

Drawing Research Network

Drawing Matters 2021

THE INSISTENCE OF DRAWING

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As a fundamental means to encounter and examine the world drawing plays a unique role, through material means and as embodied enactment, in forming a visual equivalent to lived experience. Drawings, and the act of drawing, can be seen to stand for an experience of looking, of seeing, and of being; although the question of drawing as an act of record that documents our present perhaps belies the complexity of this. Harun Farocki, while writing about documentary film in 1975, said 'what is called documentation shows the world as if it were known, which has the effect that a few years later, we can no longer experience what it looked like' (2017). In order to understand the connective tissue of drawing, we first must understand the 'building blocks', 'assemble and disassemble', and then reassemble the means and systems of drawing in order to reflect and respond to the complex issues and experiences that confront us.

The scope of drawing today is fresh in outlook and conception, unafraid to source, mine, and examine the historical, the factual, the spiritual, and the visceral imagination, or to use any technology at hand – be that a pencil, computer, video, ink, or charcoal – or other inventive medium, and in many formats. Through the lens of the Trinity Buoy Wharf Drawing Prize (known as Jerwood Drawing Prize from 2001–17) and other projects, the role of drawing and systems deployed reflect an essential and insistent means to connect, communicate, and convey experience.

In both depicting the world – and in articulating plans, aspirations, and reflections on the world – the process and language of drawing is inherently bound to the concept that is being conveyed. Hence the continual questioning and debate about what constitutes drawing, what it is for, and what are its inherent values. As an artist and educator, and as a wider research issue, one of my preoccupations is on the investigation into how we may understand and interrogate the role of drawing and the systems of drawing in use in the creative disciplines and more widely. As Tony Godfrey has said, ‘Drawing remains a seedbed. We learn many things by looking at drawings, just as we do by making them’ (2004).

As a practitioner, this investigation resides in my studio. Over an extended period of time, I have been making large-scale drawings that explore the relationship of the female subject, as the artist and model, with the defining acts of scrutiny, gaze, and feeling embodied through the act of drawing. These drawings seek to identify and visualise the relationships between what is seen, what is felt, and what we expect to see, and disclose an inherent paradox as the mind reveals the form it inhabits. This interrogation of observation, gesture, and expression has led to a sequence of drawings that question not just appearance, but the emotional or haptic sensation of being inside a skin or body that can only be seen or recognised by the self with the aid of a mirror. These drawings sit within a wider body of paintings and drawings that explore the depiction of the female subject through narrative and allegorical devices.

In *A Professional Secret*, John Berger states, ‘Image-making begins with interrogating appearances and making marks. Every artist discovers that drawing – when it is an urgent activity – is a two-way process. To draw is not only to measure and put down, it is also to receive’ (2005: 77). For me, this interrogation through drawing becomes the evidence of this temporal exchange, a glimpse of self or inner experience, amidst the external signs of appearances.

As an educator, the role and function of drawing has been critical to my teaching, research, and leadership in devising and setting an educational context for creative practice and its development. What is now known as the Trinity Buoy Wharf Drawing Prize project was devised in an art school at the heart of the curriculum to provide a focus on drawing to enable students (and others) to see drawings, to find out who was drawing, what they were drawing, how they were drawing, how we value drawing and its role and function, and what we may understand to be ‘a good drawing’. The selection process enables us to see what, as independent expert panels, they collectively believe to be a drawing worthy of wider attention – drawings that matter.

In the 1990s, at what is now the University of Gloucestershire, a major introductory component of the teaching programme in the Painting department was focussed on a structured introduction to the systems of drawing. The aims were to ensure that students understood and were practiced in a range of approaches – from the observational to the subjective – that emphasised drawing as a vital aspect of creative practice and ‘*an intellectual activity which extends visual thinking*’ (Dalwood 2015). At a time when there were few resources and venues in which to see contemporary drawing in the UK, it became

increasingly important to ensure that students could see the work of the many practitioners making drawings within the current context and to understand their purpose, prerogatives, and means of making drawings as a vital contemporary act, art form, and activity. While often unseen or hidden as an element of ideation at this time, drawing was clearly valued by many as an intrinsic element or outcome of their work. Drawing practice – and research about, in, and through drawing – now permeates many teaching institutions, as the evidence that drawing matters has proliferated and as many more drawing resources have been devised and developed by a number of influential drawing advocates in education, charities, galleries, museums, the media, and publishing.

In 1993–4, we were able to develop the infrastructure for an open drawing exhibition and to provide professional experience at the heart of the curriculum thanks to a small Enterprise in Higher Education grant and sponsorship from Rexel Derwent. Known from 1996 until 2000 as the Cheltenham Open Drawing Exhibition, it was supported by a private collector of British drawings, Westland Nurseries, The Summerfield Trust, CHK Charities, and Rootstein Hopkins Foundation. It then became known as the Jerwood Drawing Prize, receiving 17 years of major support from Jerwood Charitable Foundation from 2001 until 2017, with the Trinity Buoy Wharf Trust becoming the principal benefactor in 2018. Since 2017, the Evelyn Williams Trust have made a biennial award to an artist included in the exhibition to develop a drawing project for a solo show. All of our sponsors and funders have been highly committed to drawing, to supporting its promotion and its reappraisal, and evidencing why drawing matters.

The principal objective of devising this open exhibition with awards has been, as Frances Carey put it in 2001 ‘to raise the profile of a field of endeavour and to encourage practitioners – new and old’ and we committed to having a varied panel of selectors each year to gather a breadth of input and, as she also noted, to ‘prevent a kind of “house style” emerging’ (2001). The annual appointment of a changing independent panels of drawing experts – artists, curators, writers, and champions – who collectively respond to and select from the drawings submitted via this open call has enabled an interrogation of current drawing practice and emphasised its importance to makers; it has also highlighted the importance of teaching drawing and encouraged engagement with drawing through the resultant exhibitions and accompanying education programmes.

As we present the 26th exhibition, the 25th annual edition, now known as the Trinity Buoy Wharf Drawing Prize, we have seen tens of thousands of drawings submitted over the years, well over a thousand drawings presented in the touring exhibitions, and hundreds of thousands of visitors from all walks of life have engaged with the exhibitions and, through them, the question of why and how drawing matters. From 1994 to 2000, and again in 2020, the exhibition received submissions from the UK and internationally. (The period funded by Jerwood Charitable Foundation, in keeping with their funding remit, was open only to UK residents.) We have documented the selection through the annual illustrated publications, with statements by the artists about their drawings, reflective and responsive texts written by the selectors, and other contextual material. The aim being to broaden the scope of the material available to us beyond the exhibitions, which have included drawing practitioners from a range of backgrounds making drawings in a wide range of formats, systems, languages, and media – essentially exploring the role, function, and value of drawing today.

The selection panels have included the following artists: Graham Crowley, Anthony Green, Estelle Thompson, Peter de Francia, Deanna Petherbridge, Timothy Hyman, Eileen Cooper, Sandy Moffat, Cornelia Parker, Ken Currie, Basil Beattie, Stephen Farthing, Sarah Simblet, Jason Brooks, Yvonne

Crossley, Paul Thomas, Avis Newman, Tony Bevan, Tania Kovats, Emma Talbot, Rachel Whiteread, Lisa Milroy, Michael Craig-Martin, Alison Wilding, Dexter Dalwood, Glenn Brown, Michael Simpson, Nigel Hall, Chantal Joffe, and Ian McKeever; writers, critics, gallerists and curators such as: Felicity Lunn, Nick Tite, Angela Flowers, Nicola Shane, Andrew Brighton, Mel Gooding, Isobel Johnstone, Doris Lockhart Saatchi, Frances Carey, Richard Cork, Angela Kingston, Marco Livingstone, Marina Warner, William Feaver, Mary Doyle, Tony Godfrey, Martin Kemp, Paul Bonaventura, Catherine de Zegher, Emma Dexter, John McDonald, Roger Malbert, Nicholas Usherwood, Charles Darwent, Jenni Lomax, Iwona Blazwick, Tim Marlow, Stephen Coppel, Kate Macfarlane, Kate Brindley, Charlotte Mullins, Gavin Delahunty, Janet McKenzie, Salima Hashmi, John-Paul Stonard, Stephanie Buck, Paul Hobson, David Dibosa, Helen Legg, Megan Piper, Chris Stephens, Andrew Nairne, Dorothy Price, Sophia Yadong Hao, and Frances Morris. The Working Drawing Award, which was instituted in 2018, has a specialist panel to focus on drawings for design, architecture, engineering, science, and other disciplines within art practice selected by eminent specialists in architecture, design, engineering, and science. These panels have included Alan Baxter, Ian Blatchford, Piers Gough, Sophie McKinlay, and Angela Paola Squassini.

Importantly, it is the drawings that are selected for the exhibitions and the awards, chosen on the basis of visual values alone. A particular joy of the exhibitions is that it includes drawings made by students, early-career, mid-career, and well-known drawing practitioners, artists, makers, architects, engineers, and designers, as well as those who simply have a need and capacity to draw as a positive act, imprint, expression, or communication from any background.

The planning for this project began in 1993 and, after 27 years of leading it, it is perhaps time to build and make accessible an archive that could represent fully the drawings that have been included in the exhibitions. This would not only celebrate the project but also establish a fuller overview of the drawings it includes, as well as enable access to this resource and the potential findings and patterns that may have arisen through the selections, drawings, and artists. The project has included a number of related exhibitions, such as *Drawing Breath*, an exhibition curated to mark a decade of the annual exhibitions that toured from London to Sydney, Singapore, Aberdeen, Newcastle, and Bristol; *Drawn Together* in 2014, which brought together drawings by each of the artist-selectors to date; and Barbara Walker's solo exhibition and the forthcoming exhibition by Penny McCarthy as the Evelyn Williams Drawing Award winners in 2017 and 2019, respectively. This award facilitates the exploration of the role of drawing within a mid-career artist's practice, with profound effect in the case of Barbara Walker's *Vanishing Point*, which explored 'the visibility of Black subjects in Western European painting within a British national art collection' at the National Gallery London (French 2018).

Drawing Projects UK was established in 2009 to deliver the then Jerwood Drawing Prize as I moved to Australia to be Director of the National Art School. On my return to the UK, as Dean of Bath School of Art and Design, I needed a new live/work space and Drawing Projects UK was fortuitously able to expand as a Centre for Drawing in Wiltshire with a gallery, project space, studios, and other facilities to continue the aim of supporting the development and promotion of research initiatives in drawing, building community through drawing, and promoting professional and public engagement with and through drawing practice.

Exhibitions and projects often represent artists and makers discovered through the Drawing Prize selection process, as well as through proposals via the *Open to Draw* scheme. Projects under our *Open to Draw* programme have included the Yorkshire collective of Andy Black, Kate Black, Tracy Himsworth,

Lucy O'Donnell, and Sally Taylor; Saranjit Birdi and his *Mapping Bones* project; Alys Scott Hawkins and Chloe Briggs of *Drawing is Free*; and Greig Burgoyne's and Lucy O'Donnell's performance and exhibition, *Between the Sunny and the Opaque*.

Drawing Projects UK provides a platform for drawing and an open framework within which to facilitate and support the testing of the role of drawing. The gallery programme also reflects this premise and, since 2016, we have presented solo exhibitions that include the *Theatre of Dreams* by Australian artist Wendy Sharpe; drawings for the *Forest of Imagination* by landscape designer Andrew Grant; painting and drawings by Eleanor Bartlett; *Sketchbooks: An Obsession* by Elisa Alaluusua, which was supported by the Finnish Institute; *Flood Story* by Gerry Davies; *Drawings of Different Sizes* by Michael Pennie; *A Dawn Chorus* by Mike Collier; *Shaped Space* by George Meyrick; *Drawing Out the Canal* by Simon Woolham, which documented a walk along the Kennet and Avon canal; and *Monuments Remain* by Ian Chamberlain.

Thematic and collaborative shows have included *From the Ground: Mandy Bonnell & James Brooks*; and *Greyscale* by Sydney-based artists Peter Burgess, Julia Davis, Adrian Gebers, Pollyxenia Joannou, and Lisa Jones. *Thinking Graphite* was the outcome of a residency at the Viarco pencil factory in Portugal undertaken by Sarah Duyshart, Janine Hall, Emma Louise Hollaway, Caroline Holt-Wilson, Jo Lane, Ellis Scheer, and Charmaine Watkiss. Thematic exhibitions curated by Gary Sangster and myself have included a wide range of national and international artists and makers in shows, such as *See View, Line Up, Consequences, Around the World, and Stockpile*. We presented the very last showing of the Jerwood Drawing Prize 2017 and the first Trinity Buoy Wharf Drawing Prize 2018 exhibitions; and we now publish the Trinity Buoy Wharf Drawing Prize publications. The future programme will include the Trinity Buoy Wharf Drawing Prize 2020, a solo exhibition of notebook drawings by Professor of Fashion Design and fashion journalist, Iain R. Webb, and *Drawing Matter: Eleanor Bartlett, Lucinda Burgess, Carole Pearson*, which specifically explores the materiality of making.

Regular Drawing Sessions and Drawing Discussions are held in the Project Space. Drawing Discussions underpin this endeavour, providing access to drawing practitioners and experts, such as Michael Sandle RA, Nigel Hall RA, Dr Sarah Simblet, Deanna Petherbridge CBE, and Jose Vieira, as well as our exhibiting artists, writers, and others. Drawing Sessions have been led by Alex Roberts, Michele Whiting, Tania Kovats, Charmaine Watkiss, Caroline Burraway, Sarah Simblet, and Fritz Horstman (Josef & anni Anni Albers Foundation) delivering *Josef Albers' Interaction of Color* workshop. A number of drawing groups have also found their home in the Project Space: Michele Whiting's Exploring Drawing group, Emma Gregory's Collaborative Drawing Research Group, and Fhiona McKie's drawing 'reading group'. These sit alongside Makers Talks with speakers that have included Alice Kettle; a Poetry Society Stanza Group with a compelling monthly programme of workshops, open mics, and guest speakers; and our monthly Girl Friday Breakfast Club. All foster a community of practice, drawing, looking at drawings, and discussing drawing as a fundamental aspect of knowledge generation.

We produced extensive onsite and offsite programmes in 2019 alongside the Trinity Buoy Wharf Drawing Prize 2019, which was on show at The Salisbury Museum and at Trinity Buoy Wharf in London in January 2020. This included the delivery of symposia, workshops, and partnerships with galleries and museums across Wiltshire, and with the Royal Drawing School, Future Textiles, and Parker Harris at Trinity Buoy Wharf. In 2019, the Trinity Buoy Wharf Drawing Prize project was invited to participate in the inaugural Draw Art Fair at the Saatchi Gallery in London, and to deliver a panel discussion in the public programme.

Each of these projects – the Trinity Buoy Wharf Drawing Prize, Drawing Projects UK, and the projects within them – look to the vitality of drawing practice in current contexts. Yet, the history and practice of drawing is as long and extensive as the history of our cultures and experiences, and this imbues all that we do. From our own and others' childhood drawings to rock drawings across time and cultures, we see an almost ubiquitous need to make an imprint on, and of, the world around us. Drawing is both an ancient, current, and elemental act and action. Enabling us to see what we are thinking, as well as to understand, to communicate, and to navigate our worlds. The trace of material to surface from the hand, eye, and mind with 'all the senses as extensions of the tactile sense' in Pallasmaa's thinking and as 'the sensory mode which integrates our experiences of the world and of ourselves' (2012: 12).

We use drawing every day. We draw to measure and convey our world: measuring what we find; using coordinates to provide interpretable data and points of reference; making maps, plans, and diagrams. We follow drawings to find our destinations; to dream, and to develop schemes; to chart and convey facts in digestible forms. We measure and translate living, breathing bodies in life rooms and capture them in two-dimensional form; we explore bodies, and what it is to be human, in anatomy theatres – the design of historic anatomy theatres and life rooms eliding to provide the forum for human spectacle as we examine our own mysterious reference point through cut or drawn line. We make devices to help translate the three-dimensional world to two dimensions as we replicate and make images, from Durer's drawing machine to the camera. We make relationships, form comparisons, we interpret the experience of living from our own perspectives, scale, and positions. We capture fleeting moments, memorialising them through the act of commitment to material thinking, to medium and matter; a trace of thinking held in the interstices of surface, paper, rock, or wall. We render light and shadow in space and on surface. Our hands and eyes trace shadows as we follow a primal urge to try to capture fleeting moments and relationships.

When John Berger visited The Centre for Drawing at University of the Arts London for a day in 2008, he simply drew from the life model alongside others, and in the public discussion spoke only to read a poem. Knowledge, experience, understanding, and an emoted world were clearly and succinctly conveyed in and through these acts of observing, responding, and making; interrogating appearance, a two-way process.

Drawing has long provided a vital means to bring issues and ideas into focus, to document global events, protest, unrest, personal and social crises. This period of mass lockdown, quarantine, and isolation has been one in which creativity and culture has been reinforced as a life-affirming and connective tissue for expression, communication, and critical reflection on what it is to be human. Social injustice, inequity, and the precarity of social, economic, and political structures have all been brought to the fore in 2020.

Enabling individual reflection, direct communication and expression, and forming connections with a tangible world whilst tucked away in seclusion behind digital interfaces, drawing has evidently provided significant ways to mark time and to affirm presence. The touch of materials from hand to surface has facilitated intimacy; the eye and the camera have facilitated close looking and observation; responsive and radical ideas, schemes, and solutions created in digital or hand drawn realms. Explorations of emotional, spatial and temporal dissonances, dislocation and ambiguity, loss and longing, have resulted in a panoply of lived, imagined, and proposed human experiences. The insistence of drawing is a testament to being present: 'for the time that I saw this, felt this or touched this, I was alive in the world'.

Drawing has a unique capacity to touch everyone, as a ubiquitous, democratic, common yet specialist, intimate and precious act, activity, and language. Whatever we do, drawing matters.

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