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The Importance of Reportage

Introduction

Hello there! Reportage has struggled over the previous decade but has seen a new resurgence amongst the art scene. One of the main causes of the fall of reportage is the development of the camera and how accessible photography is in this current day and age. A new lease of life within reportage is beginning to spark. Can those sparks of hope carry this old time tradition back to the top? Within this written essay, I will be discussing what reportage is, where it came from and its development over recent years. I will also discuss the works of current artists and how their work is bringing back the importance of reportage.

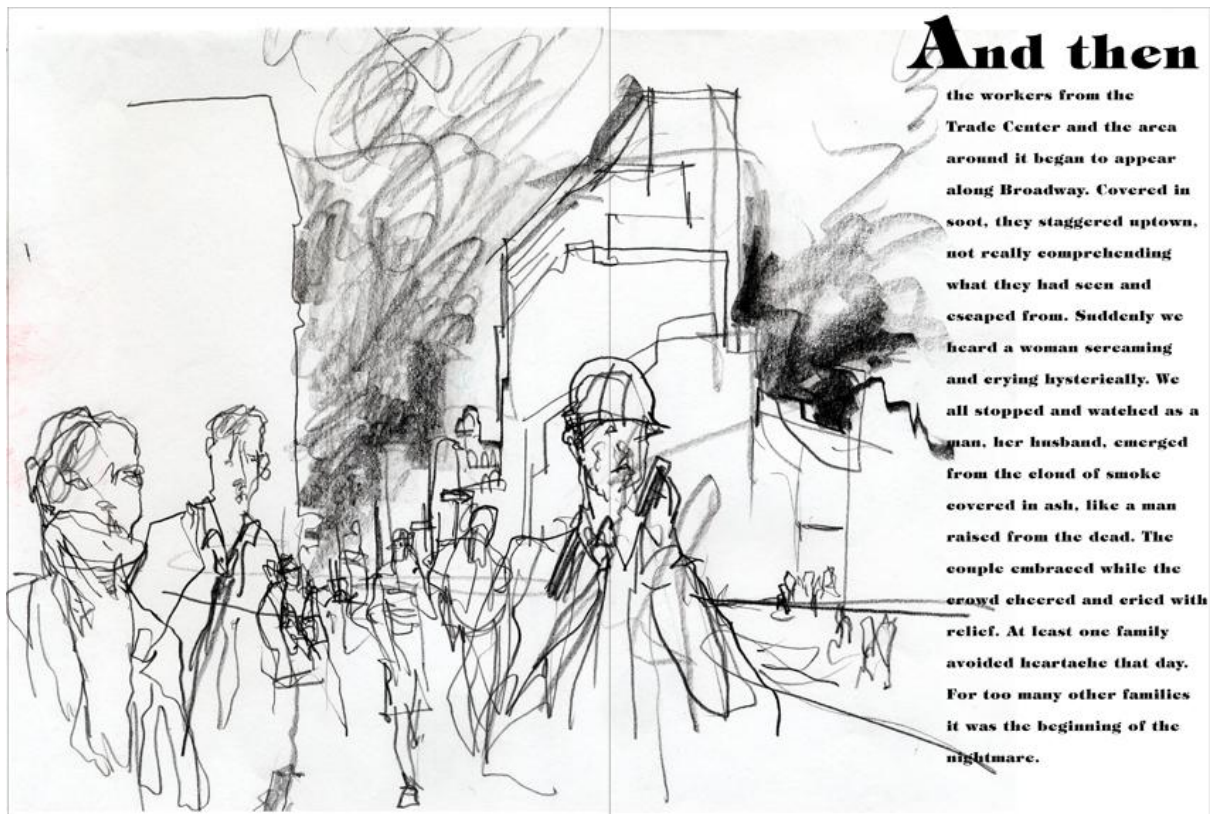
What is reportage?

Starting off, reportage can be perceived in many different ways. There are many methods to reportage, for example, video recording, written articles, photography, news reports, drawing and sketching. I will be looking into the many ways but specifically looking in to the influence of reportage illustration.

Reportage can be described as the reporting of news. This is gathering information to share to others. Reportage Illustration is documenting the events whilst on location and making marks on paper to depict the situation. These situations can be varied and don't necessarily have to be important pieces of news. For example, (i) a concert (ii) social demonstrations or rally's/ marches (iii) courtroom cases (iv) drawing passer's by. A reportage artist is like a visual journalist giving the viewer a direct understanding of the events unfolding through drawing. The artist produces rapid sketches to capture movement and to evoke a sense of character within the drawings. This gives a

more emotive side of drawing, having limited time to create marks before the person or object moves on from what they were doing. The lines created as reportage feel more meaningful and give a sense of freedom and fluidity to the drawings.

An excellent example of reportage work and instinct to do so, is Veronica Lawlor and her 9/11 sketches.



September 11, 2001: Words and Pictures: Veronica Lawlor (2014)

Here can be seen a drawing made during the events of the tragedy of 9/11. Veronica Lawlor began sketching in the moment, really capturing the raw emotions of people which wouldn't otherwise be seen by a camera. These sketches really express the terror and horror of what happened on that day and we as the viewer can experience the chaos through Veronica Lawlor's point of view. She describes reportage as an "analysis of a situation of a place, of an event through drawing. Going on location and drawing what's going on in the world." What we can interpret from

this is that it is best to be out and about drawing from life, absorbing all our surroundings and drawing what we see. Also, making sure to always carry some sort of sketchbook and drawing implement so as to never miss a moment to capture the situation.

There are many ways in which to produce reportage work. There is not one set method as each artist has their own preferred way of working. Using a variety of materials allows for expensive creation and testing out new techniques can be rewarding too. It is best to always experiment and not be limited by the tools brought on a particular day. It is essential to carry at least one sketchbook and multitude of drawing tools. Many artists prefer to work out of the sketchbook and use large pieces of paper with a drawing board. This allows for bigger scale drawings without the confines of a sketchbook. However, a sketchbook lets the artist produce multiple drawings on separate pages. I find it is best working and experimenting in a sketchbook and then when I am comfortable with how I am working, I will branch out onto larger paper. Work doesn't have to be done on paper. Many artists use cardboard, receipts or even train tickets. It just depends what is available that day. It is best not to limit yourself when drawing. Often buying cheaper materials grants more freedom about the work produced because there isn't as big a concern for 'ruining' a drawing.

Drawing tools are a necessity. As artists, we required some sort of device which makes a mark in order to produce reportage drawings. Many artists daily carry is a pen they are fond of. This can range from fine liners to fountain pens to marker pens. There is an abundance of tools artists can use today. Even the use of digital media to draw has increased. All sorts of drawing software allow artists to carry tablets around and digitally draw on the go. However, the focus here is on physical mark makers. A variety of materials is key to producing work. A mix of materials can be very effective. Charcoals and pastels give a lovely thick outline to drawings and let artists create larger blocks of colour. Colour can really define a drawing. It can add emotion into the drawings or it can change the perspective of the viewer.

History

Reportage illustration has a rather extensive history dating back to primal ages with stone carvings and cave paintings. Although not very realistic and detailed, these images still depict early signs of reportage. From images of animals and tools, these paved the way for future illustrations. Some of which can be seen today. However, I will be looking into the recent history of reportage and where it became popular.

Focusing on the 19th century, reportage was a vital. As humans ventured out and explored a largely unknown world, this allowed artists to document new land and exotic locations to share when they returned home. Artists include Winslow Homer, John Frederick Lewis, John Webber and William Simpson. Reportage artists documented people's daily lives, political events, cities and landscapes. Thomas Harrison Hair and Henry Harris Lines produced detailed landscapes from England. Also in Japan at this time, Japanese wood block masters such as Katsushika Hokusai and Utagawa Kuniyoshi documented culture and people. Hokusai produced thirty six views of Mount Fuji depicting the view from different locations and seasons. Moving onto a more recent time, work produced by war artists became a common feature in newspapers because the drawings took the reader to places they would never even imagine to visit. However, this was a treacherous task as an artist could be mistaken for a spy. These war artists became known as 'special artists'.

As the years advanced, towards the Great War and World War II, reportage artists were being used for propaganda for posters. Either to promote the army or disdain people from joining by depicting horrific scenes. Otto Dix used his work to show soldiers struggles along the front line with his piece 'Mealtime in the Trench'. This image shows a shivering man attempting to eat whilst the left behind bones of another soldier lay in the soil next to him. Reportage artists were being commissioned by the National Gallery to capture, observe and document people's daily lives in Britain during the war to show courage and stability to unite the nation. These artists included Paul Nash and Stanley Spencer.

Post Great War, many artists were reporting on positive aspects to rebuild hope and prosperity. Then the second World War came about and this largely benefitted America. Helping bring them out of the great depression and focus their minds to mechanicalisation of weapons and vehicles. However this created a bigger gap between the rich and poor, developing an underclass of under skilled people. The struggles of these people were captured by artists Horace Pippin and Charles Shahn among many others.

Additional wars followed such as the Vietnam War, however documentation was mostly dominated by photography. A medium which began to over throw reportage art as a means of communication. The key difference between a drawing and a camera lens is the thought. A drawing contains one specific artists interpretation of a scene through visual means with pen and ink. There is a physical and cognitive process which occurs whilst drawing. Taking time and patience to capture the environment which is constantly changing. A camera captures everything at once showing exactly what each eye sees. A drawing can alter a person's thought, draw the viewer to certain a point and share a unique story. Which is why reportage is still being used in courtrooms, urban sketching and social documentary.

Today, reportage illustration is carried out by many artists and students. From sharing small stories to capturing large scale events. Reportage can be seen everywhere, including magazines, newspapers, books and advertisements. Many artists use reportage to spread awareness of critical topics affecting the earth, such as climate change and wars still going on. It is easier to visualise these serious topics and see straight away what the issues are.

Analysis

Looking into the work which current reportage artists produce has been truly eye opening and inspiring to me as an aspiring artist myself. I will analyse and share my thoughts on a selection of artists whose work has been of great influence on me.

Firstly, the reportage work Lucinda Rogers does from her travels to New York are a great representation of the subject. Rogers uses a variety of materials and inks to capture the everyday life of what goes on in New York. All of her sketches are produced on large scale pieces of paper resting on a board held by hand. Rogers prefers standing because she is able to obtain a better view of her surroundings and this gives more manoeuvrability and range of motion whilst drawing. Here is an example of her reportage work in the subway:



14th Street subway booth 50 x 65cm 2002 Private collection

With this drawing there is great use of the thickness and thinness with Lucinda Roger's line work. The line work is very clear and coherent giving the viewer the direct understanding that this is in the subway. Making use of the different line thickness brings another dimension to the drawings making it stand out more in certain areas. Whereas if all the lines were the same size, the image would appear more two dimensional and possibly a little confusing. The cashier's desk is very cluttered but the microphone and hands and arms drawn over the top suggest movement which adds a more dynamic element. The drawing fills the page too so we as the viewer get a very good idea of the scale of everything in the drawing. Everything is evenly proportioned and this image is more rewarding to look at than looking at a photograph of the same image in my opinion because we notice more details. Such as the pipes, the clock, the items on the desk and the barriers on the left. Rogers has picked out these details and we see them as she does.

There is a small amount of colour in the drawing but it works well because there is only one other colour. Rogers has picked out all the subtle red signs which are all conveniently in our horizontal line of sight. The red works best as it contrasts very well with the black and white of the rest of the image. This image feels very busy to me even though there is only one character in the drawing. I feel like this is down to the fact that to the line work. The lines almost seem rushed but at the same time delicately placed. This is a fantastic drawing which captures the very essence of reportage illustration.

Here is another drawing which Lucinda Rogers produced on another one of her visits to New York. This time it is above ground focusing on a newspaper stand:



Newspaper seller on East 42nd Street 50 x 64cm 1997-8 Private collection

Like the previous image, this one also uses thicker lines to great effect. We are immediately drawn to the centre of the drawing, to the newspaper stand. These lines make the stand more bold and obvious. However, this drawing uses an alternate coloured paper meaning Rogers is able to use a white colour to highlight some aspects. With the colour of the paper, we get the feeling that this drawing was made on a grey, cloudy day. There are only a handful of people in the drawing and they are all wearing winter clothing too.

Limited colour palette has been used again here which again adds to the stall standing out. We get the feeling that this was done intentionally and that there weren't many, if not any, other colours in the scene on that specific day Rogers decided to draw. This again, is another lovely piece of reportage work really capturing the standard life in New York.

Another artist whose work I admire is Olivier Krugler. A German born reportage illustrator now based in London. Krugler produces drawings with text and calls them visual essays. His recent work

portrays Syrian refugees fleeing to safety in Greece. He documents with photographs and records interviews with a voice recorder and then reviews all the research he has gathered and then builds his drawings. Firstly by hand and then touching them up digitally afterwards. Here is one example of the type of work Olivier Krugler makes:



This piece is about an interview with a refugee named Ahmed and how his family is now living due to the war. Krugler's work is like a unique comic book based on true events, which acts as an awareness spreader for others to grasp the severeness of the refugee's terrible situation. With the text, we are able to understand what is going on and the imagery also gives us a visual understanding too. Krugler's style is quite minimalist but he creates so many lines which give a very busy feel to the drawings. The colours added on top of his drawing are to just give the viewer to prompt to the grubbiness of their living conditions. I really like how Olivier Krugler fills the page and gives the viewer plenty to absorb from one image. This another great example into reportage work with an educational meaning behind it. Reportage isn't produced for nothing. Reportage is produced to inform people and give them understanding into others lives.

In addition to Lucinda Rogers and Olivier Krugler, I also admire the work by Matthew Cook. He has produced many reportage drawings from Afghanistan and Iraq, portraying the chaos and grittiness of the war. Cook draw in sketchbooks and on larger pieces of paper using inks and water colours. This is an example of the work drawn in Afghanistan:



<http://www.matthewcookillustrator.co.uk/content/war1.html>

Here are two vehicles and a couple soldiers. There seems to be no line work in the drawing and only water colour which gives this really satisfying look to the drawing. Meaning Cook had to fully focus on a ranged colour palette to distinguish between objects and make sure everything didn't look like floating block colours. He has managed that really well in my opinion. I feel like this works better too with the white background because the focal points stand out more. Our eye isn't attracted to anything else, just two main drawings. There is a little bit of background to give a little depth and perspective but not too much that it over complicates the whole image. Within reportage, the whole scene doesn't need to be displayed in order to share your point of view with others.

Continuing, in relation to Matthew Cook's work, I have chosen a contrasting style, one more similar to my own practise which I rather like:



<http://www.matthewcookillustrator.co.uk/content/war1.html>

This style is still Cook's work, however, in comparison to the previous image which had no lines and just colour, this one is only line work. We see what appears to be 5 soldiers standing on an open plain with something in the distance to show the scale. All of these characters seem to be stocked with supplies, ammunition and guns. Again showing us the violence of war and what it does to people. What I like about this drawing is that it looks very swift. The lines are clear and concise

making everything recognisable. It is not too detailed but we as the viewer understand what is going on in the drawing. I think that having no colour adds to the drawing making us consider the time and day and the weather within the drawing. We get the feeling that it is a hot day due to the hats and the clothing worn by the soldiers. Reportage isn't an exact representation but it does give you a rough idea and understanding of the subject being reported on. That should give you an incentive to gather more knowledge on the matter.

Another artist who produced work from Afghanistan is George Butler. He was a guest of the British army for two weeks in 2014 and drew soldiers in that time. Also knowing that regular lives were being lived by locals nearby, Butler went back to Afghanistan on a separate occasion to capture this regular life which had been affected by the war. Here is an example of that:



CHARHAR SOUK, HERAT, 42cm x 60cm, Pen and Ink, <http://www.georgebutler.org/portfolio/afghanistan>

Here, Butler has drawn a morning scene of locals setting up shop for the day. Capturing a somewhat positive side of war and how people have to deal with the aftermath. The result of this

drawing resembles similarities to that of Matthew Cook's work in the way that the whole scene isn't coloured in. We as the viewer are drawn to the colour, first and are then able to observe the remainder of the drawing seeing all the small details caught by Butler. There is a very nice scale to this drawing with the trees, motor cycles, people and the building, putting everything into perspective very well.

An alternate drawing by George Butler in Afghanistan is of a man with prosthetic limbs from after the war:



<http://www.georgebutler.org/portfolio/afghanistan>

This is a rather personal drawing showing the raw emotions of the local individuals. With the facial expression and look in the man's eye, we can tell he has been through a lot but had kept a resilience about him. Missing an arm and a leg would sure demoralise and dishearten anyone. The line work is very rough and disjointed to presumably portray this person's life and troubles. The ink is black and dark to show despair. However, this character has visited the prosthetic limb project in the hope to restore some quality of life which he held before which is very uplifting. This shows reportage can be very moving, very inspiring and have a deep emotional impact on others, sharing stories and hard ships.

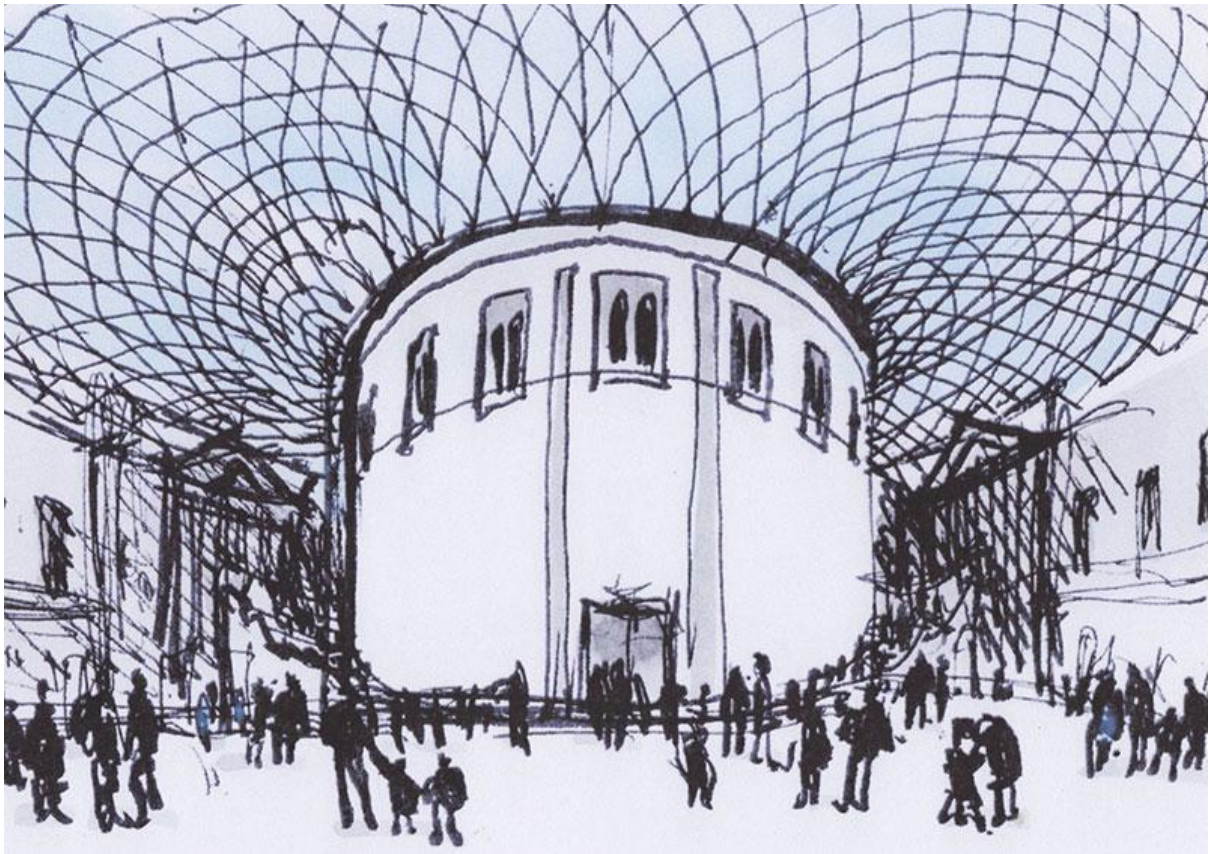
Another reportage artist whose work is of great influence to me is David Gentleman's. He is an English illustrator born in 1930 and he produces paintings of environmental landscapes and also drawings in the city and on the streets. Also Gentleman has written and illustrated books too. But for now, the focus will be on one of his recent books "London, You're Beautiful". This book consists of reportage drawings based in London throughout a whole year, each chapter being a new month. I have selected a couple to analyse:



<http://www.davidgentleman.com/swipecategory.php?cat=13>

This drawing is of Trafalgar Square. In comparison to Lucinda Roger's work as seen earlier, this is pretty obviously in London. We can see red double decker buses and more old fashioned styled buildings with pointed roofs. David Gentleman has done a great job of capturing the whole scene into this one drawing. The line work here is more 'scribbled' in comparison to the other artists, almost reminiscent of the illustrations Quentin Blake produced for Roald Dahl's novels. There is a lot to engage with within the drawing, lots of little details to see. The buildings are very simplified but the colour helps us to recognise everything. Looking at colour in this drawing, it is very sparse. A little bit of red and green for flags and buses and then multiple greys for the buildings and crowd. This drawing was made in the month of January and we already get that cold feeling from just a quick glance. Gentleman makes great use of colour throughout this book to show the variety of seasons and weather changes London gets in a year. These changes are very subtle and gradual which is really aesthetically pleasing to experience when looking through.

The second reportage drawing which I chose by David Gentleman is from inside the British Museum. This drawing is again taken from his book "London, You're Beautiful".



<http://www.davidgentleman.com/swipecategory.php?cat=13>

The lines in this drawing are very rough just like the previous image. However, there is a bigger difference in line thickness here. The people are just simple block colours, almost like silhouettes. Being as this is a very popular attraction, there is guaranteed to be many people to draw but also the architecture and glass ceiling. Gentleman has done a great job with the perspective of the room naturally adopting a two point perspective approach. This gives a more three dimensional aspect to the drawing and adds depth. In comparison to the previous image, there is a lot less colour. Only hints of blue for the glass. Anyhow, this gives a more calming vibe than the bustling cityscape. With only minimal uses of colour, the whole reportage drawing can change. Which is why it important to experiment and vary the techniques and approaches whilst drawing.

Moving on from David Gentleman, I also really appreciate the work produced by Sarah Maycock. She is an English reportage artist who has worked with a plethora of clients ranging from newspaper and magazines to food super stores.



<https://sarahmaycock.co.uk/Reportage>

Here is one example of Maycock's reportage drawing. This is a very nice composition featuring what appears to be two ladies having a conversation in a bar or restaurant. Again, reportage doesn't have to be of anything important, just a sketch of what is happening to share with other people. There aren't really any definitive outlines for either of the two characters, just block colours used to resemble them. This works great here and is acceptable because our eyes fill in the blanks to portray a full image. We get the feeling that this is an evening scene, with the blue as the background and the black to resemble a window with a night sky. The figure on the left's features are very vague but this makes the drawing more interesting to look at. There isn't a lot going on in the drawing but I feel like Maycock has captured everything needed for us as the audience. Especially with the choice of

blue. I feel this conveys more emotion in comparison to using a white piece of paper because it is more original and unique.

Another piece of work made by Sarah Maycock which I have chosen is a drawing of an elderly couple:



<https://sarahmaycock.co.uk/Reportage>

This drawing has also been made using non white paper which I think really works well in Sarah Maycock's favour because she had been able to colour in and highlight key areas in the drawing. She has sketched in pencil and then used paint to fill in the rest. What I like about this image is that Maycock has drawn the same couple twice and we and the viewer get a sense of movement within the piece. The couple seem to be at a restaurant. I like the facial expressions the two characters are pulling. We can really see them thinking about either their food choice or their conversation. Although the colouring is a little patchy we can still understand the image. There is a bold use of colours adding emphasis to the shadow and darker areas, especially on the gentleman's cheek. But also areas of light too with the shine on his forehead. Everything about this piece is very consistent and Maycock has done a great job.

Gary Embury is another artist whose work I have recently been attracted to due to the vibrancy and colours he uses. He is an English Illustrator who has been commissioned by newspapers and he is 'the editor in the chief of the online journal reportage.org'. I have picked out his work with the Bristol bike project:



<http://www.embury.co.uk/Reportage>

First off, this is a very full scene! There is lots to look at and absorb. Even after a couple of glances this may seem chaotic but it is just a bike workshop. We can see all the parts such as tools, wheels and bike frames. We are able to notice that only primary colours have been used in this scene. The overall composition is pretty consistent in relation to the line work and colour. There is also some text on the right of the page. Either this was added in before or after the drawing but this shows Embury's eagerness to gather all the information and share that with the audience. I feel like the colours have been used here to separate all the different components of the drawing, otherwise the drawing would have been very cluttered. The figure is relatively visible on the right side too, could be a mechanic fixing or testing out a bike. The overall drawing absolutely fills the page and

could be used in cooperation with a text face in an article for a magazine. I like that Embury isn't afraid to overlay lines with each other which gives this really nice effect to the drawing. Within reportage, there isn't one set style. There are many possibilities and outcomes which have been produced and many more to come. Reportage is an overlooked profession which is often misunderstood. But reportage is vital to the art scene, being able to share real events and interactions through drawing.

Also, I am a fan of Peter Arkle's work. He is based in New York where he works as a freelance illustrator for books and magazines. He produces work containing stories and drawings of everyday life. His work is a little different to the other previous mentioned reportage artists because he makes his work digitally. Here is an interesting image which I thought was amusing:

MUD IN THE CITY



<https://www.peterarkle.com/mudinthe city.htm>

This is titled 'MUD IN THE CITY', however, this almost looks more like a scene from a festival. When drawing, anything is possible! Arkle here has drawn a mud filled city with pedestrians walking about. His line work is very simple, using just black borders for each character and the lamp post. There aren't really any standout colours here, just an interesting art concept. The brown takes up the majority of the piece but it all fit together nicely. All the characters are pretty basic and we can't really see any facial features. They are all hiding in open space here, just adding to the scene. But I like the simplicity of the characters and their bland clothes because they aren't the interesting

feature. What makes this scene interesting, is the lamp post because it is so out of ordinary in a place like that. The signs and the crossing lights suggest that this is in New York but I doubt anything like this happened in New York. This is an imaginary drawing design create from scratch. It is possible that Peter Arkle sat and drew this scene and then added in the mud at a later time. This is one of the wonders of drawing, anyone can drawing anything or anywhere. The digital side of drawing has progressed hugely over the last decade. Especially with drawing tablets and how portable they are now. Also with drawing digitally, there an no consequences for mistakes (even if I don't believe in mistakes myself, I think a line is a line, it can't be wrong). Drawing digitally allows us to alter anything and undo lines we aren't happy with. Going back to Arkle's work, we can see this is a lovely way of drawing and sharing an image with others. His lines are clean and easily distinguishable.

Looking into Peter Arkle's gallery and other work, there is a common trend. His work almost always tries to convey some sort of message through his art. For example, for is a piece he did for the New York Times:

REAL TRAVEL
FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

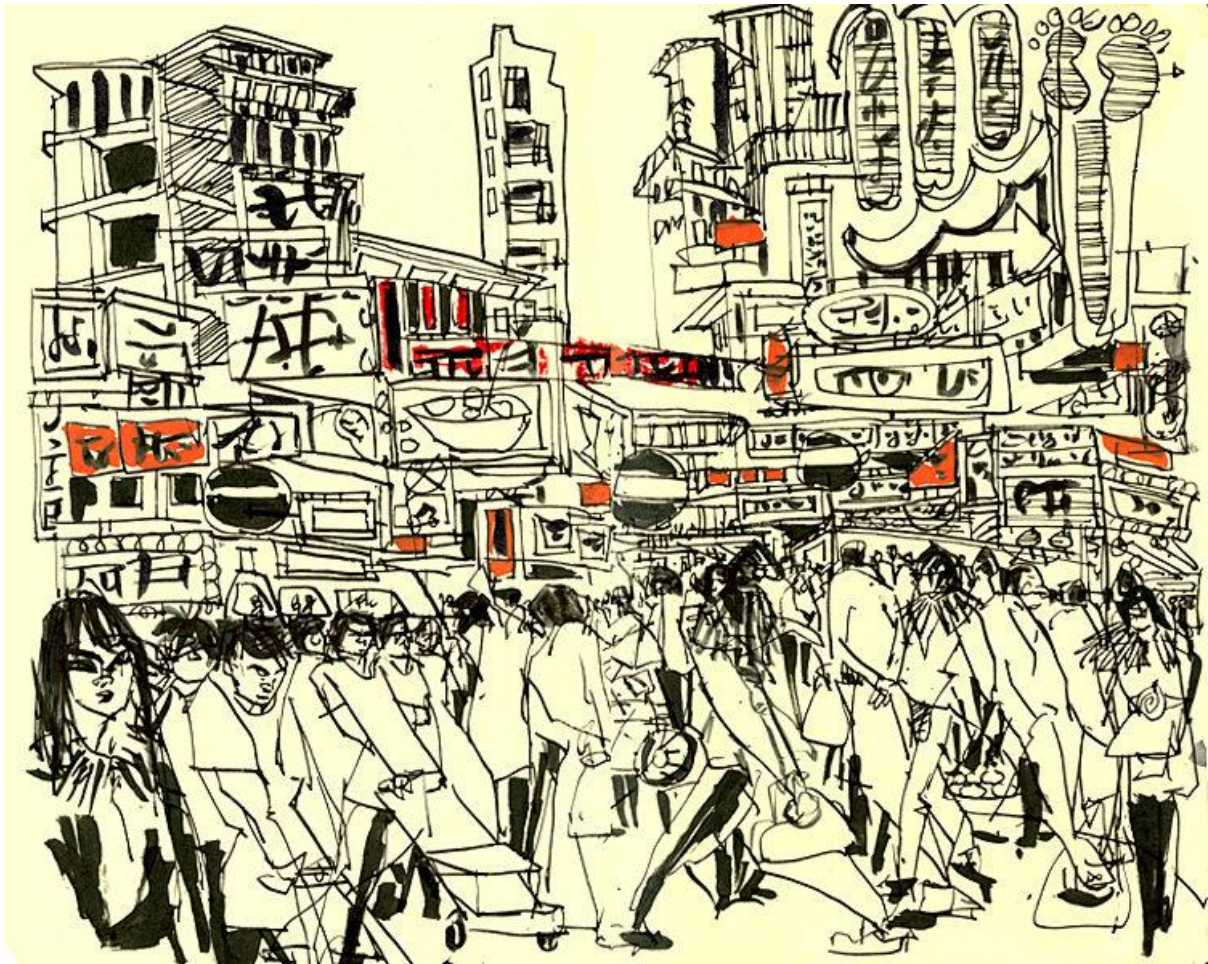


<https://www.peterarkle.com/real%20travel.htm>

Here we can see one gentleman of the left experiencing nature first hand, whereas on the other panel, everyone is viewing the same image on a screen. This isn't necessarily a bad thing, it's just

giving us an awareness check on how much screens and technology are taking over. The message is pretty clear and meaningful. I like the way Peter Arkle use these simplistic lines. They are very clear for the viewer to understand the image. In comparison to Olivier Krugler's work, mentioned previously, there is a big difference in the outcome. They both have their similarities such as the clean lines and digital colouring. Both artists use their work to convey messages to the public about serious topics such as war and climate change. The difference in their work is that Olivier Krugler's work appears more busy. There is a lot going on and a lot of information the process. He uses a wider range of colours which often overlap and the colouring doesn't always fit within his lines. Peter Arkle's work on the other hand appears more simplistic with a short and snappy meaning. The viewing time for Arkle's work would be considerably less in my opinion because there are usually less words. Both are great at what they do and really emphasise how important reportage work can be for sharing information.

Finally, Melanie Reim is my last chosen artist. She is a reportage artist based in New York where she draws and teaches. Reim has a particular interest in drawing the lives of working women. She is an excellent role model for anyone looking to begin their path as an illustrator.



<http://reportager.uwe.ac.uk/mempics/reim/reim3.htm>

Here we have a larger gathering of people in what appears to be an Asian market street. We get a feeling of this being a very busy scene through the way Melanie Reim has drawn her lines. They seem very confident and made with purpose, strong and bold lines. Drawn rapidly whilst keeping composure. There is a mix of thick and thin lines, suggesting lots of movement again. There are small hints of colour to resemble various signs and banners scattered around the scene. Again, like with Lucinda Rogers work, all the colours are with the same horizontal bracket. Drawing our eye to the middle first then allowing us the view the remainder of the scene. This is a wonderful composition truly capturing the essence of reportage.

Conclusion

To conclude, my thoughts and feelings about reportage have hugely improved! After delving into its history and background and exploring various artists work on the subject, I feel more attached and a stronger bond has grown. The amount of reportage work out there is endless and the topic is growing again due to emerging and professional artists all sharing their efforts. The influence of reportage is slowly but continuously expanding and becoming an increasingly valuable part in today's society. With the development of the camera and its quality everyone has pretty much seen the whole world already. But through reportage we get to visualise this unseen, ever changing world. Each drawing is unique, each artists style is unique, each environment is unique. The camera captures it all in exactly the same way, which I feel is getting repetitive and monotonous. Reportage gives us that breath of fresh air and something new for us to experience.

In this body of text I have covered what reportage is, where it originated, its development in recent years and the artists of today's generation and their influence on the topic. The story of reportage is of great interest to me because knowing the history of a topic is hugely important for its development. The artists I have mentioned have had a big influence on me and my own practise, inspiring me to push and produce work each day. There are an abundance of artists who didn't get chosen for this essay but I still take motivation from the work they produce. Reportage has a great base and a great community to work from and hopefully strive in the future.

Ultimately, reportage has made a huge impact over everyone today and also affecting current trends and culture. Japanese wood block prints are one of the many mainstream markets today. With thanks to Katsushika Hokusai and many other artists for paving the way in which the art world works today. Without them, reportage wouldn't be where it is today. Reportage is a wonderful way for many artists to express themselves and their feelings and to share their ideas with the rest of the world.

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