



Bargue's drawing course

A classic drawing course from 19th-century Paris - all the plates and a guide, free.

Full edition · 197 plates in three parts



Plate I-44 (detail). Source gallica.bnf.fr / BnF



Scan the code or go to
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue

About the course

What is it?

Bargue's drawing course ("Cours de dessin") is a collection of 197 lithographed plates in three parts:

- **Part 1 - After plaster casts** (70 plates): parts of the face, hands and feet, heads, torsos and full figures, drawn from plaster casts of classical and later sculpture.
- **Part 2 - After the masters** (67 plates): copies of drawings by masters from different periods and schools.
- **Part 3 - Charcoal exercises** (60 plates): drawings of nude models (known as académies) as preparation for drawing from the live model.

The plates are large, about 44 x 59 cm, and were printed by Lemercier & Cie in Paris.

Where does it come from?

The course was initiated around 1864-65 by the art publisher Goupil & Cie in Paris. It grew out of a widespread concern in France that art and design students could not draw well enough.

The drawings and lithographs were made by **Charles Bargue** (c. 1825-1883), lithographer, draughtsman and painter. The artistic direction lay with **Jean-Léon Gérôme** (1824-1904), one of the best-known academic painters of the time and a professor at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris. Gérôme chose which sculptures and drawings to include. He was married to the publisher's daughter, so his ties to Goupil were close. The course was produced for sale to art schools and drawing teachers. The sources do not say whether Gérôme himself used the plates in his own studio.

The three parts were published between about 1867 and 1873 (the sources disagree on the exact years). Goupil sold the course internationally, and it was used in art schools across much of the Western world. Individual plates were still sold right up until around 1920.

With the rise of modernism the course went out of fashion, and by around 1945 most sets had been worn out, thrown away or forgotten. It was rediscovered in the 1980s by the painter Daniel Graves, and in 2003 all the plates were published again in book form with commentary by the art historian Gerald M. Ackerman. Since then the course has once more become a fixed part of the curriculum in classical drawing schools.

The idea behind it

The student was to learn to see and reproduce form before drawing from anything three-dimensional. A plate had already been "translated" into a flat drawing, so the student could concentrate on reproducing it accurately, without having to solve for themselves the problem of turning three dimensions into two.

The plates are arranged in a teaching sequence. Part 1 begins with simple parts and ends with full figures. Parts 2 and 3 continue with master drawings and académies.

Many plates show two versions side by side: a schematic outline of straight lines, points and angles, and the finished drawing with shading. This shows how to go from the big shapes to the details - first placement and proportions, then contour, then the shadow shapes and finally the subtle transitions. The light falls at an angle, and the values are clearly graded from light to dark, so the form reads well.

No printed instructions came with the plates. How to use them was up to the teacher.

From marble to your paper

When you copy a plate from Part 1, you stand at the end of a long chain of hands:

1. A sculptor made the statue in marble or bronze. Many classical statues are Roman copies of Greek originals, so the chain may begin even earlier.
2. A plaster caster made a cast of it. Plaster casts of famous statues stood in the art schools so the students could draw from them.
3. Charles Bargue drew the plaster cast.
4. The drawing was transferred to a lithographic stone so it could be printed. Bargue was himself a lithographer, so he probably did this himself.
5. The printer Lemercier printed the plates, and Goupil published them.
6. The Bibliothèque nationale de France preserved a set, scanned it and made it freely available on its digital library, Gallica.
7. Steens Toolbox has collected the plates here and written about them.
8. And finally: you, drawing.

In Part 2 the chain begins with the master's own drawing, and in Part 3 with a live model.

Each link is a translation, and something is lost or added along the way. But the idea is old: for hundreds of years, people learned to draw by copying the great masters - not to imitate them, but to see how they solved the problems. The plates make those solutions available to everyone.

How to do it

There is no single right way to use the plates, but a typical approach might look like this:

1. **Start at the beginning of Part 1.** The first plates are simple on purpose. Don't skip them because they look easy.
2. **Print the plate** as large as you can and put it up next to your paper. The original plates were about 44 x 59 cm, so even an A3 print (about 30 x 42 cm) is smaller than the original.
3. **Draw at the same size as your print (1:1).** That way you can compare and measure directly between plate and drawing. Once you are more practised, you can try drawing at a different size - that trains you to see proportions instead of measuring them.
4. **Draw the outline first.** Use the schematic outline as your model: straight lines, few points, big angles. Measure and compare proportions, for example with a pencil or a plumb line at arm's length, and correct until the shape is right.
5. **Refine the contour** once the big relationships are right.
6. **Put in the shadow shapes** as simple areas, and check them against the plate.
7. **Build up the values** from darkest to lightest, and finish with the transitions between them. Take your time - a single plate can easily take many hours.
8. **Keep comparing.** Step back and look at drawing and plate together.

Many people today use the **sight-size method**: drawing and plate at the same size side by side, compared from a fixed distance. This is a modern way of using the plates. There is no evidence that Bague or the students of his time worked this way.

Traditionally the plates were copied in charcoal, but pencil works fine.

Why it helps

When you copy a plate, you practise precisely the skills that make drawing from life difficult: seeing proportions, angles and values as they are, and not as you think they are. Because the plate does not move and the light does not change, you can compare again and again until they match.

The course also teaches you a way of working: from big shapes to details, from straight lines to curves, from simple shadow shapes to subtle transitions. You can take that way of working with you when you later draw from casts, still life or the live model.

Vincent van Gogh borrowed Part 3 in 1880 and worked his way through it on his own. In a letter to his brother Theo in 1881 he wrote that the careful, repeated work with Bague's charcoal exercises had given him more insight into figure drawing. The young Pablo Picasso also copied from the course at the art school in A Coruña.

A caveat: the plates are drawings of sculptures and of other drawings - several links away from reality, as the chain above shows - and the old paper has darkened over time, so the values are slightly shifted. The course is good training in seeing and reproducing, but it does not replace drawing from real things.

The course today

Besides the plates here, the course is available in book form:

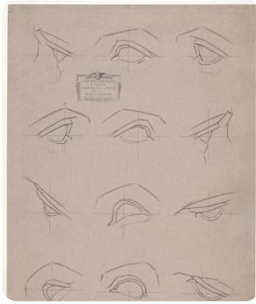
- **Gerald M. Ackerman and Graydon Parrish:** *Charles Bague and Jean-Léon Gérôme: Drawing Course* (ACC Art Books, 2019, ISBN 978-1-78884-044-6). All the plates with commentary on each one, a biography of Bague and a section on sight-size. First published in 2003; also available in French (*Cours de dessin*). Hardback, 336 pages.
- **Burst Books:** *Complete Bague Drawing Course* (ed. Gareth Thomas, 2021, ISBN 979-8-7082-8091-6). A self-published paperback of 150 pages with the plates digitally restored and without commentary. Mainly available through Amazon. Reviewers mention that the print quality varies.

The Ackerman book can be ordered through any bookshop and online booksellers.

The thumbnails give an overview. The full-size plates for printing are downloaded from the website - tap a thumbnail, or go to the address under it.

Part 1 - After plaster casts (70 plates)

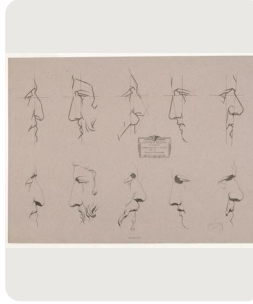
Parts of the face, hands and feet, heads, torsos and full figures, drawn from plaster casts of classical and later sculpture. Start here.



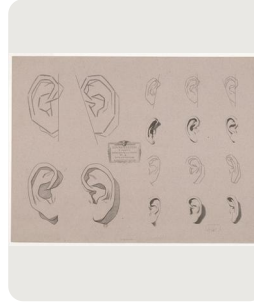
I-01
Eyes
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#I-01



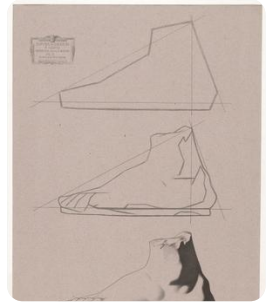
I-02
Mouths
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#I-02



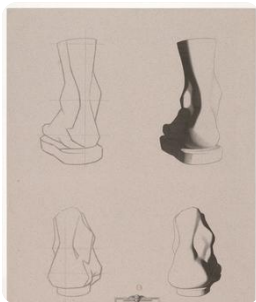
I-03
Noses
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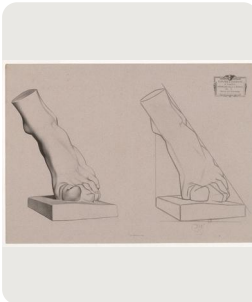
I-04
Ears
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#I-04



I-05
Profile of the foot
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#I-05



I-06
Heels
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#I-06



I-07
Foot of the gladiator
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#I-07



I-08
Foot of the Medici Venus
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#I-08



I-09
Sole of the foot
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#I-09



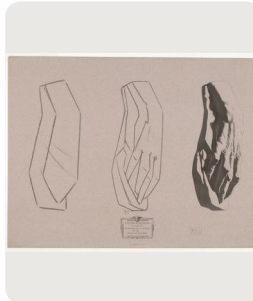
I-10
Foot of Germanicus
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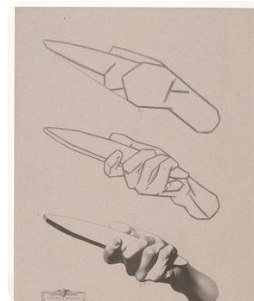
I-11
Hands in profile
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#I-11



I-12
Closed hand and leaning ha...
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#I-12



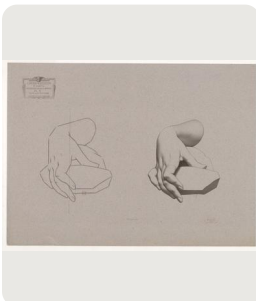
I-13
Hand of Voltaire
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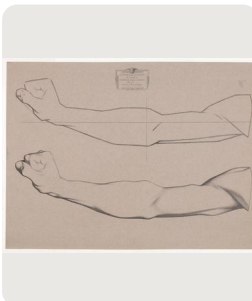
I-14
Hand holding a whetstone
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#I-14



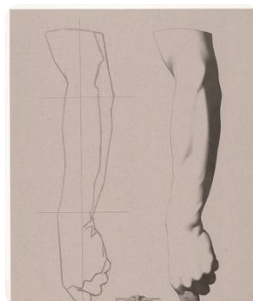
I-15
Hand of a woman pressing ...
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#I-15



I-16
Hand of a woman holding a ...
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#I-16



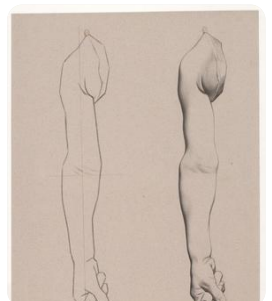
I-17
Arm of a man, horizontal po...
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#I-17



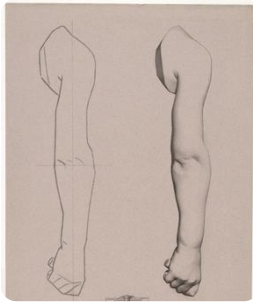
I-18
Arm of a man, vertical positi...
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#I-18



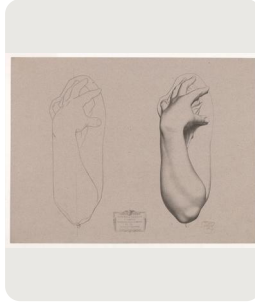
I-19
Flexed forearm of a man
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#I-19



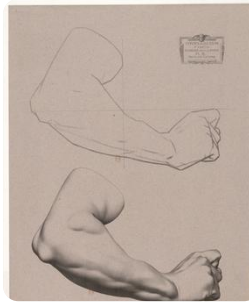
I-20
Child's arm, interior view
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#I-20



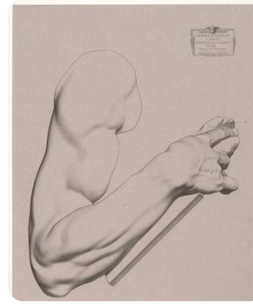
I-21
Child's arm, exterior view
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#I-21



I-22
Woman's arm, bent
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#I-22



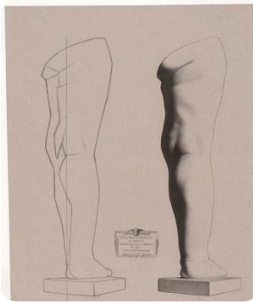
I-23
Man's arm, bent
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#I-23



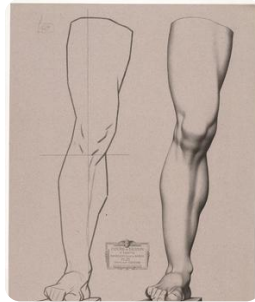
I-24
Arm of Moses, by Michelan...
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#I-24



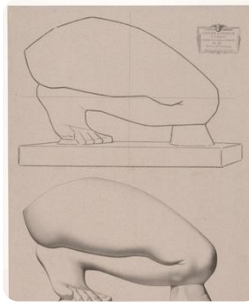
I-25
Leg of Germanicus in profile
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#I-25



I-26
Child's leg, rear view
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#I-26



I-27
Leg of Germanicus, front vi...
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#I-27



I-28
Leg of the Crouching Venus
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#I-28



I-29
Leg of the Venus de Medici
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#I-29



I-30
Legs of the Dying Slave, by ...
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#I-30



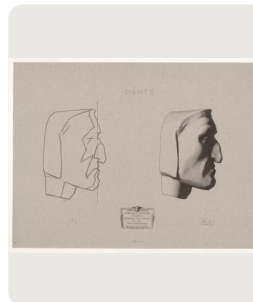
I-31
Nero as a child
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#I-31



I-32
Cardinal Jiménez
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#I-32



I-33
Young girl. Life cast
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#I-33



I-34
Dante
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#I-34



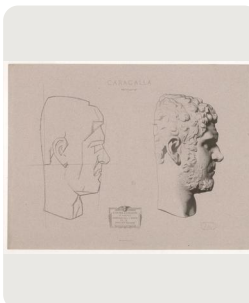
I-35
The Cardinal de Birague, by ...
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#I-35



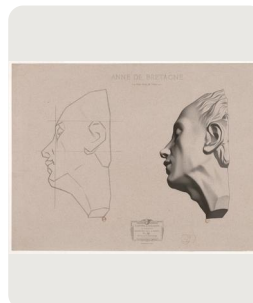
I-36
Marcus Brutus
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#I-36



I-37
Head of a horse, Parthenon
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#I-37



I-38
Caracalla
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#I-38



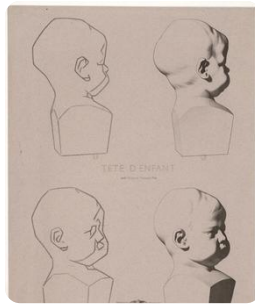
I-39
Anne of Brittany, by Giovan...
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#I-39



I-40
Julia Mamaea
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#I-40



I-41
The Capitoline Ariadne
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#I-41



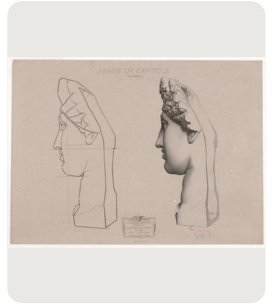
I-42
Children, by François Flama...
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#I-42



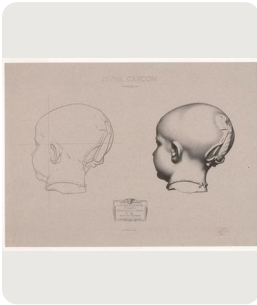
I-43
Faustina
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#I-43



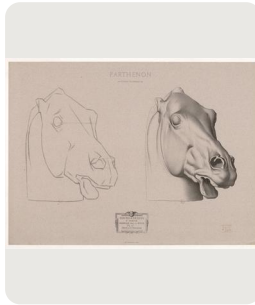
I-44
Psyché of Naples
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#I-44



I-45
Capitoline Ariadne
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#I-45



I-46
Young boy
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#I-46



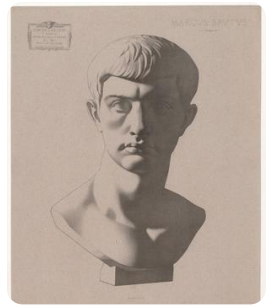
I-47
Head of a horse
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#I-47



I-48
Phocion
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#I-48



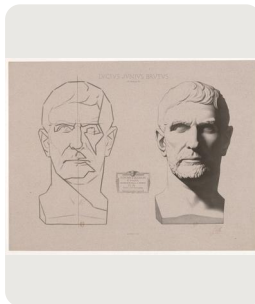
I-49
Agrippa
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#I-49



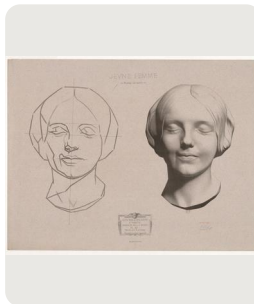
I-50
Marcus Brutus
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#I-50



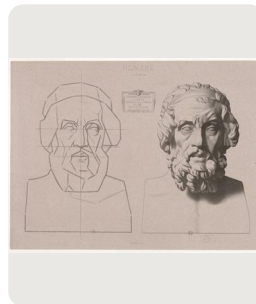
I-51
Jupiter Trophonius
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#I-51



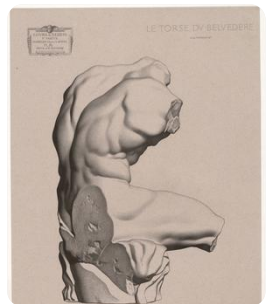
I-52
Lucius Junius Brutus
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#I-52



I-53
Young woman. Life cast
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#I-53



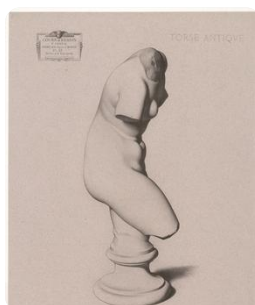
I-54
Homer
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#I-54



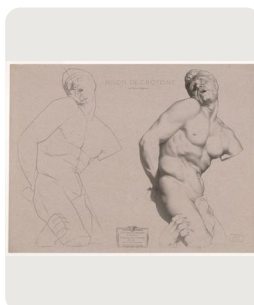
I-55
Belvedere Torso, rear view
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#I-55



I-56
Male torso, back view
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#I-56



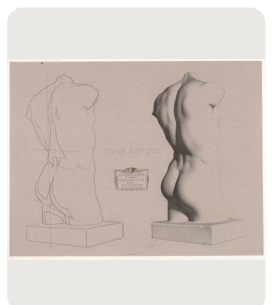
I-57
Female torso, three-quarter...
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#I-57



I-58
Milo of Croton, by Pierre P...
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#I-58



I-59
Vatican Amazon, draped
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#I-59



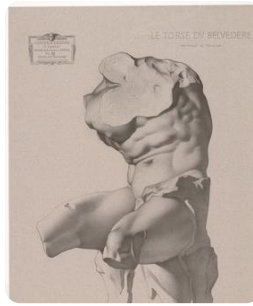
I-60
Male torso, three-quarter vi...
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#I-60



I-61
Theseus
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#I-61



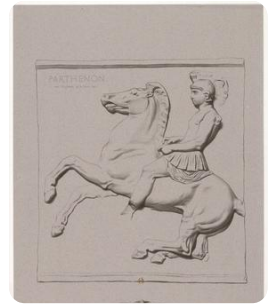
I-62
Ilissos
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#I-62



I-63
Belvedere Torso, front view
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#I-63



I-64
Female torso, rear view
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#I-64



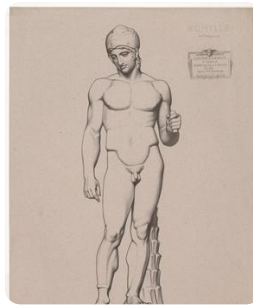
I-65
Knight
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#I-65



I-66
Two knights
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#I-66



I-67
Cincinnatus
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#I-67



I-68
Achilles
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#I-68



I-69
Germanicus
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#I-69



I-70
Saint Martha
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#I-70

Part 2 - After the masters (67 plates)

Copies of drawings by masters from different periods and schools.

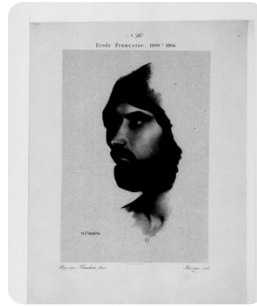
Parts 2 and 3 contain many drawings of nude models. This was - and is - a normal part of drawing training.



II-01
N° I
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#II-01



II-02
N° II
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#II-02



II-03
N° III
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#II-03



II-04
N° IV
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#II-04



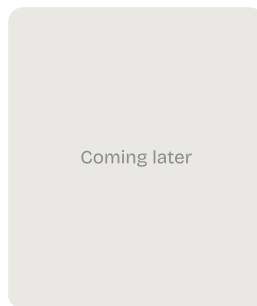
II-05
N° V
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#II-05



II-06
N° VI
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#II-06



II-07
N° VII
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#II-07



II-08
N° VIII
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#II-08



II-09
N° IX
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#II-09



II-10
N° X
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#II-10



II-11
N° XI
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#II-11



II-12
N° XII
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#II-12



II-13
N° XIII
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#II-13



II-14
N° XIV
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#II-14



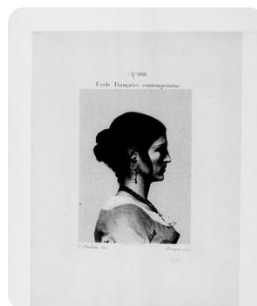
II-15
N° XV
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#II-15



II-16
N° XVI
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#II-16



II-17
N° XVII
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#II-17



II-18
N° XVIII
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#II-18



II-19
N° XIX
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#II-19



II-20
N° XX
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#II-20





II-21
N° XXI
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#II-21



II-22
N° XXII
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#II-22



II-23
N° XXIII
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#II-23



II-24
N° XXIV
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#II-24



II-25
N° XXV
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#II-25



II-26
N° XXVI
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#II-26



II-27
N° XXVII
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#II-27



II-28
N° XXVIII
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#II-28



II-29
N° XXIX
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#II-29



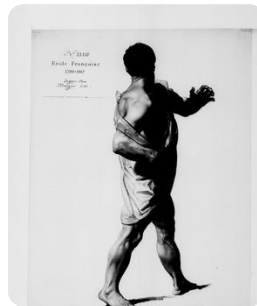
II-30
N° XXX
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#II-30



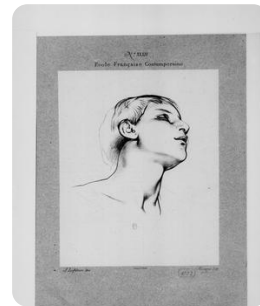
II-31
N° XXXI
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#II-31



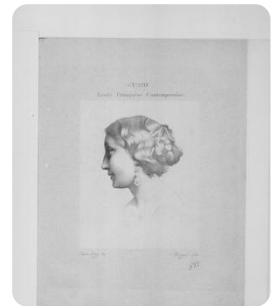
II-32
N° XXXII
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#II-32



II-33
N° XXXIII
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#II-33



II-34
N° XXXIV
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#II-34



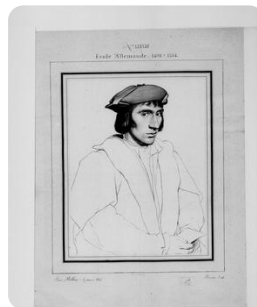
II-35
N° XXXV
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#II-35



II-36
N° XXXVI
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#II-36



II-37
N° XXXVII
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#II-37



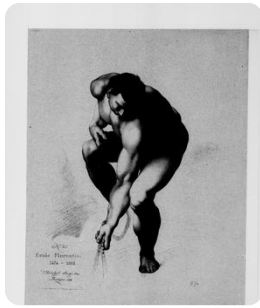
II-38
N° XXXVIII
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#II-38



II-39
N° XXXIX
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#II-39



II-40
N° XL
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#II-40



II-41
N° XLI
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#II-41



II-42
N° XLII
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#II-42



II-43
N° XLIII
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#II-43



II-44
N° XLIV
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#II-44



II-45
N° XLV
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#II-45



II-46
N° XLVI
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#II-46



II-47
N° XLVII
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#II-47



II-48
N° XLVIII
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#II-48



II-49
N° XLIX
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#II-49



II-50
N° L
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#II-50



II-51
N° LI
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#II-51



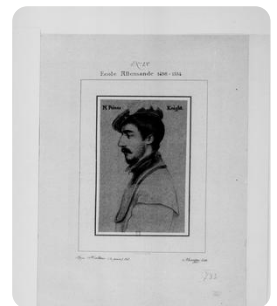
II-52
N° LII
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#II-52



II-53
N° LIII
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#II-53



II-54
N° LIV
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#II-54



II-55
N° LV
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#II-55



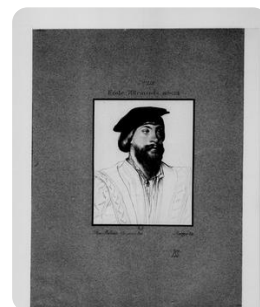
II-56
N° LVI
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#II-56



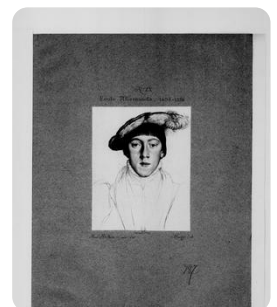
II-57
N° LVII
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#II-57



II-58
N° LVIII
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#II-58



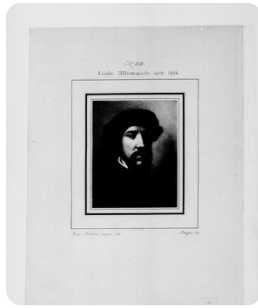
II-59
N° LIX
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#II-59



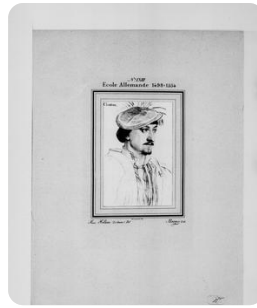
II-60
N° LX
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#II-60



II-61
N° LXI
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#II-61



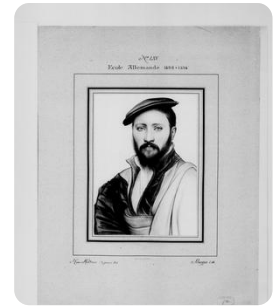
II-62
N° LXII
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#II-62



II-63
N° LXIII
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#II-63



II-64
N° LXIV
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#II-64



II-65
N° LXV
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#II-65



II-66
N° LXVI
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#II-66



II-67
N° LXVII
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#II-67

Part 3 - Charcoal exercises (60 plates)

Academies (drawings of nude models) as preparation for drawing from the live model.



III-01
N° 1
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#III-01



III-02
N° 2
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#III-02



III-03
N° 3
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#III-03



III-04
N° 4
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#III-04



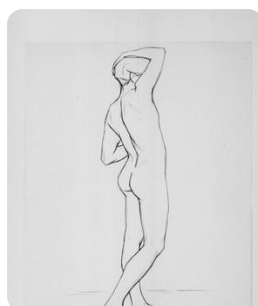
III-05
N° 5
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#III-05



III-06
N° 6
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#III-06



III-07
N° 7
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#III-07



III-08
N° 8
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#III-08



III-09
N° 9
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#III-09



III-10
N° 10
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#III-10



III-11
N° 11
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#III-11



III-12
N° 12
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#III-12



III-13
N° 13
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#III-13



III-14
N° 14
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#III-14



III-15
N° 15
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#III-15



III-16
N° 16
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#III-16



III-17
N° 17
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#III-17



III-18
N° 18
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#III-18



III-19
N° 19
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#III-19



III-20
N° 20
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#III-20



III-21
N° 21
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#III-21



III-22
N° 22
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#III-22



III-23
N° 23
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#III-23



III-24
N° 24
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#III-24



III-25
N° 25
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#III-25



III-26
N° 26
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#III-26



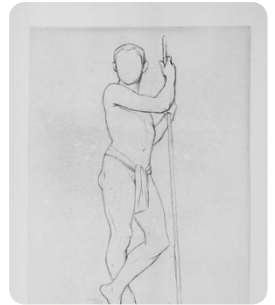
III-27
N° 27
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#III-27



III-28
N° 28
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#III-28



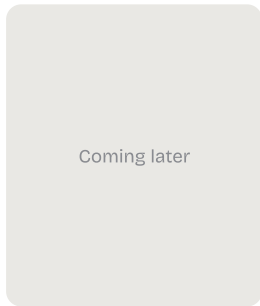
III-29
N° 29
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#III-29



III-30
N° 30
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#III-30



III-31
N° 31
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#III-31



III-32
N° 32
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#III-32



III-33
N° 33
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#III-33



III-34
N° 34
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#III-34



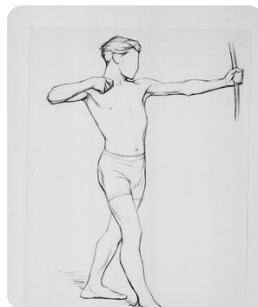
III-35
N° 35
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#III-35



III-36
N° 36
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#III-36



III-37
N° 37
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#III-37



III-38
N° 38
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#III-38



III-39
N° 39
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#III-39



III-40
N° 40
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#III-40



III-41
N° 41
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#III-41



III-42
N° 42
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#III-42



III-43
N° 43
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#III-43



III-44
N° 44
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#III-44



III-45
N° 45
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#III-45



III-46
N° 46
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#III-46



III-47
N° 47
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#III-47



III-48
N° 48
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#III-48



III-49
N° 49
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#III-49



III-50
N° 50
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#III-50



III-51
N° 51
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#III-51



III-52
N° 52
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#III-52



III-53
N° 53
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#III-53



III-54
N° 54
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#III-54



III-55
N° 55
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#III-55



III-56
N° 56
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#III-56



III-57
N° 57
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#III-57



III-58
N° 58
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#III-58



III-59
N° 59
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#III-59



III-60
N° 60
steenstoolbox.dk/bargue#III-60

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Plates II-08 and III-32 are missing from the Gallica edition and will be added later.

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The text draws on, among others, the BnF catalogue, the Van Gogh letters (vangoghletters.org), the Art Renewal Center, the Musée Picasso Paris and sightsize.com.

Transparency

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