

# Erica Tietze-Conrat, 'On Drawings'<sup>1</sup>

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[Originally published as 'Ueber Handzeichnungen', *Kunstgeschichtliche Anzeigen Beiblatt de Mitteilungen des Instituts für österreichische Geschichtsforschung*, Redigiert von Max Dvořák, Jahrgang 1913 Heft 1/2, Innsbruck: Wagner 1913, pp. 41-51, signed February 1914.]

The following remarks have been inspired by the essay by Franz Martin 'Haberditzl, Über Handzeichnungen', which appeared in the fourth issue of *Die graphischen Künste* during 1913; this comprised an essay on distinguishing draftsmanship from the other arts made on flat surfaces and characterizing its unique qualities. The loose disposition of the essay by Haberditzl makes it clear that the present remarks are intended more as a parallel account than as a critical review.

The great variety which exists among the types of drawings includes transitional examples bordering on the various branches of reproductive arts, and

<sup>1</sup> E. H. Gombrich, 'Obituary of Erica Tietze-Conrat', *Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 101, 1959, pp.149:

With the death on 11th December 1958 in New York of Erica Tietze-Conrat (born 1883) another link with a past now almost legendary has snapped. The daughter of Hugo Conrat, whose poems after Hungarian motifs were immortalized by Brahms in the *Zigeunerlieder*, she still remembered the composer. She was the first and only woman to graduate in the history of art in the era of Franz Wickhoff and Alois Riegl who guided the interest of their students to formerly neglected fields. Like her future husband, Hans Tietze (1880-1954), she thus pioneered the study of baroque art and clarified the history of Austrian eighteenth-century sculpture in many articles and books. Like him she also became a champion of the art of her generation, the work of Oskar Kokoschka and Georg Ehrlich. She collaborated with Hans Tietze in the Critical Catalogue of Dürer's works and in the *Venetian Drawings* (1944), as well as in many preparatory studies for these monographs in which her unflinching visual memory enabled her to track down derivations of motifs and connexions between paintings and drawings. Her rich bibliography, recently compiled by Otto and Hilde Kurz, and published in *Essays in Honor of Hans Tietze* (published by the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*), testifies also to her status as an independent scholar, best remembered, by readers of this Journal, for her studies in Renaissance art and iconography and for her monograph on Mantegna. Her last book on *Dwarfs and Jesters in Art* and an unpublished manuscript on the *Motif of Suicide in Literature and Art* bear witness to the range of her passionate historical curiosity. Fortright and fearless in the face of adversity, she cared for truth.

[<https://gombricharchive.files.wordpress.com/2011/04/showdoc98.pdf> accessed 15.08.2020. Ed. © The Gombrich Estate]

on painting on the other hand. The majority of drawings involve a reduced scale of colour and the use of the paper much as in printmaking. There are further aspects: pen drawings have an effect similar to that of engraving or etching, chalk drawings more to lithographs, while other techniques of drawing and graphic arts have a goal of the greatest possible similitude in appearance. The essential difference between the conglomerate of qualities surrounding the art of drawing and those surrounding the graphic arts is an ethical component: the unique appearance of drawings. This also defines the status of drawings in the relationship between artists and their public. This unique status then has its own effect on artistic aspects, on the natural subjectivity of formal and thematic expression. The uniqueness in its appearance places the drawing in proximity to the art of painting. In rare cases, the drawing differs from the painting in nothing more than the use of paper, and these are referred to as paintings on paper. This apparently minimal difference is of some importance since the lesser durability of the material prevents the artist from thinking of a lasting effect and (especially in the case of studies) further encourages a more subjective form of expression than in paintings. In most instances the scale of colour is not as broad, and paper as the ground has a different function from the canvas of a painting. There is another difference which separates the drawing from both the graphic arts and painting is that drawings are not framed.

These are the normal distinctions made between drawings, reproductive engravings and paintings. The question arises whether this characteristic relation to the ground which distinguishes drawings from paintings, or the lack of a frame which even distinguishes them from reproductive printmaking are essential to the question at hand.

We might again see the work of art as an example of the eternal law of the only way in which the intellect can present itself within the material world; the painting is bound to a given form of material such as canvas or wooden panel etc., and this material imposes its law – that of the surface. (For greater detail cf. [Erica Tietze-Conrat, Dr. E. R. Jaensch 'Über die Wahrnehmung des Raumes Eine experimentell-psychologische Untersuchung nebst Anwendung auf Ästhetik und Erkenntnislehre', *Ergänzungsband 6 der Zeitschrift für Psychologie und Physiologie der Sinnesorgane* Leipzig, Verlag von J. A. Barth 1911] *Kunstgeschichtliche Anzeigen* 1912, Number 2, pp. 35-38 esp. pp. 37-38). The colours combine to one sort of imaginary illusion or another also balance one another in the surface; this flat nature recalls the canvas. What about in drawings? The paper lies bare and visible; it is not a demand of the material, the flatness is not a product of the colour harmony but the material speaks itself. The unified effect of this combination of intellect and material is dissolved and has become a parallel rather than a coagulated phenomenon. It is so natural and obvious to see that this is paper that this plays no part in the aesthetic impression of the drawing. The material only gains an artistic value as creating space or rhythm by the colour of its paper, whether it is white or coloured, and the comparative emphasis within the drawing. By the elimination of this particular

materially bound aspect from consciousness, the other more intellectual aspect is successfully heightened, and we speak of the abstraction of drawings.

I doubt that this abstraction in the art of drawing can be seen as a removal from reality as it is available in painting. These concepts should have no place in our terminology. Artistic reality presents a parallel to our imaginary reality which we receive through our senses from our surroundings. The illusions of colour and space in paintings are taken to generate a greater proximity to reality than drawings; yet, in works of art, colour follows its own rules and the spatial illusion which the artistic imagination of depth generates through colour and compositional lines bears no relation to the imaginary spatial surroundings we receive from senses of touch and sight. Paintings are dominated by colour. It alleviates the work of the imagination in understanding the work of art; colour provides the single factor in spatial illusion which supports the imagination in its experience of space. In re-experiencing the painting, our imagination is led along more fixed avenues than with drawings which lack the colour; their initially more indeterminate character becomes more intense with our participation and ripens into a more certain and personal possession. The comprehension of a drawing is a process of acquisition in which our imagination works far more freely than in the comprehension of a painting. This subjective component gives us an indication as to why drawings have been described as intimate.

Unlike sheets of the graphic arts or paintings, drawings are not clearly distinguishable as isolated. Paintings are characterized in this way by their size, format and frame. The framing – as a creation of the painting - gains a dynamic of its own which reflects back on the painting itself (stress on parallels). Just as with the element of colour, this interaction leads to a stricter concentration in the exercise of our comprehending imagination. In a drawing, it is the spectator themselves who decide about the nature of the framing. They do so entirely subjectively with all of the possible sources of mistakes which can only be eliminated when the artist is completely identified. This shadowy product of deduction never gains a repercussive effect on the drawing.

The results of these reflections: by its unique relation to the ground, the drawing has a greater intellectual component than painting (*'geistige Komponente'*) and elicits a greater subjectivity in the exercise of the imagination on the part of the spectator. The absence of framing heightens the subjectivity of comprehension. Aesthetic experience is a contained process, but due to the absence of retroactive forces, this enclosure is less insistent.

This is where we consider the relation of the typical drawing to the other branches of arts working on flat supports. The differences to the art of painting have been seen to be no more than quantitative and therefore raise the question whether there is a methodological justification in surveying of the history of the art of drawing separately.

We would like to approach this question circuitously. Aside from the more typical drawings, there are two particular types usually designated colloquially as

designs and studies. They have often been omitted (*Klinger*) from the overall consideration of drawings and classified as a second group. Two reasons might have led to this tendency. A design reveals the incomplete idea of the artist which must then go through various stages before finding its completion – in a painting for instance. This would mean that a design is not a complete work of art and belongs to a category different from other drawings standing as an end in themselves, or the paintings they prepared. One might object: an artist might often be dissatisfied with their finished painting and attempt to resolve the same problem with another. In the course of their work, an artist often recognizes that the resolution is becoming unsatisfactory, or sometimes only when it is complete on the easel or even years later. Would we demote the earliest version to a lower category of preparatory work? It encapsulates a complete artistic experience and presents as complete an art work as the second corrected painting. The design made as a drawing must be equally seen as a self contained work of art, as the first or an intermediate conception, and we should not be discouraged that the artist might soon have gone beyond it.

Studies usually include a selected part of the entire composition which are attempted with variations or based closely on the model; usually these involve the conscious isolation of an individual element, a part of the whole. This is probably correct; but the isolated element becomes a self contained work of art as soon as it meets the eye as an independent aesthetic experience. Also belonging in the category of working materials are the detailed studies from models consisting in the attention to a motif which are by contrast not taken with a specific view directly into a finished work. This also emerges from a comparison, an interpretation of discontinuous facts: art work as a study from the model – art work as a finished painting. Yet even the most meticulous study from a model with the most advanced natural illusion is in fact as removed from reality as that which is later used in the painting; it is simply that the attitude of the artist was not the same.

To summarize our observations about designs and studies – as an interpretative science of discontinuous developmental facts, the history of art experiences these designs and studies with goal of relating them to a later finished work while aesthetics sees them as art works in an equal right to the paintings which they were made to prepare.

We return to the original question of the methodological justification of studying the development of the art of drawing historically. Drawings as 'complete works unto themselves' have a fixed place beside paintings and reproductive prints, and distinguish themselves by no more than ethical or quantitative values, so as not to suggest that they should be studied as a separate developmental phenomenon (*'als Gesamtwerk'*).<sup>2</sup> They provide a vehicle of artistic ideas in the same manner as the other arts on flat supports without adjusting any of these ideas according to

<sup>2</sup> Of course their technical component lends itself to separate attention in terms of historical development.

essentially different principles. The way in which the Italian Quattrocento tended to conceive motifs individually, Michelangelo always used current types, the manner in which Raphael or Marées arranged their compositions or how Magnasco whimsically illuminated a scene for a dramatic effect – these were all qualities presenting themselves evenly in the drawings as well as the paintings or prints by these artists. Taken together, they reveal the complete image of the individual personality, the period style (*'Zeitstil'*) of the history in its totality. As far as the history of the development is concerned, designs and studies are still more closely related to the other arts on flat supports, since their characteristic values only become apparent in relation to the finished work.

In thus characterizing the value of certain types of drawings in terms of historical development, I differ from Haberditzl to a certain degree. His purpose in surveying the entire range of resolutions to formal problems in drawings had been to provide the building blocks to an as yet unrecognized image of a sequential development for such a neglected branch of research as drawings. In aesthetically recognizing certain representative modes of drawings which had previously only been regarded as preparatory, he wishes to allow for their recognition as important points in a sequence of development which might later be discerned. However, it does violence to the unified flow of development to isolate an individual sequence of questions (*'Problemreihe'*) from the entire complicated process. The image which will ultimately prevail can only be that which accommodates the entirety of individual facts.

When Pieter Lastman made a figure study of the Sacrifice of Isaac with the main group obtrusively large, but – typically it would appear - included it in the painting as nothing more than a small piece of staffage, he has satisfied our aesthetic requirements for monumentality. For our historical judgment of the artist we cannot apply this study, but must rather consider the integration of the individual into the surroundings as we find it in his finished paintings. Indeed, this monumental study will serve as evidence of an intensification of the peculiar essentially contrarian character of the artist. After conceiving this group with such an isolated monumentality, one can see how strong his tendency was to blend it into the surroundings. The historical personality of an artist is primarily deduced from the satisfied unity of will and action in their completed works. It might happen even frequently that such a study or design was not actually implemented by the artist in their finished work, but inspired a contemporary or later colleague to further original ideas. In its quality as an aesthetic phenomenon itself, by which such a study and design continues to have its effect it demonstrates the aesthetic value which runs parallel to the historical value. When historians then elevate the importance of an artist or characterize it anew on the basis of the amount of influence emanating from the individual work and its aesthetic accomplishment – including atypical productions, then this presents a complicated process to be viewed separately from the historical significance of the artist which had been our original point of departure.

We should enumerate the various artistically expressive qualities as they distinguish themselves in degrees from those of the branches of art using flat surfaces.

The swelling and tapering of a line, the heaviness of its application, its dry or soft tone are all values also manipulated by print makers. For formal reasons, drawings are alone in further including the immediate personal effect since there is no intervention by a form cutter or a technical process, but it also includes the ethical aspect since the drawing is based on the direct contact of the hand of the artist on the paper with the instrument directly between their fingers and we contemplate with reverence and a thrill.

In drawings, the relation to the ground, the paper, is a different one than in print making. This lies in the nature of the framing elements of prints, a linear frame or the plate marks in woodcuts, engravings and etchings and clearly indicated in lithographs by the planimetric central space. One could randomly choose a print, such as the Adoration of the Magi from the Life of the Virgin by Dürer and study its relation to the ground and particularly how the ground generates a sense of space. The vertical and horizontal lines of the architecture (tower, piers of the arches, window frames - straw roof and that of the stables - brickwork) all join to form a tight net which is further intensified by the parallels of the frame. Four main parallel diagonals run between these (the broken stone balustrade in the right foreground, that from the kneeling Magus to Joseph, the quiver and neck of horse) to characterize the four receding planes in depth. This sequence is surmounted by the branch rafters below the straw roof. Optic aids leading into the depth can also be seen in the brickwork, the steps, etc. The resulting space is a product of these guiding lines. The spatial segment is completely fixed. In following these lines, our eye is always forcefully led by the framing devices into the central design, heightening the increasing impression of a spatial experience precisely delineated in breadth and depth.

If we compare this to an unframed drawing, as most of them are, and especially the studies,<sup>3</sup> I choose the pen drawing of a street scene by Stefano della Bella discussed in the essay by Haberditzl (p. 90), first we must overcome the confusing impression of the reproduction and attempt to reconstruct the effect of the original. The grey page of the reproduction provides such a contrast to the sheet as to appear regressively like such a framing device. To avoid such flaws, some publications of drawings (such as those from the Uffizi) use the method of tipping in separate reproductions and attach them only at the top centre. Our average reproductions are not produced with such care. The plates published in Frankfurt

<sup>3</sup> In framed drawings the reflexive effect of the frame into the drawing is weaker than is the case with prints. This very subtle and graded difference is due to the fact that we experience the impressed frame from the printmaking technique as it is applied from without as a far stronger limit to the image or as a more strongly emphasized section on the sheet of paper, while the drawing has more of a character of a border emerging from the paper, more like a growth similar to the other lines of the image.

are surrounded by a smooth white strip of approximately a half-centimetre as part of the photographic plate and providing a transition to the rough paper of the mount; the reproduction in the text of the Dürer monograph by Heinrich Wölfflin are all distinguished from the page with a distinct soft interior and a more intense outer black framing line made not by Dürer but by the Bruckmann publishers.

The drawing by Stefano della Bella includes two equipages passing one another; the one is moving toward the left foreground and other toward the right rear, and approached by a two wheeled carriage. The horses leading toward the left are not as stalwart in their direction and their driver seems also to be turned toward the centre of the image – creating the impression that the carriage is not being pulled to the left; this shift toward the middle is further supported by three additional figures guiding the eye toward the centre of the image in three carefully distinguished degrees of intensity. We are shown two women from behind, walking toward the right and carrying baskets on their heads. This section of the drawings includes approximately three parallel diagonals; the lines of movement toward the left and the right strike a nearly complete balance and is emphasized by the two boys running toward one another in the foreground. Only the women in the right distance create a movement toward the edge of the image without a parallel and encourage our imagination to continue. If we have not been repulsed by the contrasting frame of the reproduction, we can extend this motion until the compelling impulse dies out at a certain distance (generated by the relative intensity of the impulse and its reconstruction). Such a point is simpler to discern in the *Conversion of Saul* by Jacopo Palma Giovane (p. 87) since the edge of the sheet does not truncate the image as closely as in the *Street Scene* by Stefano della Bella. Our question: what is the significance of the ground which has been left clearly to see as the untreated paper with no illusion of a spatial ambient? The ground will afford a pliant medium for these motions, allowing the movements to continue unimpeded and prolong the bodily movements to a clear extent. The ground is not a neutral paper bearing abstract traces of an action; it is attracted to this action in terms of a resonance of its spatial aspects which can urge the direct re-experience upon the viewer.

Between the curving lines, the ground swells like a muscle, between the terrain lines it sinks like a valley in between, and depending on the motor innervation, the ground into which the directional lines penetrate resumes their motions and leads the figures in a relevant pace. The ground, the paper is a space creating factor even if it is only a factor of resonance. Yet it is precisely as such that it is not bonded to any single isolated pictorial component, its insistent content is not the secure property of a fixed spatial aperture by the reflective effect of the frame. This is how the narrative content – identical to that which might also be presented in painting or another branch of the arts - is expressed simply and unmediated within a drawing, and might appear isolated or unaffiliated.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> To borrow and adapt a sentence from Haberditzl (p. 103).

And thus we can recognize the ground as a vibrant spatiality governed by the linearity of movements and direction, at some times protruding then receding, but all the while intangible in its quivering vivacity. We arrive at this impression from the inerring illusionist linearity which compels our motoric re-experience. These lines are still significant in another way; it is also situated within the salubrious game of goading and resolution which characterizes the clean lines which turn a sheet into an 'ornamental' image. The forms bordered by lines no longer possess resonance; their rhythmic choir arises as an autonomous aesthetic factor from the organization of the surface. We also confront this aesthetic factor in prints; again it is the frame which conditions the graded difference, in this case exclusively an impairment for the drawing, with no derivative consequences to provide mitigation (*'ein Aequivalent'*). By the lack of a framing device reduces the clear ornamental effect of the lines which then only faintly stress the internal contours of the surface patterns; it lacks the clear outer contour which would play together with the frame. The subjective instability of the frame as we deduce it [from a drawing] does not allow such an ornamental image on a surface to sufficiently converge with the necessary force. There are cases in which the deduced frame aligns with the edge of the sheet, lending it the reflexive force which a frame itself would implement – this leads to the judgment: how well this drawing is composed on the sheet.

February 1914

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