

George Enescu National University of Arts in Iași

Faculty of Visual Arts and Design

Doctoral Studies

Field of Visual Arts

ORIENTATIONS AND TRENDS IN CONTEMPORARY DRAWING

STYLISTIC PLURALITY IN CURRENT GRAPHICS

Professor Dragoș Pătrașcu, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

The habilitation thesis entitled “ORIENTATIONS AND TRENDS IN CONTEMPORARY DRAWING – Stylistic Plurality in Current Graphics” continues the research started after 1989, through periodical documentation in modern art museums, contemporary art venues and art galleries in Western Europe, to which we had had no access until then. Conducted for almost three decades, this documentation has focused on two complementary directions:

1 – studying and archiving the movements and trends in the first six decades of the 20th century. Art critics and philosophers named this historical period Modern Art. Back then, I also started an annual documentation on contemporary art (the works of art created after 1960). In time, this endeavour was systematised and turned into a passion.

Paris, with its 800 art galleries, was a favourite place of research. Louvre, Quai Branly, Musée d'Orsay, Rodin, Dali Museum in Montmartre, Brancusi's Studio, Picasso Museum, Modern Art Museum in Paris, Georges Pompidou Centre (an original institution entirely dedicated to modern and contemporary creation, bringing together in one space not only visual arts, but also books, design, music and film), the modern art centres Palais de Tokyo and Louis Vuitton – all these cultural spaces display works of art ranging from Antiquity up to the most recent experiments and trends in recent art

In 2005 the Pompidou Centre opened the exhibition Big- Bang – Creation and Destruction in 20th Century Art. This still is one of the most important projects organised by this important cultural centre in the last years, an emblematic exhibition underlying the change of the paradigm of taste of an epoch, exploring the restless, adventurous and unforeseeable evolution of 20th century avant-garde and almost didactically presenting the most important directions, movements and orientations of last century art.

The last six Venice Biennials were another subject of observation, documentation and archiving. The Venice Biennale is one of the most important art biennials in the world. Every two years, one can see here the current trends of the global art scene.

The entire documentation done within these cultural institutions, galleries, exhibitions and biennials materialised in several hundreds of course notes and in an archive of approximately 8,000 images and video recordings, that I use for the two Master Programme courses I teach:

1 Syncretism of Techniques in Contemporary Art (common course for all sections of the Visual Arts department)

2 Stylistic Plurality in Graphics (1st and 2nd year, Graphics section)

2 – Another area of my personal research dealt with the queries, trends and orientations in current drawing and its integration in the vivid contemporary art performance. This has been a permanent interrogation, which accompanied my collection and analysis of the concepts, means of expressions and techniques encountered.

Globalisation of artistic languages which inevitably led to a kind of ‘visual Esperanto’ opened at the same time the way to ‘cognitive aesthetics’, globalised contact, a connection to the ‘universal network’ (as the art critic Pierre Restany has put it). Boundaries between art genres (and between arts in general) start to disappear; the means of expression interfere, borrowing their languages. Art conquers new territories, invading all fields of human activity. The fundamental question that has been accompanying visual creation since 1960 is not to what movement a work of art belongs, but rather whether it is art or not. When asked by an American journalist about the concept of his controversial work *Fountain*, Marcel Duchamp answered: “I only wanted to destabilise aesthetics”.

Confusion is bigger than ever. Exhibitions of refused artists and infallible juries have disappeared and no exhibitions close any longer after having shocked the public. Maybe only in countries ruled by totalitarian regimes. Artists are always inventing; there is a “tyranny of innovation”, as the Romanian born artist Daniel Spoerri has put it about the cultural atmosphere in Paris in the sixties and seventies. The reaction of the public was first enthusiastic, then perplex and then it turned into indifference and apathy. Artists once studied the Louvre masterpieces. Now, the anthropologic interest seems to be more important than the aesthetic one. Relativisation of forms and colours replaced mimesis, the idea that had governed art for five centuries. It seems we are dealing with a change in the role of art. Art no longer reduces to an activity that cannot be expressed in words, but involves spectacular mutations of the mind.

Diverse, non-unitary, contradictory, art of the last decades generally escapes analysis. Is it treachery or does it predict new worlds? Where does drawing come in on these tectonic plates of today’s art? Is technique as important as in the past? Recent theories about drawing tend to dwell on the idea of conceptualisation, without taking into account the current tendency of drawing to subjectivity, associations and narration (preface to the book “Vitamin D” by Emma Dexter). An artist’s technique receives the same consideration; his or her skills refined during the years of study are deemed less important than the concept itself in the world of current art. As such, there is a risk of colliding with a large part of the audience.

The two reference books Vitamin D1 (2005) and Vitamin D2 (2013) published by the famous publishing house Phaidon offer an extensive overview of the perspectives in contemporary drawing, proposing an interpretation scheme for the works of over two hundred artists from different generations, countries and continents. One of the conclusions of the study, in which 80 important contemporary work personalities (curators, museum and gallery directors, historians, university professors and critics from all over the world) took part was that drawing, painting, new media, installation, sculpture live in simultaneity and not in diachrony. Roughly, contemporary art follows two major trends: post-conceptual art and neo-romanticism. Emma

Dexter points out in the preface to *Vitamin D1*: “It is decisive that everything depends on drawing, so that internal tensions and contradictions might appear as far as the two directions are concerned.”

The language of drawing has always been regarded as the strong point of art. From this perspective, drawing reveals and presents the line and internal structures of the artistic thinking process. “From Point, Line, Surface to Contemporary Drawing – Stylistic Plurality in Current Graphics” is the name of the course I teach to the 1st and 2nd year Master programme students. The course details the drawing concept by describing and interpreting the essential elements of the artistic language, materialised in the reception (abstraction) of the immediate, sensory or utopian reality. Of course, drawing, like all art genres (and all arts, in general), does not differ when it comes to the restless search and the wish for change in contemporary art.

The syncretism of art genres, artistic movements, techniques and work modalities is a common practice. Artists transfer and shift almost everything from one side to the other. In addition to the poetic recycling of the global consumerism objects, such as installation, happening, performance and new media, which the former communist countries also embraced frantically, much to the surprise of those who saw them dying in the nineties, painting and drawing continue to manifest and produce both aesthetic and conceptual artefacts. In recent art, one can easily notice the transgression of drawing and painting, a permanent shifting between the two genres, photography often being one of the bonds, the starting point, the idea, finalizing the conceptual frame. Drawing is also constantly present in the contemporary installation practice. Current artistic projects often include the metamorphosis of the line into the three-dimensional approach.

In the second half of the 20th century, drawing became autonomous in relationship to the so-called “major arts”. The big museums of the world organised numerous international exhibitions, which “put the history of art (and artists) to discussion again through the drawn work of art” (Pan Imre). The emancipation of drawing in the context of visual arts after the sixties and seventies becomes a manifest act through the diversification of the artists’ visions and technical options. Not only painters or engravers use graphical expression any longer. “Renaissance took the painting from the wall and avant-garde emancipated the drawing from the oil painting”, said Pan Imre at the International Exhibition in Darmstadt (1970).

To put it differently, we are facing a relaxation of the conceptualism principles of the sixties and seventies. The fifty years passed ever since have brought important changes to the concept of artistic movement itself, which lost its initial “purity” and inflexibility. The idea of concept has become “global”; the “aseptic” sensation, conceptualism accustomed us to, has blurred. One can notice intrusions, interferences, openings, acceptances. This shows a major change in the cultural attitude. Internet has become a universal connector (Pierre Restany), which determines a change of paradigm. Even performances and happenings, established genres of conceptual art, have been “stolen” by the avant-garde extreme of the entertainment industry. After the appearance of in-depth studies on contemporary drawing, in addition to the neo-romantic orientation embraced by more and more young artists, neo-conceptualism still is a constant presence (even if to a smaller extent than before), whereas a more and more evident preoccupation for technique is noticed. In Paul Noble’s and Robert Longo’s drawings (to mention only the most notable examples published in the book *Vitamin D – Contemporary Drawing*, Phaidon, 2015), the technique is deemed as important as the idea. There are several examples of famous artists, who gave special attention to the accuracy of drawing, returning to a forgotten tradition, deemed as outdated until then, and to the beauty of classical drawing, while serving current ideas. “The artist must be the child of his or her age”, said Kandinski and current drawing undoubtedly illustrates it. Alfred Kubin, Otto Dix, Hans Bellmer, Ernst Fucks,

Rudolf Hausner, Chuck Close, Hans Rudolf Giger, Paul Wunderlich, Vladimir Velicovic, Laurie Lipton, David Musgrave, Raymond Pettibon, Toba Khedoori, Julie Mehretu, Ernest Pignon-Ernest, Cai Guo Kiang, Franciszek Starowiezski, Wieslaw Walkuski, Beksinski, Gazovic, Saul Steinberg, Victor Brauner, Vasile Kazar, Octav Grigorescu, Sorin Ilfoveanu, Dan Erceanu, Nicolae Alexi, Mircia Dumitrescu, Onisim Colta, Ion Atanasiu Delamare, Iuri Isar, Adriana Lucaciu and Mircea Suciu are children of the art of their age (paraphrasing Vassili Kandinski). As one can notice in the list above (which is of course incomplete and open, at the same time), my documentation also included drawings (as a preferred means of expression) of some Romanian artists. Today's art genres, as hybrid, connected, interfered, amalgamated, syncretic as they may be, are a living organism, in a continuous movement, search, change, shifting, intrusion, cohesion. Drawing, as a major art genre – be it modern, contemporary or recent – has its way, path or lane similar to those of the other art genres (if we can still use these terms now). Drawing has its faithful supporters, has definitely won its autonomy, but it is plain to see that it does not content itself with that, the wish for innovation and change making its presence felt.

In addition to presenting and detailing the documentation and research activities reflected in the didactic activity materialised in the courses mentioned above, the habilitation thesis also includes the artistic activity carried out during my university career. The Curriculum Vitae shows the parallelism of the two careers (as an artist and professor) as well as their complementarity and intersection. This can be answer to the questions whether a teacher may also be an artist versus whether an artist may (or must) share his or her cultural experience with the younger artists.