

# Academies of Art and schools of Design: a comparative study of Art and Design education

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*Art academy / Design education / Disegno / Dessin / Decorative arts*

Design education has rapidly spread worldwide since the mid-twentieth century. In some countries, design schools have enormously increased in number compared with art schools. The delicate but essential oneness of art and design education will be viewed in a long perspective of history spanning from the Accademia del Disegno founded in Firenze in 1563 to the Government School of Design founded in London in 1837, and to the écoles d'art et de design in France in the twenty-first century.

## 1. Introduction

This paper will present changing meanings of 'design' and its related words in Italy and France. It will also demonstrate that 'art' and 'design' essentially play complementary roles in the history and theory of art and design as well as in the names of academies and schools in these closely related disciplines even today. I will analyze this interwoven history in two phases: first, with regard to 'Italian-French interactions in the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries' and second, in relation to the 'French-British interactions in the eighteenth to twentieth centuries'.

## 2. Italian-French interactions in the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries

The first art academy was founded in Firenze in 1563 by Cosimo I de' Medici as part of the *Accademia e Compagnia delle Arti del Disegno*. It consisted of two different organizations: 'Arts of Design/ Drawing' Academy and Company. Both of these English translations, 'Arts of Design' and 'Arts of Drawing', are rather historical names referring to the arts based on 'disegno', principally painting, sculpture, and architecture.

According to Giorgio Vasari, one of the most influential figures in the formation of the academy and company, '*disegno* is the Father of Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture'. *Disegno* refers not only to artists' drawings but also to architects' drawings. Along with the study of the human body, anatomy, and life drawings, mathematics was a core subject of the Medicean institution's curriculum.<sup>1</sup> This curriculum explains the reasons why *disegno* was considered not only artists' drawings but also architects' drawings—or, in a sense, technical or technological drawings.

In 1784, the Grand Duke of Tuscany Pietro Leopoldo decreed that

1 K.-E. Barzman, 'The Florentine Accademia del Disegno: Liberal Education and the Renaissance Artist', *Academies of Art between Renaissance and Romanticism*, SDU uitgeverij, 's-Gravenhage, pp. 14-25.

all schools of drawing in Firenze would be combined under one roof, the newly founded Academy of Fine Arts, *Accademia di Belle Arti*. The most prestigious Arts of '*Disegno*' Academy and Company changed its name simply to the Arts of *Disegno* Academy, *Accademia delle Arti del Disegno*, conserving the task of formation and supervision of artistic production of the Grand Duchy of Tuscany.

The Academy of Fine Arts in Firenze was one of the first art academies in Italy to adopt a new name, 'Accademia di Belle Arti'; another early example was the *Accademia di Belle Arti di Brera*, which was founded in Milano in 1776. Art academies in Roma, Bologna, Napoli, Venezia, and Parma were founded much earlier than Milano. However, they did not first use the term 'Belle Arti' but instead chose names such as the *Accademia di San Luca*, Roma, for example. Many older academies used the name 'disegno', sometimes in combination with the names of specific arts. The Academy in Ferrara was the Academy of the Drawing of Figure and Architecture (*Accademia del Disegno di Figura e di Architettura*). This name displays both the artistic and architectural meaning of 'disegno'. One of Leonardo's drawings in the Uffizi gallery presents this double aspect of 'disegno'.

Although the term 'Belle Arti' itself was used in documents of some art academies in Italy, such as the *Accademia di San Luca*, Roma, even at the beginning of the eighteenth century, it was not until the last quarter of the same century when a few Italian academies began to adopt the term in their school names. Many other art academies in Italy adopted the term of 'Belle Arti' in the early nineteenth century. When reviewing its background, we can see a series of French discourses on 'Beaux-Arts' in the eighteenth century as well as the reorganization of art education in France around the turn of the century.

French interaction with Italy in art education started even earlier. In 1666, the *Académie de France à Roma* was founded. In 1676, the *Accademia di San Luca*, Roma was amalgamated with the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture (*Académie royale de Peinture et de Sculpture*), which had been organized in Paris in 1648.<sup>2</sup> From Paris, Charles Le Brun also ruled the *Accademia di San Luca*, Roma. However, it is not directly related to 'Beaux-Arts', since académies were still segregated by separate arts or music even in France.

It was in 1816 when the *Académie des Beaux-Arts* was organized in France, its predecessor being the *Classe des Beaux-Arts* of the

2 Nikolaus Pevsner, *Academies of Art, Past and Present*, The University Press, Cambridge, 1940, pp. 101-102.

*Institut de France*, formed in 1803. Both the Royal Academy of Painting & Sculpture (*Académie royale de Peinture et de Sculpture*) and the Royal Academy of Architecture (*Académie royale de Architecture*), as well as the academy of music, had been abolished during the French Revolution.

Although the Italian term 'Belle Arti' could be as old as or even older than the French term 'Beaux-Arts', French 'Beaux-Arts' was more systematically discussed in the eighteenth century. In this regard, Charles Batteux's *The Fine Arts Reduced to a Single Principle* (*Les beaux arts réduits à un même principe*), published in 1746, was the most important piece of literature in the mid-eighteenth century.<sup>3</sup> Batteux set forth a clear-cut system related to the fine arts. Devoted entirely to this subject, the book was very influential and its views were widely accepted, not only in France but throughout Europe as well.

A French tendency to distinguish the artistic from the technical can be observed in another related word, 'dessein'. It was spelled 'dessin' in some special cases. Its early example appeared in rather negative terms in the first systematically edited French Dictionary, Richelet's *Dictionnaire François*, published in 1680. In this dictionary, the French word 'dessein' was mostly spelled with an 'e' after the double 'ss', as explained below:

*Dessein, dessin*, as a term for painting, some modern people write the word without 'e' after double 'ss'. However, it should not be imitated. Their distinction is not established.<sup>4</sup> (Richelet 1680: 698)

This explanation has two aspects. One is that 'dessein' with an 'e' was its original spelling, and a new spelling that did not include 'e' after the double 'ss' became popular for use in the seventeenth century by certain groups of people to denote the drawing of paintings. The other is that no clear distinction existed yet between these two different spellings, 'dessein' and 'dessin'.

Another publication that exerted great influence in terms of 'Beaux-Arts' was *Encycloédie* by Diderot and d'Alembert, first published in 1751.<sup>5</sup> Diderot actually disliked and criticized Batteux's 'Beaux-Arts', which subsequently was not included in its first publication. In a supplementary volume published in 1776, 'beaux-arts' finally appeared in the *Encycloédie*. Even in this case, Batteux was not directly referred to. Instead, the explanation of 'beaux-arts' was based completely on a translation from a German book by Johann Georg Sulzer, a Swiss-born scholar who was active in Germany.<sup>6</sup>

However, the *Encycloédie* was very popular and was also printed

3 Charles Batteux, *Les beaux arts réduits à un même principe*, Paris, 1746.

4 P. Richelet. *Dictionnaire François*, Genève, 1680. « Quelques modernes écrivent le mot de *dessein* étant un terme de peinture sans e après les deux ss; mais on ne les doit pas imiter en cela. Leur distinction n'est pas fondée [...] » See also Nathalie Heinich, *Du peintre à l'artiste; artisans et académiciens à l'âge classique*, Les Éditions de Minuit, Paris, 1993, pp. 152-158.

5 D. Diderot et J. le R. d'Alembert (ed.), *Encyclopédie, ou, Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers, par une société de gens de lettres*, Paris, 1751, 1777.

6 Johann Georg Sulzer, *Allgemeine Theorie der schönen Künste*, Leipzig, 1771-74.

in Italy. Although the foundation of the *Accademia di Brera* in Milano in 1776 was of course a coincidence, its name, *Accademia di Belle Arti*, was perhaps suggested by the *Encycloédie*'s new supplement published in the same year. The change of school name in Firenze in 1784 to the *Accademia di Belle Arti* could also be supported by the new entry of 'beaux-arts' in the *Encycloédie*, which was widely used in Italy.

Art academy in Italy changed its name, generally speaking, from *Accademia delle Arti del Disegno* to the *Accademia di Belle Arti* at the beginning of the nineteenth century. This is a period when Napoléon Bonaparte ruled over northern Italy. From this point of view, it is possible to say that *Accademia delle Arti del Disegno* in Italy was renamed the *Accademia di Belle Arti* one after the other in the later phase of French absolute monarchy from Louis XIV to Napoléon Bonaparte. Charles Batteux's *Les beaux arts (réduits à un même principe)*, published in 1746, was dedicated to Louis XV.

### 3. French-British interactions in the eighteenth to twentieth centuries

Diderot's *Encycloédie* was based on Chambers' *Cyclopaedia*, first published in London in 1728. It was very rich in its description of 'design' in comparison with, for instance, Richelet's French Dictionary.<sup>7</sup> Starting from the general meanings of design, such as thought, plan, or representation of a painting, poem, or building, Chambers' *Cyclopaedia* then describes 'design' in textile production in great detail. Its description of 'drawing' in painting is also very detailed, referring to actual methods of drawing and to qualities in drawings, such as corrections, good taste, elegance, character, diversity, expression, or perspective.<sup>8</sup> The entry of 'design' in Chambers' *Cyclopaedia* is, however, more characterized by a 'mechanical method of designing'. It includes, for instance, how to use grid and optical devices for design.

It is said that the so-called 'Industrial Revolution' in Britain was not a sudden revolution but a continuous process of developments. Even though the Chambers' *Cyclopaedia* was published in 1728, a few years before the invention of the flying shuttle, one of the key developments in the industrialization of weaving, we can see aspects of the early years of the continuous process of industrial developments in Britain in its description of 'design'.

Even though they are used in more conventional terms, 'liberal arts' and 'mechanical arts', based on the Chambers' *Cyclopaedia* published in London in 1728, show that Diderot was in a sense more radical rather than conservative, equally regarding all of the arts in the *Encycloédie*, which is full of beautiful illustrations of mechanical arts and industries. It consistently spells 'dessein'

7 E. Chambers (ed.), *Cyclopaedia: or, a universal dictionary of arts and sciences*, London, 1728.

8 The description of 'Design' in Chambers' *Cyclopaedia* [1728] is at least twice as long as 'Dessein' in Richelet's *Dictionnaire François* [1728 edition] or Furetière's *Dictionnaire Universel François et Latin* [1727 edition].

with an 'e', instead of 'dessin' without the 'e' after the 'ss', with both drawings of human figures and of mannequins being illustrated as 'dessein'. It is a very noteworthy fact that not only was a drawing enlarger used but a 'camera obscura' was also employed to illustrate 'dessein'. Both 'representation' and 'reproduction' were 'dessein' in eighteenth-century France—or at least in the *Encycloédie*.

Rather ironically, however, Diderot's *Encycloédie* became one of the major media to spread the idea of 'beaux-arts' all across Europe. 'Fine arts', an English equivalent to 'beaux-arts', also became commonly used in the late eighteenth century, and it is generally accepted that it was based on Charles Batteux's 'beaux-arts', which was first translated as 'polite arts' and then as 'fine arts' in Britain.

Diderot's *Encycloédie* started as a French enlarged version of the Chambers' *Cyclopaedia*, reflecting both French tendency and British influence. It finally became a much larger encyclopedia than the *Cyclopaedia*. Reflecting a new French tendency, *Encycloédie*'s explanation of 'dessein' as a term to denote drawing for painting was very much amplified. However, it also included a considerably detailed explanation of 'dessein' as a term for music, architecture, and textile production, which were not included in most French dictionaries previously published, such as Richelet, Furetière, or the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*.<sup>9</sup>

When we read these descriptions and see 'dessein' in Diderot's *Encycloédie*, in which it is applied to human figures, mannequins, and drawing enlargers, as well as 'camera obscura', it is understandable that the idea of 'dessein' was used for a school that sought to provide drawing education on ideas of every sort and to implement the practical application of universal principles in eighteenth-century France. It was the Royal Free Drawing School or Design School (*École Royale Gratuite de Dessin*) established in Paris in 1767 that tried to fulfill the Enlightenment idea of providing an education that was open to all males and females, rich and poor.<sup>10</sup>

In the case of this school, 'dessin' was perhaps first spelled with an 'e' and then without an 'e' after the 'ss' around 1776. In the same year, the supplement volume of the *Encycloédie* was still using 'dessein' with an 'e' after 'ss' in 1776.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, the *École Royale Gratuite de Dessin* was one of the earliest examples of a school that adopted the 'dessin' without an 'e' after 'ss' in its school name. However, it was indeed the 'Royal Free Design School' rather than a 'Drawing School' for painting.

In 1837, seventy years after the 'dessin' school in Paris was

9 This description of qualities in drawing was adopted in later editions of Furetière's *Dictionnaire Universel*.

10 Ulrich Leben, *Object Design in the Age of Enlightenment, The History of the Royal Free Drawing School in Paris*, The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, 2004, pp. 34–68.

11 The *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* first gave the word 'dessin' without an 'e' after 'ss' in its 1798 version and explained it as a term of art. Before the 1798 version, we only find 'dessein' with an 'e' after 'ss' in the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*.

founded, the British government founded a similar school in London. It is said that when they constructed the Government School of Design, they had the name '*École Royale de Dessin*' in mind.<sup>12</sup> The Government School of Design became the Royal College of Art in 1899, while the *École Royale Gratuite de Dessin* had become the *École Nationale des Arts Décoratifs* in 1877.

The change of a school name from '*École de dessin*' to '*École des arts décoratifs*' was of historical importance. French authorities chose the new term 'Arts Décoratifs' for this field of specialization, while fine arts specialists, particularly some classical painters, insisted on 'dessin' as the foundation of 'Beaux-Arts'.<sup>13</sup> The academician Charles Blanc's *Grammaire des arts du dessin* (1867) and its counterpart *Grammaire des arts décoratifs* (1882) seem to have represented a framework of French art education in this age. French academies established a monopoly of 'dessin' in the late nineteenth century by giving the '*École de dessin*' nearly the same status as the *École nationale des Beaux-Arts*. It was the *École nationale des Arts Décoratifs*, today's ENSAD (*École nationale supérieure des Arts Décoratifs*), renamed in 1927, as opposed to the ENSBA (*École nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts*).

Italy started its school of design (disegno) in the sixteenth century, while France started its school of design (dessin) in the eighteenth century. However, they stopped using these terms for school names during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It was Britain that finally inherited a series of 'design' terms, all of which were derived from a group of related Latin terms, such as 'disegno' or 'dessin'. This is not only an interesting aspect of art and design history in Europe but also an important one, which is perhaps related to circumstances of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when Britain appeared more advanced than the other European countries because of its industrial revolution and developments.

In addition to national and academic reasons, there seem to have been local reasons as well for the renaming of some French art schools. One of the first free drawing schools, the *École gratuite de Dessin* was founded in Lyon in 1756, followed by the *École royale gratuite de Dessin* in 1766. While the former became the *École nationale des Beaux-Arts de Lyon* in 1848, the latter became the *École nationale des Arts Décoratifs* in 1877 in Paris, where the other national art school, *École nationale des Beaux-Arts*, already existed.

12 Quentin Bell, *The Schools of Design*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1963, p. 68. Quentin Bell wrote in his footnote that the late Mr. Drummond said it (the term 'School of Design') arose because the originator did not know the English word for the French word *Dessin*. He also wrote that in France, there have been *Écoles de Dessin* that were actually schools for drawing. As I contend in this paper, however, at least the *École royale gratuite de dessin* was not a school of drawing for painting but was a pioneering school of design in France. In this sense, the English 'School of Design' was not the mistranslation of the French term '*Écoles de Dessin*'. On the other hand, it was perhaps becoming difficult for the French school of design to keep the name 'dessin' in the 1870s when 'dessin' was going to be monopolized by the *Académie des Beaux-Arts* and the *Écoles des Beaux-Arts*.

13 The 'art décoratif' was not an old term but a kind of neologism in mid-nineteenth century France. In E. Littré's *Dictionnaire de la langue française* (1863), we find an early example of the actual use of the term 'art décoratif'.

#### 4. Conclusion: An aspect of art and design education in the twenty-first century

Changes of the names of educational institutions in art and design are continuing in Europe where design education was started as early as the mid-eighteenth century. Recent changes in France are also noteworthy. l'Andéa, *l'Association nationale des directeurs d'écoles supérieures d'art*, is the group of directors of all the French art schools placed under the academic control of the Ministry of Culture and issuing a national degree after three or five years of studies following secondary school advanced level examinations. As of 2012, fifty-four art schools are members of l'Andéa. Among them, nine schools now include the English word 'design' in their school names, such as the *École supérieure d'Art et de Design* of Amiens, Orléans, Reims, and Marseille.

ESAD, an abbreviation for the *École Supérieure d'Art et de Design* (or d'Art et Design), seems to have become comparable to ESBA, *École Supérieure des Beaux-Arts*. The number of ESAD schools that include the word 'design' has been increasing since the 1990s and particularly late 2000s. This is a very unusual phenomenon in the country where the French Academy [*Académie française*] always tries to protect the French language from the creeping invasion of other languages, such as English. We should also pay attention to another fact that all of these schools which include the English word 'design' in their school names are using it in combination with the simple French word 'art' instead of 'beaux-arts', and that the number of schools using the term 'beaux-arts' in their names is decreasing.

We do not know how long this change will continue or how far it will spread. We are possibly witnessing another historic change in art and design education, which is comparable to a change in the almost opposite direction from the *Accademia delle Arti del Disegno* to the *Accademia di Belle Arti* in Italy around 1800. This change occurs only with school names in a particular country. In the act of changing school names, however, we may find a greater and more global transition in the education of art and design beyond the borders of a country.

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