Picasso’s ‘Two views of a left eye’ of 1892–93: a recent discovery

by JOAN P. URANECK, Maine College of Art, Portland

PABLO PICASSO spent five and a half years as a student studying at three different art schools. Before going to the Barcelona School of Fine Arts (1895–97) and the Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando in Madrid (1897–98), at the age of eleven he was enrolled at the Instituto da Guarda in La Coruña, where he studied for three years.¹ It was here that he made the academic drawing Two views of a left eye (1892–93; Fig.47) which, as I have discovered, was copied from Study of eyes (Fig.48), plate three of Cours préparatoire, a French drawing manual published in 1864 by Bernard–Romain Julien.²

Picasso’s father, José Ruiz Blasco, moved with his family to La Coruña in 1891 when he was hired as a drawing instructor at the Instituto da Guarda. Picasso, only ten years of age, was not old enough to be enrolled in the art school until the following year when, just before his eleventh birthday, he was accepted in his father’s class.³ Two views of a left eye is one of seven extant drawings from that first year, executed under José Ruiz’s tuition.⁴ All are signed ‘Pablo Ruiz Picasso’, with his class enrolment number, 88, neatly placed beneath.⁵ Four of the drawings are copied from two other French drawing manuals, Cours de dessin (1869) and Exercices au fusain (1871), both by Charles Bargue.⁶ The practice of copying from two-dimensional examples, called drawing from the ‘flat’,⁷ had been a common procedure in training artists, both in the workshop and in the academy, since the seventeenth century, when drawing manuals became popular.⁸ Drawing from the ‘flat’ was usually introduced in the first year of schooling before the student passed on to drawing from plaster casts.⁹

Drawing books were somewhat out of fashion and not much used in France in private ateliers, such as Carolus-Duran’s, or in independent art schools, such as the Académie Julian.¹⁰ Bernard–Romain Julien’s Cours préparatoire was a new type of manual called a cours de dessin, developed in the nineteenth century to teach students how to draw the human figure.¹¹ The term cours de dessin and its English equivalent ‘art school’ are: Illustrated: Practical: A Treatise on the Higher Elements of Art (London, 1871); and E. Cowling: Picasso: Style and Meaning, London 2002, pp.32–58.

I wish to thank the National Endowment of the Arts for two research stipends to study the history of drawing books, and Charles E. Pierce Jr, Anne Fábregas and Susan Waller.


² A copy of the 1864 Cours préparatoire by B.-R. Julien is in the National Art Library, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

³ Richardson, op. cit. (note 1), p.41.

⁴ Palau I Fabre, op. cit. (note 1), p.42. The seven academic drawings are: Atemus leaves, 1892–93 (Museu Picasso, Barcelona); Study for the right profile of an old man, 1892–93 (private collection); Study for the right profile of a man, 1892–93 (private collection); Two views of a left eye, 1892–93 (Museo Picasso, Málaga); Torso, 1892–93 (Musée Picasso, Paris); Torso Belvedere, 1892–93 (Museu Picasso, Barcelona), and Man seated with his face in his hands, 1893 (Heirs of the artist).

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Three drawings are copied from C. Bargue: Cours de dessin, Paris 1869: Double study of a bearded man in profile, 1892–93, is copied from plate 3; Torso, 1892–93, is copied from plate 56; and Torso Belvedere, 1892–93, from plate 63. One drawing, Seated man with head in hands, 1892–93, is copied from plate 39 of Exercices au fusain, Bargue’s volume of 1871. For an account of these first-year drawings, see Staller, op. cit. (note 1), pp.72–73 and notes 39 and 41. See also I. Lavin: Past and Present. Essays on Historicism in Art from Donatello to Picasso, Berkeley 1993, pp.257–58.


⁹ Ibid., p.27


47. Two views of a left eye, by Pablo Picasso. 1892–93. Conté pencil on paper, 23.7 by 31.5 cm. (Museo Picasso, Málaga).

dessin, used first by Pierre Lacour in 1826 in his book, *Cours complet de dessin – Depuis les éléments les plus simple jusqu’aux figures académiques*, implied that there was a series of lessons through which the student progressed rather than simply copying a collection of images. The *cours de dessin* became popular in France in the nineteenth century for the teaching of beginners, particularly young students in lycées or those preparing to enter the grands écoles.13 Julien was among the leading authors of *cours de dessin* manuals along with Gédon François Reverdin, Henri Guillaume Chatillon, Josephine Ducollet and Charles Bargue.14 The *cours de dessin* was modelled after earlier drawing manuals such as Gerard Audran’s *Les Proportions des corps humain* of 1683 (Fig.49), in which the figure was broken down into parts starting with the components of the face, such as the eye. Students copied from the examples, called *modèles de dessin*, which were available as engravings until the nineteenth century and largely as lithographs after 1825.15 The *modèles de dessin*, which served as guides to introduce beginners to the practice of drawing, were arranged in a sequential manner and after the parts were mastered, the student combined them together to form the whole figure. Art historians have often confused Picasso’s drawings from the ‘flat’ with drawings after plaster casts, which is easy to do because many of the *modèles de dessin*, such as Julien’s *Study of eyes*, were based on unidentified antique statuary.16

The case of *Two views of a left eye* is a perfect example of the confusion that surrounds Picasso’s drawings because, like the other academic studies from his first year at La Coruña, it was believed by some scholars to have been copied from a plaster model when, in fact, it is an exact copy of Julien’s *Study of eyes*.17

The nineteenth-century *cours de dessin* was distinguished from earlier drawing manuals by its new large size (65 by 50 cm.), its portfolio format and its loose moveable pages, called *pages volantes* which could be removed from the portfolio and used individually by the instructor or the student.18 Julien’s *Cours préparatoire* measures 36 by 157 cm. and includes eighty-four plates. A popular practice for the new student was to tack one of the *pages volantes* next to their paper on the drawing board. Julien’s *Cours préparatoire*, suivant le programme adopté par le Gouvernement pour l’enseignement du dessin dans les lycées. Collection de nouveaux Modèles alementaires, dessinées d’après l’Antique et Autographed par J., as the full title informs us, was a *cours de dessin* first published in Paris in 1857. It was re-issued in 1864 after the sweeping educational reforms initiated by the French government in the previous year.19 These called for a complete overhaul in the teaching of art, a re-organisation in the instruction of drawing and a higher quality of drawing manuals, especially the improved *modèles de dessin*, such as Julien’s.20 Bernard-Romain Julien (1802–71), a painter, draughtsman and lithographer, who had studied under Gros and lived in Paris, exhibited from 1833 to 1850 at the

---

18 Harlé, *op. cit.* (note 11), p.17.
23 *Ibid.*.
24 *Ibid.*.
25 *Ibid.*.
26 *Ibid.*.
27 For Spanish drawing books, see F. Gallardo Otero: ‘El Cuaderno en los métodos de enseñanza del dibujo 1848–1930’, Ph.D. diss. (Universidad Complutense de
Salon, but was best known for his lithographs. He was a commercial portraitist until 1840, but thereafter concentrated on the many editions of his *cours de dessin*. He was an accomplished draughtsman, making his own drawings for his manuals, and *Study of eyes* is characteristic of his subtle transitions from light to dark and of his exquisite and exacting style.

Picasso was fortunate to have had access to Julien’s new *modèles de dessin*. While Spain had undergone curricular reform in the nineteenth century, the drawing books, or *cartillas*, used in schools had remained largely unchanged. The *cartillas* were aimed at teaching mechanical drawing (*dibujo lineal*) until 1884 when reforms introduced figure drawing (*dibujo de figura*). The pedagogical approach used in the *cartillas* was similar to the French method of copying the human figure from the *modèles de dessin*, but the examples in Spain did not consist of high quality drawings. For example, those found in *Estudios Preliminares de Dibujo en sus aplicaciones a las artes industriales en una serie de cartillas, destinadas á las clases preparatorias de la Escuela Central de Artes y oficios de Madrid* (1880) by Manuel Antonio Capo (Fig. 50) are crude in comparison with Julien’s.

The Instituto da Guarda, a small art school in the north-western province of Galicia, had started out as part of the Instituto da Guarda, a secondary school founded by Eusebio Guarda. Like most nineteenth-century Spanish secondary schools, it focused on teaching practical drawing skills for careers in professions such as engineering and architecture. Drawing concentrated on *dibujo lineal*, principles of construction and architectural drawing. Archival documents in La Coruña indicate that educational reforms brought significant changes. The secondary school’s curriculum expanded to include physics, chemistry, singing, French and German, night courses for adults and a Superior School for young students. More important, the drawing component of the secondary school was given its own status in a separate art school and its curriculum was enlarged in the direction of the fine arts. Chapter VI, articles 35-49 of the art school charter, divided the curriculum into two levels. The younger students’ curriculum consisted of the drawing of figures, decorative drawing, the mechanics of drawing, modelling and the making of casts — *sawado de adornos*. The older students’ curriculum consisted of drawing from the antique and *del natural*, painting, sculpting with the chisel and modelling by hand. Once this foundation was completed the students could go on to specialise in painting or sculpture. In 1890 the Instituto da Guarda appealed to the Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando in Madrid for first-division status as a school of fine arts, and changed its name to Escuela de Bellas Artes.

The curricular changes at the Instituto da Guarda brought a new programme of sequential instruction for art students from which Picasso benefited. His father taught three courses: ‘ornamental drawing’, ‘figure drawing’ and ‘figure drawing from the cast’, and he continued to teach from *cartillas* just as he had in his previous post in Málaga. Two views of a left eye is further evidence that, instead of using Spanish manuals, José Ruiz preferred the more progressive French *cours de dessin*, thus bringing the higher standards of the French educational reforms to teaching in Spain. The training that Picasso received at this early stage of his life became the foundation on which he relied throughout his career. To take a single example, no one familiar with Picasso’s *œuvre* could fail to note the remarkable resemblance between the juvenile ‘eyes’ illustrated here and those in his neo-classical work of the 1920s, of which the study for *Three women at the fountain* provides a striking example (Fig. 51).

---

23 *The modèles de dessin* used in the manual by Capo are reproduced in Gallardo Otero, op. cit. (note 23), pp.204-70.
28 *Ibid.*, chapters II-IV.
30 *Ibid*.
31 *Ibid.*, chapter VI, article 42.
33 *Ibid.*, chapter IV, article 43.