlighted in scientific literature dedicated to analyzing historical traditions and contemporary state of drawing training for artists specializing in Fedoskino lacquer miniature painting [2, p. 76].

Existing programs for the course "Academic drawing", up until now, had several shortcomings:

- insufficiently structured and well-thought-out academic assignments;
- lack of substantive connection with other related subjects, such as "Design" and "Performance skills";
- discrepancy between the high complexity of practical tasks and the number of hours allocated by the curriculum for their mastery [3, p. 52].

Currently, at the Fedoskino institute of lacquer miniature painting – a branch of the Russian university of traditional art crafts – significant importance is placed

on the discipline of “Academic drawing”, which provides students with knowledge and skills necessary for realistic representation of nature. However, a pressing challenge facing higher education in preparing future artists of lacquer miniature painting involves not only developing spatial vision and enhancing drawing skills but also fostering the ability to think visually, cultivating compositional thought processes, honing analytical perception abilities and mastering creative transformation techniques [4].

To understand the origins of the present-day specific features of teaching the subject “Academic drawing”, one must turn to its historical tradition dating back to the XIX century. Products manufactured at the Lukutins' factory were decorated with designs copied from lithographs, engravings, popular prints, etchings and paintings by renowned Russian artists. Snuffboxes and other items featured copies of portraits executed with “extraordinary fidelity and resemblance” [8, p. 281]. All products produced at the factory bore illustrations “exclusively in the Russian style and taste” [8, p. 281]. By mid-nineteenth century, Lukutin's craftsmen became famous for creating scenes depicting everyday life, celebrations and working days of peasant villages: “Circle dance”, “Russian dance in tavern”, “Peasant family”, “Expectation”, “Rest”, “Peasants’ feast”, “Barshchina”, “Fishing”, “After haymaking”, “On leave”, “Troykas”: summer and winter, etc. [5].

Teaching drawing to miniaturist artists has always been accorded top priority. In the XIX century, under P.V. Lukutin, a school for painters was established in Danilkovo village where up to twenty people received training. The best craftsmen were sent by the Lukutins to study at Moscow Stroganov school, ensuring continuity of academic teaching traditions [8, p. 218].

In Soviet times, the traditions of training artists in lacquer miniature painting continued at the Fedoskino school of lacquer miniature painting.

From the 1960s through the 1990s, the academic drawing course at the Fedoskino school of lacquer miniature painting included exercises such as drawing simple objects (vegetables, fruits, geometric shapes like cubes, cones, pyramids, etc.) and graphic representations of human figures. The curriculum encompassed tasks involving still-life compositions, plaster rosettes, fragments of David’s head, plaster models of human heads (“obrubovka”), casts of antique statues' heads and portraiture. Additionally, thematic setups addressed topics including sports (Fig. 1²⁰), rural labor, village life and music (Figs. 2, 3).

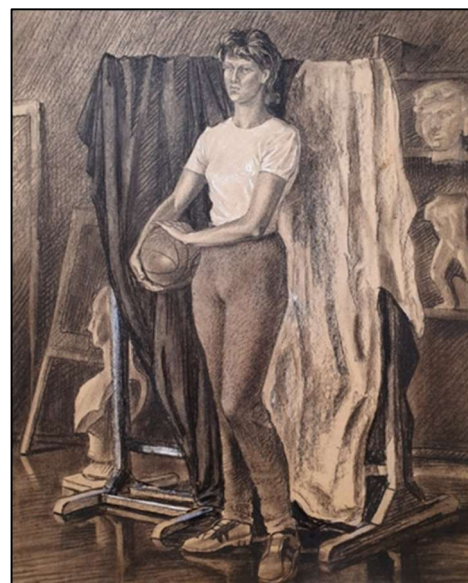


Fig. 1. Educational thematic arrangement “Female figure in interior”. 1980s.

²⁰ Figs. 1-12. Photo from archive of the Fedoskino institute of lacquer miniature painting – a branch of the Russian university of traditional art crafts.

In addition to classroom assignments, the drawing program included independent creative work titled “Artist's portrait” (Fig. 4). This could be either a self-portrait or a portrait of a fellow student. Typically, the artist would be depicted inside a studio setting.

Students faced the following challenges:

- to find an interesting compositional solution for the artist's portrait and create sketches based on imagination reflecting the overall composition of the final piece;
- to select appropriate props and surroundings for the scene;
- to determine the viewpoint from which the image of the artist will appear most expressive.

The process of working on the drawing from life consisted of several stages:

- composition planning of the learning setup;
- linear-constructive construction of objects and figure;
- modeling the shape using tone while considering its position in space;
- detail refinement and highlighting the main object of the composition – the artist [1].



Fig. 2. Educational thematic arrangement. 1970s.
Paper, pencil



Fig. 3. Educational thematic arrangement. 1980s. Paper, pencil

When completing a thematic drawing assignment, students were required not only to demonstrate skill in constructing objects, modeling forms and conveying space, but also to show their ability to create a cohesive artistic image. The experience gained during complex thematic drawing projects helped students develop creative compositions in courses such as “Design” and “Performance skills”.

Depicting a theme-based arrangement entitled “In the artist's studio” represents a creative process essential for training artists in traditional art crafts. As noted by N.G. Kuznetsov, various types of creative activity (mimetic, analogical,

bisociative, intuitive) can be effectively integrated into academic drawing assignments to enhance professional skills [6, p. 185].



Fig. 4. A. Kosherenko. Self-portrait.
1986. Paper, sepia, sanguine

At present, academic drawing plays a foundational role in the professional development of artists specializing in Fedoskino lacquer miniature painting.

The primary objective of academic drawing instruction goes beyond nurturing spatial and analytical thinking; it aims to cultivate the capacity for artistic transformation of reality.

The curriculum for the course “Academic drawing” includes sections wherein students complete still lifes of varying degrees of complexity: thematic still lifes incorporating works of Fedoskino lacquer miniature painting and small-scale solutions, intricate thematic still lifes such as “Antiquity” and “Tea party in interiors” (Fig. 5).

While studying the contents of the discipline “Performance skills”, students acquire

the technique of Fedoskino lacquer miniature painting by executing still lifes featuring flowers and fruit, along with compositions centered on the theme of “Tea party”, which are traditional motifs in the works of Fedoskino masters.

Working on arrangements that include folk art products helps students learn the basics of composition, techniques for interpreting form, rendering light-and-shade relationships and color nuances necessary for subsequent execution of plots and still lifes in the technique of Fedoskino lacquer miniature painting. Thus, there is an interconnection between academic assignments in the disciplines of “Academic drawing” and “Performance skills”. This practice serves as a vivid illustration of M.A. Saltanov's idea that “the system of professional education in the field of Fedoskino lacquer miniature painting represents the interconnectedness and mutual dependence of all disciplines, principles of curriculum design being grounded in artistic traditions and historical continuity” [9, p. 50].

When working on still-life drawings, students need to follow these steps:

- searching for the best composition in preliminary sketches and organizing the image properly on the final format;
- linear-constructive building while adhering to correct proportions and perspective laws;
- rendering complex tonal and spatial relationships between objects, dependencies between objects and environment.

By performing an academic exercise – a still life – students gain skills in compositional exploration, maintaining proper proportions, establishing perspective and handling complex tonal relationships between objects (Fig. 6).



Fig. 5. S. Kotkova. Tea party in interior.
2025. Paper, pencil



Fig. 6. S. Kotkova. Still life with
Fedoskino items.
2022. Paper, pencil

Having mastered the principles of construction, tonal analysis and composition rules, students move on to more challenging tasks in academic drawing—depicting humans. The syllabus for the “Academic drawing” course at the Fedoskino institute of lacquer miniature painting includes the following types of assignments: copying graphic works by Russian artists, portraits, drawing plaster figures, sketching live models and extended sessions with one or two models.

Since, within the framework of the discipline “Performance skills”, students work on multi-figure narratives such as “Tea party”, “Walkabouts” and “Circle dances”, the objectives when completing academic drawing tasks become developing constructive drawing skills for multi-figure compositions and drawing dressed figures.

Additionally, the curriculum for the course “Academic drawing” incorporated themes focused on portraying the human figure: “Tea party”, “Drawing a seated model with musical instrument”, “Two-figure arrangements in folk costumes” and others (Figs. 7, 8).

Some assignments within the “Academic drawing” course are completed in a smaller scale, aligning with the traditions of miniature painting and requiring exceptional precision and meticulous detail work.

Small-format artwork develops attention to details, accurate proportion perception and the ability to perceive the whole through small elements. Students work on these drawings using sharp hard pencils, paying close attention to shading techniques. Small-format still-life drawings feature detailed depiction of objects, patterns, textures and conveying depth. Working within limited dimensions adds complexity, demanding convincing form and spatial representation despite the reduced size of the images.



Fig. 7. S. Kotkova. Drawing of seated figure in interior.
2025. Paper, sepium

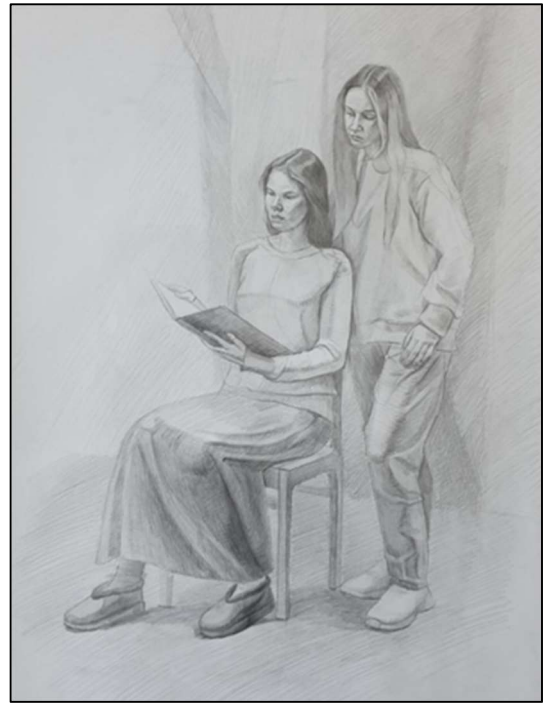


Fig. 8. A. Vinogradova. Two-figure arrangement.
2025. Paper, pencil

In training future artists specializing in Fedoskino lacquer miniature painting, it's important to consider typical errors often made by students when depicting the human figure, including inaccurate proportions, lack of plastic integration between clothing and body, mistakes in constructing complex angles, volume rendition, tonal relations and maintaining overall composition unity [7, p. 129].

When carrying out similar assignments, it is crucial not only to accurately represent objects, ornaments and textures but also achieve a sense of depth and airiness without compromising the integrity of the drawing. Executing small-format drawings instills in students attention to subtleties, the ability to use visual means appropriately and strive for concise expression. Such drawings require a high level of technical proficiency achieved only through prolonged practical effort (Fig. 9).

Images of musicians playing various musical instruments frequently appear in Fedoskino lacquer miniature painting. To improve drawings depicting musicians, the curriculum for the “Academic drawing” course incorporates the following topics: “Drawing of a seated model with musical instrument”, “Small-scale drawing of a seated model with musical instrument”. Through these tasks, students explore the principles of form construction, figure plastics and learn how to convey interaction between figure and space in drawings, creating expressive plastic images.

New topics have been introduced into the curriculum of the academic drawing course aimed at improving skills in depicting figures in national costumes and interiors. These include “Sketching models in national costumes” and variations of female and dual-figure compositions in Russian national attire. These assignments are carried out in different formats, including A2, A5 and small-scale formats (Figs. 10-12).



Fig. 9. S. Kotkova. Small-format model drawing.
2023. Paper, pencil



Fig. 10. A. Tyurina. Drawing of female figure in folk costume.
2022. Paper, pencil



Fig. 11. S. Kotkova. Small-format drawing of model in folk costume.
2023. Paper, pencil



Fig. 12. A. Vinogradova. Small-format drawing of female figure in Russian folk costume.
2024. Paper, pencil

When drawing models in Russian costumes, students aim to create an image of a peasant woman, detailing her clothing elements such as lace, embroidery, fringe, braid and decorations. In the complex two-figure arrangement “Drawing of two figures in Russian national costumes in interior setting”, students must establish a plastic link between the two models, avoiding monotonous listing of costume details while working in tones; they must structure complex tonal and spatial relationships between the figures and surrounding environment, emphasizing the key aspects –

the interdependence of the two figures and the plastic harmony of all components [10, p. 104].

The curriculum for the “Academic drawing” course at the Fedoskino institute of lacquer miniature painting is organized as follows: in the first semester, students draw plaster heads, plaster figures, portraits, sketches and studies of the human figure, execute copies of great Russian artists' works; in the second semester, they proceed to long-term small-format drawings of thematic arrangements linked to topics covered in the courses “Design” and “Performance skills”.

Executing small-format drawings of thematic arrangements, tailored to the characteristics of Fedoskino lacquer miniature painting, helps students develop drawing techniques, precise rendering and subtle tonal elaboration of every detail in their work. This practice enhances students' imaginative capabilities, compositional and figurative thinking and trains their analytical perception of nature and its artistic transformation. Such activities are vital for training future miniature artists, reflect the specificity and essence of their future creative endeavors, contribute to the cultivation of aesthetic sensibility and foster respect for the cultural heritage of the Russian nation.

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