Collaborative Drawing Projects

Masters Thesis

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By

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Abstract

Who makes art, where art is made, and what art looks like have been foundational considerations within my art educational and studio practices for the last few years. Much of what my family and friends outside of the visual arts-world engage in would not be considered by them to be art or having the potential to be art. But like me, a soon-to-be a Master of Fine Arts, these friends and family notice and make in various ways. Reflecting on my family’s non-traditional making has broadened my current art practice and led me to address the questions of who makes art, where art is made, and what art looks in my own work. Most recently, I have been engaging in collaborative drawing projects.
This work is dedicated to Dr. Christine Thompson

Who introduced me to Reggio-Emilia’s emergent approach
Acknowledgements

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I would also like to thank the Ohio State University for granting me the opportunity to study and teach here. This experience has furthered my passion for studio teaching, and allowed me to experience two years with serious art colleagues. It has been an invaluable experience that will affect how I teach and make work from here on.
Vita

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Fields of Study

Major Field: Art
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1. The Role of Art Education and My Family History/Folklore

During my last quarter as a graduate student at Ohio State, I attended The Wexner Center's, "Discussion with Mark Bradford and Aminah Robinson." This discussion among two esteemed artists and a representative from the prestigious Wexner Center highlighted essential questions that have been bubbling up since I was an undergraduate.

Both Bradford and Robinson were repeatedly referred to as "artists," and each time they disputed the title. Each talked about their own histories with "making": Bradford discussed the time spent in his mother's hair salon, and Robinson talked about the oral traditions in her family and neighborhood. Artist seemed to be a tricky label. Why was it that these two are now being considered "artists" by certain authorities, but at another point in time their practices (making advertisement signs, styling hair; telling and illustrating stories, walking the neighborhood) were considered merely practical, functional, and unremarkable? One implication of Bradford's and Robinson's uneasiness with being called "artists" seemed to be that the other "makers" in their families and neighborhoods should also be referred to as "artists," but aren't. Art seemed to be something that had once excluded and now included Bradford and Robinson, but not the other members in their communities that seemed to be engaging in similar practices.

Who makes art, where art is made, and what art looks like have been foundational considerations within my art educational and studio practices for the last few years. Much of what my family and friends outside of the visual arts-world engage in would not be considered by them to be art or having the potential to be art. But like me, a soon-to-be a Master of Fine Arts, these friends and family notice and make in various ways. Like Robinson and Bradford, I've found artist to be a tricky label. Reflecting on my family's non-traditional making has broadened my current art
practice and led me to address the questions of who makes art, where art is made, and what art looks like in my own work.

Document 1: MFA Show Workstation at UAS
2. The Importance of Documentation as Part of the Current Project Process

DOCUMENTATION AS OBJECT OF ACCOUNT

Entering the corridor that leads into and out of the UAS galleries, my workstation is immediately to the left in a nook that is the same size as my studio. Once entering into the workstation nook, viewers notice large placards duct taped to the column closest to the worktable. The bottom one read:

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Document 4: MFA Show Workstation at UAS, Instruction Placard
Why do I ask participants to document and share as a part of this process? Photographs and video documents claim to provide objective evidence of something’s presence in a particular space and time with an authenticity that other media do not have. Documentation has been an important part of my recent practice because it provides evidence of 2D drawings existing in 3D space. While facilitating a project done in Italy, objective documentation of spaces was a component of the work. Outlines don’t exist in nature, but here was evidence of line drawings in the same space as ordinary 3D life. These drawings were interacted with as though they truly existed and had 3D form.
Photographs and videos include and exclude information by way of a formal frame. Because of this cropping, everything and everyone within the frame is implicated. In Italy ordinary, forthright spaces entered into a dialogue with Sharpee-drawn objects. During the dashed line project, similarly ordinary and unremarkable spaces came in contact with unnaturally bright, graphic shorthand devices. Suddenly these spaces weren’t ordinary or straightforward. With the introduction of dashed lines and because of the camera’s framing, everything and everyone cropped in was implicated and involved in an unusual and metaphorical situation.

Document 6: Dashed Line Project, Danielle at Scioto Park

With the dashed line project, what initially began as documentation of my dashed lines in spaces revealed how the camera perceived spaces and depth. The camera perceived the line in
the space in ways different from human perception. This exposed how the camera’s perception was contingent on the rules of linear perspective.

Document 7: Dashed Line Project, Lines in Studio

In some documentation, it was hard to tell if the dashed lines were actually in the space or added to the photo during post-production. In this way the camera becomes a part of the artwork because it affects the experience of the documentation.

Though the photographic and video documentations may be objects with aesthetic qualities, they should not be considered the art objects in this process. In my family, photographs and video allow for otherwise fleeting moments to be captured, referenced, and used in the future. They are a way to get to a story, song, or other memorable accounts. Family documentations are considered snapshots, and are not taken with the intention of being art.
These documents are used as record, and experienced as reference. Similarly, documentation in the dashed line project should be more analogous to the way it operates within family photographs. Documentation of using dashed line tools may involve artistic intention, but the photos are not the art objects. They are a record that can then be used as reference.

After entering the corridor, the viewer encounters an oversized video projection, the first element of my workstation.

Document 8: MFA Show Workstation at UAS, Video Projection

The video is a 25-minute loop of segments of experiments carried out over the last year. Projected on the wall parallel to the entrance doors, the video spills over a recessed section and onto the floor. When not projected over a part of the recessed area people, lines, and landscape
appear objective; viewers can get pulled into the illusionistic, projected space and observe their experiments without visual disruption. The projected image reaches to the corner of where the projection wall meets the hallway. Repositioning oneself near the corner, the image becomes sculptural and broken. People, lines, and landscape feel as though they simultaneously have form and are incredibly flat. Their form is determined by what the projection falls on. Because this projected image spills on to the floor, viewers can literally step on to, not exactly into, the images.

Viewers’ shadows become incorporated into the action on the screen. These projected images attempt to gain 3D form and interact with viewers’ bodies. The video element of the installation has potential to be more than an aesthetic object: there is potential for instructional modeling and for interaction.
VANTAGE POINTS: RELATIONSHIP OF DOCUMENTER TO PROCESS

In looking at family photographs with other family members, the photographer is rarely recalled or acknowledged. The represented people and places are visible and they are used as starting points for other recollections. During the Italy project, the documenter was treated similarly: as someone objectively capturing facts. How participants staged or interacted with their drawings was most important. Documentation during the dashed line project also began this way. A distanced, possibly voyeuristic documenter captured the encounters of a participant with a dashed line.

Document 10: Dashed Line Project, Kristn at Whetstone Park

Because the activation of these dashed line tools depended on their orientation in space relative to the participant, the camera sometimes caught an interesting slippage. The participants
were not the documenters, and the camera shooting from a different vantage point highlighted that these tools “worked” from particular vantage points and seemed quite useless from others.

Participants watching footage taped from the camera's, or documenter's, vantage point were often disappointed. Moments that had been so poignant to them appeared silly or unremarkable to the camera. I became disappointed too. It was important to see what others were noticing, but that was lost if someone else was filming from a stationary or distanced position. The question of how participants could see what I had been seeing as a documenter, or make their own decisions regarding moments worth highlighting became more important.

Over time, the documenter eventually achieved a more flexible vantage point by becoming more actively involved:

![Images of participants engaged in activity]

Documents 11 & 12: Dashed Line Project, Jamie and Evan at Home

Later, as in the MFA project, all documentation was put into the hands of the participant, and then catalogued online.
3. The Importance of an Art that is Experiential and Functional

FUNCTIONAL AND CONCEPTUAL OBJECT THAT CATALYZES PROCESS/EXPERIENCE

A paper napkin on a table. An object that is camouflaged by normal use and everyday-ness, in some way becoming anonymous. An object we have already assimilated, already experienced. A “habitual material” which, when observed with searching eyes, eyes that distinguish, can become something else: white, airy, and delicate; just a bit rough; overlaid and opaque; or open and almost transparent. A napkin removed from invisibility and made the protagonist of attentions and reflections. From the object-napkin function, we change direction and are catapulted into the discovery of the known-unknown paper napkin, making it something special because we look at it in a special way. (Vecchi & Giudici, 2004, p. 27) ...

Outlines don’t exist in nature, but the Italy project and dashed line projects produced documentation of outlines in nature. During the group project in Italy, the line drawings on transparency film wanted to fool us into thinking the represented objects were really there. The drawn objects shared participants’ 3D space, and with the transparent surface the lines sometimes felt as though they existed independent of a ground. Unlike other drawings that are meant to be observed, these drawings on transparency film were props to be used. Participants pantomimed wishes of punching out an antagonist, acquiring expensive Italian boots, or missing American chain coffee.

As participants interacted with these objects they activated them, or brought them into a 3D realm. In the end though, it was obvious that these objects were 2D drawings; these objects only existed as outlines or simplified representations of their actual counterparts. In documentation these activated drawn objects seemed imagined, or of something appearing from the past or future. We don’t believe that the drawn coffee is truly thirst quenching, but we are familiar with using and trusting shorthand images to represent the real thing. As playful and provocative as many of these activated Italy drawings were, in the end the recognizable objects
were too limiting and inflexible. Boots could only be configured in so many ways, and would always be “boots.”

**DRAWING PROPS BECOME “TOOLS”**

![Documents 13 & 14: Not a Stick](image)

What could be a more flexible drawing prop? I kept a transparent plane, but replaced the drawn objects with a duct taped dashed line. Of the many kinds of lines that duct tape could make, why enforce strictly dashed lines? Dashed lines are a particular kind of device that communicate certain things about time, space, and form. In this project, they are bright, tangible, 3D representations of a 2D device that like the drawn objects in Italy still could represent an absence, or something that is hidden or imperceptible.

As for the dashed line’s ground, a rectangular frame harkens back to other traditional drawing surfaces. It is an objective frame, unlike a more organic, expressive shape. It is a window, a viewfinder, and a way to hold and position the line as the line’s support. Each dash on a side of the plane needs to be the same color. If they are different colors, each dash will be emphasized rather than creating a cohesive line. Varied dashes feel more like a design than an objective device. This is a line with a front and back. The line on the front is one color, it’s
mirrored opposite is another color. The size of these planes with dashed lines varies, but never exceeds the size of one’s body. This drawing prop’s scale emphasizes its ability to be easily transported. This drawing prop allows for “drawing” as a verb as much as “drawing” as a noun.

How do we refer to this thing, this drawing prop? These drawing props facilitate serious investigations. They are tools; more specifically, they are dashed line tools. They have uses. These uses are discovered through participants’ activation. What may initially seem like a limited, objective fragment becomes quite expressive and articulate, if not also a futile representation rather than the actual thing the tool stands in for.

Document 15: MFA Show Workstation at UAS, Tools at Rest

Dashed line tools can be displayed on a mantle or as a series of layers, but that’s not their only purpose. Like the Italy project drawings, dashed line tools’ purpose is not primarily to be
displayed. But unlike the Italy project’s representational drawings, dashed line tools have potential to do and be lots of different things. Inviting others to document their tools as they were used allowed me to see when others thought these tools were “being,” and being something in particular.

![Image of a cat looking at a dashed line drawing]

Document 16: Dashed Line Project, Karma’s Cat at Lunchtime

MAKING YOUR OWN TOOL

When making one’s own tool became a part of the dashed line project, it was important that constructing the tools didn’t take long or become too complicated. Many of the drawn objects done in Italy took some time to plan and execute; this was a relevant component given that this project was happening within the context of a drawing studio class. The dashed line project is still about drawing, but doesn’t presuppose that all participants are comfortable observationally drawing. The dashed line project also doesn’t emphasize rendering a particular object, just a particular kind of line. The objects in the dashed line project are not to be understood as art
objects in themselves, or as precious drawings made carefully. Dashed line tools need to be able to be made quickly. The emphasis is on using the tool post-construction, not the making itself. These tools are not just meant to be aesthetic they’re also practical. Visitors to the MFA workstation would have read:

![Paper with instructions](image)

**Making and Taking a Tool**

1. Choose a piece of Plexiglass, or cut a piece of vinyl
2. Choose two colors of duct tape
3. On one side, use one color to make a dashed line on your Plexiglass or vinyl
4. On the opposite side, make the same line using your other color
5. Take your dashed line tool home with you, and document its use (see below)

**Just Taking a Tool**

(if you do not wish to make a tool)

1. Choose one of the pre-made Plexiglass or vinyl tools.
2. Take your pre-made dashed line tool home with you, and document its use (see below)

Document 17: MFA Show Workstation at UAS, Instruction Placard

This step of constructing a dashed line tool, or choosing a pre-constructed tool, was intended as an unintimidating process that lead to a specific product. Anyone should have felt like they could do this.
CATALYZED EXPERIENCE

To see, to perceive, is more than to recognize. (Dewey, 1934, p. 24)

With such a particular tool being framed as something to use and not just look at, what do these tools do? There needs to be empirical investigation to find out. This transparent surface is something to see through or with. It allows you to notice aspects of a space, in regards to the window and line.

![Image of a transparent surface with dashed lines]

Document 18: Dashed Line Project, Danielle and Cloud

This interactive process was designed with adults in mind. Certain behavior becomes permitted with these dashed line tools. Empirical use of these seemingly useless, purposeless tools encourages playful exploration of natural and very public spaces. Adults have thoughtfully
charted, noticed, and experimented with an essential element of drawing: a line. For a period of

time, participants seem to forget (what might otherwise be considered) the absurdity of this
situation. In one case, my two adult brothers’ hands touched with only a thin, transparent plane
between them. They thoughtfully examined each other through this new window, and playfully
used the tool in terms of each other.

Document 19: Dashed Line Project, Jamie and Evan at Home

The tool became an activated item between them, and extended as something they could use
together. This behavior became permissible with the presence of the dashed line tool.

It is important that these tools get out of blank, neutral art spaces such as galleries and
studios. In these white-cube spaces, the dashed lines can be reduced to an abstract, aesthetic
element. This display had happened several months before the MFA show during the Open Studios event. On the MFA workstation instruction placard directing the making or taking of a dashed line tool, the last instruction was for participants to take their newly made (or chosen pre-made) tool home. In the gallery, these dashed lines could be mistaken as an aesthetic object in itself, not something to be used and something relevant in non-art spaces. Dashed line tools are non-figurative devices meant to interact with figurative, 3D, non-art spaces. They are meant to ask questions in otherwise familiar spaces. They allow for a particular kind of looking in everyday spaces.

ART and EPISTEMOLOGY

Collaboration, play, and sharing are important to my practice. On my mom's side of the family, traditions are important. When I've asked some of my mom's cousins why it's important for them to pass along certain rituals and practices, the question has usually been treated as though there is an obvious answer: to know your past is to know yourself. This sharing is supposed to give one a sense of what is valued or meaningful, and sometimes there is also an explanation of why these practices are especially important. In my particular family, group singing has been upheld. We are able to remember all the past times this song was sung. We can laugh about certain lyrics and improvisations, and it's a fun way to do something together. This tradition is practiced by my brothers and me but varies in how it's expressed from sibling to sibling, and it is quite different from what my mom ever participated in growing up. There is a structure, but room for interpretation within each person's expression.

I've begun to realize that my art practice is an extrapolation of this process. There is an initial proposal with individual incorporation, and later reciprocal sharing. In the dashed line project, my aim is to share a way that I see drawing, and hopefully others engage within my structure while also sharing how they visually see spaces. Early in what became the dashed line project, the dashed lines were fixed in studio and gallery spaces. I wondered what might happen if these lines became mobile and their orientation was decided by other people. I was curious to
see how various people used this line; would those who were visually trained use it differently, more elegantly, more carefully? I was happily surprised with how little direction was necessary for everyone who participated.
4. What is the Art Context?

ENVIRONMENTAL FRAME

The way that a space is set up gives cues as to what we are and are not to do. This was as true for spaces of tool exploration as it was for my workstation in the MFA show. I wanted to encourage gallery visitors to re-examine expectations of spaces that display art and artworks. I wanted people to ask, “Who makes art, and where is art made?” Even though visitors were in an art gallery, they were allowed and expected to touch and make things, more akin to a children’s museum or studio space. The top placard indicated this:

This is a hands-on, participatory station. Please feel free to touch and make a dashed line tool by following the instructions below. Feel free to ask a gallery attendant for assistance at any time:

Document 20: MFA Show Workstation at UAS, Instruction Placard
A year prior, when the dashed line tools were stationary, installed lines their object-ness was emphasized. They were made to be observed in a predetermined situation. They read as *my* lines in a configuration and space of my choosing.

Later, Open Studios, which was situated chronologically between the stationary dashed lines and the MFA show, highlighted how easily neutral, blank spaces emphasized the lines as isolated formal elements; dashed lines interacted and reacted in terms of other dashed lines. This process emphasized finality rather than a more continual process with flow and moments of pause. Also, the fact that participants were working in an art space facilitated more arbitrary and unmotivated choices. The tone of participants seemed to be compliant yet mostly disinterested. Once these lines were mobile and in everyday contexts, they highlighted both practical and poetic relationships. There seemed to be more inherent interest in spaces that were meaningful to participants and where there were more 3D, ordinary referents.

**TEMPORAL FRAME**

I don't see this dashed line project ending like other works I have made. Previous works seemed to make a particular statement and be self-contained. In John Dewey's *Art as Experience*, he likens artmaking to living and doesn't see an end, but rather a building upon. There are periods of experiences and periods of reflection. These reflections do not signify an end; they are part of a continual process of experiencing and reflecting.

These fragmented lines, these tools, should be understood as a part of a continual process. This process argues for something other than achieving an object in the gallery, or an object that rests at home. As artmakers, we notice things around us and use those things; we draw from what is around us in an ongoing process. Everyone notices things around them and uses those things. I am interested to propose a familiar tool of mine as a means to investigate what others see and notice.
Bibliography


Also:
Reggio-Emilia Approach (in general)
Miranda July’s, Learning to Love You More Project
Children’s Museum of Pittsburgh
Robin Rhode
Peter Campus
Richard Long’s Walks
Folk music from the 60’s