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The Importance of Learning Art Through Drawing

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*Abstract: Form is one of the most important categories in the teaching of artistic drawing. Its origin and levels of complexity form a structure characterized – according to Paul Klee in *The Thinking Eye* – by interpretation of and relationship between the parts, whose process is essential to conceive the definitive character in which formation determines the form, different interaction modes bring about multiple forms. The study of artistic drawing is based on the study and reflection of the form, which is subdivided into elements that describe its kinetic energy and spatial dimensions, tensions, and internal and external relationships, but that in its totality releases symbolism and expressivity; from it, arises an entire conceptual structure that allows developing any discourse on making. Language, in its character of a mental construction that allows abstracting a concept associated with a particular object from reality, has never changed its way of dominating the identity of objects through the idea of form. Understanding it has to do with the determination of its properties, with diversity, and with shared essence. To see, to know how to see, involves learning to detain our eyes on the forms and their characteristics; it implicates the development of qualities and aptitudes of analysis and observation. Thus, educational action in visual arts is conceived as a communicative relationship that makes references to previous knowledge and that does not cease in the physical limits of visual representation because it also has a cognitive nature that appeals to memory, time and graphic representation.*

Keywords: Learning, Arts, Drawing

Introduction

WHEN ARISTOTLE MADE his characterization of knowledge, he distinguished a rational part and a part that lacks reason (*alogs*), the first was subdivided into knowledge of what is clear and what is distinct (*epistemonikon*), which can be exemplified by mathematics, and knowledge of what is variable and diffused (*logistikon*) where, for example, philosophy would fit. He also implied that there were five ways in which the soul could approach truth: *techne*, *episteme*, *phronesis*, *sophia* and *nous*; out of these, only *episteme* was obviously related to teaching, or *didakte*, and to learning, or *matheton*, and although it has been interpreted that the five ways were *episteme*, neither *techne* nor *phronesis* were actually considered knowledge, the first, for being related to fabrication, or *poiesis*, and corresponding to repetitive and reflective actions, and the second, for belonging to action, or *praxis*. In the end, both are tasks to produce or change something... in them plastic arts were involved and to them corresponded the *action of drawing*...

However, drawing, from the time of the Greeks, has been a field of knowledge of which evolution, as sustenance of teaching and learning experiences, has created a diversity of aspects that include everything from artistic drawing to schematic drawing. Juan José Gómez Molina and Lino Cabezas, who conducted important research on this subject, creating deep knowledge in this regard, laying the foundations of its disciplinary nature, acknowledge

within a generic taxonomy¹, analytical, descriptive, naturalistic, realistic, conceptual, abstract, schematic, poetic, scientific, technical, linear, crafty, animated, ornamental, decorative and artistic drawing, and each of these categories is described with references and semantic and instrumental characterizations, agreeing that drawing is a fundamental action for understanding reality, given that it involves complex thought and intentionality, which respond to mental images, real or fictitious, in which there are as many interpretations as there are visualization capabilities.

Reaching the arts from education means treating with special emphasis the concepts that arts grant us if we know to acknowledge them: discover, interest, awaken attention [...] reaching the arts from education gives meaning to moments of both sublime pleasure and utter annoyance [...] reaching the arts from an educational perspective means emphasising all those elements which surround the art and which foster the coming to light of the many connections which the act of looking at a work of art enables us to make...²

Background

To understand and teach artistic drawing, in addition to the development of the spectrum of concepts that involves such a wide classification, a necessary parallelism with invention has been created, promoting proclamations about “*the science of art*”, which is precisely based on needs and horizons of drawing schools.

And so, we can mention, among the most important examples of known drawing artefacts, Leon Battista Alberti’s *veil* or grid (1435); Euclid’s *visual cone or pyramid* (3rd Century A.D.), which gave the elements for Leonardo’s glass proposals, Simon Stevin’s perspective device, and Kircher’s mesoptic instrument (both in the 17th century); Brunelleschi’s *perspective panel* (described by Tuccio Manetti in 1480) which would result in Danti’s mirrors in the 16th century, and David Hockney’s sequence of reflections in the 20th century; Kircher’s magic lantern (1646) from which opaque projectors emerge, or Max Fleischer’s rotoscope for animated drawings (1917); Dürer’s perspectograph with which visual rays are materialized as lines, *sportello* or little door (1525) derived since 1475 from Piero della Francesca’s perspective method, of which didactic qualities always stood out in spite of its limitations, and from it emerged instruments such as Vignola’s perspectograph and Danti’s and Parigi’s *squadras* from the 16th century, Cigoli’s square from the 17th century, or Gavard’s diagraph from the 19th century; and Baldassare Lanci’s semicylinder (1557), which inspired Mario Bettini’s instruments in that same century.

Pantographs, compasses for drawing spirals, parabolas or ellipses, specialized squares, rods for perspectives, planigraphs, variants of the perspectograph, optigraphs or graphic telescopes, or the camera obscura, are some of the instruments developed by artists and scientists as aids in artistic drawing, whose extremes are manifested in the recommendation to use these instruments as an argument to certify naturalness, by being able this way to establish comparisons and carry out perfection in colour and form, and although not all mannerists and classicists agree with these viewpoints, there are testimonies, like that of Bellori in the 17th century, who was convinced that artists “*had no ideas in their minds*” and “*were used*

¹ Lino Cabezas. “*Las palabras del dibujo*” in Juan José Gómez Molina. *Los nombres del dibujo*, pp. 265-295

² Eulàlia Bosch. *El placer de mirar*, pp. 237-239

to ugliness and horrors”, adding that naturalism attracted the lower classes where everything that is seen is linked with “*the visual sense*”.³

Although these ideas were much included in drawing teaching methods, we cannot ignore the importance that different branches of science had in this discipline, in the evolution of materials, instruments and specialized technical resources that have made possible the derivation of important aspects and styles of drawing.

Learning Drawing

The teaching of artistic drawing, in particular, has been a motive of diverse visions because it is absolutely delimited from *what is useful*, from *what is good for*, which are conditions that, from the viewpoint of theoretical visions of positivism supplemented with ideological viewpoints, like the theories of value or functionalist theories, have ranked knowledge in a directly proportional relation with its social returns, that is, with its *quantitative indexes of cost-benefit* that, in artistic and humanistic disciplines, *are impossible to value by virtue of their being linked to strictly qualitative conditions*, like the aesthetic or poetic experience, or what Valéry describes as the most manifest character of a work of art: *its uselessness*, which has been validated by theories such as Adorno’s, for whom artistic pleasure is nothing more than a bourgeois reaction against the spiritualization of art, in regards to which Jaussons that currently the term ‘enjoy’ has lost its sense completely, considering it merely a technicality, forgetting that

...Herder’s concept of spiritual pleasure finds its own certainty in an originitive *having*, to which follows, at the same time, having the world (*existence is pleasure*); In Goethe’s Faust, finally the concept of pleasure was extended toward all levels of experience, up to the strongest yearning for knowledge (from a *person’s vital pleasure*, passing through the *pleasure of action* and the *conscious pleasure*, until the *pleasure of creation*, according to Faust’s known scheme)...⁴

The previous agrees with Marcuse’s thesis, which seeks to reaffirm the culture that broke away from civilization, from the fragmentation of actions, culminating in the radical division of two worlds: *work and leisure*, where every attitude toward arts remained inserted, ignoring the genuine social benefits of artistic *praxis*.

Also the teaching of drawing and its demarcation as a discipline with a strength of its own is derived from its academical insertion as a basic subject, for learning what is still considered major arts in many places: painting, sculpture and print. And although it is true that the development of the ability to draw is a fundamental condition to understand a work’s sense of project, it was merged curricular-wise with such strength that its foundations were changed; in fact, it is sometimes recognized for “the fundamental role that it plays as a “closed-order” discipline that maintains the efficacy of the productive system, both in what it represents in terms of saving energy, the economy of scattered actions, as in what it represents in terms of symbolic actions [...] fundamental scheme of configuring training, it is at the same time

³ Cf. Lino Cabezas. “*Las máquinas de dibujar. Entre el mito de la visión objetiva y la ciencia de la representación*” in Juan José Gómez Molina (coord). *Máquinas y herramientas del dibujo*, pp. 83-302

⁴ Hans Robert Jaus. *Pequeña apología de la experiencia estética*, pg. 34

a scaffolding of excess, model of models through which the artist can be allowed to imagine himself as a constructor”⁵

Thus, drawing is identified with sketching, outlining, the first images, brainstorming, unfinished lines, previous general notes, simple drawings that precede the execution of a painting, the sketchy modelling of sculpture or part of the schematic development of a work, it is a croquis, a raw drawing: “*we speak of sketching, because neither you nor I am Michelangelo, we draw poorly and we must capture the sense of the word drawing, we are not talking about you representing your idea perfection to me, we are not even talking about you showing it to someone! Because the only thing that drawing is good for in many cases is for you to understand the idea and to remember it without going into precisions or details...*”

The previous testimony, by a university student of plastic arts, is only an example of how people see drawing in formal education, and it expresses clearly Kandinsky’s concern for social dangers that prevent art from going beyond the world of appearances: the exaggerated concern regarding the technical aspect, the triviality and insubstantiality that lead to decoration, imitation, or reproduction of what already exists, and the emptiness of external formalisms.

Artistic drawing is a practice that mustn’t be submitted to banality, because it is a primordial aesthetic experience; it is the original plastic manifestation, the most important resource to educate sight; it reveals expressive statutes that determine the fundamental concepts of plastic arts.

It is a process in which the law of exhaustion of forms does not apply because it needs no epigones, it permanently renews the cosmic view of reality, it is a spatiotemporal condensation, the niche of the imaginary of all times that allows for the realization of what Cézanne⁶, in a rejection of reductionism, demanded of every young person who thinks that he ought not invent everything: “*order especially your brain with the conciliation of different viewpoints*” interrogating the material world and nature, and after determining the expressive resources, ask ‘what do I want?’ and proceed with the “*search from the simple to the complex, to attempt to discover it.*”

Matisse acknowledged in these affirmations Cézanne’s importance in his determination to transform form. Thus, drawing is also understood as a moment in knowledge that has been through all the traditions renewing their critical, historical, visual and technical dimensions.

Philip Rawson⁷ speaks of the independence that artistic drawing can have from colour, perspective, dimensionality; it evolves based on the conceptual structure of linear drawing, in this sense, he affirms that it is the most spiritual and subjective of all visual art activities.

Line is the essential material in artistic drawing; strokes, marks, spots have a merely symbolic relationship with the experience of seeing, a similitude is never expressed with reality, therefore, the teaching of drawing has presented historically important challenges.

In 1900, during the First International Congress on the Development of Drawing and Art Teaching in Paris, and in 1904, during the Second Congress⁸ transcendent conclusions were

⁵ Juan José Gómez Molina et al. *El dibujo. Belleza, razón, orden y artefacto*, pg. 16

⁶ Marcelin Pleynet. *La enseñanza de la pintura*, pg. 48

⁷ Cf. Philip Rawson. *Drawing*, pp. 1-11

⁸ Cf. Victor M. Reyes. *Pedagogía del dibujo*

posed, the most important being regarding the characteristics that the teaching of drawing must integrate: evolutionary as an adaptation, realist as an inspiration, general as an application, spontaneous as an execution, and aesthetic as a formation.

Eleven years later, qualities related to the pedagogic nature of the method were expressed: progressively developing the drawing of spontaneous expression and visual intelligence; developing observation based on the education of the eye and reason, and progressively expanding creative imagination with the constant educating of feelings.

Conclusions

It is clear that, in these considerations, the transcendence of the teaching of artistic drawing is defined; its disciplinary nature is considered a given, delimiting it as a partial function of plastic arts, and attributes are determined that will evolve from the fact of drawing, like original personal aptitudes and experience understood specifically as the way of doing.

Corresponding to a particularization of Vygotsky's⁹ ideas, it can be affirmed that the importance of drawing in learning is understood from different aspects: its strength as social criticism is made obvious; it discovers the valuation of artistic drawing; it establishes relationship mechanisms with the society; it expresses psychological indexes in its praxis; it forms cognitive conscience substituting trivial rules; it bases the aesthetic experience; it allows understanding fundamental process of vision and observation, abandoning interiorized schemes.

The teaching of art through drawing, as one more resource of symbolic declarations or any other symbolic structure, allow the epistemological articulation of ideas regarding the world.

In his book *Ways of Worldmaking*, Nelson Goodman affirms that there are approximately as many worlds as there are ideas of worlds. Of all the symbolic constellations that we use to create worlds, Goodman adds, none is necessarily better than the other [...] the development of drawing can be compared to the process of organic growth: sometimes an image emerges little by little from a previous image, and sometimes the images change abruptly as a result of a casual discovery that we make thanks to the lines and forms that we have been drawing randomly ...¹⁰

Paul Klee defined once drawing as an *active line on a walk*; however, artistic drawing involves more profound matters as an artistic purpose of itself. Daniel Mendelowitz made an apologia of drawing as the most important art for its essential informality, its subjective properties, its qualities of contiguity and immediacy, and its close link with the action and effect of creating. Gomez Molina says in this regard:

The identification of drawing as 'the father of the three arts' in Vasari, or as the 'foundation of art' in Cennino Cennini, or 'foundation and technique of the arts' in Ghiberti, is the invention in which our most positive experience lies, that which allowed Leonardo to develop the clearest vision that we have been able to have of him as a form

⁹ Cf. Lev Vygotsky. *Psicología del arte*

¹⁰ Brent Wilson et al. *La enseñanza del dibujo a partir del arte*, pp. 21 and 26

of knowledge. Thence we can speak of drawing under a concept that exceeds its formalizations.¹¹

As any interdiscipline, the pedagogy of artistic drawing is to recognize its foundations, which is why it is necessary to refer to the ontological beginnings in which it lies and the conditions of knowledge that determine drawing as a specific object of study. In virtue of this, methodology serves as a bridge between the general principles of making and learning, determining the particular universes of knowledge; the analysis of the theoretic imperatives of artistic drawing implies both approaching the methodological models of its teaching, as well as the general principles of its particular methodology and the conceptual assumptions in which they lie.

The approach proposed herein presets drawing as a discipline and a making integrated in the social field because, as any other human making, it cannot be separate from its conditions nor from its social consequences. The perspective allows understanding drawing in fundamental and inevitably controversial aspects.¹²

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¹¹ Juan José Gómez Molina. "Los dibujos del dibujo" in J.J. Gómez Molina. *Las lecciones del dibujo*, pg. 181

¹² Cfr. L.C. Vilchis. *Método de enseñanza del dibujo de Gilberto Aceves Navarro*

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Professor in Posgraduate Program of National School of Visual Arts in National Autonomous University of Mexico. Pioneer in Mexico using digital resources in arts and design. First woman director of National School of Visual Arts at UNAM (2002-2006), has published four books about Graphic Design Theory, Graphic Design Metodology, Non-linear languages semiotics and Graphic Design Hermeneutics, 32 research papers and 18 didactic manuals. Manager from two diferent firms: a technologic center and a graphic design place. Teacher during 30 years, is oficial tutor from postgraduate program in the lines of researching projects, semiotic and hermeneutic studies; participating in academic events in Mexico, Dominicana Republic, USA, Canada, Greece, Spain, Cuba, Peru, Holland, Uruguay, Argentina, Germany and Portugal and presentating conferences in Mexico, Panama, Cuba, Spain, USA, Lisbon and other countries; also, being advisor thesis from more than 120 researching student thesis works in different universities. Professional graphic designer, working in Mexico, USA and Canada in firms like BMG Entertainment, Environmental Law Institute or UNESCO in traditional and digital way. Visual artist, has exposed digital art, collage and visual poetry in more than 30 exhibitions in Mexico, Panama, USA, Rusia, Spain, France, Greece, Palestine and Frankfurt.

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