

*Drawing Myth and History in visual art.*

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**Abstract:** After the famous exhibition “Copier créer” curated by Jean Pierre Cuzin in the “Musée du Louvre” in 1993, the practice of drawing art has acquired a renovated interest.

This exhibition revised the theoretical concepts introduced by Bober and others in the second half of the XXth century and increased the value of the contribution of drawing in the study of art history instead of the idea of copying. An important catalog and essay by Haverkamp, Begemann and Login, titled “Creative copies”, appeared in 1988 and contained the best examples of the main collections.

The last but not least important consequence was the collaboration between international museums, using their own spaces, with contemporary artists. The hermeneutic drawings and paintings by Markus Lüpertz in the Munich Glyptothek and the exhibition of Giacometti’s drawings shown in the IVAM in 2000 are two excellent examples of the European relevance in this field.

I want to analyze here twenty years of drawing done in different museums and institutions around the world and its close relationship with the process of recovering our historical memory by using visual art.

**Key Words:** Drawing, History of Art, translation, interpretation, experimentation

This article will attempt to review three key aspects regarding the role of the sketcher when confronted by both the questions history poses and the recovery of the memory:

#### **A/ TRANSLATION**

The value of the translation: the historiographical contribution of the sketcher / artist. In the first place, one must accept the thesis of the different strategies deriving from a nonverbal knowledge of history. That is to say, the artist does not use words to explain facts and the processes that led to them. One of these nonverbal forms would be art itself as an instrument which enables the study of both the cultural and artistic object.

#### **B/ INTERPRETATION**

The hermeneutic value: Manifestations and interpretation objectives.

Secondly, one must review, through the image, the interpretative expression and the definition of the objectives. That is to say, to contribute to the already established thesis set up at the famous exhibition celebrated in the Louvre Museum which was coordinated by the historian Jean Pierre Cuzin in 1993 “Copier Créer”.

### C/ EXPERIMENTATION

Experimentation: the drawing acts like both a bridge and dialogue. Finally, I will attempt to briefly show the graphic work I have done over the last twenty-five years. These drawings follow the quiet current of study, historical referencing and current of thought that has come down the centuries that is; the *hermeneutic* work of the artist as conceptually different from the copy. This current of thought sought knowledge, the recovery of memory and to open a profound dialogue with other cultures, other myths and other times.



#### The value of translation:

Jacques Derrida has contributed, as is well-known, to a revisioning of the value of our reading of history and has shed doubt on the ability of language to become an objective instrument of analysis. His theories have had a very specific influence in the world of art world through the currents of thought that we have come to know as “*Post-modernity*”.

In fact, deconstruction proposes neither a criticism, nor a philosophy, but a practice of reading, a conjunction of diverse attitudes when confronted by a text or image. With regard to this *post-structuralist* idea, we can consider the thesis in which the reading of an art work must not solely be “thought” through the word or photography as a means of documentation.

With the use of the image as a document of historical value as used by the French school of “*Histoire de la Culture*” and the contributions of Peter Burcke, nowadays nobody doubts the need to study the image in order to understand our past. However, it still remains to be proven that reproduction systems can be considered trustworthy.

What is the value of the reproduction? What is the value of the reconstruction of the object through drawing? I do not believe that it is a unique and insignificant *dilettante* exercise. To translate a narrative or lyrical text in literature into another language has an undeniable academic value. The problem arises when this translation is artistic and metaphorical. However, according to Derrida the same problem arises within historical analyses with the metaphorical accumulations of the historical processes and their conceptual paradoxes. The drawing drawn from a work of art is a new creation. It is a

translation of ideas contained in the original work. It helps us to include certain concepts in the selection process and reconstruction of the original master piece. Therefore art translated by art would be another of the cumulative systems of approach to the analysis of a work. It is what in French terms is known as the “d'après” attitude. It's something more than a version. It is a fact, however, that we cannot totally share the positions of deconstruction as absolutely true.

The Argentinean sociologist and philosopher Juan Jose Sebreli recently indicated his discrepancies regarding postmodernism which he described as a” fraud” in his book *The Forgetfulness of Reason a Critical Review of Contemporary Philosophy: El olvido de la razón. Un recorrido crítico por la filosofía contemporánea.*

A recent exhibition was held at the Picasso Museum in Barcelona under the title *Forgetting Velasquez.* It was a tribute to the influential inspirations (or rather transgressions) that Picasso and others had exerted on the artist

Has the artist forgotten logical reason? Was truth only to be found in the works of the past? As well the great iconoclastic act of Marcel Duchamp: the moustaches on the Gioconda can be seen today in Barcelona where they have been brought from the Pompidou Center in Paris. Perhaps I share with Sebreli certain aspects regarding the idea that postmodernism has not managed to disassemble reason and that the idea of progress has not been completely ousted. This concept, of course is clear in medicine or in Legislation on Human rights. Does art progress? Of course one tends to think it does not. Its knowledge is cumulative and parallel, it is not axiomatic. However, drawing from a model has contributed to the growth and the formation of artists from the time of the first known sketchbook with the medieval drawings of Villard de Honnecourt. The more art history produces the greater the number of art works to translate, to comprehend and to incorporate into our knowledge. That is to say or means: greater information and analysis must be implemented in including our cultural objects.

On the other hand globalization and multiculturalism, initiated by the impressionists in their gaze towards East, disrupted the vision of a unique Western model. The files of art “scores” are becoming increasingly wider. One would hope that such an amount of translation will lead us to greater knowledge and progress.

### **B/ The value of the Hermeneutic:**

The version, d'Après mentioned before, leads us forward to talk of interpretation: the translation previously mentioned. As an act of understanding art history and its objects acquire another unsuspected value as soon as the desire to interpret appears. Drawing, in this context, establishes an a-temporal / a-spatial bridge. The point being to open a dialogue with the model, with the referent, so that master/maestro and translator talk about how the art work was created. The translator, now interpreter, looks for the essence and the perfume of the masterpiece. Seurat searches for the light in the sculptures of Puget, Giacometti looks for the structure in the Egyptian sculptures, Carpeaux the movement, Vuillard the atmosphere and Waterhouse the myth.



The idea of creation in the interpretation of art work has already had been studied by Haverkamp and others in his "Creative copies" catalogue and, after the exhibition at the Louvre, the initiatives extended throughout Europe. The interpretations of Lüpertz at Munich's Glyptoteque, Miquel Barceló paintings at the Louvre, the collaboration of Anthony Caro with the National Gallery and the most recent anthology dedicated to copies of Giacometti in the IVAM of Valencia is testimony to this activity. Barceló in his African notebook writes: historians study the history of art, we use it. This idea of utility and not of art as an object of study is complementary to the translation concept. To this we must add the idea of admiration and tribute embraced by Giacometti in his work. All his life he worked in the belief of the universality of art: all the models and subjects of culture were of his interest. It is well-known that both Derain and Picasso liked primitive art. What they considered primitive ranged from the Iberian sculptures and the pre-Roman to those of Africa and Polynesia. In short, when we talk about the opening towards the East in the XIX century, we really must grant these artists the credit for having opened western eyes to the borders of the cultural object. New myths appear: the misunderstood past, the continents of Africa and the Australia.



Anyway it would be naive not to admit the destruction of myth in our time. The Neo Pop or Warhol's followers, to name one group, are one of the few currents that have generated a copyist school. We can truly say that they work as copiers because they greatly differ from the cultural attitude of the interpreters. The end of narrative and

shared legends are one of the effects of post modernity. It remains paradoxical that in the era of information, major displacements of art works have been generated around the world and so few people draw art. To interpret drawing in our days does not necessarily imply the geographic displacement of the drawer.

The drawings of the authors are carried out with well differentiated methods, both direct and indirect. The indirect ones, known in the past as stamp collecting by the artists, is a phenomenon widely used today. The artist studies, draws from books, cuts out reproductions from the specialized press, or even draws from DVD or the television.

The drawing support for many artists in the XX century were the same art books with annotations in the margins. The privacy of these studies has meant that they are not all well known by the wider public. The so called *liber veritatis* of the old workshops such as Claude Gellé's (Claudio de Lorraine) will help his own disciples to interpret his work. When Lorena allowed individuals to take notes from his drawings he knew that they weren't copying him, they were interpreting him with his absolute authorization.

In our days, tracking by Internet has opened our cultural patrimony to millions of viewers. What we do not know is, if besides losing the shared myths, we will lose hermeneutical art.

### C/ Experimentation

I do not know if I can call the very diverse work I have done over the last twenty-five years "field research". Initially, towards the 80's, my drawings were works of translation of working methods, such as in my first drawings on Rembrandt



Later, the background, there was a dialogue with the authors that tried to interpret their thought: why did they paint or carve in such a way? Lately, the sense is surprise and knowledge. These drawings, in their majority internal notebooks of my study, come from trips and direct notes on the original pieces.

I often did them in the countries where they originated or in museum depositaries from the original works and, on other occasions, at temporary exhibitions. Some of these studies have had direct consequences in my own work. In other cases it is the result of my need to search for a lost inheritance, to purchase knowledge from the praxis of art history. My graphical work has allowed me to debate formal knowledge with my students and my academic colleagues about the loss of our myths, our historical legacy and the difficulty of retention in terms of the observer. Given the length restrictions of the article I am unable to use some two hundred drawings to illustrate my ideas and praxis. The pieces shown here are just a summary of twenty five years work.



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