

*STUDIO INCAMMINATI*  
*CURRICULUM*  
*REVISED SEPTEMBER 2010*

**MISSION STATEMENT**

Studio Incamminati exists to meet the express 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 master the practices needed to develop rewarding careers and lives in the arts.

The curriculum reflects Studio 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 concentrates on both the human form and the human soul, producing in the process art that informs, fulfills and nourishes society. 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 Studio Incamminati unveils the human condition in its complexity, reveals the human soul, and something profound about us and the world we live in. Studio Incamminati strives to create richly meaningful art that will inspire generations to come.

The broad aim of the curriculum is foundational based on the belief that mastery of technique is prelude for creative expression. Mastery of foundational skills 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 is dynamic, using the paragons of the past to bring enlightened meaning to the present.

The curriculum consists of four successive levels (approximate years), 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 semester's close. Augmenting Studio Incamminati's teaching staff is a host of visiting art faculty as well as lecturers in art history and anatomy, all committed to maximizing student potential. Visiting faculty brings fresh perspective to our most pressing issues and lecturers in anatomy and art history are essential for rounding out the artistic experience.

Studio 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 Studio Incamminati curriculum, and there is no *single way* to master the basic concepts. Approaches will vary to maintain individuality; but we all remain committed to the basic concepts.

### LEVEL ONE: FIRST STAGE

All Studio 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. 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 are longer. 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 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 before the next level.

Students step back frequently to assess how well they understand 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 helps students improve hand/eye coordination and shape observational powers. Development of hand/eye coordination and observational skill mark all phases of the curriculum at Studio Incamminati.

Students 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, before moving onto oil paint. Students will learn about value fields along with the flow of light across the entire subject.

### 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 the focus from the abstract and non-objective to creating the figurative. We attend to planes and values. As the drawing builds, 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 are 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 while introducing paint handling.

Students 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 assists students in acquiring patience while mastering the more complex tonal work to come.

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 continues, offering the student another opportunity to develop more complex skills. These drawings form a solid base for future work in color.

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

This second stage includes an *Introduction to Color*. Using simple still life setups beginning with boxes, the students 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 Two

## 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 knowledge of art history and knowledge of the human figure are important elements in the development of the artist.

The final stage of *Charcoal Drawing* occurs during this stage. Students aim to build upon the drawing exercises of Level One. Students will learn the basic principles involved in developing drawings 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 learning 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 one. Also the students will study the form of the figure through gesture, relating angles, anatomical landmarks, and shapes of light and shadow. They then progress into the study of the figure in its environment, focusing on values 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 seems to emerge from the surface of the painting. Studying from a cast gives the student consistency in lighting and poses allowing checks and double checks for accuracy over time. The principles 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 is a strict black and white painting with NO color variations. Principles of form and accurate relative values are stressed. Paint handling is very important at this stage and paint should be laid in thinly and controlled.

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, with sensitivities to edges and textures, students learn the essential competencies for mastery of painting itself. Without these competencies, students find the handling of color impossible.

The study of color continues at the beginning of the second level. How best to acquire the observational skills to see these color complexities? Students 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 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 affects color differently than natural light and the effects of natural light constantly change with the time of day and seasons. Similarly, studio conditions will affect colors very differently than 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 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 to build certain areas while keeping others thin. Brushwork, while remaining fluid, becomes more subtle in recording light and shadow, and the textures of thick and thin.

Also at this stage, students are 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 address the principles essential to transform abstract flat shapes into fully dimensional form and create a sense of light on the figure. The students focus on drawing the figure with a full range of values and develop the ability to make accurate relative value calibrations. The focus is 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. Students are 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 eight days. Walking through the stages of a painting with prior compositional studies and applying thought before paint becomes the focus of the third level. By now, 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 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 is a better understanding of the different skills that go into a painting and the process a painting must go through. Poses get longer over the semester and range from three hours to two weeks (four days) to four weeks (eight days) or longer. At times students are 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 called *Color Studies III*. Students are exposed to a variety of approaches as they continue to refine their own aesthetic sense. Color studies of the human figure are augmented by color studies of still life. The two exercises overlap as students explore their aesthetic sensibilities. The student is 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 exercise helps 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 are used the last half. The still-life studies directly feed into the figure studies, so students can see the differences and similarities of color in both disciplines. Classes start with short studies, developing color in light and shadow areas. The purpose of the shorter studies is 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 which the figure can be captured in all its poetry.

Level Three students are mentored by an instructor, one day a week in his or her private studio. The semesters include a seven-week mentorship cycle which enables the student to rotate among several instructor studios during the school year. The objective is to practice through the completion of a small painting over and over during the seven-week cycle period.

The goal of the mentorship program is to teach the student how to take control of the painting process; putting together all of the tools and knowledge learned up to this point in order to complete a finished painting. The mantra is “Keep It Simple” in composition and canvas size. This gives the student the opportunity to learn to manipulate the paint and transition from one color to another and create a completed painting with understanding and control. The students will build the painting, starting with a grisaille where they are pleased with the proportions. They learn how each stage is the stepping stone for the subsequent layer. The benefit is that the student is observed while the instructor is doing his or her own work. When the student is stuck or ‘off track’ or simply lost, they have someone that is readily available to help them.

Studies will eventually develop into finished paintings for possible exhibition. Toward the end of the cycle period, mentors and students meet to discuss the process of completing the artwork produced in the program in a group critique.

Students also benefit from lectures in pedagogy as teaching is essential to Studio Incamminati's mission, students must appreciate the teaching role both as a means to firmly establish their own understanding of fundamentals to advance their own art and to promulgate the important movement in humanist realism.

At this stage, students may apply for entry into the Teaching Assistant Program. This two-year program provides the applicant with the necessary resources and training to be eligible, upon completion of the program and subsequent review process, for a teaching role in selected Studio Incamminati programs.

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

At this stage, Level Three students focus on longer model poses. The poses now range from three hours to their maximum curricular length of 60 hours. This provides students the opportunity to address 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 goal of the semester is to apply all skills developed to this point: drawing, painting, composition and color awareness, into one cohesive process resulting in a fully realized painting. This leads the Level Three students to a path of self discovery and self reliance and gives them the necessary tools to assist them as they continue with their studies. The Mentorship Program and optional Teaching Assistant Program will also continue during this stage.

Students begin to plan their Level Four schedule with advisement from their newly chosen mentors who will coordinate a development plan to address the next phase of their work. This development plan includes a portfolio review of the student's work by the Artistic Director, the instructors, with input from the student.

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

Admission to level four is contingent upon approval by the Artistic Director. Level Four students have demonstrated mastery of the skill 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 formal 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 studies, referred to as Independent Visual Thesis, focuses on developing a personal proposal built upon a theme for a series of paintings either in figure or still life. Level Four students are expected to develop a body of work of 10-20 paintings created in class for Studio Incamminati exhibitions.

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 any level 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 such as evening seminars taught by the artistic director or guest instructor workshops on advanced topics.

### TEACHING FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM (OPTIONAL)

The Fellows program exists to provide Studio Incamminati artists at an advanced level the opportunity to continue a direct relationship with the Studio that is mutually beneficial. Teaching Fellows (instructors with on-site studios) provide the leadership and training of Studio Incamminati artists in a nurturing environment while continuing to work on achieving their own goals as professional artists. In exchange for providing that environment, Fellows are supported through studio space, pay for teaching classes, and other benefits as listed below. This is a one-year program with an option to reapply each year.

The Teaching Fellows Program has the following objectives:

- To support advanced-level artists through teaching and other opportunities
- To allow advanced level artists to continue developing their artistic and professional goals while promulgating the principles learned to an audience of artists and the general public
- To help advanced level artists prepare the next generation of artists through teaching and mentoring in a nurturing environment
- To create an environment where advanced level artists can continue to grow and learn from each other as part of a “community of artists”
- To provide a way for Studio Incamminati to retain the highest quality artists whose goals most closely match our needs

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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 One-Three. As students advance through the curriculum they 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 13 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
- 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 instructors, students 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 . . .

Studio Incamminati Instructors set the length of poses and their duration varies considerably. As noted previously, some poses during the early part of the curriculum last one minute. As students advance, however, the length of poses will increase. Instructors determine when students are ready to move to more committed compositions. The same principle 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 is offered the time and space for this opportunity, as artists bring different backgrounds to the studio and space availability changes as the studio programs grow. Studio space rotates among artists and length of time that space is available will vary.

### ON THE LEARNING CULTURE . . .

Studio Incamminati is a community of artists where individuals encourage each other as they steadily progress through the curriculum. Students are taught in a non-competitive, nurturing environment. This approach prepares students to assume greater responsibilities in the future, and creates a sense of camaraderie on the studio floor. This collegial atmosphere inspires visual learning among the students as each displays his or her artwork (approved by the instructors) on designated wall space. This experience is enhanced weekly as students have the opportunity to visit on-site instructors' studios and discuss and review artwork.

## ON EXHIBITIONS . . .

Studio Incamminati sponsors at least two exhibition events throughout the academic year and also works 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 the Fellows/ Instructors. Note that no work is exhibited without this review process.

The annual end-of-year *Artists of Studio Incamminati* exhibition profiles the work of students in Level Two and up. As part of these events, students receive instruction on the elements involved in putting together a successful exhibition. Among these are promotion, staging, framing, funding, sales and building relationships with supporters.