Drawn Together Through
VISUAL PRACTICE

An Anthology Edited by
Brandy Agerbeck, Kelvy Bird, Sam Bradd & Jennifer Shepherd
This anthology contains exciting and varied contributions to the growing literature on visual language and its power to “draw us” together. The authors offer a wide range of experience, powerful illustrations and the core message that visual language enables us to learn, think, and grow in new ways – especially when considering the complex relationships that words alone can’t illuminate. Drawn Together through Visual Practice reflects the power of this field to help transform organizations and communities in life-affirming ways.

– Juanita Brown PhD, Co-Founder, The World Cafe

After 45 years of drawing on the wall it is extraordinary to see this field bloom in such rich and contributive ways. The authors are the cambium layer—advancing and shaping it with practice and questions—providing inspiration for all of us who are living into this emergent, hopeful, phenomenon.

– David Sibbet, The Grove Consultants International

The field of visual practice has long been nurtured by the quiet presence of artists devoted to listening and serving the groups with whom they work. It is high time that they turned and faced the room and shared the depth of artisanal practice and craft that underscores their devotion to the work. This collection is a stunning revelation of the heart of this practice. Whatever your role in group work, you will be made better by listening to these voices and stories of experience, sensitivity and careful attention.

– Chris Corrigan, Art of Hosting and Harvest Moon Consulting

A first-rate look at the new world of visual practice. I know from personal experience that capturing content and discussion in real time imagery can help create communal understanding and memory. The images give participants a shared visual vocabulary that help capture complex ideas and enable the move to new discoveries and innovations. The book is a delightful dive into understanding the background and development of this new teaching/art form. Enjoy.

– Deborah Ancona, Seley Distinguished Professor of Management, Faculty Director of the MIT Leadership Center, MIT Sloan School of Management
I’ve seen visual practice map ideas, refresh memories, and provoke insights in many meetings involving dozens of professionals from business, government, and education. So it’s a special delight to discover this collection representing the art, craft, and inspiration of visual practice from multiple perspectives.

– David N. Perkins, Carl H. Pforzheimer, Jr., Research Professor of Teaching and Learning, Harvard Graduate School of Education

Graphic facilitation is a powerful way for a group to come to know themselves and the work they want to do together. It is no wonder that it so quickly became a part of any good meeting, conference, or problem solving session! Drawn Together is a valuable book, timely and well thought through. It should be read and employed by all wanting to improve and accelerate the rate of change and innovation within an organization, executive team or community. The more diversity in the room, the more powerful visual imagery becomes.

– Gail Taylor, Co-Founder of MG Taylor, Inc., Founder of Tomorrow Makers, Inc.

At last! A compendium of stories, helpful approaches and mind sets that reflects the diversity, the richness of scope and the broad impact of the growing field of visual practice/visual language. Our visual practice not only encompasses ‘making the invisible visible’ and ‘making the visible visual’ through many artistic means, but also, it incorporates all the human elements of working together, listening, and inclusion that our world is crying for. The potential is unlimited. This is a must read for people who are looking for ways to make substantial change and impact in our world as a group or as an individual and who are looking for paths to go ‘from my way to our way’.

– Susan Kelly, Visual Practitioner

Drawn Together offers me tools to reflect and improve on developing campaigns for Lush, and encourages personal reflection on my process. A tremendous job bringing together a picture of the evolving work and sharing best practices.

– Carleen Pickard, Ethical Campaigns Specialist, Lush Handmade Cosmetics, North America
Contents

The Visual Now: An introduction ........................................................................................................ 1

Making Room for Making: In praise of imperfect drawings and the humans who make them
BRANDY AGERBECK ......................................................................................................................... 5

Drawing-to-Learn: A general studies course for first-year college students
DR. LAURENCE MUSGROVE ........................................................................................................... 15

In Front of the Wall
ALFREDO CARLO .......................................................................................................................... 31

Visual Improvisation: How improvising influences my sketchnoting
EVA-LOTTA LAMM .......................................................................................................................... 39

Solo-Practitioner Partnerships: A conversation between Lisa Arora and Robert Mittman
......................................................................................................................................................... 53

Sensemaking through Arts-Infused, Person-Centered Planning Processes
AARON JOHANNES .......................................................................................................................... 63

Dancineering, Researchals, Bodystorming, and Informances: Movement-based approaches to sensemaking and transmediation through contemporary dance
CHRISTOPHER KNOWLTON ......................................................................................................... 75

Stories and Storytelling
ANTHONY WEEKS ......................................................................................................................... 85
The Secret to Long-Term Impact in Your Engagements
MARY ALICE ARTHUR ................................................................. 97

Using Perspectives to Build a Practice
BRYAN COFFMAN ........................................................................ 111

Cultivating Cultural Safety: The visual practitioner’s role in motivating positive action
SAM BRADD ................................................................................. 121

The Use of Imagery in Conflict Engagement
AFTAB ERFAN ............................................................................. 133

Steady, to Scale
KELVY BIRD .................................................................................... 143

A Learning Journey: Connecting self to planet
STINA BROWN ................................................................................ 155

Sharing a Dia Experience
CLAUDIA MADRAZO ......................................................................... 165

Embodied Mark-Making: The Big Brush experience
BARBARA BASH ............................................................................. 173

Discovering Wisdom Within and Between: How storyboards, portraits, and visual explanations can help us learn to solve the puzzles of our time
JENNIFER SHEPHERD ..................................................................... 185

Sensemaking, Potential Space, and Art Therapy with Organizations: Moving beyond language
MICHELLE WINKEL ........................................................................... 197
Kinesthetic Modeling: Re-learning how to grope in the dark
JOHN WARD ................................................................. 205

Becoming a Visual Change Practitioner
NEVADA LANE ................................................................. 217

Four Mindsets of a Visual Ecology in the Workplace: Re-visioning language through visual thinking
MISHA MERCER ................................................................. 225

Rigorous Design of Visual Tools that Deepen Conversations and Spark New Insights
CHRISTINE MARTELL .......................................................... 241

Imagery That Travels Well: Making yourself understood across cultures with the help of visual language
PETER STOYKO ................................................................. 251

The Thermal Lift of Visualization: How to empower people in visual thinking, learning, and co-creation
MARTIN HAUSSMANN, INTERVIEWED BY BRANDY AGERBECK .... 271

Bridging on the Rise
JAYCE PEI YU LEE, INTERVIEWED BY KELVY BIRD .............. 285

When We Cannot See the Future, Where Do We Begin?
BOB STILGER ................................................................. 295

Reflection and Visual Practice
JENNIFER SHEPHERD AND SAM BRADD ................................ 303
Reflection is an integral aspect of visual practice. When we make time to reflect, we come to know more about ourselves, see new possibilities for action, and make wiser choices. Along the way, we extend our awareness and care and create openings to expand our competence. This is true, regardless of whether “we” are the ones holding the pen, offering input or bearing witness to the creative process, or interpreting a completed work. We all stand to benefit—personally and professionally—from practicing reflection to make meaning of our work and our experience in it.

We, the authors, have both heard our clients reflect out loud when engaging with our drawings. They exclaim: “I hadn’t ever thought of my work this way until I saw my ideas presented visibly. It’s completely changed how I think of my work!”
Reflection helped a group with whom Sam was working to make sense of the conference:

“It’s a busy conference, and I found it valuable to take a break and review the graphic recordings. The images helped me reflect on what was happening and make new connections between sessions.”

And, speaking professionally as practitioners, we’ve discovered that the subjects on which we reflect, and the questions we ask, influence what we learn. By expanding our awareness of subjects and the range of questions to ask, we’ve uncovered blind spots in our thinking and identified more areas to explore in our practice.

For example, reflection helped Jennifer rethink the concept of families:

“I was preparing for a strategy session with a Canadian non-profit organization. The Executive Director and I were talking about family—a core concept for this organization. As we talked about how family structures have shifted and diversified over decades and how the definition of family has also changed, I realized that my “go-to” drawing of a nuclear family was woefully inadequate. To do justice in my role as graphic facilitator, I would need to explore other ways to capture the essence of the idea of family. Rather than drawing its form—mother, father, kids, and maybe some extended relations—I would need to illustrate ties of mutual consent and the functions of family life.”

In our profession, we make dozens of decisions per hour. Reflection on each decision in the moment isn’t always possible: sometimes actions are too fast, or possibly routine. How do we know what we show? Architect and educator Donald Schön developed “reflection-in-action,” a reflection methodology, because he noticed that professionals are expected to simply know how to do things, demonstrating “actions and judgments spontaneously, unaware of having learned to do these things... and unable to describe the knowing that the action reveals.”

Reflection-in-action helped Sam research his own practice for his graduate work.
“I designed a research study about my graphic facilitation. Although it might sound strange to research oneself, I found Schön’s methodology a rigorous way to learn about myself. By pausing in reflection, I was able to write about my work, and in this way become more curious about it. The deeper I went, the more questions I had for myself—and the more I enjoyed the process of problem-solving my way out of them.”

Your invitation

In this final contribution to the book, as a closing and opening gesture, we invite you—our colleagues, clients, and facilitation partners—to notice areas for reflection in your own practice, whatever that might be.

We have created 65 questions to support your reflection. As we’ve been diving into our own practice in this area, we’ve found it helpful to focus our thinking on our relationships with co-facilitators, clients, participants, and the broader field of visual practitioners. We’ve also benefited from reflecting on our connection with the visual artifacts that we create and how all of these link dynamically when we’re working. For simplicity, we’ve organized the questions into sections. Each section includes questions about one of these connections. The figure below illustrates the recursive nature of reflection.

Model and illustration by Jennifer Shepherd
Here are some suggestions for how to use this chapter as a kind of personal workbook:

- Reflect on your own, or gather with peers, clients, and others
- Read the questions aloud, pause, and notice what answers arise
- Phone a colleague and have a conversation
- Write a journal entry and see what emerges
- Bring your thoughts forward to the field of visual practice online or at a conference

We offer these methods as wisdom from our shared experience. We’ve tried them all, and they work! A few years ago, we were hungry to explore emerging practice themes with colleagues and peers. Having taken the initiative to convene and host a “Deep Conversation Series” with fellow members of the International Forum of Visual Practitioners, we used these approaches to deepen our learning, and started to compile and refine questions that warranted further reflection.

We offer these and many more questions as a gift to the visual practice field. These are only a start. Now, it’s your turn. We invite you to share your own questions on the Drawn Together Through Visual Practice website so that those of us wishing to deepen our learning may benefit from your insights, and so we may grow the sensemaking practice of reflection together.
My relationship with the field of visual practice, our role, and our work to do:

1. What is my wish for the field of visual practice?
2. What do others in the field seem to care about right now, and what about that matters to me?
3. What am I doing to learn with others, if anything? (For example: meet for coffee dates, participate in graphic jams, attend conferences…)
4. What might I share with others to help the field learn and grow?
5. What trends do I notice in the visual practice field right now? What is unfolding?
6. What do I need to pay attention to as the field changes?
7. What helps me distinguish what work is mine to take on and what work might be better suited for another practitioner?
8. If we brought a common message to our clients as visual practitioners, what would we say about who we are, what we do, and how we act?
My self and my visual practice:
9. What is the scope of my visual practice?
10. What ethics guide my visual practice?
11. What are my primary talents?
12. What skills do I need or wish to acquire?
13. When I’m caught by surprise, by something that is said or happens in the room, how do I refocus?
14. When I am working with emotional content, how do I take care of myself?
15. What qualities do I need to have as a competent visual practitioner?
16. What’s one value that I bring to my work? What are some of my other core values?
17. What can I learn from accessing vulnerability and humility? How do I bring these into the room and to the group?
18. If I’m working in an unfamiliar context, what resources can I turn to? For example, I might not know the relevant words or images. What do I need to learn or ask before I arrive in the room so I feel prepared?
19. How can I work to support diverse experiences, across difference, to value and hold all voices and perspectives in the room?

My relationship with the client:
20. What do I need to share with my clients about the potential of visual language and practices?
21. What practices can I share to help clients adopt visual thinking?
22. How can I help clients reflect on the impact I can make?
23. What do my clients need to know about me and my unique capacities?
24. What do my clients need to tell me about their projects for me to do my best work?
25. What enables visual thinking practices to flourish in an organization?
My relationship with the artifact I am creating:
26. How do I hold the client’s intent and meeting outcomes in mind while I’m working?
27. How do I respond when someone asks me to change a drawing?
28. How do I nourish my creativity?
29. How do I develop my personal visual vocabulary to keep it fresh and relevant?
30. What do my visual icons say about my worldview and my appreciation of context?
31. What technology and platforms do I use for my work, and why?
32. What helps me choose the emotions, words, and unspoken dimensions (or “elephants in the room”) to capture?
33. How can the room setup help me do my best work?
34. When does it matter to accurately represent an idea visually?

My relationship with participants:
35. What do I need to know about myself to be in service to the group?
36. What do I need to know—and care—about the group to be in service to myself?
37. What matters about how I am introduced? What do I need to tell someone who is introducing me?
38. What feedback can I ask participants for that can help me reflect, learn, and grow?
39. If I can’t just show up, set up, and get to work, then what is needed to connect with participants and the environment?
40. Can I think of a time when a participant came up to me and described how the visuals changed the experience for them? What did we learn in this conversation?
41. How do I tap into group dynamics and choose what belongs on the page?
42. What is my role in orienting participants to the power and potential of visual thinking methods?
43. How can I help participants use the visuals to reflect?
44. What emotional impact could our work have for participants? What could thinking about this bring?
My relationship with the facilitator(s):
45. What conversations do I want to have with the facilitator before a session begins?
46. Knowing sessions vary, what helps me stay nimble and respond in the moment?
47. What do I need to know about facilitation to help me be a good partner?

Participants’ relationship with the artifact:
48. How could the room setup influence participants’ ability to reflect and make sense of their work?
49. Do participants see the artifact as “something I’ve done for them,” or as “something I’ve done with them?” Does it change how I do my work?
50. What helps participants feel connected to the artifact and offer input or feedback to the creation? What can happen before, during, and after?
51. What do participants do as they look at the artifacts?
52. What activities could I suggest to use the visual artifacts to help participants reflect?
53. What helps participants make “Big Picture” connections?
54. How can I measure what matters?
55. How can I help participants see things they couldn’t see before, and how can they show me things I couldn’t see before?
56. What activities could help participants reflect on their own drawings?

The client’s relationship with the artifact:
57. What is the specific purpose of the visual artifact to be created? Who is it supposed to help, with what, and how?
58. How will this artifact have use after the meeting?
59. How could the artifacts be used for reflection after the meeting?
60. Have you been in a session where the process of creating the artifact was of greater value than the artifact itself? What is different about these times?

Our work and the future:
61. How might our work be relevant to people outside the room?
62. How do our drawings influence culture?
63. If visual practices were integrated into every profession, what would that look like?
64. How does visual practice shape a future? What becomes possible?

JENNIFER SHEPHERD makes it easy for everyday leaders to clarify what matters, discover new possibilities, and intuitively make their next move. She believes individuals, organizations, and communities can achieve great things when they tap into the latent wisdom within and between them. Jennifer inspires leaders like you to access this wisdom and use it to generate insight and collaborate well. Jennifer is the Principal of Living Tapestries, a consulting practice based in Ottawa, Canada. She holds a Master of Arts in Human Systems Intervention and is an IAF Certified Professional Facilitator. www.livingtapestries.ca

SAM BRADD is a graphic facilitator and specialist in information design. He uses visuals for people that want to engage, solve problems, and lead. Together, we’re drawing change. In the last 15 years, Sam has collaborated with the World Health Organization, Google, indigenous organizations and researchers on three continents. In 2016, his side project the Graphic History Collective published a new book of comics because how we tell histories can change the world. He has a Masters in Education (University of British Columbia). Contact: @sambradd and www.drawingchange.com.

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