

Phil Tyler VR teaching at UoB

At present my role at the university is Visual research coordinator for fashion, fashion communications and textiles BA courses.

I teach across all three levels of all the courses, but I'm also responsible for coordinating the work of two other visual research tutors.

In terms of what I have been delivering over the last academic year, I would broadly say that my major preoccupation has been delivering a clear understanding of the nature of visual perception in order to help students improve their observational skills.

I deliver a lecture on visual research, outlining theoretical approaches to drawing as well as visual perception¹, and then I follow this with practical workshops. For the most part last year sessions were three hours in duration and some sessions where a whole day. It has become apparent that attendance on these all day events was generally poor (about 50%) so this year sessions have been reduced to an hour and a half in duration.

I think that students find drawing difficult. They find it challenging and many students claim that they do not like drawing.² Subsequently these sessions seem to offer the student the opportunity to do something else other than confront the problem. Excuses might range from working on a garment, or doing written work for either historical contextual studies or business studies submission.

This shortened time span has put extra pressure on me to try to get students to produce outcomes quickly. I have therefore focused on approaches that will help students improve their observational skills, the confidence of their drawing and enable them to start communicating their ideas.



1 as discussed in Betty Edwards Book drawing on the right side of the brain

2 It would certainly be interesting to find out why this is so.



Structure of sessions

Sessions would begin with a life model wearing a range of different outfits.

An initial drawing will be untutored lasting 10 minutes. This will be used as a datum drawing for later in the session. Whilst the students draw, I monitor how long each student looks at the model against how long they look at the paper.

At the end of this first drawing I get the students to put their drawings out for all to see. By looking at each others drawings, it is easier to think about how each are making perceptual errors. I will then use this to reiterate some of the key points from the first lecture about looking at the model rather than at the paper

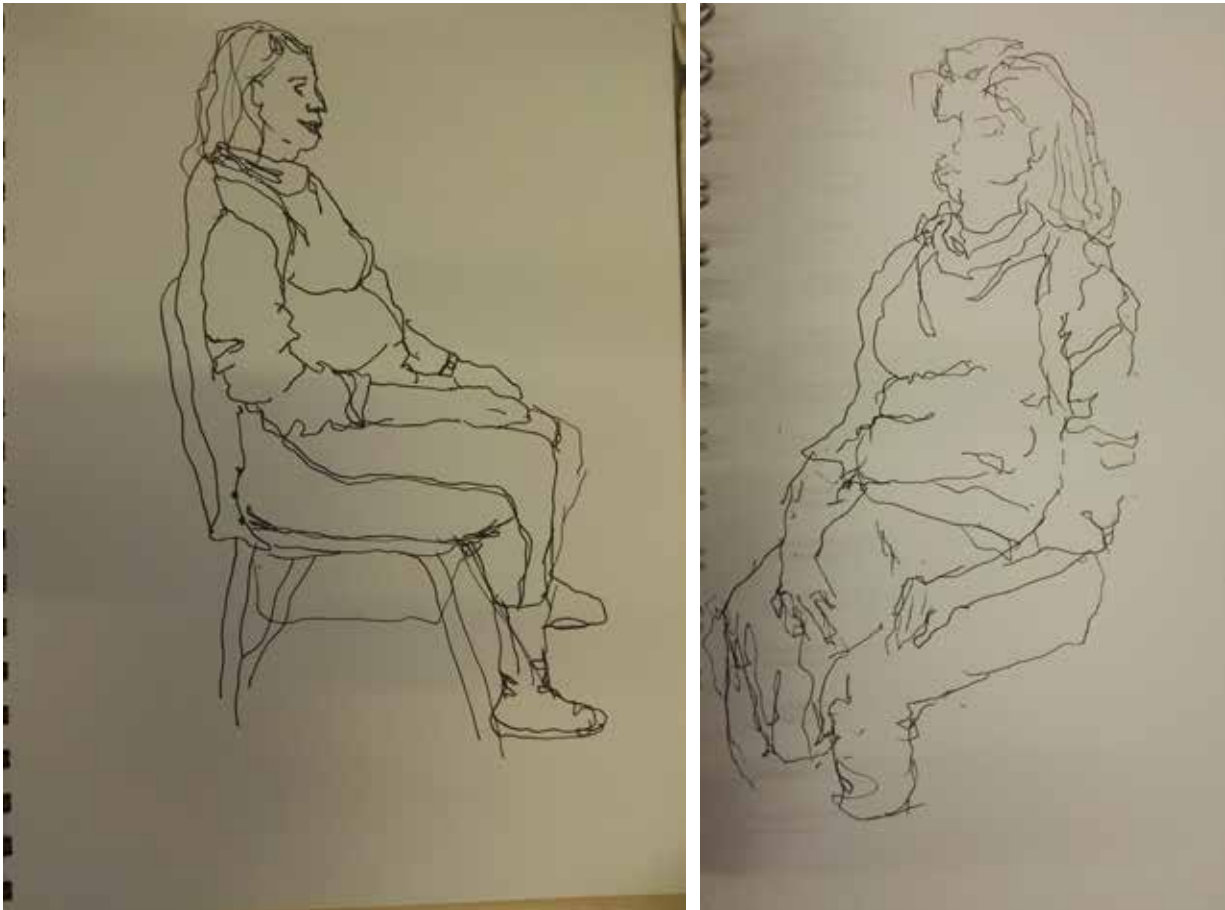


and drawing from memory.

Blind drawing will normally follow on from this, where the focus is around a way of seeing rather than outcome, getting students to slow down their looking and get lost in the creases and folds of clothing. Circumnavigating the figure through the creases and folds improves the ability of the student to see the figure objectively.

With practice this becomes second nature been initially it seems alien.

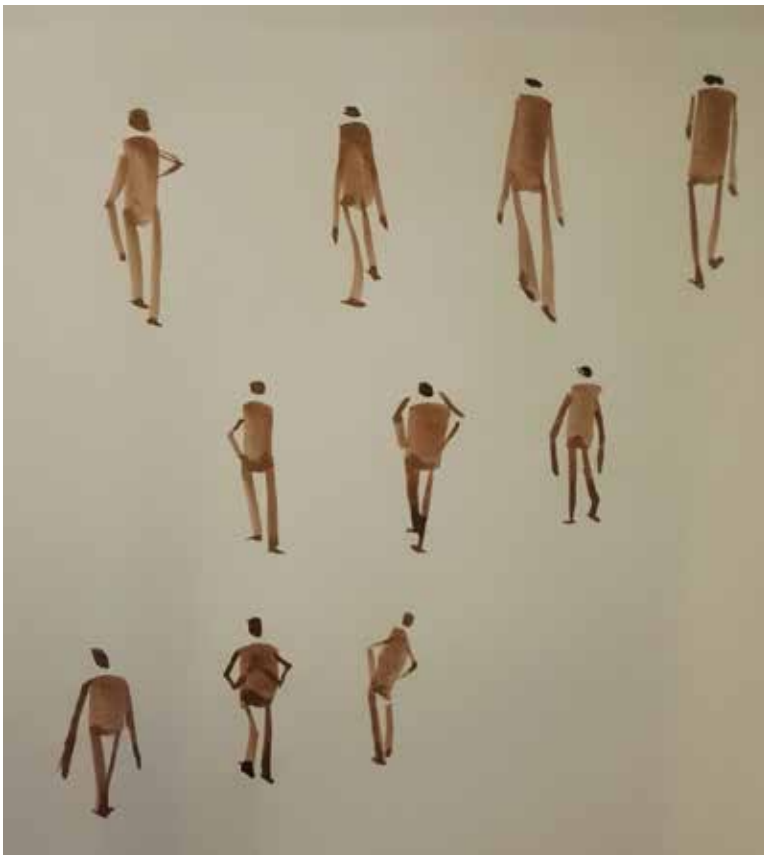
Students make sketchy lines and this means that there is a separation between looking and drawing. Slowing down and making one line continuous line rather than lots of stetchy marks, means tha there is a greater connection between that which is seen and drawn.



After initial survey of blind drawing (this will usually involve 3 or 4 blind drawings executed over 5 minute or 10 minute duration) we will then move onto partial peak drawing, a term Betty Edwards uses. Here the focus is the same approach as blind drawing, but this time the student has the ability to look at their drawing for a short period of time. However the stress is still placed on looking mostly at the model rather than the paper. If no model is present, I will usually encourage each student to become a model. I will keep these poses short, but it means that each student gets an experience of how difficult it is to be a model. Sometimes students dress up, wearing knitted jumpers, woven garments and also recently using two metres of calico wrapping or draped over the figure.

After partial peak drawing, I will usually be encouraged students to swap hands making a number of drawings with their wrong hand. The expectation on these drawings is low the concentration is high and invariably students may discover they produce better drawings this way.

Toward the end of the session I will move onto gesture drawing, where I ask students to attempt to capture the whole figure in a maximum number of five marks. The scale of these drawings is utterly dependent on the size of the brush so initial drawings will be made without referring to the model at all, but simply



considering the idea of mark making. The duration of these drawings will around one minute and the first two or three will involve spending a minute looking at the model rehearsing their marks rather than making a drawing.

The resultant drawing is executed after a minute of looking in approx with five seconds.

The next series of drawings will usually entail combining gesture and line this time executed with a graphite stick.

This has just about being covered in one and a half hours.

With a longer duration of sessions, one could begin to talk more about negative space, measuring principles proportion and scale and a broader range of media. Last year, with extra time, I was able to look at

tonal drawing with charcoal as well as placing a wash over a linear drawing to deal with aspects of tonality.



Photographs

Having established basic principles of observational drawing the focus now shifts on to fashion illustration.

Students will certainly use photographs to work from for their fashion illustrations so it is important that they understand how to get the best out of their mobile devices.

One session from this year in saw students photographing each other playing with angle of vision and lighting, printing off the subsequent photographs and then drawing from these using the same exercises that the been outlined previously.

This sees a continuance of more photographic source material to work from, sometimes their own or sometimes from fashion magazines.

It is at this point we can begin to



talk about exaggeration, character and also the drawing of a face where the utilisation of gridding and upside-down drawing is really valuable.

We will also do a session with students draw directly from the garment they have made. This year we did this in the workshop spaces alongside the mannequins developing their studio practice to make a stronger connection between visual research and design.

Students will make experimental worksheets investigating aspects of mark making as well as surface manipulation and mixed media to create textural experiments to try to capture the tactile nature of the material being used.

We will also try to think about what the student is trying to communicate through the garment and find a drawing style that suits that intention.

Final drawing sessions will bring together these various strands into more resolved fashion illustrations and this may be done physically or digitally.

This year I am teaching Photoshop and InDesign to the textiles students.

I have created a number of instructional videos that are now on student Central to support some of the ideas explored in my fashion illustration classes.

I've also created similar content for teaching Photoshop illustrating not just how to create colour surface and pattern but also how to use both Photoshop and illustrator to produce fashion illustrations

Other kinds of drawing

Not all drawing is about producing a recreation of something seen (mimesis).

Systems

systems is a simple idea ideas from no ideas exploring the division of a square with one line two lines and three lines. This system of rule following provides starting points for the generation of repeat patterns. These drawings are also used to translate into three dimensions using coloured card where lines represent: cuts, folds or scores. Structures are made and are also photographed. Using software like Adobe capture complicated patterns can be produced from this source material also this generates ideas for vessels, support structures and spaces.

This notion of rule following and leans heavily on the work of Sol Lewitt. How something can emerge from a seemingly simple starting point.

Although different in flavour the first colour workshop incorporates the use of systems to produce complicated networks of colour relationships. This also feeds into the production of 48 miniature colour studies which develop students' understanding of the use of paint mark making and composition

Colour workshops involve drawing in response to music. This is an exercise where students have to completely close their eyes and try to consider the notion of mark making as a way of communicating some of

the rhythm, movements and timbre of contemporary orchestral music and jazz music that's played. Emphasis here is placed on physicality, the way in which the body can be used to make marks as well as the wrist. Process is often utilised and instructions can suggest the desire to erase parts of a drawing and redrawing other parts as the session progresses. Rule following can be an important strategy to interrupt the ideas and develop new outcomes. These drawings will be executed on a small scale in the sketchbook but also on a larger scale using a 1 charcoal and a rubber. Biro drawings are drawn seated, whereas the charcoal drawings are done standing up so that the whole body becomes part of the action. Both of these sets of drawings are they not used to develop a series of paintings, taking the mark making but then applying various different colour recipes to make a series of colourways

Taking a line for a walk looks at the idea of developing ideas through drawing: moving motifs around, changing format, compositional elements but also very exploring the idea of constants and variables. This will take elements from the music drawing and play with them, see what happens, experientially discovering (by chance) exciting compositions and possibilities that (in this context) can be taken into textile ideas (I have also used this as starting point for 3D).

Slide Project

Explores the transformation of imagery through the use of largely redundant technology. Handmade slides, are scratched, painted, burnt, stained, sliced etc and yield seductive imagery when combined with photocopies as well as transparencies. The imagery can be projected onto wall, over objects and rephotographed offering alternative drawing strategies.

VR within Fashion and Textiles

My other role includes tutorials and feedback sessions. This may be in the form of a one to one tutorial, a peer review or a small group critiques. The focus of the sessions is on the nature of research and how it informs practice. This might suggest other techniques or processes to develop ideas as well as making relevant contextual references. These varying input have been devised largely through my experience of running a part-time foundation course at city college

The sessions run at the university form a rather fragmented narrative rather than a cohesive program. This is in part due to rooming the size of the spaces to teach drawing, as well as the differing timetables of various courses. This has meant that many sessions have been repeated two different groups. Students find that the concentration involved in drawing is too much for them. They lose focus so sessions have been shortened to 1.5 sessions of Fashion.

A more considered programme of study, delivered across the School of Art is achievable if there were sufficient space to teach larger groups. In much the same way that a contextual studies programme of lectures could explore a series of themes, a drawing program could explore something similar: visual perception, object drawing, life drawing, drawing as a means of expression drawing, drawing as a means of visual communication, drawing systems as well as drawing as a process.

