IRAND: Helping to preserve children’s and youth drawings of the 20th century

Research Objectives

The research team around Prof Dr Ströter-Bender explores historical events of the 20th century through the lens of children’s drawings.

Detail

Technologiewerkpark 21 Raum TP21.2.28
33100 Universität Paderborn
Germany

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

• IRAND - CHILDREN’S AND YOUTH DRAWINGS. [online] International Archives. Available at: https://international-archives.net/en/home-2/ [Accessed 15.04.2020]

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What insights can children’s and youth drawings offer that a researcher cannot get from other historical documents?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.
What 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 While many believe that the most important historical documents include political declarations or photographs, it is increasingly common for historians to expand their definition more widely. Creative pieces like paintings and symphonies have also been archived as historical documents, but even this has tended to stick to history’s greatest creative geniuses.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 20th 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 Jutta Ströter-Bender hopes to preserve these drawings, so they can provide educational value to future generations hoping to study the major events of the 20th 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.

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 upbringing 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 20th 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 these 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 easier to save children’s drawings. Some of the most valuable images are included in this book.

**Children living in concentration camps, witnessing genocide, or experiencing war may choose to process these traumatic experiences through drawing.**
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.


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 herself, 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 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 20th 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.

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 1900), 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 of children’s drawings so that more people will take care to rescue childrent’s art during times of historical significance.

IRAND is made up of 21 members, who work for institutions in Canada, Switzerland, Ireland and Germany.

The network, therefore, acts as an archive for historical drawings. 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 maturity, 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 herself, 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 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 20th 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.