



Arthur Wesley Dow: View of Lake Louise, Alberta, Canada, 1919

ARTHUR WESLEY DOW

Shaping America's Art Educators

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ARE6049 History of Teaching Art

Masters of Art in Art Education, *University of Florida*



Arthur Wesley Dow (1857-1922) Brittany Maid, 1886

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Introduction

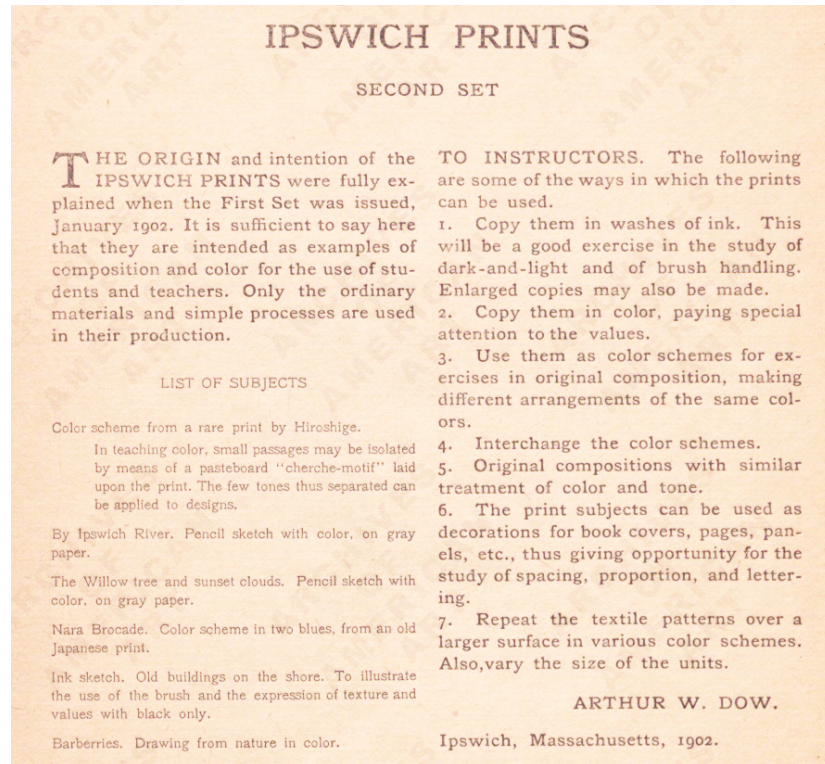
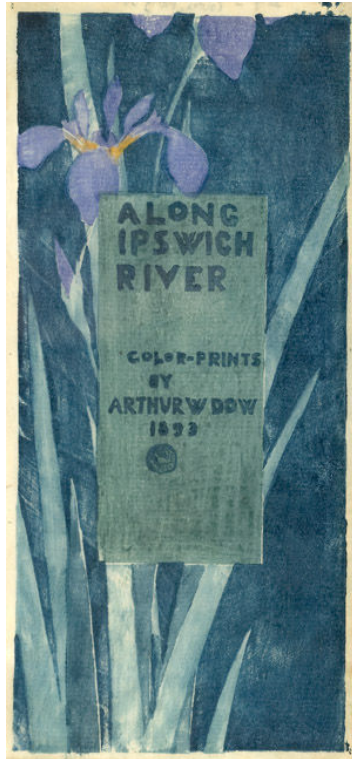
Art Education during the time period of the 1870's to the early twentieth century had specific gender related goals, which had a direct correlation to the industrial arts of the time. However, shortly after the turn of the twentieth century there was a new art education movement in the United States affecting theories and practices that was born from criticism of the industrial revolution's monotonous life. This shift in direction from a boring existence to a celebratory and

academic one opened the door for modern art and modern art education. This time period was characterized by a culmination of three societal desires: “to develop an appreciation of beauty, to promote wise use of leisure time, and to transmit community values” (Stankiewicz, 2001, p.132). Furthering the idea of a new direction was the next stage of American art education, which is still a great influence to us today: a combination of design theories, formalist aesthetics and creativity. There were many individuals during the early twentieth century that contributed to this movement. However, the most lasting influence by far was the artist and art educator, Arthur Wesley Dow.

Dow’s Influence

Born on April 6, 1857 in Ipswich, Massachusetts, Dow was the oldest son of Mary Patch and David Dow. Although his family was poor, he and his younger brother Dana found an educational opportunity in the Reverend John P. Cowles who was a recent retiree from the Ipswich Female Seminary. As a result, the young Dow began a rigorous program of Greek, Latin and mathematics which gave him time to receive an advanced education while being able to pursue new interests while he taught elementary classes in Linebrook Parish, located near Ipswich (Green, 1999). During this time period, an interest in the history of his native colonial town began and Dow was strongly supported in this endeavor by Reverend Caldwell. Some of Dow’s most well known earlier work is that of the Ipswich prints, where Dow taught himself

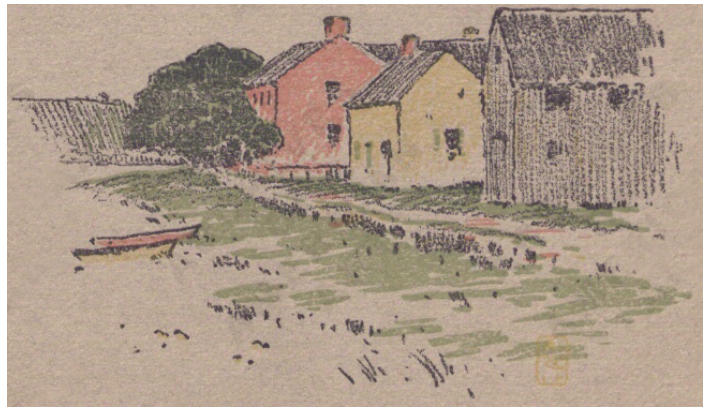
how to work in lithography and engraving as a preservation project to “memorialize many of the pre-Revolutionary War buildings in a series of prints” (Green, 1999, p.11). Thinking that the



Color prints cover, circa 1893; Explanation of the Ipswich Prints for art educators, circa 1902

historical buildings might be demolished soon due to the period of industrialization, Dow took on this project with enthusiasm. In the end, over a hundred years later, the buildings still stand in the town, as it had escaped the industrialization era.

In 1880, Dow received his first patrons through an introduction by the Reverend Caldwell: the Farmer family. Moses Farmer, an engineer, became an important influence on Dow as he introduced him to electromagnetic devices he had invented and the idea of mysticism. Green (1999) stated of Dow that “acknowledging this interest in the unknown and unknowable is



Artwork: Ipswich Prints (second set), 1902 and Loose Prints, circa 1901-1906



Dow and Henry R. Kenyon in Dow's Ipswich Studio, circa 1890

crucial to understanding Dow's work" (Green, 1999, p.11). As Dow's work developed, he showed an interest in furthering his art studies and decided to move to Paris, France in 1884. Stankiewicz (2001) states, "he shared experiences common to many American artists – studying in the Académie Julian, a favorite training ground for painters" (Stankiewicz, 2001, p.90). During 1884 and 1889, Dow travelled back and forth from Paris to Brittany, where he enjoyed producing landscape paintings that were accepted into the Paris Salon and exhibited to moderate

success back in the United States. The website located at the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution (2014) speaking about the Arthur Wesley Dow papers, circa 1826-1978, bulk 1879-1922, states:

Shortly after his return to Ipswich, Dow took a studio in Boston, where he hoped to attract students and began an extremely fertile and successful period as an art educator. He began studying Japanese art, particularly the compositional elements employed in Japanese prints, which he synthesized with Western art techniques and utilized in teaching composition and design. In addition to seeing students in his Boston studio, he began the Ipswich Summer School of Art, which continued into 1907. Pratt Institute hired Dow as an art instructor in 1895 and he remained there until 1904, when he was appointed the Director of Fine Arts of the Columbia University Teacher's College, a position he retained until his death in 1922. Between 1897 and 1903, he also taught at the Art Students League. [Home page]. Retrieved February 24, 2014, from http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/arthur-wesley-dow-papers-7588/more#section_6



Académie Julian, Paris, France, circa 1886

A handwritten signature in dark ink on a light-colored, slightly textured paper. The signature reads "Arthur W. Dow" in a cursive, flowing script. The paper is tilted slightly to the right.

Visual Thinking and Influence on Art Theory

In 1899 Dow wrote a book called *Composition*, which became very popular. The book provided the “standard by which art was taught, at all levels from grade school to college” and became the “bible of art students and teachers” over the next forty years, changing the face of art education forever (Green, 1999, p. 24). The book promoted the “signature elements of art”, which were line, notan and color (Stankiewicz, 2001, p. 96). Dow was invited to teach at the Prang Institute as a result of the writing of this book and described his art theory approach as a “structural one, a process of building up harmony fundamental to all fine arts” (Stankiewicz, 2001, p. 89). He also believed that universal art principles were shared by all cultures. Dow maintained that “the validity of all art forms, from every culture” was a universal art principle, recognizing the value of multicultural art studies (Green, 1999, p. 9).

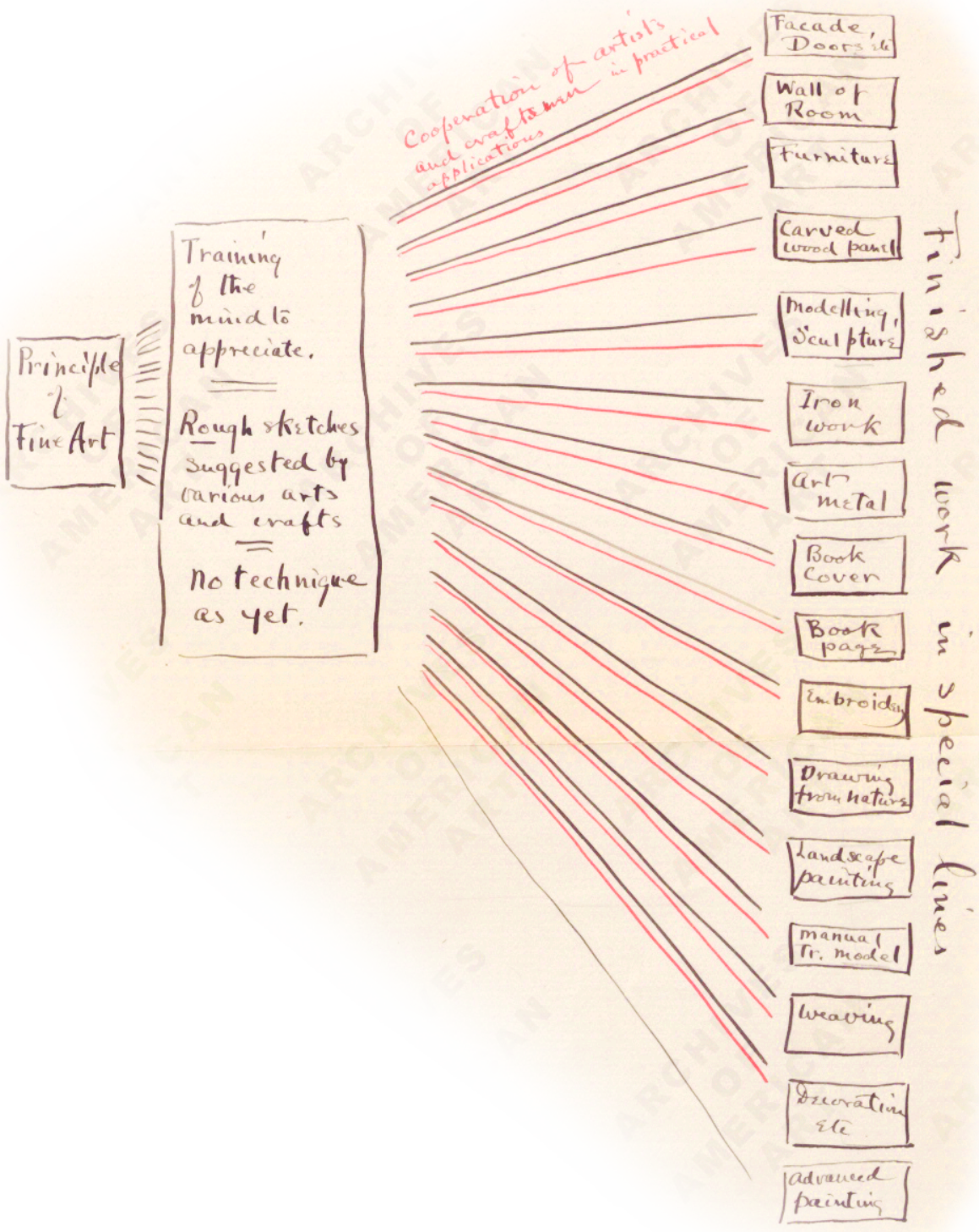
Personal Significance

Mock-Morgan (1985) purported that Dow’s influence as an artist and art educator was highly significant both in the United States and internationally and that his service to art education “was to move the training of art teachers out of the art academies” (Mock-Morgan,

1985, p. 234). Additionally, Dow's explanations of the mysteries of design were clear and concise. He created the synthetic system where he first defined the elements of art and the art principles (Mock-Morgan, 1985). Dow's views on instructional practices makes the most sense to me. He had an intense commitment to art education and worked on developing high school and adult amateur curriculum. He was even remembered for influencing positively such artists as Weber, O'Keeffe, and Coburn. Dows theories in the artistic development of young children included the allowance of student artistic expression with the added freedom of creativity. His book, *Composition*, broke the mold of the common art education practices at the time as students were encouraged to notice their environment for "good design" and then create art based upon these theories. This departure from the strict way of teaching students to copy existing art began an unstoppable movement in art education and is still currently in place today as a result. Dow's educational practices enhanced the individual's power to "create".



Arthur Wesley Dow, Brittany Field with Figure, 1889



Notes and Writings by Arthur Wesley Dow: Composition and Principle of Fine Arts, 1907



Dow in Studio, circa 1900

The Art of the Cave-Men
Dec 2 1913
Introd. Remarks -
Probable Age of Man often discussed
- article in Times - Calaveras skull -
Neanderthal skull - Bible chronology.
Glacial epoch, Esquimaux.

Lectures on The Art of the Cave Men, 1913-1916



Dow with Class, Pratt Institute, Brooklyn, New York, circa 1899

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