

INTRODUCTION TO GENERAL DRAWING: PATHWAY TO GROOMING THE NEXT GENERATION OF VISUAL ARTISTS

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Abstract

Most visual art works, start with an idea, a single point or dot, which is then extended and translated into drawing. Drawing which is representing objects and ideas in lines is as old as man, as represented in prehistoric cave drawings, paintings and engravings. The teaching of drawing as a psychomotor domain of learning is indispensable in every art school of which the Department of Fine and Applied Arts, University of Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria is no exception. This paper presents the sequential process of teaching general drawing using the practice based methodology of research. Application of the elements and principles of design in composing a good drawing, materials and techniques, problem - solving dealing with perspectives, foreshortening, modelling of forms using shading techniques, and the critique of works are integral in the course. The holistic foundational training of drawing is pivotal to the success of the students in the fields of specialisation which the students will eventually make as a choice. The paper concludes by eulogising drawing and suggesting ways of encouraging same in our institutions of learning.

Key Words: Drawing, Grooming, Visual, Artist, Practice – Based, Critique

Introduction

Introduction to general drawing which has the course code FAA 101; is a compulsory two credit load course, intended to develop the artistic dexterity of the fresh year students, with the aim of exposing the students through constant practice of the art and act of drawing and the various associated skills development in the programme. Teaching drawing to fresh year students is an interesting and tasking exercise. The collection of students from various secondary schools backgrounds, some with robust art teaching in visual arts and hence, grounded in the basic rubrics of drawing, while others are fair and technical in their drawing, even though technical in approach, especially students who took the technical drawing options, however, there is a group without any cognate training in drawing, whose works look elementary in nature and tend toward the scribbling stage of a child's drawing in the developmental stage. The tedium of harnessing all the strength and weaknesses of the class is a daunting task which the lecturer must understand and solve in order to develop interest in the students to make drawing an interesting exercise. Drawing, which is an age long exercise, is sometimes innate and at other times learnt through training, which is what is practiced in art schools and other art professional classes.

The early cavemen drew on the cave walls and other surfaces to serve as sympathetic magic for the purpose of hunting and making the animals drawn vulnerable to them as prey. In modern days, drawings help to solve design problems, representing objects and creating illustrations for visual understanding of the viewer. Beyond the aforementioned, drawings are strong visual statements, expressing the personality of the artists, telling allegorical stories through symbolic lines, which starts from an individual, and sometimes, with exposure to the world, become universal symbols and statements used for particular purposes. A good example is the work of Gerald Herbert Holtom (20 January 1914 – 18 September 1985), a British professional designer and artist, who created the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) logo (Fig. 1), created in 1958 to give a voice to peace in the face of mounting hostility and Nuclear war threats and today are accepted globally as a universal symbol of peace.



Fig.1. CND Symbol, Gerald Herbert Holtom, 1958. Source:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peace_symbols

Drawing is foundational and a means of communication in all creative process, hence, drawing cannot be over looked in an art school and other related design courses in the University. According to *Introduction to Drawing* (n.d.) "Drawing arises from a universal human impulse—the desire to communicate. The act of drawing consists of using the eyes, mind, and heart to translate an image seen into an image recorded". Drawing which precedes photography and other digital methods of recording images, develops the critical part of the artists to observe carefully objects in nature and how to appreciate the creative process. For instance, Gombrich (2012:310) in discussing the potency of drawing and how it is more of a careful study and the pathway to masterpieces, states that, "We know how minutely Michelangelo studied every detail, and how carefully he prepared each figure in his drawings". Also, the drawings of Leonardo da Vinci show careful studies of various subject matter, which today, form the basis for the expansion of the frontier of engineering inventions, innovative medicine, architecture, art and a hub for research in the arts and sciences. The drawing of the Vitruvian Man is a good example of an iconic drawing (Fig. 2). According to an online article *Leonardo da Vinci* (2011:1) "Leonardo da Vinci's drawing of Vitruvian Man is one of the most popular world icons". The article further reports that:

The Vitruvian Man was created by Leonardo da Vinci around the year 1487. It is accompanied by notes based on the work of the famed architect, Vitruvius Pollio. The drawing, which is in pen and ink on paper, depicts a male figure in two superimposed positions with his arms and legs apart and simultaneously inscribed in a circle and square. The drawing and text are sometimes called the Canon of Proportions or, less often, Proportions of Man. It is stored in the Gallerie dell'Accademia in Venice, Italy, and, like most works on paper, is displayed only occasionally.

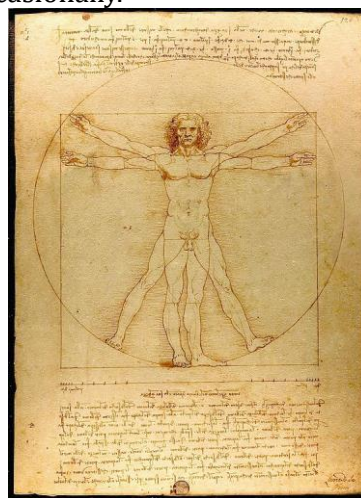


Fig.2. Vitruvian Man. Leonardo da Vinci. 1490

Source: <http://www.leonardodavinci.net/the-vitruvian-man.jsp#prettyPhoto>

This iconic drawing is an avant-garde piece in the study of proportion and the science involved in drawing exercises. This mathematical and methodical piece, yet free hand drawing with well annotated explanations, gives a framework for the indepth application of drawing to the success

of all inventions. The theory that led to the creation of the Vitruvian man is better explained by the proponent who was a Roman architect named Vitruvius.

Vitruvius in Puchko (2017) avers that:

For if a man to be placed flat on his back, with his hands and feet extended, and a pair of compasses centered at his navel, the fingers and toes of his two hands and feet will touch the circumference of a circle described therefrom. And just as the human body yields a circular outline, so too a square figure may be found from it.

Several artists before Leonardo have experimented with the theory and created sketches to bring to life the theory, however, it was the genius of Leonardo da Vinci's drawing that gave life to the theory, which today is a connecting point between the art and science. Leonardo in Puchko (2017) opines that, 'By the ancients, man has been called the world in miniature; and certainly this name is well bestowed, because, inasmuch as man is composed of earth, water, air and fire, his body resembles that of the earth.' Puchko (2017) concludes by stating that "In other words, man is a microcosm of the universe". The history, art, artistic dexterity, science and medicine of anatomy, all from a masterpiece drawing, which is still being researched in modern and contemporary art is a good parlance for the inclusion of drawing in art and science curricula in order to produce wholistic students and professionals.

In contemporary art practice, artists use various drawing media to communicate issues, solve complex design problems and sometimes express subconscious thoughts. In the Nigerian art scene, pioneer artists like Chief Aina Onabolu, Akinola Lasekan and Ben Enwonwu, just to mention but a few, used their drawings in forms of realistic renditions, cartoon drawings and sculptural drawing studies to refute the claims of the Europeans that an African cannot draw or produce an artwork of anatomical accuracy. The drawings from the founding fathers of Nigerian art were outstanding master pieces which compete favourably with any European art academy and helped to set the pace for art training in the various art institution across the country, which produced, outstanding protégés/ protegeses across the country. For the art students, drawing is the hub of the art training, and hence, the importance to be placed on it cannot be overemphasised. This paper is a practical guide to teaching drawing, especially in Fine and Applied Arts programme of the University of Jos, Nigeria, with the aim of improving the drawing skills of the students and giving drawing a pride of place in academic exercise.

Drawing Exercises

Drawing classes is a continuous exercise in the University of Jos art school. Students are exposed to the rubrics of drawing from 100 Level through 400 Level. In the 100 Level class, for instance, students are exposed to the fundamental elements of art like line, shape, form, space, value, texture and tone. Also, the various principles of art/design like balance, repetition, harmony and rhythm, just to mention but a few are discussed with the aim of guiding the students to creating good drawings and compositions. In general drawing, the process of achieving excellence is a constant practice, hence, at the initial stage of the class; students are shown various drawing materials and techniques used for drawing. Pencils of various shades and grades (H and B grades), erasers, pencil sharpeners, clean dry rags, kneaded erasers, charcoal pencils (hard and soft), pastels, felt pens, cartridge papers, cardboards and other materials used for drawing. Understanding of the materials and how each is used is paramount in the exercises. Audiovisual aids and videos on drawing techniques were shown to students early in the course to help them have a good take off point in the course.

The first drawing class was to help the course lecturer determine a measurement perimeter for the students' understanding of drawing and their approach to still life/ object drawings. A ceramic vase was placed on a stool and the students were asked to draw the objects. (See Plate I). The exercise produced some interesting drawings and some others showing potentials for improvement. This formed the basis for the other drawing assignments and a take off point for other experimentation with drawing for the class. Being a foundational level, the process of experimentation is very important as compared to the product or final outcome of the drawing.



Plate I: drawings showing different 100 level students' still life representation of a ceramic vase and stool. Photography source: Jacob E. Onoja

Another still life composition was posed in another contact with various objects and the students were asked to draw the objects showing the outlines using various lines and filling of the background with lines for the exercise (Plate II).

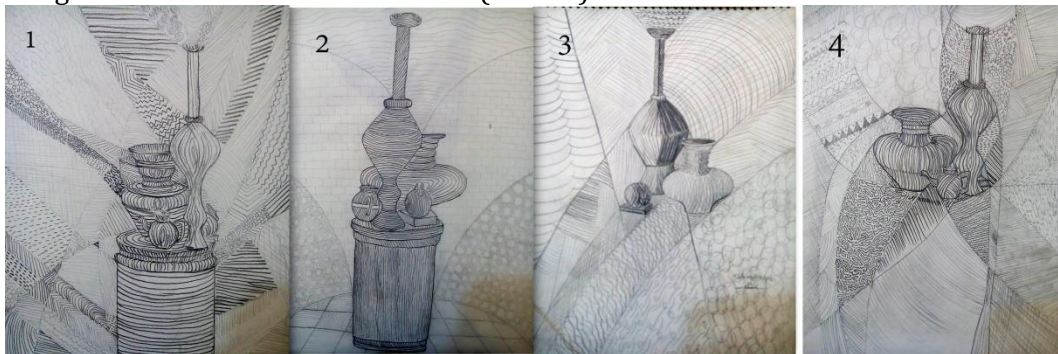


Plate II: Exploration with lines. Photography source: Jacob E. Onoja

The exploration with various lines is to train the hand - eye coordination of the students, and also to make them build confidence in the use of drawing materials at their disposal. The outlines of the shapes are also to be filled with lines and of various qualities. The exercise helps to loosen the hand and wrist muscle movements of the students and help them draw freely and more confidently.

Varied man-made objects are arranged in varied compositions, natural objects and a collection of man - made objects in a composition are posed for the students to draw in other classes. In one of the take home assignments, students were requested to extract various textures from different surfaces. The exercise was intended to help the students appreciate various textural qualities, improve on their shading techniques and create design sense by making simulations of a checker board (see Plate III). The drawing exercises were intended to develop appreciation for the nature of objects in space, good planning of the use of the working 2 - dimensional space to represent the illusion of 3 - dimension on the 2 - dimensional surfaces.



Plate III. Extraction of various textures. Photography source: Jacob E. Onoja

Understanding the interplay of light and shade on objects, and a careful study and representation, gives visual strength to the drawings. The boldness or fragility of the lines of choice by the students also communicates a lot of the personality of the students. Also, the shading techniques adopted sometimes show subtlety and mild strokes, indicative of a soft-spoken or calm personality, or bold and definite strokes, which connote assertiveness of the

student. This of course, can take reversal of roles and is not the intent of this paper (Psycho analysis of drawing).



Plate IV: Four drawings showing simulated textures on tree trunks. Photography source: Jacob E. Onoja

The texture extraction exercise was followed by nature drawing of various tree trunks (Plate IV) in the sculpture garden space of the Department of Fine and Applied Arts, University of Jos. Simulating tactile qualities of objects in nature is a buildup on the texture extraction exercise. The effect of light and shade on tree trunks, rough looks of the barks, hollows and others textural forms are to be studied and represented in the drawings.

Composition is vital to the success of any drawing; hence, creating drawing with good compositional sense and plan is encouraged. According to creative blog staff (2015:1) "A strong composition is crucial to a successful piece of art. It's what will attract a viewer's eye and what will hold their attention once they take a closer look". Also, Boddy - Evans (2017:1) succinctly states that:

Composition is the term used to describe the arrangement of the visual elements in a painting or other artwork. It is how the Elements of Art and Design - line, shape, colour, value, texture, form, and space - are organized or composed according to the Principles of Art and Design - balance, contrast, emphasis, movement, pattern, rhythm, and unity/variety - and other Elements of Composition, to give the painting structure and convey the intent of the artist.

In one of the classes, students were asked to use their hands and that of their course mates to make a composition of three hands that tell a story. The results were amazing. The students are being introduced gradually to solving complex drawing and compositional issues.



Plate V: Compositional drawings using the hand to tell stories. Photography source: Jacob E. Onoja Assessment

Students' assessment is in three phases. The first being the preliminary stage of going through the drawings of the students while the work is ongoing in the class to make inputs, encouraging the students to observe carefully, instructing them of the use of space orientation of the paper to accommodate the drawing properly based on proportion, balance and other oral instructions in the drawing studio or outdoor spaces. The second phase is done by the lecturer- in- charge in the office. The works are scored in percentage of a hundred, taking into cognizance some parameters of the proper use of the elements and principles of art/design. The third phase is the general class discussions of the drawings, in which, the works are displayed for critique and discussions (Plate VI). In this last phase, students learn from the strong points of their

colleagues and make plans to improve on their next drawing exercises.



Plate VI: Students display their works for class critique by their class mates and course lecturer.

Photography source: Jacob E. Onoja

It is also instructive to note that, after each class, a follow up assignment is given to keep the students in practice after class hours. This helps the students to keep practicing the art of constantly drawing and improving on their skills acquisition.

The scoring system is a range between the poor and the excellent. Weak students score averagely between 45% and 55%, good students score between 56% - 60%, while the very good to excellent students' scores range between 65% - 85%. The weekly scoring system helps to stimulate creative competition among the students which ultimately leads to better drawings and enhanced skills in every new assignment.

Experimenting with shading techniques (hatching, cross-hatching, pointillism, woolly, blurring etc.) for instance (Plate VII), shows how the students used the various techniques of shading in a composition of oranges arranged to the composition choice of the artists.



Plate VII: Four different drawings (outside the classroom assignment) of 100 level students to interpret shading techniques in a still life composition. Photography source: Jacob E. Onoja

Each orange was shaded using a particular technique to define the form. The students were further encouraged to experiment more with the technique and stick with the ones they are more comfortable with.

The sign of mastery comes with practice and ability to solve some problems posed in a drawing class. For instance, the students were taught some rules of perspective and how it affects the representation of 3 - dimensional objects on a 2- dimensional surface. As a test of skills, the students were asked to draw any of the stair ways in the departmental complex looking downwards. The aim was to ascertain the students' understanding of one-point perspective. Some students had difficulty plotting the imaginary lines of perspective which converges at the base of the stair way, hence; they had funny looking drawings like failing buildings in an earthquake situation. While a good number had good representation from their view points of the drawings (Plate VIII), others were poor in their drawings.



Plate VIII: Five different drawings of 100 level students to solve perspective issues on a stairway.

Photography source: Jacob E. Onoja

Conclusion

The popular saying that practice makes perfect is true in every sense of the word in drawing exercises and repositioning the visual arts discipline as a foremost creative foundation for every artistic endeavour. The vibrant future of the visual arts is better improved through the discipline of constant drawing exercises. Great masters passed through this same path, hence, young aspiring professional artists will do well to embrace the art and act of drawing. Furthermore, making innovative inventions and ground breaking scientific designs can be faster with drawings to enhance the design and production processes; therefore, it is recommended that, mandatory introductory drawing courses are taught to all students in the Faculty of Environmental Sciences and General Studies (GST) course at entry into the university.

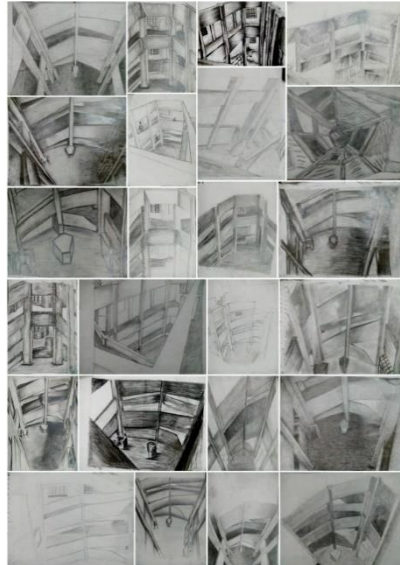


Plate IX: Collaged drawings of the faculty complex overlooking the gallery
Photography source: Jacob E. Onoja

This will reinforce understanding of aesthetic judgement and merge innovative thoughts with illustrative presentations through drawings. Possibly, in answering science-based questions, all the students are expected to arrive at a specific answer given certain formulae, however, in visual arts, different students answer differently to a given task, this is because, creativity is personalized and unique to individuals, even though, there are set rules guiding design, individual dexterity sets the field apart. This helps in innovative inventions and creation of unique ground breaking products and designs. Through training in drawing, students of visual arts always enjoy freedom of expression and fluidity of arriving at solutions.

It is also important to note that, outdoors experiences in drawing can be liberating; as this allows the students freedom of movements, choice of space, fresh air and better interaction with nature as compared to the enclosure of the classroom environment. The drills and thrills of drawing help to expand the frontiers of knowledge and should be encouraged by all and sundry in our educational institutions, especially the University of Jos, Nigeria.



Plate X: Outdoor drawing session. Photography source: Jacob E. Onoja



Plate XI: Collaged still life drawings of the study on wheel and drapery.
Photography source: Jacob E. Onoja

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