

## STAFF

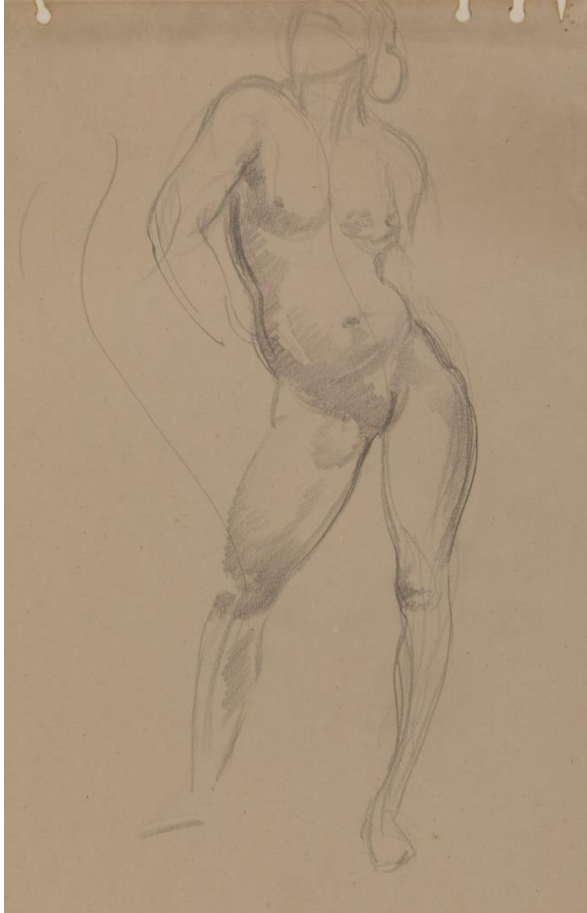
In 1952, Betts hired Harry Redman (1920 – 1994), a former pupil of Walter Sickert, as tutor in the School. He placed him in joint charge of the life room with Hubert Arthur Finney (1905 – 1991). Students described Finney as a draughtsman of the “Old School”. He focused on the accurate study of the human body. Like Betts, Redman was a follower of Sickert. Robert Gibbings (1889 – 1958) joined the department in 1936. The celebrated artist, book designer and printmaker developed new courses in typography.



James Anthony Betts, *Standing Female Nude*, conté crayon, UAC/10779. © Estate of J. Anthony Betts.

Unlike the highly finished, experimental drawings Betts exhibited in the 1920s and early 1930s, in Reading his drawing became a more firmly preparatory and working practice. In *Standing Female Nude* he echoes the rough, sketch-like quality of Sickert's drawing. The figure also appears to emerge from the scribbled walls reflecting Sickert's instruction to see the subject and its background as part of the same design.

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Robert Gibbings, *Nude Study*, pencil, c.1950s. Private Collection. © Estate of Robert Gibbings.

Betts did not neglect the so-called “industrial” arts and crafts in Reading. In 1936, he appointed Gibbings, the celebrated book designer and wood engraver of the Golden Cockerel Press, to introduce apprenticeships in typography. Although best known for his wood-engravings and book illustration, Gibbings was an artist across several disciplines including painting and sculpture. The female nude was a favored subject and he practiced life drawing throughout his career.

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Harry Redman, *Man Sitting on a Stool*, charcoal and ink, UAC/11025. © Estate of Harry Redman.

As well as a pupil of Walter Sickert, Redman was a disciple of Betts. Students recall similarities between their approaches in the life room. These included admonitions to look and draw what was seen, including the spaces between objects, and a pointed emphasis on the position of intersecting planes (based on Sickert’s idea that all observed lines and edges had direction, like the hands of a clock). In this study, the lines marking out the intersecting planes are left visible at the feet of the chair.

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Hugh Finney, *Reclining Female Nude*, conté crayon on Japanese paper, UAC/11016. © Estate of Hugh Finney.

In 1946, Betts engaged Finney as a sessional, then full-time, tutor at the School of Art. A fellow Royal College alumnus, Finney took on much of the teaching in the life room. One former student described him as a “draughtsman of the old school” focused on the accurate study and rendering of the human body. Here, the model (viewed from above) is arranged in an awkward, twisted pose requiring clever foreshortening of the legs, arms and torso to create an illusion of the body in space. Less attention has been paid to the hands and feet, which are drawn with a few short lines.

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Hugh Finney, *Miss E.M. Skrimshire*, pastel, 1957.  
Reading Museum: 1958.241.1. © Estate of Hugh Finney.

E. May Skrimshire (Skrimmy) was a founder member and personality of the Reading Guild of Artists. The Guild was established in 1930 “to create a common bond of union between the practising Artists and Craft workers of the district”. Skrimshire was appointed First Secretary. Staff members at the School of Art supported guild activities and were regular exhibitors at guild shows. In this accomplished pastel portrait, Finney conveys his sitter’s bright and inquisitive character.

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## STUDENTS

The use of an iron bedstead as a prop in the life drawing classroom is a mark of Sickert's influence at the School. Back, and partially-obscured, views are also common among student work from this period. Special attention is paid to the relationship between the model and their surroundings.



Anthony Harris, *Professor Betts in a Life Drawing Class*, conté crayon on grey paper, 1952, UAC/11014.  
© the artist.

In this drawing, Harris (an art student at Reading from 1948-1952) captures Betts teaching in the life-room. He would often commandeer his students' work in such lessons and draw directly on the corner of the page as shown here (such demonstrations would be scrupulously rubbed out afterwards). As Betts drew, he offered verbal instructions, muttering stock phrases like "put it down" and "dichotomy" punctuated by a series of tongue "clucks" fondly recalled by his students.

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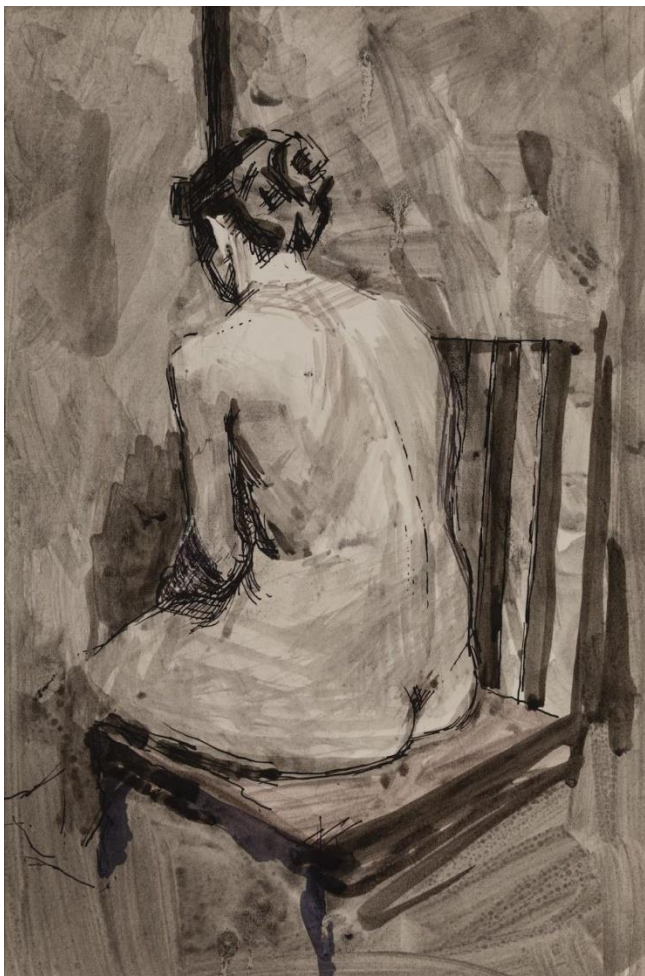


Anthony Harris, *Man Sitting on a Bed* (University of Reading School of Art), conté crayon on grey paper, 1952, UAC/11012. © the artist.

The iron bedstead introduced into Reading's life drawing classroom referenced the drawings of Walter Sickert – for whom it became a common

prop. The male model in Harris's drawing is also fully clothed like Sickert's male models always were. Betts was quick to reproach students who voiced complaints when faced with such "boring" models. He advocated for the Sickertian principle that "anything" could be the subject of art and against the Victorian "obsession" with high themes and perfect forms.

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Clive Ashwin, *Woman Seated on a Chair*, ink and wash, 1960, UAC/11015. © the artist.

Ashwin studied under Betts from 1957-1961. He recalls the principle behind Betts' instruction as "first-hand observation and the direct recording of visual experience". This school drawing of the back of a seated nude model also illustrates how "there was no attempt to search for elegant poses or evocative props". The figure and background are set down quickly in broad strokes of wash using a brush, then key details and contours are picked out in pen and ink.

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Michael Twyman, *Nude Model in the Life Room*, pencil, 1953-1957. Private Collection. © the artist.

Twyman was a student on the fine art degree course under Betts from 1953-1957. He recalled how it involved a wide range of activities over the first two years (drawing, painting, sculpture, printmaking, lettering typography, and the history of art) before specialising – in his case in “Advanced design and book production”. All degree students were also required to take two other subjects in their first year (Twyman studied Geography and French).

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Michael Twyman, *Portrait Study of Female Model in a Coat*, conté crayon and ink wash, 1953-1957. Private Collection. © the artist.

In both of Twyman’s student drawings shown here, Harry Redman’s corrections are present in the upper right-hand corner of the page. They exaggerate the key directional lines or “planes” that intersect the model’s face to demonstrate how it is constructed. Unlike Betts, Redman did not always rub out his demonstrations. Much loved by his students, Redman is widely remembered as a kind and sensitive tutor.

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