

Epilogue

When I started drawing, I didn't anticipate the extent to which the unconscious interpretation of what I observe might be questioned, or the effect that this would have on what I see.

The sketches described in this book are those that have been key to establishing my drawing habit. Not an exact method, but an approach built around distinct modes of looking. And as I continue, I find myself combining these in new ways, extending the methods and materials with which I work.

Previously, had I wanted to create a record of what I saw each morning I would simply have used my phone camera. By stealth, photography has become a pervasive fact of my everyday life. These sketches though aren't merely about achieving a likeness. They initiate a more prolonged engagement with what I see; a deeper observation and a different kind of thinking. Photography merely gives the impression of recording the experience of looking. Imagining that my camera has captured what I see actually deters me from critical observation. I think this is what John Berger meant when he said that pictures are taken "in order to forget".

And with the proliferation of digital imaging technologies, the quantity of photographs in circulation has increased massively. The ease with which they are disseminated via the internet and social media creates a more intense and overwhelming version of Italo Calvino's 'rainfall of images': a rainfall that comes from everywhere and nowhere. Responding to it, the inclination to 'skim' is almost inevitable. But the passive consumption of what is seen creates the visual equivalent of fast food. And 'fast images' do not nourish.

What my phone camera ‘sees’ is something quite distinct from what I see. Where digital image-capture creates the impression of a single ‘take’, drawing reveals seeing as the sum of countless, individual viewed instants. Each sketch registers these moments, accenting the perceptual shifts taking place. And as my eyes are encouraged to linger, ‘slow images’ begin to emerge.

In making these sketches, I haven’t simply learnt how to draw, but rather, how the act of drawing itself creates a different means of experiencing the visual world. The images I make do not merely represent my perception of what I see, they actually help to determine it. Drawing changes the relationship between the see-er and the seen. It encourages a more equal exchange and enables me to register what I couldn’t have previously.

In nudging me away from the repeating structures of language, drawing has highlighted how normally the experience of past observation dictates most of what I see in the present. It’s made me more interested in how images are formed, in finding ways to get lost in them rather than simply reading the bald facts of what they show.

And as I become more confident improvising with different ways to direct my gaze, the unfolding pattern of things is allowed to wrestle free from my normal frames of reference. I permit fragments to stand for the whole so that nothing ever looks quite the same twice.

The drawings in this book show you ways to ‘unsee’ the normal order of things. Continue, and this has the potential to become deep-seated and long-lasting, as drawing comes to both condition and renew how you make sense of the world. Leaving behind an everyday kind of looking that shows you only what you’ve seen

before, you are less likely to take things at face value. And as drawing initiates an altered perception of the visual, you’ll entertain less orthodox interpretations of what you see, encouraging a more expansive and creative outlook.

It’s true that this may take a while, but even in the short term the very least you can expect is that drawing institutes a more reflective kind of engagement with the visual world, making you more mindful of how you see and creating a meditative space to ‘hold’ your thoughts. And the ability to make the world anew each time you draw will have the effect of heightening your sense of engagement and wonder, allowing you to continually see the familiar with new eyes.