



# REPORTAGE ILLUSTRATION: VISUAL JOURNALISM



## CASE STUDY

### Anne Howeson: Drawing and memory

Anne Howeson is an artist and tutor at the Royal College of Art in London. She worked for many years with publishing and editorial clients from Europe, Canada, and the U.S. Currently she works on self-initiated drawing projects such as the regeneration of King's Cross, which she discusses below. She received the Jerwood Drawing Prize in 2000 and has exhibited in *The Guardian* newspaper.

*Memory, even if you repress it, will come back at you and it will shape your life.*

— W.G. Sebald

The central theme of my work is place, and the people

who inhabit it. These elements are expressed through memory and time. Drawing is my primary working method—its urgent, shorthand nature is a direct conduit to the imagination and a doorway to the unconscious.

Place and the memory of places are integral and they influence my thinking as a teacher, but locations can be interpreted in many other ways than the literal and can be used as containers and metaphors for stories, concepts, and imagination.

Two of my recent drawing projects have concerned regeneration in the largest area of urban redevelopment

in Europe—King's Cross/St. Pancras, London. The first, *Remember Me* (Guardian Media, 2009), commemorated the disappearing buildings and imagined a fictitious architectural future in the neighborhood. The second, *Present in the Past* (Collyer Bristow, 2015), took copies of early engravings from London prints and drawings archives and changed their scale, context, and content (by erasing and redrawing) to evoke a sense of time passing and memories interweaving into a kind of palimpsest.

Building sites have an excitement and an instability that's ambiguous and compelling to



Figure 5.19  
Anne Howeson, "Culross Buildings (Disappeared)." Anne Howeson's atmospheric drawings of the area around King's Cross in London.



Figure 5.20  
Anne Howeson, "Tile Kilns." An example of Anne Howeson's use of original source material with drawing.

draw (see Frank Auerbach's 1952–1962 London Building Sites sketches). When I started work on the drawings for *Remember Me*, King's Cross was both a ruin and a new neighborhood in the process of reconstruction. Few of the old buildings had yet been dismantled and the area was at the beginning of a transition that would continue for the next ten years (and is still in progress) with a growing and shifting population. In making the work I was motivated by a feeling of nostalgia for a place which had not yet disappeared but whose days were numbered. I wanted to depict an atmosphere that felt frozen in time, scruffy, and sometimes dangerous.

It was this "in between" state that intrigued me. I spent many evenings wandering the streets behind the station, with sketchbook and camera, watching the pulling down and raising up of buildings in the waiting railway lands. These drawings were not a representational document, more an attempt to hold on to a memory and invent a fictional future for the places I knew so well. Most of the content was architectural—there were almost no people in the streets. I had intended to include figures in minor semi-abstract roles, but came to see the buildings themselves as the personalities. Like the Eiffel Tower (described as the "Shepherdess of Paris" by

Apollinaire in his poem "Zone"), the warehouses, site offices, tenement blocks, and towers of King's Cross were the lead characters and the lamp posts, CCTV cameras, and bollards the supporting cast.

I'd just read W.G. Sebald's book *Austerlitz*, and was moved by his reference to memory—"the vortex of past time." One passage in particular, set in Liverpool Street station during regeneration, described a station porter in a "snow white turban" (not a white rabbit) who emerged from a "low doorway in the builders' fence reaching up to the second story of the interior façade of the station . . . and now disappeared through it again with an odd jerk."





Figure 5.21  
Anne Howeson, "Celebrations of the Dead."

As though entering an under-world, Austerlitz follows the man through the doorway, into the disused Ladies Waiting Room on the other side, where the "man in the turban was nowhere to be seen." Later, the space seems to merge with other places from its past, reminiscent of a Piranesi print: "vaults and brickwork arches bearing on them many-storied structures, with flights of stone steps, wooden stairways and ladders, all leading the eye on and on."

The second project, *Present in the Past*, developed from a meeting with Francis Marshall, curator at the Museum of London, who invited me to work with the museum's prints and drawings archive. Choosing a few of the early engravings, I made large

digital prints and worked on top of them, erasing and redrawing, to evoke a sense of passing time. The "unbuilt" places of the future and the disappearing buildings from the past were imagined and revisited. Part document, part fiction, the drawings slowly developed, becoming a kind of "conversation" with the earlier artist, new stories woven into the old ones, playing with time, memory, and place, where the ghosts of past communities could encounter people on the streets of today.

The original prints were full of people strolling with their dogs in parks and church yards, men digging graves, workmen building railways, a man gathering firewood—and my drawings became populated with people

too. This was a pleasure. I started to research contemporary figures through reportage drawing. In *King's Cross* and the *Smallpox Hospital*, for example, where a row of people pass across the front of the station (suggesting a continuous stream of time), sketches were made of people in the underground and around the station walking with babies in prams and dogs on leads or running to catch trains, dragging suitcases behind them.

I didn't have a political agenda. At first I felt sad about the disappearing and familiar places, concerned that the environment might become too corporate. However, change is inevitable and intriguing (the archive prints show successive disruptions and building works







through previous centuries), and it's exciting to watch new public spaces emerge in a changing environment with an eclectic mix of uses.

Both King's Cross projects are about memory and drawing. I believe that drawing has a powerful predictive quality, and can be an instinctive way of planning and thinking in a visual, non-intellectual way:

*Drawing always knows better than I what I want to say.*  
— Josef Herman

As a tutor at the Royal College of Art, keen to promote drawing, and believing that ordinary situations can be enhanced and made extraordinary by the ability to remember and re-evoke, I wrote an exercise for first-year students, giving them an A6 sketchbook, and asking them to make a quick "memory drawing" each day

of an incident/observation from their everyday life. A document/evocation/diary note—of

something seen and experienced, concerning events, objects, or people.

While this idea may seem deceptively simple, the use of imagination and memory in reportage drawing (in addition to observation) is both radical and highly demanding. Ambitious and complex new projects have been generated from these starting points, sustained throughout second-year study and into future practices.



Figure 5.22  
Anne Howeson, "St. Pancras in the Fields 1752."

