

'Witness' Reportage and documentary
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Thoughts from the chair, Gary Embury

Drawing is currently undergoing a renaissance in the disciplines of fine art, applied art, graphic design and illustration. There appears to be a drawing zeitgeist taking place in art schools and evidence of a particular interest in documentary drawing and reportage.

More recently the phenomenon, known as 'On the spot' sketching has received much attention particularly through Gabriel Campanario and the 'Urban Sketchers' movement. Many of these artists draw everyday scenes in cafés, people on the subway, architecture and cityscapes. They publish their work online through blogs and social media. Conferences and symposia are held internationally with keynote speakers and master classes, and thousands of artists in many countries now participate in drawing. This communal, global participatory activity probably wouldn't have happened without the development of social networks and online activity.

The drawing of everyday scenes and situations in an objective way is a very different discipline to the much more dynamic and proactive activity of drawn visual journalism, which aligns itself more closely to photojournalism and the visual essay. Illustrators such as Olivier Kugler in effect work as journalists, interviewing, sketching and photographing their subjects, often compositing and interpreting the visual, aural and textual material in a layered interpretive way. Much of the narrative and commentary finds its way to the published artwork through annotated notes and transcribed conversations.

In the preface to '*The Decisive Moment*' - Cartier-Bresson's 1952 book of 126 photographs - Bresson reflects on the 'fractions of a second of the significance of an event.' Interestingly the original title of the book, '*Images à la Sauvette*' translated into English literally means 'images on the run'. The *Indecisive* moment may in many ways describe more accurately the practice of reportage drawing, which often captures minutes or hours rather than seconds. However, a purely visual descriptive approach to drawn reportage may not be enough to expose underlying issues inherent in subjects or locations. Work not made necessarily on the spot may be more effective at showing and exposing underlying social and moral issues. Drawn Reportage, Documentary illustration, reportorial drawing or visual journalism all describe the practice of the 'artist as reporter', author, or subject as storyteller and doesn't just rely on direct 'on the spot' observational drawing.

Drawn reportage and documentary illustration is increasingly relevant today especially when one considers the rise and ubiquity of citizen journalism. Practitioners are making self-initiated work, authorially, self publishing or proactively finding a commercial context for their work.

There has in recent years been a notable rise in publicity on and offline concerning drawing and reportorial projects. However, Reportage artists need to take advantage of the opportunities digital media can offer by considering new directions in the way work is produced, recorded and distributed. Inspiration can be taken from the way in which photojournalists and documentary filmmakers are using the 'Meta Image' creating multiplatform projects to tell their stories and reach new audiences.

Is this the beginning of a new era of drawn visual journalism, or, considering the ubiquity of mobile phones and cameras, just an offshoot or parallel strand of citizen journalism, and if so, what are our responsibilities as producers and consumers of this material?

Gary Embury
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