Outset study at drawing room: the first year

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What led to the establishment of a new library space in London specializing in international contemporary drawing? Beyond providing access to collections, how will this research hub support artists practice and scholarship, and encourage deeper engagement from exhibition audiences? This article looks at the development of Outset Study's collections, audiences and events programme, and reflects on successes and challenges faced in the first year.

In the 1960s and 70s a serious re-appraisal of drawing took place[1]. Long considered conservative, and used mainly as a preparatory process to making work in other media such as painting and sculpture, drawing was then adopted as a primary form of expression by a generation of conceptual and minimal artists including Sol Lewitt, Mel Bochner, and Robert Rauschenburg[2]. In the decades that followed, new drawing reassessed its methods and materials, enlisting a diverse array of tools including video, light, performance and sculpture to express its fundamental gestures[3]. Today, drawing practice continues to elude definition and embrace experimentation[4].

Drawing Room was initiated in 1999, at a time when this re-engagement was gaining crucial momentum. Starting from the mid-1990s in the UK alone there were a series of major initiatives: in 1994 The Jerwood Drawing Prize was instituted; in 2000 The Princes Drawing School, now The Royal Drawing School, was founded; The Campaign for Drawing and its associated Drawing Research Network were established in 2000 and 2001 respectively; followed shortly after by The Centre for Recent Drawing in 2004.

Around this time the first dedicated BA and MA drawing degrees were also introduced alongside fine arts degrees at the University of the Arts London, Falmouth University and Manchester School of Arts. Drawing also became increasingly prominent at international art exhibitions and biennials, with events like the Drawing Now Contemporary Art Fair in Paris, now in its 9th year, dedicating a full week to the medium.

The publication of Phaidon's enormous book *Vitamin D: New Perspectives in Drawing* in 2005 is a further indication of drawing's growing prominence. The first publication of its size and global scope, focusing on the variety of practices utilized by over 100 emerging artists, it was followed by *Vitamin D2* in 2013.

1. Katharine Stout, introduction to *Contemporary drawing from 1960s to now* (London: Tate Publishing, 2014).

2. Bernice Rose, introduction to *Drawing now* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1976).

3. Emma Dexter, ed., *Vitamin D: new perspectives in drawing* (London: Phaidon, 2005).

4. Christian Rattemeyer, ed., *Vitamin D2: new perspectives in drawing* (London: Phaidon, 2013).

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Fig. 1. Outset Study.

From the outset Drawing Room's directors had sensed a growing need for access to specialist resources on recent drawing to aid scholarship and support the production of new work. Interestingly, none of the other drawing spaces had undertaken to document contemporary drawing or provide access to research material on the subject. The directors began to see in their own collection the potential core of a library that could be shared with visitors and researchers alike. Though small, the material gathered from 12 years of curating Drawing Room's exhibition programme included publications on important, yet lesser-known, artists and key exhibition catalogues unavailable elsewhere. This formed the core of the 'Outset Study' research collection, which launched in October 2013 with generous support from the Outset Contemporary Art Fund.

The Drawing Center in New York, established in 1977, had served as a key model for the Drawing Room gallery, but the directors were not aware of any other research libraries on contemporary drawing in Europe, or in fact anywhere else in the world. The models for Outset Study therefore came from arts organizations specializing in other areas, notably the Henry Moore Institute for the Study of Sculpture, the Live Art Development Agency and INIVA. Housed within the Drawing Room gallery, Outset Study is the first space dedicated to the documentation of international contemporary drawing. Conceived as a research hub with a library at its heart, it provides opportunities for artists and researchers to investigate drawing's rich recent history, and contribute to its scholarship and development. It also operates as a valuable resource for exhibition visitors to learn more about the medium, and encompasses a series of displays, participatory events, workshops, talks, and online resources.

The Collection

Starting from a few shelves of books in the directors' office in the summer of 2013, the small collection has increased by about a third in

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its first year. The accelerated growth of the library is partly due to a high rate of acquisitions in the early months in which we tried to acquire key titles missing from the collection; but is predominantly due to keeping a-pace with the exhibitions programme which is the main driving force in acquisitions.

The opening of the library has coincided with two of the gallery's most ambitious and successful shows to date. The first of these Abstract Drawing (Feb-March 2014), curated by the artist Richard Deacon, surveyed over 30 artists and included high profile works by Jackson Pollock, Anish Kapoor, Tomma Abts, Richard Serra, Sol Lewitt, and Alison Wilding. Later in the year *The Nakeds* (Sept-Nov 2014) co-curated by the artist David Austen, again included works by over 20 artists including Joseph Beuys, Louise Bourgeois, Tracey Emin, Chris Ofili, Egon Schiele, and Andy Warhol. The Drawing Biennial fundraiser in 2015, one of the most important fixtures in the programme and a primary source of funding for Drawing Room, featured over 200 artists and also introduced a significant number of new titles and artists to the collection.

The rapidly growing collection currently contains around 2,000 books and 70 journal titles focusing on international contemporary drawing circa the 1970s. Manual checks via COPAC indicate it contains many items not held in some 90 other major UK and Irish libraries, making it an important research resource in its field.

The General Reference Collection includes publications on individual artists, catalogues of group exhibitions and private and public collections, drawing surveys, theory and journals. When initially sorting through the directors' shelves, identifying our special holdings was an important exercise in emphasising the value of the Study. It was exciting to find a small number of artist's books and zines, as well as a ready-made special collection that came in the form of the Artists' Reading Lists. For a number of years artists and curators taking part in Drawing Room's programme have been invited to compile reading lists that inform the themes explored in their work. A selection of titles is acquired from each list to form a unique Artists' Reading Lists Collection. Containing an eclectic range of material covering subjects from philosophy to mathematics, and including poetry, plays, novels, essays, theory and sound works, these lists provide an extraordinary insight into artists' practice. This special collection is heavily used by



Fig. 2. Peter Liversidge's series of artists' books on various proposals projects.

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readers, and is also drawn on for discussion groups, and help to promote a deeper understanding of the exhibition programme.

Additional special collections include the Drawing Room Collection of the gallery's published output, a Teaching Collection, and Information Files on emerging artists on whom there is little published material available. Our online resources further provide video and audio recordings of talks and in-conversation events, as well as essays, exhibition bibliographies, the artists reading lists, and permanent online incarnations of the temporary Study displays that coincide with each exhibition.

One of the early challenges of developing this collection is its international scope. The collection is currently strong in Western European, North American and Latin American contemporary drawing, but is under-represented in a number of key areas. Our policy prioritizes strengthening holdings in Middle Eastern, African, South Asian, East Asian and Eastern European contemporary practice. This is a significant challenge considering our budgetary constraints, but an important one, as emerging economies also shift cultural and curatorial interest. The recent surge in art collecting in these regions has fuelled a wave of new biennials and art fairs, as well as prompting specialized sales of Latin American, Russian, South Asian and Chinese art by the big auction houses[5]. Major museums and galleries are also adding more non-western art and artists to their collections and contemporary exhibitions programmes, further raising interest in these areas[6]. The process of identifying and contacting galleries and institutions in these regions is a slow one that sits alongside many other responsibilities, but forming exchange and donation partnerships in

5. "Eye on Asia: understanding the Chinese art market," posted February 12, 2015 http://www.sothebys.com/en/news-video/blogs/all-blogs/eye-on-asia/2015/02/understanding-china-art-market.html

6. "On India: the Amaya collection: a historic sale" posted April 17, 2013 http://www.sothebys.com/en/news-video/blogs/all-blogs/on-india/2013/04/historic-sale-amaya-collection.html



Fig. 3. Study display accompanying the Chromosome Damage exhibition.

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these areas will enable us to greatly enrich the research value of the collection in the long term.

A limited budget is another early challenge, as available resources do not match ambitions. It is increasingly necessary to develop expertise in new areas such as philanthropic fundraising, and to be resourceful in finding alternative means to reach goals. Nurturing relationships with commercial galleries, and corporate and individual patrons has been crucial to the growth of the library collection, with most of our books now being acquired through donation and to a lesser degree publication exchanges. Similarly in seeking to acquire a library management system, options such as securing external funding, using open source software, and partnering with related institutions are being rigorously explored at the outset to ensure reduced long term expenditure and sustainability, while still achieving widespread availability of our resources online.

Funding strategies are worked on across the whole gallery team and have enabled Drawing Room to achieve an ambitious library service that exceeds expectations from an organization of its size.

Events and Projects

Conceived as a research hub, Outset Study's remit goes beyond providing access to its collections, and is committed to hosting its own regular events programme that runs in parallel with the exhibition programme, providing another strand of engagement.

The Study Groups series was introduced immediately after the launch of Study, and initially consisted of a Reading Group discussing theory texts relating the themes of the exhibition, and a Listening Group using extracts from film, theory and sound works to explore aural themes in the current exhibition. In 2014 a Making Group was also introduced, and these popular artist-led practical workshops have so far included a 'field drawings' excursion led by Sarah Macdonald, two dynamic evenings on figure drawing by Donna Huddleston and a collaboration with the London Sculpture Workshop on wax modelling as a sketching tool, led by Giles Coby.

The sessions are informal and seek to engage a wider audience in contemporary visual and aural cultural theory, and explore shared experiences of reading and listening together. Additionally artists often work in an isolated way out of the art school environment, so the Study Groups provide a valuable opportunity to meet and exchange ideas.

Outset Study also hosts talks, in-conversations, temporary displays and special projects. The displays are a particularly enjoyable aspect of the programme to coordinate, and are an opportunity to highlight objects from our own special collections, as well as those loaned from other sources. For the Abstract Drawing exhibition items were loaned from the Lisson Gallery archive, and included fascinating correspondence from artists Roger Ackling, Sol Lewitt and John Latham, as well as early private view cards, photographs, and press cuttings that rarely see the light of day. For the more recent Chromosome Damage solo exhibition, artist Daniel Guzmán lent objects from his personal collection and provided some wonderful stories about how he acquired them and their significance to his work. Though small, these temporary displays nevertheless provide meaningful context to the

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main exhibitions, and are translated into a permanent online display on our website upon their closing.

For Outset Study's launch the artist Peter Liversidge was commissioned to create a temporary installation. Known for his process of generating hundreds of typed proposals for artworks or performances for a commissioning body before finally executing just one or two, Liversidge's installation for Drawing Room took the form of a single giant billboard scale proposal that plays with the idea of 'The Rules of the Library'. Interposing invented and existing rules (poolside etiquette, rules from the Library of Congress, etc.) with Study's actual rules, it is a playful and arresting work that continues to excite the interest of visitors, and has helped to define the character of the space. Over the last two decades Liversidge has also collected his proposals into a series of beautiful small edition artists' books, of which Outset Study has the most complete collection available in any library in London. These books were first displayed at a special Gin Proposal event hosted by Liversidge as a fundraising event for Outset Study's first anniversary, in support of collection development.

As with many areas of the Study project, the events programme is strengthened by including contributions from the whole Drawing Room team, making a diverse and exciting series of events and displays.

Audience

Outset Study is a completely open access space connected to the exhibition route, placing learning and research at the centre of the visitor experience. Gallery visitors form the largest group of daily visitors to Outset Study as they naturally finish the exhibition by moving into the library, often spending significant time there lingering in further reading and contemplation.

Special interest groups and student groups from colleges and universities form another large section of our readership, as they combine director's tours of the exhibitions with time in the Study for further reading. Additionally BA and MA students working on dissertations make up the largest proportion of research visitors, while higher level researchers, writers, teachers and curators from as far afield as Australia and South Korea, as well as those from other institutions in the UK have also visited Study for publications and teaching research.

There are a large number of artists' studios and creative enterprises in the Bermondsey area, and Drawing Room itself is located on the ground floor of Tannery Arts' studio complex which houses around 25 artists, therefore the library is extensively used by local artists. It has also seen an increasing number of international artists from Canada, US, Finland and Italy build time at Study into their research visits and residencies.

Finally, and crucially, Outset Study supports Drawing Room's curators in their research for the exhibitions programme.

The Future

In the long term Outset Study aims to be the pre-eminent resource for research on international contemporary drawing. It will also play a

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Fig. 4. Field drawings Making Group, warming up with an exercise in Outset Study

central role in delivering Drawing Room's learning, education, continuing professional development, local outreach and audience development strategies. Short-term priorities include publishing our collections holdings online, developing the institutional archive, as well as supporting the production of scholarship through establishing Outset Study research fellowships and residencies.

Many have commented that it is interesting to find a gallery opening a library space at a time when the sector is contracting. However the first year of Outset Study has demonstrated that there is enormous enthusiasm within cultural organizations and audiences for library spaces, and as the public sector contracts, appreciation for open access specialist libraries will likely increase.

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