

SEEING DRAWING

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Drawing is central to all that is produced within the broadest spectrum of art and design. It is the core around which the conceptual and intellectual development of students takes place. A number of art and design institutions in the UK are in the process of developing a family of products that address the important subject of drawing. The focus of the project is fundamentally and crucially concerned with the process of developing visual literacy mostly at the undergraduate level. The essential skills of drawing have become marginalised by a series of factors, and effective use of expensive and sophisticated software packages has been constrained by lack of understanding of drawing skills in many art and design applicants. A great deal of costly staff time is needed to retrieve this situation.

Seeing Drawing addressed this problem by producing a resource that will have wide applicability to the subject of art and design, and to other related subjects. The products are readily integrated into teaching and learning practices within higher education, and they will reduce the amount of costly lecturer time presently expended on remedial work.

At the end of this three-year project, the outcome is a set of quality-assured, interactive multi-media DVDs on drawing. The product provides an extremely valuable teaching and learning tool for use throughout education. It enables students to develop as independent learners and provides a much needed, innovative, and cost-effective teaching aid to support hard-pressed teaching staff. In 1998-99, almost six percent of higher education students in the UK were in art and design. If related subjects with a clear interest in drawing such as architecture, engineering, and technology, are included, the total rises to almost 16 percent.

The partners in this government-funded project are:

- The London Institute (lead partner)
- Falmouth College of Arts
- Ravensbourne College of Design & Communication
- University of Ulster Faculty of Art and Design

The University of Glasgow Evaluation Group oversees the process of production, testing, and delivery.

This consortium represents a large part of the total art and design activity in the higher education sector. The expertise available to support the project is formidable. The consortium partners have significant experience in management and delivery of complex publicly funded projects.

SEEING DRAWING'S SIX SECTIONS

1. As Exploration

The section developed by Camberwell College of Arts (The London Institute) enables consideration of "figure and body" and "objective and subjective." It asks us to question how we perceive the world around us and how we "sense" through our own bodies. A three-part approach allows navigation through visuals and text to consider cognition, perception, and the act of drawing by visiting the practice of three well-known artists, and to interact through drawing, in a manner uncharacteristic to computing programs.

2. As Instrument

This section, compiled by Ravensbourne College of Design & Communication, represents a survey of the related areas of drawing for design such as architectural, engineering drawing, and drawing with the computer, in both 2D and 3D. Drawing as Instrument does not intend to recreate the drawing environment of either paper and pencil or computer-drawing packages, but instead provides access to the tools, methods, and conventions of drawing processes that support communication and definition of an object or product. The objective is to supply a means whereby students can access central features of measured drawing, enabling them to establish points of reference. Drawing as Instrument works through a number of approaches and levels, providing explicit interaction through which students accomplish key tasks and view examples of drawings, techniques, and conventions.

3. As Method

The section developed by the University of Ulster will be used by first-year undergraduates as a reference device. It is intended to reassure those with different levels of drawing ability that experienced designers had the same fears and anxieties in their initial work. It highlights their ways of dealing with the issues. The initial video section introduces the student to the thoughts of a ceramic designer as he selects and draws an object as reference for a later design piece. The approach explains how the designer relates to the drawing process as an informing and selective activity. This is complemented by the work of four other designers who work in product, environment, graphics, and animation. Their thoughts on their work are subdivided into: why draw, approach, application, reference and style. This allows the student to explore in depth how designers integrate and apply drawing to the creative process. The core principles are further illustrated by the sketchbook work of an illustrator who reinforces the similarities and differences in working practice.

This section is a useful touchstone for drawing in an applied context. It complements some of the more personal interactive aspects of the programme, enabling those who wish to undertake design studies to relate to the practice of drawing.

4. *As Reflection*

In this section, designed by Falmouth College of Arts, students are encouraged to work independently with their peers or with their tutors through creating, selecting, and evaluating. They learn how drawings can be created in response to a variety of contexts. Navigation through the section confronts the user with a number of visual problems that have to be solved to gain access to all four levels. The introduction provides the context. This is followed by a section on Truth, which asks why drawings are created in the first place. Thirdly, the Eye section contains some basic principles of how we might spatially analyse what we see through simple examples of architecture, object, and figure. And finally, in the Beholder section, students view a drawing and ask how can we make objective judgements about it.

5. *As Understanding*

This smaller module, also developed by Falmouth College of Arts, was conceived to support the other modules by introducing propositions about the physical characteristics of how the eye reacts to reflected light to produce sensation. This is followed by a section called the Mind, which interprets user experience to create visual models, and explores the cultural role of the viewer and its impact on interpretation of these models.

6. *As Fashion*

Developed by London College of Fashion (The London Institute), this section shows the importance of drawing for the curriculum. Recent research indicates that drawing can be used not only to develop the ability to see, but also to enhance the individual's capacity for rational thinking generally. Fashion illustration tends to focus upon the technique of drawing and the finished image, thus reinforcing the students' perception of the importance of technique over experimentation and conceptual development.

This section enriches students' drawing experience by showing potential uses in the fashion design process. For the first time, it is possible for fashion students to see the thinking and conceptual development that inform the process of drawing in fashion. They can explore the various functions of drawing in the fashion curriculum from the perspective of practitioners. The content providers rethought the approach and decided to let the excellent examples of work speak for themselves and allow them to dictate the best ways to communicate their message.

The student becomes a much more active participant in working with the material. The sequence of dealing with the material and the speed of learning are determined by the usefulness to the student. Each student's interactive experience with the section is uniquely addressed to and determined by that student's quality and level of interest.

DISSEMINATION

Ownership of these products resides with the consortium partners. Products will be available at marginal cost to all directly funded UK higher education institutions. The consortium partners have sought the widest possible sector involvement in an interactive process of product development, and there has been a sector-wide conference to launch the project.



The Seeing Drawing main menu.



Collage of images from the Seeing Drawing project.