

I have often said that drawing isn't in the hand. But *something* is in the hand, in the arm, in the body. There is a sort of groove you find that has to do with muscle memory and is one kind of fluency. It feels graceful, athletic even, confident that the stroke has traction as if magnetized. This comes from hours of drawing, though not necessarily 10K.

We need some fluency, we need that physical-optical resonance of our instrument. The problem with fluency is habit. Fluency becomes a path of least resistance, natural to follow but then hard to escape. The issue is how *not* to follow it mindlessly but lead it or at least be abreast of it.

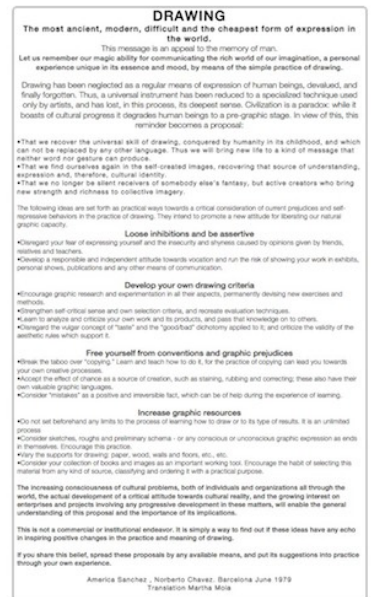
The eye might show us what it wants to see, but I think less by giving us a fixed goal than by inviting and channeling our responses on the fly. There is some capacity in us that recognizes when something falls right or when it has become stale. We notice when our drawing surprises us and holds our own attention, and when it doesn't.

These are subtle things that have nothing to do with making pictures. Drawing lets us deal with these subtleties because it lies so close both to the conscious and unconscious mind and also to its own roots. It is never far from lines incised in rock or clay, from streaks or scars on skin, from gestures accompanying vocal utterance or used for shaping wood or stone, from signs and symbols and maps. However far we refine our drawing, the path back down to the very first roots is still there, as close as a sharp palm-sized stone or a charred stick.

Fluency is hard won and hard to let go. But we can lose it pretty easily simply by neglect as our Covid experience reveals. The world interferes. Fear, anxiety, conflict, complication are seldom good for the spirit or for the art unless we find some spark of courage and resistance in them.

And this is always a negotiation even in the best of times, because just when we arrive where we think we want to be, we see the thread we were following doesn't stop there and if *we* stop, it leaves us behind. So we drag our skills and our understandings along behind and they are never more than barely enough. Robert Bly once said that the old stories didn't actually end "happily ever after." They were great ordeals with small redemptions. This isn't to suggest depression. It is about gathering courage and not going to sleep, not letting comfort take over. It is about the spark of resilience we all have claim to.

As I was writing this, thinking about resilience and spirit, I thought of the Drawing Manifesto I have kept close for years. Since it was no longer available via my old website, I added the pdf to my new website and did some research into the two people who wrote it in 1979.

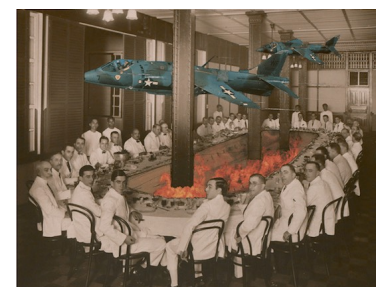


[The Barcelona Drawing Manifesto](#)

In 1986 Derek Boshier gave me this inspiring drawing manifesto written by Norberto Chaves and America Sanchez who met while teaching at the Eina Design and Art School in Barcelona. This was the topic of rixlab notes #2 in 2015. It is on the rixlab page of my new website and linked here so you can download it for yourself.



longtime friends: Barcelona designers Norberto Chaves and America Sanchez 42 years after the manifesto



[America Sanchez is an interesting, influential graphic designer in Barcelona](#)