

The Epistemology of the ABC Method Learning to Draw in Early Modern Italy

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Even if some northern European drawing books in the tradition of Albrecht Durer started with a dot, a line and geometrical figures (» *Fig. 1*), the so-called ABC method was the most popular approach in the European manuals between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. Thus, these drawing books began by initially presenting the parts of the body in the same order: eyes, noses, mouth, ears, heads, hands, feet and so on, and continued by constructing the whole body. This method was named “ABC” because of its basic character and because of parallelizing the drawing process of face members with letters.¹ Most manuals for beginners from other fields were similarly named in general ABCs.² Artists had been using the ABC method in their workshops at least since the mid-fifteenth century in Italy, much before the first drawing books were printed. Around 1600 it became so self-evident that a pupil should begin their drawing education with this method that one can recognize the youngest apprentices in programmatic images just by studying eyes and noses.³ Even on the ceiling of *Sala del Disegno* in the Roman *Palazzo Zuccari* the youngest student at the left of *Pittura* presents a piece of paper with a drafted eye, ear and mouth (» *Fig. 2*).⁴

What is the reason that the ABC method became so common at least in these three centuries? How could drawing body parts be useful at the beginning of artistic

1 In 1683, Giuseppe Mitelli arranged body parts together with letters in his drawing book *Alfabeto del Sogno* to emphasize this parallel. Karel van Mander was one of the first authors who called this method ABC: “Everybody should be very grateful to a great Master, who, for your benefit, O Youth, would publish in engraving an ABC book on the principles of our Arts.” / “Nu grootlijxe waer een groot Meester te dancken / Die in sned’ uytgaef u / o Ieucht / ter jonsten / Een A. b. boeck / van’t begin onser Consten.” Van Mander (1604) 1916, p. 56. English translation by Thiel 1965, p. 124.

2 Barr 2006, p. 72. Nanobashvili 2018, p. 35–36.

3 For example Pier Francesco Alberti: *Accademia d’Pitori*, Engraving, Los Angeles Getty Research Institute; Giovanni Stradano: *Invention of the Oil Painting*, Engraving, The British Museum, London. Literature and further images: Nanobashvili 2018, pp. 35–42.

4 For Palazzo Zuccari and the educational program in the frescos, see: Kliemann 2013.

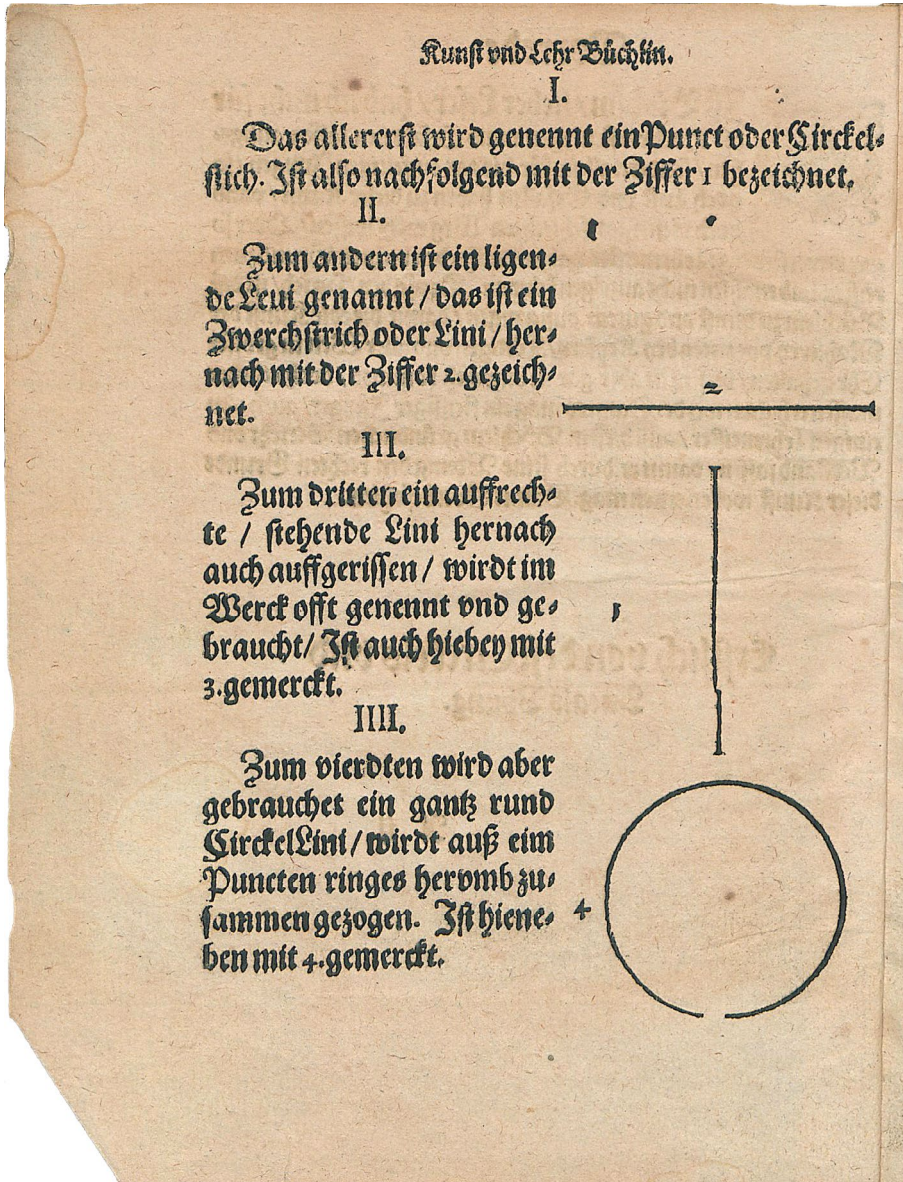


Fig. 1 Sebald Beham: *Warhafftige Beschreibung aller fürnemen Künsten, wie man Malen vnd Reissen lernen soll*, Frankfurt a. M. 1605, Fol. [2v] (Heidelberg University, urn:nbn:de:bsz:16-diglit-172860 [29.11.2018]).



Fig. 2 Federico Zuccari: *Sala del Disegno*, Palazzo Zuccari, Rom (Kliemann 2013, p. 166).

education? And why was the method not updated almost until the nineteenth century, even if artistic expression had changed so much? In the following three chapters, I would like to trace back the origins of the ABC method and suggest new understanding for its background.⁵

Grammar of the body

Best-known earliest examples of the ABC method can be found in printed drawing books after 1600, in the so-called *Scuola Perfetta* and in Odoardo Fialettis *Il vero modo*, both published for *dilettanti*.⁶ But, as Andreas Schumacher had argued, this method was already well known in Italy by the 1520s for artists' education.⁷ The method's origins can be traced back to the fifteenth century:

Among many drawings from the workshop of Francesco di Simone Ferrucci from 1487–88 one can find exercises of faces, antique fragments and putti. A nose, a mouth and an eye are drafted in the upper corner of one sheet (» *Fig. 3*). The message on the top of this page can be identified as a note by the master to his student, “Dear Michele, I remind you to repeat these figures a hundred times.”⁸ The student seems to be a beginner as the ABC method started by drawing eyes and noses again and again.

5 For literature on drawing books, see: Fowler 2016; Pfisterer 2014; Schumacher 2007, pp. 85–92; Nanobashvili 2018.

6 For literature on drawing books, see: Heilmann/Pfisterer/Nanobashvili/Teutenberg 2014; Heilmann/Pfisterer/Nanobashvili/Teutenberg 2015.

7 Schumacher 2007, p. 89 ff.

8 The note on the top of the page: “Michele mio io mi ti richomando per le mille volte mandoti queste figure.” See for the drawings of Simone Ferrucci: Pisani 2007, pp. 82–87, 158–209; Ames-Lewis 1985.



Fig. 3 Francesco di Simone Ferrucci: Sketch-Book, black chalk on paper, 1452–1493, The British Museum, London, Inv. 1875,0612.16 (Nanobashvili 2018, p. 38).

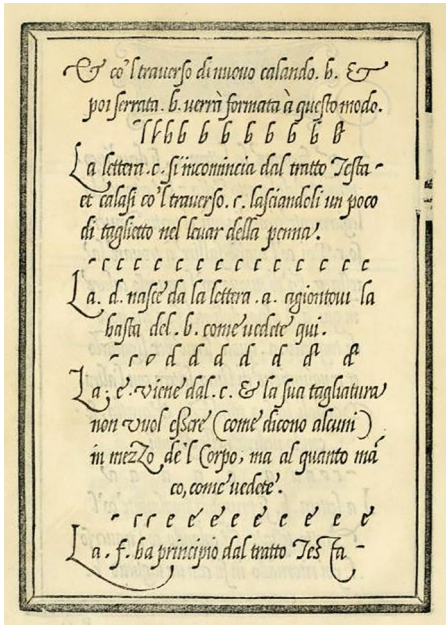


Fig. 4 Giovambattista Palatino: *Libro nel qual s'insegna à scriver ogni sorte lettera*, Rom 1550, Fol. Biii v.

Furthermore, in *Della Pittura* (1435/36) Leon Battista Alberti suggests a special method for learning face members, which was relevant for the ABC and could be compared with a writing lesson:

I would like, at least, that those who undertake the art of painting should follow what I see being done among teachers of writing. Those, in effect, first teach separately all characters of the alphabet. Thereafter they prepare to bring together the syllables and subsequently the expressions. Therefore, let our [painters] also follow this procedure in painting. At first, let them [learn] the edge of surfaces, [I would say] almost the elements of painting, then the connections of the same [surfaces]; from here on, let them *learn by heart* with precision the shape of all members, and all the differences that can be found in the members. In fact, those [differences] are surely neither few nor insignificant. There will be those whose nose is hooked. There will be those who show flattened, curved, and wide nostrils; others who present flaccid cheeks; thin lips distinguish others; and above all the single member have, in their turn, something in particular that, when it will have been present in greater or less



Fig. 5 Odoardo Fialetti: *Il vero modo et ordine per dissegнар tutte le parti et membra del corpo humano*, Venedig 1608, Fol. 7 (Heidelberg University, <https://doi.org/10.11588/diglit.25922> [29.11.2018]).

measures, then it renders the whole limb very different. Indeed, we see how the same member chubby in us as children and so to say rounded and smooth are, instead, with the arising of old age, harsher and rather bony.⁹

9 Sinisgalli 2011, S. 77. “Voglio che i giovani, quali ora nuovi si danno a dipingere, così facciano quanto veggio di chi impara a scrivere. Questi in prima separato insegnano tutte forme delle lettere, quali gli antichi chiamano elementi; poi insegnano le silabe; poi apresso insegnano componere tutte le dizioni. Con questa ragione ancora seguitino i nostri a dipingere. In prima imparino ben disegnare gli orli delle superficie, e qui se essercitino quasi come ne’ primi elementi della pittura; poi imparino giungere insieme le superficie; poi imparino ciascuno forma distinta di ciascuno membro, e mandino a mente qualunque possa essere differenza in ciascun membro. E sono le differenza de’ membri non poche e molto chiare. Vedrai a chi sarà il naso rilevato e gobbo; altro arrano le narici scimmie o arovesciate aperte; altri porgerà i labri pendenti; alcuni altri arrano ornamento di labrolini magruzzi. E così essamini il pittore qualunque cosa a ciascuno membro essendo più o meno, il facci differente. E noti ancora quanto veggiamo, che i nostri membri fanciulleschi sono ritondi, quasi fatti a tornio, e delicati; nella età più provetta sono aspri e canteruti.” Alberti 2002, p. 155 (Nr. 55).

Even if Alberti's statement on comparing drawing with writing is programmatic and should not be understood literally, there are similarities in the teaching methods of both fields. This becomes most evident by looking closer at the first printed writing- and drawing-manuals from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.¹⁰ In these early writing books authors mostly explain every particular step and present how to modify a letter in 4 or 5 sequences (» *Fig. 4*).¹¹ As we see in one of the early drawing books by Odoardo Fialetti, he transforms the same method for learning each face member line by line (» *Fig. 5*).

According to Alberti's programmatic quote, a drawing lesson should resemble writing even in its structure. After learning the body parts as letters, one should combine them as syllables, and later as words ("expressions"). A similar idea can be found in all five versions of Alessandro Allori's unfinished drawing book (1565–1580), which is the first written evidence of the ABC method.¹² The didactic part begins with the proceeding steps: after teaching the fragments of the face line by line, Allori introduces measures to order the parts to a head (» *Fig. 6*) and later to the whole body. In comparison with the writing lesson, the measures used by Allori can be understood here metaphorically as grammar of the body. As one needs grammar rules to construct a whole sentence out of single letters, measures are fundamental to combine the fragments to a whole body in a correct way.

Beyond comparing the drawing and writing methods on the visual level, as it had already been done before, the way of teaching seems to be similar as well.¹³ Repeating the same form a "hundred times", as Francesco di Simone Ferrucci wrote to his students, can be compared with the didactic methods of the early modern grammar books. For instance, Aldo Manuzio taught the reader of his widely published volume *Institutionum grammaticarum libri quatuor* (1493) to learn the long lists of syllables by heart. Only afterwards was the student able to use them in a proper way for words and sentences. Body parts could be compared with the syllables in this context. A student would only be able to combine the whole body out of the fragments after learning them profoundly by drawing them again and again.

Through parallelizing drawing with writing, artists sought to make the basis of education in their field more similar to the intellectual foundations. This happened not only in theory, as in *Della Pittura* by Alberti, but also in practice, as one can find in many drawing books. Drawing not only resembled writing because one used a line to express ideas but because constructing a form or a human body paralleled the production of text.

10 On the comparison of writing and drawing a lot of research has been done by Kemp 1979, pp. 127–131; Rosand 2002, pp. 139–144.

11 In the writing book *Il vero modo de temperare le penne* (1522) by Ludovico Vincentino Arrighi, there is even no alphabetical order and the letters are ordered by their formal similarities to explain rendering easier.

12 For further literature about Allori, see Nanobashvili 2018, pp. 20–72.

13 See the comment on the comparison of writing and drawing above.

RAGIONAMENTI DELLE REGOLE

Molti se ben quest'ultima parte che mostra il profilo intero si poteva far senza nielica
quanta la mostra, anzi scrivere della prima, non voglio perdonar a forza alcu
na per che, a' assicurarmi che sia bene, il costume, e però questa dimostra
+ ridotta in tre divisioni la stessa profilo, ne accorrese, che tutte sono fucine
+ non si fanno numero prima, che si mettano insieme, e si usino di loro alla
regola di tracciar l'occhio, il quale ~~forma~~ al punto difficile, e le buste linea
della f. c. a' disegno di tracciarlo, ma molto più praticato che in più che, per al ultimo imitarlo o sempre con suo bello
alla costruzione di questa, si usano un paio, conto di disegno, e forse un terzo prima un grande quanto in il potere
di tirare per una sola ragione, o vice, il quale, sia per tirare in uno punto, o punto a quella di costruire detto regola, non si tira
L'una parte il profilo, senza bocca, capelli, e naso, nel occhio, dove per un funzione, cioè quella f. che mostrano la linea, che
quando si fanno di questa, le due distanze, sia una q. d'una, in una, per un al occhio, non si tirano.

e di più come

come vedi, e se ti ho mostrato con la misura, l'occhio è alto primamente, quanto
è l'una delle tre parti dell'altrezza di tutto il profilo, or esso è posto nel
mezzo tra il ciglio, il naso, e la bocca, che tirare la due linee, si avverte come
vedi di sopra, e la ragione a questo dal $A\ B\ C\ D\ E$, ed altre al D , ed poi tirare
se mi sia fatta, come vedi di sopra, tuere l'occhio, occuparne la medesima
si come di sopra, e quanto occupa il naso, il resto per che ~~disegnare~~ l'occhio
serve, se al luogo dove comincia la gola, come in quest'altra linea, occhio
+ a arco vedi come l'occhio del canto dell'occhio, cioè verso la coda, al
detto occhio tirare lo spazio sopra di una delle actoni, più basso nel più che
nel meno, ed in terzo quarto, tirare l'actone di tutto il $A\ B\ C$ dove finisca di
misurare l'altrezza, e lo tirare per il primario di questa di $A\ B\ C$

secondo al io
cioè $A\ B\ C\ E\ D$

= La fine dell'anno 1580

Fig. 6 Alessandro Allori: Ragionamenti delle regole del disegno, Manuskript E, 1572–1580, Fol. 61v, Biblioteca Nazionale, Florence, Inv. Palat. E.B.16.4.

Why printed images?

Even if the paradigmatic role of writing lessons is clear, it is still questionable how useful it could be for a pupil to draw two-dimensional forms, and how could he transform these figures into lifelike images? Why did students initially have to draw such rigid images instead of studying three-dimensional examples, such as plaster casts or life models?

One reason would be the availability of prints and drawings in comparison to sculptures or models. All artists owned printed examples or at least their own drawings, which were used in the workshops. Drawing after a model or a nude had to be planned and were most likely expensive. On top of that, a selection of sculptures was not available everywhere. Besides the practical reasons, that prints and drawings were easily available, I would suggest looking at the theories on cognition and seeing, to understand the usefulness of two-dimensional examples.

In the Aristotelian tradition relevant in the early modern period, cognition was understood as an unscribed tablet “tabula rasa” on which all new impressions left their imprints as a wax seal.¹⁴ Following this idea, a two-dimensional image would be a most “suitable” to leave an impression in pupils’ minds, as it was a flat effigy in itself. In this way, two-dimensional images seem to be the best example at the beginning of artistic education. By drawing exemplary images many times, students could memorize them and at the same time gain perfect “marks”, which could be reproduced and combined later out of the mind in many different ways.

In the well known art educational book of Giovanni Battista Armenini *On the true precepts of the art of painting* the author seems to refer to this Aristotelian concept, that a drawing process could make an impression on mind. After describing how to study face members following the ABC method he writes: “In prescribed manner, one makes copies [of eyes, noses and ears] until the paper is full. This is done to accustom the hand and to make a deeper impression on mind”.¹⁵

Whether we look at Aristotle’s “wax seal” or also at Kepler’s “retina images”, where he compares the sight with camera obscura, in these theories the seen object is first transferred to a two-dimensional representation until one can perceive it.¹⁶ Following this observation for the early modern times, the printed (or painted) two-dimensional images could be understood as most appropriate examples to begin the learning process, as they repeated the seen “representation” of all forms.

14 Aristotle: *De Anima*, II, 1; *De Memoria et reminiscencia*, 1. See for Aristotle and the sensory perception in early modern time: Bolzoni 2001, p. 130 ff.

15 Armenini 1578, p. 53: “Cosi col predetto modo se ne vien poi à formar molti, per fino à tanto che la carta si vede esser piena, & ciò si sa per avezzarsi la mano, & perche se gl’ imprima meglio nella mente.” For english translation see Olszewski 1974, p. 124.

16 For Kepler see Fowler 2012, pp. 110–113. Folwer argues that these flat “retina images” could be compared with the prints as representations and as prototypes of the seen objects.

‘Fabricating’ the body

Asking why students should begin their education by drawing two-dimensional prints raises a further question: why commence with eyes and noses? As mentioned before, most drawing books begin initially with members of the head, followed by the whole body, and concluding with examples of figures (» *Fig. 5*). But why did they not start with more simple forms, like geometrical objects or landscape elements? Even if the head and eyes were thought to be most important body parts, could this metaphorical importance be the only reason for choosing those features as a starting point? An answer could be found in discussions on practical educational programs that transpired in the newly founded Florentine *Accademia del Disegno* of the 1560s. Two different positions of Alessandro Allori and Benvenuto Cellini seem most remarkable in this context and should be discussed closer.

Allori shows his confidence in the ABC method in his above-mentioned drawing book manuscript. His long working process on this manual from 1560s to 1580s can be reconstructed by five versions of his manual. In each renewed draft he changed both the structure of text as well as the progression of topics. The only element that he never transformed was his decision to begin the practical part with the ABC method, teaching the students how to draw the members of the face line by line and then the whole head (» *Fig. 7*).¹⁷ It seems at the same time that Allori knew this method well and he recognized its importance, not willing to change it over the years.

Also Benvenuto Cellini was familiar with the ABC method. By his account, he was even educated by the same method in the 1520s.¹⁸ In contrary to Allori, he criticized it in his treatise *Principles and method of learning the art of drawing*, “I hold for certain that this [ABC] method is not a good one [...] and that the true and better method would be to put in front of them [young students] things that would not only be easier, but also more useful than beginning by drawing an eye.”¹⁹ Instead, he suggested starting artistic education by drawing the “first bone of the shin”. Cellini’s critique has never been considered as part of an educational method, but only as a programmatic statement to emphasize the meaning of anatomy.²⁰

Looking at Giovanni Stradano’s drawing for the Roman artist’s academy from the 1570s, it seems that both ideas of Allori and Cellini were discussed in a broader circle (» *Fig. 8*).

17 For different versions of Allori’s manuscript and for the new classification of the five version, see Nanobashvili 2018, pp. 21–34.

18 Perrig 1997; Reilly 2004, pp. 34–35.

19 Translation and comment: Reilly 2004, p. 35.

20 Possibly this part was not considered as a methodical suggestion because Cellini himself goes further arguing that drawing a bone would be more convenient as it looks as a simple stick. Perrig 1997, p. 276; Reilly 2004, p. 35.

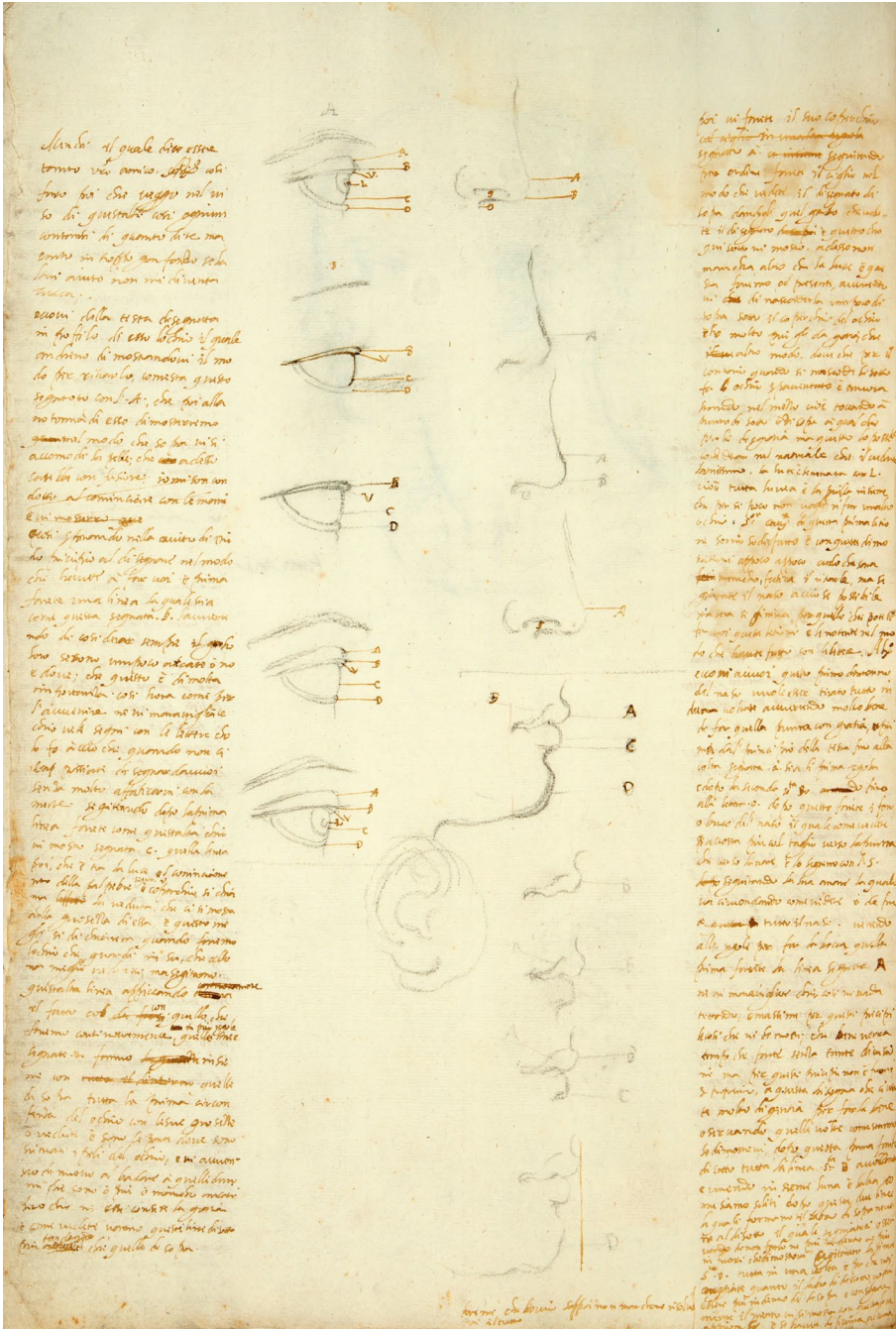


Fig. 7 Alessandro Allori: Ragionamenti delle regole del disegno, Manuskript A, ca. 1565, Fol. 54r, Biblioteca Nazionale, Florence, Inv. Palat. E.B.16.4.



Fig. 8 Giovanni Stradano: *Drawing for the print*, 1573, The British Museum, London, Inv. SL,5214.2 (Nanobashvili 2018, p. 43).

This artist's academy in Rome was presumably founded with the support of Medici soon after the Florentine *Accademia del Disegno* (1563) in 1570s, even before the *Accademia di San Luca* started their meetings in 1593.²¹ In this context, Stradano designed two related preparatory drawings for prints for both academies emphasizing the symbols of each city.²² In the Roman version, personifications of arts and students are gathered in one place: in the background on the left, the personification of painting is working on a historic scene; in the center, sculpture is making a statue of Athena, the patron goddess of Rome with Romulus and Remus at her feet; architecture is seated at the table; next to him engraving, and anatomy on the right. The two youngest boys represent the first steps of education: in the very right corner, a standing boy is drawing a bone of the skeleton. At the left edge a small boy is repeating the form of an eye over and over again (» *Fig. 8*). Since the two pupils were put in opposite corners and approaching the first rudiments of drawing in disparate ways, it seems that Stradano depicted here two discussed ways of drawing education. Allori's ABC can be recognized on the left side and Cellini's drawing the bones as anatomy approach on the right side.

Besides the metaphorical meaning of both methods of drawing education, which are based on the intellectual path of either writing or anatomy, the question arises as to whether Allori and Cellini had further reasons to suggest different educational methods? To contextualize both discussed methods, I would first suggest following Cellini's anatomical path and then confronting it with Allori's ABC.

As one can see in the programmatic texts and images made for Florentine and Roman academies, the artistic climate of these institutions gave anatomy new purchase in the tradition of Michelangelo as the most prominent foundation of artistic knowledge. Artists had not only to acquire knowledge of the internal parts of the body. They were also expected metaphorically to "build" the body in their imagination inside out, following the example of nature, starting with the bones, which should be covered by flesh and later by the skin.²³ This process of "constructing" the body was mostly compared with the iconography of the resurrection of the dead, as for instance Prophet Ezekiel mentioned in the Old Testament.²⁴

Ascanio Condivi, biographer of Michelangelo, cited this ancient idea of three steps for describing the fresco of resurrection in the Sistine Chapel:

- 21 For the foundation of the Roman artist's academy before the activities of Federico Zuccari, see: Marciari 2009.
- 22 For the drawing, see Heilmann/Nanobashvili/Pfisterer/Teutenberg 2015, pp. 299–301 (*Kat. 54*, Nino Nanobashvili). For the focus of different images for the academies, see: Schulze Altcapenberg/Thimann 2007, pp. 114–117 (*Kat. 26*, Ulrich Pfisterer).
- 23 See Krüger 2002.
- 24 Giorgio Ghisi engraved the vision of Ezekiel and presented the transformation of the skeletons step by step, rising from the graves, "dressed" in flesh in the second step and later becoming the whole figure, here depicted as marble sculptures. See Krüger 2002, pp. 159–162.

In this work, Michelangelo expressed all that the art of painting can do with the human figure, leaving out no attitude or gesture whatever. [...] At the sound of the trumpets, the graves on earth are seen to open and the human race to issue forth in various and amazing attitudes; although some, according to the prophecy of Ezekiel, have [1] their skeletons merely reassembled, [2] some have them half-clothed in flesh, and [3] others, completely.²⁵

Condivi emphasized Michelangelo's knowledge of anatomy and contextualized his skills. Following Condivi, the divine artist used the similar anatomical way for constructing the bodies from inside out in his paintings, as Godfather and nature did. By referring to the resurrection and the act of animation, Michelangelo breathed life into the depicted bodies, and his approach served as exemplary for other artists.

Cellini's previously quoted statement, in which he suggested beginning drawing education with the rendering of bones, can be understood as a reference to the same idea. He aimed to establish an anatomical way of constructing the body from the very first educational steps, which would follow the example of Michelangelo and yield life-like bodies. Following this argument, Cellini's method does not presume to represent a simplification of ABC by stating to draw members of the head. Rather, he suggested an alternative and challenging road to allow the students to enliven depicted bodies.²⁶

Let us now compare the ABC method that Alessandro Allori initially used for his drawing manual with Cellini's anatomical approach and ask if Allori had a similarly significant reason for choosing this method. As we have seen before, the artistic ABC imitated the teaching methods of language lessons and parallelized letters and syllables with body parts. In this way, learning to draw was compared with an intellectual act of text production. Two further examples from the Aristotelian context could lead us to the better and new understanding of this method.

On Giulio Bonasone's last print from a series of amorous god-couples *Amorosi Diletti degli Dei* one can see the seated *Pittura* drawing a child on the canvas with the aid of Apollo at her back («*Fig. 9*). Ulrich Pfisterer interpreted the drawing process of the gods in this print metaphorically as procreation.²⁷ It is thus noteworthy that *Pittura* initially outlined the head of the "new born" on the canvas. This print goes back to

25 Wohl 1976, pp. 83–84. „In quest'opera Michelangelo espresso tutto quel che d'un corpo umano può far l'arte della pittura, non lasciando in dieto atto o moto alcuno. [...] Al suono di queste trombe, si vedono in terra aprire i monumenti, et uscir fuore l'humana spetie, in varii et meravigliosi gesti, mentre che alcuni, secondo la propezia di Ezechiel, solamente l'ossatura hanno riunita insieme, alcuni di carni mezza vestita, altritutta.“ Condivi 2009, p. 40, Fol. 37r–37v.

26 Remarkably, Cellini took into account the idea of the vivification of the sculpture to life in his casting process. The creation was imitated by parallelizing the steel "skeleton" with bones and bronze with earth and blood. See for this parallel Cole 2002, pp. 43–78.

27 Pfisterer 2005, pp. 46–52.



Fig. 9 Giulio Bonasone: *Pittura and Apollo*, c. 1545, engraving, London, Inv. 1875,0612.16 (Nanobashvili 2018, p. 38).



Fig. 10 Hildegard von Bingen: *Liber Schivias*, Rupertsberg Codex, 12th Century, I.4, Fol. 22, lost (Saurma-Jeltsch 1998, plate 22).

the Aristotelian idea and imitates the creation of a child as the philosopher mentions in “On the Generation of Animals” (*Historiae Animalium*):

Now the upper portion of the body is the first to be marked off in the course of the embryo’s formation; the lower portion receives its growth as time goes on (This applies to the blooded animals.) In the early stages the parts are all traced out in outline; later on they get their various colours and softness and hardness, for all the world as if a painter were at work on them, the painter being Nature. Painters, as we know, first of all sketch in the figure of the animal in outline, and after that go on to apply the colour.

As the source of the sensation is in the heart, the heart is the first part of the whole animal to be formed; and, on account of the heat of the heart, and to provide a corrective to it, the cold causes the brain to “set”, where the blood-vessels terminate above. That is why the regions around the head begin to form immediately after the heart and are bigger than other parts, the brain being large and fluid from the outset.

The development of the eye is something of a puzzle to the student. In birds, beasts, and fishes alike, the eye are from the outset very large in appearance, yet they are the last of all the parts to be completely formed, since they shrink up in the meantime.²⁸

According to Aristotle, a head is the body part created first, soon followed by the heart and the eyes at the very beginning. Even if the creation act was not demonstrated in detail as much in the early modern images, one can find its depiction in the medieval manuscript on the visions of Hildegard von Bingen *Liber Scivias* (» Fig. 10). The image represents the animation of an embryo and reflects Aristotle’s parallel to cheese production in the background.²⁹ According to the philosopher’s comparison, just as adding the fig juice to milk produces cheese, so, too does the meeting of sperm and fetus animate the human child. The eyes and circles in the golden rhombus in the center of this image symbolize the light according to Hildegard’s vision and stand for animation on the embryo. It is important to emphasize that in this image the eyes stand for the vivification of the child and for the beginning of life.

The start of drawing manuals by rendering members of the head and mostly the eyes seems to go back to this Aristotelian notion of procreation: eyes one of the first parts formed in the womb and at the same time, they stand for the animation. By learning the ABC method (in order of eyes, nose, mouth, ears, head and so on), the young artist enacted a process parallel to the way in which it was believed, that nature formed and enlivened an embryo.

Looking at Allori’s and Cellini’s educational programs, it seems that both artists aimed to introduce a drawing method that reflected the process, whereby man himself came into being. In the case of Cellini, it meant “building” the body from inside out, a procedure that imitated the resurrection of the dead and the enlivening of the body. In the case of Allori, it resembled the generation of human life. Both positions shared a common goal: demonstrating to a student how to construct an animated lifelike depiction.

The ABC was not only a noble and useful way of teaching, because it imitated methods of language lesson, but it also reflected a fundamental artistic discussion about enlivening the artwork. By learning the ABC, the student chose a path to imitate

28 Aristotle: *De generatione animalium*, Book II, Part 6. Pfisterer 2005, pp. 48–49.

29 See for the image Fricke [2015].

the creation of the human body from the very beginning. It seems that the basis of this method was never made a subject of discussion in the following centuries but every artist and drawing manual just referred to it. As demonstrated before, it can be observed in the middle of sixteenth century, when the first text and drawings on systematic education were invented.

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