

Painting Professorship at Fine Arts of Lisbon, 1934: Case Study on Model Proportions of Five Paintings

Ana Mafalda Cardeira¹

Abstract

The present case study intends to compare proportion on five paintings made, in 1934, for a competition for Painting Professor in the Faculty of Fine Arts of Lisbon. Model proportions indicated that the male portrayed would had a height between 170 and 180 cm. Henrique Franco winning represented the breakthrough from naturalism in the Academy of Fine Arts of Lisbon with the embrace of new plastic forms of representation, as it can be confirmed by these painting competition testimonies.

Keywords: Painting, Human Proportion, Nude Model, Academic, Fine Arts, Portugal.

1. Introduction

No hay mejor assunto para los artistas que el cuerpo humano. (Climent & Lance, 2007, p.7)

Nude study and the application of anatomy have already been approached many times through history, in which its used has been mutually positive resulted in exchange of knowledge (Comar, 2008; Barcsay, 1996; Moreaux, 1988). This means, in the artistic context, the study of anatomy is essential for the representation of the human body (or animal), and reversing the process, scientific illustration is essential for the study of anatomy by the scientists and others scholars that need such scientific knowledge.

For the purpose of this study, it is worth emphasizing that *proportion* results from the contraction of "*pro*" and "*portion*", meaning "according to a section".

¹ Artistic Studies Research Center (CIEBA/FBAUL), Largo da Academia Nacional de Belas-Artes, 1249-058, Portugal.

In other words, the relation between section and whole, established mathematically and obeying to different criteria throughout Art History (Climent & Lance, 2007). However, even before presenting the case study of 5 nude paintings, the word *canon* means “rule” e “precept”, as denotation of a specific norm that establishes ideal proportions to the human body in order to represent it artistically (Climent & Lance, 2007). Other definitions can be here conjured, but it is not justified taking into consideration the aim of this case study.

The application of anatomy in art comes from the opposing and reciprocal necessity, integrating as illustration in Medicine, forming through time as reciprocal necessity of visual representation (Harcout, 1987; Shaw, 994). Nevertheless, besides renaissance period, anatomical representation for artists enduringly appeared in the eighteenth-century and only in the nineteenth-century, and ever since plastic anatomy has occupied itself with aesthetics of proportions of the human body (Lombardini, 1903).

The title of this paper rests on the inversion of the process already published as paper, in which “beyond the visible” represents the analytical study of the material and technical characterization of paintings from the Faculty of Fine Arts of Lisbon Painting Collection (Cardeira, 2013). Here, we present inedited five paintings made by different Portuguese painters for a Painting Professorship in 1934 (made at the same time and space) are showed and studied in a comparative and explorative perspective. While modernist vanguards were already established in Europe, and in particular in France, Portuguese Academy of Fine Arts only could discontinue naturalism with this professorship competition. Therefore, these paintings determine the new educational vanguard took forward in the Academy of Fine Arts of Lisbon since 1934.

Finally, what we intent, frequently forgotten from the researchers of analytical scientific field, it is to regain the look into the painting’s surface and the representation embodied. Moreover, invoking the painting’s virtual domain to help us analyzing the proportion of the human body represented. With the aim of studying the proportions of paintings from this collection, we resorted to photogrammetric techniques of these paintings, under digital format and two software products to process the images.

1. Proportion method of analysis

The resort of multimedia tools is essential for the survey of this study. As a first step, photographic record was made in the Painting storage, with the purpose of avoiding the misplacement environment of the artworks.

To obtain the photo record, the painting is placed with a 90° in relation with the floor, the camera (®Canon 5D + lens EF 24-105mm f/4L IS USM) is placed in the middle height of the painting and at a 90°, a gray scale is placed on the surface of the painting and two light sources at 45° in relation with the center of the painting.

In a second step, ©Photoshop CS6 is used to crop and treat the image color. Nevertheless, this software is also useful to calculate the proportion of the head, thus the height from the cortex of the cranium and the calcanei region of the foot (extremity of the lower limb) and in this case, the paintings made at the same time by different authors, representing the model from different views. Values are related to painting's digital dimension and do not correspond to real measurements.

Nevertheless, in order to confirm values of heights, we resort to ©InDesign CS6 software, using a grid with equal size, from the vortex of the cranium till the calcanei region of the foot (extremity of the lower limb). This analysis of proportions methodology is accomplished by taking the module of the head and compare to the total dimension of the model's body height (Climent & Lance, 2007).

2. Plastic analysis

In this paper, we will demonstrate with argumentative support to sustain a theory of canons using paintings made for a Painting Professorship at the School of Fine Arts of Lisbon in 1934, where Abel Manta (1888-1982), Fernando dos Santos (1892-1965), Henrique Franco (1883-1961), João Reis (1899-1982) and Ricardo Bensaúde (1894-1974) competed (Fig. 1). In this professorship, Henrique Franco won the cathedra, being promoted in that same year (Faria, 2009).

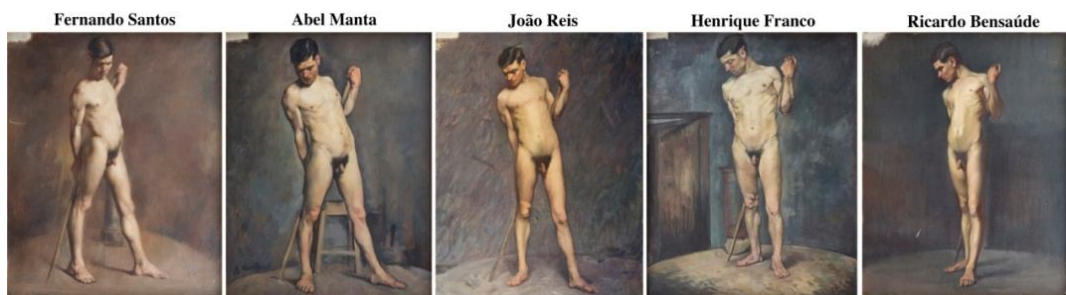


Fig. 1 –*Male Nude* (from left to right): Fernando dos Santos (1892-1965), Abel Manta (1888-1982), João Reis (1899-1982), Henrique Franco (1883-1961) e Ricardo Bensaúde (1894-1974). All made in 1934, oil on canvas, approximately 100 x 80 cm. (©FBAUL)

We start from the analyze of painting's composition and structure, observing that these artworks were made at the same time and place (professorship), representing different views of the model, all made in oil on canvas and with similar dimensions of height 100 and width 80 cm (Fig. 2).

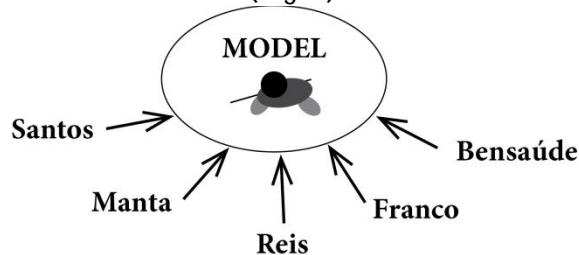


Fig. 2 –Position of painters in relation to the model (top view).

In structural terms, it is possible to observe that all the painters place the model at the center of the composition. On the other hand, if we assume that the paintings did not suffer dimension modifications of the canvas through time, both paintings of Santos and Franco are positioned slightly above the horizontal line from the center of the painting.

In terms of pre-thinking of a balanced composition, it is possible to observe a major ability to prior position the model from Reis' and Bensaúde's paintings, being the one of Manta as well taught in a centered pictorial position. In terms of color and tone, it is possible to divide all the paintings by background and model, balancing the final result into a reciprocal combination and relation of tone.

In relation of the model depicted by these painters, it can be observed a major choice of light hues, apart of Reis that presents more yellowish flesh shades. Nevertheless, it is worthwhile noting that this yellowish tone can be related to varnish oxidation, resulting in yellowing and darkening of the artwork (Fig. 3).

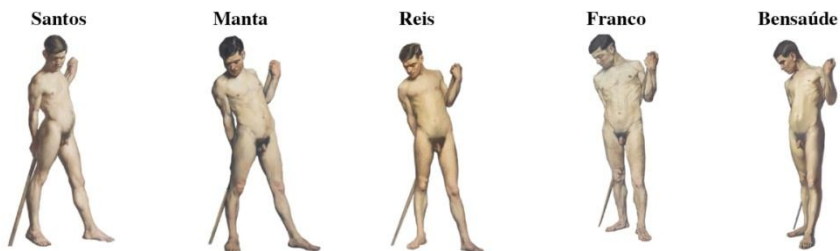


Fig. 3 – Model figures without background with painter's last name indicated above. (©FBAUL)

In the background level, it can be distinguished different tones assigned from these painters. Hence, we can distinguish bluish tones from Manta, Franco and Bensaúde and brownish tones from Santos and Reis (Fig. 4).



**Fig. 4 – Background without figures with painter's last name indicated above.
(©FBAUL)**

In plastic terms, we can make an initial analysis and determine on the model and the background, being both levels the predominant in these compositions. On one hand, we have a plastic expression on brushes strokes lighter on Santos and Reis paintings and a more demarcated by the zone painted in paintings made by Manta, Franco and Bensaúde. However, on the backgrounds, all painters present contrasting tones with the aim to emphasize the model and all are made with large paintbrushes, with the exception of Bensaúde (Taborda, 1922).

Finally, concerning the plastic handling, the relation of line border between model and background is homogeneous in Santos, Reis and Bensaúde's artworks, mixing both pictorial masses into a kind of mist. Nevertheless, in Manta and Franco's artworks, this frontier line is delimited by a darker and strong silhouette, clearly and heterogeneous delimiting the figure from the background.

3. Model proportion analysis

The concrete analysis was based on the canon, the relation between head and body and observed using criteria approached by Stratz, indicates that Manta and Bensaúde's paintings are made with a proportion of $7^{1/2}$ heads and can there are two hypotheses (values of measurements represented in the study do not correspond to the original dimensions of paintings – digital unit of measure for reference). The first consists in the fact that both painters, and specifically Manta, have followed a more naturalist canon comparing to Bensaúde.

The second hypothesis is based on the representation of Manta and Bensaúde's models are both closer to realism, with basis on naturalism concepts, might indicate that the model could had the height of approximately 170 cm (Fig. 5) (Stratz, 1926; Climent & Lance, 2007).

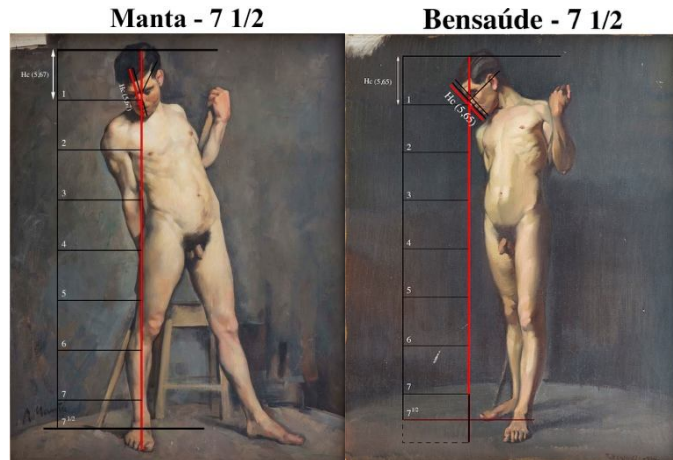


Fig. 5 –Male Nude of Abel Manta (left) and Ricardo Bensaúde (right), with proportion measurements. (©FBAUL)

In Santos and Reis' paintings, we observe a more stretched canon, which can indicate that both painters come closer to a more neoclassic movement, such as Vitruvius, with proportions closer to the head has eight parts of the body (Windle, 1892). However, the model could have had heighted between 175 and 180 cm, which is considerably closer to a realistic view and measurement of the man portrayed in this professorship (Fig. 6) (Stratz, 1926; Climent & Lance, 2007).

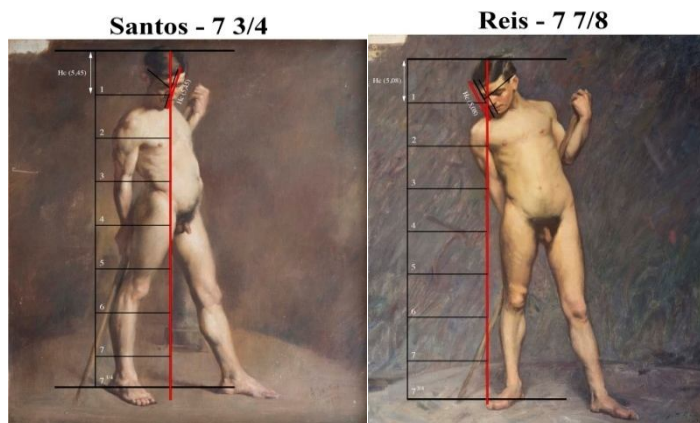


Fig. 6 –Male Nude of Fernando Santos (left) and João Reis (right), with proportion measurements. (©FBAUL)

Finally, the canon represented by Franco, according to Straz's criteria, would have represented a man of short stature, with a height of 165-170 cm (Stratz, 1926; Climent & Lance, 2007; Langer, 1994; Richer, 1893). However, carefully observing Franco's model, the total size of both legs is too short in relation with the rest of the body (taking into consideration that the real anatomy of the model is unknown and no other painter applied this proportion). In other words, the pelvis height would correspond to the center of the total height of the model and in this case, this height is inferior in relation to the superior (pelvis to head) (Fig. 7).

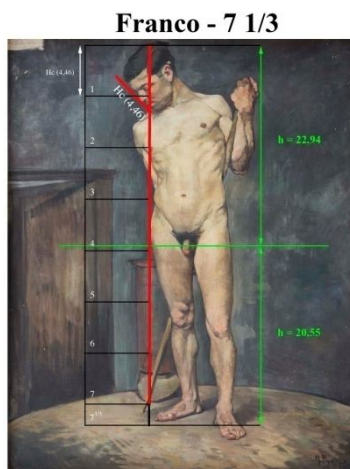


Fig. 7–*Male Nude* of Henrique Franco, with proportion measurements. (©FBAUL)

This representation could have been associated with a higher perspective that the painter would be in relation with the model, but not justified by the dimension of the inferior limbs (feet) and the relation with the head. Moreover, taking into consideration the last reform of 1860, which stayed in used through out the twentieth-century, stated the use of perfect models (Ferreira, 1860). Henceforth, if the model would in fact have this proportion, Franco would be the only painter portraying it like this.

Hence, it is possible to hypothesize the proportion representation in this professorship, being much closer to the correct representation in Manta and Bensaúde's paintings, gaining positively with the form, line, color, perspective and shadow the Manta's artwork. Curiously, in the eyes of the Portuguese Art History expert José Augusto-França, Henrique Franco would have won unfairly this professorship, being Abel Manta the worth winner (França, 2009).

In one sense, we can agree with Augusto-França's point of view, concerning the anatomical analyses, but in terms of plastic depiction, the most modernist of these painters was in fact Henrique Franco.

Moreover, this professorship marked the new arrival of modernism in the Academy of Fine Arts of Lisbon by introducing a Painting Professor with those firm strokes of plastic matter, prevailing among the new generation of Portuguese painters in the twentieth-century.

4. Conclusion

This case study intent to demonstrate the importance of virtual resources in the study of academic nude paintings to reach the canon and moreover, the methodology used in specific academies and times. In other words, proportion studies can indicate a specific school and theory basis used in the academies. In this case study, inedited five paintings made by different Portuguese painters for a Painting Professorship in 1934 (made at the same time and space) are showed and studied. Proportion analyses of these paintings were made by measuring the size of the head and multiply along the model's body, reaching an approximated canon that indicates that this male model had heighted between 170 and 180 cm. Although modernist vanguards were already established in Europe, the Portuguese Academy showed a slower pace to embrace new forms of pictorial representation and this professorship brake through with new and fresh plastic handling.

Acknowledgements

Author would like to thank the Faculty of Fine Arts of the University of Lisbon for lending these paintings for investigation.

6. References

- Barcsay, J. (1996) *Anatomía artística del cuerpo humano*. Barcelona: Idea Books, D. L., (p. 14). Translated by Antonio G. Valiente.
- Cardeira, A.M. et al. (2013) Caracterização material e técnica da pintura de Veloso Salgado – contributo museológico. *VOX MUSEI*, vol. 1, no. 1, 64-72.
- Climent, C.P. & Lance, M.M. (2007). *Las proporciones humanas y los cánones artísticos*.Valencia: Editorial Universidad Politécnica de Valencia, (pp. 7-19). "
- Comar, P. (2008) *Figures du corps : Une leçon d'anatomie à l'école des Beaux-Arts*. Paris: ENSBA – École des Beaux Arts de Paris, (pp. 22-28.)
- Faria, A. (2009). *A Coleção de Desenho Antigo da Faculdade de Belas-Artes de Lisboa (1830-1935): tradição, formação e gosto*. Master thesis. Lisboa: Faculdade de Belas-Artes da Universidade de Lisboa, (p. 151).

- Ferreira, J.M. (1860). *A Reforma da Academia de Bellas Artes de Lisboa*. Lisboa: Imprensa Nacional, (p. 51).
- França, J.A. (2009) *A Arte em Portugal no século XX: 1911-1961*. Lisboa: Livros Horizonte, (p. 123).
- Harcourt, G. (1987). *Andreas Vesalius and the Anatomy of Antique Sculpture*. *Representations*, vol. 1, no. 1, 28-61.
- Langer, C. (1884). *Anatomie der äussen formen des menschlichen korpers*. Wien: Toeplitz & Deuticke, (p. 46-52).
- Lombardini, A. (1903) *Manual de Anatomia Plastica*. Lisboa: Tavares Cardoso & Irmão (p. XIX).
- Moreaux, A. (1988) *Anatomia artistica del hombre: compendio de anatomia osea y muscular*. (1st ed.).Madrid: Ediciones Norma. (pp. 372-374). Translated by Juan Sobrado Perez.
- Richer, P. (1893). *Canon des proportions du corps humain*. Paris: Libraire Ch. Delagrave, (p. 28).
- Shaw, J.S. (1994) *The Anatomy Lesson: The Body, Technology and Empathy*. *Leonardo*, vol. 27, no. 1, 29-38.
- Stratz C.H. (1926). *La figura humana en el arte*. Barcelona: Salvat, (p. 9).
- Taborda J.C. (1922). *Regras da arte da pintura: com breves reflexões críticas sobre os caracteres distintivos de suas escolas, vidas e quadros de seus mais célebres professors*. Coimbra: Imprensa da Universidade, (p. 16). Translation of Prunetti, M. (1786). *Saggio Pictorico*. Rome: Bouchard et Gravier.
- Windle, B.C. (1892). *The Proportions of the Human Body*. London: Baillière, Tindall and Cox, (p. 28).

Figure captions

Fig. 1 –*Male Nude* (from left to right): Fernando dos Santos (1892-1965), Abel Manta (1888-1982), João Reis (1899-1982), Henrique Franco (1883-1961) e Ricardo Bensaúde(1894-1974). All made in 1934, oil on canvas, approximately 100 x 80 cm. (© FBAUL)

Fig. 2 – Position of painters in relation to the model (top view).

Fig. 3 – Model figures without background with painter's last name indicated above. (© FBAUL)

Fig. 4 – Background without figures with painter's last name indicated above. (© FBAUL)

Fig. 5 –*Male Nude* of Abel Manta (left) and Ricardo Bensaúde (right), with proportion measurements. (© FBAUL)

Fig. 6 –*Male Nude* of Fernando Santos (left) and João Reis (right), with proportion measurements. (© FBAUL)

Fig. 7 –*Male Nude* of Henrique Franco, with proportion measurements. (© FBAUL).