

Drawing as Fitting: slow pedagogy through the travelling sketchbook

Ernesto Fenollosa, Susana Iñarra Abad, Juan Serra
Universitat Politècnica de Valencia, ETSA

Keywords

Hand drawing, Architectural pedagogy, Embodied observation, Travel workshop, Situated architecture

In an era defined by the rapid generation of images, ideas, and architectural proposals through artificial intelligence, the act of drawing by hand emerges as a radical pedagogical counterproposal. This article presents an educational experience at the School of Architecture of Valencia: a travel workshop with first-year students whose sole purpose is drawing. The proposal departs from a fundamental distinction: drawing not as a medium of project representation, but as a mode of slow, embodied observation. “Drawing is not merely a visual act but a haptic one, a way of touching and understanding architecture through the moving hand” (Pallasmaa). When a student draws a building, they are forced to look at it for an extended period. They must calibrate proportions, light, materiality, context—aspects that cannot be delegated to a digital tool. This is the fundamental pedagogical condition: less speed, less digital mediation, fewer tools. This subtraction produces a deeper and more situated architectural understanding.

The experience reveals a growing difficulty: each year, it becomes harder to wean students off their mobile-phones and get them to face the blank page. The screen offers an immediate and risk-free relationship with the image; drawing demands exposure, slowness, and tolerance for error. This resistance is the symptom of the pedagogical problem that the traveling workshop seeks to address.

Drawing requires students to calibrate their perception to the scale of what is in front of them, developing a scalar attention and a careful, situated engagement with the place. The travel journal, incomplete and provisional by nature, becomes an instrument that doesn’t resolve but rather questions.

This article argues that hand drawing is not a nostalgic technique but a pedagogical practice of productive contraction—one that trains future architects to observe before designing, to understand before proposing, and to adjust their responses to places.