

*STUDIO INCAMMINATI*  
*CURRICULUM*  
*REVISED JULY 2008*

MISSION STATEMENT

Studio Incamminati exists to meet the expressed needs of students eager to learn the aesthetic and philosophical principles of humanist realism and the techniques espoused by Nelson Shanks. Modeled on the traditional Italian academia and French atelier, Studio Incamminati provides a dynamic teaching program to produce highly skilled artists who can call upon their abilities to create art with depth of purpose. We teach artists whose art and teaching will in turn inspire others. As Studio Incamminati progresses, our students will master the practices needed to develop rewarding careers and lives in the arts. And as the Incamminati movement advances its influence will be recognized worldwide.

The curriculum detailed below reflects Incamminati's commitment to artistic excellence in fulfillment of our mission.

INTRODUCTION

The curriculum at Studio Incamminati is designed to assist students in developing the essential skills and techniques integral with humanist realism. Humanist realism attends to both the human form and the human soul, producing in the process art that informs, fulfills and nourishes society at large. Thus Studio Incamminati's emphasis on skill and technique goes well beyond the faithful reproduction of our object of study. The realism espoused and practiced by Incamminati unveils the human condition in its moving complexity. The realism espoused and practiced by Incamminati plums the depths of the human soul. Ours is a realism that cuts to the bone and reveals something profound about us and the world we live in. It speaks a language desirable for all to access. In sum, Studio Incamminati yearns to touch immortality by creating richly meaningful art that will inspire generations to come.

The broad aim of the curriculum is foundational as we are convinced that mastery of technique is prelude for creative expression. Mastery of foundational skills is understood as liberating as it positions artists to be truly creative and communicate in meaningful ways the human experience. The absence of such skills is paralyzing as it restricts one's ability to convey the world in which we live. Thus students at Studio Incamminati learn to draw and paint the human figure and still life, work with light and shadow, refine form and shape, and interpret and understand color. While indebted to practices of the Old Masters, the curriculum at Studio Incamminati is dynamic, using the paragons of the past to bring enlightened meaning to the present.

The curriculum consists of four successive levels, each demanding mastery of certain competencies. Each level is organized in terms of stages. Advancement through the curriculum is contingent on demonstrated mastery of the skills specific to the student's level. Students who wish to advance will present their work to Studio Incamminati's teaching staff for review at the close of the semester. Augmenting Studio Incamminati's teaching staff is a

host of visiting art faculty as well as lecturers in art history and anatomy, all of whom are committed to maximizing student potential. Visiting faculty bring fresh perspective on our most pressing issues and lecturers in anatomy and art history are essential for rounding out the artistic experience.

Students should note that Incamminati Instructors communicate the essential concepts of the curriculum in their own terms and through their own language. There is no *single way* to communicate the Incamminati curriculum, and there is no *single way* to master the basic concepts. Approaches will vary somewhat to maintain individuality; but we all remain committed to the basic concepts.

### LEVEL ONE: FIRST STAGE

All Incamminati students begin their experience by learning how to see the human figure in its basic simplicity. The aim is to “see big” by grasping the whole figure and eschewing the micromanagement of form. Students understand the figure as movement and they must feel the energy of the figure in their very beings, from their head to their toes. Initially, through a series of short gestural poses, students capture the energy of the figure using charcoal as their medium. (As the semester proceeds, the poses will be of greater duration.) Students exercise a certain freedom in their manipulation of the charcoal. Freedom, however, is not license, and students must maintain their commitment to see the form objectively. Their strokes should be fluid, driven by the very kinetic energy of the pose they seek to capture through strictly straight lines and angles. At this juncture, students do not attend to curves. Straight lines and angles best describe the basic armature of the pose, providing the necessary foundation on which to build complexity. The progressive nature of the curriculum demands that students master foundational proportions of lights and darks. Only by mastering the foundational blocking in of shapes can one proceed to the next level.

Students step back frequently to assess how well they have understood the energy of the gesture and how well they have grasped the major direction or tilt of the figure. Students attend to the large elements or prominent masses of the figure. This exercise will help students improve their hand/eye coordination and will train their observational powers. Development of hand/eye coordination and observational skill mark all phases of the curriculum at Studio Incamminati.

Students will also work from still life to develop the ability to see graphic shapes in light and shadow. Still life offers students the advantage of variety of objects, forms, shapes, color, surfaces and texture, placement in space, relation to background—all issues relevant to realism. At the foundation or beginning level, still life consists of the simplest shapes and objects in monochrome — the cylinder, the sphere, and the cube — and increases in complexity as skills progress. Students must bring to still life the same kind of energy inherent in the human figure. They must capture the object in its simplicity with fluid strokes using charcoal initially as their medium, prior to moving onto oil paint. Students will learn about value fields along with the flow of light across the subject in its entirety.

### LEVEL ONE: SECOND STAGE

Having established the basic structure of the pose, students now mass the figure by defining or chiseling shapes of light and shadow. Here students come to see – with eyes squinted– the planes of the figure and how they combine to create transitions of value. (We see values with eyes squinted, color with eyes wide open) While keeping the excitement of the gesture, students learn to perceive the figure in the abstract simplicity of light and dark shapes. This “blocking in” is rapid, dealing with the “whole,” not details. This stage has two values, light and shadow, in addition to the middle value of the ground, and is visually three-dimensional. The artist makes several “passes” on the paper, making the shapes more accurate but not getting tight. Recognizable features emerge from the development of the abstract shapes.

We now move our focus from the abstract and non-objective to creating the figurative. We attend to planes and values. As the drawing builds, our shapes, lines and values become more accurate and refined. In sum, developing sensitivity to the dark lights and light darks and the complexities of value shifts allows for refinement of the gesture and a more compelling expression of its energy.

Students will be introduced to the management and handling of paint using *open grisaille*: a brown paint traditionally used for drawing an under painting, which is the first stage of any painting. Open grisaille is a monochromatic technique used to study and capture shapes and shadows. We are focused on half the value scale, building volume as we lay in the darks and shadows by wiping out the lights. (The canvas tone functions as the brightest value.) Open grisaille work is an exercise that helps students convey more fully the energy of the figure whilst introducing paint handling.

Students will begin their work with open grisaille using very short gestural poses, similar to the first semester’s introduction of charcoal. The exercise should be repeated until the process becomes part of the student’s artistic nature.

Along with open grisailles using short poses, students will have the opportunity to extend their work through a semester-long drawing of a cast. Drawing casts is an extension of value studies, and will assist students in acquiring patience while mastering the more complex tonal work that is to come.

Here again the aim is to establish a strong foundation on which to build complexity. Students must resist the urge to refine the cast without first grasping its foundation. Students must see the larger shapes. They must repeatedly look from the subject to the canvas to assess how well they have recorded the shapes in their darks and shadows.

Still life drawing in charcoal will continue, offering the student another opportunity to develop more complex skills. These drawings form a solid base for future work in color.

Students will be introduced to basic studies in anatomy. Anatomy instruction will be gradual, corresponding to the level of sophistication of drawing the figure.

This Second stage will also include an *Introduction to Color*. Using simple still life setups beginning with boxes, the students will learn to see and relate basic color relationships under artificial light. Students learn about color relationships by seeing each color in relation to the colors surrounding it. They learn to “paint the effect of light” by understanding that colors are

affected by the nature of the light source. Students are introduced to Nelson Shanks' full color palette and learn to make strong color statements in order to see and understand the color. The students learn to mix and adjust colors directly on the canvas with full immersion in the dynamics of color coming later in level II

## LEVEL TWO: FIRST STAGE

To aid students in mastering the nuances of light and shadow, further studies in anatomy are offered along with lectures in art history. Studio Incamminati insists that students that knowledge of art history and knowledge of the human figure are important elements in the development of the artist, properly understood.

The final stage of *Charcoal Drawing* occurs during this stage. Students will aim to build upon the drawing exercises of Level 1. Students will learn the basic principles involved in developing drawings further toward completion. Important practices of accuracy of proportion, value systems/ value relationships, edge development, the concept of big to small or simple to complex, the concept of building everything upon relationships, understanding the building of structure and form, and knowing when a work is completed.

Students will continue to use the *Open Grisaille* method to continue their learning of construction drawing with the figure, just as they have done in charcoal. At this stage, the student will continue strengthening and building on the foundation of the figure begun in level I. Also the students will study the form of the figure through gesture, relating angles, anatomical landmarks, and shapes of light and shadow. They will then progress into the study of the figure in its environment, focusing on values as the semester progressing while developing proficiency in paint handling.

In addition, as part of this first stage, students are introduced to *Cast Painting*. The goal is to paint a cast that literally seems to emerge from the surface of the painting, to push you to see and paint as clearly and accurately as possible. Studying from a cast gives the student consistency in lighting and poses allowing you to check and double check your accuracy over time. The principles that are studied here can be directly applied to figure and still life paintings. The concepts of gesture and proportion are of primary importance at this stage. This is not a value drawing but a line drawing with accurate shadows.

The cast painting will be a strict Black and White painting with NO color variations. Principles of form and accurate relative values will be stressed. Paint handling is very important at this stage and paint should be laid in thinly and controlled at first.

At this juncture it should be clear how the Studio Incamminati experience helps students build sophistication of their work. From charcoal abstractions of angles and straight lines through sophisticated renditions of light and shadow, replete with sensitivities to edges and textures, students learn the essential competencies for mastery of painting itself. Without these competencies, students will find impossible the handling of color.

The study of color continues at the beginning of the second level. How best to acquire the observational skills to see these color complexities? They approach color directly and

broadly, eschewing the micromanagement of the color relationships, a directive that runs throughout Studio Incamminati's curriculum. At Studio Incamminati students learn color by learning to see it in the strongest mode possible. By this we mean that students see color – now with eyes wide open – in its simplicity, and they learn how to heighten or exaggerate the colors they represent on canvas. These colors apply to subjects in warm **artificial light**. As with the previous phases, students start with simplicity and build towards refinement. To this end, students first work with artificial light on bold colors. Artificial light on bold colors allows students to better see and appreciate color and the impact of color relationships. Committing the same kind of energy to color as light and shadow, students do hundreds of short color studies of simple objects in strong light. Students learn to appreciate the relationships between large masses of color, taking advantage of the sharp distinctions created by artificial light.

To accommodate the full palette of colors, students must understand color as a series of relationships. Light affects color and colors affect each other. Artificial light will affect color differently than natural light and the affects of natural light constantly change with the time of day and seasons. Similarly, studio conditions will affect colors very differently than if one were painting Plein air.

## LEVEL TWO: SECOND STAGE

This level of Studio Incamminati's curriculum is committed to the transition from *Open Grisaille* to an introduction of full tonal and value spectrum through a practice we have come to call *Closed Grisaille*. The palette widens to incorporate cool and warm hues, keeping in mind the full tonal range. Students gain sensitivity to subtle changes in value. Edges in their complexities are explored and rhythmically integrated. Students practice how to effectively feather and blend the light darks and dark lights and to articulate hard edges from soft edges. Textures are likewise explored as students learn how to build certain areas while keeping others thin. Brushwork, while remaining fluid, becomes more subtle in its recording of light and shadow, of the textures of thick's and thins.

Also at this stage, students will be exposed to *Figure Drawing in Graphite*. The objective is to push drawing skills, to increase ability to see the relative values within the figure and to learn to 'plan ahead' with specific goals to accomplish at different times. Students will address the principles that are essential to transform abstract flat shapes into fully dimensional form and create a sense of light on the figure. The student will focus on drawing the figure with a full range of values and develop the ability to make accurate relative value calibrations. The focus will be on structure, anatomy, proportion, light direction, edges, abstract linear movements through the figure, composition and an understanding of the basic forms.

From color studies of simple objects, students move to more sophisticated compositions and are introduced to color studies of the human figure. Students come to appreciate the relationships between colors under different light conditions. They assess whether colors are warm or cool, dark or light, intense or moderate. They become sensitive to the color complexities of the human figure as it is juxtaposed to other color masses and subject to different light conditions. Further studies in anatomy as well as a workshop in Ecorché or

Anatomy Studies augment students' sophistication in the human figure. And as is now firmly established, students are forever on the move, testing their observational powers by stepping out from behind the easel, examining and re-examining the color relationships before committing them to canvas.

### LEVEL THREE: FIRST STAGE

Closed Grisailles become more complex, with poses building up to 8 days. Walking through the stages of a painting with prior compositional studies and applying thought before paint becomes the focus of the third level now that students have demonstrated competency in drawing and tonal painting and have acquired a firm foundation in color study. Learning to relate the figure to its background and composition of multiple elements are additional concepts to conquer. The purpose is for students to begin learning how to build paintings with the figure as the subject. Students will explore in painting how to 'marry' their skills with drawing and their skills with color. There are many different variations on how to do this, and students will begin this exploration with the guidance of two teachers who will be working together, teaching on different days. The result of this will be a better understanding of the different skills that go into a painting and the process a painting must go through in order to develop toward completion. Poses will get longer over the semester and range from 3 hours to 2 weeks (4 days) to 4 weeks (8 days) or longer. At times students will be instructed to do charcoal drawings and color studies before a final painting.

The curricular focus now moves to the greater sophistication of form through the handling of paint, a stage we refer to as Color Studies III. Students are exposed to a variety of approaches as they continue to sophisticate their own aesthetic sense. Color studies of the human figure are augmented by color studies of still life. The two exercises will overlap as students explore their aesthetic sensibilities. The student will be expected to see and paint color differences, experimenting with various still-life and figure poses in natural light. The alla prima technique of completing one color study after another, building on each prior exercise will help to improve the student's experience and strength to see color in natural light. Still-life will be used the first half of the semester, and models will be used the last half. The still-life studies will directly feed into the figure studies, so that the students can see the differences and similarities of color in both disciplines. Classes will start out with short studies, developing color in light and shadow areas. The purpose of the shorter studies will be to acclimate the student to the natural light, further advancing their skills of seeing color, and gradually extending the length of the studies into longer, more advanced studies.

Anatomy and art history instruction continue apace, and affiliated faculty augment students' understanding of the ways by which the figure can be captured in all its poetry.

Third level students will mentor with an instructor, one day a week in a private studio. This is a privilege for the 3<sup>rd</sup> year student and an opportunity for the advanced fellow to mentor a student (an important part of the Incamminati program). The semesters will include 7/6/6 week cycles so the 3<sup>rd</sup> year student rotates to the next private studio and is under the supervision of the next fellow. The objective is to practice thru repetition the completion of a

small painting over and over during the 7/6/6 week period. This takes them beyond the color study phase.

The goals of the mentorship program are twofold: One is to direct the student to learn how to take control doing a finished work. The mantra is Keep It Simple, this will give the student the opportunity to learn how to manipulate the paint and transition from one color to another and creates a completed painting with understanding and control.

The students will build the painting, starting with a grisaille where they are pleased with the proportions and basic drawing at the grisaille stage. Basically, they are learning how each stage is the stepping stone for the subsequent layer. Secondly the teacher will direct the student towards a more professional mental frame of mind. The teacher will offer assistance when needed over the 6/7 days. The benefit is that the student is observed while the fellow is doing their own work and when the student is stuck or 'off track' or simply lost, they have someone paying close attention that is readily available to help them. Studies will eventually develop into 1 or more finished paintings and the student must begin to think about the exhibition side of being an artist. This does not preclude a lifetime of continued study. It simply helps one to start thinking about developing towards a professional career. It will offer an opportunity for the student and teacher to discuss ideas on a one-on-one basis. It is the hope that not only the student, but also the mentor will learn from this process which is the very core of the Incamminati idea that you grow as an artist thru teaching. The process of teaching this will help one to think about ones own professional direction. At the end of the cycle period the mentors and the mentored will meet to discuss and review the process of completing the artwork produced by the mentored students in the form of a group critique.

Students will also benefit from lectures in pedagogy (as teaching is essential to Studio Incamminati's mission), student-artists must appreciate the teaching role both as a means to firmly establish their own understanding of fundamentals to advance their own art and promulgate the important movement in humanist realism. At this stage students are invited to apply for entry into the Teaching Track or Students Teacher program. Students who find themselves in this program are asked to assist incoming students (level I) in the use of charcoal and capturing gesture, becoming in effect mentors to students working at the earlier levels. The Program inaugurated in the fall of 2007, allows eligible full time level III students to apply for a Student Teacher position at Studio Incamminati. This year long program will provide the applicant with the necessary and appropriate resources and training to be eligible, upon completion of the program and subsequent review process to have a teaching role in Studio Incamminati programs. Similar to the Mentorship program, there will be a 6/7 week cycle session allowing student teachers to work with more than one instructor. Also a group lunchtime discussion, twice a month would be held; including participants; Jay, Andy and the Instructors to review the student teacher program.

### **LEVEL THREE: SECOND STAGE**

At this stage, level III students focus on personal development. Poses now range from 3 hours to their maximum curricular length of 60 hours. This provides students the opportunity to address their individual needs while fully exploring the stages necessary to develop a full painting. Students begin each work with both a preparatory compositional sketch and basic color study. The end goal of the semester is to apply all skills developed up to this point; drawing, painting, composition and color awareness into one cohesive process resulting in a

fully realized painting. This will lead the level III student to a path of self discovery and self reliance and give them the necessary tools that will assist them as they continue with their level IV studies. The current Mentorship program and Teaching Track/Student Teacher program will continue also at this stage.

In addition, students will begin to plan their Level IV schedule with advisement from their chosen mentors who will coordinate with them a personal career development plan to address the next phase of their work. This review process with their mentors should include a portfolio review of the student's current work, input from all Instructors on the student's progress pertinent to the current level III second semester and input from the student as well.

#### **LEVEL FOUR: FIRST AND SECOND STAGES**

Admission to level four is contingent upon explicit sanction by the artistic director. Level four students have demonstrated mastery of the skills sets defining levels one through three and have demonstrated willingness to contribute to the broader program and its mission by serving as mentors, volunteering for special events, and so forth. At this level, students continue to receive guidance with less formalized class instruction while focusing on creativity in concept and composition. The objective is to synthesize the skills mastered in levels one through three with the goal of producing work as independent artists. Advanced and intensive studies of the human figure and independent work on still life are part of the level four curriculum.

Students are mentored by advisors of their choosing. Advisors critique student work and consult on all matters pertaining to the creative process, including review of student portfolios. Students have the opportunity to further hone their skills by taking classes at levels one, two or three, provided space is available. Students may hire their own models for use in semi-private designed spaces. Lectures and seminar programs designed to facilitate artistic achievement and career development continue. Students also have the opportunity to participate in advanced level programs (i.e. evening seminars taught by the artistic director or guest instructor workshops on advanced topics).

Level four students are expected to maintain commitment to the teaching mission of Studio Incamminati, spending two to three hours per week assisting beginning students. Students also have the opportunity to participate in the portfolio program, assist in workshops as well as outreach programs.

#### **FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM**

Level five students are Studio Incamminati Fellows, the most advanced artists who constitute the leadership of the school. Fellows have the opportunity to teach the formal curriculum. Fellows interested in teaching must fill out the application form attached to this document. Teaching Fellows convey Studio Incamminati's principles, assess the work of students, and evaluate portfolios of incoming students as part of the admissions process. Instructors meet biweekly to discuss matters relative to teaching and curriculum.

Fellows may also elect to simply paint in spaces shared with other Fellows. They need not assume the role of teacher, although Studio Incamminati is committed to instruction as part of the learning process. But we acknowledge the need from time to time for sabbaticals.

Level five artists (as all other artists at Studio Incamminati) have 24 hour access to studio space and receive assistance in the marketing of their work, which includes participation in donor events and help in forming relationships with galleries. Level five fellows are also granted stipends for photographing and proper framing of their work

As even the most accomplished artists remain students, fellowships exist in perpetuity, a kind of stage from which one does not “graduate.” Above all, level five artists, no matter where their careers take them, will always have a relationship with Studio Incamminati. Studio Incamminati is not just a school but a movement. Those who train at Studio Incamminati will therefore carry with them the artistic principles the school espouses and in their own ways seek to promulgate these principles to ever-broader audiences.

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### ON COMPOSITION . . .

Composition is critically important element running throughout the curriculum of Studio Incamminati. Initially, artists studying at Studio Incamminati will face the foundation questions of composition, which are placement and proportion: will the figure or object fit on the page? Is the size chosen by the artist pleasing in proportion to the surface? What kind of power does a given placement and proportion convey? These exercises require students to grapple with the essential considerations of whether a composition works element by element.

As the artist develops skill in handling materials and depicting light and shadow, form and shape, composition questions become more complex and sophisticated. An artist becomes a master when she or he can make conscious decisions about composing subject matter in a meaningful way and can deal with both the technical and artistic challenges of those decisions.

### ON SETTING POSES . . .

Incamminati Instructors work with the monitors to set poses for students from levels 1- 3. As students advance through the curriculum they will take note of the Instructor’s decision making in setting a specific pose. Students will learn how to deal with the considerations of setting up a pose that works for as many as thirteen vantage points; what poses a model can hold for varying lengths of poses; marking and re-setting the model in the pose after breaks; creating ideal light conditions; dealing with feedback from other artists; and matching poses to instructional issues, such as what poses are more appropriate for anatomy or for color exercises. In due course, and in conjunction with Incamminati Instructors, students will set their own poses, articulating their rationale in doing so. This is an essential and sensitive concern for every figure painter and an important skill to develop.

## ON THE LENGTH OF POSES . . .

Incamminati Instructors set the length of poses; their duration will vary considerably. As noted above, some poses during Phase One of the curriculum will last but one minute. As students advance, however, the length of poses will increase. Incamminati Instructors will determine when students are ready to move to more committed compositions. The same holds for still life compositions. A very limited number of spaces for extended still life are currently available for artists to pursue longer still life work. There is no hard and fast guideline as to when an artist may expect to be offered the time and space for this opportunity, as artists bring different backgrounds to the Studio and space availability will continue to change as the studio programs grow. Studio space rotates among artists and length of time that space is available will vary.

## On Teaching Down.....

Studio Incamminati is a community of artists where individuals encourage each other as they progress through the curriculum. Our teaching down practice is but one facet of this encouragement. As students progress through the curriculum they are expected to assist newly arrived artists who are working to master more foundational skills. Students in level two, for example, can lend a helping hand to level one students as they work to master the human figure in its simplicity; level three students work with level two students as they master Closed Grisaille, and so it goes through the curriculum. This practice prepares students to assume greater teaching responsibilities in the future, and it helps create a sense of camaraderie on the studio floor.

## ON EXHIBITIONS . . .

Studio Incamminati sponsors at least one exhibition throughout the academic year and will also work in conjunction with other organizations for additional exhibitions. Participation in these shows is contingent on a review process involving the Artistic Director, Nelson Shanks and Level Five Instructors. (Please note that no work is exhibited without this review process)

The annual fall exhibition profiles the work of students in level II and up. As part of these events, students will receive instruction as to the elements involved in putting together a successful exhibition. Among these are promotion, staging, framing, funding, sales and building relationships with supporters.