

A Drawing Book for Digital Eyes



Looking at book covers may not tell you everything, but they do tell you something. A collection of leather-bound 'how to draw' books of the nineteen twenties exudes confidence, the expertise of the masters handed down. The titles indicate attention to technique, referring to 'pencil drawing', 'lead pencil drawing', or 'pen and ink', and speak of the 'art' of drawing. Some of these had been in print for fifty years. There are idealised classical figures, nature studies, but also stirrings of a more liberal approach. By the nineteen forties and fifties the books are less formal, less symmetrical, and more Do-It-Yourself: 'I wish I could draw', 'Drawing at Home', 'The Natural Way to Draw', 'Drawing Without a Master'. Some are slim volumes running in series devoted to subjects such as ships, cats, trees, even tanks. You draw the world around you.

There are similar drawing books published today, but there are also the all-embracing compendiums, as if the whole of drawing could be brought into one volume: 'Atlas of Drawing', 'Drawing Now', 'The Complete Book of Drawing'. The covers show diagrams, maps of drawing, or multiple images; a tonal pencil drawing of a female nude, a 'life' study - but not an idealised one - is the most telling 'traditional' image representing 'drawing'. Yet that species of drawing, informal and

descriptive in the manner of a character study, would not have counted as 'traditional' in the manuals of 1910. Today, the authors are obliged to define drawing, perhaps suggesting that we have a more open-minded attitude than existed in past regimes. They ponder whether road markings, Manga, plumbers' diagrams, cave drawings; all use the same language as the drawings of Ingres. Open definitions, they seem to say, are better than closed ones. So going for a walk in the park could be considered 'drawing', even without GPS track. Thus a cover image of a map or a diagram is a good bet.

The same exercise applied to book covers on digital art comes up with a simple colour formula. The more theoretical, all-encompassing books have all black, or grey covers, with few illustrations. (You might say this matches the dress code of the intellectual: funereal, nothing frivolous, slightly intimidating, humourless.) The 'how-to' books for amateurs are in friendly pastel colours, like celebrity cookbooks. The surveys with 'new' or 'digital' in the title must project 'edge', with clashing primaries set in diagonal grids, or ghostly negative colour to suggest a 'virtual' world. Images are bled, fluorescing with an otherworldly light. 'Digital' is the phenomenon, they seem to say, just as much as the work of individual artists.

In broad terms, then, the drawing manual has evolved from something authoritative to something more democratic, domestic, an evening pastime, something anybody could take up; and from there to what it has become today, a hobby, but one without 'experts' too sure of where they stand. Digital how-to books run alongside in a parallel universe. Does drawing belong on the shelves among traditional crafts, art history, contemporary art, or art theory? It doesn't sit comfortably in 'new technology'. Nor would the digital books look right in the art section. Anthologies of contemporary drawing favour the handcrafted, made by individuals, more subjective than objective in character, often fragile, sensitive, and far from the brasher world of computer graphics, or even from graphic illustration. This is a sweeping observation, but if you look through comparable books of 1990 you will find a more forceful type of drawing, heavily gothic, primitive, dark and thick-lined. Throughout these twenty years there is little mention of digital drawing – whether understood as 3D wireframes, algorithmic drawing with plotters, animation, or the integration with common techniques. It is tempting to see the recent preoccupations of drawing as a reaction against anything 'technological', as if a consensus has emerged which treats the vibrant world of computer graphics as something that the drawing book does not have to tangle with. Put simply, drawing with the computer is not drawing at all.

During that period the drawing conference has developed its academic character, much taken with the idea of - in the jargon - drawing as a form of 'cognition'. Depending on your point of view this represents either the resurgence of drawing, or the desperate need for concerted action to ensure its survival. Drawing is proposed as a way of thinking, as 'trans-disciplinary', with the themes of communication, dialogue, collaboration: plenty on theory, philosophy, phenomenology, but little on the practicalities, techniques, art history, or the interpretation of drawings. One explanation for this is that, paradoxically, it is only when a discipline loses its centrality, its sense of purpose, that it looks elsewhere for its *raison d'être*. When drawing really mattered no one needed to make the somewhat lame point that it was the foundation of visual communication. No one, that is, except for Percy Bradshaw. His long-running advertisements for the Press Art School - the advertisements were themselves drawings - promised a career ahead of you if only you learned to draw. His correspondence course in South London was advertised in 'The Studio' from the 1900s to the 1950's, and just as the book covers tell one story, these drawings show the prospective student evolving from starchy aesthetes, to soldiers in gas masks, through to pipe-smoking amateurs¹. Bradshaw - a versatile artist, with cartoons, postcards, to his name - produced several anthologies that are now remarkable documents.

SKETCHING
FOR YOUR
Pleasure and Profit

Press Art School Postal Courses are unique in their range and in their results. They have trained more Students, they have produced more famous Artists than any other School of the kind. Whether you are a Beginner, an Advanced Student, a budding Commercial Illustrator or wanting to specialize in Water Colour, Cartooning or Fashion Drawing, I have a Course which will bring you pleasure and profit.

One pupil writes:—
"I am selling my Cartoons without any bother and am now working on some sample work for a large publishing firm."

Men and women all over the world have written similarly. Read what some of them say in my illustrated Prospectus describing all Courses in detail. Eminent Artists contribute to the School's tuition by demonstration, advice and explanation of the individual technique which made them famous.

Write for the School's handbook to the Principal, Percy V. Bradshaw,
THE PRESS ART SCHOOL LTD.
 (Dept. S65), Tudor Hall, Forest Hill, S.E.23

Advertisement for Percy Bradshaw's Press Art School 1948, from 'The Studio'.

His 'Art in Advertising' of 1925 is a rich compendium of wonderful drawings². We see these now through the filter of Pop art, which initially treated 'popular' images as dumb. We are now acclimatised, and have no problem in reading those lowbrow graphic devices in 'fine' art. You could say that advertising - and graphic design generally - has kept pace with digital media, while contemporary art has limped alongside, keeping its distance. In art schools it was the Graphic Design departments that incorporated the computer suites in the eighties and nineties, and the Fine Art Departments that loftily dismissed them. But in 1925 the distinction between academic and commercial art –always in part a class distinction – was just as complicated. Frank Brangwyn R.A., with an enormous reputation at that time, wrote the introduction to this publication. His sketch of the hammer-beam hall of Middle Temple, in London, may strike us as an accomplished study, with its raking lights, shadows and reflections. But its purpose was to sell Stephenson's floor polish.



"Sketch for an advertisement, subsequently completed in pen and ink, for 'Stephenson's floor and furniture polish' by Frank Brangwyn R.A.. From 'The Art in Advertising' 1925 by Percy Bradshaw. Page 9.



Illustrations by W. Smithson Broadhead, produced for the London Press Exchange, and used by them in the advertising of the Daimler Hire Service.

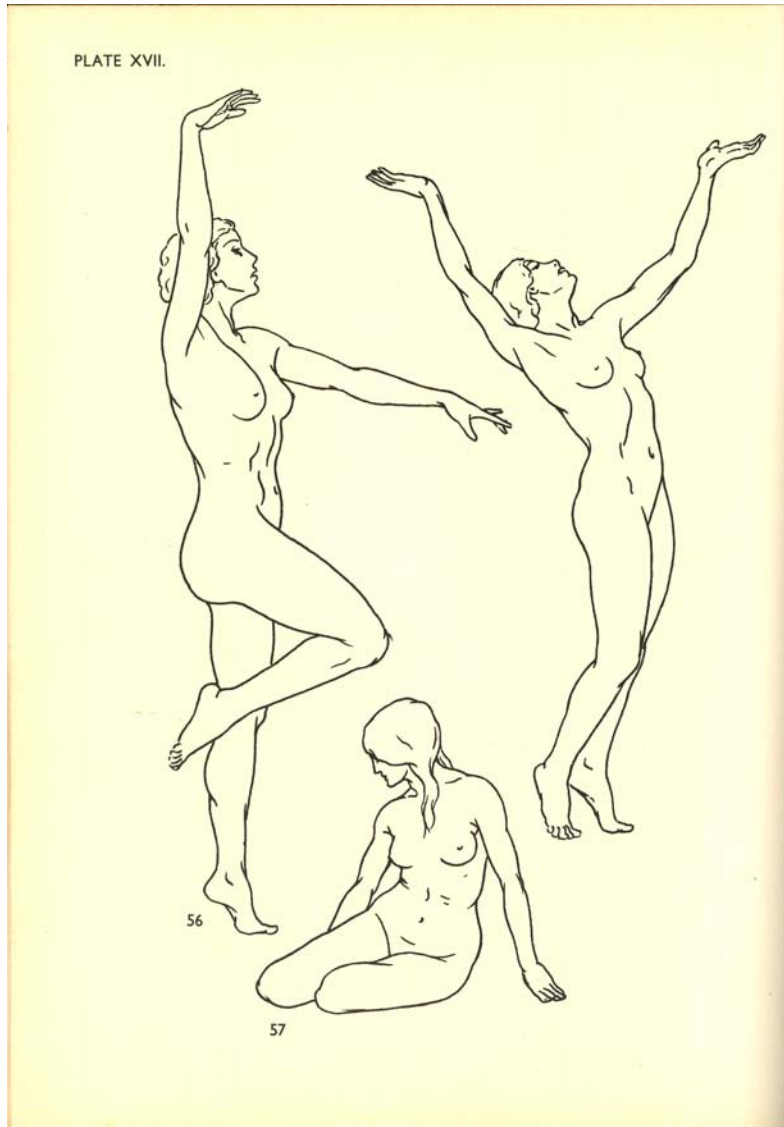
“Illustrations by W. Smithson Broadhead, produced for the London Press Exchange, and used by them in the advertising for the Daimler Hire Service.” From ‘The Art in Advertising’ 1925 by Percy Bradshaw. Page 129.

Another page contains two drawings from the Press Exchange. At the time advertising agencies had teams of draughtsman at hand, along with sets and costumes, so that you could choose a style, or period to frame your product. These drawings were for the Daimler Hire Company, and are drawn by W. Smithson Broadhead. Initially I was fascinated by these as period pieces, the elegant counterpoint between the edges of the drawings, the figures, the seating

arrangements; the textural contrasts, the padded seats, the sharp corner of the attaché case, the handles, and of course the expressions on the faces. Then, after a little research, I began to understand them better, or rather see their point. This Daimler at the time was the equivalent of a limo, and every detail speaks of aspiration. In the top picture the seated woman with the fur has hired the saloon and perhaps has a present in her hand for her friend stepping through the door – a door opened by the chauffeur outside. This friend looks across with a moment's hesitation. She had not expected this degree of luxury. Perhaps, non-plussed, she is thinking someone has come up in the world. In the bottom picture it is the younger man who has hired the Daimler, and it is his the attaché case. It is the same car, with tassels for window blinds, and the curious swivelling chairs. Outside is a view of the Royal Exchange, familiar from Logsdail's painting³, and my guess is that again the younger man has cleverly chosen this as the venue to close a deal. The older man is saying something like, you are telling me this South African mining share will grow threefold?

There are scores of similar drawings – we may want to call them illustrations – and at the same time there were scores of drawings made as academic studies, as more self-consciously 'art' drawings – portraits, landscapes. There is an episode in Bradshaw's autobiography where the President of the Royal Academy, Sir William Llewellyn, is invited to a formal dinner at the Sketch Club, at the time chaired by Percy Bradshaw. They get on well enough, but at one point, Bradshaw remarks: you paint princes, I sell pickles⁴. Today there appears to be no interest in Llewellyn's portraits of politicians, while the advertising art of the time - the lower caste art – attracts enthusiasts on EBay.

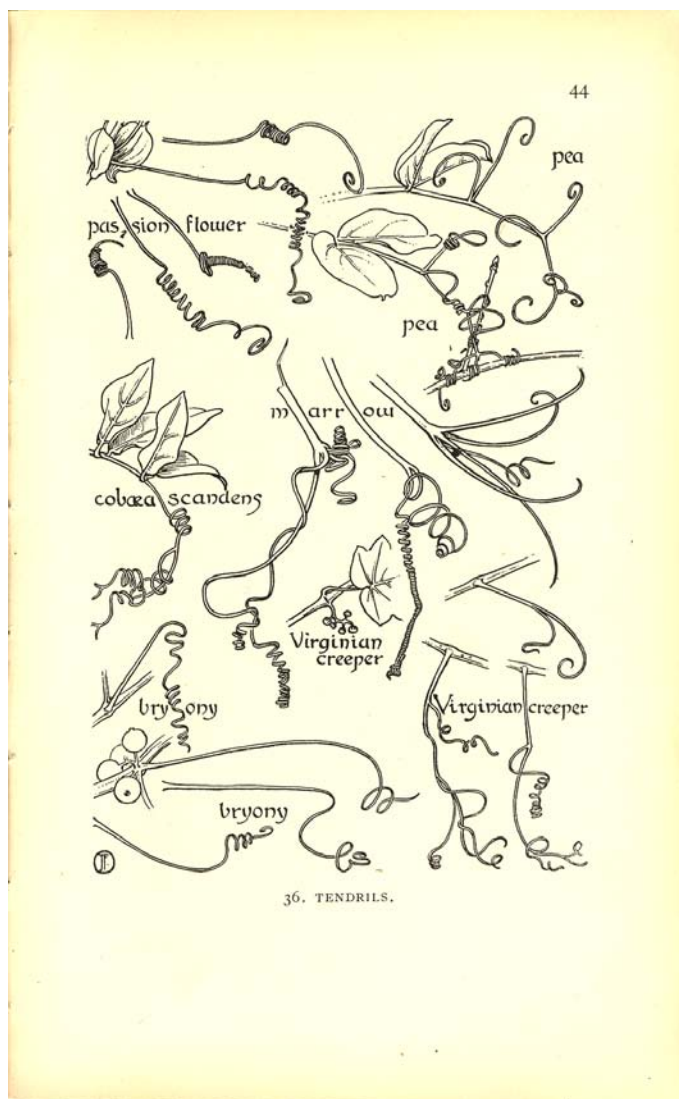
To understand why the drawing manuals were produced the way they were we have to picture the ethos of the time, the hierarchies, the value ascribed to the different types of drawing. The way you learned to draw depended on your career path - unless it was just a hobby. Today Percy Bradshaw would be at a loss; proficiency in drawing, like learning to ride a horse, is not a necessity. It is just an end in itself. The competitions, such as the Jerwood Drawing Prize in the UK, conceive of drawing as an art form in its own right. Each epoch thinks its view of drawing is the right one, timeless and universal. But every attempt to pin down the 'uniquely human' factor tells us something about that epoch. A demonstration in 1930 on how to draw the 'female form' will strike us now as typical of its time, affected with mannerisms, in its gracefulness, in the gestures of the hands, in the hairstyles.



From Cecil G. Trew 'Drawing Without a Master' 1936, A and C. Black, London, Plate XVII, page 57. "The female figure is more supple and the curves more flowing, the anatomical landmarks being rounded off, and the muscular prominences less pronounced."

Today we may not take our bearings from Athens, from the golden section, from anatomy, from the Renaissance, from ballet. But we do talk about the body, the brain, and the human need to draw. In the twenties that type of talk would get you nowhere: self-expression, phenomenology, worrying about what drawing 'is', would kill the conversation. One example of how the same term has come to mean almost the opposite of what it once meant is 'memory'. Drawing from memory used to be a common teaching technique, like the game memory. Students could be required to study some complex object for several hours each day without being allowed to draw it. On the last day the object would be removed and they had to reconstruct it from memory. The examples of student drawings of a fire engine of the time, or of

architectural details in Catterson-Smith's 'Drawing from Memory' are staggering⁵. They would depend on the strictest and most objective way of looking. Today 'memory' is treated as something personal and subjective, and illustrated as if from a fade in a movie, a faint trace, a watery layer, something lost and buried. Some would say that this demonstrates a narcissistic tendency: drawings are primarily about the person doing the drawing, not about what is being drawn. Perhaps this is inevitable. It used to be an easy remark when teaching drawing to students who were less than enthusiastic. You could say everything you see in this room, everything you have in your sitting room, your kitchen, was designed by someone, and all these objects started off as drawings. Nowadays you would have to admit that almost everything around you was designed on a computer.

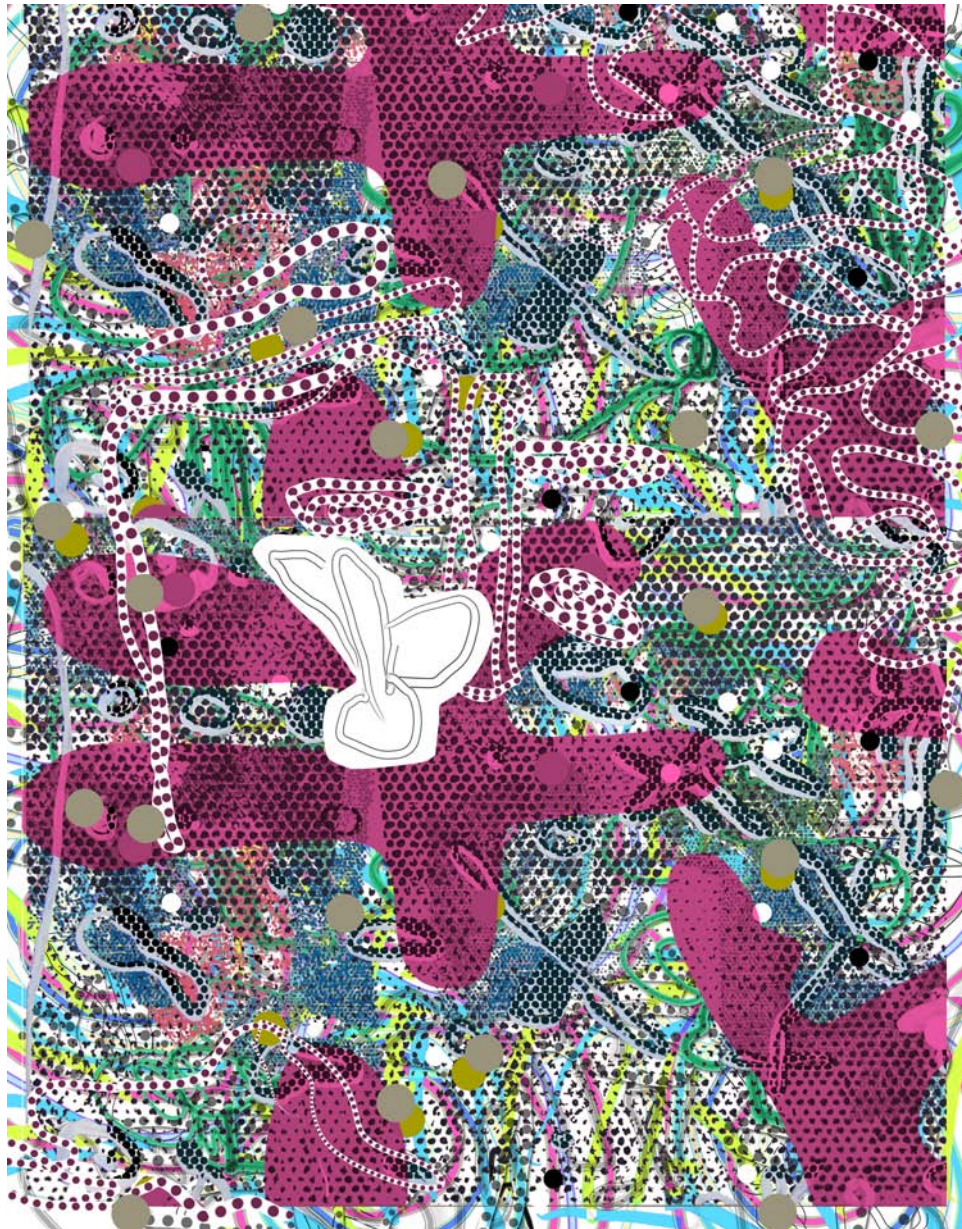


From Lewis F. Day, 'Nature and Ornament: Nature the Raw Material of Design' 1928, Batsford, plate 36, page 44. Day regrets the neglect of tendrils in drawing from nature.

My own interest in this self-help literature came about because I had to find my way through computer graphics – and ‘without a master’. I needed to weave what I knew in painting and drawing into these new and forbidding systems. In the eighties there were manuals, software instructions, but there was precious little guidance for the aspiring artist. There was no tradition, no tracks to follow. With all that in mind, eventually I wrote my own book on painting with the computer, though it was not really a guidebook at all⁶. The next step was to have been a book on digital drawing, a book that could fill in what drawing books chose to leave out. There was a problem. I could not decide what ‘digital drawing’ was. Was it distinct from ‘regular’ drawing, and what was regular drawing anyway? On one occasion I presented a talk called ‘does digital drawing exist?’ at a drawing conference, and colleagues came up to me beforehand and say ‘I would come to your talk, but I am not interested in that’. On the Drawing Research Network the few attempts to move a discussion along reveal a discouraging indifference⁷. Information is readily available for anyone interested: exhibitions, museum exhibitions even⁸. But this does not trickle across to the drawing community.

Books on digital art do not mention ‘traditional’ painting or drawing either, except for the publications aimed at amateurs, where you learn how to scan and modify a sketch, or transform your holiday photos with watercolour filters. But ‘how-to’ books only cover techniques and tricks of the trade, not the deeper culture of art – or of computer graphics for that matter. To imbibe that culture you need to be at a good art school. You can become proficient in Photoshop by following the exercises – ‘the Classroom in a Book’ – just as you could ‘learn to draw’ through the Press Art School (as Ralph Steadman did). But you would be taking it in second-hand. The Royal Academy, in fact, banned drawing manuals from its premises, calling them ‘book academies’, and throughout the teaching profession they are frowned upon, though in most cases they are written by art teachers, often retired art teachers. That may be why some are a decade or two behind their time. If the point of art education has long been to learn from your experience, to find your way through trial and error, then the last thing you should do is to follow these recipes. In the earlier book drawing ‘from nature’ is often advocated in preference to copying from an approved set of drawings, yet the books also contain line drawings showing correct proportions, the rules of perspective and so on. Some could be mistaken for botany books, with many elegant line drawings setting the standard. They do also contain good advice, of course, with arguments and anecdotes. When it comes to drawing plants, Lewis Day bemoans the neglect of tendrils⁹. Should you use a ruler for

straight lines? Should children be allowed to draw 'naturally'? Should you finish a drawing?



James Faure Walker, *Villa Dora* 2008, archival inkjet print 41" x 34" (104 x 86 cms)

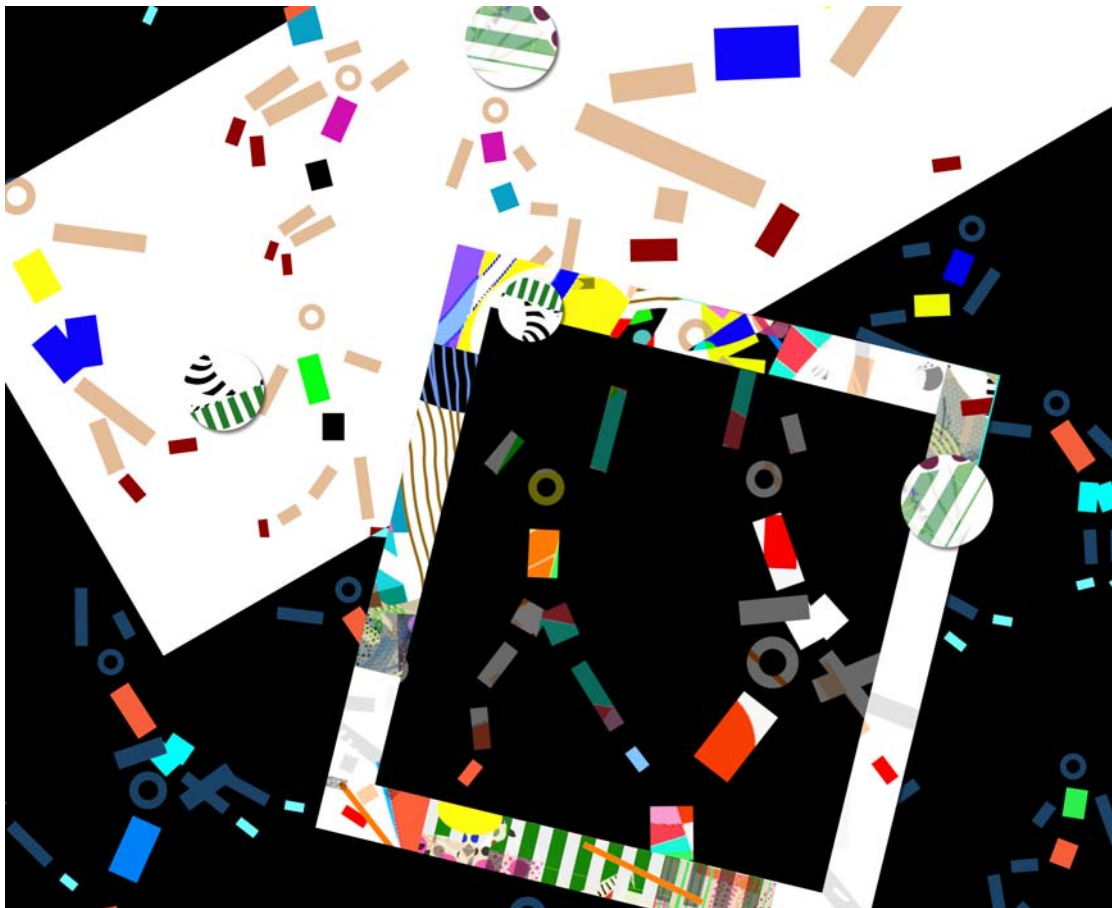
Delving into these volumes I am relieved to find controversy, passion, contradiction, prejudice. In fact there never was a time when there was a clear consensus about drawing, and how drawing should be taught. If you are looking for the equivalent of today's foolishness – an absurd dependence on theory, combined with the failure to recognize the value of digital techniques – then you will find it. Or rather, you will not come across 'modern' art, or mention of cubism, or abstraction, until the fifties – except of course for Ozenfant or Klee's writings and images, which had limited

impact. But it is also a lost world, one easily dismissed because no one here represents a staging post in the march of history that comes to mind with that term 'modernism'.

The next batch of drawing books to be published may well offer an enlightened account of digital drawing in all its variety, and set it alongside other varieties. For my part, I do not think this could be taught from a book - completing a set of exercises would not make you an expert. Digital drawing cannot be treated as a specialism. That would be as absurd as today titling a book 'lead pencil drawing', or 'gel pen drawing'. You need to absorb a wide range, art from all periods, at the same time as understanding the way 'new' media work. There is no reason why drawing cannot continue being essentially the same, as pen or pencil on paper, or at least as 'still' image. There could be a difference in approach though. Attention may move from being about observation – looking at a scene and transcribing it – to being about visual analysis, understanding graphic language. Drawing on a screen, or via a drawing tablet, you just look at the drawing, without constant reference to the object you are drawing. In fact in a rough count of all the types of drawing apparent in the British Museum, or even in the National Gallery, only a tiny minority were done from direct observation. It is not so abnormal to concentrate exclusively on the drawing itself. The 'drawing from memory' advocates of a hundred years ago actually discouraged drawing directly from what you see in front of you. You use memory, imagination, the devices of line and tone.

There are innumerable occasions in our everyday lives that are more or less undrawable in traditional terms - if we thought only in terms of pencil and paper, and direct observation. Occasionally I come across an elderly gentleman sketching another passenger on the underground, or a student sketching St Paul's, but the cameraphone is more convenient, a way of fixing a visual memory in a moment. But without interpretation, analysis, absorption. But what of television? What can be the point of drawing from TV? Sometimes it does actually make sense. In my own case I received – out of the blue, from what appeared to be spam – an unexpected commission in the summer of 2009, and it was outside the football season. I was one of five English artists selected to make a print celebrating the South African 2010 World Cup¹⁰. The only way of watching football was through the Web. The method I came up with was first, draw rapidly with pen and paper, capturing characteristic gestures, the arms being as important as the feet; then distil these into six simplified 'characters', just rectangles and circles. There were copyright considerations, since individual players or teams could not be represented. Besides the requirements of the brief, too literal an approach would not work, because there is no definite

viewing position for a match. Most of us watch football via TV, from overhead, with fast cuts, close-ups, our attention entirely on where the ball is travelling. What I came up was like an animation worked into a shifting pattern, a still image, a geometry alluding to constant movement within defined rectangles, whether the pitch, the penalty area, the goal. I might have arrived at this solution through laborious collage, but the advantage of making it in paint programs was the speed of permutations I could run through, with mistakes giving impetus to the process. At one point I put a 700 percent scale change in instead of a 70 percent, so that I got a full-face, looming close-up.



Detail from *Up* 2009 South African 2010 World Cup commission archival inkjet print 33" x 24" (84 x 60 cms)

The second example of a project where I had to improvise a combination of digital and 'physical' methods was at the excellent 'Drawing Spaces' in Lisbon¹¹. Three of us spent three weeks drawing each other, in evening sessions where the public could join in and draw us as well. My colleagues, Ana Leonor Rodrigues and Pedro

Seraiva, drew principally in pencil and pen, while I undertook to use a mixture of digital and other methods. Drawing in public was always going to be a challenge – I depended on my laptop, a projector, printer, as well as felt tips and paper. Moreover, I am not a Portuguese speaker, and way from my studio. But the project did work well. I produced twenty large drawings, combinations of sketches, photographs processed in a paint programme, and then transcribed onto paper from a projected image. I stole images from my colleagues' drawings, as they did from mine. In comparing our approaches, I realised that the way I work needs to be quite robotic, as if working against the clock, without the regular pauses for reflection, the half-closed eyes, the standing back, the adjustments one makes when drawing with paper, pencil and eraser. It is not that I was driven by a plan, because I am constantly switching from one idea to another, leaving whole sections out, making radical changes, but I was needing to improvise at speed.



James Faure Walker, *Self-Portrait at Drawing Spaces* 2010, felt-tip on paper, 60 cms x 100 cms

A further difference was simply that I worked in colour. There is no technical or logical reason to restrict oneself to black and white using digital devices. Today we may consider drawing to be a state of 'looking' as much as anything more practical: a state where we meditate, respond, and make images that are provisional, tentative and not necessarily complete in the way a painting needs to be complete. A digital

method, with everything in flux, everything adjustable, each stage saveable, could be used much more than it is. There is no reason not to 'visualize' in colour. Whatever the limitations of digital drawing – relying on electricity is one – too much reliance on what drawing is supposed to be imposes unnecessary inhibitions. This self-consciousness was behind the difference between our drawings and the drawings the audience made: they tended to be stiff, lacking rhythm, but often signed with a certain pride. I photographed and transcribed some of these 'student' drawings wondering whether I could capture their awkwardness. Our drawings – for all their inadequacy, and knowingness – were not lifeless. We seemed able just to draw, to get on with it, to be completely absorbed. At the same time I do not feel I know 'how to draw'. Leafing through all those manuals I realise how much I have never learned, and must apply myself to if I want to look professional, and up to Percy Bradshaw's standard. Yet I do practise my drawing – often brush drawing – just about every day. What I have gained from that is a certain ease, not perhaps fluency, but I can set about making a large drawing in public, and not worry about it being good or bad. Without that practice, without the awareness that you don't get it right every time, I don't think I could do that.

¹ For a set of these advertisements, see Faure Walker, J., 2008, 'Pride, Prejudice and the Pencil' in Garner, S., ed., 'Writing on Drawing: Essays on Drawing Practice and Research', Intellect/ University of Chicago, October 2008, page 73.

² Bradshaw, P.V., 1925, 'Art in Advertising: a study of British and American Pictorial Publicity', The Press Art School, London.

³ William Logsdail, 'The Ninth of November' 188 (1890), Guildhall Art Gallery, London. See:
<http://collage.cityoflondon.gov.uk/collage/app;jsessionid=EF38F56A803250E01C48D6139C5E7450?service=external/Item&sp=H39027&sp=9461>

⁴ Bradshaw, P.V., 1943, 'Drawn from Memory', Chapman and Hall, London, p. 153. "At the Dinner, in a speech thanking him (Sir William Llewellyn PRA (28-38)) for joining us, I asked him to drop a sympathetic tear for those of us who were humbler members of his profession, and who, while he was producing portraits of Royalty, had to derive artistic inspiration from rhubarb, or while he was painting Politicians had to suggest the pictorial fascination of pickles."

⁵ Catterson-Smith, R., 1921 'Drawing from memory and mind picturing', Pitman & sons, ltd. London, New York.

⁶ Faure Walker J. (2006) 'Painting the Digital River: How an Artist Learned to Love the Computer', Upper Saddle River N.J., Prentice Hall.

⁷ <http://www.drawing.org.uk/>

⁸ For example: 'Digital Pioneers' at the Victoria and Albert Museum, December 7 2009 to April 25 2010.

http://www.vam.ac.uk/exhibitions/future_exhibs/Digital%20Pioneers/index.html

⁹ Lewis F. Day, 'Nature and Ornament: Nature the Raw Material of Design' 1928, Batsford.

¹⁰ <http://www.2010fineart.com/index.php>

¹¹ Espacos do Desenho/ Drawing Spaces, February 3 to 20 2009. "The draughtswomen/men draw one another + P2 - duplicate, Ana Leonor Rodrigues, James Faure Walker and Pedro Saraiva. During the period of 10 days, three artists draw and portray one other obsessively."

<http://drawingspacesen.weebly.com/archives.html>