

WHAT LIES BENEATH: TECHNIQUES USED FOR UNDERDRAWINGS

Lesson Plan

15-Adult



*Creation of Eve (Altarespiece of Ciudad Rodrigo), Maestro Bartolomé and his workshop, 1480-1488.
Detail of Eve (left) and the corresponding infrared reflectogram.*

Summary:

The underdrawings found throughout *The Altarpiece of Ciudad Rodrigo* attests to the fact that many different hands were involved in its creation. Infrared reflectography is a useful tool that can reveal both preliminary sketches in addition to compositional changes. Artists would either plan their composition on a temporary cartoon (later transferring the design onto the panel) or apply the underdrawing directly on the prepared support making changes when necessary. In this lesson, participants will learn about the various methods and styles used by the painters of the Ciudad Rodrigo Altarpiece and create their own underdrawings emulating these techniques.

Age group:

15 to adults.

Length of lesson:

2 lessons of 50 minutes.

Objectives:

- Introduce the students to underdrawings found throughout *The Altarpiece of Ciudad Rodrigo* ([Retablo Underdrawings](#))
- Review how Old Master painters transferred their drawings to wooden panels or canvas.
- Introduce infrared reflectography (see link on Kress Reconstruction Website) to show how technology can help the understanding of artistic practices.
- Enable creative exploration and discovery.
- Develop analytical skills.

Materials:

- Power point explaining the uncovering of the underdrawings of the panels belonging to *The Altarpiece of Ciudad Rodrigo*, including the use of technical analysis (Infrared Reflectography).
- Focus on The Creation of Eve; a cartoon was used to position the figure of Eve as demonstrated by the drastic shift in position in the underdrawing. The sketch of Eve is identical in size to the final painted figure.
- Power point explaining techniques of transfer in painting: pouncing and tracing. See the techniques of [underdrawing](#) on this website.
- Unlined paper for each participant.
- 4B pencils for each participant.
- A pattern tracing stylus for each participant.
- A sharp stylus or needle for each participant.

- Masking tape.
- Two pre-primed gesso panels- <http://www.truegesso.com/main2-13.html> (to see how grounds were traditionally applied visit the [ground preparation](#) link).
- Black charcoal.
- Black pen or black ink.
- Brushes.

Lesson Day 2: Tracing and Pouncing

Tracing

1. Explain with a Power Point or handouts how infrared reflectography (IRR) was used to reveal the original underdrawings of the panels of the *Altarpiece of Ciudad Rodrigo*. Include comparisons of IRR images and the final painting.
2. Show a slideshow that explains transfer techniques (pouncing and tracing) and their specific use in painting.
3. Ask the participant to make a drawing with a pencil or to copy a drawing displayed on the screen, and spread black charcoal over its back using a brush.
4. Ask the student to attach the drawing to the prepared panel with tape.
5. The students should follow the outlines of the drawing using the pattern tracing stylus. The drawing will transfer from the original drawing to the panel.
6. The participants can reinforce the outline of the drawing transferred to the panel with a black pen or black ink.

Pouncing

1. Give each participant a piece of unlined paper and ask them to create their own drawing or to reproduce a drawing displayed on the screen.
2. Each participant will use a needle to perforate the outline of the drawing.
3. The finished “pricked” cartoon is then attached to the pre-primed gesso panel using tape. The participants will spread a small amount of black charcoal powder across the surface using a brush, ensuring that the charcoal successfully passes through the holes onto the panel.
4. When the drawing has been completely transferred, the participant will outline the drawing with a black pen or black ink.
5. Discuss with the students the benefits and drawback of each technique. Include in the discussion issues of time consumption, facility, types of materials, etc.

Glossary:

Ground: A foundation layer used to prepare a support material (panel or canvas) for the application of paint. Grounds provide a smooth, uniform, and nonporous surface.

Infrared reflectography (IRR): Infrared light has the ability to penetrate through paint layers to reveal what is underneath (e.g. underdrawings).

Panel: Any flat, rigid support, usually made of wood, prepared with ground layers for painting upon. Until the adoption of canvas, most movable paintings in Europe were painted on panel.

Underdrawing: Preliminary drawing made before the application of paint layers. Some underdrawings are visible to the naked eye, especially when the paint layers are very thin. However, infrared techniques allow the detection of underdrawings that are concealed under the paint layers.

Resources:

Pre-primed gesso panels: <http://www.truegesso.com/main2-13.html>

Bomford, David, ed., *Art in the Making. Underdrawings in Renaissance Paintings*. London: National Gallery Company, 2002.

Cameo: Conservation & Art Materials Encyclopedia Online, last accessed August 22, 2013, <http://cameo.mfa.org>.

Dotseth, Amanda W., Barbara C. Anderson and Mark A. Roglán, ed. *Fernando Gallego and His Workshop. The Altarpiece from Ciudad Rodrigo*. Dallas: Meadows Museum, SMU and Philip Wilson Publishers, 2008.

Oxford Art Online, last accessed August 22, 2013, <http://www.oxfordartonline.com>.

[Reconstruction of *The Raising of Lazarus*](#)

[Retablo Underdrawings](#) – webpage hosted by the University of Arizona Museum of Art showcasing infrared reflectograms of the entire retablo.

Additional Image:



Infrared reflectogram of *The Creation of Eve*