“... to be educated to become valuable and useful citizens and artists“

The origins of the Städelschule
In 1834, when the engraver Eugen Eduard Schäffer (1802–71, image 1) was commissioned to “complete a picture on the Institute’s premises and give lessons to three or four of the Institute’s students”, it thoroughly fulfilled the original intention behind the Städel Institute of Art. Schäffer was assigned three students with the aim of “educating them to become those valuable and useful citizens referred to by the Institute of Art’s benefactor in his Deed of Foundation when he was thinking of artists educated at his institute becoming useful citizens”. The engraver was also thinking of the “widespread glory” he could help the Städel Institute of Art achieve. In return he very much hoped to be awarded a professorship – by then he had been associated with the Städel Institute of Art for 16 years since 1818, and was one of its first students and recipients of a bursary.

The outcome of his negotiation for a professorship will be disclosed once we have a grasp of the intention and idea behind the Institute of Art. To understand the background to it and its interdependencies, we need to go back to the time when the precursor of the Städelschule was established.

When the affluent spice trader and banker Johann Friedrich Städel (1728-1816), who in around 1800 was one of Frankfurt’s richest men, conceived of his idea in the 1790s for a Städel Institute of Art (which later became the Städelschule) and made provision for it in his famous will, he was thinking of a gallery that would be open to the public and would offer art lessons to children of the townspeople of Frankfurt (image 2).

This was not an unusual idea: all across Europe the teaching of future artists was linked to art collections. While academies were being established in large cities or capitals, with their students tutored in fine masterpieces in the great art collections affiliated with them, then in smaller cities and towns or places characterised as having a bourgeoisie, what were known as institutes of drawing emerged. They were set up to promote art, artists and to an extent craftsmen as well. Particularly in the great institutions, the aim was often to teach and reinforce a particular style (something that the Académie Royale established in Paris by Louis XIV took to extremes).

But back to Frankfurt. J. F. Städel made provision for art education in his will:

“That the children of parents without means living in this place, without distinction as to gender or religion, who wish to devote themselves to the arts and to building professions and learn the rudiments of drawing from skilled teachers or in the city’s existing institute of drawing – and if their fortunate natural abilities and skills are demonstrated in this first lesson and they have made themselves worthy of further support from other masters through their diligence and good performance, they will be have free lessons in historical and landscape painting, all kinds of engraving, pure and applied mathematics, quite particularly though in architecture and those sciences associated with the subject of art – should receive the necessary support for this, even abroad, in accordance with the circumstances in which they find themselves and the demonstration in one or another individual of eminent abilities and good performance – in order to be educated to become valuable and useful citizens and artists.”

Städel did not establish a school, but rather wanted to use his funds to pay for external teachers to give basic instruction to impoverished children who wished to become artists or architects. It was to be made possible for the more talented among them to go on to receive specialist instruction in painting, architecture, engraving and even mathematics with other teachers, either in Frankfurt or further afield in the country or abroad, assisted by bursaries, with the aim of turning them into valuable and useful citizens and artists.

Six months after Städel’s death on 2 December 1816, the five executive administrators of the Institute of Art were busy with the opening of the gallery when they received the first applications from Frankfurt.
Initially the only teacher was the aforementioned Johann Andreas Benjamin Reges (1772-1847, image 3). The administrators were certainly acting in accordance with the founder’s wishes when they commissioned him: Reges had previously run the Institute of Drawing in Frankfurt and was acquainted with Städel. He had also witnessed the signing of Städel’s will. Initially Reges taught the nineteen supported students at his home in the first year, then in Frankfurt’s orphanage where the administrators had rented a room from the summer of 1817. Lessons were taught there every day except Saturdays, “from two in afternoon until eight in the evening, with each student generally having two lessons one after the other, either after school or, for apprentices, in the evenings after work between six and eight”. For apprentices working during the week, a “Sunday school” was established. In the early years it was less about improving the students’ artistic taste or honing the skills of fine artists than supporting them with actual training for their trade. The Städel Institute of Art expanded its teaching staff in 1818.

If students wanted to learn something that was not (yet) on offer in Frankfurt, they could apply for bursaries to study elsewhere. In the first year one Theodor Witting was awarded 200 gulden “to travel to Switzerland and have lessons there”, and Eduard Schiller was awarded 800 gulden “for academic studies in Heidelberg and Vienna in architecture and aqueducts”. The Institute of Art also supported future artists to study in famous places – Heinrich Friedrich Höfler and Johannes Thomas were given 400 gulden per annum from 1817 “for studies in drawing and painting in Paris” and, like Wendelstadt before them, studied under Antoine-Jean Gros.

For future craftsmen and artists and their parents, the focus was on them being able to earn a living in the long term. Nevertheless the intention was also for the Institute of Art to gain something. In the case of Höfler and Thomas, the Institute of Art immediately expected something in return for their bursaries. The two painting students were commissioned to provide fresh castings of ancient sculptures in the Musée Napoléon for the Institute’s collection. In the award of bursaries, the administrators bore in mind the benefit to the city so that the support they offered would have an impact on the city itself.

The institute’s view of what “valuable and useful citizens and artists” might mean to Städel and his contemporaries is reflected in what was happening at that time in the engraving department at the Städel Institute of Art. In Frankfurt in 1817 there were limited opportunities to be trained as an engraver. Therefore Johann Nicolaus Hoff (1798–1873, image 4), the son of a Frankfurt watchmaker and neighbour of J. F. Städel, travelled to Stuttgart in 1817 to learn engraving on a bursary from the Städel Institute of Art. Six months later, in 1818, the administrators appointed Johann Konrad Ulmer (1780–1820) to teach engraving on an annual salary. However, Ulmer did not work in Frankfurt for long; mental illness led to him taking his own life in August 1820.

As Herr Reges has undertaken to teach [my son] for three or at most four years for what is certainly a small sum of 25 gulden per annum and in return for food, lodging and clothing, I am unable to give him what for me is a significant sum in addition to that payment for food and clothing”, petitioned the father of one Johann Georg Körner for help with his son’s teaching. The records in the Städel archive illustrate the focus of his contemporaries: the teacher, Reges (image 3, more about him below) wrote a report on Körner who had already been taught by him for two years and now intended to become an apprentice. Since the student was not physically strong, Reges believed that:

owing to his high level of ability, I can bring him to the point where he can feed himself with illumination within three or four years at the most (by this I mean work that is first rendered in Indian ink then has colour added in a manner undertaken in the Rhine or Lahn area or the like and that is mostly lacking here) [...]. I would undertake to prepare him all day from morning to night for this profession and thoroughly endeavour to ensure he persists with it, insofar as his abilities allow, until he can earn a living through such work.”

The objective of the lessons in those days was to train students so that they would be able to make ends meet – fundamental for the time before the welfare state – and in Frankfurt unoccupied professional niches were useful to achieve this. J. F. Städel had already given commissions and support to local artists. Christian Georg Schütz the Elder, for example, had designed the interior of his home and business premises on Rossmarkt (image 2). The support offered by the Institute of Art is to be seen against this backdrop.
In early summer 1821 on a Städel bursary and with a recommendation for Peter Cornelius (1783-1867), in a letter to the administration, Schäffer reported a difficult start and atmosphere at the academy because “the strict and tense academy work” left the “students cold and unfeeling”. He decided to choose “the preservation of his individuality over lessons at the academy and therefore stopped going to classes, preferring to work on his own.” Although personal contact with the Bavarian court architect Leo von Klenze (1784-1864) and his professor Carl Ernst Christoph Hess (1755-1828) must have been beneficial, the work Schäffer submitted was not recognised by the administration in Frankfurt (it was established practice at the Institute of Art for its scholarship holders to submit their work).

Nevertheless, Schäffer continued to be funded by Frankfurt. One reason for this might have been that Cornelius was convinced of the bursary holder’s work and talent: after Schäffer’s many requests to the administration for an increase in funds – he could barely get by on the bursary – were rejected, Cornelius not only loaned his student his own money, but allowed him to engrave his pictures and took on commissions on the condition that Schäffer took care of the replicas. Schäffer followed him to Düsseldorf on a Städel bursary. After a break, Schäffer again received bursaries from the Städel in 1830 and 1832, and again in 1834/35 for the abovementioned commission; in return he was to train three students.

It is clear here how the concept behind the Institute of Art was realised with the help of the individuals it sponsored: while the benefactor and the first administration saw value from a merchant’s perspective, with a focus more on the city (castings for the collection, illuminations and engravings for the city), the notion of usefulness changed in the 1820s. In 1826 the administrators started to consider an expanded concept for the Städel Institute of Art.

Most of the administrators had in the meantime become associated with the Nazarene movement. The links to this group of artists in Rome led to a discussion about their concepts for the Städel Institute of Art: in the second half of the 1820s, the administrators essentially concerned themselves with the issue of whether they wanted to establish an institute for training artists or for training art. While the former would concentrate on the education of individuals, the latter would include the emergence of a far-reaching art trend that would at the very least “embellish” the city of Frankfurt, but also generate income and raise the profile of its artists and lastly set nothing less than the direction of art policy for the “nation” and quite simply for the future. Here the production of art was a fundamental part of the concept: appointed on a basic salary, at an amount designed to encourage artists to accept other art commissions (thus leading to the design of the Römer’s Kaisersaal), students were to be involved so that they could learn as they executed actual works (rather than the dry and eclectic pieces for which the Nazarenes and Schäffer criticised academies).
In 1829 it was decided that the Städel Institute of Art would be an *art education institute*, and teachers Philipp Veit (1793-1877, painting), Friedrich Maximilian Hessemmer (1800-1860, architecture) and Johann Nepomuk Zwerger (1796-1868, sculpture) were appointed. In line with academies teaching a particular style, the concept behind this institute meant that the early days of the Städel Institute of Art were associated with the Nazarenes.

Thus in 1834, when Schäffer received a commission for a work from the administration and was to train students in return, it was fully in keeping with that idea. At a time when artist colleagues were already being appointed, Schäffer also hoped for a professorship: "[...], on a salary that allows the sacrifice associated with the eager endeavour of the ideal education of young artists." When in particular at the start of the 20th century we consider that Weizsäcker and Dessoff counted Schäffer’s early works as being “among the most important art ever produced in Germany”59, there may have been good reason for Schäffer to hope. However, his submission was not accepted by the administration; they rebuked him because they saw that student’s interests were not being sufficiently taken into account, despite his emphatic wish to train them to be useful citizens, and ultimately paid for the whole project with the cheaper option of a bursary.56 Thus he remained a teacher – it is unclear whether this was because of real financial constraints, personnel policy or a display of power. Only in 1848, 30 years after being accepted at the Institute of Art as a student, did the Städel confer on Schäffer his desired title of professor.53

This is how the administration funded and supported the training of a young artist from Frankfurt at the Institute of Art in Frankfurt and at academies in Munich and Düsseldorf, and contributed to him becoming a successful artist who then returned to Frankfurt to teach future artists. Their money paid out dividends in the long term. However the calculation went beyond pure costs because Schäffer, as the founder intended, was not merely an artist or bursary holder, but a citizen as well. Through the engagement of individuals (J.F. Städel) and of civic society (the administration and citizens of Frankfurt) Schäffer received support to commit to his artistic training and was motivated to provide a mutual benefit that was independent of political power – because Städel had conceived of his Institute of Art in Frankfurt as an independent body.

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2. Städel Ffm, Box AA, Fascicle AA.16, No. 383, 15.03.1834, E.E. Schäffer to the administration.

3. Städel Ffm, Box AA, Fascicle AA.16, No. 383, 15.03.1834, E.E. Schäffer to the administration.

4. Student from June 1818, recipient of a bursary from May 1821; Städel Ffm, Box AA, Fascicle AA.16, No. 96, 28.06.1819, Johanna Catharina Schäffer to the administration; No. 383, 15.03.1834, E.E. Schäffer to the administration.


8. *Stiftungs-Brief des Städelischen Kunstinstituts enthalten in dem Testament des Herrn Johann Friedrich Städel, hiesigen Handelsmanns und gewesenen Mitglieds des löbl. Bürger-Colleges, vom 15. März 1815*. [printed] Frankfurt am Main 1817, § 2, p.5f. On the institute of drawing: in bourgeois Frankfurt in the middle of the 18th century there was also a desire to have an academy, resulting in what was called an “institute of drawing”. This served primarily to educate craftsmen and had a chequered history due to changes in staff and finance problems. The Städel made provision for this institute in his will. Städel wanted to use existing establishments in the city without tying them to the institute through donations. The money was to go to the children, not be used as a contribution to the institute of drawing. Meyer 2013, p.217-219. Goethe mentioned it in Kunst und Alterthum, Goethe, Johann Wolfgang. *Ueber Kunst und Alterthum*, 1 volume: *Ueber Kunst und Alterthum in den Rhein und Mayn Gegenden*. Issue 1. Stuttgart 1816, p.90f. Städel Ffm, Box X, Fascicle Drawing School, Reges to the administration, 13.01.1821, undated, Johann Jacob Körner to the administration; No. 383, 15.03.1834, E.E. Schäffer to the administration.

9. It was usual in around 1800 that elementary instruction in drawing was also de vised for craftsmen, with advanced courses for artists built on this. This offer for future craftsmen was also available elsewhere, Pevsner 1986, p.155, 163.


11. Städel Ffm, Box Z, Fascicle Z, No. 109, undated, Johann Jacob Körner to the administration.

12. Städel Ffm, Box Z, Fascicle Z, No. 109b, 16.09.1819, J.A.B. Reges to the administration. – In 1821 Reges confirmed to the Administration that Körner was “physically frail, but works with me all day long and is making very good progress”. Städel Ffm, Box X, Fascicle Drawing School, Reges to the administration, 13.01.1821, und No. 7.


14. On the institute of drawing see note 8. In 1804 Reges was also appointed to teach drawing at the Gymnasium. UB Ffm, manuscripts department, estate of J.A.B. Reges, *Hier eine kurze Notiz von meiner Lebensgeschichte*, 12.03.1833.

16. Städel Ffm, Box X, Fascicle Institute of Drawing, 13.01.1821, Reges to the administration, and register of students of the commendable Institute of Drawing who received free lessons in 1817. 24.03.1818 (including the names of the students); Städel Ffm, Box X, Fascicle Institute of Drawing, “List of paid costs for lessons”.

17. They did not pay rent, but in return included orphans free of charge in the lesson. Städel Ffm, record book I, 10.03.1818, p. 30, § 103; 28.04.1818, p. 31, §105.

18. To the administration “Most dutiful report on those students of drawing whom the honourable gentlemen have graciously assigned to me to teach”, Städel Ffm, Box X, Fascicle Institute of Drawing, 13.01.1821, Reges to the administration.

19. Städel Ffm, Box X, Fascicle School of Architecture; also records, Kestner 05.09.1824; see too Meyer 2013, p. 221, note 1418.

20. As incidentally Goethe too had previously made public about the institute of drawing, Meyer 2013, p. 218.

21. As freelance staff: Christian Jakob Beer (1772-1824), a certain J.H. Wolvenschilder, between 1819 and 1823 the teacher Peter Schmid (1769-1853; lessons until 1821) with a “newly invented method of drawing”, 1819 Clemens Stix, 1820/1821 W. Reinheimer, 1822 the Austrian painter and engraver Anton Radl (1774-1852), Meyer 2013, p. 219-227, and p. 221, note 1423. In 1818 Franz Wilhelm Brofft was appointed for architecture (replaced in 1824 by Heinrich Fülbeck) and Johann Konrad Ulmer for engraving. The gallery inspector, Carl Friedrich Wendelstadt (1786–1840), who had been trained in Paris under Jacques-Louis David und Antoine-Jean Gros, probably only began teaching in 1820 (in his contract however teaching was agreed from 1817), on this see Meyer 2013, p. 221f., note 1424.


23. They were to receive a further 3,200 gulden from Städel funds for a total of four years. Städel Ffm, Notiz Buch, unregistered, p. 2. Also Meyer 2013, p. 228.


25. J.F. Städel had however explicitly mentioned this in his will as an area of training for artists to be promoted as part of higher level lessons (see above).

26. At his father’s request, Hoff was one of the first to receive a bursary of 300 gulden per annum, initially for two years – in all he was to receive Städel bursaries for nine years. Städel Ffm, record book I, 10.03.1818, p. 12, § 42; 01.10.1817, S. 14, § 52; Städel Ffm, Notiz Buch, unregistered, p. 2.

27. Städel Ffm, Box M, Fascicle M4 Ulmer, 15.2.1818, for a salary of 800 gulden – On Ulmer: Meyer 2013, p. 222-224.


29. Städel Ffm, Box AA, Fascicle AA.16, No. annex 153 ad § 299, 29.09.1820. This and the next clause follow this document.

30. Städel Ffm, Box AA, Fascicle AA.16, No. annex 153 ad § 299, 29.09.1820

31. See note 21.


33. Städel Ffm, Notiz Buch, unregistered, p. 2.

34. Bursary May 1821 to Nov. 1825 "for engraving studies in Düsseldorf and Munich", Städel Ffm, Notiz Buch, unregistered, p. 4. – at that time Cornelius was director of the Düsseldorf Academy, but also worked in Munich. The administrator Johann Friedrich Böhmer was acquainted with Cornelius and had written to him about Schäffer. Städel Ffm, Box AA, Fascicle AA.16, No. 193b, Schäffer to the administration, 29.09.1821.

35. Städel Ffm, Box AA, Fascicle AA.16, No. 193b, Schäffer to the administration, 29.09.1821.

36. Städel Ffm, Box AA, Fascicle AA.16, No. 201, Schäffer to the administration, 28.09.1822.

37. Städel Ffm, Box AA, Fascicle AA.16, No. 201, Schäffer to the administration, 28.09.1822.

38. Städel Ffm, Box AA, Fascicle AA.16, No. 193a, Schäffer to the administration, 03.07.1821.

39. Schäffer studied under Hess from September 1822. Städel Ffm, Box AA, Fascicle AA.16, No. 201, Schäffer to the administration, 28.09.1822.

40. The reasons he gave in June/July 1824 were his travel expenses and material, Städel Ffm, Box AA, Fascicle AA.16, No. 235, several accompanying letters in June/July 1824 (but see too other letters in the fascicle).