

Studies in Material Thinking, <http://www.materialthinking.org>
Vol. 4 (September 2010), ISSN 1177-6234, AUT University
Copyright © *Studies in Material Thinking* and the author.

DRAWING LIVES – REPORTAGE AT WORK



Julia Midgley
Reader Documentary Drawing
Liverpool School of Art & Design L.J.M.U.
www.juliamidgley.co.uk
j.k.godfrey@ljmu.ac.uk & julia@juliamidgley.co.uk

Abstract: Drawing is alive and well, it lives. Reportage records with drawing the lives of others, hence the title. Documentary drawings, unlike documentary photography, capture minutes and hours as opposed to fractions of a second. Reportage plays an important role – access to intimate or moving events, such as surgery, is granted due to the minimally invasive nature of a pencil inscribing paper. Most recently my own engagement has been with archaeology. Archaeologist's drawings record the physical effects of passing time, the documentary artists' drawings capture minutes and hours by recording live action. Whilst working on the Stonehenge Riverside Project within the group Art+Archaeology (<http://www.artistsinarchaeology.org/>) layered drawings linked the artwork with the archaeology. In 2005 as Artist in Residence for the Excavation of Chester's Roman Amphitheatre drawings again documented an excavation. Before my association with Archaeology residencies included The Royal Liverpool Hospital Trust – "Drawn from Experience". It was here that echoes of artists working alongside surgeons in wartime struck home. Other engagements have been commissioned by Blackpool Pleasure Beach "Blackpool Pleasure Beach – A Palette of Life"; Granada Television "Granada Sketchbook"; and the construction site for the new Art & Design Academy – Liverpool School of Art & Design.

The resulting portfolios illustrate for example how medicine was practised at the end of the 20th Century. They produce time capsules or archives of each organisation and tell a story of working life and popular culture at the beginning of the 21st Century. This paper looks at the genre and its role in collaboration with medical, archaeological and contemporary society as archival recorder. It aims to demonstrate the viability and continuing role of the genre today.

Key Words: Drawing, archive, reportage, practice, archaeology, artist.

.....

Drawing Lives – Reportage at Work

Introduction

Documentary Drawing or reportage, unlike documentary film or photography, attempts to capture minutes and hours as opposed to fractions of seconds in a single image. Drawing is not in competition with photography, it offers an alternative view or perspective. Unencumbered by the photographer's sometimes weighty, cumbersome equipment the artist can access intimate or moving events, such as surgery, thanks to the minimally invasive nature of a pencil working on paper. The artist edits away extraneous detail allowing the viewer to focus on the core of activity. In turn this efficiently conveys the tensions and passions witnessed on location. The drama of surgery, for example, powerfully affects the artist, whose artworks will inevitably reflect emotive responses. It could be argued that the genre has emerged from a tradition, particularly in England, of appointing Official War Artists.

A Brief History

During the First World War artists were sent directly to combat zones often the front line. Many worked alongside surgeons as they operated.



Figure 1. Prof Henry Tonks, © courtesy Royal College Surgeons of England

Sir Henry Tonks entered service as a medical orderly, before being appointed as Artist to a unit set up by surgeon Harold Gillies dealing specifically with facial injuries. Gillies recognised the value of combining different mediums to provide a more rounded record of his patients. The resulting series of pastel drawings by Sir Henry Tonks illustrates both the collaboration between artist and surgeon, and one of the earliest examples of reconstructive surgery. He drew from direct observation. Interestingly Tonks' pupil at The Slade School of Art, Diana Orpen, 1914 - 2008, daughter of war artist Sir William Orpen was to produce drawings at the Plastic and Maxillo-Facial Unit at St Albans during the 2nd World War (fig. 2). In the 1970's Orpen was again involved with illustrating reconstructive surgery (Barron and Saad, 1980).

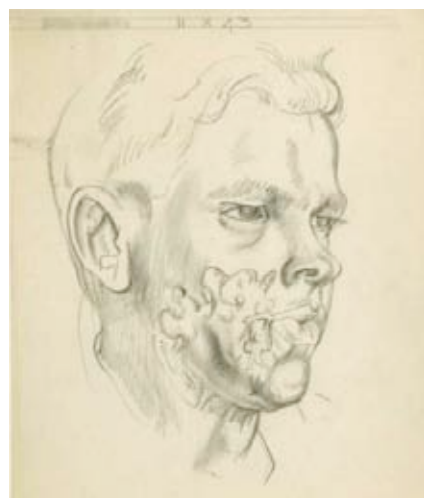


Figure 2 Diana Orpen, © British Association of Plastic, Reconstructive and Aesthetic Surgeons

In England Paul Nash, Sir Hugh Casson, Christopher Nevinson, Barbara Hepworth, and countless more were appointed as Official War Artists. Women artists were not in the front line but recorded the war effort at home. They worked in hospitals, in the munitions factories, and on the land. Dame Laura Knight was engaged to document events post war at the Nuremburg trials.



Figure 3. Sketch 'The Nuremberg Trial' (LD5798) Dame Laura Knight 1946, © Imperial War Museum

Prisoners of war and internees also made drawings of their suffering (Sujo 2001). Memorably Kathe Kollwitz's (Hartley 1981) heart rending images of mothers protecting their children could be said to communicate desperation more poignantly than any other medium.



Figure 4. Bedrich Fritta, The Morgue 1943 - 44, © Imperial War Museum

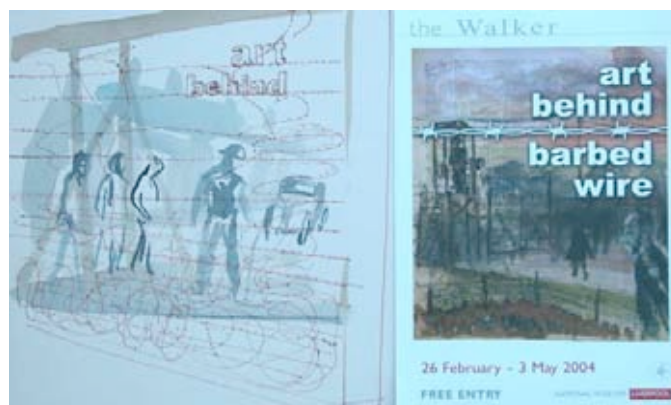


Figure 5. "Behind Barbed Wire- Interness Huyton camp", © the Author

Since the second World War artists have continued to record conflict for example Linda Kitson, the Falklands War, and Peter Howson in Bosnia. They continued their connection with medicine too. Susan Macfarlane, a nurse turned professional artist, produced in 1995 the wonderful body of drawings "A Picture of Health", (fig.6) documenting breast-cancer care, originally launched at the Barbican Centre, London, and a subsequent portfolio "Living with Leukeamia – Paintings and Drawings of Childhood Leukeamia" in 1998.



Figure 6 "A Picture of Health" 1995 kind permission, © Angus and Euan Mackay

The Doctor / Artist

Sir Roy Calne, the eminent transplant surgeon, makes paintings and drawings of his patients, occasionally using them to illustrate his own books and lectures. Sir Roy received advice on colour and painting from Royal Academician John Bellamy who was at the time recovering from a liver transplant. Whilst many surgeons are gifted artists very few turn their abilities to recording their patients during and after surgery. It has been said that patients benefit remarkably when confronted by their condition in such a visual and engaging manner. Through his skills as an artist he illustrates the humanity and suffering of patients and promotes international understanding of transplant surgery. Here the surgeon's knowledge combined with his artistic skill communicates the patients' and his

own experience with intimate immediacy, simplicity of line, and compassion. Here then we see the poignancy and exceptional power of drawings to engage and captivate an audience.

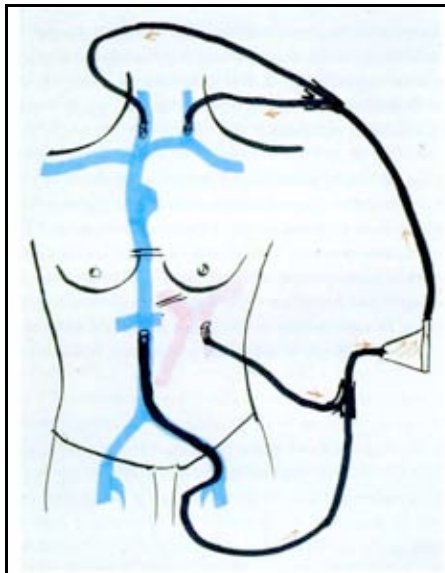


Figure 7. © Sir Roy Calne



Figure 8. Calne Lectures, © the Author

A Personal Observation.

My own practice as a documentary artist began on the factory floor where an artist's work can only properly progress with full collaboration from both the client and the complete workforce. In this spirit The Royal Liverpool University and Broadgreen Hospital Trust appointed me as their Artist in Residence. (fig. 9) I was to focus on the human face of the Hospital, to produce a panoramic view of the art and science of medicine in Liverpool at the end of a century. (The Residency culminated in 1999, the 50th Anniversary of the National Health Service). Without the will and determination of the medical and administrative staff for the project to succeed, the task would have been hard to embrace. Instead it was the artist, the drawings, and the process of making them, which were in turn embraced. It is important to be an unobtrusive fly on the wall, whilst simultaneously securing a clear view to the subject matter. The working lives of others always prove engrossing; thus far mutual respect has always developed between artist and subjects whatever the profession. The artist sees and absorbs new thought processes and procedures, which in turn inform his or her own practice. Clarity of understanding contributes to lucid thinking. Thus, ideas are conceived which would not have been born without the access afforded by such collaborations. For the medical staff the experience provides opportunities to witness an artist's eye at work. To them, the artist is part lay-person, part professional observer, who presents objective, possibly novel, interpretations of their work.



Figure 9. Artist in Residence, © the Author

On practically every visit to the Hospital in Liverpool (too frequently for it to be a coincidence) a member of staff would reveal that they, or, a family member had a visual arts training or practice. I felt that this reflected empathy between medical science and the visual arts - "as illustrated centuries ago when anatomists studied drawing as well as dissection they were artists in their own right" (Petherbridge and Jordanova, 1997). In Liverpool's international community patients occasionally struggle to communicate. Seated by her unconscious partner, a young woman was isolated by poor English (fig.10). Disengaged, she absently acquiesced to the artist's presence but grew animated on seeing the end result pointing to elements of the drawing. The image had initiated a dialogue. The power of drawings to elicit an emotional response from a viewer was similarly demonstrated when an exhibition visitor wept in front of the drawing 'Tender Farewell' (fig. 11). Moved not so much by death, more by the nurse's tenderness towards an unknown individual, the drawing had provoked some personal memory and experience.



Figure 10. Non English Speaking Couple & Figure 11. Tender Farewell, © The Author

In a renal transplant operation I stood behind the surgeon as the donor kidney was cleansed. (fig. 12). The unique and particular gift of the transplant team is to replace something bad with good. I was accorded the privilege of witnessing this process. Standing immediately behind the surgeon, almost mesmerised, I hoped my pencil would tell the story more eloquently than words.



Figure 12. "Prof. Robert Sells cleans Kidney"



Figure 13. "Post Mortem", © the Author 1999

The Residency "Drawn from Experience" culminated in a touring exhibition, (University of Liverpool; The Royal College of Surgeons of England; and New Academy Gallery, London) lectures, and a fully illustrated publication. Drawings were acquired for National public collections – The Wellcome Foundation; National Museum of Science and Industry; and The Royal College of Surgeons of England. After touring England some of the works travelled to The Liverpool Hospital in Sydney. These acquisitions reflected the enthusiasm with which drawing is received in medical circles.

Unexpected surroundings.



Figure 14. Unexpected surroundings, © Peter Owen 2002

Documentary Artists can be found in unexpected surroundings. The two Residencies at Blackpool Pleasure Beach (Fig. 14), one of the world's most visited amusement parks, and Granada Television in Manchester, bear witness to the variety of projects an artist may be required to record with drawings. Whatever the situation or organisation project requirements remain very similar from venue to venue.



Figure 15. © the Author 2001

At Granada Television there was "a certain paradox between the instant gratification that television demands and the considered discipline of creating artworks" (O'Neil 2002). The Hospital, Amusement Park, and pressurised atmosphere of TV production represent a broad canvas of contemporary lives. Seated with pen or pencil the documentary artist as a professional observer fulfils a special role and colours that canvas.

In 2005 English Heritage in partnership with the City of Chester began an excavation of the City's Roman Amphitheatre. This was the start of what was to become for me a long association with archaeology. The brief was to record archaeology at work; to see how, as layers of excavated ground were interpreted, centuries of history and past existences would be revealed.



Figure 16. © Simon Mills 2007

Archaeologists draw constantly:-

"Drawing makes demands on archaeologists. It sometimes requires standing for hours in uncomfortable positions holding unwieldy planning boards or grids strung on wooden frames. (fig.16). Archaeologists draw in all but the very worst weather – many can tell you about the time they had to wipe the snow from their drawing as they went. We draw in very hard pencil (4H to 7H) producing lines scored into the permatrace that won't easily rub off or wash away" (Wickstead 2010).



Figure 17. Photograph, © David Heke 2005 Figure 18. Making drawings, © the Author 2005

In the above drawing (fig. 18) certain figures are seen in different poses as the day's work continues. The foreground figure in the photograph (fig. 17) can be seen bottom right in the drawing. The passage of a working day is documented whilst the archaeologists record the passing of much greater amounts of time.



Figure. 19. Photographer records surveyors, Chester Roman Amphitheatre, © the Author 2005

The project photographer David Heke, can be seen (fig. 19) surveying the surveyors. Television and Radio interviews took place constantly - on one occasion recorders were drawn, recording recorders.



Figure 20. Man in a Trench, Chester Roman Amphitheatre 2005, © the Author

An archaeologist rammed rectangular metal boxes into sections of the earth wall in order to extract samples of earth (Fig. 20). Visible layers could be read as a book encapsulating earlier lives. Whilst the drawing recorded activity in the trench, the earth sample revealed a bigger story.

Hosting an Artist in Residence had been a new experience for the Archaeological team. They expressed surprise that I had chosen to draw what seemed to them unimportant aspects of the dig; for example upturned barrows, the assembly of scaffolding, and bags of finds suspended to dry on lines. However, they were emphatic that the drawings “were so familiar” that they recognisably portrayed not the research and academic rigour of excavation but the reality of archaeology.

Before joining Artists+Archaeology and The Stonehenge Riverside Project I was employed to produce drawings on a construction site, for the new Liverpool Art & Design Academy. There were some interesting visual parallels to the observations made of archaeological practice :-



Figure 21. © Simon Mills 2008



Figure 22. © the Author 2007

Surveyors' poles formed T shapes (Figs. 21, & 24), and large-scale excavation exposed layers and grids (fig 24).

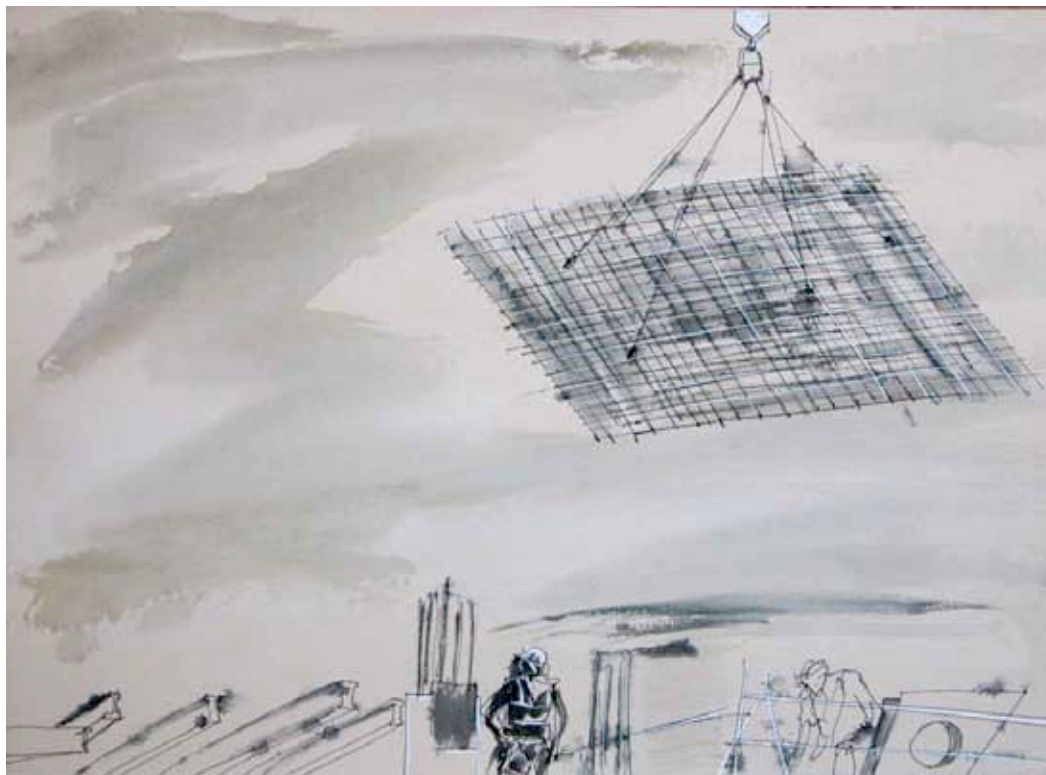


Figure 23. More grids, © the Author 2007

Due to stringent health and safety regulations close collaboration was a must on the construction site. The concept of working with an artist was new to the site and project directors but their willingness to proceed enabled artwork to progress. This working practice was echoed on the Chester and Stonehenge sites.

Stonehenge Riverside Project.

Dr Helen Wickstead formed the group Artists+Archaeology with the purpose of looking at drawing process as practised by Archaeologist and Artist. A driving interest for her, she enlisted Professor Leo Duff of Kingston University to help create a group of drawing specialists. This group would be embedded within the Stonehenge Riverside Project led by Professor Mike Parker Pearson. Six artists spent two weeks working on location in the summers of 2007 and 2008. The excavation encompassed Woodhenge; The Cursus; The Avenue; Amesbury; The Cuckoo Stone; Durrington Walls, and Stonehenge itself. More than 150 archaeology students plus their directors made this one of the largest excavations in Europe. As archaeologists described their process we recognised very quickly the enviable aesthetic of their notation methods.

“Field drawings are static. There is no ‘movement’, no attempt to include the perception of time passing or the personal experiences of the individual doing the drawing. Field drawings work towards the definite, fixing what we know. The strict conventions of field drawing and the importance of the collective in decisions made through drawing make this no place for ‘self-expression’. Nonetheless some archaeologists produce drawings in an unmistakable individual style, and field drawings can be a source of personal pride.

The permatrace is taped over lightweight board covered in millimetre-ruled graph paper. A semi-transparent drawing surface comes into its own when finished drawings are removed from the planning board. Because the permatrace is see through and plans are marked with grid points of known co-ordinates drawings can be precisely layered" (Wickstead, 2010)



Figure 24. © Prof. Julian Thomas, section drawing The Cursus

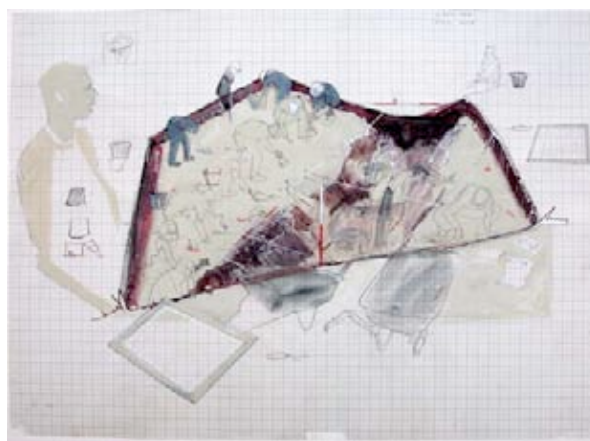


Figure 25. Julian Thomas & Cursus Trench, © the Author

Drawings are a source of personal pride to archaeologists. However, the noticeable difference here to the practice of visual artists and the ownership of their drawings is clear. For example, Professor Thomas's name is applied to the section drawing of the Cursus yet it is the product of his team (Fig 24). The draughtsman is anonymous. I chose to follow the archaeologists' example and work on graph paper using for the first time 5H and 6H pencils. The drawing of Professor Thomas beside his Cursus trench (Fig 25), describes the movements of individuals over a six or seven hour period. The decision to employ graph paper as a support for some of the Stonehenge Riverside Project pieces reflects a common medium, and interest, engendered between two disciplines. Having observed the careful notation demanded of the archaeologists by graph paper the artist's working practice absorbed a new understanding of excavations. Hard pencils drew on graph paper but were used by the artist in a freehand gestural manner graphically recording yet contrasting archaeologists' techniques.

Archaeologist and Artist shared a lively dialogue exploring with interest their contrasting drawing techniques which employed similar materials.



Figure 27. Trench 1, © the Author

As a group we tried to emulate the archaeologists' process but unlike the archaeologists we were free to apply personal interpretation.

"Mud splatters and scuffed lines are more compelling than 'official' digitally enhanced illustrations. We annotate our drawings with thoughts that occur in the process of drawing and digging. Removing these annotations - while it makes a 'cleaner' more professional image - makes drawings less, rather than more, informative." (Wickstead, 2010)



Figure 27. Infant skeleton with Dog Skull, © the Author Figure 28. Infant Skull, © Simon Mills

An infant skeleton buried with a dog's skull was found beneath the Cuckoo Stone. A sacrificial burial probably Roman, nails had been driven into some of its bones (fig 28). Forensic archaeologists worked clinically to annotate this moving find, later, off duty, their reaction to my drawing revealed a more emotive response recalling the potency of drawing as witnessed in the Liverpool Hospital project in the late 1990's. When an artist is given intimate and private access to moving events their work will communicate with powerful poignancy. Both the artist and viewer are affected. The artist arguably producing works of emotional strength reflecting the experience whilst the viewer invests the drawing with their own feelings, a noteworthy cross fertilisation of sensitivities. The infant skeleton left indelible marks on my visual memory and still moves me two years down the line.

Rebecca Davies (Davies, 2007), a member of our group, observed: "I built up a series of drawings that recorded human activity within the space rather than recording the space itself. I translated these moving variables into visual diagrams so I could find patterns and visual connections that would help me to explain how the archaeologist plays an active yet subjective part in revealing and remodelling historic spaces".



Figure 29. Rebecca Davies at work, © Simon Mills



Figure 30. Image, © Rebecca Davies

In 2008 we returned, again for two weeks. Constant rain led to the production of small A6 water based postcard sized drawings.



Figures 31 & 32. A6 watercolour drawings, © the Author 2008

Fencing surrounded trenches, monuments, roads and pathways. The view, to both the monument and the excavation, was interrupted by layers of netting, wire, and barrier tapes. A parallel to archaeological layering was illustrated in the drawings by the use of tracing paper in order to echo the archaeological process.



Figure 33. Fences and Barriers, © the Author 2008

In 2009, laboratories and offices around the UK were visited in order to record the Post Excavation Analysis of finds from Stonehenge. The Universities of Oxford, Cambridge, Bournemouth and Sheffield all provided access. The finds which I had witnessed being excavated from the Salisbury Plain were now examined in, for example, a huge Accelerator Mass Spectrometer for Radio Carbon Dating (University of Oxford), or through a laboratory microscope, or, subjected to the intense scrutiny of an archaeological illustrator working in her own home. Recorded by a pencil, modern and traditional technologies rubbed shoulders.



Figure 34. Seeds, © the Author 2008



Figure 35. Oxford A.M.S., © the Author 2008



Figure 36. Sieves, © the Author 2008



Figure 37. Mike Allen – Home Lab, © the Author

Concluding summary.

From the trenches of World War 1 to the archaeological trenches on Salisbury Plain reportage continues to fulfil an important role. It speaks a common visual language communicating across cultures, and subject matter. The artist plays and has played an important role by providing a fresh perspective, an alternative viewpoint. By the exclusion of superfluous information only the core action is presented. The records produced form not only archives of momentous events but intimately engage the viewer. A cross fertilisation of ideas is generated between disciplines, lively debate instigated, and different professions develop mutual respect. They learn from each other about their relevant practices. The constant theme running through the history of reportage is our continuing fascination with the human condition. The human face does not change, nor does its reflection of extreme circumstances. We respond daily to facial expression, separated from contemporary costume it is that which communicates with us.

Artists as diverse as Marjan Satrapi (whose graphic novel *Persepolis* describes her childhood in Iran arguably more forcefully than words ever would) and Tim Vyner (who travels the world recording sporting events) contribute to the tradition. Vyner records sporting events as he sees them from The Olympic Games, (Fig. 38) to street soccer in Ghana. As a reportage artist his images present a unique view of the global passion and atmosphere of live sport.



Figure 38. Beijing Olympics, Postcard, © Tim Vyner

Figure 39. Art of Conflict, © Mario Minichiello

A discipline, which arguably began on the field of conflict, now embraces the full compass of human activity, for example:- Mario Minichiello's (Fig. 39) graphic, powerful subjects covered during the late 1980's included the Birmingham Six hearing, Beirut hostage releases, and Spy Catcher trials. He produces living images of life on the edge.

Arabella Dorman lived and travelled with the British army in Basra and Southern Iraq. Her work explores day-to-day life and the psychological experiences of soldiers during conflict, and, its aftermath. Xavier Pick has just returned from

Basra where his inspirational sketchbooks graphically recorded life as experienced by the armed forces. The Basra portfolio which seeks to portray the positive side of conflict was exhibited in London and on the military base. He has maintained a practice of producing daily visual diaries for 15 years, which he describes as a living portfolio, reportage for him is a way of life.



Figure 40. Freedoms, © Xavier Pick 2009



Fig 41. Morphines, © Xavier Pick

2009

The images I have used here are a small representation of reportage or documentary drawing as currently practised. The genre reflects capsules of time, archives, and collaborations, not just with medical, and archaeological sciences but contemporary society in general, lives in conflict and at peace. It does not simply record but via personal interpretation it engages with and contributes to a cross fertilisation of knowledge, perspectives, and skills.

References

- Barron J. N., Saad M. N.,** (1980): *Operative plastic and reconstructive surgery*, Edinburgh, Scotland: Churchill Livingstone
- Davies R.,** (2007) Stonehenge 2007 – Rebecca Davies *Projects Artists in Archaeology*, retrieved from http://www.artistsinarchaeology.org/index.php/about_us/
- Hartley K.,** (1981) *Kathe Kollwitz 1867 – 1945, (pp.65)*: Cambridge, England: Kettles Yard, isbn 0 907074111
- Petherbridge D.,& Jordanova L.,** (1997): *The Quick and The Dead – Artists and Anatomy*: London, England: The South Bank Centre, isbn 1853321729
- O. Neil E.,** (2001) Introduction and Preface in J. Midgley (Ed.) *Granada Sketchbook, (pp. 2)* Liverpool England: Liverpool John Moores University, isbn 0952316161
- Sujo G.,** (2001) *Legacies of Silence, (pp.55)*: London England: Phillip Wilson, isbn 085667 534 2
- Wickstead H.,** (forthcoming 2010) In S.Callery (ed.), *The Dig as Drawing Machine In Thames Gateway Project*



Figure 42. Archaeological Illustrator, © Julia Midgley 2009

Julia Midgley

Reader Documentary Drawing

Liverpool School Art & Design L.J.M.U.

Liverpool, UK

www.juliamidgley.co.uk

j.k.godfrey@ljmu.ac.uk & julia@juliamidgley.co.uk

A figurative artist, printmaker and researcher Julia Midgley is module leader and Reader in Documentary Drawing within the Graphic Arts B.A.Hons programme at Liverpool School of Art & Design, Liverpool John Moores University, Liverpool, UK. Reportage/documentary drawing is her prevalent activity. Originating from the war artist tradition, it investigates and practices a 21st century role for the genre. Drawing is the bedrock of her practice and informs the printmaking and reportage portfolios. Julia is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Painter Printmakers, R.E. she was a Council member from 2004/ 2005, and a member and Past Vice President of the Manchester Academy of Fine Arts. Reportage commissions/projects take the form of Residencies. Since 2007 as a member of Artists+Archaeology <http://www.artistsinarchaeology.org> Julia has been embedded within The Stonehenge Riverside Project. From 1997 -1999 she was Artist in Residence to the Royal Liverpool and Broadgreen University Hospital Trust.

Four publications about her documentary residencies have been published:-

" **Drawn from Experience**" 1999 pub. LJMU & Royal Liverpool & Broadgreen University Hospital Trust isbn 0 9523161 07

" **Granada Sketchbook**" 2001 pub. LJMU isbn 0 9253 16161

" **Blackpool Pleasure Beach - A Palette of Life**" 2002 Blackpool Pleasure Beach Ltd isbn 0 9514677 4 3

"**Amphitheatre**" 2005 pub. Chester City Council isbn 1 872 587 186