



# Prof Jutta Ströter-Bender

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## IRAND: Helping to preserve children's and youth drawings of the 20<sup>th</sup> century

### Research Objectives

The research team around Prof Dr Ströter-Bender explores historical events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century through the lens of children's drawings.

### Detail

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### Bio

Professor em Dr Jutta Ströter-Bender, University of Paderborn, Germany, is Co-Founder of IRAND, the International Archives and Research Network "Historical Child Art". She is a Corresponding Member of the "SCEaR Working Group Schools" (UNESCO Memory of the World Programme). Her research on World Heritage Education, Art Education and historical children drawings has been published in several books.

### Funding

The research project is sponsored by Kickert Breitstreckwalzen GmbH, Leopoldshöhe, Germany.

### Collaborators

- Professor em Dr Kunibert Bering, Art Academy Düsseldorf, Germany (co-founder of IRAND)
- Dr Sabine Weichel-Kickert, University of Paderborn, Germany
- Anna Eichinger, University of Paderborn, Germany

### References

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### Personal Response

#### **What insights can children's and youth drawings offer that a researcher cannot get from other historical documents?**

// Drawings can be discussed as a unique category of a materialised form of communication and expression, as a pictorial sign system, capable of describing everything, rich in symbolisations. They can be seen and read as individual, authentic and important documents of serious events, social changes and everyday life, corresponding to the personal world view of a child. Many children's drawings allow new perspectives in the specific history of their national education and school systems. A new research field has started in exploring the provenance of important drawings and the history of their collections. //



# IRAND

## Helping to preserve children's and youth drawings of the 20<sup>th</sup> century

Professor Dr Jutta Ströter-Bender of Paderborn University is co-founder of the International Research and Archives Network (IRAND) that is preserving and archiving children's and youth drawings of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. IRAND views these endangered collections as historical documents, worthy of preservation and PhD level research. The network is a Cooperating Institution of the Sub-Committee on Education and Research (SCEaR), UNESCO Memory of the World. IRAND is helping to promote the importance of children's drawings for a range of research fields.

**W**hat makes something historically interesting? While many believe that the most important historical documents include political declarations or photographs, it is increasingly common for historians to expand their definition more widely. Creative pieces like paintings and symphonies have also been archived as historical documents, but even this has tended to stick to history's greatest creative geniuses.

Prof Dr Jutta Ströter-Bender's research has gone beyond this to examine children's and youth drawings of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Though not professional artists, the creators of such artwork have had first-hand experience of peace and war times that gives their drawings a unique authority.

Through co-founding the International Research and Archives Network (IRAND), Prof Dr Ströter-Bender hopes

to preserve these drawings, so they can provide educational value to future generations hoping to study the major events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### WORLD VIEWS IN PEACE AND WAR TIMES

A drawing which appears simple at first can contain many dimensions that make it more interesting as a historical document. Children who draw have no agenda but to accurately represent the world they see before them. They emphasise the most important aspects of a situation and use facial expressions to give the viewer of the drawing insight into the emotional effect of the scene.

Children living in concentration camps, witnessing genocide, or experiencing war may choose to process these traumatic experiences through drawing. By analysing large numbers of these drawings, it is possible to gain information about an entire generation.



Sardinia, Italy, 1926: A book with children's drawings showing scenes of everyday life and the traditions on the island. Olga Raffaeli Collection, Inv. 004814 / 00224R © Museo della Scuola e dell' 'Educazione "Mauro Laeng". Università degli Studi Roma Tre (Photo: Jutta Ströter-Bender). The archive of the school museum, Rome, houses an important collection of more than 200 exceptional children's drawings from Sardinia. The drawings were compiled by teacher Olga Raffaeli and bequeathed to the school archive in 1937.

Historians can determine their education level, attitudes towards others, and which values they regard most highly.

An 'Aryan' child living in Germany during the years of 1933–1945 is bound to depict Nazi ideology different than a persecuted Jewish child. By gathering and protecting drawings, we can learn about how their upbringings and experiences differ. These drawings are authentic because they are not created in fear of persecution as an adult journalist's newspaper article may be. They are an innocent and honest attempt to depict the reality of the situation.

The 20<sup>th</sup> century was a period of rapid change, with each generation facing unique challenges, most notably, the First and Second World Wars, but with economic collapses and war being recurring themes. From the Armenian genocide beginning in 1915 to the Rwandan genocide of 1994, every generation from every part of the world has had their own traumatising events to deal with. For the young, drawing has been an outlet for this and examining those drawings gives a profound insight into the world views of former generations.

### ENDANGERED COLLECTIONS OF CHILDREN'S AND YOUTH'S DRAWINGS

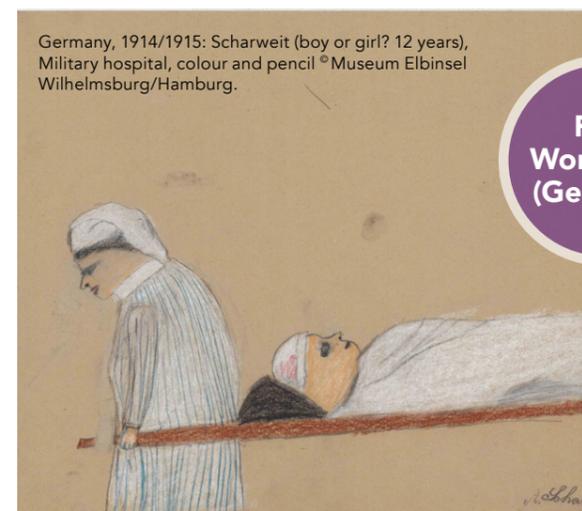
A child's drawing, even if extremely well preserved, is unlikely to survive more than 100 years. Important European

collections disappeared during the two World Wars. Other important historical documents are becoming endangered.

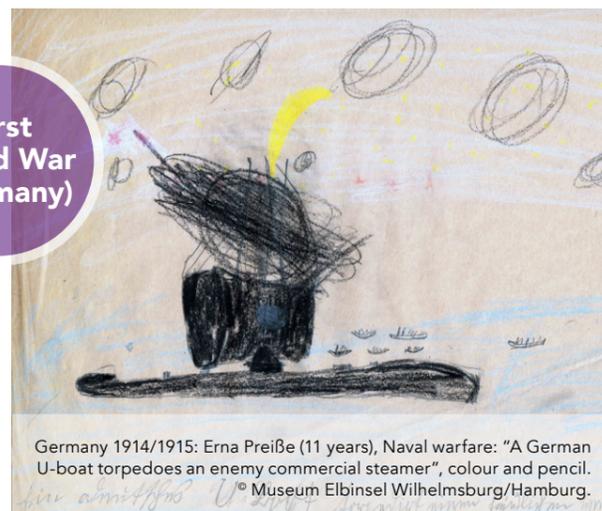
The last century saw museums and art galleries become increasingly

interested in artwork made by ordinary young people. During events such as the Spanish Civil War, teachers and parents saved pictures drawn by children and donated them to museums. As technology progressed, it has been

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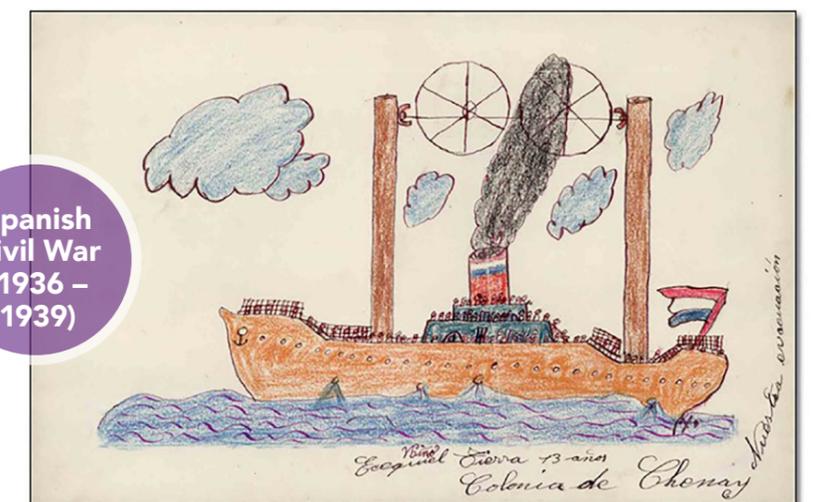


Germany, 1914/1915: Scharweit (boy or girl? 12 years), Military hospital, colour and pencil © Museum Elbinsel Wilhelmsburg/Hamburg.



Germany 1914/1915: Erna Preiße (11 years), Naval warfare: "A German U-boat torpedoes an enemy commercial steamer", colour and pencil. © Museum Elbinsel Wilhelmsburg/Hamburg.

The two drawings belong to a collection of class sets of more than 300 children's war drawings, rediscovered 2012 under the roof of a museum at Elbinsel, Wilhelmsburg, Germany. These drawings from a child's perspective give a snapshot of German thoughts and war education in the first years of World War I. The German children did not have their own experience of the war in their homeland; their information was filtered through the propaganda and falsified.



1936–1939: Ecequiel Tierra (13 years), "Evacuation", origin: France, Colonia de Chenay, pencil, coloured pencil, reference code: F 126-4-0-12: © National Archives, Ontario, Canada. This drawing is from a series of 41 drawings that were created by Spanish children who were evacuated to "colonias infantiles" (children's colonies) during the Spanish Civil War (July 1936–April 1939). During their stay in the colonies, the children were encouraged to draw their experiences and memories (a form of art therapy). Depictions include aerial bombardment of villages, evacuation to the colonies by boat and other means, fighting at the battlefield as well as scenes of more peaceful surroundings. The collection is preserved in the National Archives, Ontario, Canada.

Germany, 1946. A dedication for the Irish Food Aid for German children. Page in a so-called „Danke-Buch“ (Thank You Book), Anita Reinhart (12 years), Saarbrücken, © Tony O’Herlihy

In this „Danke-Buch“ more than 80 drawings, letters and poems are dedicated to unknown representatives of the Irish and Swiss food aid. The humanitarian action ensured the survival of many children after the war and later enriched the history of friendship between Ireland and Germany. At this time, most of the city of Saarbrücken was destroyed by bombing. There was hunger and suffering in the civilian population. The solidarity of individual countries (Ireland, Switzerland) was received with great gratitude and recognition. The universal and time-spanning message of these drawings opens up a deep and emotional insight into this time.



1945/1946  
Switzerland  
/Germany  
(Ireland)



Switzerland, 1945/46, Henryk Reicher (16 or 18 years): Entrance of the Concentration Camp Buchenwald. Pencil. © Archiv für Zeitgeschichte ETH Zürich: NL Charlotte Weber

Presumably Switzerland, Jugendheim Felsenegg on the Zugerberg, CH 6300 Zug. At the time of its creation, the home was run by the Swiss Red Cross (Children’s Help) for young survivors from Auschwitz and the Buchenwald concentration camp. They were encouraged to draw their experiences.

**These drawings, when viewed as historical documents and endangered collections, make for interesting museum exhibits. They add colour and interest to a wider range of visitors.**

possible to make these drawings a permanent part of the historical record.

By promoting the research in children’s and youth drawings archives of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Prof Dr Ströter-Bender and her team are able to build up a more interesting and accurate picture of historical events. The most important form of preservation is through digitisation. Turning pieces of paper into online files has made it possible to create powerful reminders of the past that will not easily decay.

By treating drawings as historical documents worthy of being archived, Prof Dr Ströter-Bender and IRAND have helped to lower the endangered status of children’s drawings. This means that future history exhibitions will contain a wider range of material to educate people of notable historical events.

**HOW DOES IRAND OPERATE?**

Though archiving of children’s and youth drawings has been practised since at least the years before the First World War (since 1990), public understanding of its importance remains limited. This is why IRAND was set up by Prof Dr Ströter-Bender and Prof Dr Kunibert Bering in 2017. This organisation was designed to generate more attention to the importance of children’s drawings.

Unlike many other historical records, drawings require teachers and parents to take initiative and ensure that they are preserved. The founding of IRAND is an attempt to raise public awareness

so that more people will take care to rescue children’s art during times of historical significance.

IRAND is made up of 21 members, who work for institutions in Canada,



Documentary Box for Historical Children’s and Youth Drawings

A drawing (1913) and the biography of Walter Macke (1910–1927) telling the family history of Walter and his father August Macke (1887–1914), a famous German painter, who died 1914 in the First World War. (Jutta Ströter-Bender / Claudia Niessen). © Ströter-Bender Collection.

France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Spain, Switzerland, and the UK. This makes it a truly international organisation, collecting images of global historical importance. Members also work in a range of research fields outside of history, including science, education, art history, cultural studies, and museology. This gives the preservation and archiving of youth drawings a broader significance beyond historical record.

Expanding over its first few years, IRAND began working with the International Advisory Committee (IAC), Sub-Committee on Education and Research (SCEaR), UNESCO Memory of the World (MoW) programme International Advisory Committee (IAC) in January 2020. IRAND mediates historical children’s and youth drawings in the sense of UNESCO Peace Education and Cultural Diversity. The Network refers by remembering the destinies of children in peace and wartimes to the rights and concerns of children as outlined by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (<https://www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention/convention-text>).



Germany, Archive Research. City of Kassel, Grimm-Brother Collection © Jutta Ströter-Bender

The team initiates exhibitions, workshops and pedagogic programmes with museum coffers / documentary boxes like the exhibition that took place from January-February 2019 in the Déak17galeria / Youth Gallery, Budapest, Hungary ([www.deak17galeria.hu/en/exhibitions/museum-in-a-coffer---telling-histories-of-child-art](http://www.deak17galeria.hu/en/exhibitions/museum-in-a-coffer---telling-histories-of-child-art)).

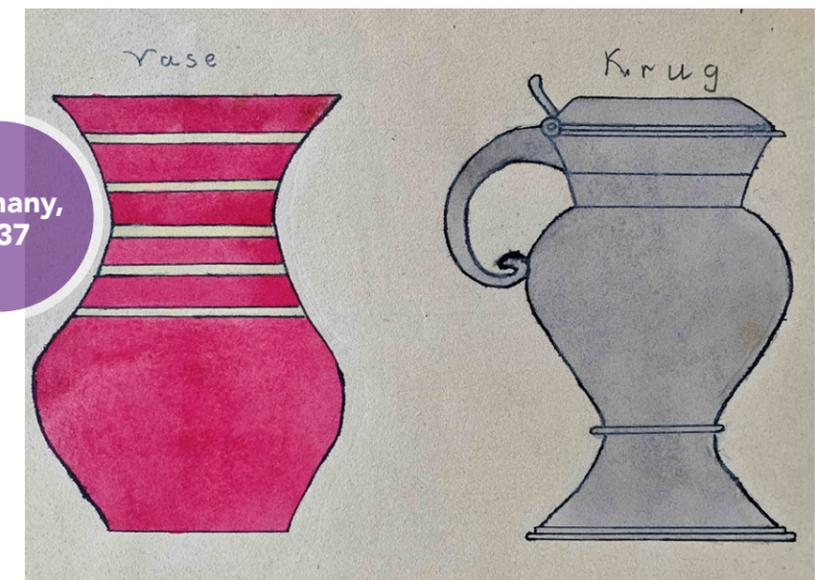
**CHILDREN’S AND YOUTH DRAWINGS AS HISTORICAL DOCUMENTS**

Part of IRAND’s work in promoting the preservation of children’s and youth drawings is in producing research. Their records can be used by PhD and master’s students to answer important historical questions. The network, therefore, acts as an archive for historical documents which can be used to support academic enquiries.

This can be from an art perspective, charting the history of children’s artwork, its materiality, including what influences the creation of its motifs and how the drawings themselves influence the progression of art. It can also be used to study different nations, in particular their approach to education. For instance, how does a child in 1930s Germany draw its environment compared to a

Swedish teenager during the 1960s? Analysing these images can teach us a lot about different teaching methods and educational standards.

The digitised children’s drawings may also be used as historical documents for a researcher writing a biography. This could be a biography of the child themselves, or a teacher or parent. By looking through drawings at the time and putting them into their historical context, a researcher can more accurately analyse a person’s



Germany, 1937

Girl (10 years?), School task: vase and jug, © Ströter-Bender Collection

childhood. They can combine the research with photos and historical paintings, reconstructing situations of these childhoods.

Finally, these drawings, when viewed as historical documents and endangered collections, make for interesting museum exhibits. They add colour and interest to a wider range of visitors, inspiring different target groups and dialogues between the generations. Researchers in museology and education can use the drawings to increase their range of material for students. IRAND encourages researchers to start viewing youth drawings as historical documents to progress science and assist PhD and master’s students.

Children’s and youth drawings of the 20<sup>th</sup> century offer a unique and fascinating insight in war, genocide, and peace times. These endangered collections should be considered historical documents, worthy of preservation and academic study across a range of research fields. Prof Dr Ströter-Bender and IRAND are using digitisation to ensure the permanent place of children’s drawings as historical record. They are also planning an international joint application for the inclusion into the UNESCO Memory of the World Register in order to protect endangered collections for future generations.

Classe Campbell (1910-1987), "Girl Painting",  
Sweden 1966 (Ströter-Bender Collection)

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