

Référence électronique

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Lyon's Drawing School

Lyon first established an Academic School approved by patent letters in 1676. Its professors Thomas Blanchet (1614-1689) and Antoine Coysevox (1640-1720), were both members of the *Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture**. The establishment died out for unknown reasons “it is not known why, it is not known how and it is not known when it happened (Donat Nonnotte, Académic conference of the 21 of February 1769) and it was only during mid-Eighteenth Century that a new School of Drawing opened. Initiated by the Abbot Antoine Lacroix (1708-1781) prompted by the Architect Jacques-Germain Soufflot (1713-1780), the project only came to life six years later in 1757 after a debate between two parties. On the one side were the advocates of the “*école de la fleur*”, school of Applied Arts dedicated to silk making (Jean-Baptiste Oudry (1686-1755) commissioned to referee the debate supported this position), and on the other side were those who defended an Academic School of Arts and Crafts, opened to Artisans, Painters, Sculptors, Architects and Amateurs (championed by Soufflot and his friends the sculptor Michel-Ange Slodtz (1705-1764) and Abbot Lacroix, the art enthusiast).

The School's revival was due to the patronage of the Intendant Henri Léonard Bertin (1720-1792), one of the twelve founding members. Once the Superintendent of the Kings's Buildings (the Marquis of Marigny), the Squadron leader of Lyon (the Marquis of Rochebaron) and the Provost of the Merchants (Jean-Baptiste Flachet de Saint-Bonnet) had all agreed to the project, the “*École du modèle*” opened on the 10th of January 1757. The School was housed in the “*Hôtel du Vieux gouvernement* (the Old Government's Manor House)” on “*rue Saint-Jean*” and received funding for its upkeep and subsidiaries for students' prizes given out each year. It seems there were three classes of 20 students, who were taught drawing, sculpting and painting from life. A fourth class gave lectures on painting, geometry, perspective and anatomy. In 1767, Charles Jacques Leclerc de la Verpillière (ap. 1734-1776), who took over from Flachet as head of public administration, granted the School with a private chapel, which adjoined Trinity College's boarding lodges on today's alley of Ménestrier. The chapel was big enough to accommodate the School of Medicine's anatomy lectures. On the 27th of November 1768, a riot caused a fire which forced the school to move and part of the establishments' art collection disappeared at that time.

The director and professor of Lyon's second School of Drawing was the portrait artist, Donat Nonnotte (1708-1785). He was one of François Le Moyne's students (1688-1737) who became a member of the *Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture** on the 26th of August 1741 and Lyon's Official Painter in 1751. His position in the city made him Jean-Charles Frontier's rival (1701-1763). He was also a member of the Royal Academy but a winner of

the Premier prix de Rome. The two men shared the role of director until 1763 and entrusted some of the teaching to Antoine-Michel Perrache (1726-1779), sculptor and engineer. Once a State Council decree confirmed the functioning of a Free Royal School of “Drawing for the progress of the Arts and that of the City of Lyon’s manufactories”, Nonnotte gave in his notice in 1780. After closing in 1793 and reopening in 1795 as an Applied Arts Drawing School, the School showed its ambition once more under the Empire by becoming *École des Beaux-Arts* (or Fine-Arts School) by decree in 1807.

Nonnotte is the author of a series of academic conferences, delivered between 1754 and 1779 in front of the members of Lyon Academy, and which he had planned to become his *Traité de peinture* or Painting Treatise. His discourse entitled “*Sur les progrès des arts à Lyon et sur les écoles de dessin* (The progress in the arts at Lyon and on Drawing Schools) pronounced on the 21st of February 1769 is an important printed source which gives an understanding of how the School operated, and of its ambition. For instance, he reminds his audience that because of its geographical position and its trading history, Lyon must play a pivotal role between Paris and Rome. Nonnotte’s fellow academicians talked of how he had soaked up the ideas and thoughts of the Parisian Academy, and how he also was also answering to local cultural and productive needs. By addressing Lyon’s erudite circle composed of members from the Science, Literature and Art Academies, Nonnotte was securing the School’s position.

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