

BARGUE ENCORE AN ACADEMIC TRADITION REVIVED

For anyone interested in traditional art instruction, 19th-century culture, or even just superb printmaking, 2021 is now a year of historical and educational significance. After decades of research and planning, the *Bargue Encore* project has launched with the publication of 10 exquisite lithographs that replicate 10 of the plates in Charles Bargue's legendary *Cours de Dessin*, or *Drawing Course*. The visionaries who have guided this effort to completion are Daniel Graves, director and founder of the Florence Academy of Art in Italy, and Pierre Alloueteau, director and founder of Signus Publishing in southwestern Switzerland.

HISTORICAL CONTEXTS

First, an essential bit of background. The original version of Bargue's *Drawing Course* consisted of 197 loose-leaf plates (prints) published in three phases between 1868 and 1871. Each lithographic plate measured approximately 24 x 18 inches, and almost all were made by the Frenchman Charles Bargue, who was born in the mid-1820s and died in 1883. The crediting on the title pages of the course's first and second parts is significant: translated into English, it reads *Drawing Course by Charles Bargue, with the Aid of Jean-Léon Gérôme, Member of the Institute, Professor at the School of Fine Arts of Paris, etc.*

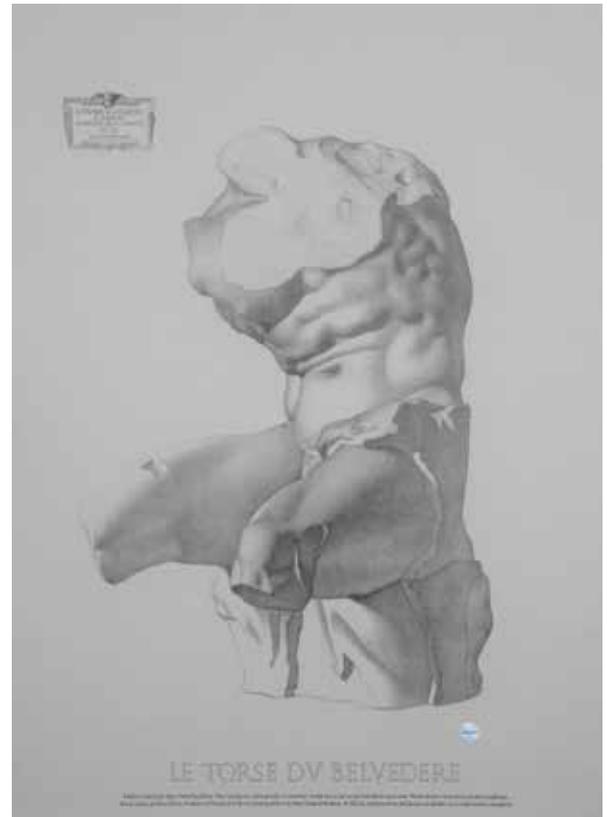
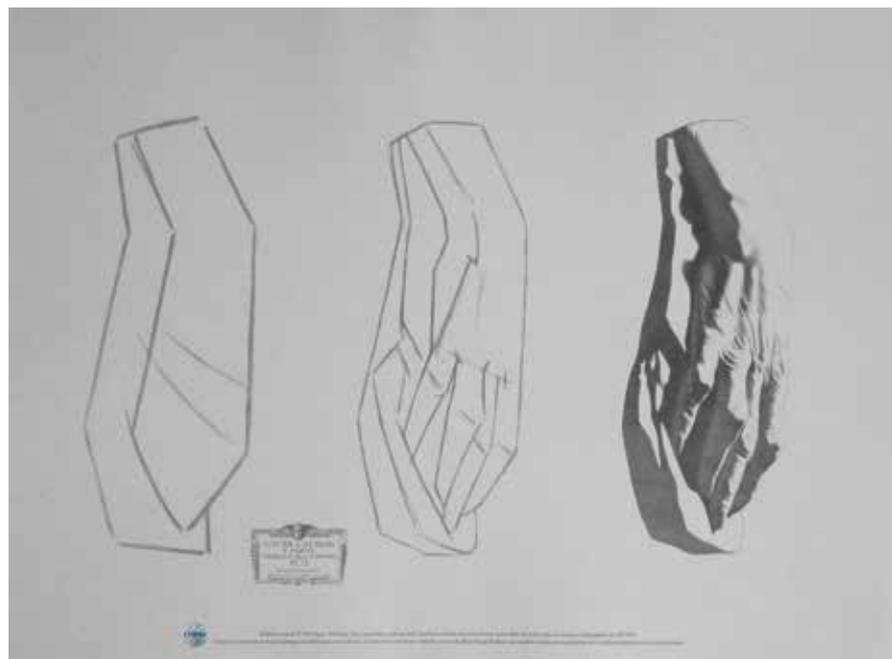
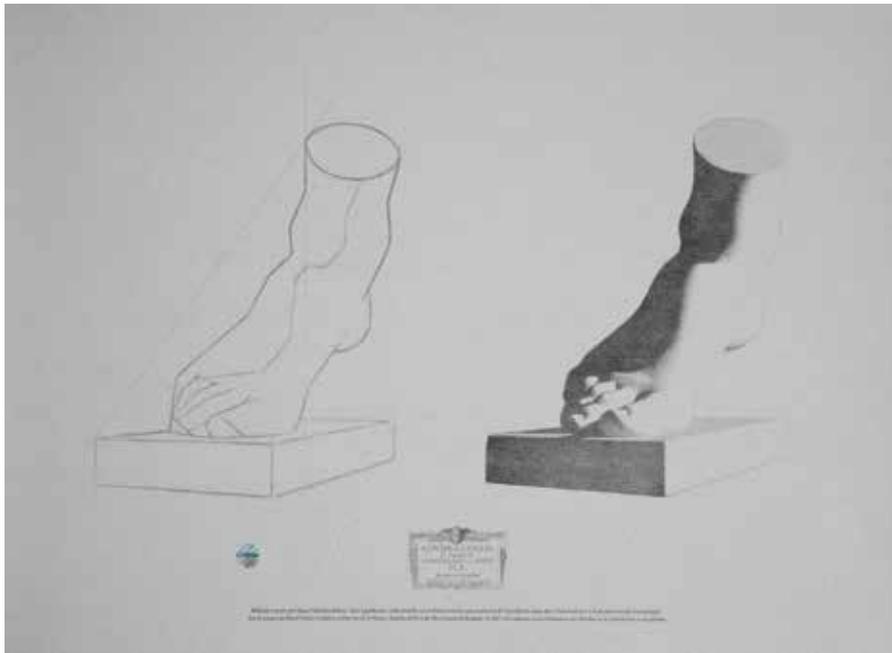
When this project was initiated circa 1864–65, Bargue was a relatively unknown middle-aged lithographer working for the hugely successful Parisian dealer and publisher of reproductive prints Adolphe Goupil (1806–1893). Goupil conceived and published this project in response to growing anxiety in France over the poor quality of draftsmanship found



A black *Bargue Encore* portfolio with five of the completed plates

among students of design and the decorative arts and, to a lesser extent, students of fine art. Goupil's son-in-law was the renowned academic painter and teacher Jean-Léon Gérôme (1824–1904), who lent his prestigious name to the project.

Drawing manuals were nothing new at that time, but this program was by far the most successful one aimed at training younger artists and designers, thanks largely to Goupil's worldwide reach through such distribution partners as the New York City gallery M. Knoedler. A century ago, you would just as likely find a portfolio of Bargue plates in the art schools



(TOP LEFT) *Bargue Encore's* Plate 1-8, *The Foot of the Medici Venus*, marble at the Uffizi Gallery, Florence ■ (LEFT) *Bargue Encore's* Plate 1-13, *Hand of Voltaire*, possibly by Jean-Antoine Houdon (1741–1828) ■ (ABOVE) *Bargue Encore's* Plate 1-63, *The Belvedere Torso*, front view, marble at the Vatican Museums, Rome, after a drawing by J.-J.-A. Lecomte du Noüy (1842–1923)

of San Francisco and Cincinnati as in Paris and Glasgow. If your great-grandparents studied art, they surely encountered it.

Bargue's *Drawing Course* is a practical introduction to figure drawing that efficiently trains the eyes of its users, who copy its 197 *modèles* (good examples) in charcoal on paper. These are ordered, more or less, from the easiest to copy to the most difficult, and are divided into three parts. No instructions were provided because it was assumed that atelier masters would already know how to teach with the plates. Published in 1868, the first part contains 70 plates, progressing from parts of the body toward full figures, both male and female. Most of the plates show casts of antique sculpture, though there are also details from sculptures by Michelangelo, Pierre Puget, and other named masters.

It was Gérôme who told Bargue which sculptures to draw. Most of the plates contain two images: a finished drawing of the cast, and an outline of it, formed of points, lines, and angles that help students see the subject in the abstract, and that also make it easier to measure. Bargue offers clues on how to manage the essential forms by building up the outline from points on the principal features, then joining them up with straight lines that are easier

to measure than curves. He also relies upon raking light to emphasize the subject's sculptural quality through a progression from lights to darks.

The second part of the course was published in 1870 and contains 67 plates of drawings by Renaissance and 19th-century masters. Again, it was Gérôme who selected the drawings, which include images by Michelangelo, Raphael, Holbein, Flandrin, Bonnat, and Bouguereau, among others.

The course's third and final part was targeted toward fine art academies, where students were required to master the lessons of all three parts before being allowed to sketch from the live model. It was published in 1871, by which time Gérôme had ceded artistic control of the project to Bargue, partly because Bargue had proved himself so competent, and partly because Gérôme was sitting out the Franco-Prussian War in London. Part III contains 60 *académies*, or drawings of nude or semi-nude male models, shown as full figures only. Most are outlines, without shading or background, again enabling students to measure more easily.

Like so many aspects of rigorous academic training, Bargue's *Drawing Course* gradually vanished from the world's art schools as modernism became fashionable in the second quarter of the 20th century. By 1945, most of the plates had been discarded or forgotten, partly because they had become torn or dog-eared through heavy use by generations of pupils.

REDISCOVERY

In the early 1970s, the American-born and -trained artist Daniel Graves (b. 1949) first learned about such late 19th-century French academic



(LEFT) *Barge Encore* team members Genta Plasari, Pierre Alloueteau, Anki Eriksson Graves, and Daniel Graves ■ (BELOW LEFT) The project's historic Marinoni & Voirin press (7 1/2 tons) was hoisted into the air during its journey from France to Switzerland.



masters as Gérôme and Bouguereau while reading R.H. Ives Gammell's groundbreaking book *The Twilight of Painting*, which was first published in 1946 and reprinted several times thereafter. Like the Barge plates, these once-popular artists had essentially been forgotten, so Graves began

researching them. In the mid-70s, he stumbled upon several original drawings by Barge (a superb draftsman and painter in his own right) at New York City's Shepherd Gallery, which is still a rare champion of academic art today. Even then, Graves found the sheets too expensive for his budget, but he was intrigued when Shepherd proprietor Robert Kashey described the once-famous drawing course Barge had developed with Gérôme.

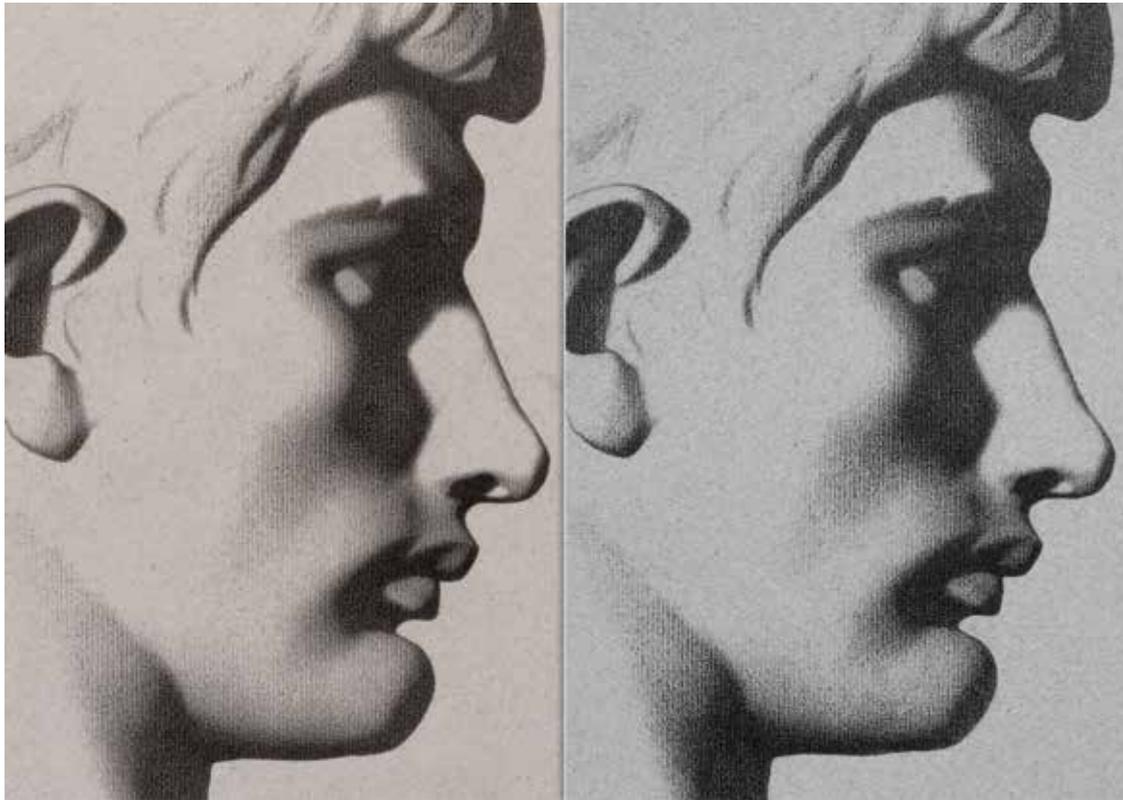
A few years later, having settled in Italy, Graves found and bought one of Barge's *Drawing Course* lithographs at London's funky Portobello Market. "This sparked my interest in finding the rest," he recalls, and in 1983–84 he finally obtained permission from London's Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) to photograph its collection of Barge lithographs himself. Getting the resulting shots printed was expensive, so Graves arranged with a Florentine lab to trade one of his paintings for printing the photos. Alas, when he returned to collect them, the shop had lost his negatives. Fortunately, its insurance coverage underwrote Graves's next trip to London and the cost of fresh film. "This time," he laughs, "I photographed all three volumes and the Florentine shop printed them without losing anything."

That same year (1984), the California-based art historian and Gérôme expert Gerald Ackerman (1928–2016) happened to be studying temporarily at the Florentine atelier Graves then ran with the artist Charles Cecil. Graves suggested to Ackerman a reprinting of Barge's *Drawing Course*, illustrated with plates at their original size and explanations of how each contributes to student learning. Back in America, Ackerman learned his publisher was not interested, so he told Graves he should publish on his own.

Alas, Graves could not find a publisher either, but he kept using his own photos to teach pupils, frustrated only that their quality and scale simply did not live up to the originals'.



(LEFT) VICTOR ADAM (1801–1866), *Interior of Lemercier's Lithographic Printing House*, c. 1846, lithographed on paper by Charles Villemin (active 19th century), image: 13 1/4 x 16 3/4 in., Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City, gift of E. Weyhe, 1923, 23.13 ■ (ABOVE) In central Paris, the former Lemercier printing house is now home to the restaurant Brasserie L'Alcazar.



A close-up of a plate in the Musée Goupil (left) alongside the corresponding plate from *Bargue Encore* (right). Bargue probably drew on thin Chinese paper resting upon thicker laid paper, which explains why we see the laid paper's ridge lines only in darker areas.

The cold-pressure stamp applied to every *Bargue Encore* plate as proof of authenticity.

In 2003, Graves was surprised to learn that Ackerman had published a scholarly book illustrating all of the plates, albeit at reduced scale. Though he had not invited Graves to participate, Ackerman did thank him in the acknowledgments. (In the interest of transparency, I was then directing New York City's Dahesh Museum of Art, which co-published this volume with ACR Éditions in France.)

A KINDRED SPIRIT

Fast forward to 2018, when Pierre Alloueteau (b. 1956) arrived at Graves's Florence Academy of Art to learn more about drawing from the Bargue plates. A Swiss artist whose publisher parents had once supervised 750 employees at their own printing press in France, Alloueteau proved to be the ideal ally in pursuing the Bargue vision because he had dreamed it, too. Long before, his family had published original, editioned lithographs created by contemporary artists, and even a book about lithography itself. Soon after Alloueteau had started making his own original lithographs on a 19th-century press, most of Europe's lithographic ateliers closed, so he pivoted to oil painting; thanks in part to his friendship with the American entertainer Dan Rowan (of *Rowan & Martin's Laugh-In* fame), he landed his first U.S. exhibition in Sarasota, Florida.

By the mid-1990s, Alloueteau had learned computer coding and produced the first French CD-ROM devoted to teaching English as a foreign language. Craving projects more artistic, he ultimately created the first online drawing course in French, featuring 63 illustrated units that are equivalent to a 2,200-page book.

Shortly after reading Ackerman's Bargue book, Alloueteau approached the Musée Goupil in Bordeaux to raise the idea of a CD-ROM offering Bargue's *Drawing Course*. Because French museums are government-supported, the curator declined the opportunity immediately, as he would never help a for-profit firm, even though Bargue's copyright



was in the public domain. In 2006 the Dahesh Museum permitted Alloueteau to photograph the Bargue plates it owned, and in 2015 he finally created nine videos about how to draw the Bargue way. He was still not sure he understood the sight-size method used to copy the plates, however, so he was pleased in 2016 to meet Graves at Barcelona's Museu Europeu d'Art Modern (MEAM) as it launched its annual *Figurativas* competition and the Art Renewal Center's International Salon. (Please see page 72 for details on this year's editions.)

Two years later, Alloueteau spent six weeks at the Florence Academy of Art working from a Bargue plate enlarged from the Ackerman book. Over coffee he and Graves discussed their shared hope to work from full-size reproductions, and soon they were setting the stage to realize this dream.

Having received a blessing from Prof. Ackerman's heir, the pair began slow, complex negotiations with the V&A, Musée Goupil, Dahesh Museum, and various private collections, finally securing formal permission to reprint approximately 20 plates. At this point, Alloueteau invited his friend Genta Plasari, a Ph.D. biologist and artist who had excelled at his Bargue course online, to join the project, and between them these two individuals have devoted more than 6,500 hours since 2018.

Plasari has contributed her understanding of technical and scientific matters such as photolithography and analyzing inks and papers, and Alloueteau soon approached Patrick Pramil, a Frenchman who had recently concluded 44 years operating a 19th-century lithographic press, very few of which survive. He soon spotted an advertisement for a used press in a remote area of central France, so Alloueteau and Plasari drove 750 miles in winter weather to see it. Their disappointment with it inspired them to seek a historic press more like the one on which the original Bargue plates had been printed, and a while later they located a suitable press just six miles from the first one they had seen. Driving through snow again, this one (manufactured by the French firm Marinoni & Voirin) was ideal, but it took months to price its essential overhaul and organize its transportation from France to Switzerland. (Illustrated here is a photo of the press, which weighs 7 1/2 tons, being hoisted onto a truck.)

Not surprisingly, Alloueteau reveres the oft-forgotten history of printing in Europe. He knew Bargue's original plates had been printed by a leading Parisian firm, Imprimerie Lemercier & Cie, and he tracked down a historical image of its main printing hall, designed by the celebrated



engineer Gustave Eiffel. This was not quite enough, so he even visited the building itself, now home to a restaurant that retains the distinctive glass roof and interior columns illustrated here.

A TRYING PROCESS

After Graves identified the Bargue plates that provide the most pedagogical benefits, the team began studying the digital scans that had been provided by museums and private collectors. Many of those historic plates carry technical annotations and instructions that fascinate print historians but are distractions to art students. On her computer, therefore, Plasari began to “clean away” such marks, and more: for each plate it took her three days to eliminate evidence of the paper’s imperfections, retaining only the drawing executed by Bargue himself. In areas of hatching, for example, she had to drag her stylus between each hatch to remove the paper’s coloring and the tiny shadows of its fibers. For areas where Bargue’s line had been obscured, Plasari had to guess his intention and restore what she dared. Even now, the team is reluctant to describe in detail the complex process that required two years of research and experimentation with historical printing techniques, not to mention sourcing lithographic stones with the “right grain” in several European countries.

Ever the perfectionist, Graves sought pristine results from the newly restored press, and when it began to disappoint, Alloueteau and Plasari wondered whether they should pivot to the easier offset or giclée methods; they even tried to produce a Bargue plate on a sophisticated photographic printer. In all cases, the results were merely acceptable, never beautiful.

Fortunately, Alloueteau contacted Didier Petit, a French salesman specializing in printing equipment who replaced one key part inside the press. Suddenly the quality of its prints soared, and finally the entire team felt ready to visit the Musée Goupil to compare their creations with the originals. The hosting curator blanched when she saw how infinitesimal the differences appeared to anyone but a paper specialist, but she also knew that her institution had already granted permission for the reproductions to occur.

Fortunately, the results are in, and they are superlative. (I have examined a portfolio of five plates.) Each has been inspected by Graves

Florence Academy of Art instructor Dasha Belokrylova demonstrates how to copy a *Bargue Encore* plate.

and Alloueteau for accuracy of line, value, and coloring of ink and paper. Both men have signed the portfolio’s cover sheet guaranteeing its quality. To prevent counterfeiting, each plate carries a hologram with a unique number and also a cold-pressure stamp depicting a horse. Purchasers also receive a certificate for each plate, which they should store separately.

As of now, anyone (be they atelier directors and private collectors) can visit the *Bargue Encore* website and purchase any quantity of the new plates they desire. Purchasers also receive complimentary access to two online courses, one introducing Bargue’s program and the other the sight-size method (in English or French). In addition, those eager to help students benefit from the plates should visit the website’s Sponsors page, which explains how to donate plates to an Art Renewal Center-approved atelier of your choice. Sponsors are rewarded for their generosity with plate(s) for themselves as well as prominent crediting on the portfolio’s cover sheet and the project’s website.

Such magnanimity reminds us that the Bargue plates are not only captivating objects of desire, but also effective teaching tools that still have the potential to impact the future of art. Just for example, illustrated here is an instructor at the Florence Academy of Art, Dasha Belokrylova, using one of the new plates to inspire her students.

This project is cause for celebration, so congratulations to the entire project team, and happy collecting to the rest of us. ●

Information: fineartlithography.com/en. Each plate costs \$149, and some still have a discounted pre-order price of \$115. (On the website everything is priced in Euros and the values cited here reflect the currency exchange rate as of April 6, 2021.)

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