Art, Design and Psychology

Introduction

Children explore the world around them through intellectual, physical and emotional methods.

All these factors play a part in their art.

Psychological studies have established a series of stages of development in this process - simply stated as:

SCRIBBLE - LINE - OBSERVATION
Restriction in Expressive Skill
Withdrawal

Two Models:

Similar, but different
(ages are approximate)

A general outline
(taken from several sources)

Scribble

- around 14 months
- shapeless, purposeless
- The primitive cell from which all graphic art grows
- wavy (like a waive of the hand)
- little muscle control needed
- sweeping movements of the arm from elbow or shoulder
- tangled movement like a pen attached to a pendulum or string

Viktor Lowenfeld *Creative and Mental Growth 1978*
First Stage of Self Expression (Scribbling Stage) 2 - 4 years
First Representational Attempts (Pre-schematic Stage) 4 - 7 years
Achievement of a Form Concept (Schematic Stage) 7 - 9 years
Dawning Realism (Gang Age) 9 - 11 years
Pseudo-naturalistic (Stage of Reasoning) 11 - 13 years

Herbert Read *Education Through Art 1966*
Scribble 2 - 4 years
Line 4 years
Descriptive Symbolism 5 - 6 years
Descriptive Realism 7 - 8 years
Visual Realism 9 - 10 years
Repression 11 - 14 years
Artistic Revival 14 years

a) *Disordered* - uncontrolled markings that could be bold or light
Lowenfeld (1978)
4 stages of scribble

Scribble and control

- around 18 months
- Gradually change to including circular movements, interspersed with lines - basic lessons are being mastered
- Initially chance, watching another child drawing, slowly brought under control of mind and body
- control of muscles in hand, wrist and arm
- collaboration of mind and body

Illustrations from David Lewis & James Greene (1983)
Your Child's Drawings: Their Hidden Meaning

Scribble and Precision

- around age 2
- more demanding lines, angles, zigzags and crosses
- use of arm, wrist and finger muscles
- challenges to perception, memory and co-ordination of hand and eye movement
- building of a store of knowledge about motions and products with varying results
- can continue alongside gradual increasing skill in formal, recognisable pictures
Beginning of Precision

- More restricted - doesn't spread across page, isolated lines
- sometimes named - “a flower”

Pre-Schematic Stage

- Announced by the appearance of circular images and lines which seem to suggest a human or animal figure.
- During this stage the schema (the visual idea) is developed.
- The drawings show what the child perceives as most important about the subject.
- There is little understanding of space - objects are placed in a haphazard way throughout the picture
- The use of colour is more emotional than logical
  Lowenfeld

Two ways toward realism

- **Observation** - watching others - copying movements (not the drawings)
- **Experimentation** - haphazard - similarity recognised - repetition of success
- Often human figures, but also animals and plants
- Humans and animals remain popular, plants decline

Human Forms

- Primitive and tentative - Head and body only (tadpole drawing)
- full face
- parts added as skill and perception increase - feet, noses, eyes, mouth feet, arms, body and head
- Animals drawn in profile
Symbolism and Schema

- **Around 4/5 School starts** - social world broadens
- regular repetition of schema
- Circle used for heads and tree tops
- Drawings don’t look like they should appear to adult eyes
  - figures look alike (no differences between male/female)
- conceptual understanding rather than visual observation
- close attention to detail - distortion and exaggeration
- simple geometric forms

*Illustration from Kellog, Rhoda (1970) Analysing Children’s Art*

Human Figures

- Preceded by consistent shapes
- Hundreds of them!
- Eventually the shape becomes a man/mother/sister/brother
- Very individual, may vary considerably
- Figures in the child’s experience which impress determine the subject matter
- people = socialising process
- lines represent arms and legs

The Schematic Stage - around 7 to 9 years

- Easily recognized by the demonstrated awareness of the concept of space.
- Objects in the drawing have a relationship to what is up and what is down.
- A definite base and sky line is apparent.
- Items in the drawing are all spatially related.
- Colours are reflected as they appear in nature.
- Shapes and objects are easily definable.
- Exaggeration between figures (humans taller than a house, flowers bigger than humans, family members large and small) is often used to express strong feelings about a subject.
- Another technique sometimes used is called “folding over” this is demonstrated when objects are drawn perpendicular to the base line.
- Sometimes the objects appear to be drawn upside down.
- Another Phenomenon is called ”X-ray”. In an x-ray picture the subject is depicted as being seen form the inside as well as the outside.

In between stages (transition)
In between stages (transition)

- Neck and shoulders are run together in a continuous outline
- arms ‘open out’ into the body segment
- hand and fingers appear
- feet are in a different schema
- clothing takes the place of the body
- neckline and cuffs forming distinct boundaries
- arms and trunk run together
- by 7 the average drawing should have most of these

Still Geometric

- Ovals, triangles, squares, circles, rectangles, or irregular shapes are used as body schema
- All kinds of shapes are used for legs, arms, clothes, etc.
- When separated from each other, these shapes are meaningless in isolation

Meaning Through Exaggeration

- Arms are often longer, hands enlarged
- Changes in shape are accompanied by added details or, leaving things out altogether e.g. eating = mouth bigger
- extended arms if touching or picking up and object
- Indicates expanding interests and awareness
- Not copying, concept forming
- Process: thinking, awareness of feelings, perceptual developments

Use of a base line
• Indicating space
• relates everything else on the page
  at 3 - 1% use baseline
  at 8 - 96% use baseline
• Conscious relationship is between
  child and environment
• outdoors: base for things to stand on
  character of landscape surface
  flowers, trees, buildings, machines,
  animals and people all stand on this
  base

Lowenfield accounts for the multiple use of
the baseline:

• Obvious (to children) that
  people/things line up
• this is based on a kinaesthetic
  (movement) experience
• the child experiences movement in
  lines
• its natural, things come, one after
  another in a line
• therefore two sides of a street - two
  base lines
• Hence, different events can be
  portrayed: steps, hills, streets,
  railway tracks

The use of a baseline in problem solving:

• drawing a house on a hill -
  experienced as climbing up but
  arriving at a flat area with a house at
  the top is solved by using two base
  lines each with the character of the
  experience
• The same would apply to drawing:
  inside a cave, underwater, an animal
  burrow, etc.
• Solution - x-ray or cross section
• Also seen for inside buildings;
  house, school, rooms, etc.

Social Experiences
• Less drawing of single figures - more groups
• more major objects; children and adults, buildings, landscapes, trees and animals
• beginning of composition
• The child at this point holds onto a life when the inanimate object has a relationship with the child e.g a child can give a rock a “good telling off” for hurting their foot!

The Gang Stage - 9 to 11 (Lowenfeld)

• Dawning realism as process becomes important
• Group friendships of the same sex are common and self awareness to the point of being extremely self critical
• Realism - not in the photographic sense, more an experience with a particular object first time that the child becomes aware of a lack of ability to show objects the way they appear in the surrounding environment.
• The human is shown as girl, boy, woman, man clearly defined with a feeling for details often resulting in a “stiffness” of representation.
• Perspective characteristic of this stage: an awareness of the space between the base line and sky line.
• Overlapping of objects, types of point perspective and use of small to large objects are evident in this stage.
• Objects no longer stand on a base line.
• Three dimensional effects are achieved along with shading and use of subtle colour combinations.
• Because of an awareness of lack of ability drawings often appear less spontaneous than in previous stages. (Less vital and lively.)

Transition

• A symbolic world is created, lived out on paper, where ordering and arranging relationships can take place
• This helps the child to become objective and no longer tied to subject-object interpretations
• If you ask the child to tell the story, their meaning of the story will unfold

Pseudo-realistic Stage
In this stage the product becomes most important to the child, marked by two psychological differences.

Visual: the individual's art work has the appearance of looking at a stage presentation. The work is inspired by visual stimuli.
Nonvisual: the individual's art work is based on subjective interpretations emphasizing emotional relationships to the external world as it relates to them
Involvement

*Visual types* feel as spectators looking at their work form the outside. *Nonvisually* minded individuals feel involved in their work as it relates to them in a personal way.

Colour

The *visually* minded child has a visual concept of how colour changes under different external conditions. The *nonvisually* minded child sees colour as a tool to be used to reflect emotional reaction to the subject at hand.

NB This accounts for a personal reluctance for students to study colour as separate, without a context of external conditions, visual or social, in which to set their study.

Some other considerations:

When things are difficult...

**Art Therapy and Visual Metaphor**

"...invisible monsters that gnaw away at the inner self, creatures that destroy self esteem and leave in their wake anxiety and pain. For children from violent homes, the monsters can be an abusive parent, neglect, incest, and severe emotional trauma."  
Kathy Malchiodi 98:4

"In all creativity, we destroy and rebuild the world, and at the same time we inevitably rebuild and reform ourselves."  
Rollo May 1985:144

When things are different....

**Nadia**

- born 1967, of Ukrainian émigré parents, second of three children (other children normal development)
- Language development problems, diagnosed as on the Autistic Spectrum at an early age
- Internationally famous
- Proportion and Perspective understood, not normal until adolescence
- Horse and Rider: drawn from memory
Stephen Wiltshire

- born 1977, of British parents
- 1987, when Stephen 10, he was the subject of a QED programme (BBC)
- Stephen also draws from memory having studied or ‘watched’ a building for 15 mins or so
- The beginning point of any drawing is random and lines appear “like a sewing machine”, the line spinning from the pencil point until finished.
- Series of drawings of buildings around London
- has gone on to have an agent, and many visits to major cities all over the world, leading to several publications

And finally, for those that have an ability to draw

Adolecense

- Can draw with accuracy and detail
- Have to acquire perspective, light, shade, depth, solidity, texture

Until that is the adult artist wants to draw like a child again!
Examples are: Paul Klee, Dubuffet, Kandinsky, Miro, and Russian Futurism

Source: Selfe, Lorna (1977) Nadia: a case of extraordinary drawing ability in an autistic child

Source: Casson, Sir Hugh (1987) Stephen Wiltshire Drawings


Home