****

**School: Design**

**Researcher: Tim Vyner**

**Project Title: *The Times* Artist Covering the Olympic Games – Digital Methods for Location Drawing (2008-2013)**

**UOA: 32 Art and Design: History, Practice and Theory**

Research Statement

This research portfolio explores the ways in which digital technology has changed the process of reportage illustration, resulting in projects that take place in real time, making a contribution to global sporting events as they happen and not only retrospectively.

The research took place between 2008–2013 and covered two distinctly different Olympic Games; Beijing 2008 and London 2012. The first research question from this period asks: how has technology informed the practice of reportage illustration as a method of working on location?

In Beijing 2008, Vyner used traditional methods of reportage illustration, working on location during a unique moment in time as Beijing hosted China’s first Olympic Games. The drawings made during this time recorded the emerging narratives, and the preliminary sketches were brought back to the studio, before being developed into an exhibition several months later. The exhibition provided a good opportunity to relive great sporting memories, but it could only provide a retrospective lookback at the events of the Olympic Games. Looking back at a tournament felt passive and disconnected from the ways in which sport and news are consumed ‘live’.

Technology has always provided opportunities for the illustrator to develop their practice, and several factors aligned during the period of this research project. Digital drawing was speeding up the process of working, while in 2010 the first iPad was launched and the general public were starting to consume high quality news content in real time. In the run up to London 2012 Vyner had shifted his gaze from Beijing to the East End of London and was documenting its transformation in the build up to hosting the games. Timing was key, and as the work shifted continents it also shifted media in order to question existing illustration processes. The early digital drawings had all the life and immediacy of analogue sketches made in pen and ink, but they also had the bold colours and time-based qualities of finished artwork. During this time the research set out to test how this use of digital technology could enable the reportage illustrator to capture unique narratives around live events and connect more quickly with an audience. The possibility of sending artwork directly to a client while on location meant publishing high quality work capturing the mood and atmosphere of live sport in real time was a real possibility. The digital drawings captured the atmosphere and the immediacy of the games in a way that was distinct from sports photography, opening up the possibility of new narratives and new audiences.

The second research question in this portfolio asks: how can reportage illustration employ digital technology in order to capture unique narratives around live sporting events and provide engaging content for both sporting and non-sporting audiences?

The new technologies mentioned above, presented the illustrator on location the opportunity to publish in real time. The research aimed to engage new audiences this way. Vyner worked with *The Times* newspaper to embed reportage illustration into their sports coverage, something usually only covered by photography. This was an attempt to extend the coverage of live sporting events to engage with new audiences, who were not only interested in the sport but also the city and the mood and atmosphere of what it is like to experience a live global sporting event.

After a series of test events in the run up to 2012 that included the London Marathon, BMX world championships in Birmingham, Blenheim Palace Triathlon and the Olympic Torch journey around the UK, Vyner familiarized himself with the iPad software, producing work on the spot. The illustrations were sent to the newspapers’ Olympic team, who could upload the content to reach their online readers immediately. The drawings were accompanied with audio recordings made on location that enhanced the ‘live’ experience for readers. In addition to the drawings in print and animation, there was an accompanying text that created a different point of view of the Olympic Games to the sports pages of a newspaper. By capturing the mood and atmosphere of London of the fans, London residents and first-time visitors to the city, Vyner shed light on alternative narratives that would otherwise go unreported.

This project resulted in up to 3 deadlines a day throughout the 17 days of the Olympic Games, resulting in 45 published drawings, including a wraparound souvenir newspaper cover on 9th August. A framed print of this cover was offered in a competition to Times Readers and over 10,000 readers applied, one of the highest responses to a *Times+* competition.

A series of exhibitions continued to grow new audiences for reportage illustration and sport. These shows used the same digital drawings to provide a chance to look back and relive memorable moments from the remarkable summer. Visitors to London art galleries in the heart of Shoreditch, as well as footfall in a large city hospital in Bath resulted in new audiences seeing the work, including people who had been volunteers during the games but were not aware of the illustrations. A series of lectures and further exhibitions followed.

In conclusion, this research took place over a 5-year period in which the traditional analogue processes for drawing on location combined with new digital technology, along with the shifting habits of how the general public was consuming news, sport and live events, leading to a renewed interest in observational drawing and new commissioning opportunities for the reportage illustrator. By combining visual and textual narratives, Vyner produced new insights into the context, setting, and atmosphere of the Olympic Games and opened up new possibilities and processes of working for reportage illustrators.