

## **Final Reflection on My 2023 Summer Enrichment Experience at the Texas Academy of Figurative Art, Summer Teen Program**

*by Madeline Dieters*

Receiving a scholarship from the Garwin Family Foundation has allowed me to broaden my horizons, deepen my art skills, and make friendships with other like-minded artistic teens this summer. I appreciate GFF for working with me to find an experience in which I was enthusiastic as well as satisfying their rigorous criteria for programs. Being the only program of its kind in the United States for teens, I was excited to attend the Texas Academy of Figurative Arts to focus my artistic efforts on classical realism.

The pursuit of classical realism in art, a process of replication from photo and still life, has been a focus I have wanted to take my art for some time. This summer I was ready to dive into the careful and meticulous techniques necessary to form my skills in this direction. Before attending the program in Texas, I had expectations of what it would be like. I expected to be pushed in my artistic technique, in my knowledge of Old-masters, and in my color and light theory. Although these expectations were met, it was difficult to acclimate to the stringent physical conditions of standing eight hours to paint and draw, complete silence in the room for that time (no music), and learning to focus my mind to block out the other students working in the same room.

I was apprehensive about attending a program by myself and meeting new people. The class included a total of nine students, all girls, and it was incredibly awkward the first day. However, with each day and breaks to chat and get to know each other, everyone seemed to open up and share themselves more and more. With such a small group, I learned a lot about each student and really formed strong friendships with each one during our breaks and lunch walks.

The first skill that was taught was graphite drawing using pencils sharp enough to cut paper. The academy's standards for sharp pencils were high and throughout the program, this proved to be the case for all supplies and techniques. As the weeks progressed, I learned the importance of these high standards and saw the improvement in my own work because of it. I did enjoy graphite drawing with replication, but oil painting was the medium I wanted to improve the most. I am always enraptured by carving an image of form and shadow out of a blank canvas. I had never realized how much light theory was important to replication. The instruction on light theory and how it works really opened my eyes to see things in a different way.

In reflection, although a challenge to start work again after a weekend break, I had more fun the second week of the program. A charcoal project was introduced, and is such a

fun medium to work with. Charcoal gave me the ability to have bigger and more open spaces and motions on the page. However, it was much messier to work with than graphite. I made deeper connections with my new friends in the program. Not only was I watching my art take form and improve, but I also was watching how all of the other students' work was improving as well.

Although the two weeks went by quickly, the things I learned and the memories I made will be with me forever. All of the instructors at the Texas Academy of Figurative Art were incredibly helpful, knowledgeable, and gave understandable critiques and techniques throughout the two weeks. Even though every student had a different goal and direction, we all improved our skills immensely from this program. I am already using the skills I have learned in new art pieces since I have been home.

I would recommend this program to any art student who wants a foundation of skills to further their artistic technique, whether it be realistic or abstract or a fusion of the two. I am so grateful to the Garwin Family Foundation for sponsoring this life and career changing experience for me this summer.