

## Citation

LEGEAY Mathilde, “The Drawing School of Quimper”, translated by Adèle Verdier and edited by Alexandra Woolley, *Les papiers d’ACA-RES, Brefs historiques*, put online in March 2020.

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## The Drawing School of Quimper

The creation of Quimper’s Drawing School of was one man’s desire made true: François Valentin (Guingamp, 10 April 1783- Quimper, 21 September 1805). The painter is probably the only known artist from Brittany to have made a name for himself. From a modest background (his father was a primary school teacher in Quimper), he probably came across painting through his uncle who was a glassmaker. His talent was noticed by the abbot Thalouët de Séverac, who sent him to Paris, where he became Joseph-Marie Vien’s student and went, without any prize or scholarship, to the *Académie royale* of France in Rome. He went back to Brittany around 1772, where unfortunately, he did not secure many commissions<sup>1</sup>. The artist started to gain recognition from the French Revolution, in which he took part. When Quimper became the capital of the Finistère region, Valentin became its administrator, and managed to save masterpieces from destruction. A whole floor of the hôtel du Haffond, *rue des Gentilshommes* in Quimper, was used to store the masterpieces he had saved during his surveys of Brittany. During the *an III* (1794-1795), he opened the first Fine Art Museum of Quimper. In a room of the same building, he set up a Drawing School where he became a teacher. This first attempt was to link the Museum’s collections to teaching, just like what the Cacault brothers, François (1743-1805) and Pierre (1744-1810) did some time later at Clisson<sup>2</sup>. Little remains from this first Museum and School of Drawing, other than three copies of Valentin letters, published by his biographer Louis Ollivier in the *Bulletin de la Société d’Émulation des Côtes du Nord* in 1888. This periodical mentions these documents, without disclosing their origin.

In any case, this first school did not last long. Indeed, François Valentin seems to have taken a particular interest in the *Écoles centrales* that opened in each district capital, and among them was Quimper. On the 25<sup>th</sup> of February 1795, an act was passed advocating the teaching of sciences, literature and art. On the 12<sup>th</sup> of July 1796, the register of the Finistère’s *Administration centrale* approved the creation of an *École centrale* in Quimper. The *collège des Jésuites*’ old building was given to the school, which opened on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of September 1796. Valentin was foreseen and recommended to teach drawing and was officially appointed by the jury of the *Instruction publique* on the 27<sup>th</sup> of August that same year<sup>3</sup>. From that point on, the *École centrale* and its classes are well-documented in the Finistère’s archives (in the Quimper section). The artist’s signature is featured several times but is not always linked to the practice of drawing. The teachers used to sign all the documents sent to the Finistère administrators. According to an extract from the registers of the *Administration centrale* of the Finistère<sup>4</sup> from the 25<sup>th</sup> of July 1798, each teacher earned 500 *francs* per term. The rules, written and approved by all teachers, give insight

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<sup>1</sup> On the life and career of the artist François Valentin, see Florence de Massol, *François Valentin, peintre de Quimper*, Master Thesis defended in 1987, found at Rennes II University Library.

<sup>2</sup> See LEGEAY Mathilde, « Les écoles de dessin nantaises », *Les papiers d’ACA-RES, Brefs historiques*, put online in 2018.

<sup>3</sup> Quimper, Archives départementales du Finistère, 16 L 8.

<sup>4</sup> Quimper, ADF, 16 1 10.

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on the way the school was run<sup>5</sup>. Like other schools, a competition system was set up between students, which was organized in each subject, including drawing. A document published in 1798 by the *École centrale* reporting on how each subject was taught, mentions Valentin's drawing class on pages 2 and 3 and the drawing contest on page 166. Valentin remained the drawing teacher at the *École centrale* until his death in 1805.

This Drawing School in Quimper saw the light of day because of this man's passion for the arts and heritage. His teaching became official thanks to the creation of the *École centrale*.

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<sup>5</sup> Quimper, ADF, 16 L 6.