

INNOVATION IN THE ART OF DRAWING USING THE REMBRANDT VAN RIJN EXAMPLE

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Abstract

The art of drawing, like any other skillful activity, is plagued with boredom if constantly carried out overtime using same approach, style and technique, without recourse to innovation. This paper projects innovations as a means for eradicating boredom in the art of drawing by examining the drawing praxis of a master of drawing - Rembrandt Van Rijn, outlining the innovations he recorded. It argues that with innovations introduced to the art of drawing, boredom can be eliminated. The paper in conclusion submits that the introduction of innovations into the art of drawing envelopes the artist with enough inspiration which automatically eliminates boredom, paving way for the artist to produce more drawings thereby enhancing drawing praxis.

Keywords: Boredom, Innovation, Rembrandt Van Rijn, Drawing, Inspiration

Introduction

Getting a task done repeatedly is often characterized by boredom as the person involved is faced with routine repetition of such activity. As he gets familiar with the task which he constantly does, he is bound to experience boredom. Boredom is a state or condition which is characterized by perception of what a person is involved in as tedious. It is further characterized by lack of interest and appears quite unpleasant and physically painful. Banett and Martin (2015) assert that boredom is an unpleasant, transient, affective state in which the individual feels a persuasive lack of interest in and difficulty concentrating on the current activity. Markman (2012) explains that one reacts to unpleasant situation by changing the situation. Boredom only occurs when one is unable to change the situation and it leads to disliking the things that are the objects of the boredom. This means that if the situation in getting something done is changed, boredom can be eliminated. The change can be in method, style, approach or means of getting something done.

In visual arts, any creative work should be dynamic to meet the challenges of the time. Evolving new styles and techniques remain the only plausible means of providing fluidity in visual documentation of experiences of our time without becoming insipid (Ukim, 2016:148). Drawing can be seen as the foundation upon which other arts are built. It is the basis for painting, sculpture, architecture and even engineering (Idiong, 2004:12). This fact does not disqualify drawing from being a complete work of art on its own. However, many seem to capitalize on the foundational role it plays for other works to be created and fail to produce drawing as complete art work, making the art of drawing boring to be involved in.

This paper, in seeking to eliminate such boredom, examines the drawings of a master of the art of drawing, Rembrandt Rijn to outline the innovations he introduced to drawing which made him set a record by producing well over one thousand, four hundred good and complete drawings.

Innovations in the Art of Drawing

Before now, drawing took the form of making a mark either by scratching, writing or applying colour on a surface. As such it was possible to see drawing only as the use of line to create a visible mark on a surface. Overtime drawing has gone beyond creating visible mark on a surface. It is the rendering of forms by means of lines (Uzoagba, 2002:3). This form can either be two dimensional or three and line goes beyond a mark on a surface. Ekong (2004:27) argues that line in art is thought of as being the path made by a pencil, pen, crayon or other drawing objects, that line can be anything thin or long such as a wire or string, even a tall thin tree. It therefore means that regardless of whatever form and material line takes, once a mark or form is created a drawing is made. For instance, Lucien den Arend manipulated stainless pipe to create a three dimensional drawing. Although the work is three dimensional, the fact that he made use of pipe which is a thin long object, the work passes for a drawing.



Fig. 1, Title: Outdoor Line, Artist: Lucien den Arend, Source: www.denarend.com

This perhaps opens the door for experimentation in the art of drawings in terms of medium, approach and style resulting in various innovations which blaze the trail in the art of drawing of the contemporary artists like the putting together of line objects to create a drawing. David Moreno's wire drawing of a chair is one created by arranging multiple lengths of rods, manipulated and hatched in a way to achieve the image. It is innovative to see a drawing in a three dimensional form. Alexander Calder's *Self Portrait*, Amy Goodman's *Horse*, and Ime Eteno's nail and robe drawing - *Bicycle Rider* are more examples.



Fig. 2, Title: A 3D chair fabricated in a corner, Artist: David Moreno, Source: www.google.com.ng



Fig. 3, Title: Self Portrait, Artist: Alexander Calder, Source: www.google.com.ng



Fig. 4, Title: Horse, Artist: Amy Goodman, Source: www.google.com.ng



Fig. 5, Title: Bicycle Rider, Artist: Ime Eteno, Source: The Artist

Most activities in recent times the world over is driven by technology. The emergence of computer has reshaped the way things are done. It has affected education, banking, sports, entertainment and the like, of course art is no exemption. The existence of computer graphic software makes for perfection in some aspects of graphics. Better textile designs are executed with the use of CorelDraw software. The painter can possibly design his or her mural with the computer. Conversion of photographs and colour sketches into mosaic design further enhances the practice of painting. In the same manner, drawing is also affected positively. Computer software like AutoCAD takes the centre stage when it comes to architectural drawing. Not only does it make the drawing process quicker than normal, it also guarantees perfection.

Just as the 21st Century artists came up with a radical approach to art which gave birth to assemblage and collage, the contemporary artists should employ all available means to be innovative in the art of drawing; in medium, style and technique. This should not be limited to drawings done in the studio by one person. It may go beyond that to synergism with other related disciplines, for instance, a pathway or road can be seen as a line. If such a road were designed to follow the artist's sketch or drawing and executed correctly, it would pass for a drawing, though to be viewed from above. A collaborative effort between the artist who produces a sketch of a drawing and a horticulturist who plants flowers can yield an outdoor drawing made of flowers. An assemblage of people standing or sitting as arranged by the artist according to his design, temporarily, would also pass for a drawing. Beyond the existing known styles of drawing are abstraction which makes use of shapes, lines, value, colour and/or texture, art Nouveau which is illusionistic but primarily flat, Manga which is based on the Japanese comic book, Surrealism which appears like a dreamlike situation and based on pure imagination (Hoddinott, 2016) and a lot too numerous to mention. The artist should make his drawing cut across the much existing styles and can also be innovative to come up with new ones by getting involved in studio experimentation. Techniques of plastic art can be employed in drawing for instance technique of assemblage, collage, mosaic, installation, and the like. Once lines are create in the process, drawing comes to being.

The essence of the artist employing as many mediums, styles and techniques of drawing as possible and also exploring avenues of coming up with new ones in drawing is to break the monotony of constant

repetition of a particular technique, medium or style which breeds boredom. Breaking away will rekindle the passion as the drawings to make will be more interesting to work on as observed in Rembrandt Van Rijn's case.

Rembrandt's Innovations in the Art of Drawing

Drawing is the easiest and most common means of artistic expression yet it can take the form of a complex, tough and scarcely employed means of artistic expression. It depends on the purpose and perspective one looks at it. It can be a means to an end or an end in itself (Idiong, 2004:12). Unlike drawing as an end which refers to a finished drawing for aesthetic purpose, drawing as a means to an end refers to a drawing produced as a basis for other works of art. For example, a sketch for a painting or architectural drawing for a structure. Such drawings are primarily meant to serve as a guide to producing some other works; therefore making drawing a foundation upon which other arts are built.

Such drawing is usually quickly executed and intended as a way of exploring aspects of the subject (Sibley, 2014). In fine arts, it is commonly referred to as sketch, a rapidly executed freehand drawing with minimum details not like a finished work. It often consists of a multiple overlapping lines meant to convey an idea. Most artists concentrate on this type of drawing which does not demand much attention and time. It takes an artist with exceptional passion for drawing who is patient and can concentrate enough to produce drawing as an end. This appears very tasking and for an artist like Rembrandt Van Rijn to have produced more than 1400 known finished drawings, he had to generate a means of overcoming boredom in the process of producing these numerous works. He introduced innovations to make the exercise interesting and free of boredom, innovations which have advanced the art of drawing even in today's drawing praxis.

Rembrandt Van Rijn (1606-1669) was one of the greatest draftsmen in the history of art, not just because of the numerous drawings he produced which numbered well over 1400, but mainly because he regarded his drawings as a purely private record of observations and feelings (Schwartz, 2015). He was versatile. While many artists chose between drawing either people or landscape, the Rembrandt drawings can possibly be divided between the two (Mends, 2015). Rembrandt considered drawing beyond mere rough study prior to realizing a piece of art like painting. He saw drawing as an art on its own, little wonder he produced more drawings than paintings and etchings. He produced about 600 paintings, 300 etchings and 1400 drawings with more than 60 self-portraits (Gombrich, 2016). These self-portraits were not only appearance of himself in various stages of his life, but were also a means of studying facial expressions that conveyed diverse feelings such as worry, fear, surprise, amusement or excitement and a means of exploring different drawing techniques.

He attached great importance to the art of drawing. He used this form of art to experiment and explore the effects of light and shade much more easily and faster than in paint. This guaranteed him the basis on which he developed the particular portrait lighting which is referred to as “Rembrandt lighting” (Mends, 2015). This is a lighting arrangement on one side of the face, and a triangle of light on the shadowed part of the face. This innovative lighting effect injected into the art of drawing by Rembrandt wore off the supposed boredom in the course of producing the numerous works credited to him. This effect recast the pictures as very contrasting ones, revealing the light and shade in a more appealing way. It made his models appear very appealing, interesting and inviting to draw as evident in photography today where Rembrandt’s lighting is employed to make photographs more appealing and interesting to the sense of sight.

The inspiration from the picture surmounted the anticipated boredom in the course of producing the numerous drawings. Uwah (2016) observes that the quality of picture (or appearance of objects) for drawing affects inspiration to draw. There are pictures which are naturally more inspirational than others especially those with good contrasting effect.

In terms of materials, Rembrandt made use of red chalk (Sanguine). This is evident in *Man pulling a Robe*, black chalk evident in *Diana at her Bath*, ink with *Cottage in a Storm* as an example and brushes/pens.



Fig. 6, Title: Man Pulling a Robe, Artist: Rembrandt, Source: www.google.com.ng



Fig. 7, Title: Diana at Her Bath, Artist: Rembrandt, Source: www.google.com.ng



Fig. 8, Title: Cottage in a Storm, Artist: Rembrandt, Source: www.google.com.ng

Rembrandt equally produced etched – carving, the drawing into wax spread in a very precise controlled manner on a metal plate before putting it in a dangerous chemical bath for acid to bite into the metal and make the plate. The plate is then rolled over with ink and fitted to a press to squash the ink out of the crevices and onto a piece of paper – hence the etching (Mends, 2015). Rembrandt equally engraved. He employed subtle hatching and crosshatching to create light and shade.

Rembrandt innovated a drawing style which is transient in nature. It involves suggestive selection of some significant features which appeal to the viewers' imaginations for emphasis. Historians have resorted to describing it as "shorthand". Although shorthand literally would pass for abbreviated writing used by stenographers to take down speeches. In this case Skrapits (2015) affirms that shorthand combines brevity with suggestiveness, with an emphasis upon significant features and an appeal to the spectator's imagination. He further observes that shorthand conveys fairly accurately the essence of Rembrandt's approach to drawing - although he was of course recording visual impressions not sound.

Shorthand as a drawing style reduces the supposed lengthy period of time for completing a drawing to a shorter one in that only significant features which appeal to the viewers' imagination are emphasized. Like shorthand in the literary sense which reduces a lengthy speech to a few strokes of writing yet still have the same meaning, shorthand as a style of drawing in a way decreased the length of time it took Rembrandt to

produce drawings without affecting the quality of work negatively. This arrangement surmounted the anticipated boredom.

Conclusion

Although the art of drawing is a pleasurable exercise, it is characterized by boredom when being done repeatedly without innovations. For the artist to produce numerous drawings without getting bored, he or she must explore avenues for injecting innovations into it. This would inspire the artist and in turn surmount boredom, like in Rembrandt Van Rijn's case where he introduced innovations like shorthand style of drawing, special lighting effect and exploration of diverse materials for drawing which enabled him to produce more than 1400 known drawings.

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