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The great drawing power of touch and observation

• Children love to draw but self-consciousness in the teenage years can divorce many of us from an innate facility

Lucinda Jolly

The world can be divided into those who can draw and those who can't. It's an ability that has been invested with an almost mythical power.

Drawing packs a potent currency. It makes the ordinary person special, gives kudos to the outsider and protects the geek from being bullied by the jocks. And it's often colonised by the solipsistic parent.

Most children are happy to draw. That is, until they hit puberty, when what professor of art and American culture at Washington University and author of *Stick Figure* DB Dowd calls "aesthetic anxiety" descends and many give up.

How many of us were told we couldn't draw or that our drawings just didn't make the grade? And so, shamed by our inadequacy, we gave up.

Responses to the importance of drawing range from absolutely to not at all. But Dowd suggests we've got drawing all wrong. He writes – surprise, surprise – that drawing isn't about drawing well. Instead he promotes drawing as a tool for learning. Drawing, in Dowd's book, helps us think and, better yet, makes us slow down, be patient and pay attention. He even goes so far as to claim that drawing makes us better humans, in the sense that it trains us to wrestle with evidence and challenge assumptions.

In a similar vein, the architect character in Anna Gavalda's book *Consolation* points out that if you want to understand something, sketch it, because observation leads to understanding.

In 2009, while teaching drawing skills to art and design students, University of Cape Town (UCT) fine art and social science graduate Leonard Shapiro developed an observational drawing approach involving the sense of touch as an important observation sense. Shapiro named this approach the Haptico-visual observation and drawing method. He teaches this method to medical practitioners and students at UCT's medical school.

This multisensory observation method involves



Leonard Shapiro

the sense of touch (and sight of course), coupled with the simultaneous act of gesture drawing. "As you feel the three-dimensional form of a bone with one hand, you draw it with the other. Feeling it involves movement and so does drawing it, especially using gesture drawing."

Shapiro's method acknowledges the research around haptics since the late 1960s by professors Susan Lederman and Roberta Klatzky from Queens University in Canada in which touch – in the form of different hand and finger movements, including lateral stroking and grasping – are used by humans to understand an object.

"We gather so much information about objects through our hands using our sense of touch," says Shapiro. "Our hands take up a large part of the sensory cortex in our brain. We navigate through our world and we explore and observe objects through our sense of touch, even if we don't realise it consciously. With this method, we use touch actively."

While there has been a smorgasbord of techniques to make drawing easier, Shapiro's method, with its emphasis on touch as an observation sense, is a first in drawing for use in anatomy education, he says. "My thinking was that if I could help medical students become better observers, they would potentially become better doctors, better diagnosticians and better surgeons," he said.

Interestingly, prior to 1934 in the US, Shapiro points out that it was compulsory for students in the sciences to learn to draw. He believes in the democracy of drawing, that given the chance everyone can draw. And so



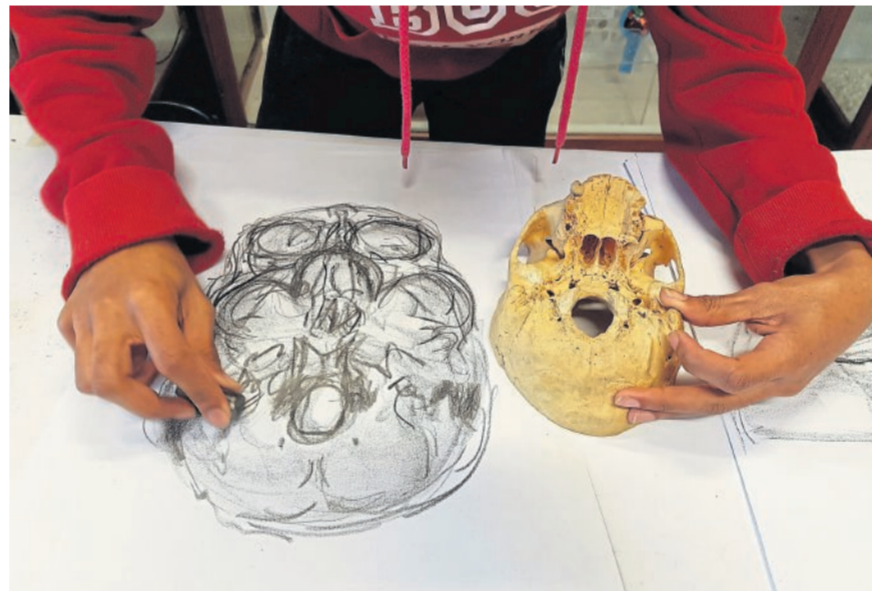
Up close: The enhanced observation method improves the study of anatomy by using touch and drawing. The skill is a useful method for visual note-taking in the field of medicine. /Supplied

those who take the anatomy observation course he runs learn to observe and draw – from the student to the medical professional. The method has helped, for example, the radiation oncologist improve spatial orientation skills and the ophthalmologist who wanted assistance in drawing the spherical space of the inside of the eye.

One of the outcomes of this method, explains Shapiro, is that "a three-dimensional mental picture of the object is formed in the mind of the observer, who will later be able to retrieve the object from memory and draw it without looking at the actual object itself".

"This is an extremely useful method for visual note-taking in the field of medicine."

In practice, Shapiro's method means taking medical students and medical professionals through a series of exercises which involve observation



Three dimensional: A medical student simultaneously draws and uses his sense of touch for enhanced observation of anatomy. /Supplied

using touch, mark-making and gesture. He implicitly trusts that everyone can do it".

And they do. When professional artists are shown the drawings made by the medical professionals

and students after taking the course, Shapiro says they are often incredulous at the competency of the work. It's as if gestural drawings in the school of Frank Auerbach greets them from the page.

Under Shapiro's careful, skilled and compassionate guidance, fear is replaced by confidence and ability. And, most importantly, observation, so critical in the medical field, has taken root.

LIQUID INVESTMENTS

Fickle pinot noir offers a glimmer of hope



MICHAEL FRIDJHON

It is easy to understand why pinot noir is called "the heartbreak grape". It is deeply susceptible to the influence of climate, soil and viticultural management.

Heat, sunlight hours, rainfall and the geology of vineyard subsoils play a disproportionate role compared with other varieties, though how and in what way is by no means as certain as some pundits claim.

Coupled to this is the huge weight of the benchmark of the Burgundy heartland bearing down on pinot winemakers elsewhere in the world, especially in regions where the cultivar is widely planted.

All this might be less important than it now appears if the Cote d'Or – that 40km long and about 2km wide strip which is the source of the planet's greatest examples of what the variety can produce – had remained a fashion backwater. Until 50 years ago, even the undisputed masterpieces from sites in Vosne-Romanee, Chambolle Musigny and Gevrey Chambertin traded for a fraction of the price achieved by the top Bordeaux properties.

The region's appellation controllee regulations were arcane to the point of mystifying all but the local authorities. Even today the most sought-after wines may not legally bear the cultivar name. It's hard to imagine a less likely candidate for apex status in the world of fine wine.

Leon Coetzee is about as geeky as anyone in the Cape wine scene. Over the years he has tracked down, discovered or coaxed back to life any number of unusual vineyard blocks, along the way producing – under his Fledge & Company label – a series of limited bottlings made from the different varieties lurking in these sites. The parcels of vineyard he customarily farms range from the Karoo via Elgin and Stellenbosch to the Swartland. Nothing, not time, distance, inclement weather, dust, disease nor the state of the economy, appears to have dampened his pioneering spirit, but pinot has come close.

THE VERY BEST WINES FROM THE 2017 VINTAGE ARE ALL BETTER THAN THEIR COUNTERPARTS FROM FIVE YEARS AGO

"[It] hasn't pushed us over the edge yet ... you're not allowed to have a less than perfect vintage ... this grape is a fickle mistress. It's also just the most vintage specific grape ... creating a style-mark is almost futile, other than to play it all by ear and leave it to nature."

Coetzee had not yet been born when the late Tim Hamilton Russell and his then winemaker Peter Finlayson planted the first modern pinot vineyards in SA in the Hemelen-Aarde Valley in the 1970s. Hamilton Russell's vision spawned a new area of origin, a place where like-minded masochists could book a ride on the emotional rollercoaster of pinot production. This, in turn, produced an environment in which equally masochistic consumers could part with depressingly large sums of money to sample the fleeting controllee regulations were arcane to the point of mystifying all but the local authorities. Even today the most sought-after wines may not legally bear the cultivar name. It's hard to imagine a less likely candidate for apex status in the world of fine wine.

In 40 years Cape wine has made up for centuries lost to isolation and ineptitude, but it has only been in the past decade that pinot has delivered a glimmer of hope. Battered followers could be forgiven for thinking this might be just another mirage, though evidence from the recent Pinot Celebration in the Hemelen-Aarde Valley suggests this is not the flash of fool's gold in the pan.

First, there is a coherence to the wines – not all of them – because the role of the winemaker is significantly more important than the geography and the geology. Second, the very best wines from the 2017 vintage are all better than their counterparts from five years ago. The vineyards are older; the more nuanced skill sets of viticulturists and cellar masters are increasingly evident.

In 2012 there were only a couple of wines worth even a fraction of their asking price. Today you can comfortably buy Hamilton Russell, Bouchard Finlayson, Storm, Newton Johnson, La Vierge, Ataraxia and Creation. They are not all Burgundian but they are authentic. In time, a few of them could be hauntingly good.

HALF ART

Mthethwa – minister of meh, vanilla inaction and patriotic pandering

When Nathi Mthethwa was appointed as SA's

minister of arts and culture in 2014, the arts sector let out a collective groan. Here was a man associated with Marikana and Nkandla, a Zuma acolyte who appeared to have been "demoted" to the job from the police ministry because he didn't defend Msholozhi with adequate guile.

Things got off to a bad start when Mthethwa used a presser at the National Arts Festival to lecture artists about being too critical of the government, suggesting ominously that he didn't think freedom of expression was always important, and encouraging everyone to adopt a parochial pseudopatriotism that would

paper over the postapartheid cracks. I have referred to that speech a few times in this column, because it encapsulates precisely what one doesn't want in an arts minister.

For five years Mthethwa has been a vanilla presence, a kind of ministerial meh, presiding over a department that is desperately in need of fixing – and doing precious little to fix it. He has continued with the blandishments about arts and social cohesion, when what he

WHERE WAS THE MINISTER WHEN 'INXEBA' WAS FACING CENSORSHIP? HE WAS SILENT WHEN PUBLIC THREATS WERE MADE

really means is that artists should all be mild propagandists for the ANC. He has failed to intervene when large sums of money have disappeared under his watch through misspending or corruption. He has been, you might say, offensively inoffensive.

So it came as no surprise to learn of his remarks at the inaugural SA Film Summit in Johannesburg. It was perhaps to be expected that the department of arts & culture, which hosted the summit, invoked the banal language of "nation-building" in its promotion of the event. But Mthethwa took it further, affirming that filmmakers should be presenting the "singular" story of "forging this path of building a nation" after 1994 to local and global audiences.

Perhaps he meant "singular"

as in "unique" – thus falling into the trap of SA exceptionalism, where many have gone before him. But I fear the minister was informing his audience that his department believes there is really only one big story to be told: a curiously revisionist success story in which there is no place for fracture or dissent.

Sharing platitudes about overcoming barriers to participation in the film industry (he skirted the issue of race and focused on "young people, women and people with disabilities"), Mthethwa at least acknowledged some of the country's socioeconomic fault lines. Yet he doesn't seem to want the struggles of marginalised groups, or anything that might be seen as controversial or discomfiting, to be portrayed on screen.

Where was the minister



CHRIS THURMAN

when *Inxeba* (*The Wound*) was facing effective banning and censorship? He was silent when public threats were made to the filmmakers, though he was happy to accept the plaudits when it looked like the film might be nominated for an Oscar.

And what, moreover, can the minister tell us about the outcome of a forensic investigation into money-wasting at the National Film and Video Foundation? Surely that is also undermining access to the industry and preventing films from being made? Here Mthethwa is schtum.

He will talk at any given opportunity, however, about Bric's – and so it proved at the film summit. Mthethwa is



Arty Nathi: Then president Jacob Zuma and arts & culture minister Nathi Mthethwa in Port Elizabeth in 2015. /The Herald/Mike Holmes

confident that these are the markets to target for SA films and that they offer exemplary

national models for film production and distribution. Oh, and Nigeria. And Rwanda, he

added, veering off script. Studies have been done, he said. But Nollywood is the key competitor; Nigerians are to blame for most things, xenophobic politicians know, and this includes the fact that we are no longer "Africa's largest audiovisual media market".

But back to Bric's, where the Big Four "know exactly what is their national interest: you go to China," notes Mthethwa, and "you'll get it".

I haven't been to China, but I do know that artistic freedom is not high on the list of state priorities. Jair Bolsonaro's Brazil is hardly a conducive environment. And as for India – there's more than the Bollywood cliché, including space for filmmakers who don't simply endorse the crude Hindu nationalism touted by the Narendra Modi government. Ask Vishal Bhardwaj or Hansal Mehta or Nagraj Manjule.

We don't need "nation-building" films. We need nation-challenging, nation-changing films.