

THE AGELESS CHARACTER OF DRAWING AS FORM AND EXPRESSION IN CONTEMPORARY ART

Summary of the doctoral dissertation

The dissertation “*the ageless character of drawing as form and expression in contemporary art*” brings into discussion two research directions: a theoretical study of drawing, accompanied by a subjective selection of some artists considered relevant for our research, as well as an examination of the personal creation, a theoretical analysis supporting the personal artistic endeavor.

I chose drawing as the subject of my doctoral dissertation believing that it has always had and continues to have an important role in the creation of each artist regardless of the setting of his/her expression. Definitions, concepts and convictions about drawing were revised so that drawing may be redefined as form and expression in contemporary art.

The chapters approached in this paper start from general to particular; from a general definition of the image, through a short history and presenting drawing-specific techniques, making the connection with the other environments, presenting the importance of drawing for them and reaching a subjective plane related to contemplation, the interpretation of the exterior environment (abstract drawing, landscape drawing), going further towards the contemporary, towards an outline that separates from the traditional, where there are no rules, everything is allowed, an outline where work techniques are mixed and drawing leads to another form of expression detaching from conventions.

The thesis is structured on 5 chapters; **the first chapter** entitled “*The constancy of drawing – creation of a precedent*” starts from the definition of the notion of image, the *Image as a representation of reality and unreality* (subchapter 1.1), then continues with a short history of drawing, *The evolution of drawing – short history* (subchapter 1.2) and ends with an itemization of a few traditional drawing techniques, *The traditional techniques of drawing* (subchapter 1.3).

Drawing is an image, figurative and abstract, free from rules. Drawing is an artistic image giving shape to a new vision over reality due to expression means specific to drawing.

Starting from the preliminary drawing for a work of art until the acquisition of autonomous values, from the drawing created as a contour line to that of shape definition, such receives an aesthetic value. The line, the gesture, linear codes, impressions and the

technique of instruments, the applicability of the drawing, its expressivity, subject and form constitute a complex constellation incorporated into the drawing's creation.

The second chapter, entitled "*The need to know and recognize drawing in painting, sculpture, and graphics*" treats drawing as a linear sketch, *the drawing – form, line, and sketch* (subchapter 2.1); *subchapter 2.2* analyzes the relation of drawing with engraving, *drawing in engraving*; as well as with painting, *the pictorial drawing* (subchapter 2.3); and finally, the connection with sculpture, *the statuary drawing* (subchapter 2.4).

Thomas Munro states: *drawing can be an independent art that produces deliverable shapes or a component of other arts like painting, where it comprises preliminary sketches and forms painted directly with the brush*, emphasizing the independent character of these artistic forms as well as the tight connection between drawing and the other arts.

In drawing, sketches are appreciated for their expressivity, for their inspiration as well as for innovation, all being important aspects of a sketch in any techniques because they are part of an evolution chain inviting cognitive sequences and practical procedures. The fundamentals of the sketch are suggested by opened-closed, ambiguity, imprecision, allow for interpretation and reinterpretation, lend themselves to correction, change of mind, and redrawing.

Deanna Petherbridge believes that the possibilities of drawing seem limited in comparison to painting. The line itself, abstract, direct or imitative, does not exist in the visible world. It is a convention of representation, a focal element in the formal ensemble of art making as the line refers to force, to direction.

Starting from the assumption of engraving as a setting, in engraving drawing becomes an agent, a cause, a function, and in the end, the engraving remains an extension and a projection of drawing. Eugene Delacroix stated: *engraving is a true translation, meaning the art of translate an idea from one art to the other*, thus supporting the perennial and interconnected character of the drawing.

Gombrich mentions: *Art works are not mirrors, but they have in common that indistinguishable magic of transformation, which is so difficult to express in words*. Drawing in engraving is still drawing, as in the end, through translation and reproduction; the engraving is a reflection of the drawing. A short incursion among few of the traditional engraving techniques has helped us in our research in the sense of understanding the diversity, gesture and particularity of the form and expression of drawing within the technical-creative process of engraving.

It is our opinion that drawing is essential and mandatory in the pictorial creation, occupying an important place in the accomplishment of the composition and the construction of a painting's composing elements. Read Herbert punctuates *when crossing from drawing to painting, the line does not necessarily disappear*. Herbert mentions Blake William (1757-1827), painter and engraver who asserted that the line is the one or even the only mean to painting thus promoting the line to the rank of essential element in any art.

The contemporary artist Silvia Bächli believes that drawing is an apparition in movement, a tinted deviation, a change in the gravitational field that indirectly draws the attention on the object and the dream's figment that will never concretize in the drawing. To draw means to enter uncharted territory, to circle and walk in it, to create a space and analyze it, to work with and against the age of the paper. Drawing opens inner spaces and exists in those spaces without fully occupying them.

If to paint means to give life to the drawing, to make the form flourish, as André Lothe states, then drawing will not be missing from the pictorial creation.

In drawing or painting shape is suggested in space, and in sculpture, the shape is positioned in that space.

The sculptor Stephen Talasnik states: *the beauty of drawing for sculpture is a form adding a dimension avoiding the two-dimensional visualization. Drawing is an abstract visual mean that researches the infinite possibilities of the shape. Drawing is an instrument for invention as it becomes a way of thinking while sculpture offers the proof of the three-dimensional shape. Drawing is a process of cogitation while sculpture is its material accomplishment. Sculpture is finite and drawing is infinite*.

Drawing is a two-dimensional form and sculpture is the three-dimensional form of drawing.

The third chapter, entitled "*Drawing, pragmatism and contemplation*" is structured in three subchapters, as follows: *The contemplation of the image* (subchapter 3.1); *Abstract art and abstract drawing* (subchapter 3.2); *Landscape and landscape drawing* (subchapter 3.3).

When painting a landscape, the purpose of the artist is not to describe the landscape's visible aspect but to convey something about the contemplated landscape, states Read Herbert. If drawing is image and expression, then any drawing is worth contemplating as contemplation and the state of contemplation is not related just to nature.

Contemporary drawing does not represent just a static reality – depending on the technique used or even on the overlapping and interfering with other artistic mediums, drawing can be charged with emotion and spiritual acts.

In our attempt to define abstract drawing, we sought, first to define the word abstract. Abstract means detached from objects, phenomena, or even from relations where reality exists; without connection to actual data or facts; and difficult to understand due to the lack of actual illustration. Reality is not deformed but totally transformed passing through a critical, analytical, synthetic cogitation, calling on plastic means in order to portray a world beyond images, beyond reality.

Abstract drawing is a form of subjective expression, a procedure of a creative imagination. Alienation from the objective reality helps us discover, from another perspective, a new aspect of reality, with a new meaning, with a greater attention for color, texture, rhythm, form and line.

Abstract drawing is the transformed, deformed reality, another perspective of reality, ideas from impressions where geometry, form, rhythm, and harmony interfere.

Rosario Assunto defines the landscape as: *the nature which as an object of aesthetic experience constitutes into a limited image of the infinite, giving spatial form to its own absolute temporality.*

André Lothe asserts that regardless if we are talking about drawing, values, colors or surfaces, extraction, detraction and suppression should exist in the compositional practice of the landscape. Starting from the landscape's objective reality, the abstract landscape could be the replacement of organic shapes with inorganic ones.

Fundamental for the drawing imitating nature are a series of exterior shapes that together form a new reality about nature. The realistic landscape is an objective art and the abstract one, a subjective art. In any of these two situations, visual experience, creativity, emotion, attitude, availability and sensitivity are required for its representation into drawings.

If the drawing about nature is a study, then nature will be examined with attention to details determining in our conscience a clear image which late-on may be interpreted, deformed until its total generalization.

Chapter four entitled “*Three-dimensional drawing*” comprises subchapters:

1. *Drawing between flatness and embossing;*
2. *Unconventional drawing;*
3. *Contemporary directions in drawing;*

One of the directions of drawing as a form would be embossed drawing situated somewhere between the two-dimensional and the three-dimensional drawing. With this type of drawing, besides the visual sense, an important role is that of the tactile sense. In this subchapter we chose to present the dry stamping technique and not that of drawing in engraving because of the important role it has in our analysis, respectively the form of the drawing manifested in two ways: flat and embossed.

To go beyond limits and rules imposed in one way or another leads to new pursuits, to new questions; for these types of drawings, *to want to fully master the practice of an art means to conquer the freedom of using its means safely and with easiness* states Paul Valery.

In this subchapter, we chose to present the artwork of some artists due to the unconventional materials used. Their starting point and inspiration is traditional drawing translated in an environment unconventional for art. In these cases we are dealing with a drawing situated between flatness and embossing but, because of the intervention of unconventional materials, unusual for drawing, the images presented may be categorized as unconventional drawings.

We need an extended acceptance in redefining drawing – interfering with so many media; contemporary drawing may no longer be an individual drawing or an initiatory one for an artwork, as it may no longer be a completely autonomous one due to its generosity in exploring form and expression in so many settings.

Artists produce images with the aid of unconventional materials in order to express their vision in art, which refers to drawing, and it becomes an experiment, a starting point for creation, a bridge between conventional and traditional with contemporary and experimental.

Another direction of drawing could be that toward animation where drawing becomes a frame within an animation. Artists like Francis Alys and Valerio Berruti are preoccupied with the frame-by-frame animation of drawing. Here, drawing serves animation; it becomes a mean, a sequence, a constituent and a component of a different work of art, with another stylistic form.

Traditional drawing techniques are accompanied by new approaches, and in many cases they push the limits of drawing towards collage, painting, sculpture, illustration, animation, installation, and performance. A wide variety of styles, genres and subjects are emphasized in various forms, from miniatures to areas of tens of square meters.

Artists continue to consider drawing an essential approach to address and interact with today's world.

Drawing surrounds daily in different forms. The relevance and longevity of drawing were never questioned; artists or art critics did not believe it dead as with painting. Emma Dexter mentions two main aspects of today's drawing, the conceptual one, with a theoretical speech where the line is an abstract sign, and the traditional one.

Drawing is a sensation, a feeling, an attitude, states Anne Ellegood.

The purpose of contemporary art in general is to arouse, to bestir. The artist invests economical and psychical value in his practice, which becomes more intense due to this period where time has another value given by the ever-advancing technology.

In comparison with traditional drawing where we have a two-dimensional imitation of reality, in contemporary art, drawing reaffirms and redefines itself as it is more connected to cogitation, to feelings, intelligence, innovation, conception, to three-dimensions.

The fifth chapter, which constitutes the last part of the paper, is dedicated to personal research and creation, is structured into five subchapters each of them bearing the titles of projects, finished or ongoing.

Because I sought refuge in the world of signs, for the *Braille landscape* project I chose the Braille alphabet as a method of expression. In fact, this project aims at being an analysis at the level of plastic space perception by sightless persons as well.

It is my opinion that a reflex image may be an anticipation of what lies beyond the limits of this world, hence the title *Beyond images*.

For the *Landscape* project, the crossing from an existing landscape to an imaginary one and not the other way around is not based on a figurative image but on a symbolic one where black or color are in equal measure bearers of symbol.

The *LandEspace* exhibition reunites a selection of drawings part of a series of artworks *Existing landscape*, *Imaginary landscape*, and *Beyond images*, projects where the abstract approach of landscape in drawing is the general subject.

As required for the thesis, I added the introduction, conclusion, bibliography, and list of illustration consisting both from images documenting the theoretical part as well as from images from the personal research and creation.

Major changes took place in the evolution of drawing due to the permanent relation with other artistic media, which, in their turn have undergone stages of development, expansion and innovation. Due to this perennial character, the form and expression of the

drawing change from one image to the other, from one technique to the other, as drawing itself acquires an evolutionary and innovative character.

The doctoral research has aided in fathoming the theoretical analysis in relation and in parallel with the personal practical endeavor as the theoretical analysis constituted a support for the personal endeavor.

Based on our research we may conclude that drawing in contemporary art is not just the art of representing an object using black and white line in traditional techniques. The perennial character of drawing in contemporary art is given by its association with the new expression media, whether digital or unconventional, through their assistance or support, as it distinguishes itself most of the time in any form of contemporary art.