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A Brief Discussion on the Teaching of Art Theory and Basic Modeling in the Digital Media Art Major

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Abstract: *The Digital Media Arts major is an emerging interdisciplinary field characterized by a broad scope that integrates technology as its core with art as a complementary component. To cultivate high-quality professionals with strong humanistic qualities, artistic literacy, and aesthetic capabilities—who can adapt to the developments of the digital era and information society while possessing broad perspectives and excellent communication skills—it is essential to develop students' foundational skills in drawing, including modeling, structural proportions, perspective, and the relationships between light and shadow, as well as basic color theory.*

Keywords: *Digital Media Arts Major; Digital Drawing; Digital Color; Art Theory*

1. Talent Cultivation Goals for the Digital Media Arts Major

The Digital Media Arts major is an emerging interdisciplinary field characterized by a broad scope, integrating technology as the primary focus with art as a complementary component. Students are expected to master the theories and skills related to the development of digital media, including digital audio, digital video, digital film and television, computer animation, and digital games. They should possess strong artistic literacy and foundational knowledge in digital media technology, enabling them to apply the acquired knowledge and skills to complete digital art creations. The core courses of this major include Basic Artistic Modeling, History of Chinese and Foreign Art, Design Aesthetics, Introduction to Art Design, Introduction to Digital Media, Videography Techniques, Introduction to Broadcasting and Television, TV Lighting, Digital Film and Television Effects, Screenwriting and Directing, Animation Planning and Screenwriting, Principles of Animation Motion, 3D Modeling and Rendering, 3D Effects and Animation Production, Online Game Design and Creation, and Multimedia Information Processing and Communication[1].

The program trains students with firm ideals and beliefs, well-rounded development in moral, intellectual, physical, aesthetic, and labor aspects, a solid cultural foundation, professional ethics, and innovative awareness. It also fosters a spirit of craftsmanship, strong employability, and sustainable development abilities. Students will master the basic knowledge and skills in the professional field, aiming for software and information technology services, digital creative industries (including strategic emerging industries, broadcasting, television, film and recording production, cultural and artistic industries, internet and related services, architectural decoration and renovation, landscaping engineering, business services, news and publishing industries), and will be trained as computer software technology engineers, virtual reality engineers, technical editors, animators, film and animation producers, other art professionals, multimedia content creators, digital media artists, film and television photographers, digital video compositors, editors, digital video (DV) planners, new media operations specialists, converged media editors, data analysts, short video producers, user operation specialists, interior designers, landscaping engineering technicians, advertising designers, full-media operators, visual communication designers, and other related professionals[2]. Graduates will be equipped to engage in work such as virtual reality technology art, virtual reality interaction design, virtual reality application development, UI design, web front-end development, animation production, digital media interaction design, next-generation game art, digital modeling, film and television animation, game special effects production, 3D scene design, film post-production, photography, videography, video editing, film direction, screenwriting, content planning, user operations, data analysis, content editing, video production, new media operations, interior design, landscape design, visual effect rendering, custom home design, advertising design and production, brand visual design, digital media art design, and more. These graduates will meet the needs of industrial transformation and upgrading, as well as corporate

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technological innovation, by becoming high-quality, development-oriented, interdisciplinary, and innovative technical professionals.

2. Issues in Art Theory and Basic Modeling Education

Promoting aesthetic education, improving students' aesthetic abilities, cultivating their innovative thinking, and fostering comprehensive development in moral, intellectual, physical, aesthetic, and labor aspects all require students to simultaneously engage in art theory learning and foundational modeling training. The combination of visual and manual skills is essential for discovering, perceiving, analyzing, researching, exploring, practicing, and sharing beauty. However, in higher education, art programs often allocate relatively few hours to art theory courses, leading to superficial exposure and insufficient depth in students' understanding and thinking. Additionally, foundational modeling courses are often poorly connected to subsequent specialized courses, resulting in students' practice being imprecise, learning insufficient, and artworks subpar. Issues such as "exam-oriented thinking," "technical overemphasis with little critical thinking," or "more talk than practice" are prevalent in foundational modeling education. The short-term, intensive art education in high schools leaves students with various modeling issues that are not adequately addressed, only for them to repeat the same teaching models of geometry, still life, plaster, and live modeling without improvement. Excessive focus on technical skill training without timely updates and improvements to modeling materials and tools, such as the use of computer imaging software for more efficient artwork completion, further exacerbates the problem. Often, students in foundational modeling courses outperform teachers in terms of drawing skill, while instructors, having limited exposure to the later stages of students' creative work, risk creating a disconnect between the courses[3].

Art theory teaching often suffers from "rote learning," "superficial discussions," or the attitude of "no exams, no learning." In the classroom, the mode of teaching is often restricted to textbook lectures and PowerPoint presentations, which fail to adapt to the multidimensional changes of the times. Teachers themselves may lack sufficient artistic cultivation and judgment, with inadequate recognition of the need for lifelong learning. This results in mechanical teaching, where the same content is repeated without reflection or improvement. Moreover, art students are frequently burdened with heavy workloads and struggle to complete assignments, leaving no time for deep reflection, let alone fostering interest or accumulation of knowledge. As a result, students may reach a point where they only focus when the teacher highlights exam points, and their attention shifts only when exams approach, leaving little room for genuine intellectual engagement[4].

3. Teaching Goals and Challenges in Digital Sketching

To cultivate high-quality professionals with strong humanistic qualities, artistic literacy, and aesthetic capabilities—adaptable to the digital era and information society, with a broad vision and excellent communication skills—it is essential to train students in the fundamentals of art, including modeling, structural proportions, perspective, and light-shadow relationships. Students should also become proficient in using sketching and quick-drawing techniques to create digital artworks, develop artistic thinking, collect, organize, and restructure materials, and enhance foundational modeling capabilities, artistic expression, aesthetic transformation skills, and teamwork[5].

The Digital Sketching course is a foundational professional course offered in the first semester for all directions under the Digital Media Arts major. It serves as a prerequisite for all subsequent professional courses in the major.

Knowledge Structure:

1) Master artistic modeling techniques, including perspective, composition, human body proportions, muscle and skeletal landmarks, and the relationships within a composition.

2) Understand the national educational policies and guidelines relevant to the digital media field.

3) Familiarize with the historical development and forefront trends of the professional field, as well as industry employment dynamics.

Skill Structure:

1) Grasp the basic creative processes and standard requirements of the digital media arts field, including proficiency in digital drawing software and tablet tools.

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2) Focus on mastering accurate perspective techniques and composition methods, such as for indoor and outdoor scenes, building exteriors, and natural landscapes.

3) Independently or collaboratively complete CG artworks, meeting character modeling requirements with accurate proportions, muscle, and skeletal features.

Teaching Challenges:

For instructors, it is crucial to possess solid and proficient sketching demonstration skills, clear and logical teaching abilities, experience in teaching follow-up courses, familiarity with graduation design processes, and awareness of industry employment trends. For students, foundational skills in artistic modeling are required, along with a significant amount of extracurricular time for in-depth and repeated modeling practice, and comprehensive study of art history and theory[6].

4. A Brief Discussion on Teaching Methods for Digital Sketching

Taking the conventional 16-week teaching schedule for character modeling in sketching as an example:

Weeks 1–5: Introduction to basic sketching theory and digital drawing board essentials, including necessary tools and precautions for practice. Topics include perspective, composition, structural sketching (geometric plaster models), emphasizing the structural forms of objects; light-shadow sketching with still life, focusing on spatial effects; texture sketching using objects with varying characteristics as subjects; and combination sketching with daily objects, emphasizing composition methods to move beyond simple combinations. Teachers should utilize software and tablet tools to assist in subsequent instruction.

Weeks 6–12: Sketching of human skulls, analyzing the relationship between skeletal structures; transitioning to head portraits, emphasizing the connection between muscles and bones; and figure sketching using live models or photo references to address proportion and muscle structure issues. Teaching during this phase should be adjusted to accommodate students' current skill levels. Students may choose between traditional easel sketching or digital sketching as tools.

Weeks 13–16: Following an assessment of the students' learning progress in the earlier phases, integrate elements of later courses by "bridging the past and future." Students are guided through creative design processes and standards, employing flipped classroom techniques to allow them to take the lead. Students independently select themes and materials for their sketching creations. Activities such as "teaching through competitions" prepare students for upcoming professional competitions or exhibitions, involving them in analyzing exhibition standards and sharing past student works. This approach ensures that students go beyond traditional technical training to test teaching outcomes through practical applications.

5. Teaching Goals and Challenges in Digital Color

Digital Color is a foundational subject offered in the second semester of the Digital Media Arts major. It serves as a prerequisite for all subsequent specialized courses in the program. Preceding courses include sketching, quick-drawing, and art history, while follow-up courses cover topics such as Introduction to Digital Media, Animation Planning and Screenwriting, Principles of Animation Motion, and 3D Modeling and Rendering.

Knowledge Structure:

1) Apply artistic modeling techniques learned in earlier sketching courses, reinforcing knowledge of perspective, composition, human proportions, muscles and skeletal landmarks, and composition relationships.

2) Understand professional competitions relevant to the digital media field.

3) Stay updated on the latest trends in the industry and appreciate outstanding works of color.

Skill Structure:

1) Practice professional creative design processes related to the digital media arts field, and become proficient in using multiple digital painting software tools.

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2) Understand the three elements of color (hue, value, and saturation) and the basic factors of color (light source color, inherent color, and environmental color).

3) Focus on the contrasts in color perception, such as warmth and coolness, lightness and heaviness, softness and hardness, size, vibrancy, and excitement versus calmness.

4) Apply principles of color matching, including cold colors, neutral colors, warm colors, pure colors, and patterns.

5) Express the characteristics of various colors. For example, red has the lowest frequency and strong diffraction, often evoking warmth, excitement, and happiness. In contrast, blue, a typical cool color, symbolizes calmness, rationality, and depth.

Teaching Challenges:

The challenges in teaching this course rely on foundational skills from earlier sketching and quick-drawing classes, as well as proficiency with software tools. For instructors, it is essential to possess strong sketching and quick-drawing skills, alongside the ability to teach foundational color theory, demonstrate techniques in class, and explain software operation processes. From the students' perspective, substantial time outside of class is required for color modeling practice, reviewing key points, and enhancing software proficiency.

6. A Brief Discussion on Teaching Methods for Digital Color

Taking a 16-week teaching schedule as an example:

Weeks 1–5: Introduce basic color theory and artistic characteristics, covering necessary tools and precautions for practice, as well as topics such as color perception, color psychology, principles of color matching, and color characteristics. Practice with geometric plaster models and still life to help students explore the richness of color through fundamental modeling. Students should aim to depict lively colors based on accurate object modeling, combining a variety of still life subjects with different shapes and textures. This helps students understand the principles of color modeling and the relationship between color and form.

Weeks 6–12: Focus on color landscapes and human modeling. Conduct outdoor or on-campus landscape sketching, and use photos or live models for figure studies. Emphasize the subject's shape characteristics while applying color theories introduced in earlier weeks. Students can adjust their learning priorities based on their focus on landscapes or figures.

Weeks 13–16: Engage in comprehensive color creations, guiding students to express their understanding of objects through color works. Emphasize the completeness and diversity of creative works. Summarize the creative processes for landscapes and figures and provide evaluations of student assignments.

Three Approaches to Digital Color Teaching:

1) Refine the aesthetic education elements embedded in digital color teaching, encouraging students to integrate learning with daily life. For example, apply principles of color matching to everyday clothing choices.

2) Strengthen students' understanding and application of excellent traditional Chinese culture in comprehensive color creations. For instance, during the later stages of the course, students can design artistic images of the twelve Chinese zodiac animals, create flat designs, and participate in various art and design exhibitions or competitions.

3) Foster cultural confidence by telling Chinese stories. During the middle stages of the course, the figure study segment can focus on pioneering figures from various industries, combining modeling training with moral education. For color landscape studies, emphasize rural and village scenes from poverty alleviation projects. This helps students understand China's national conditions and the latest policy directions, contributing to the development of their worldview, values, and life outlook.

7. Improvement of Art Theory and Basic Modeling Education

The school should innovatively build a curriculum system consisting of "foundation platform + core modules + expansion modules" for the program, ensuring that the knowledge and skills acquired by

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students are seamlessly connected with the industry. The implementation of the "Excellence in Technical Skills Talent Training Program" and the "Craftsman's Workshop Support Program" aims to meet the diversified individual development needs of students. The focus should be on cultivating top talents in the advertising industry who possess high comprehensive quality, excellent professional skills, as well as innovative and craftsmanship spirit. For example, students should be encouraged to participate in national competitions such as the National College Students Advertising Art Competition, the National University Digital Art Design Competition, Milan Design Week, China Good Ideas and the National Digital Art Design Competition, as well as provincial and national vocational college skills competitions. Meanwhile, the parallel implementation of the "Excellence in Creative Talent Training Program" and the "Art Workshop Support Program" will provide a broad platform for students to showcase their creative talents and refine their artistic craftsmanship, aiming to nurture industry elites. The school can also leverage deep school-enterprise cooperation resources, forming strong partnerships with well-known domestic and international advertising companies and digital media platforms, jointly developing and certifying authoritative vocational skills certificates. This not only provides strong support for students' career development but also enhances their skill levels and professional quality.

The program can focus on key areas such as advertising creativity, visual communication, digital media, AI visual design, and brand planning, aiming to cultivate high-quality technical talents who can excel in advertising design, visual expression, digital content production, brand image creation, and marketing planning. Students will be trained to keep pace with the transformation and upgrading of the digital media industry and corporate technological innovation, growing into professionals with developmental, interdisciplinary, and innovative capabilities. The curriculum should be competition-oriented, strengthening students' ideals and beliefs, fostering all-around development in moral, intellectual, physical, aesthetic, and labor aspects, enhancing scientific and cultural levels, solid cultural literacy, adherence to professional ethics, expansion of innovation awareness, and the spirit of craftsmanship. This will enable students to adapt to the digital transformation and diversified integration in the advertising art design industry.

Both the "eyes high, hands low" and "eyes low, hands high" approaches have their respective shortcomings, and these issues will recur in the teaching process. Students should possess artistic thinking, observation methods, and expressive abilities. Art theory and modeling are like the two hands of a person, and their coordination is essential for helping students more comprehensively discover, perceive, analyze, research, explore, practice, and share beauty. Art theory is not just the transmission of knowledge; it needs to be combined with history, society, economy, politics, culture, and other dimensions. Teachers themselves must continuously improve their cognitive literacy and perspective. The concept of "lifelong learning" should be integrated with the quality of being "knowledgeable." It is important to focus on classroom teaching methods to increase class efficiency and train how to quickly attract students' attention within a short period. Establish art theory teacher competitions and pilot student flipped classrooms. Utilize online resources and activate the classroom atmosphere through images, videos, and body language to make teaching more dynamic. Additionally, it is essential to clarify the relationship between theory and practice: practice becomes theory after summarization, and theory guides practice after induction. Teachers should also have certain modeling practice experience to make the teaching more relevant. For example, art language, creative thinking, and picture expression should not just be about learning successful case studies from historical masters, but can also incorporate the practical experiences of teachers themselves or past students, even including failure cases, so that students can accept teaching in a more authentic way. In basic modeling education, it is crucial to maintain the integrity of course teaching demonstrations and emphasize the cyclic nature of learning through practice and teaching. Regular art exhibitions showcasing the results of basic teaching should be held, and students' proficiency in the latest digital art software should be strengthened, with real-time updates to materials and techniques. Pilot exchanges between theory and modeling teachers should be conducted during each semester, with teachers participating in graduation creative design guidance or employment support services.

8. Conclusion

In summary, teaching digital sketching and digital color serves as the foundational "stance training" and "groundwork" in the curriculum. Establishing solid modeling skills in students is crucial as it directly impacts their subsequent courses and the essential artistic literacy required for graduation and employment. For instructors, the saying "to forge iron, one must be strong oneself" holds true. Teachers must possess classroom demonstration skills, integrating drawing with explanation and critical thinking while adhering to the principles of art education and student learning patterns. They must also have

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comprehensive professional competencies, including proficiency in painting software, multimedia production, creating video courseware, and delivering online lectures.

Students majoring in Digital Media Arts need to master various image processing and animation software tools, enabling a smooth transition between "easel sketching" and "digital sketching" through the interchange of materials and tools. They should continually update and improve their learning methods to enhance the efficiency of completing artistic works.

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