

Citation

GOBERT Aude, “Rouen’s Drawing School”, 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 Rouen

Jean-Baptiste Deschamps (1715-1791), a painter originally from Dunkerque, settled in Rouen in 1741. Although his long career was widely acclaimed, his artistic production was disappointing. Initiator and unique teacher of the Rouen’s Drawing School until the end of his life, he was appointed member of the *Académie royale de peinture et sculpture* in 1764. Yet, he was more praised for his writing skills than for his work as an artist, like his speech entitled *Sur l’utilité des Établissements des Écoles Gratuites de Dessin en faveur des Métiers*, awarded by the *Académie française* given in 1767 and then his four volumes on the *Vie des Peintres Flamands, Allemands et Hollandois* or even his *Voyage Pittoresque de la Flandre et du Brabant*. He also wrote on the history of Dunkerque and was in charge of the city’s Fine Arts Museum

With the support of the Parliament Member Pierre-Robert Le Cornier de Cideville (1693-1776) and as part of the creation of Rouen’s *Académie des sciences, belles-lettres et arts*, Deschamps welcomed his first students in 1741. Two years later, the school gained momentum and the surgery school’s amphitheatre was made available to his students by its professor Claude-Nicolas Le Cat (1700-1768). Pupils and their teachers all contributed money to pay for a model, which enabled the school to host three classes on drawing, sculpting and live nude drawing. In 1746, steps were taken to get local and royal recognition as well as subsidies, supported by Quartermaster Louis-François de La Bourdonnaye (1700-1777). The “*Projet pour l’établissement solide à Rouen d’une école de dessin* (Project for firmly establishing a drawing school in Rouen)” was printed that same year. The document specifies the nature of the classes given by Deschamps— drawing, sculpture in the round, study from nature, geometry, perspective, architecture — and organised free classes for 30 students protected by subsidies given by Academicians, Amateurs and others close to the Parliament Member Cideville.

Driven by his success and held in high esteem by his Parisian friends (Lemoyne, Le Bas, Chardin...) who made sure he received press coverage, Deschamps became the talk of the town and worked hard during the next four years to reinforce his position and his status in Rouen, by keeping good relations with locals and Parisians in power. These different strategies helped him build a solid network in Rouen, which led to a *Conseil* ruling in 1750, making the School official and giving Deschamps the desirable institutional status of Professor, with an income.

For almost 52 years, Rouen Drawing School trained students in different fields. Some became artists, architects or engineers-to-be. Deschamps students also found work in Rouen’s thriving manufacturing trade. Those who had the talent to pursue artistic careers after graduating from the Drawing School generally left town to go to Paris where they worked in art studios, through Deschamps’ network. Most of them never failed to mention their association to Rouen’s Academy, giving new life and cohesion to the local artistic *milieu*. In the last quarter of the Eighteenth Century, many of Deschamps’ former students, when back from Paris or Rome, were accepted within the society and took an active part in it.

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