

## **What is a museum? Drawing as online learning strategy for international students**

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### **Keywords**

China, experiential learning, heritage, interpretation, memory, objects, pedagogy, teaching

### **Abstract**

*This article recounts the experience of devising and remotely delivering a multi-disciplinary drawing-based online summer course for Chinese students. This pivoted around the question: ‘what is a museum?’ Students were invited to give an initial drawn response prior to the first session. The resulting images provided the basis for whole-group discussion followed by further creative tasks. Activities included designing a museum logo, drawing a representation of an object of special personal significance and writing an interpretative text label. The chosen artefacts were then accessioned into a virtual museum in order to realize the promise of the online course, entitled ‘Museum Makers: Objects, Collections and Display’. This pedagogical endeavour was intended to use drawing to actively engage learners such that they were able to define museums, recognize the value of objects, understand what makes a collection and appreciate the principles of interpretation. Illustrative examples of student work are reproduced alongside an account of the production process and the participants’ views on the effectiveness of drawing as a learning strategy. The paper reflects on the challenges and opportunities of implementing drawing in a non-art context before going on to outline the operationalization and outcomes of the initiative, leading to a series of transferable findings and conclusions.*

### **Introduction**

Drawing’s role in the learning process has long been extolled. A recent instance is the position paper published in this journal written by a UK-based academic who is ‘flying faculty and lecturer’ at a university in England’s West Midlands and its partner institution in Wuhan, China (Masi 2023). The author’s excellent literature review of ‘drawing for learning’ promotes drawing beyond the domain of art and design by seeking to inspire educators in other disciplines to test the application of drawing in their practice (Masi 2021: 214–15). In this article I endeavour to do just that by recounting the experience of devising and remotely delivering a drawing-based online summer course for Chinese students. This opportunity arose thanks to a longstanding involvement in a suite of Humanities courses taught as part of a joint institute involving my home university in the East Midlands and Communication University of China in Beijing. The following paper starts with reflections on the challenges of implementing drawing in a non-art context before going on to outline the operationalization and outcomes of the initiative, leading to a series of transferable findings and conclusions.

### **Drawbridges**

Compelling someone to draw and share their efforts puts most people on the defensive. A typical response is to raise the sort of ‘drawbridge’ erected by Gareth Evans: ‘I cannot draw. Which is to say, I cannot “draw” out into communal light the interior life of a subject through the medium of a line or lines not involving words’ (2017: 40). Drawing is especially problematic for young adults given that they have recently undergone ‘a profound transformation’ in their imaginative lives. Vygotsky (2004: 35–36) illustrates this by considering changing attitudes towards drawing. Only a supposedly talented few adults practise this art while the rest, critical of their immature earlier efforts, disavow their

'childish play' on the grounds that they 'can't draw' (Dewey 1916: 277; Ingold 2011: 177). These beliefs are compounded by the dominance of spoken and written language, with the result that only 'a tiny minority' of older children and adults continue expressing themselves graphically while the majority 'abjure non-verbal symbol systems' (Broudy 1991: 128; Winner and Gardner 1981: 30).

This has implications when it comes to drawing for learning. Effective education entails students having a clear understanding and acceptance of any learning activity's purpose and actively cooperating in its establishment (Dewey 1963: 67). This is not straightforward, however, because each participant will have preconceptions 'about how people learn' (Kolb 2015: 281). Encountering an unfamiliar or questionable approach is likely to be met with resistance and even rejection. Unsurprisingly, educators deploying drawing have sometimes found it to be a deterrent, with a percentage of learners expressing a reluctance or refusal to participate (Kearney and Hyle 2004: 377; Xiao and Carless 2013: 324). It is essential, therefore, that non-artists are reassured that drawing 'is not a test of artistic ability [...] [and] that there is no right or wrong method of proceeding' (Hammer 1968: 367). Consequently, every effort is acceptable and of value (Rose 2016: 317; Brooks 2009: 28). This reassurance needs to be factored into the learning activity with particular thought given as to when the drawing takes place and how it is framed. Structure, dealing with resistance to drawing, and timing are thus crucial issues that need to be taken into consideration when it comes to participant produced images (Kearney and Hyle 2004: 379). The rationale for this is that drawing 'is intellectual, if intellectual at all, not in its fixed inner structure, but in its function – in its power to start and direct significant inquiry and reflection' (Dewey 1910: 39). When it comes to the results, the response should not be a 'drill' or of correcting 'mistakes' as this would 'likely to be fatal to reflective power' (1910: 52).

Allaying fears and coaxing learners into lowering their 'drawbridges' makes it possible to tap drawing's potential for innovation and inclusivity. Its accessibility and universality propagandized by Ruskin (1857: 4) in the nineteenth century has been confirmed by subsequent research. Thus, the capacity for drawing has been shown in toddlers at the 'scribbling stage' and extends to adults of every physical and mental ability including individuals who are blind or partially sighted (Alhassan and Osei 2020; Longobardi et al. 2015; Szubielska 2018). Furthermore, because drawing is 'both nonverbal and embodied' (Oliver et al. 2019: 177), it opens up the possibility of suggesting novel ways of being. It also empowers investigators who want to think 'outside the box' while at the same time allowing voices to be heard that might have remained silent had other, more traditional methods been adopted (Grazziotin-Soares and Ardenghi 2022: 2, 6).

Working with drawings positions participants at the centre of an 'interpretive process' (Mitchell 2011: 11). This is a hallmark of what might be termed constructivism or active learning. This takes various forms but with common traits (Imaz 2021: 1022). These tend to relate to interdisciplinarity and involve encouraging students to literally draw on their prior experiences and existing knowledge to conduct enquiries, which they share and compare with those of other participants. This is learning as joint venture premised on reciprocation and collaboration. It is, therefore, an erratic process of co-creation stemming from a series of active choices. This endeavour is set out in *An Active Student Participation Companion* (2019), an open-source publication which the authors have left deliberately incomplete and with spaces for annotation: '[w]rite, notate, draw a map, reflect, cross-out, add-on, scribble in all the spaces left open! Build this into your own guide' (Barrineau et al. 2019: 3).

A drawing exercise in class turns this theory into practice and brings with it the promise of active engagement. This is because drawings are catalysts as well as tools for meaning-making and its mediation (Kuzle and Glasnović Gracin 2021: 751). This entails overcoming the reservations expressed earlier by Gareth Evans, namely bringing into 'communal light the interior life' that gave rise to a drawing. Vygotsky's studies on the drawing processes of children affirm that learning occurs when participants pool their knowledge leading to the construction of expertise, the sharing of which

renders it meaningful (Brooks 2009: 10). This type of activity also increases the likelihood of the learning event itself becoming a consequential and memorable encounter or, as Dewey puts it, ‘an experience [...] that [...] stands out as an enduring memorial’ (1980: 36).

Experiential education brings with it the potential for ‘transformative learning’, something that drawing is peculiarly well equipped to provide, thanks to illustrations’ capacity for ‘provocation’ (Male 2019: 9–10). That word – provocation – has special significance in Freeman Tilden’s *Interpreting Our Heritage* (1957). He identified it as the ‘chief aim of interpretation’ (Tilden 2007: 59). This activity, like teaching, ‘is an art’ (2007: 53). It is, moreover, ‘a kind of education’ (2007: 152) but not in the sense of ‘direct and detailed instruction’ (2007: 63). Instead, the purpose of interpretation is to turn a passive recipient into ‘a fellow discoverer’, stimulating them to broaden their ‘horizon of interests and knowledge, and to gain an understanding of the greater truths that lie behind any statements of fact’ (2007: 59, 63–64). Tilden was writing in the context of natural and cultural heritage, and he had in mind direct contact with landscapes or objects. He wanted people to appreciate such things with their mind’s eye, alert to qualities beyond the visible: ‘[i]nterpretation, whether in the National Park System or in any other place where it is offered, promotes that mindsight’ (2007: 165).

## **Operationalization**

The place most closely associated with interpretation is the museum. And it is this phenomenon that is the focus of the educational activity addressed in this paper. It was delivered in the summer of 2022 and took place online due to ongoing restrictions imposed in the wake of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic. The host was the Faculty of International Media (ICUC), which forms part of Communication University of China, a top-ranking Project 211 institution physically based in Beijing in the People’s Republic of China (Shu et al. 2021). The course, which was open to undergraduate and postgraduate students from any discipline, was advertised as follows:

### Museum Makers: Objects, Collections and Display

The purpose of these workshops is to introduce students to collecting, collections, and museums. Participants will be presented with a series of questions or issues and asked to draw or write responses which will then be shared and discussed during five two-hour workshops. This approach will ensure the contribution and active engagement of all participants. By the end, everyone will be able to define museums, recognise the value of objects, understand what makes a collection, and appreciate the principles of interpretation.

Prior to the first session, participants were asked to complete a task inspired by the following remark: ‘[i]f a person comes suddenly into your room and calls out “Paper”, various alternatives are possible’ (Dewey 1910: 116). In this case, the word called out was ‘museum’ and the means of capturing the ‘various alternatives’ was through drawing. Students were encouraged to respond to the call as spontaneously as possible, the goal being to try and distil their ‘automatic thoughts’. This phrase, which is reminiscent of Tilden’s term ‘mindsight’, is used to refer to the first thing one thinks of when presented with an item of information (Turkington et al. 2009: 2). Automatic thoughts influence our ‘attitudes about the self, others, and the future’ (Beck 2019: 17–18) and, as such, are central to cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT). This link with psychotherapy is instructive because the act of drawing has become one of the most extensively used therapeutic and diagnostic methods in clinical psychology, psychiatry and art therapy (Lin et al. 2020). One explanation for this enduring prevalence is because drawings afford us a glimpse of our ‘inner worlds’ (Hammer 1958: 6; Hogan 2016: 35). Perhaps the most common and well-established way of achieving this is the House–Tree–Person (HTP) test, with drawn responses to each of these things projecting a person’s sense of family, environment and self (Yu et al. 2016).

This procedure was repurposed as a means of encouraging individuals to visualize their 'automatic thoughts' triggered by the question: 'what is a museum?' Each resulting picture became available for description, reflection, analysis, discussion and comparison. The premise of this is that, unlike written or spoken accounts, visual responses rely on a different syntax to establish 'a baseline for building a common language' which can, in turn, be used as 'a communication tool that aids understanding' (Barrineau et al. 2019: 168). This is particularly advantageous to the education exercise described here because the course in question was led by a British lecturer for the benefit of Chinese students for whom English is a foreign language. Getting them to draw from their own experience was part of an effort to scope out a shared means of exchange that took into consideration linguistic and cultural differences.

'Visual problem-solving techniques' play an especially valuable role in the development of 'a personal voice' (Clarke cited in Male 2019: 13). That idiosyncratic pronouncement is articulated by the drawer as he or she interprets their own image for the benefit of someone else. This reminds us of Tilden's characterization of interpretation as a joint process of discovery; a sharing of interests and knowledge that moves beyond mere facts to get at 'greater truths'. The drawings were to serve as the 'entry point' (Mitchell 2011). Translating them 'into the means by which they may be realized' required 'additional interpretation' (Dewey 1963: 70; Kearney and Hyle 2004: 376). This is why scholars working with participant-produced images stress the need for some kind of complementary commentary to develop and refine participants' knowledge and skills (Kolb 2015: 281; Kostenius 2011: 512).

One way of achieving this is through making use of social media (Oliver et al. 2019: 173). Thus, students were to draw their 'what is a museum?' responses and then upload them to WeChat, China's most popular super-app, which is amenable to the construction of online communities of practice among teaching practitioners, an increasing number of whom are putting it to a range of educational purposes (Burch and Bunnag 2023). Operating in this vein, it was decided to set up a bespoke WeChat group for pre- and post-workshop sharing of information and work. The workshops themselves were held over VooV (Tencent) Meeting, which is part of the same company responsible for WeChat. These sessions were the first time that the students would see the sketches of other participants. Prior to class, the drawings were collated into a PowerPoint, the first slide of which featured numbered thumbnail images of each sketch. A student was invited to start by talking about their picture, which was shown full screen. When they had finished, the screen reverted to the thumbnails and the person who had just spoken was asked to select another picture that appealed to them. Its creator then explicated their design and repeated the hand-on until all images had been covered. This ad hoc ordering obliged everyone's attention so that they knew which images had already been talked about. Furthermore, disrupting the numbered sequence was a conscious homage to the 'choose your own adventure' (CYOA) stories that were extremely popular in the 1980s and 1990s. These 'game books' feature multiple scenarios, inviting the reader to make a series of choices before skipping to the page numbers indicated. Consequently, each novel contains a multitude of stories with different endings. This was repurposed as the organizing principle for all the drawing exercise PowerPoints. Facilitating student choice was in keeping with the engagement ethos of the workshops, all of which were informed by an appreciation of the 'educational reward in taking some control and ownership of content' (Mundy and Consoli 2013: 222).

The 'what is a museum?' brief led to other creative tasks prior to each workshop. For example, students were introduced to the International Council of Museums (ICOM) and shown its changing logos dating back to 1946. This provided the prelude for a fresh graphic exercise, namely an invitation to come up with a logo to accompany their museum drawing. Another assignment was prompted by Kolb's characterization of learning as a 'process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience' (2015: 49). With this in mind, students were to identify one object in their personal possession that held extra special significance. This became the subject of another

drawing that would be shared and used as the basis for a spoken explanation of their choice of artefact. This was intended as a means of introducing interpretation, defined as 'a mission-based approach to communication aimed at provoking in audiences the discovery of personal meaning and the forging of personal connections with things, places, people, and concepts' (Ham 2013: 8). The medium selected for achieving this was the traditional text label of the kind seen on gallery walls. Despite all manner of changes and developments, this interpretative device remains of 'absolute and fundamental importance' to museums (Black 2005: 281).

The culmination of the course sought to realize the promise of the 'Museum Makers' title. Drawing on their refashioned ICOM logos as well as considering the form and function of museums, the group was asked to collaborate to come up with a suitable joint name and logo for an imaginary institution that might house a collection consisting of their precious objects. It was hoped that conceiving a personally meaningful object in the rarefied environment of a museum would give each owner recourse to those 'greater truths' spoken of by Tilden while also achieving the 'transformation of experience' that Kolb rightly sees as constituting the lifeblood of learning.

## Findings

The course attracted one male and fifteen female students. Five were undergraduates while the rest were enrolled on taught MA programmes. Their majors were journalism (seven students), communication (five) and advertising (two). This reflected the main subjects for which CUC is renowned. In addition, two students were at the mid-point of a two-year MA in museum and heritage development. This is one of three joint MA programmes delivered as a partnership between ICUC and Nottingham Trent University in the United Kingdom (Burch et al. 2019).

Every one of the sixteen participants engaged enthusiastically in the various activities. The drawing tasks and discussion succeeded in meeting the key objective of ensuring that all students actively contributed to every workshop. The overview slides of the 'what is a museum?' task plus the ICOM logo and object drawings are reproduced below (see Figures 1–3). Each contribution is 'bursting with indefinite possibilities of which the construction actually drawn was merely one' (Merleau-Ponty 2002: 682). Museums are at once winged storehouses, open books and temporal bridges. Every response evinces individuality and creativity. As such, the drawings fulfilled their principal function of prompting debate and, because no two drawings were the same, offering unique insights. They served as the means of delivering key curricula. This can be demonstrated by a closer look at drawings 8 and 12 of Figure 1 (see Figure 4). They encapsulate changing attitudes towards museums and provide a visual complement to mutable written definitions. Thus, in the image to the left of Figure 4 it is the collection that takes centre stage. The image to the right, in contrast, is all about people, with artefacts omitted. This divergence was highlighted. The following definitions were then shared:

A museum is an institution which collects, documents, prepares, exhibits and interprets material evidence and associated information for the public benefit.

Museums enable people to explore collections for inspiration, learning and enjoyment. They are institutions that collect, safeguard and make accessible artefacts and specimens, which they hold in trust for society.

A comparison of the two was made before the texts were revealed to be the former and current definitions used by the UK's Museums Association. The altered priorities suggested by this rewording are indicative of a discernible 'shift towards a more visitor-oriented role' for museums (Mason et al. 2018: 19). Conjoining the students' drawings allowed them to appreciate that, together, they had succeeded in identifying fundamental aspects of the museum – and that these intuitions are of

relevance to both museology and professional practice. Thus, looking again at the left-hand side drawing of Figure 4, one can notice that it visualizes the careful balance that all museums need to strike when it comes to access and preservation. The latter is marked by the frames around the paintings and the rope barrier which enforce physical restrictions while allowing visual consumption. In the right-hand side image, the museum serves as a communicative 'bridge' between past and present. The accompanying text advances the idea of the museum as 'a process of talking'. Communication is, of course, inherent to the other image. But here, it is the artworks that are 'speaking' through the medium of the text labels that are intimated in the rectangular shapes beneath each picture. It thus became possible to use these and other student drawings to introduce the written interpretive task. The label writing exercise was not mentioned until after the students had singled out a possession of special significance. Aside from their functional value, these items tended to be tokens of love, often acquired at pivotal junctures in life (e.g. reaching adulthood, starting university). Some things were broken or had outlived their functional use – as with old-fashioned cameras bequeathed from fathers to daughters (see 3 and 13 of Figure 3). Yet they were kept because of what they symbolized. A common denominator among these artefacts was the way they linked the owner with friends and relatives. This gave tangible insight into the nature of collective memory as set out by the French sociologist, Maurice Halbwachs (1877–1945). He famously stated that 'it is individuals as group members who remember' (Halbwachs 1980: 48). Drawing on his own experience, Halbwachs realized that memories:

are recalled to me externally, and the groups of which I am a part at any time give me the means to reconstruct them, upon condition, to be sure, that I turn toward them and adopt, at least for the moment, their way of thinking.

This is exactly what happened in class. Individuals shared a recollection by referring to other members of their family or friendship groups. They externalized that memory through their chosen object. This physical evidence was reconstructed to match the novel thoughts brought about by being incorporated into a new group made up of the members of the 'Museum Makers' workshops. This educational experience has added another layer of memory, enhancing still further the meaningfulness of the object. Drawing these things revealed so much more about the seeing eye of the creator than a documentary photograph (Edwards 2013: chapter 12; Hockney cited in Montgomery-Whicher 2022: 72–73; Ingold 2011: 225). Indeed, Treib argues that drawing and photography are 'inherently different' (2008: ix). One reason is because the act of drawing is an immersive, gestural and markedly personal act (Montgomery-Whicher 2022: 98). This can be understood by comparing a handwritten letter with a typed e-mail. The former imbues the message with the 'human touch' (Burch 2020: 9).

The object lesson made it possible to divulge deeply emotive feelings and intimate issues. It is quite an achievement to have contrived a situation in which a student was prepared to talk openly about an innermost story of loss and grief and to share it with strangers via a remote video connection. This was the case with the drawing numbered 9 in Figure 3 (see also Figure 5). A used ticket led to a discussion of life and death given that the train journey it facilitated involved travelling to the funeral of a beloved relative. This revealed the powerful potential of all objects, including mere 'ephemera', a word that was introduced to the students in relation to the train ticket. The humble piece of paper had a short-term practical function but an enduring symbolic value. This bears a remarkable similarity to John Berger's account of discovering an old travel document while sketching a deceased Russian writer: 'I glued the railway ticket to the drawn portrait. Andrei Platonov thus seemed to be present' (2011: 153–56).

The ticket and other objects opened the way for an understanding of interpretation as well as an appreciation of the form and function of text in museums. Figure 5 is a clear demonstration that 'exhibit labels tell very short stories' that can be of universal relevance and which, at their best, actively

engage visitors by encouraging them to 'look back and forth between the label and the image' (Serrell 2015: 22–23). It has been argued that the optimum museum label is so compelling that it induces visitors 'to read the story out loud to family members or companions' (Ramberg et al. 2002: 307). Particularly impressive or moving stories are capable of becoming 'an essential part of us'; and that part equates to 'the story's descendant or offspring' (Berger 2011: 84). There would seem to be a high likelihood of this happening in the case of Figure 5 given the nature of the object and the universality of the story.

The overarching aim of all these activities was to draw on experiences and transform them into learning. The hope was that the workshops themselves would be memorable. Confirmation of this came from the name chosen by the students for their virtual collection: 'Memory Museum' (Figure 6). This was such a pleasing choice because it implies that the workshops had attained Dewey's goal of 'experience [...] as an enduring memorial' (1980: 36). A further intimation of this came when one student lauded the workshops for being a 'fresh experience to learn the knowledge by drawing [in] this special but interesting way', and that this had resulted in something 'unforgettable'. Aiding this was the decision to bring the workshops to a close by accessioning the students' objects into their self-styled 'Memory Museum'. This resonated particularly strongly with one cohort member:

One thing that I found very surprising was the coherence of the course. When we were writing about our own objects, we didn't think that the next session would be for us to put our objects in a museum, which I found very interesting. There was also the drawing, designing the logo and designing the museum, all of which provoked my thinking and exercised my skills from different angles.

This remark – like the 'unforgettable' comment cited above – was made in an anonymous feedback form distributed at the end of the course. This elicited thirteen responses. In one, the drawing tasks were praised as they 'make me think actively and convey my thoughts freely'. Another wrote:

The way of drawing really impressed me. It enlightened my original thinking to the museum. Sometimes this kind of thinking is an instinct, but it can express the clearest idea of people. I have gradually realized that maybe sometimes drawing is more powerful than the words.

Such feedback suggests that the goal of using drawing to empower the students had been met: '[i]t gives us enough time to think independently and focus on the particular aspect before we get information from [the] professor'. Similarly, eschewing 'traditional hierarchical' structures in favour of 'group discussion [and] improvisation' was welcomed ('I really love this').

A quality that appears repeatedly in the feedback is 'atmosphere'. One student came to class fearful of a 'very academic' tenor and was therefore understandably glad to find it was 'very relaxed and active'. Another said that they 'really like[d] the atmosphere of discussion'. A third wrote: 'I sometimes think of things that seem nonsensical, but I enjoyed the process that I was able to interact with people in the class like friends, and [the teacher] gave serious comments to each of the students'. It seems therefore that the workshops struck the right balance between instruction and creativity ('[i]t's guiding and it's engaging').

The inclusive nature of the dialogue was commended, as was the sense of interaction and engagement: 'I like the way students share their opinions and stories in class, it makes me feel very involved, and [the teacher] doesn't simply output his ideas, but leads us to think about them, which I appreciate a lot'. The 'sharing [of] ideas and getting to know classmates' led to a pooling of knowledge as well as an enhanced sense of camaraderie. Combining resources was praised: 'everyone gives their own ideas

and understands the project better', with the 'team cooperation' resulting in 'a better summary'. Inclusivity was a definite plus: '[t]he tutor paid attention to every student, and did not ignore anyone'. The relaxed ambience and chance to contribute while listening to fellow students rather than just the teacher led one student to conclude that he or she has 'gained a deeper understanding of museums'. This indicates that the approach advocated here is not antithetical to in-depth comprehension. That said, however, this needs to be weighed against some of the other feedback responses, especially those suggesting a degree of frustration about not 'getting a specific answer directly' with one student wishing to receive 'more basic knowledge about the museum itself'. This is understandable given that the pedagogical approach contrasted to the sort of teacher-centred learning familiar to Asian learners where communication flows from an authoritative leader to passive students (Burch et al. 2019: 288). And, finally, it needs to be noted that three of the sixteen students did not give feedback, indicating that they were neutral at best or, more likely, did not have a favourable view but were reluctant to say so.

## Discussion

This paper has sought to contribute to an understanding of, and appreciation for, 'visual methodologies' in teaching (Rose 2016). The student drawings suggest that Kolb is correct to say that we all enter 'every learning situation with more or less articulate ideas about the topic at hand' (2015: 39). The precise nature of the particular 'learning situation' under discussion merits restating before finally considering the potential applicability of this approach. First, this was in truth a very modest course that was overtly introductory in nature. It was not credit bearing but was instead part of the host university's commitment to its students during the summer period. This was especially welcome and necessary given the ongoing restrictions of movement in the wake of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic. That fact also explains why it took place online. Students opted to take part on a cost-free, voluntary basis. Sixteen chose to do so. This small group size made it feasible to hear from all participants. This would simply not have been the case had the numbers been higher. Indeed, even at this scale, discussion had to be curtailed. It stands to reason that a larger intake would make it impossible to hear from everyone. But it was precisely a sense of inclusiveness that students appreciated most ('everyone had the opportunity to express their opinions'). How would participants react if some of them were deprived of the chance to show their drawings, explain their ideas and receive feedback as part of the group? The comparatively small group size helped to facilitate the relaxed atmosphere of the course.

This was aided further by the fact that it was not constrained by being part of a formally accredited programme leading to a qualification. Consequently, the drawings were not 'graded'. The idea of giving numerical scores seems inappropriate if one accepts a statement that John Berger makes repeatedly in his illustrated publication, *Bento's Sketchbook*: '[w]e who draw do so not only to make something observed visible to others, but also to accompany something invisible to its incalculable destination' (2011: 11). With this uncountability in mind, would students have been so effusive in their feedback if their drawings determined the outcome of their studies? Also, this was an elective course, so it is unsurprising that these self-selecting students were complimentary. Those more critical of the approach would have read the overview and opted not to participate. How would students react if this was a compulsory component of a formal qualification? Another area for consideration is the makeup of the cohort. The group was homogenous when it came to nationality (Chinese) and age (early 20s). What impact would diversity have? Furthermore, only one student was male. Does gender matter when it comes to drawing as an adult learning strategy?

Raising such questions is, of course, a natural consequence of any initiative and helps drive new research. Much of that future enquiry will feed into extant literature on the challenges and opportunities of drawing in an 'electronic age' (Treib 2008). Once-perceived concerns about the 'threat' posed by touchscreen devices have been assuaged, especially with the narrowing of 'the experiential

gap between digital and traditional drawing’ (Montgomery-Whicher 2022: xviii). So, while predicting the future is notoriously difficult, one thing seems certain: the continuance of ‘handmade images in the digital world’ (Hockney and Gayford 2020: 336). This is the firm conviction of British artist David Hockney (born 1937), an early and prolific adopter of the touchscreen ‘sketchbook’. Indeed, Hockney credits the popular appeal of his digital drawings to the fact that viewers ‘know they are done *by hand*’ (Hockney and Gayford 2020: 336, original emphasis). This was appreciated by the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV) when curating an exhibition of more than 600 examples. *David Hockney: Current* (2016–17) commenced with a suite of iPhone and iPad drawings. The earliest dating from 2009 include text messages and doodles as Hockney explored the new medium’s potential. The resultant images and annotations were displayed at NGV as wall prints and screen images. Some of the latter played looped animations of the mark-making process. Hockney has himself studied these stroke-by-stroke recordings to inform his own practice (NGV 2016). Students could do likewise. And it is important to stress that any touchscreen device can be used, not just those equipped with a stylus. Finger painting can be produced and shared on the smallest screen – even smartwatches. Introducing such digital canvases into the classroom has been shown to promote ‘peer teaching and learning’ while being convenient, efficient and effective means of creative experimentation and risk-taking (Wang 2018: 53). Funded initiatives involving the acquisition of touchscreen devices and associated drawing apps would capitalize on this, ensure inclusivity and build on the research findings of this paper.

Thus, in spite of its evident limitations, the drawing experiment documented here has proven to be both fruitful and informative. Its timing was propitious, coming as it did one month before ICOM agreed upon a new museum definition. Yet it did so only after rancorous debate and resignations that threatened to split the organization (Seymour 2022). This is a reminder that what ‘museum’ means has always been a source of oftentimes intense debate (Gurian 2006: 48). The ‘Museum Makers’ course actively engaged in this process. Whereas it took ICOM several fractious years to come up with an answer to ‘what is a museum?’, a group of sixteen Chinese university students agreed on the following in less than a week:

A museum is a bridge which connects the past with the present. Each museum object passes a specific piece of history to visitors. It is a key to open parallel space. Compared to books, people can gain a greater and deeper knowledge and experience from a museum. It is like a tangible archive of the wisdom of humanity and the wonder of nature. Making people learn about the meaning of civilization is the most important duty of a museum.

The stress here on objects reflects the emphasis placed on material culture. With more time it might have been possible to consider ‘how the practice of drawing may embody intangible culture’ (Ruiz 2017: 253). Other fields of enquiry might similarly be addressed. For instance, this paper’s focus on museums complements pedagogical studies of drawing in ‘higher education health sciences courses’ as well as many other disciplines (Grazziotin-Soares and Ardenghi 2022: 2). Being mindful of different academic contexts is crucial because museums need to go ‘beyond disciplinary boundaries’ in the continual pursuit of ‘other types of knowledge’ (Cameron and Mengler 2009: 213, 215). A case in point is the role played by drawings in research into organizational development and change (Kearney and Hyle 2004). For instance, through drawing it becomes possible to determine the ‘emotional classroom climate’ and use this to factor-in children’s own needs and aspirations when it comes to the form and function of schools (Kostenius 2011; Kuzle and Glasnović Gracin 2021; Kuzle 2021). This is an illustrative confirmation that ‘transformative arts integration’ is an effective way of recognizing and expressing emotions as well as empathizing with others (Oliver et al. 2019: 167, 177). In other words, evidence-based research can and should be deployed to champion actual change.

This can surely be utilized by museums. Inviting any museum’s stakeholders to draw pictures of ‘their’ institution would disclose a diversity of meanings and associations. This would quickly reveal that every

single museum is in fact a plurality. This could be used to draw out particular nuances and insights. Thus, such a drawing approach could establish an intergenerational record through a comparison of views on museums by people of different ages (Grazziotin-Soares and Ardenghi 2022). This could be repeated using other variables such as nationality, gender, class or educational level. What part, if any, did drawing play in helping ICOM's members articulate and share what 'museum' means to them? Visual responses alone would not have been enough to avoid disagreement or reach consensus, but they may well have sped up the process and brought together different points of view along the way towards agreeing on a new definition. This is essential given long-standing concerns that the museum concept is being 'pulled in [...] incompatible directions' (Stallabrass 2013: 43).

Be that as it may, experimenting with educational methods by attempting something as relatively unconventional as drawing is a reminder to educators of the need to continually question habitual behaviour and always be on the lookout for novel ways of augmenting 'powers of observation' (Dewey 1963: 75). And no other technique can rival drawing when it comes to honing that power (Ingold 2011: 179). That, in the final analysis, is why this article advocates drawing as a strategy for responding to the perennial question: 'what is a museum?'

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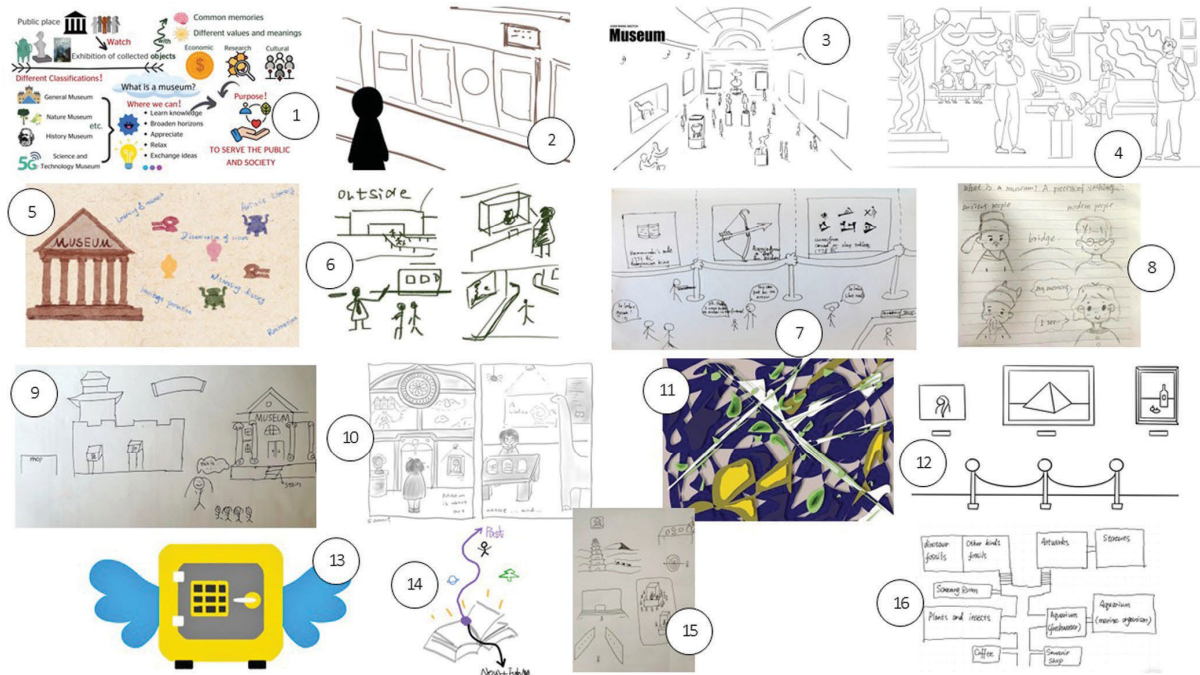


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Figure 2: Various. (2022). ICOM logo proposals. © Dong Ningxi, Fang Yiyuan, Feng Pingping, Li Yumeng, Sun Mengyao, Wang Juan, Wang Jiwen, Wang Nannan, Ying Yiren, Yuan Jianan, Zhang Keying, Zhang Yawen, Zhang Menglei, Zhang Xiyun, Zhang Yuxin, Zhang Rusen. (Compilation by Stuart Burch).



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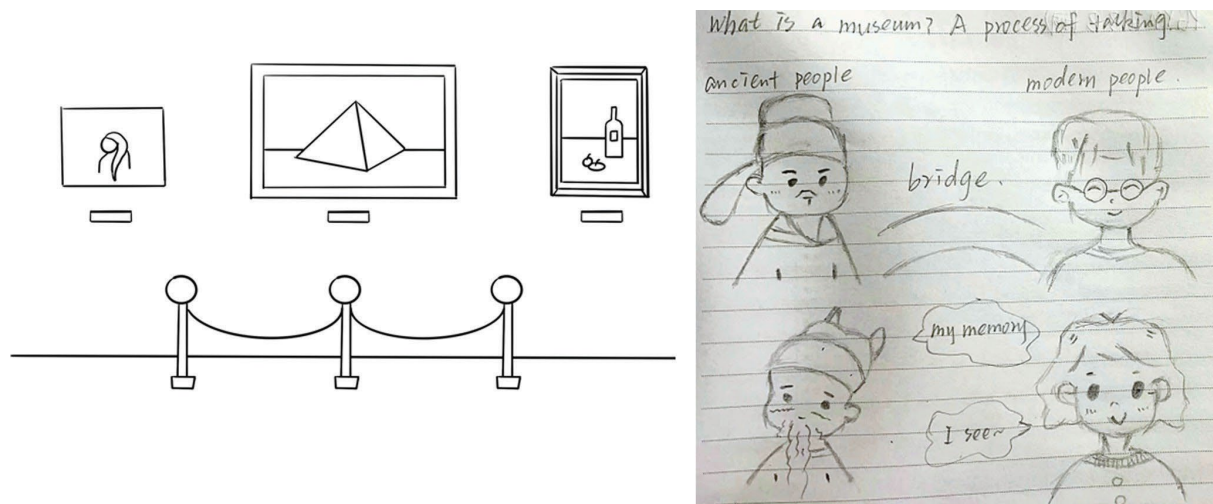
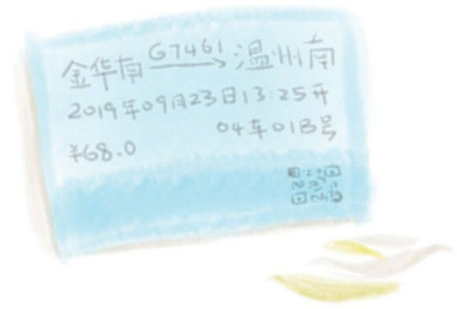


Figure 4: Li Yumeng and Zhang Menglei. (2022). Details of Figure 1 (drawings 8 and 12). © Li Yumeng and Zhang Menglei. (Compilation by Stuart Burch).

## A train ticket from death to life

China. Bought at Jinhua train station, September 23, 2019. Private collection.

When did you first face death? For many people it is at a funeral. Here is a train ticket from Jinhua to Wenzhou. These places are written on the ticket together with a date: September 23, 2019. On that day, Sammi went to the funeral of her aunt who had died of cancer. In the past four years, Sammi's whole family moved to a new city to take care of her aunt. It's now time to go back. Death teaches us to cherish our loved ones and our life.



A blue train ticket to a funeral. The flower petals are chrysanthemums, symbols of mourning.

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Figure 5: Zhang Yuxin. (2022). Museum label proposal based on Figure 3 (object 9). © Zhang Yuxin.

# MEMORY MUSEUM

Figure 6: Various. (2022). Name and logo for a museum to house objects seen in Figure 3. © Dong Ningxi, Fang Yiyuan, Feng Pingping, Li Yumeng, Sun Mengyao, Wang Juan, Wang Jiewen, Wang Nannan, Ying Yiren, Yuan Jianan, Zhang Keying, Zhang Yawen, Zhang Menglei, Zhang Xiyun, Zhang Yuxin, Zhang Rusen.