

NEW YORK STUDIO SCHOOL

OF DRAWING, PAINTING & SCULPTURE

Summer 2023

Sculpture Marathon – IN-PERSON

Life-size Figure

Instructor: Brandt Junceau
Class Hours: 9am - 1pm ; 2pm - 6pm
Dates: Monday, June 5 – Friday, June 16 (class meets daily, excluding weekends)

Course Description

The life-size figure is a touchstone of sculpture. Making something our own size, standing like oneself, with every surface, each feature-- a head, a face, a gaze like our own-- that's a very peculiar proposition, unlike anything else mankind makes for itself. It must have been strange, startling, and intimidating the first time, in prehistory. Done right, it still is.

After Rodin, the life size figure walked away from rhetorical demonstration, toward daily life. Recently, that has been perhaps best exemplified in photography-- the *Beach Portraits* of Rineke Dijkstra and the *Museumgoers* of Thomas Struth, for example. Likewise, the figure of this course is the body we live in, today.

In the interest of speed, the armatures will be ready for work on the first morning. The pose is quotidian: very little implied motion, very little signing "gesture." Better to let the body speak for itself.

This class is not an anatomy lesson, although anatomy is employed. We think through what tells and what suggests-- what makes "message" of a body?

Basic modeling skills are on the table but you need not have done this before to try it in June. Bring readiness to try for trying's sake. On offer is pure experience—the 10 days do not include preservation of the work in clay (that may be pursued separately on an individual basis). Our ten days are a creative confrontation with life, and everything it takes to make life hold still for a moment, and take *Form*.

Through the week, we take occasional breaks for brief slide talks and conversation. After lunch on the last Friday afternoon we clean up and review all our work with invited critics from *outside* the room: Choghakate Kazarian, Garth Evans and Bruce Gagnier. Reception afterward, for all concerned.

Course Outline

At the end of our ten days a figure is made but class time does not allow for firing, moldmaking and casting. Typically, the work is broken down again to raw material. *Participants interested in casting their sculptures are encouraged to enroll in the Mold-Making & Casting Marathon, which takes place at the School during the two weeks following this Marathon.*

This Marathon is essentially an investigation. Every working hour in clay, putting it on, taking it off, bending it here, scrubbing it there, is question and answer: *what makes this thing live? and what am I looking at?* In practical terms, we're making an inanimate thing, yet the undertaking is only worthwhile if that made-thing is implicitly animate. *How does that happen, why is it so necessary, and at what point did it swing from dumb matter to lively image? What made the difference?*

This matter of image, which is *the* matter; it could work by employing every aspect of the model-- a very literal correspondence, or by an adroit choice of some aspects of the model. Of course each extreme (all or little) is unlikely, but

just what matters most and works best, for us, now? The choices, the methods, the means have changed over generations, over millennia. We'll look at that. Seeing how it has worked for "them" in the past, brings out the nature of what works now, for us. A life-size figure requires an armature. Armatures will be prepared beforehand and you'll start building over it the first morning. The armatures will be identical, and from the measure of our model. Male or female, I don't know yet. The "pose" (I hesitate to call it that) will *not* be academic.

A figure in ten days is real work. We'll take breaks, including breaks to review progress. I read aloud in class, usually while work is ongoing and we talk about the readings during work and on breaks. As to slides, for the sake of distance, bring your laptop. We can zoom together in the room, looking at the same thing at the same time, at social distance and near enough for easy hearing.

Learning Outcomes

Given that the life size figure in clay will be broken down, the class outcomes are in effect all experiential. That is a good thing: one takes away fundamentals. In making a life-size figure, the same size as oneself, one acquires literal "muscle memory" of anatomy. And plenty of other peculiar intangibles: simply putting in the time, spending ten days at arms' reach from a life-size clay "person," one gathers a sense of what we are, in material terms, and how an image affects us by proximity, that no visitor to an exhibition can gather. A visitor might not claim that same experience, but it is essential to an artist.

Of course one will take away refreshed modelling skills, which are peculiarly different at life size vis a vis smaller. Not having done it before is no impediment: one learns everything by doing, and nothing standing still. Doing is everything. Just start. I recommend shooting the work frequently. Your photographs will jog the experience to mind later. As will every other piece, at any scale, you attempt thereafter. This big thing will live on in your every other piece at any size, down the road.

Evaluation and Grading

Grading is on a High Pass/Pass/Low Performance/Fail basis for NYSS MFA candidates.

Readings and Resources

There is not a reading list to be gathered and read beforehand. The Instructor will read things aloud day by day and provide either or both photocopies and citations for follow up reading: a reading list does accumulate over time and you walk away with it. Our slide lectures are recorded and a link is distributed afterward. I have a program of texts in mind, but my program is always modified by the conversation that develops at work in the room. Things come up and they are included in the slide talks and readings that follow.

Materials and supplies

Clay will be supplied by the Studio School. As to tools, please bring what modelling tools you have. The larger tools needed for work at life-scale can and will be made in-house the first morning, and anytime at need thereafter. Toolmaking skill and the mental readiness to make tools at need is one of this course's essential "Learning Outcomes."

As to store-bought items, the largest elephant ear natural sponges are helpful, as are synthetic sponges (a tile-setters sponge, available from a hardware store). Old towels are also useful, the coarse-nappier the better. A few plastic tubs with lids are handy for keeping some clay at the ready in other states of plasticity (more or less squishy).

An email will be sent to participants with any additional materials prior to the start of the Marathon.

School, Department & Class Policies

Please refer to the Student Handbook for information regarding the School's policies on academic integrity and plagiarism. All students must abide by the general health and safety regulations laid out in the Student Handbook and on the School's homepage nyss.org with regards to Covid protocols and entry procedures. Students are expected to be on time and to attend all classes. Classes missed due to Covid related precautions will be excused.