DRAWING CAMERAS - ITS TIME TO DRAW TO SEE BETTER!

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Activity summary/learning project

Open to the public since 1993, Casa da Cerca - Contemporary Art Center made its mission the dissemination of Fine Arts, primarily focusing on Drawing, through regular flow of exhibitions and a vast array of parallel activities. Having these as a starting point, our Education Department created a prototype of a drawing instrument: the “Drawing Camera”.

This tool, inspired by the Camera Obscura, has been used in several education project both inside and outside Casa da Cerca, and have the fortune to reach and captivate a wide range of publics of all ages, socio-economic and education levels, including people with disabilities and special needs.

Designed and built by us in Almada, this instrument was developed to facilitate and familiarize drawing through observation. It consists on a wooden box, a magnifying glass, a mirror and a transparent acrylic board. With any kind of light, allows everyone to translate a three-dimensional reality to a bi-dimensional surface, respecting proportion and perspective with ease.

Its use is very simple: Covering the head with a black sheet (similar to the ones you see in old photo cameras), you will see an upside down image projected into a piece of parchment paper. This image is a symmetrical projection of reality. After a few adjustments you will get a clear and in color projected image that you just have to trace, stressing the shades and giving it depth using light/shadow techniques. This first drawing is the negative matrix of the final drawing, that will subsequently be transferred to another sheet in order to further conclude the observational drawing.

This mechanism is precious in creating awareness towards drawing, breaking barriers and inspiring people to experiment. We have been testing it since 2012 and it has been used by thousands of people, satisfying people's need for realism and the figurative aspects of drawing, often feared by all those who think they can't draw.

http://www.sulinformacao.pt/2013/09/camara-de-desenhar-ciencia/
After the activity/experience

The first great project developed with this device was "Renascence Workshop of the XXI century", integrated in the collective exhibition "Science of Drawing" (2012). The “Drawing Cameras” were a huge success, surprising their users by the magic of the projection hidden beneath the black sheet. Soon people took upon them all aspects of the machine and started to feel confident to draw other people, plants, landscapes, buildings and works of art.

We did this particular Workshop with groups from all the country and of all levels of schooling. In the experiment we divided them in two groups: the first would draw with the machine while the other posed as a model. They would exchange roles when the first finished drawing. This approach would generate silence that would generate high levels of concentration that we reinforced by playing music on the background. The fact that the "drawers" were covered by the black sheet and the "posers" had to stay still like statues, added some solemnity to the whole experience. We also noted that this tool has an enormous inclusive potential as well as aiding immensely the learning curve of observational drawing. The diversity of these groups, allowed us to observe and collect some data about how observing drawing is made in the different human development stages.

The Drawing Cameras was again used at the "Occupy the Drawing House" project. We made a 1/100 model of Casa da Cerca that was covered by drawings made with the Drawing Camera. After some experimentation we figured out that if the Camera was at a 5 meters distance of its subject we would get the same proportion of the Casa da Cerca's model so the drawings would fit perfectly in its facade. Also, based on this project were taught several aspects of the architectural project of the original building.

The Drawing Cameras have been used indoors as well as outdoors, and has contributed for the acknowledgment of this Contemporary Art Center as a House devoted to the art of drawing. Late August, A Casa da Cerca, took part on a social vacation program, allowing 600 youngsters to create a portrait and be part of a big collective drawing "In each face equality".

The different contexts where we used the Drawing Cameras allowed us to discover its many capabilities, particularly its incantatory power, but also its limitations, the need to steady the Camera after framing the image, its shallow depth of field, its low optical output quality and its low portability. But with those constraints in mind we developed an app for Ipad that allows people to easily sketch the art pieces in our exhibitions, promoting its contemplation through drawing. So the project itSketches came to be, in partnership between Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, a tool to help
people to take the first step to draw what you see, over a timeline, valuing drawing as a process and not as a final product.


These resources, as tools for drawing and observational methodologies, lead us to understand that it increased the number of times people came to our exhibitions, training their sense of observation and attention to detail, augmenting their learning capabilities. The innovative aspect of this experience, is very relevant pedagogically and is very appealing to teachers and educators and therefore to their students. Being “A Casa do Desenho” (The House of Drawing) is very rewarding, specially because we know that we are promoting drawing interpretation and expression.