



# In Practice

WITH DR. RONALD E. GOLDSTEIN

## The Art of Dentists: Part II Masterpieces in Miniature



**Guest Author**  
**Laurence Rifkin, DDS**  
Private Practice  
Beverly Hills, California  
Phone: 310.205.0010  
Fax: 310.205.0718  
Email: LRRifkin@pacbell.net

Adjunct Faculty Member  
UCLA Center for Esthetic  
Dentistry

*Laurence Rifkin, DDS is co-founder, director, and lecturer for Michelangelo Seminars in Beverly Hills, California. His general practice emphasizes full-mouth reconstruction, esthetic dentistry, and periodontal implant prosthodontics. Dr. Laurence Rifkin is an accredited member of the American and European Academies of Esthetic Dentistry and the American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry.*

**D**entists use artistic skills frequently in their practices. The ability to see an object, replicate it using a free hand, and coordinate realistic colors is important to the very existence of esthetic dentistry. Like any other skill, the skills of a dentist, just like those of an artist, need to be practiced and



**Ronald E. Goldstein, DDS**  
Clinical Professor  
Oral Rehabilitation  
Medical College of Georgia  
School of Dentistry

*Dr. Goldstein also serves as adjunct professor of restorative dentistry at the University of Texas Health Science Center; adjunct clinical professor of prosthodontics at the Henry M. Goldman School of Dental Medicine, Boston University, and visiting professor of oral and maxillofacial imaging and continuing education at the University of Southern California School of Dentistry. Dr. Goldstein is the author of Change Your Smile and Esthetics in Dentistry.*

fine-tuned. To do this, dentists can vary their routines and explore different outlets for their artistic abilities. Drawing and sculpting skills to the dentist or cosmetic surgeon are just as important as the alphabet and language to the writer or notes and melody to the musician. There are several ways that I have benefited from expanding my knowledge of art and creativity. By honing the skills of an artist, I have made myself a better dentist by:

- Building confidence in my patients as to my ability to understand and achieve their esthetic goals.

and also add layers of peripheral or central skills that can finesse excellent dentistry into masterpieces in miniature.

### **BENEFITS OF STUDYING ART FOR THE DENTIST, TECHNICIAN, AND SURGEON**

You might ask what some of the benefits of knowing the finer points are. Some of these benefits are:

- Developing our intuitive visual language for improved creativity, communication, and design.
- Improving hand-eye coordination and imagination to create beauty in two and three dimensions.

*Leonardo da Vinci was not only an artist but also a scientist and an inventor. His observations on subjects such as human anatomy are considered masterpieces today.*

- Understanding the subtleties of “natural beauty” and creating personalized smiles that are unique to each patient’s individual face.
- Really seeing form, color, and details in objects, not just seeing objects as a whole, so that fabricated teeth become more lifelike and undetectable as dentistry.
- Being able to speak the language of art and communicating clearly with my patients and technicians.

You might ask, “Why is art important to dentistry if I’m only creating teeth? As long as they look like teeth, isn’t that enough?” By studying art, we continue to learn and refine our dental skills

photography, sketching, computer imaging, wax-ups, direct composites, periodontal plastic surgery, orthodontic alignment, tooth preparation, color matching, and surface texturing.

- Displaying your art in your office sends a message of your appreciation and attention to the beauty of art and your dentistry.
- Drawing develops visual perception of outline form details, special proportions, and value differences in color.
- Sculpting continues the skills of volume, weight, and texture in three dimensions and in all views and angles.
- Being able to think and visualize in three-dimensional layers.
- Understanding the cause and effect of surface contour on light reflection, deflection, and absorption.

### **GETTING STARTED**

#### **The Author’s Experience**

After 10 years of practice, I realized esthetic dentistry was rediscovering the science of beauty and art. I began to take courses in drawing, painting, and sculpting in the evening at a local art school once per week. I found this enjoyable but I also began to look at teeth and faces from another perspective that wasn’t limited by formulas and





Oscar Wilde once said, "Looking at a thing is very different than seeing a thing."

mathematical proportions common in medical and dental literature. Many months, years, and books later my art and dentistry improved. I found that there was an improvement not only in my

dental anatomy but also in my esthetic diagnosis and in my communication skills to both patients and technicians. I have since become a member in dental and cosmetic surgery academies to

continue my exposure and learning in dental and facial beauty. The passion for excellence was a driving force that caused me to get over the aversion of re-doing something. Re-doing or doing over is common in art.

#### What Can You Do?

You must get over your fear



of art and failure. There are several books that can help, such as *Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain* by Betty Edwards. This will enable you to eliminate any misconceptions such as "It takes talent" or "I've never been artistic." If you can write your name or throw a ball or drive a car, you can learn to draw. Art skills begin in the mind's eye in the right side of the brain. Edwards will suggest and teach you to start by copy/drawing a subject by looking at it upside down. Remember, there are no failures, only results, so practice and have fun in seeing the improvement.

Take a local college or high school extension class in drawing, sculpting, and photography. Photography is an essential diagnostic skill today enabling us to see enlarged images of teeth and smiles and document a patient's beginning, intermediate, and final conditions after treatment. Drawing is a rapid skill for conceptual design. Sculpting is the extension of drawing in three dimensions and critical for all of our fabrication and therapeutic care. Take courses or read about facial esthetics from dental and medical literature.

Learn to see natural shapes and look for variation, not mathematical symmetry and proportion. Remember, as a dentist you are creating organic, growing forms, not assembling machinery. Forget the details for a while and look at the big picture of composition. See the whole face first. Then look at smaller sections such as the smile zone, lips, gingiva, and teeth. Review com-



**D**izzy Gillespie, the great jazz trumpeter, once said, "There are no mistakes, only results."

plete denture esthetics and treat natural teeth like movable teeth and adjustable gingiva.

Visualizing an empty mouth allows us to see the face, soft tissue support, compositional har-

mony, function, phonetics, and esthetics without distraction.

Whether we restore the beauty of the smile with complete dentures, implant-supported or natural-supported restorations,

the final outcome must look believable, undetectable as dentistry and be pleasing and personal to the individual patient.

Dentistry can be considered very much like beautiful architecture because it requires functional thinking and design as well as esthetic appeal. Developing a structure from the inside out is critical for function and surface



esthetics. The face, like all body structures, is built on a skeletal support that has its impact on muscle form, pull directions, and soft tissue scaffolding.

Use the technology of digital photography for rapid visualization of your patients' faces, smiles, and intraoral views. It all begins with visual analysis, design, and then the artistic fabrication skills of drawing and sculpting. The handpiece, instruments, and scalpels are nothing more than tools to alter form for the benefit of health and beauty. It is the dentist that guides and controls these tools to the visualized goals. The better the visualization is, the more directed the hand and tools are.

Finally, get your staff involved so that it can be a true team effort. Help them understand the artistic approach to observation. Work with your laboratory technicians to achieve the desired goals and expectations. Take classes together and go to museums.

When your entire team grasps the concept of how art and beauty are involved in the dental process, the office will change and improve; and your patients will respond positively.

#### **CONCLUSION**

Be who you are. Never say you cannot do something. You already have the skills and desire to be the best. Always strive for the best and enjoy self-improvement in your practice and have fun doing it. ○