

## Importance of Plein-Air Practice in Professional Art Education

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### ABSTRACT

The article discusses the role and importance of plein-air practice in vocational training of art specialties' students. It analyzes the historical aspect of plein-air drawing in nature origin. It identifies psychophysiological characteristics of visual perception in fine and decorative art. It characterizes methods of artistic perception of reality and educational activity in the conditions of an open-air. It defines methods of creative work in professional and artistic activities, facilitating the development of integral perception and artistic-creative skills. It substantiates the complex of special tasks aimed at the acquisition and development of students' knowledge, abilities and skills of drawing outdoors. It describes the themes of work in plein-air. It comes up with pedagogical conditions of formation of professional skills of art specialties' students in plein-air art space.

### KEYWORDS

professional art education, fine and decorative art,  
plein-air practice, artistic and creative skills.

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## 1. Introduction

1.1. The role of plein-air practice in vocational training of art specialties' students

The developing processes of globalization and modernization of all public life spheres are placing new demands on the quality of training competitive and solicited professionals, able to realize their potential in new socio-cultural conditions. The leading aspect of dealing with the matters of the professional and creative development of students, their self-improvement and self-development, should become scientific and practical knowledge accumulated in the field of artistic creativity. Understanding the process of development of artistic and creative skills should completely improve the professional training

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of future specialists in the field of fine and decorative arts. One of the most effective ways of developing artistic and creative skills of students is plein-air drawing.

Plein-air (French *en plein air* - «outdoors») is a technique of object depicting with natural light and in natural conditions. The term is also used to refer to a faithful reflection of the colorful richness of nature, all the color changes in natural conditions, with the active role of light and air. The work of the great German poet Goethe, “The doctrine of the colors” contains valuable thoughts on the meaning of landscape painting. Goethe wrote: “The artist, grateful to the nature, which gave birth to him, gives a new second nature in return, a nature created by thoughts and feelings, humanly perfect” [6, p. 156].

The outdoors work has its own specific features and capabilities to achieve professional excellence. These studies contribute to the development of such necessary qualities as observation skills, comprehensive perception of nature, creative thinking, well-developed visual memory. The plein-air work develops skills of a fast drawing, necessary for the future artist. Contact with nature builds aesthetic taste of students, opens up opportunities for further creative activity, enriches the spiritual hemisphere.

The world around us is one of the most important figurative interpretations in art. Nature has a positive effect on the emotional state, stimulates cognitive activity. The abundance of light, a variety of reflexes, big space, diverse illumination of the image objects allow the artist to know the complex and diverse reality. Sketches and shcizzos outdoors differ significantly in terms of the work from sessions in the classroom. Constantly changing illumination creates certain difficulties for painters-newcomers. Students face the issues of psychological, emotional and volitional nature. The manifestation of independent initiative, perseverance and hard work is essential for the future of artistic and creative activity.

## 1.2. Historical analysis of the plein-air practice emergence in fine and decorative art

The extant monuments of culture and art of the ancient world show that people used to represent nature since immemorial times. In Egypt, the Middle Kingdom period (XXI - the beginning of the XVIII century BC) Nile thickets, different fish in waters and in the nests, small predators, hunting among the papyrus, were reflected in the multilayer compositions placed on the walls of temples. The frescoes were a kind of illustration to the Nile hymn, which was glorified as the source of life for the whole country. The geographical features of Greece: the valley, the low rounded mountains, olive and lemon groves at the feet of them, coastal strip cut by coves and a large number of islands have contributed to convergence of a man and nature, and the scale of the world, its simplicity and beauty led the Greeks to understand the proportionality of human and natural forces. Influence of the favoured nature was everywhere: in science, architecture, plastic arts, philosophy, in the mindset of the Greeks. The specific feature of Hellenic thinking – to analyze everything that caused their astonishment, and then simply and rationally explain – led to the development of realistic art.

The ancient Greek painter Apelles (IV century BC) in one of his portraits was able to show the source of light – lightning and glare on the face and human body. A picture of another Greek master Antifil (about 300-340 years BC) “Boy blowing the fire” also shows the light source and light effect is transmitted. The Ancient Roman frescoes and Byzantine mosaic have attempts to pass light and air environment and colored shadows. The saved fragments of murals confirm the widely held view that the ancient artists, aspiring to a full transfer of the depicted objects, studied the characteristics of their lightning, and used their observations of nature in the picturesque practice [14, p. 26].

The effect of natural light on objects located outside at the first time appeared in Western European painting. Giotto di Bondone (1276-1337) was the first who implemented that principle of painting that became the cornerstone in Renaissance art – to imitate nature. He began to paint people directly from the life, no one did it neither in Byzantium nor in medieval Europe, and he brought real space and real objects to the art. Breaking the tradition of planar images, he put no figure on a gold background, but on a background of a landscape or in the interior.

In the work of Italian painter Cennino Cennini pictures of nature were declared a model for the painting. The representative of the Early Renaissance Piero della Francesca in his paintings reproduced light as an important element of the composition. During this period, the painters of Italy have successfully solved the problem of the light and shadow connection among figures and landscape, and increasingly renounced golden and colorful conventional backgrounds. Artists of the Renaissance enriched the theory and practice of the art with development of such problems of artistic reality reflection as reproduction of volume, space, light, depiction of human form and real environment - interior, landscape.

Analyzing the nature, Leonardo da Vinci turned attention to its appropriateness, he urged artists to follow it: “Whatever discoveries are made by human genius ... it never would make a creation of that beauty, clarity and simplicity, which the nature is capable to, because its works are not missing anything and have no any excess” [11, p. 141].

A special place in the development of the theory and practice of plein-air painting belongs to the English artist of the beginning of the XIX century D. Constable. Personal practical experience of the outstanding paysage master and some of his statements on the technique of painting from nature were a valuable contribution not only to the development of the realist school, but also to the development of certain art schools. Artistic principles of Constable and, in particular, his practical method of studying painting in plein-air, were a reference for many students of several European schools of art in the 30 - 60s of XIX century [12, p. 118]. The most complete realization of plein-air principles can be found in the second half of the XIX century, in the works of the masters of Impressionism C. Monet, C. Pissarro, O. Renoir, A. Sisley, etc. The term “plein-air” got widespread use right in that moment. In 1891, Monet enters into the competition with the nature in plein-air. He creates a series of sketches-paintings “Poplars” on the banks of the River Epte, working simultaneously on several easels trying to capture the nuances of color and light, constantly changing with the time of day and weather.



In Russia in the second half of XIX - early XX centuries V. D. Polenov, V. A. Serov, I. I. Levitan, K. A. Korovin, I. E. Grabar and many others worked in plein-air. Since the end of the XIX century until the present day plein-air work is the basis for novice painters' training.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1. 2.1. Formation of students' artistic and creative skills in terms of plein-air work

Skills are mental qualities and properties of human personality, which appear to commit a certain type of work. The skill of a particular artistic activity is a prerequisite for implementation of this activity as a creative work based on high-quality execution of artistic and creative work. V. S. Kuzin refers to artistic skills the following properties:

- Artistic and creative imagination;
- Emotional attitude to the story, depicted phenomenon of reality;
- Volitional characteristics of artist's personality.
- High sensitivity of the visual analyzer, rising in the process of graphic activity (sense of form, sense of color, sense of proportion and lines);
- Rapid acquisition of new techniques in the study of a variety of techniques in graphics and painting, high sensorimotor features of the artist's hand [10, p. 212].

“Artistic skills work on the creation of artistic values and are of interest to the community. Indeed all the artistic activities in one or another kind of art, in this or that period of life, many are engaged with more or less success” [1, p. 173].

To ensure the conditions for the development of creative skills, their relationship is needed in mastering technical and aesthetic techniques of various graphic and pictorial materials. “The creative development of artist occurs often in a kind of dialectic of creative ideas and technology; new creative ideas sometimes require to master new technical means for their implementation; mastery of new technical means offers an opportunity for new technical possibilities, opens a door to new creative ideas, and new creative ideas require further development and improvement of technology and so on”, - S. L. Rubinstein noted [15, Vol. 2, p. 61]. One of the conditions necessary for the effective formation and development of artistic and creative skills is determined by “presence of freedom in the creative manifestation” [5, p. 27]. In the process of artistic activity, students master a new language for figurative expression of their thoughts, feelings, attitudes, they are broadening the mind of knowledge, bring up feelings and learn in emotional and figurative language. “By developing student’s creative skills (need for creativity) we grow out of him the researcher, not a “recipient” of knowledge, not a passive observer of life, but inspired the master, multiplying the beauty of life” [8, p. 38].

2.2. Special aspects of visual memory and a solid vision development in the process of plein-air painting.

The central problem of the process of drawing from life is a problem of perception. Perception is a holistic reflection of objects and phenomena arising from the direct influence of physical stimuli [4, p. 412]. Perception depends on the characteristics of mental processes and emotional responsiveness of a person. For the artist-designer, artist-teacher, arts and crafts' artist perception is a property that defines its capabilities in professional activities. Psychophysiological characteristics of visual perception in the visual arts:

- The advantage of the dominant stimulus;
- A feature to see clearly only part of the whole;
- A perception in the context of all-round illumination, proportionality, correlation of objects and the environment.

Student's perception differs significantly from professional perception of artist; perception of student has a number of drawbacks, such as superficial visual impressions, inaccurate visual estimates, the instability of visual attention, etc. In this regard, one of the leading students' learning problems of plein-air painting is a disposition to constancy and selective perception of subject matter. The restructuring of ordinary perception to artistic vision depends largely on gaining experience. When a student draws from nature, he carefully peers into what he pictures, he is focused, his intellectual activity is aimed directly at the object of the image. As a result of regular plein-air drawing, observing, listening, viewing, the perception becomes more delicate and sensitive.

Plein-air as much as possible develops visual memory, because environmental conditions are changeable. Originally perceived image of depicted motif changes quickly, and meaningful memorization and reproduction of nature by memory is necessary. Drawing from memory develops self-control, mobilizes the processes of perception, memorizing preservation of the seen information. "Drawing from memory is a process that includes two essential components. Firstly, memorizing of nature, its proportions, motion, character, tone-color relationships, etc. Secondly, but no less essential, remembering the progress of work on the image: eye movement, hand action with the material, sequence of fulfillment (where to start and how to finish the work)" [17, p. 17].

Conscious observation is characterized by selectivity, summing up and excluding minor, it helps to identify the most important and attributes of the depicted objects.

The ability of the artist to visually perceive the nature and at the same time by the method of comparison to determine the proportional, tonal and color relationships and interconnections of all the details of motif and their cosubordination to the main semantic component, this ability characterizes the development of integral perception. Outstanding Russian artists and teachers A. A. Deineka, B. V. Johanson, V. A. Favorsky, G. V. Beda noted that the process of forming a integral vision is long and gradual. As noted by V. G. Beda, "Developing capacity of integral vision and simultaneous comparison of all parts of plein-air is an important task of painting training. If the novice painter does not master this special skill, further training will not give positive results. It is the ability to see integrally and work with relations makes the difference between the professional painter and the layman" [1, p. 47]. In order to form an



integral vision, educators and artists have formulated such recommendations as, for example, to look at the nature “largely” to make visible image less clear, but blurred. “To peek”, “to see the nature by peripheral vision” - such mindsets gave outstanding teacher Pavel Chistyakov to his students. These recommendations are still relevant in the modern process of integral perception learning.

### 2.3. Methods of artistic cognition of reality in plein-air conditions

For the development of artistic and creative skills of students in plein-air conditions it is necessary to use the complex of methods, including tasks, reflecting the specifics of the artist's labor.

Artistic method is a historically developed set of principles of artistic and imaginative reflection of nature in the paysage genre, determined by the level and kind of society development, its beliefs and ideals. This set of artistic method principles includes:

- The principles of aesthetic evaluation of paysage from the standpoint of a certain aesthetic ideal;
- The principles of artistic selection of the paysage motif;
- Ways of artistic generalization of the selected motif;
- Principles of nature embodiment into images of paysage painting.

The creative method is a system of artistic means, which includes forms of motif grasping, ways of generalization, ideas about how to study the laws of nature and what is worthy of attention in it, etc. Work on paysage is carried out by the method of organizing relations (proportional, tonal, color, spatial, etc.). In turn, attitudes are learned and determined by comparison - the oldest method of paysage painting. Copying of paysage masters' originals is a method that has been used since the early Renaissance [3, p. 294].

The main source of knowledge and skills in the paysage work, and the leading method for the study of nature, educational and creative students' practice – plein-air work, that is, performing sketches from nature. Etude work in plein-air conditions can also be regarded as a method of work with nature, and as a method of demonstrative training.

The learning process of painting takes place mainly in the form of practical activity of students. There can not be methods worked out once and for all in this process. The teacher combines them in his activity in different ways, but not randomly. The choice of teaching methods of landscape painting is determined by the need to take into account such conditions as an introduction to the process of studying the theoretical basis of graphic competence, color theory, composition laws, etc. Taking into account these conditions will make it possible to apply the following teaching methods:

- Lecture-conversation as the most accessible form of theoretical material transfer;
- Showing progression of nature depicting;
- Exercises that provide mastering of a strong practical skills and techniques needed to reinforce new material.

Thus, in teaching plein-air drawing not particular techniques are important, but holistic methodical system where all the components are in continuous unity, pursuing a common goal - the formation of the artist's personality.

#### 2.4. Specifics of plein-air drawing

Plein-air painting and drawing should be started with flora image. A thorough study of the structure and form of plants, flowers, shrubs, trees and other elements of the flora helps in further work on the creation of an artistic image in the landscape. Sketches, studies, sketches of plants. First should be found a compositional image of a plant, general proportional relations, construction should be planned, plastic solution form and its expressiveness should be found. Then details of the form should be worked out. For plant study the following paintings and graphic materials are used: pencil, pen, ink, paintbrush, pen, pastel and watercolor. The paper for work can be white and toned.

The main thing in landscape work is a fine choice of motif, the choice of landscape composition. In this work student faces some difficulty in the transfer of atmospheric phenomena, versatility, variety of shapes, sizes, colors, constant change of light. The main thing is to sort out the impressions of the landscape, find the most interesting, select needed details and to subordinate them to the whole. In the process of composition making, students need to pay attention to the proportions in the landscape, to apply knowledge of linear and aerial perspective, to achieve expressive solutions of specific moments in landscape in accordance with the artistic conception [8, p. 3701]. To solve composition design in landscape students should find a composition center, the necessary rhythm, symmetry and asymmetry, draw from the law of contrasts.

Plein-air painting studies are divided into a picturesque sketch, short-term and long sketch. Work on the implementation of a long sketch can be carried out in stages:

- Search for a composition, analysis of major proportions;
- Developing structure, perspective;
- Defining sketch coloration;
- The transfer of the main tonal and color relations;
- Work on the space;
- Work on a form volume, the transfer of light and shade. Detailing.
- Completion of the work. Synthesis and finding the main thing.

At plein-air work on long-term sketch lasts about two hours or more, depending on the size of the work and the details maturity. Sketch is a short-term picture that is aimed to transfer the main and special features of the motif. Runtime for sketch is from 15 minutes to 1 hour. A study is a quick drawing by graphic materials. Runtime of study is from 1 to 10 minutes.

#### 2.5. The complex of special tasks in view of the professional activity of the future experts in the field of fine and decorative arts



The aim of plein-air practice is to collect the maximum amount of information about the natural forms of flora and fauna in a short time, to study and sketch motifs of flora and fauna, and on the basis of sketches create their own artistic-graphic composition [16, p. 57]. In plein-air, students master the art features in the work on paysage, they solve a problem set by the teacher, learn to make a choice of motif, learn to create intelligent composition and consistency in the exercise, with due account of utilised materials and other technical means used in visual arts.

Taking into account the specific features of plein-air drawing, the main objectives of plein-air practice sessions focused on the acquisition and development the following knowledge and skills of students:

- The ability to perceive the nature in large-scale, three-dimensional space, and its image - in two-dimensional space on a plane;
- The ability to perceive the heat-cold relations and shades depending on the light, surroundings, the spatial farness of plans, by practicing the laws of chromatics, linear and aerial perspective;
- The ability to compare the nature colors in their combinations using the background, brightness, saturation, based on the characteristics of landscape painting;
- The ability to apply the method of work with great color and tonal relations, maintaining the overall tone-color scale, perceiving nature holistically;
- The use of plein-air schizzos, along with sketches and studies in graphics and in color, as the primary, preparatory material for the current academic tasks, including composition;
- The ability to create expressive compositional and color solutions in the schizzos from life and from memory, accomplished on the basis of in-depth study of natural phenomena.

For students of art specialties, we have developed tasks developing an integral vision and the artistic and creative skills:

- Active and purposeful observation of an object or phenomenon;
- Finding composition dominants;
- Fulfillment of works in various states of nature;
- The use of different formats for work;
- Implementation of three variants of works from a single motif in different lighting conditions and with a choice of different composition centers;
- Implementation of work with different artistic materials [13, p. 87].

Here the works' topics in plein-air, which are characterized as follows:

- Landscape with a low horizon line;
- Landscape with a high horizon line;
- Work on the "paysage-state" (fog, sunrise, cloudy, sunny day, evening, sunset, etc.);



- Sketches and schizzos of architectural elements;
- Urban and rural landscape;
- Paysage with water image;
- Still life in plein-air in open space;
- Still life with wild flowers;
- Image of animals;
- Plein-air portrait;
- Figure in plein-air [7, p. 3701].

#### 2.6. Pedagogical conditions of forming professional skills of students of art specialties in plein-air art space

In the plein-work artistic, creative, intellectual, aesthetic problems are solved. In this regard, one of the leading pedagogical conditions of development of artistic and creative skills in plein-air is to create a creative environment. Creative environment means a common attitude of the teacher and students in the achievement of a specific goal of educational and creative tasks. Immersion into problem, into general idea takes place in the creative environment. Establishing creative environment may include:

- A co-production of still life, nature;
- Student's participation in youth exhibitions and competitions;
- The collective examination of sketches with a discussion of works;
- Conducting workshops by teacher;
- Study and analysis of samples of Russian and foreign art in museum collections;
- Viewing of didactic textbooks, CDs on the methodological characteristics of plein-air painting [18, p. 111].

The most supportive environment for the development of artistic and creative skills of students in the process of making sketches in plein-air are created at:

- The use of individually-differentiated approach of education;
- Providing creative nature of the activity;
- Providing positive motivation, positive emotional mood during and after the creative activity of students;
- Construction of educational content based on the complementarity of disciplines, unity of purposes, objectives and requirements;
- Management of students' self-education process, aimed at the formation of cognitive activity, self-improvement and self-development.

### 3. Results

Plein-air practice has its own special aspects, great opportunities to achieve professional skills of the future experts in the field of fine and decorative arts. Painting in plein-air conditions creates a vast store of visual experience



necessary to carry out painting and graphic images, observation skills are developed, as well as visual memory, visual thinking, holistic perception; it forms positive emotions from communication with nature, the aesthetic taste of students [21, p. 1501]. An important condition for the development of artistic and creative skills is to create motivation for creative work, which consists of two aspects consideration: the educational and creative.

The educational aspect is consistent and purposeful study of color and spatial patterns of the surrounding reality, the visual perception of color, the study of painting and graphic techniques, and so on.

The creative aspect involves the creative orientation of education: the conscious use of color laws, selection of materials for the purpose of subjecting them to plan and achieve the greatest expression of the artistic image, the development of intrinsic motivation to do the work.

Intrinsic motivation of personality is the basis of creativity and includes imagination, feelings and emotions. It develops creative thinking and encourages independent activity, which helps to acquire some experience as a basis of professional skills. The great importance for development of creative independence has the result of activity (achievement motif), acting as a motivation to achieve great success [20, p. 2345].

At classroom lessons, students are often led to the definition of the image object, material, size of academic work and other important conditions of academic studies. On the plein-air practice, students get a lot of freedom in the choice of motif, composition construction and depicting state of nature. The rapidly changing way of illumination, the lack of classroom comfort make the students quickly make their own decisions. Depicting large spaces in the paysage, which is fundamentally different in comparison with the deep-space plans in still life and portrait, actualize the knowledge of students in matters of linear and aerial perspective, laws of work with illumination relations of tone and colouring of schizzo [9, p. 1603]. The need for quick decision-making in the course of work on the motif in plein-air makes students to take responsibility for finding the picture composition and colour score for schizzo from nature. In the process of systematic studying in plein-air students successfully develop a variety of professional skills:

- Skill of quick “capturing” nature;
- Skill of inconstant perception of shape and color;
- Skill of perception form, its proportions and location in space;
- Skill of observing of simultaneous and sequential contrasts;
- Skill of defining common properties of the objects;
- Skill of comparing the similarities and differences between objects;
- Skill of typification and generalization;
- Skill of work with the basic composition techniques;
- Skill of work with basic painting means.

#### **4. Discussion**

Reform of higher education, development of educational standards for professional training of a new generation require a search for new forms and methods of specialists' training in the field of art education. The current trend to

cutdown academic hours in curricula for the most of special subjects reduces also the level of specialists' education. Drawing and painting require some time spent in carrying out educational tasks. Therefore, pedagogues have to give the information in a compressed form, to reduce and transform educational material for students to have time to make a certain number of necessary educational tasks. In the circumstances of slack in time, available to work on special subjects of visual cycle in the classroom, percent of individual, extracurricular form of training of future specialists in the field of fine and decorative arts, increases. This forces to seek for ways of optimal and rational solution to the problem of effective professional training and readiness of art specialties' students in the educational process of high school [19, p. 2185].

Motivation to learn, personal initiative and self-reliance of students acquire an important role in the formation and development of creative personality of the future artist. Art-creative activity in education becomes the basis for development in understanding of fine arts, in character building, formation of the future artist's personality and assists in self-education, self-development and self-improvement. In the field of graphic activity, where the artist acts as an independent creator, based on his own understanding of the meaning of art, on the personal perception of reality, the issue of independence is the most urgent; it gets fundamentally important [2, p. 35].

### 5. Conclusion

Plein-air painting, as a form of academic and research practice, develops conceptualization of the future artist on the beauty of nature, brings love, develops aesthetic perception of the world. Creative work in plein-air is accompanied with composition search, implementation of a set of field studies, sketches, schizzos. Educational objectives in plein-air are to study the nature, light and air environment, as well as determined by the search for appropriate material for future creative work. Noted by the artist, the theme turns heart often and can be born in a big work in the future, it turns into a series of paintings and graphic works, thesis.

Drawing from nature is considered to be a special kind of active perception and one of the best ways to remember. Plein-air practice has a positive effect on the creative potential, on the development of artistic and creative skills, namely:

- The ability to artistically-figurative expression;
- The ability to make work's composition solution, the ability of the artistic, creative and aesthetic perception of nature, mastery of the technique, methods and skills of watercolor painting;
- The development of imagination and visual memory;
- The integrity of artistic vision, the ability to compositional structure making and coloristic solution of the work;
- The ability to find of pictorial means, necessary for artistic and imaginative realization of idea;
- Conceptualization of personal creative experience, work on separate series, the skill to anticipate the result, the development of one's own artistic style.

These abilities are the most important components in the aesthetic and creative development of future artists, allowing to solve the artistic challenges.



Search activities of a student, which are realized in the process of joint activities with the teacher, are considered as a condition for activating the creative independence of students. Self-education as a process of independent acquisition of knowledge and skills, needed in school, is the way leading a person to self-development and self-improvement.

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