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11-2016

Industrial Drawing in American Schools 19th Century

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Hudson, Jaime, "Industrial Drawing in American Schools 19th Century" (2016). *Art Education Case Studies*. 5.

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Industrial Drawing in American Schools

19TH CENTURY

By Jamie Hudson

The Growing Problem in America's Manufacturing Industry

- After the American Civil War (1861-1865), Americans could not compete with Britain's growing textile industry
- The economy was falling apart because of the lack of material and skill
- Almost all American artisans were taught overseas and there were not many left
- The arts were only taught to those who could afford it (Rich)

The Drawing Act of 1870

- In Boston, Massachusetts a petition began forming amongst citizens in the textile industry stating the importance and need of drawing in public schools in order for American manufacturing to become successful (1869)
- “..every branch of manufactures in which the citizens of Massachusetts are engaged, requires in the details of the process connected with it, some knowledge of drawing and other arts of design on the part of skilled workmen engaged. At the present time no wide provision is made for instruction in drawing in the public schools.”

The Drawing Act of 1870 Continued..

- On May 16, 1870, the legislature enacted the first law in the nation making the teaching of drawing compulsory. Meaning that drawing was required in all public schools
- The problem: regular teachers did not know how to teach or incorporate drawing into their classrooms
- Boston had to look to Britain's school systems for a solution and was recommended art master, Walter Smith. He was hired in 1871 as the Art education Supervisor of Massachusetts in order to bring first hand knowledge of British teaching to America

Walter Smith's Creation of "Industrial Drawing"

- "...The kind of drawing which the State of Massachusetts requires that its citizens shall have the opportunity of studying, is called "Industrial Drawing;" and wisely so called for in that lies the justification of its public action in the matter"
- Smith wanted to "...produce a love of order and nourish originality"
- He believed drawing was important in the industry and can lead to a productive and successful life
- He wanted to incorporate science in this form of drawing in order to practice design with geometric shapes and overall just increase knowledge
- Smith wanted to teach children how to draw, not how to make drawings

Walter Smith's Industrial Drawing Method

- Smith separated the public into three sections: Children, skilled artisans, and general public. Children would be taught drawing in schools as part of their general education, artisans would be taught in night schools, and the general public would be able to have lectures in museums if they wished.
- Smith educated teachers who had previous knowledge of drawing. He did this so in turn they became knowledgeable enough to teach normal teachers how to incorporate art in the classroom. He even started a school specifically for them, it was called the "Normal School".
- Smith devised a plan for incorporating drawing skills in grade schools. For younger students, they would be taught, "free-hand outline drawing" and when they were old enough they would eventually learn "model drawing". "Memory Drawing" and flash cards were also included in his method (used in all grades).

Smith's Impact

- Overall Smith's normal art school was extremely successful, allowing thousands of teachers to be knowledgeable with art in the classroom
- Students (children and adults) were able to display their drawings in art shows. Showing just how remarkable drawing can be
- He allowed hundreds of men and women to be prepared to go into the workforce successfully
- His movement eventually lead to modern art teaching

Additional Information...