

Artistic Drawing and Thought Expression: CAFA Drawing Retrospective 2009-2015

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Abstract

Artistic drawing is one of the disciplines of fine arts; it is the art of embellishing our spaces; a means for the artist to express his thoughts and the medium he uses to provide the viewer with a reading of society. The artist finds in it an indispensable mode of expression. Let us specify that “thought”, the concept we refer to in this dissertation, concerns only the artist’s intentions, the vision of the world, and the interpretation of social realities. Knowing that the expression of thoughts has a pre-established path which is: speaking or writing, it is not daring to attribute the communicative function to drawings. Thus, is there any expressiveness in the images? Let us see if we can read the drawing like a book. Does the artist use the same writing tools as a writer? Can he describe all the social, historical, and cultural realities by drawing them? By studying this art and visiting museums of history, we realized that, with “the drawing as a historical document”, it was possible to reconstruct past events. Indeed, from this point of view, we analyzed the content of the drawing to arrive at certainty. Therefore, the artist catches social, historical, and cultural realities to interpret them and suggests a pictorial reading with triple value: aesthetic, historical, and cultural. From the collection of data, we assemble information on the drawings exhibited at the CAFA, on the original artworks, and in the 798 gallery survey reports (Contemporary Arts Space, Beijing) to conclude by posing the problem of the expressiveness of the artistic drawing and trying to solve the enigma to enlighten the reading of this pictorial writing.

Keywords

Drawing, Expression, Artist, Viewer, Reading, Interpretation, Analysis

1. Introduction

In general, man expresses his thoughts and feelings through language. Accord-

dingly, he uses speech, writing, facial expressions, or gestures (Maia & Santos, 2018). Speaking and writing have the sentence as a linguistic unit. The latter is a logical sequence of words arranged grammatically to express a complete meaning. In spoken language, the words in a sentence are made up of sounds, while in written language, words are made of signs or characters called letters. Facial expressions or sign language are known through body movements, gestures, and postures (Sandler, 2012). In addition to these three forms of language, others depend on the culture, ways of expression, and disciplinary field.

Considering drawing as a means of expressing a thought or a feeling, we transform it into a language. Saying what one can think in ways other than those mentioned above is a matter of imagination in the drawing.

The topic is essential for a global understanding of visual art from the cultural aspect, as it has long been believed that art can be used to express ideas and emotions. Drawing has been a part of human culture since ancient times, with many famous works of art being created by artists worldwide. This research article explores how artistic drawing can be used to express thoughts and feelings and how this form of expression can be beneficial for studying visual arts and other related subjects in scientific fields. By studying the relationship between artistic drawing and thought expression, artists hope to gain insight into the power of art in helping people communicate their innermost thoughts and feelings.

Without applying written text to the characters in a comic illustration, a cartoonist puts into dialogue characters with the images (Tsakona, 2009).

In our public space, the icon is an excellent means of communication. As such, signs fulfil several functions, particularly rectifying, informing, and preventing.

For example, specific primary, secondary, and university subjects are best taught and understood through drawing.

This art of drawing has continued to serve as a means of expression for humans since prehistoric times. Ancient civilizations, such as the Egyptian civilization in Africa, the Chinese in Asia, and the Mayas in America, have reproduced images of nature through drawings. The drawing was then a form of expression (Bégouen, 1929; Maynard, 2005; Naumburg, 1955).

Over time, drawing has integrated human activities, and its significance in today's usefulness covers numerous technical, technological, and scientific fields. We insist that art, with all its classifications, is related to drawing. With the drawing, we can retain this essential element that links the different art types. Architecture, sculpture, painting, and comics are closely linked to drawing. While music (musical signs), poetry (illustration), dance (study of movement), cinema (animation), and photography (mixing and computer processing) use it differently.

The primary of this research article is to explore the relationship between artistic drawing and thought expression. Specifically, we aim to investigate how different types of drawings and techniques of drawing can be used to express

thoughts and feelings, as well as how these drawings viewers can interpret these drawings. We will examine the potential for drawing as an interpreting tool for individuals with natural talent in art. Finally, we will consider the implications of our findings for art education and the history of art in CAFA.

“Artistic drawing and thought expression” is the title of this dissertation, which analyses the expressiveness of the art of drawing in general and artistic drawing in particular.

2. Opinion

Drawing is an art form practised for centuries, and its definition, techniques, forms, and educational implications have been studied extensively. Our understanding of this art form allows us to appreciate its expressiveness within the limits of the practice. Although many artists practice drawing, we can still distinguish ourselves from others by acquiring knowledge that is unique to this technique. This knowledge is a testament to the connection between drawing and expressing one’s thoughts.

By definition, artistic drawing represents an object, figure, or idea on a two-dimensional surface. The main difference between artistic drawing and other types of drawings is its focus on aesthetics and beauty as a subject of interpretation (Grünfeld, 2002). Often in the visual arts, one proceeds by various techniques to be able to draw. These techniques are closely related to the equipment and materials used. Well-known are: paper, canvas, board, wall, pencil, feather, pen, charcoal, pastel, eraser, and felt. Note that the name that generally characterises the drawing technique derives from the names of the materials and equipment used. Technical or industrial drawing, the most common form, constitutes a common language among engineers, architects and designers (Henderson, 1991). The language of technical drawing is not as philosophical as that of artistic drawing. This language is quite technical and standard on universal properties; in other words, its understanding is clear. A Chinese engineer who does not speak German can communicate with a German engineer via drawing to build a machine together (Macqueen, 1959).

This form of language that communicates thoughts through images, i.e. drawing, is much discussed. More than one article deals with this topic. However, our dissertation looks at it from a more specific perspective. Our experience, intuition and attitude determine our point of view on this issue.

Artistic drawing and thought expression has been studied for centuries. In China, for instance, Xu Beihong and Jiang Zhaoshe established a system of teaching drawing in Chinese painting, as Yuyun stipulates in his research on the CAFA teaching system. In the past, scholars have focused on the traditional painting styles of China, such as ink-wash painting and calligraphy. More recently, research has shifted to explore the modern art forms that have emerged in China since the twentieth century. This includes exploring how contemporary artists use traditional techniques to express their ideas in new ways (Sorokin, 2017).

In addition to examining individual works of art, scholars have also examined how Chinese culture influences artistic expression. For example, some studies have explored how Confucianism and Taoism shape Chinese aesthetics and influence artwork created by contemporary artists. Other studies focus on how different aspects of Chinese culture are represented in artwork, such as folk tales or religious beliefs (Hill, 2006).

Studies have also examined the relationship between art and politics in China throughout history. This includes looking at how political events or ideologies influenced artwork during different periods and exploring how certain pieces were used to convey political messages or propaganda during the cultural revolution. In this area, artistic drawing is more expressive.

In the artistic drawing, mastery of technique comes before the expression search. Of course, people with such drawing skills have very sharp value judgment and aesthetic flair; they learn to draw more quickly than others. Practising and learning under the guidance of a master is capital for every learner. Only talented students can adapt quickly. They learn the basic concepts quickly, so finding expression is still a matter of personal effort and imagination (Jacquette, 2014).

In painting, as in other fine art disciplines, drawing is indispensable because it is helpful in artistic anatomy, composition, graphic design and other fields. The drawing class is the model for understanding the subject. Its study consists of mastering the above topics. In most art schools, drawing is a core subject for the entrance exam, alongside elective courses, for those wishing to study fine art (Gardner, 2006; Gawlak et al., 2021). Therefore, our attention is on the study of drawing at the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing, which, according to the major, is the studio's speciality. If we consider only the painting department, the drawing of the first studio differs from those of the other studios in composition, texture and expression. As far as Chinese painting is concerned, the visit to its studio made us understand that linear drawing occurs through several processes; in Chinese painting, the execution of landscape drawing is different from that of figure drawing.

Artistic drawing allows us to read things because our deduction refers to its application in learners' cognitive development. That is to say, the development of everything related to memory, intelligence, perception, and attention. According to the process of drawing, from the first line to the last line of charcoal or pencil or any other tool, the artist observes the outline of the object, pays attention to the composition of figures and lines, and compares the limits of objects in space (Barchinoy et al., 2021; Ives & Pond, 1980). He immediately memorises the image and immediately reproduces it on a two-dimensional surface. He must accurately use his intelligence to transfer authentic images of objects in real space to a given surface. There will be several tactics: line tracking, which means dexterity, composition, and image construction, perspective, which provides people with the illusion of depth; and "shadow and light", which is for the impression of volume. Therefore, reading the artist's impression and expression through draw-

ing requires a good understanding of this art.

3. Reading

In any case, the reading of the artistic drawing takes place in various ways since it mainly concerns the artist on the one hand and different readers of the drawing on the other. A thousand readers of an artistic drawing will read the same subject differently (Nodine & Krupinski, 2003). Note that the reading evoked in our dissertation is seen first as a way of understanding drawing through simple observation and then as interpreting the information the artist put on his artefact. The first reading is open to the public; the second is for connoisseurs, art critics, art historians and artists (Gaiger, 2002).

However, the artist uses three reading stages: before, during and after the drawing. This way of reading relates to his understanding of aesthetics and observation of nature, including all that exists within it (Botella et al., 2018). This reading allows the artist to reproduce what he sees with his eyes and to explain it; in his way. At the same time, he would use images to write messages or generate his thoughts in the same way. Therefore, the artist's reading precedes the viewer's reading.

As mentioned, the artist uses three stages of reading, before, during and after.

Before drawing, the artist selects and arranges the theme. He will learn how to set the objects on the scene. That could be a figure, a still life, a landscape or an abstract expression. The critical part of organising a theme is setting space and the objects about the purpose, but there must be a correspondence, the relationship between the different objects.

During drawing (the process), the artist establishes a close relationship between the actual image (the object he has in sight) and his thought representing his interpretation and the message he is trying to deliver. Note that there is a significant step between the observation of objects in real space and the representation of their images on a two-dimensional surface, namely the memorisation instant of images.

After drawing, his reading is criticisms. He looks closer at the likeness between the object and the image or the similarity of features, judges their proportions ratio, carefully checks the volume, and controls the tone gradient, line and harmony. He observed the whole composition.

What should we read in artistic drawing? If we ask ourselves another question: what should we read in a book? Without knowing what we will read we can answer with one word: the content. Does the answer make sense? The content of a book is the text on the inside pages; to read them, we have to open the book. However, when a drawing is displayed, anyone can see it. Yes! Anyone can see it, but its content is the artist's visual expression, line, volume, information, thought and soul. We read it like the words of a book. When we look at an open book, we see all the words, just the text, not the content. Seemingly to image, the artistic drawing is an open book; we have to read its contents.

How do we read an artistic drawing? Like the book, the author brings together the opinions of thousands of readers on the same point. Ensures that all readers read and understand the same content. If not in the same way, but reach the same goal. Here, we do not pretend to do the same in the drawing. Moreover, we are committed to ensuring that everybody understands, in the same way, the language in which the artist expresses his ideas through his works.

Many interpretations are often applied to a drawing, not because of the lack of possibility for different readers to have the same opinion but because of the symbolic meaning of the object that the artist draws (Bruder & Ucok, 2000). The rose, among others on its thorny branches, does not symbolically have the same meaning as what is detached from it and held out to a woman's hand. Without referring to artistic movements such as symbolism, surrealism, romanticism, and abstraction, any object represented through drawings is not devoid of its symbolic meaning. Photographic realism, also known as hyperrealism, focuses on the faithful representation of photos; did not deviate from the logic of the object's symbolic meaning.

However, it depends on the artist to offer an authentic reading of his thoughts while drawing. It is the artist who delivers the message; it is he who writes using the drawing. Furthermore, we bring all the reading issues around the artist. How to read if the artist cannot read it himself? What about an abstract drawing displayed in a gallery?

Genius reveals the soul of an artist. Therefore, we can only read the artistic drawings by relying on the artist's reading of his works. However, it is always speculation that pretending to develop a theory that allows viewers to read a drawing. Many people look at the drawing, read it and explain it in their way (Carrier, 1986).

4. The Rooting of Artistic Drawing in Educational Culture

What can best explain our claim is the large-scale drawing exhibition held at the Beijing Central Academy of Fine Arts Museum in 2009. Let us go back to the one with the theme, "Sixty years of drawing". Reading this exhibition makes it possible to situate the rooting of artistic drawing in the educational culture.

Apart from speculations, we do not want to be mere observers but assiduous researchers curious to know. This exhibition, which began on December 28, 2009, and ended on March 7, 2010, allowed us to understand many things about drawing.

In this museum, the drawing outlined the facts and events that characterised its rooting in educational culture and its history at Beijing Central Academy of Fine Arts. One could read the evolution of this art through the centuries and its teaching. There were four main periods based on the drawings in the exhibition. The first extends from 1949, the year of the founding of the People's Republic of China, to 1955. According to our interpretation, we consider this period today as that of the avant-gardes—those who introduced artistic drawing into Chinese visual art. The second period goes from 1956 to 1966. This period is a legacy for

academic posterity. *We have seen the role of education and the impact of those who learned to draw abroad on the art teaching system (drawing) for future generation t*—the third period lasted from 1977 to 2000. This period showed emulation, the mastery of drawing techniques and the search for visual expression in terms of style because the exhibited works demonstrated the genius of some who teach today at the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing. The fourth period runs from 2001 to 2009 and probably until today. Here the works of various studios were exhibited, and research on new materials was the theme. In this series, we noticed the contemporary features and trends.

Let us go back to the avant-garde. A pencil drawing dating back to 1924 on the wall generates a feeling of intense admiration. Having a drawing in front of one's eyes that converse with one's mind produces an irresistible feeling. Open-minded people can interpret an abstract drawing before reading the comments (Yuán Yùn Shēng 1985). Consequently, we affirm that these avant-garde artists, whose works will serve as a reference for future generations, have made known expressions of their thoughts through drawing. In chronological order, considering the years of their work presented in the exhibition, we quote: Xù Bèi Hóng (1924), Wú Zuò Rén (1933), Zhāng Ān Zhì (1936), Dài Zé (1946), Zhōu Lǐng Zhāo (1950), Lǐ Hú (1950), W éi Q ĭ Měi (1950), Wáng Shì Kuò (1950), Zhān Jiàn Jùn (1953), Jìn Shàng Yí (1955, 1972), Lú Chén (1955), Zhū Nǎi Zhèng (1955), Guō Húai Xiù (1955) et Yuán Yùn Shēng (1985).

Since the pioneers of artistic drawing have established theories through their publications and drawing courses attended by the students, drawing is undoubtedly an indispensable tool for learning visual art. Therefore, a prior year program was organised in the recruiting classes of all CAFA departments to teach the basics of drawing.

Following the avant-garde, visual artists and teachers from the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing had integrated other studies such as osteology and myology as an introduction to figure drawing; sketches as a study in landscape drawing to capture instants of time and motions in nature. They integrated observation practices of plaster models and living models. From then on, drawing has a theme; later on, we saw the influx of publications of artistic drawing techniques books, analyses on various drawing subjects and, of course, the questioning of specific methods of teaching drawing initiated by their predecessors.

From all these, we will remember that the studies and research in this art enable artists (teachers) to develop a drawing scheme in visual art and coordinate the application of different techniques with different forms of expression. These studies and research also allow the autonomy of artistic drawing in that with only drawing as a means of expression, and they could create a panoramic image of their history and culture.

5. Expression of Thought

The artistic drawing is much more nuanced and combines several visual art elements resulting in a composition of spots, tonal gradations, shadows, light, lines

(Fichner-Rathus, 2016), etc. From this harmonious composition of all these elements arises artistic beauty. Moreover, the composition allows reading the artist's emotions, ideas, thoughts, and feelings in the drawing. Therefore, the artist uses drawing as a means of communication. He communicates with images and figures from his imagination and nature (Bergbom & Lepp, 2022).

Expressing thoughts through drawing is not as easy as it looks because we have always believed, according to the adage, "a picture is worth a thousand words". Therefore, it is necessary to have an image or a figure on a surface to understand the meaning of drawing; it is still necessary that the emotions through the concerned image or the figure provide information (Silver, 2001).

We should not take every image or character out of context, as they can be part of a language that conveys meaning about the world. As previously mentioned, the artist organises information in a drawing just as a speaker organises words in speech. It implies that constructing drawings is similar to expressing sentences, and thus the drawing has five communication functions (Iseminger, 2018; Wurmfeld, 1998).

The first function of a drawing is typically informative and serves as a guide for the viewers. We found elements in geographical maps that can make the drawing easier to understand. However, the artist does not necessarily strive for an exact resemblance to the object he draws. Instead, he often represents it in a way that reflects how the mind perceives it. There are multiple ways to interpret or read an image, depending on one's perspective.

The second function is expressive because each drawing reflects the artist's mastery of techniques, cognitive skills, aesthetic taste, artistic knowledge, and emotion.

The third function is predictive, which is more applicable to the project design of paintings, ceramics, sculptures and any works conceived through sketches. Then, the drawing becomes the sketch of the artwork.

The fourth function is mnemonic; it often appears in imaginative drawings, where a person describes what the mind envisions without referring to images. It can also be a drawing based on the description used to reconstruct the image. In this case, it can be a robot portrait.

The fifth function is heuristic, related to creation and discovery, allowing the artist to embody his ideas. This aspect also exists in fashion design. However, in visual art, painting with this appearance makes it easier for people to pursue the search for style.

6. Conclusion

Through our retrospective of artistic drawing at CAFA, we have gained insight into this art form's language. Drawing tends to represent beauty and specific socio-cultural values and serves as a means of communication between intelligent beings, allowing the artists to express their emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Our dissertation on artistic drawing showed how both the artist and viewer interpreted drawings; how artistic drawing became part of the educational culture at the

CAFA level; and finally, how it expressed thought.

We have demonstrated that drawing is both an art and a practical skill by confirming our opinion—however debatable—on our vision of it. This art is based on the principles of aesthetics and requires knowledge gained through practice, hard work, and repetition.

Understanding the meaning of an artistic drawing requires the artist and the viewer to read it. To further emphasise this, we have divided the artist's reading into three phases: before, during, and after the drawing. This approach allows for a greater convergence of opinions among viewers when interpreting the drawing, providing them with more apparent elements to consider.

The rooting of artistic drawing in CAFA's educational culture is relevant to our dissertation's substance. Furthermore, it demonstrates that the approach taken by various actors in teaching drawing has positively affected the improvements made to the program.

Expressing thoughts is the only point that contains the essence of all content in our dissertation. Here, we have proved that drawing is a part of language and a good way of communication.

Finally, drawing has been an essential tool in the technical, technological, and scientific fields since prehistoric times, and its usefulness in the visual arts is evident. It has enabled people to assimilate painting, composition, and artistic anatomy knowledge. Therefore, drawing has significantly impacted human life's cultural and artistic aspects throughout history. Moreover, for the upcoming research on this topic, these are the suggestions we made:

- 1) Further research should explore the relationship between artistic drawing and thought expressed in different cultural contexts.
- 2) Future studies should investigate how artistic drawing can be a tool for self-expression and communication among different cultures.
- 3) Research should also focus on the impact of artistic drawing on cognitive development, mainly in its potential to increase the ability to judge and observe levels.
- 4) Studies should also examine how artistic drawing can be used as a form of the game for individuals with the problem of recognising shapes.
- 5) Research could also explore the use of technology combined with traditional art forms to create new ways of expressing thoughts through artworks, such as virtual reality or augmented reality applications that allow users to create interactive artwork experiences from their homes or studios.
- 6) Finally, the research could investigate how digital tools can facilitate collaboration between artists from different cultures, allowing them to share ideas and work on projects that combine their styles into one unique artwork experience.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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