

Cartography through drawing: the path of belonging by stephen farthing

*Cartografia através do desenho: territórios do
pertencimento de Stephen Farthing*

*Cartografía a través del dibujo: territorios de
pertenencia de Stephen Farthing*

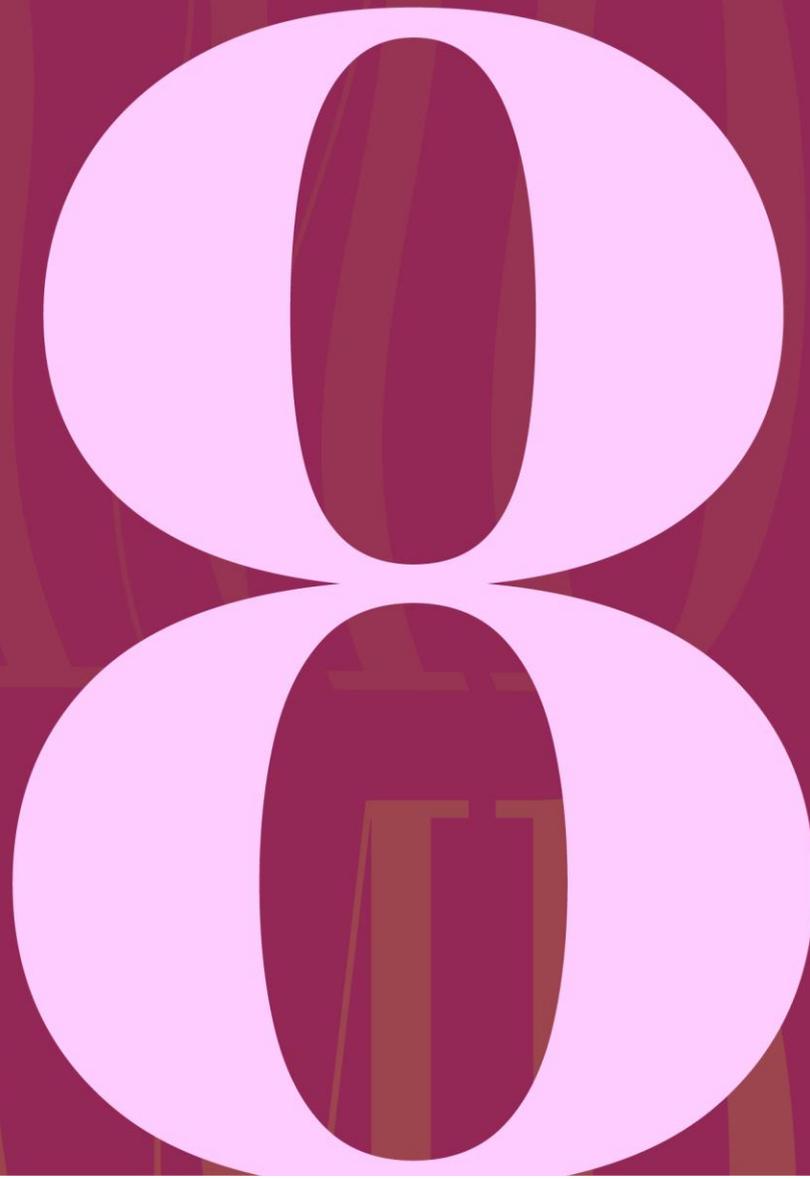
Interviewers

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Abstract

The interview with Professor Stephen Farthing covers part of his career as an artist, researcher and teacher in drawing, including thoughts on the roles of drawing and its learning process based on its understanding as interdisciplinary knowledge going beyond the arts field. Farthing establishes relationships between drawing, cartography, the perception of belonging in territories mapped by drawing, and the need to record space, dimensions, history, and emotions. It is also through drawing that the researcher investigates his interests in art, as in his studies on painting. The artist's drawings instigate reflections on the painting and the drawing itself as a form of reflection and elaboration of thought. In this sense, the researcher defends the teaching of drawing through a broad approach, intertwining areas of knowledge.

Keywords: Drawing; Teaching; Cartography.

Resumo

A entrevista com o Professor Stephen Farthing aborda parte de sua trajetória como artista, pesquisador e professor em desenho, incluindo reflexões sobre as funções do desenho e seu processo de aprendizagem a partir de sua compreensão como conhecimento interdisciplinar, indo além do campo das artes. Farthing estabelece relações entre o desenho, a cartografia e a percepção de pertencimento em territórios mapeados pelo desenhar e pela necessidade de registrar o espaço, as dimensões, a história e as emoções. É também por meio do próprio desenho que o pesquisador investiga seus interesses em arte, como em seus estudos sobre a pintura. Os desenhos do artista instigam tanto as reflexões sobre a pintura quanto o próprio desenho como forma de reflexão e elaboração do pensamento. É nesse sentido que o pesquisador defende o ensino do desenho por uma abordagem ampla, entrelaçando áreas do conhecimento.

Palavras-chave: Desenho; Ensino; Cartografia.

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Resumen

La entrevista al profesor Stephen Farthing recorre parte de su trayectoria como artista, investigador y docente en dibujo, incluyendo reflexiones sobre las funciones del dibujo y su proceso de aprendizaje a partir de su comprensión como conocimiento interdisciplinario, yendo más allá del campo de las artes. Farthing establece relaciones entre el dibujo, la cartografía y la percepción de pertenencia a territorios mapeados por el dibujo y la necesidad de registrar el espacio, las dimensiones, la historia y las emociones. Es también a través del propio dibujo que el investigador investiga sus intereses en el arte, como en sus estudios sobre la pintura. Los dibujos del artista instigan tanto reflexiones sobre la pintura como sobre el dibujo mismo como forma de reflexión y elaboración del pensamiento. Es en este sentido que el investigador defiende la enseñanza del dibujo a través de un enfoque amplio, entrelazando áreas de conocimiento.

Palabras clave: Dibujo; Enseñando; Cartografía.



Stephen Farthing, 2015. Fonte: Anelise Zimmermann.

Stephen Farthing is an artist, a painter and a Professor of Drawing. His teaching career includes working as a Lecturer in Painting at Canterbury College of Art (1977-1979), a Tutor in Painting at the Royal College of Art (1980-1985), Head of Painting (1985-1987) and Head of Department of Fine Art (1987-1989) at West Surrey College of Art and Design, Ruskin Master at the Ruskin School of Fine Art, Professorial Fellow of St Edmund Hall, Oxford (1990-2000) and the Rootstein Hopkins Research Professor of Drawing at the University of the Arts London/UAL (2004-2017). He studied at Saint Martin's School of Art and graduated in 1973 with a Master's in Painting from the Royal College of Art in 1976. As he participated in the Abbey Scholarship Programme, Farthing studied for a year at the British School in Rome, Italy. He became a member of the Royal Academy of Arts in 1998. He participated in many art exhibitions, such as the Biennale of São Paulo, in Brazil, and others in the United Kingdom, Latin America and Japan. In time, Professor Farthing has written and published books on drawing practice and research through drawing. Website: <http://stephenfarthing.co.uk/>

Interviewers:

In your research "The Bigger Picture of Drawing³", you talk about the transition of the three-dimensional to the two-dimensional perspective through drawing. Where does the cartography drawing, the drawing of life, stand in this perspective? How does cartography create connections with the territory?

Professor Stephen Farthing: When you use the word "perspective", I assume you are referring not to perspectival drawing but to a range of methods of representing three-dimensional information as a two-dimensional image. Cartographers aim to describe the landscape as a measured two-dimensional "readable" image. Maps are readable like text because they are based on a set of conventions that, as readers, we must learn to recognize, while artists drawing are, by definition, pragmatic.

A life drawing by Rembrandt is not shaped by a rule book, a set of universally understood conventions. With that said, artists draw with many shared assumptions in mind. The darkness of a line can add emphasis; lightness can suggest vagueness or uncertainty. An outline that describes a recognizable shape is often where a drawing starts; adding tone can indicate volume or mood. Artists do not work with the certainty of a writer, that is, the one-to-one equivalencies of an alphabet and a dictionary. They draw intuitively with line and tone, pragmatically shaping the drawing as they go. As such, the map is much closer to the written word than an image drawn from life by an artist. The written word is a two-dimensional representation of speech, just as a musical score is a representation of sound, and the map is a representation of the surface of either terrain or the heavens.

Cartography establishes measured relationships between the component parts of whatever is being mapped. Cartographers can tell us how high a range of mountains is or how wide a river is; it can take us on imagined journeys and help us plan actual routes.

³ FARTHING, Stephen. The Bigger Picture of Drawing. *In: Thinking through drawing: practice into knowledge. Proceedings of an interdisciplinary symposium on drawing, cognition and education, 2011. Online Proceedings [...] New York: Columbia University, 2011. p. 21-25. Available: < https://www.academia.edu/2938948/Thinking_through_Drawing_Practice_into_Knowledge_2011 >. Accessed in: 23 out. 2023.*

In terms of emotional content, a map of the Amazon generates a very different set of emotions from a map of the streets and buildings in São Paulo. A drawing by Delacroix, a musical score and a written text all have the ability to generate emotional responses in the reader.

Interviewers:

How does the feeling of belongingness perceive our perception of the territory we are drawing?

Professor Stephen Farthing: I suspect that belongingness is where the emotional content of every drawing originates, that is, from both our sense of self and our familiarity with what we are drawing. If we take the example of the landscape drawings made by the first European settlers in Australia and North America, what is clear is that the European artists had a deeply embedded understanding of the landscape where they were born, which converted the unfamiliar as they drew into something familiar. So, we see drawings of Australia based on a European landscape model. The drawings by the indigenous people of Australia spoke of the landscape in terms of stories and magical relationships, not in terms of trees, grass, and skies, which typified the European understanding of landscape.

Interviewers:

Do drawings cross the barriers of territory and our belonging to the space we are in?

Professor Stephen Farthing: In common with the spoken and written word, drawing enables the user to record, explain, wonder, understand and share conclusions in a two-dimensional form with others.

Interviewers:

Do we learn to draw when we draw? Do you think we learn how to learn when we draw?

Professor Stephen Farthing: I suspect that as we draw, we can learn both how to draw and how to learn. Over time, the more we draw, the more insightful and more eloquent our drawings can (but not necessarily) become. Great draftsmanship is often the product of practice. But for this to become true, the person drawing must be chasing the answer to a question or actively engaged in a voyage of discovery, not passively replicating (however skilfully) what is before their eyes.

Interviewers:

How has your research changed how you used to teach drawing and how you used to think about your work as an artist?

Professor Stephen Farthing: My research into drawing has opened my eyes to the value of those responsible for organizing formal education at all levels to view drawing as an essential tool and a key component of our literacy and creative thinking. So we teach drawing not simply in the art room, as an art historically driven thread, but as a cross-disciplinary transferable skill.

Interviewers:

Why research drawing through drawings?

Professor Stephen Farthing: Plenty of people have written books about drawing, but few have managed to capture its essence. For this reason, I thought I would try to understand better what drawing is by trying for over a decade to draw drawing⁴. The reason? Because I thought it was my duty as a Professor of Drawing to

⁴ A pesquisa em desenho. In: O desenho conectando conhecimentos. Produção de Anelise Zimmermann. Florianópolis: Editora UDESC, 2018. 24 min, son., color. Episódio 01. Disponível em: <https://www.pesquisaemdesenho.com/episodio-1>.

be able to explain to others what we are doing when we draw and, by doing that, make it easier for students to understand how to draw.

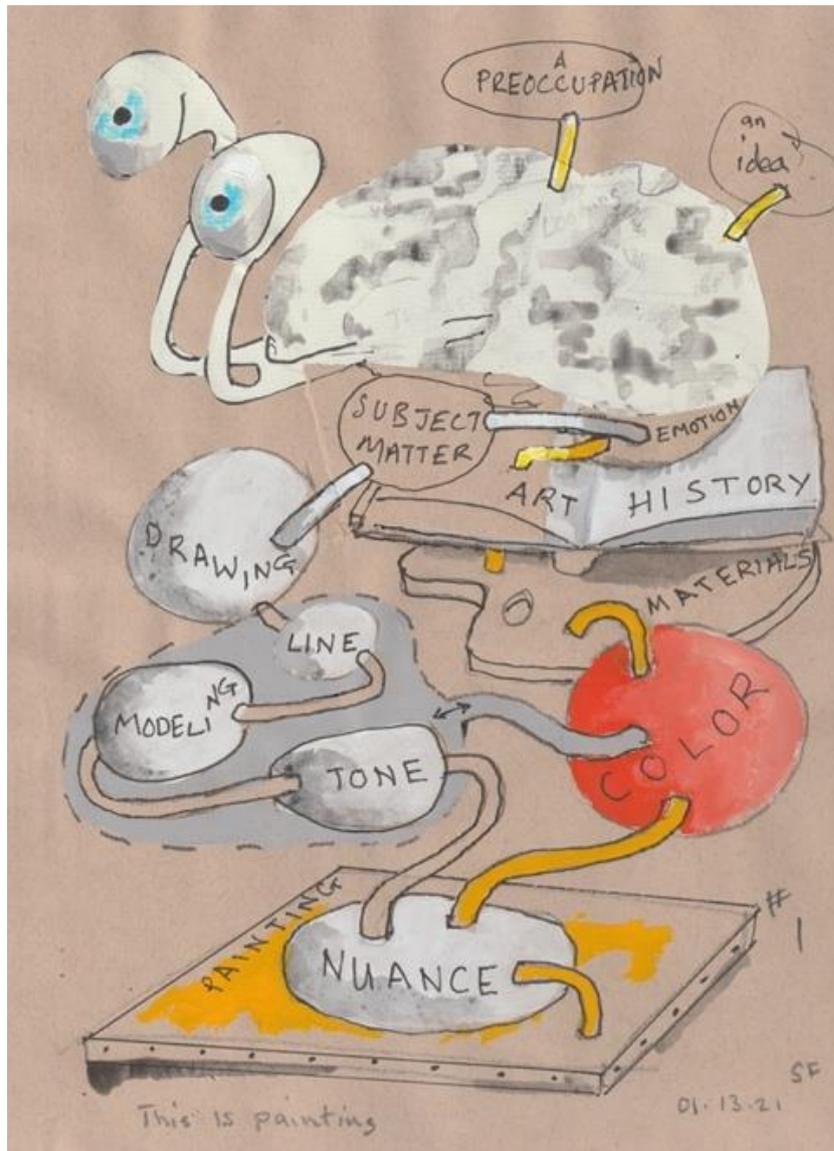
If you show a class a 15,000-year-old drawing of cattle on the walls of a cave in southern France, then talk to them about the anatomical drawings of Leonardo da Vinci in the Royal Library in Windsor, then compare those drawings to Van Gogh, a tattoo on human flesh and the line at a road junction that causes your taxi to draw to a halt... You have the start of a conversation about drawing. Perhaps the following week, we look up at the night sky and make a cerebral drawing by joining the stars that conjure the name Orion in our heads. At that point, we have begun to draw drawings without making a mark on a sheet of paper.

As part of my research through drawings, in the following two figures, I have attempted to draw painting. It started with motivation, the seen and the idea - we then move to knowledge, art, historical and material - then through subject matter to the relationship between drawing and painting. The first one (Figure 1) is a drawing of a painting. The second image (Figure 2) is a drawing of a specific painting by Vermeer, *The Girl with Pearl Earrings*. The size of the balloons that represent the component processes is determined by my estimation of their relative importance within that particular painting. I have made similar drawings of a range of paintings⁵.

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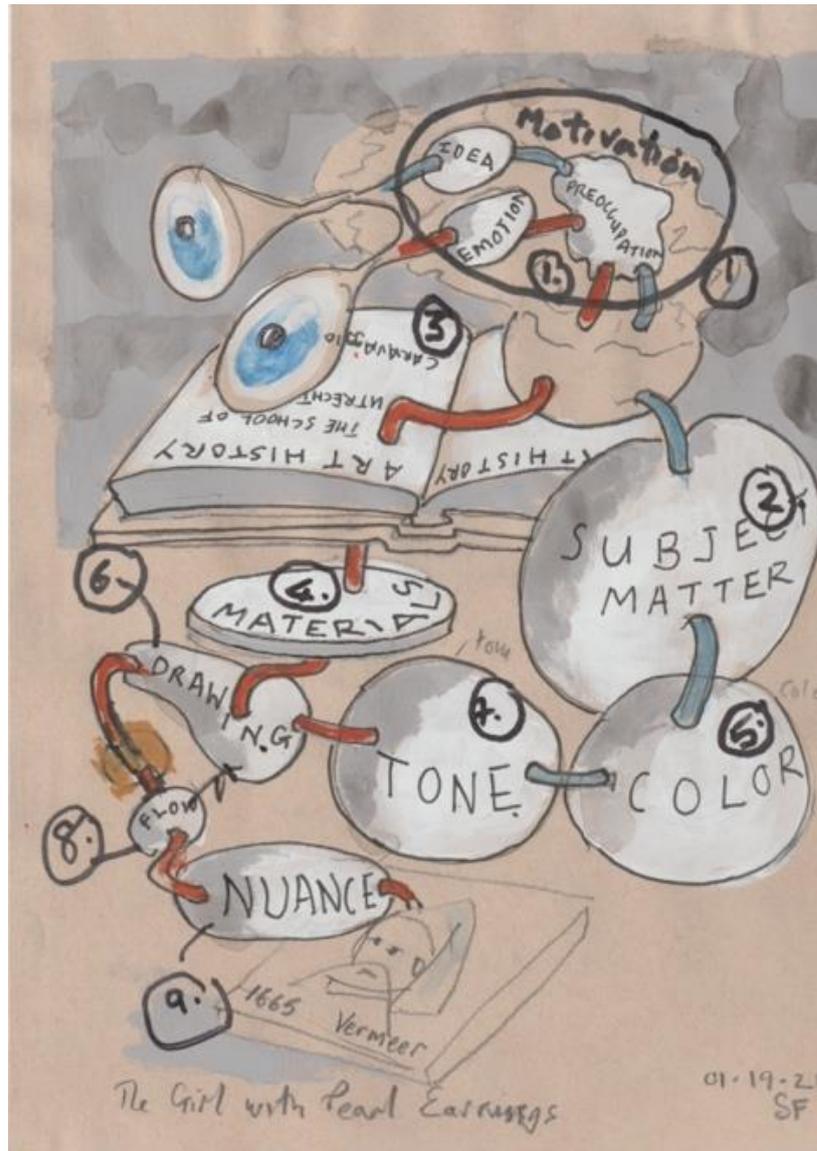
⁵ FARTHING, Stephen. **Artists' Laboratory 02: Stephen Farthing RA**. Royal Academy of Arts: London, 2010.

Figure 1 – Drawing of painting.



Source: Collection of the artist (2021).

Figure 2 – Drawing of the painting The Girl with Pearl Earrings by Vermeer.



Source: Collection of the artist (2023).

Interviewers:

What is the importance of thinking about drawing in an interdisciplinary way for artists and educators?

Professor Stephen Farthing: It is important to understand drawing as a universal tool and not simply something artists did on paper until the camera was invented and computer-aided design programs were written. To achieve this

understanding, we must first appreciate the many applications of drawing and the role it plays in our general literacy and ability to communicate with each other. Drawing is culturally far more important than I suspect the high school and University curriculum gives it credit for. It is a means of communication still used today despite photography and the written word. It is practised on a daily basis by preschool children and research scientists, artists, architects, designers, and cartographers who use drawing as a means of not simply presenting ideas but as a stimulus to organizing their thoughts and wondering.

In conclusion

Throughout the interview, Professor Stephen Farthing talks about part of his research trajectory in drawing, highlighting the process of drawing as part of a process of elaboration and representation of thought – the drawing that communicates, that understands, that brings a message or that wanders through ideas, memories and the limits of territories. In cartography, at the same time that drawings delimit spaces, establish measurements and guide geographic routes in the two-dimensional transcription of the three-dimensional world, they also tell about belonging, familiarity, and estrangement and make us glimpse imaginary routes at the intersection of so many other routes and stories possible. Using these drawing possibilities, Farthing investigates the paths of paintings, seeking to understand and represent the relationships between motivations and processes. Based on the various properties of drawing, the researcher highlights the importance of its teaching and practice, from the school years to university, through a broad understanding of its possibilities, intertwined with the most diverse fields of knowledge, transcending its historical connection to art.

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