Mandy Hallenius has seen adults think that people can’t learn to paint or draw but she disagrees.

"It’s easier to learn how to build than relearn how to build from scratch," Hallenius said. "It's more efficient, more practical. Why reinvent the wheel?"

"You have to go through 60 years of history, of knowledge, which generation after generation built, has left us a library of literature, a database of skills, forms, and methods of the classics that are worth keeping, and why they continue to look at the past for that which inspires and imparts to us. For the full story, see our Mandy Hallenius Classics article."

Hallenius said that after all, these skills already exist and art teachers, who are trained in the classics, are able to draw, paint, and sculpt from imagination to create art, and that through music, there is also a need for skill-based education in the visual arts. By learning a student has many tools to express themselves.

"If I want people to see it as I see it, I make sure they see it," Hallenius said. "I'm not just teaching them to draw, I'm teaching them to see."

"That's an either/or proposition. Hallenius explained. "But adults often remain stuck at this level, not realizing that drawing can be taught. "No one thinks they can't even play piano or sing. People realize we need to take piano lessons in order to learn to play," Hallenius said.

According to the DVI website: "Like teaching the classics, teaching the skills of the atelier movement has an either/or proposition, Hallenius explained. "But adults often remain stuck at this level, not realizing that drawing can be taught. "No one thinks they can't even play piano or sing. People realize we need to take piano lessons in order to learn to play," Hallenius said.

Hallenius's sister learned to paint through the atelier movement.

"It didn't matter what they drew. As Hallenius explained: "I'm looking at a houseplant, and saw that it has a spiral pattern. If you want people to make art, you need to teach them the skills to do it."

"These skills are needed to draw or paint what they can imagine. To help children develop these skills, as well as open up many avenues for cognitive development, the classic method of training visual artists should be salvaged from the past and incorporated into the curriculum today. She founded the Da Vinci Initiative (DVI) with this objective in mind.

"If we don't use these skills, we're losing the cultural memory that is built up from generation to generation. Hallenius said."

The institute's first objective is to make teachers aware that this training exists. "I've had teachers tell me they didn't even know they could learn to draw," she said. "There's a hunger in the art community for this knowledge. So they're eager to pursue it."

In order to get the word out about these skills, Hallenius said that DVI offers give workshops and attend state and national conferences. Hallenius travels 60 times a year and has visited 20 to 30 states.

"I can see that the 22nd rib has been removed in the model," she said. "Erasing the right rib in an image of a woman makes her waist appear smaller. But in knowing how masses move in space, Hallenius can spot the lie."

Hallenius says her sister learned to read before she did, and so her sister had access to vistas beyond Hallenius's imaginations. "No one would dare that reality opening up the world to us in calculable ways."

It's the same with visual literacy. When Hallenius sees a billboard with a model lying on a beach, she immediately knows whether that image has been Photoshopped or not. "I can see that the 22nd rib has been removed in the model," she said. "Erasing the right rib in an image of a woman makes her waist appear smaller. But in knowing how masses move in space, Hallenius can spot the lie."

Another example comes from the video game industry, which is always seeking to create games that feel real. "I can see that the 22nd rib has been removed in the model," she said. "Erasing the right rib in an image of a woman makes her waist appear smaller. But in knowing how masses move in space, Hallenius can spot the lie."

Gaining these skills in drawing allows children to do more than just compose pretty pictures. As DVI's website outlines, in practicing these techniques, students gain hand-eye coordination and fine motor skills. They gain an awareness of history when they are introduced to the background of these techniques. The draftsmanship skills they learn give them a working knowledge of geometry and ratios that will serve as an experiential foundation for abstract math encountered later. And as children explore the subject matter of painting—how colors and details in paintings help tell stories—students are learning language skills.

Of course, students gain visual literacy, too. They begin to understand information that the eyes take in as a new way. New colors, new values, your proper and incorrect ways they could with- out this training," Hallenius said.

"By teaching students how to break objects down and understand them in different dimensions, students gain gain advancement in their visual perception, and therefore their visual intelligence increases," the website states.

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