Drawing as an epistemic tool in art history

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Since the nineteenth-century academic institutionalization of art history as a discipline in its own right, the vast majority of art historians have used drawing to observe, document, classify, and interpret works of art. Yet, despite the substantial body of documentary evidence attesting to this practice, the use of this tool and its theoretical stakes remain largely understudied. The research project "Drawing as an Epistemic Tool in Art History" (University of Fribourg, 2025-2029 – supported by the Swiss National Science Foundation) aims to address this gap by conducting a global investigation that seeks to restore drawing to its rightful place in the writing of art history.

The research will develop along two closely linked directions. First, it will identify and examine drawings made by art historians and preserved in archival centers and art history institutes and departments in Switzerland, Europe, and beyond. Second, it will analyze these materials from a transdisciplinary perspective. The project aims to create a freely accessible archive that will offer future generations both a clear overview and an essential research tool for a body of material that has so far been difficult to access.

To enable a more complete mapping of this phenomenon, the project launches a call for contributions from the scholarly community. We invite researchers and institutions to identify and report any archival collections—public or private, academic or associative—that may help to inform and enrich this investigation on an international scale. A key requirement is that these collections include graphic records of any kind, regardless of their form or medium : collages, tracings, sketches, diagrams, doodles, and so forth.

All substantial input to this repertory will be acknowledged, and credited individuals will be prominently listed on a dedicated page of the repertory's website (currently under construction). We look forward to hearing from you and warmly thank you for your valuable support.

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More about the project (in French and German):
https://www.unifr.ch/art/fr/recherche/projets-de-recherche/dessiner-voir/

Reference:

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