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Drawings that Make History: A Viewing Guide to Understand Youths' Perspectives, Identity Traits and Emotional and Material Worlds

ABSTRACT / ABSTRAKTI

Drawings made by minors are assets for understanding their perceptions of events and for addressing themes that are difficult to talk or write about. However, when found in archives they pose methodological and ethical challenges if the makers or the contexts of creation and collection are not known. These absences complicate writing about youths and matters that represent them. To overcome this, we propose a viewing guide by example of drawings made by early youths in Finland in two historical contexts: the process of European integration in the early 1990s and the COVID-19 lockdown in 2020. Grounding the analysis in the motifs and their materiality, four viewings are proposed: the first focuses on how these historical events are depicted, the second examines traits that evidence the makers' youth, the third highlights emotions and states of mind, and the fourth zooms into the material and the sensory experiences they transmit. This viewing guide demonstrates that drawings effectively capture youths' perceptions of specific events, but also broader phenomena that affect them, opening possibilities to understand their experiences more holistically. This guide helps researchers appreciate drawings as personal narratives, and it informs the future collection of similar materials to better include minors in curatorial processes.

Lasten ja nuorten piirustukset avaavat heidän näkemyksiään ja käsityksiään sekä antavat mahdollisuuden käsitellä aiheita, joista olisi vaikea puhua tai kirjoittaa. Tutkija kohtaa kuitenkin tiettyjä metodologisia ja eettisiä kysymyksiä, jos piirustukset ovat arkistoaineistoa, jonka syntykonteksti ja muodostumisperusteet tunnetaan heikosti. Taustatietojen puutteet vaikeuttavat lapsilähtöisen tutkimusotteen soveltamista, joka on ihanne lapsia ja nuoria koskevassa tutkimuksessa. Apuna tilanteeseen esitämme tässä artikkelissa neljä näkökulmaa piirustusten käyttämiseen lähteaineistona historiallisessa tai yhteiskuntatieteellisessä tutkimuksessa. Havainnollistamme näkökulmia esimerkeillä kahdesta eri yläkouluikäisten Suomessa tekemästä aineistokokonaisuudesta, joista ensimmäinen liittyy Euroopan integraatioon 1990-luvun alussa ja toinen vuonna 2020

pubjenneeseen koronapandemiaan. Ensimmäinen piirustusten aiheisiin ja materiaalisuuteen pohjautuvista näkökulmista paneutuu siihen, miten 13–15-vuotiaat kuvaavat piirustusajankohdan tapahtumia ja ilmiöitä. Toinen tutkii piirteitä, jotka kertovat piirtäjien iästä ja elämänvaiheesta. Kolmas näkökulma korostaa piirustusten välittämiä tunteita, ja neljäs keskittyy piirustusten materiaalisuuteen ja niiden välittämiin aistikokemuksiin. Osoitamme, että piirustusten kautta on mahdollista lähestyä sitä, miten ilmiöt ja tapahtumat on koettu, ja myös ymmärtää lasten ja nuorten arkea laajemmin. Tämä opas auttaa tutkijoita – erityisesti sellaisia, jotka eivät ole tottuneet käyttämään visuaalisia lähteaineistoja – hyödyntämään niiden avaamia näkökulmia yksilöiden kokemuksiin. Lisäksi opas tukee tulevien dokumentointi- ja tutkimushankkeiden suunnittelua ja toteuttamista.

drawings, visual research methods, youth, archive material, European integration, COVID documentation / piirustukset, visuaaliset tutkimusmenetelmät, nuoruus, arkistoaineisto, Euroopan integraatio, koronadokumenotinti

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Introduction

Serendipity is a charm in archival research. Lori Ostergaard¹ recognized that accidental discoveries need to meet a prepared mind that can recognize their significance. Imagine the accidental discovery is a bundle of drawings made by 13- to 15-year-olds that convey what historic events and phenomena must have felt like for them. If a researcher decides to tell their side of history using visual sources, the prepared mind needs an equally prepared eye. This article is the product of a serendipitous encounter of two researchers who found what seemed to be keys to understanding how youths in Finland experienced historic moments, such as the European integration and the pandemic spring of 2020. The proposed viewing guide is the result of regular encounters sharing material and reflecting on an ethically sound approach to drawings, paintings, and collages created by youths with the intention of drawing conclusions from their experiences at the time, remaining fair to their contribution and respectful of their possible intents and motivations.

Children's and youths' first-hand accounts of historical events are rarely stumbled upon. When found, these are often posterior records of memories in biographies and oral history interviews. In recent decades, historians have taken a growing interest in children's experiences during exceptional times, such as war or evacuation and their possible effects in their later lives,² and some have also made use of drawings as source material. Wartime drawings have been a source to study the perceptions of the parties in civil war,³ and the influence of war, propaganda, and pedagogy on children.⁴ Global crises or times of strong political and economic reform are experienced differently by children compared to adults. This does not subtract from the significance or impact of these events in their lives and later identities; it just makes it more urgent to examine these perspectives.⁵ Historians and cultural heritage

scholars have also used children's drawings to study their emotional belonging to the nation and perceptions of the home region and living environment.⁶ Children's own drawings constitute a special type of source material, as the majority of archived materials concerning children and young people have been produced by adults – either as memories mediated by the lapse of time, observations and interviews made by other adults for research purposes, or the result of institutional documentation, for example, at school.⁷

Shifting to contemporary perspectives on youth research in Finland, a solid body of work exists ranging from youth studies and pedagogy to social work, urging researchers to remain close to youth cultures and support their initiatives. This youth-centredness is about doing research *with* and not just *about* children and youths, which has become a basic principle in contemporary child and youth research.⁸ Acknowledging that any academic publication provides an account of youth mediated through adult perspectives and interests, it is easy to find research based on interviews, writings and other ethnographic material elicited and created by youths, which captures their own situations, cultures, and viewpoints.⁹

Plenty of guidelines exist to examine personal accounts of events. While we briefly review several of them here, an important inspiration has been Mauthner and Doucet's 'listening guide'.¹⁰ Their guide consists of consecutive readings of interview material with shifting perspectives. This is meant as an exercise to analyse qualitative interviews by paying attention to what people reveal about themselves and considering the social and power relations involved in identity building, both in general and in the context in which these revelations occur. Found narratives, such as diaries and letters, are usually created without research or publishing intent. These have become popular sources in social and historical research interested in the perceptions, experiences, beliefs, or value systems of so-called ordinary people in diverse times and contexts. To approach personal narratives with the intention of doing history from below, it is recommended to read against texts, especially if they concern groups excluded from official accounts; to seek references to embodied experiences and feelings; to reflect ethically about the private sphere in which some sources were originally created; and to acknowledge the multiple temporalities involved in autobiographical writings.¹¹ This brings us to remark on the textual- or oral-centeredness of literature about personal accounts and the subsequent overreliance on analytical tools that focus on written genres or rules of discourse. People keep records of their lives, regardless of whether it is done as a conscious act of providing testimony or not, and this is done in a wide range of media – from diaries to poetry or music, collecting newspaper clippings, taking photos and videos, or publishing content on social media.¹² Drawings, artworks, and collages are valid forms of personal testimony, but they require additional tools to interpret their message.

Visual research methods (VRM) help interpret visual objects and require us to critically negotiate the meanings we assign to them. VRM typically refer to creating or interpreting images *with* participants in order to narrow the gap between the researcher and the participants, and to enrich the possibilities offered by the traditional interview method.¹³ To gain access to the drawers' intentionality, researchers consider it more important to follow the drawing process than to examine the actual result as that can lead to misinterpretations. Visual evidence is more open to interpretations than language-based materials, and the researcher holds considerable power in interpreting the drawings. We acknowledge that the interpretations we offer in this article are not exhaustive: another researcher might focus on different aspects or even interpret them in an entirely different way. Interpreting other people's perspectives can be slippery in research situations where temporal or physical distance prevents us from observing the context of making or discussing the meaning of the image with its maker, as ethical guidelines suggest.¹⁴ Research with drawings made by children often uses images to frame the encoun-

ter between the researcher and child,¹⁵ and the analytical focus is on the narrative or dialogue and not on the image.¹⁶ While there is a gap in visual methods literature addressing interpreting drawings made by youths, youth-centredness helps bridge the distance between researchers and participants, because it forces researchers to learn about and let youths' own cultures and initiatives guide the observations. In turn, the earlier mentioned literature that draws from social, cultural, and (oral) history theories helps to recognize and make visible the distance and the power imbalances between two adult researchers and the early youths who made the drawings, and the differences between being a teenager in 1993 and 2020.

This article draws from drawings, paintings, and collages created by youths in Finland and is structured in four thematic sections that can be read in a non-linear form, applied to other kinds of found visual material such as videos or photos, or used as a guide to consider when eliciting and collecting visual works from youths. After describing in more detail the two sets of artworks, we proceed to examining the material side by side, making the analytic process visible.

Europe at school competition and quarantine diaries

The drawings to develop this guide proceed from two distinct collecting initiatives that aimed to grasp the perspective of youths on large-scale societal phenomena occurring at the time: European integration and the COVID-19 pandemic.

European integration originated as an economic endeavour that in the 1980s enlarged into a project called 'People's Europe'. To enhance the popularity of integration, the European Communities wanted to deepen the member states' cooperation in cultural matters and disseminate knowledge of Europe's history and culture to foster European identity among the citizens. Finland, balancing between the Western and Eastern Blocs and located on the northern edge of Europe, was eager to enter all forms of co-operation enabled by the accession to the Council of Europe in 1989. One of these was a writing and drawing competition for children aged 7 to 18 that was organized by the European Cultural Foundation (ECF) with the support of national actors such as the Finnish National Committee of the European Cultural Foundation. The Committee's aim to raise awareness of Europe in Finland and promote Finland's visibility in (western) European countries became even more important after Finland submitted its application for membership to the European Communities in March 1992, just a few months after the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

In Finland, the competition was organized via schools and teachers for the first time in 1990. Each year, the ECF selected an overall theme and launched age-specific assignments for written and visual works. The only visual arts competition entries archived in the National Archives in Helsinki date from 1993. Of the 346 drawings and paintings sent to the Committee for evaluation, half were permanently archived. In this article, the 58 archived works by 7th-, 8th-, and 9th-graders are used to illustrate our reflection. The 13- to 15-year-olds had two assignments to choose from: the first encouraged them to choose and describe two or three events or phenomena in Europe that had caught their attention in recent years, and the second assignment dealt with one or more highlights of the last 40 years in Europe.¹⁷ Both assignments dealt with the past and aimed at directing youths to think about the past from a European perspective instead of the national one that was taught at school.¹⁸

Fast-forward thirty years: one of the most dramatic health crises of this time originated in eastern China and became known as the COVID-19 or coronavirus pandemic. Its rapid spread caused an immediate impact on people's everyday lives across the world. The confinement measures, although

not as strict in Finland as in many other countries, had an effect on all population groups, including children and youths. For periods of months at a time in 2020 and 2021 schools closed, forcing pupils to change their routines from one day to the next. This soon raised concerns about the impact of sudden and prolonged confinement on young people's learning, socializing, and mental health. Research provided evidence that factors related to family, personal situations, gender, and geographical locality made experiences of confinement and remote schooling widely heterogeneous among pupils.¹⁹ It has been established that the pandemic turned schools, an important source of structure and routine for children and youths, into a factor of messiness in life.²⁰

This historic moment was evidenced by the hundreds of documentary initiatives motivated by international heritage bodies, such as the ICOM, or following the example of events that set a precedent, such as 9/11.²¹ Zuanni's survey of collecting projects among European museums characterized them as 'spontaneous' and 'unconnected'.²² Hence, multiple forms of testimony have been preserved, leaving a fund of knowledge about the pandemic from personal objects, photos, and accounts of people living through this exceptional time. In Finland, a handful of projects documenting youths' experiences were reported to the Network for Collections Management and Contemporary Documentation in Finland (TAKO).²³ In addition to the interviews, essays, photographs, and diaries collected, 27 art diaries made by 13- to 15-year-olds are the works considered for this article. Most diaries were titled '*Karanteenipäiväkirjä*' (quarantine diary) and consist of notebooks or bindings of drawings, doodles, watercolours, or collages ranging from two pages to daily entries from 16th March to 14th May 2020, totaling nearly a thousand individual works.²⁴ The diaries were originally made as a school project by two classes in a municipality in eastern Finland, and they were exhibited in October 2020 in a public venue, to be then collected by the Kymenlaakso museum.²⁵

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As stated earlier, we approach these drawings not as mere illustrations of these events but as found 'personal narratives' that provide insights into the experiences of youths living through these events in a visual language that needs guidelines. Hence, we suggest a viewing guide to stimulate interpretation. We find our inspiration in Mauthner and Doucet's 'Listening guide' with which the feminist scholars urge researchers to distinguish between what research participants tell about themselves and their 'actual selves'. 'Reading' research material several times prevents superficial interpretations and enables us to pinpoint how we come to know the individuals we investigate.²⁶ However, we are aware that the listening guide was conceived for analysing conversational situations and cannot be applied unmodified to visual artworks. In order to adapt this listening guide to drawings, we propose four viewings to help the reader methodologically and in the formulation of research questions. The first viewing examines what from the historical event was most *iconic* or repeated in drawings, the second seeks *identity* traits of children and youths, the third asks about *emotions* and *states of mind*, and the fourth zooms in on the *materiality* of drawings as well as the *sensory or embodied* experiences that the objects depicted transmit. These four foci resulted from viewing our research material consecutively from diverse perspectives but always grounded in the motives depicted. Some drawings open a specific perspective more easily than others, and the overall research design concludes which of the perspectives are the most fruitful.

First viewing: From the Berlin Wall to memes, a visual catalogue of mediatic events

Questions that we often address include the following: what motifs in the drawings are particularly noticeable or repeated in each set of drawings? What do these images refer to? How do they inspire the viewer? As perception is subjective, in order to ground our interpretations in how historical events have

impressed themselves on and were remembered by early youths, the first viewing focuses on images that can be directly connected to the historical events in question.

Iconic images say much more than what they depict. An icon can be an image that means what it ‘naturally’ represents, or the meaning can be a convention from a specific time. Iconography studies the shared understanding that contemporaries can extract from an image.²⁷ Horst Bredekamp writes that iconic images shape history and hold meanings that do not go away.²⁸ For example, the atomic cloud over Hiroshima still serves as a deterrence for entering a form of warfare where mutual destruction is assured. Icons refer as much to the image as to the set of meanings that its audience may attribute to it. What is iconic from an event and how the event is interpreted is not necessarily the same for all people. However, images hold great power to anchor memory or shape perceptions.²⁹ This is true for personal photo albums that support or stimulate our memories, but also for art or news media that inform and shape our perceptions of events about which we do not have first-hand knowledge. Precisely events widely broadcast on television, in newspapers, or on social media were the most predominant in both sets of drawings.

The most iconic theme in the ECF competition drawings is the fall of the Berlin wall, which had been a symbol of totalitarian tyranny and the division of Europe during the Cold War. Many drawings show the destruction of the concrete wall and people crossing, like in the image below on the left. Although there were several demonstrations and other events in the Baltics and eastern central Europe that were important steppingstones to the end of the Cold War and many of them took place closer to Finland, the fall of the Berlin wall caught the most attention and rose as a central symbol of the end of an era.



Figures 1. & 2. (left) A.J. 8th grade, n.d.; (right) Young Europe M.P. 8th grade, n.d. (*Eurooppa koulussa - Euroopan koulupäivä* (1993) / National Archives Finland)

Another iconic reference are flags, which are the most used references of nation states. Also, the flag of the European Communities (EC) is used in imaginative ways. The introduction of the blue flag with twelve golden stars along with other symbols was part of the project that aimed to bring European integration closer to ordinary citizens.³⁰ In both drawings above, the flags turn the countries into actors. In the drawing on the left, the two waving flags represent clear opponents, whereas in the drawing on the right the vibrant colours form a harmonious whole. One can notice both the EC's twelve golden stars and the blue, black, and white of Estonia, which had newly regained its independence. Images of pollution and environmental problems are also conveyed in diverse ways, such as in the first image through nuclear plants and factory pipes emitting fumes or oil spills. The footage and imag-

es of topical events, such as an oil tanker wreck off the coast of Spain, were reported extensively on television and newspapers, and were reproduced in some drawings.

In the quarantine diaries done in Spring 2020, a rounded shape with lumps makes an occasional appearance, but the corona virus and its victims were not the main visual motifs. What students depicted best in their diaries were the ways the pandemic impacted their lives: this is made evident by solitary figures and the profuse use of newspaper clippings mentioning contagion numbers, confinement, remote schooling, and even memes related to the shortage of toilet paper in supermarkets. Instead of one single iconic image, the most remarkable was that young people produced an echo of the media with their drawings. This reproduced the sense of avalanche that derived from the fact that COVID-19 monopolized the mainstream and social media during those months. This echo is accentuated because these artworks were also diaries – that is, notebooks organized chronologically making this collection, as with the ECF competition drawings, into catalogues of mediatic events.



Figures 3. & 4. (left) C.M. 7th grade, 17.3.2020; (above) R.M. 9th grade, 30.3.2020 (#Tallennataäibetki-aineisto / Kymenlaakso Museum archives)

These two works refer directly to the pandemic and reproduce the media echo that it generated. The image on the left was made by a 7th-grader in the first week of confinement and captures a personal reaction to the flood of news, which became perhaps too much to bear. By contrast, the image on the right, made by a 9th-grader, depicts a silhouette of China, which refers to the origin of the disease, but places this flag in a hand that became an enduring symbol of risk and contagion. Both works convey personal and symbolic messages that keenly synthesize two effects of the pandemic on everyday life.

Finding that both groups of artists reproduced or embedded ‘news’ media in their artworks, both sets similarly act as a selection of mediatic events that caught the attention of youths. Subsequently, this produces an echo of their information habits and communication environments. While the ECF competition serves as documentation of the most broadcasted events of the late ’80s and early ’90s, the ‘quarantine diaries’ literally embed news and allow one to follow the progress of the pandemic. This periodicity inherent in diaries enabled the second group to experiment with visual formats and include their opinions and emotional reactions to the events. This also reproduces their information habits,

which differ strongly. In the 1990s, newspapers and television were the main sources of news, while in 2020 youths were exposed to real-time floods of information, and news are often delivered alongside emotions and personal opinions. These will be the focus later on, but next we turn to the protagonists of the drawings alongside these historical events.

Second viewing: Depicting youth and signs of identity

Both sets of drawings were made by 13- to 15-year-olds, hence, we refer to them as ‘early youths’. We have avoided referring to them as ‘adolescents’, as the term emphasizes the changes that occur in transitioning from childhood to adulthood. While we acknowledge that this is unquestionably a period of huge physical, hormonal, and psychological changes, we consider all stages of life to be somewhat transitional. Also, typical ‘adolescent’ behaviour such as being self-aware or rebellious are not exclusive to this age. For us, it is important to focus here on their age because this is something that they all shared while making their drawings, and the focus here is on examining how this played a role in making sense of the huge phenomena with which they were dealing.

Drawing about something is giving meaning and interpreting; it is a way to make sense of the world. At the same time, it entails interpreting and constructing oneself. The way individuals choose to represent a theme reflects their values, attitudes, and identity. This is always relational because meaning-making is done in relation to other people’s and culturally accepted views on a phenomenon. Youths aged 13 to 15 years old are exposed to social and cultural norms and values in their families, but also in school and after-school activities as well as through peers and the media. This makes them acquainted

with diverse, possibly conflicting norms and values. Concerning identity, Harriet Nielsen has pointed out that even if change is inherent to growing and time passing, a person will manifest certain traits from childhood that remain unchanged over time.³¹ But even to remain the same, a person needs to change, not just because they grow and mature, but also because their peers and the social world around them is changing. In short, it is important and intriguing to explore the material focusing on identity formation, and how social and cultural norms and values are reflected in drawings made about and in a world that is changing.

The clearest reference to age and the reason we ponder about identity making is that many drawings in both collections include young people or young adults, with the absence of the middle-aged, elderly



Figure 5. I.T. 7th grade, n.d. (*Eurooppa koulussa - Euroopan koulupäivä (1993) / National Archives Finland*)

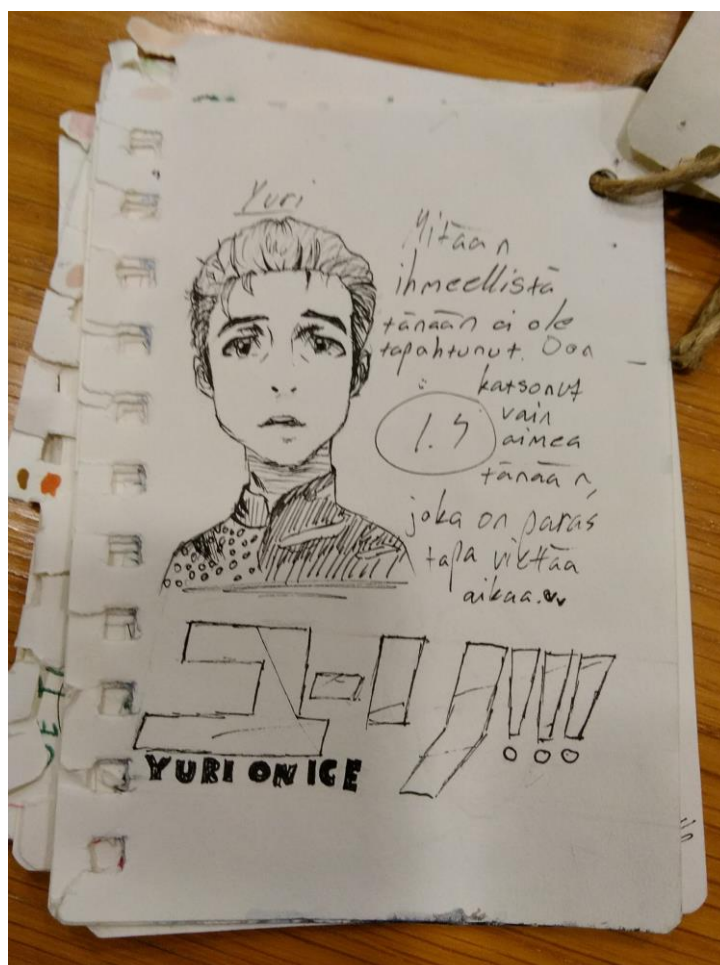
people, or small children. This highlights the importance of peers for young people. We have picked two drawings among the collections that were particularly interesting for examining identity traits.

One feature associated with youth, regardless of the context, is that it is a time of active identity construction, at least in modern Western societies. Identity construction involves making plenty of choices. In the 1993 collection, there are five drawings that depict two opposite evolutions either on the societal or the individual level. The most intriguing one is a watercolour painting by a 7th-grader attending school in the Sámi Homeland in Finland (image 5). The picture depicts a young girl whose left side is dressed in boots, patched jeans, and a green pullover with a nocturnal city skyline as the background. The right side of the girl is dressed in traditional Sámi clothing (*gákti*) with a fell and a *lávvu* – a traditional Sámi dwelling – in the background.

The girl is smiling on both sides of the painting, but the contrast between the sides is striking. The painting poses questions about identity and the future. Both the traditional Sámi *gákti* and the somewhat punk clothing style carry strong symbolic significance, as they reinforce an individual's affiliation with an ethnic community while aligning them with a particular age group. A cultural reference one could easily connect with this painting is the eccentric musician Maukka Perusjätkä's popular punk hit *Vaatteet on mun aatteet* ("Clothes are my ideology") released in 1980. The painting raises questions about identity-making and choices. In the painting, the clothes are paired with very different surroundings. The young person was not only choosing a clothing style but also pondering where to live and what kind of a life to lead. The painting highlights the different interpretations of the assignment. The theme of Europe's recent past could lead to reflection about one's own identity and future.

Flicking through the diaries made in 2020, there is a notable and recurrent presence of hobbies and objects related to play, pleasure, or things the drawers liked. For example, the collection includes a diary drawn in the manga style from which the picture above is extracted (image 6). Considering that these images were drawn during a lockdown, it is obvious that certain hobbies had more visibility, namely, those that could be practiced at home or in nature. Hobbies are important agents in identity making (like clothes), and having all that extra time inspired some not just to practise their hobbies, but to immerse themselves in them in a way that would not be possible in normal circumstances. This is highlighted by the statement written in the drawing, 'Nothing special happened

Figure 6. L.P. 9th grade, 1.4.2020 (#Tallennatääbetki-aineisto / Kymenlaakso Museum archives)



today, I have watched anime all day, which is the best way to spend time'. The abundance of hobbies can be interpreted as a sign of resilience. Most diaries were titled 'quarantine diary' and were collected as pandemic documentation, but hobbies and leisure activities make their appearance repeatedly, which indicates that they helped the youths to endure the difficulties. To consider hobbies illustrative of resilience, and not a lack of interest in the pandemic, it is necessary to remark that this exceptional situation caused loneliness and anxiety, and these images exist as well, but images that show ordinary pleasures reminiscent of resilience can stem from everyday ordinary things and help one to adapt to difficult circumstances.³²

In both sets of drawings, the artists depicted people their age. Therefore, it is important to examine what other motifs and images related to identity can be recognized. These gain unique meaning when examined against each historical event: the idea of highlighting regional identity or depicting choice fits the backdrop of European integration, while finding refuge in hobbies fits a period of restrictions and isolation.

Third viewing: Emotions and states of mind in colours and patterns

Having reviewed the most repeated visual motifs in both sets of materials (mediatic events and their age), we turned to address what hopes, fears, and fantasies these historical events inspired in early youth. In addition to being an essential part of building an identity, feelings and emotions are relevant when examining historic phenomena, particularly these two. Concerning the ECF competition, the goal was to encourage a personal attachment to the European project, even to spark a sense of 'European' identity. In the case of the COVID-19 pandemic, it soon became clear that uncertainty and isolation can lead to serious emotional and mental health disorders. Drawings can demonstrate how crises and turning points with a global impact were experienced at the individual level; hence it is important to seek emotions and states of mind in the drawings.

Sociologist Nancy Chodorow positions the power of feelings 'where the psychological meets the cultural or the self meets the world'.³³ By this, she means that through feelings we make sense of the world, and when we voice these feelings, others make sense of us. This is the main task of this viewing. To glimpse into how the youths made sense of their world and the unfolding events, we trace images, colours, or other patterns in the drawings that convey to the viewer a feeling or a state of mind. On a more abstract level, one could approach the material similarly to detect fantasies which approximate what Castoriadis (1997) calls 'radical imaginary' or 'the creative flow of affects and desires [that] constitute the basis of the unconscious and the psyche'.³⁴ It is difficult to talk about young people's unconscious psyche by looking at drawings that require time and planning. However, it is important to interrogate how young people's imaginations and fantasies were stimulated by the events.

Within the set of images from 1993, drawings depicting mediatic events (as discussed earlier with image 1) illustrate the young people's uncertainty and anxiety about the future and the hopefulness or mistrust associated with the idea of Europe. While most of the pieces have an optimistic undertone, the drawings depicting war or environmental problems give way to more pessimistic approaches. Even though the Cold War was over, the nuclear plants to the east of Finland continued to pose a threat that had been actualized in Chernobyl only a few years earlier.



Figure 7. C.T. 8th grade, n.d. (*Eurooppa koulussa - Euroopan koulupäivä (1993)* / National Archives Finland)

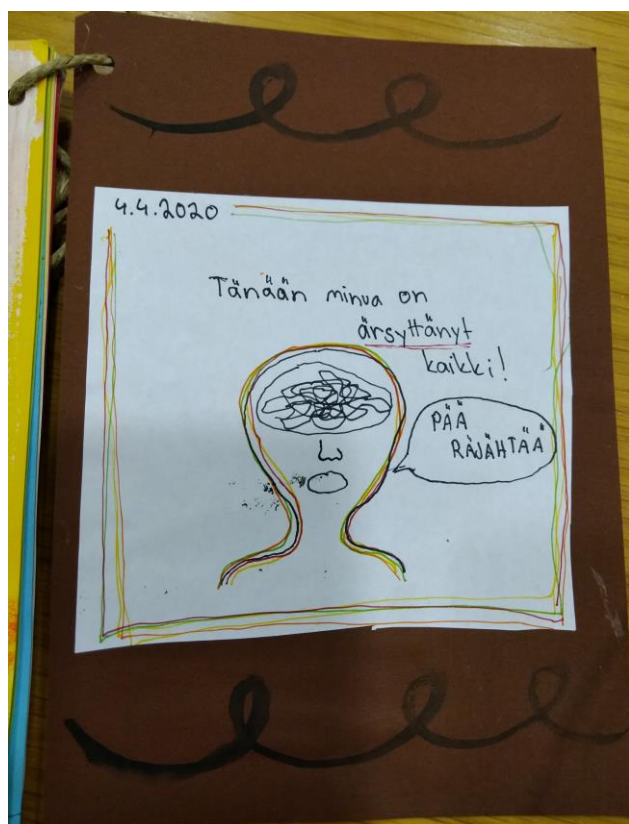
The duality concerning the ECF competition's material that was discussed in the second viewing can also be observed when the young people's emotions and states of mind are put into focus. The European Communities were founded on the goal of lasting peace in Europe, but the bloodiest battles in Europe after the Second World War were fought in the early 1990s. Although the Yugoslav wars had at first no international dimension and were located geographically far from Finland, a war with all its horrors was taking place in Europe and causing fear, disbelief, and disappointment: how could this happen again?! The outbreak of the war was a main concern for Finnish youth in the late 1980s, whereas, for example, Austrian and English youths were mainly concerned about themes connected to their personal future.³⁵

The white dove with an olive branch in its beak pictured in the painting above is a symbol of peace that derives from the Classical world and the Old Testament, and it was therefore relevant to the objectives of the competition.³⁶ In the painting, a black bird is pecking at a bleeding white dove on a pile of sharp stones, which symbolizes the painter's shock and despair at the brutality of war. On the other hand, the upper part of the painting with the vibrant, ascending dove and the light background colour conveys hopefulness and faith in a peaceful resolution to the situation. According to our interpretation, the painting expresses an awareness of the horrors of war but at the same time confidence and optimism towards the future: Europe has overcome and will overcome the conflicts. Imagination leads us to ask 'what if' concerning our futures. It enabled the drawers to envision both a better future and a troublesome future to warn what might happen if the developments continued unchanged. Therefore, the significance of imagination is particularly great during times of crisis.³⁷

In the quarantine diaries, the students convey emotions in many ways. Some write 'mood' or '*fii-lis*' (a Finnish slang word for 'vibes') alongside an image, draw emojis, or make subtle choices, such as to colour in red the rain dropping from clouds made of overwhelming newspaper headlines (see image 3 in the first viewing). The dichotomy of optimistic and pessimistic views towards Europe is similar in the quarantine diaries. The two images below, which represent opposite poles of our emotional spectrum, highlight this dichotomy but also the wide range of emotions experienced during the pandemic, as well as the range of visual strategies used by youths to capture emotion.

The drawing on the left was made by a 7th-grader and depicts a head exploding and scratched (an image repeated in a couple of drawings), all framed by dark brown paper. The girl clarifies in the text 'today everything has annoyed me!' with the word describing the emotion underlined. By contrast, the

watercolour on the right was made by a 9th-grader, and while an emotion is not written out, the happiness is effectively transmitted by the combination of two bright cuddling parakeets (a bird that best endures captivity in pairs), the sentence ‘seeing a friend today after a long time’, and a smiley. Both im



Figures 8. & 9. (left) “tänään minua on ärsyttänyt kaikki” M.V. 7th grade, 4.4.2020; (right) “tänään näin kaverin pitkästä aikaa” R.M 9th grade, 22.4.2020 (#Tallennatäähetki-aineisto / Kymenlaakso Museum archives)

ages convey strong feelings that one can easily connect with having endured a period of social isolation or difficulties at school or home. Nevertheless, they could also be read as typical teenage moods.

Fourth viewing: Drawings as material tokens of sensory and embodied experience

Grasping something from the physical and sensory experiences of youths requires us to turn to the materiality of the drawings. The material turn has provided abundant theories to explore drawings as artefacts and practices that set material constraints on expression and the objects depicted in them as sources of information about the space, time, and practices of their makers. Proponents of actor network theory recommend conceiving of objects as agents that participate in the action that occurs because their power lies in the social connections they enable (or not) and what we do to accommodate them.³⁸ Turning to visual-material theories, photographic theory provides interesting approaches that urge researchers to zoom out from what an image depicts and to focus on the apparatuses required for creating or putting the images on display to understand their context of birth, value, and later use.³⁹ We need both the socio-material and the visual-material approaches to properly address the materiality of

drawings as gateways to the places and time inhabited by youths, and to inquire about youths' activities and sensory worlds.

It is difficult to transmit in this text the apparatus of the drawings – that is, their format and materials. As material objects, drawings can be looked at, touched, and smelled. Their folds can provide information on their use, and the text inscribed in the drawing or on the back can provide information on the drawer or the message the artist wanted to convey. Both the competition drawings and the diaries were made to be seen. The Europe drawings were submitted to a competition and hence to be looked at, evaluated, and liked. The quarantine diaries were made as a school assignment but also to be exhibited at a local public venue before being donated to a museum. In terms of their appearance, they have different formats and use diverse techniques conferring unique affordances. For example, the 'Europe' drawings had to be submitted on A3 paper and students submitted only one, which required them to do their best. By contrast, the quarantine diaries were made in notebooks smaller than A4 paper and their length varied greatly. Length is a great conveyor of engagement. For example, a diary of only two pages compared to one with one artwork for each day of the lockdown provides valuable information about the variety of intensity with which students engaged with the assignment. Regarding the techniques, these varied in both datasets, from pencil, crayon, or watercolour to pen, marker, or collage. This was freely chosen by the students but all shared being made of materials that are easy to find at home or in school. We found the choice of technique and the skill of the artist did not determine the expressive richness of the works (see images 8 and 9 from the previous reading). However, some of the diaries comprise a wide variety of techniques, which revealed a will to experiment as an artist. A few followed one particular style, which reveals a sense of the development of an individual style.



Figure 10. J.K. 7th grade, n.d. (*Eurooppa koulussa - Euroopan koulupäivä* (1993) / National Archives Finland)

Turning from the apparatus to the content of the works, there were two ways in which both sets of drawings transmitted sensory and embodied experiences. The first can be found in the type of

environments depicted that reveal a time of year or location, and the second is the presence of things that stimulate the senses or inform the viewer about what the maker was doing.

Although the 1993 drawing assignment stressed Europe as a whole, many of the drawings emphasize their makers' native country. In map drawings, the borders of Finland have more detail than the shapes of Central European countries, and the country is disproportionately large compared to the rest of the continent. When the drawings are approached as material objects, they transport the viewer even more clearly to their maker's environment and experiences. The drawing above (image 10) was made by a 7th-grader living in the Sámi Homeland in Finland (as in image 5). Most likely it depicts a scene taken from his own life. Snowmobiles are a necessary and practical means of transportation in sparsely populated areas where snow covers the ground for more than half of the year. The highly visible and detailed drawing of the Lynx logo on the snowmobile shows it to be one of the brand's most popular models, also connecting it to Northern Finland. The dwarf birch and mountain birch trees in the picture convey the harsh natural conditions of the area. Although the snowmobile is placed most centrally in the drawing, most of the picture depicts nature – snow-covered fells and the low-hanging sun. The viewer can almost feel the coldness of the environment. A person with his back to the viewer seems to be cutting the birches. Independently of how the viewer interprets the purpose of cutting the branches, the choice of depicting this activity and the objects provides an insight into his active interaction with and utilization of his material environment.

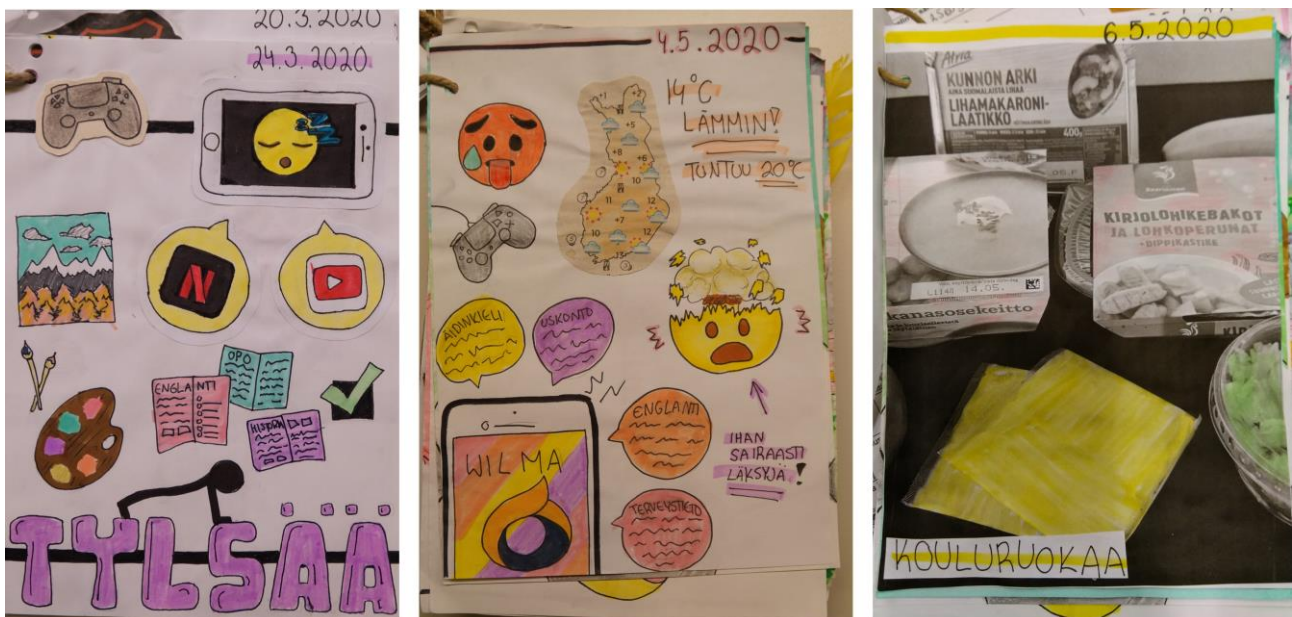


Figure 11. K.P. 7th grade, 24.3./4.5./6.5. 2020 (#Tallennatäähetki-aineisto / Kymenlaakso Museum archives)

It is easy to identify that the 2020 diaries were made in the spring. Blooming nature, Easter decorations, and youths engaging in gardening tasks are motifs that capture the same idea of interaction with the environment, which particularly that year conveyed joy and hope after a winter of isolation. In addition to seasonal rituals, references to daily routines are abundant. The three drawings above (image 11) belong to one of the diaries that follow a coherent whole, each page containing a series of quotidian objects making an inventory of things done, news read or the happenings each day. Including several pages helps in showing the visual-material approach that transmits engagement as well as sense of developing one own style. One set of objects, mobile devices, makes a continuous appearance in this and other diaries. Logos of apps – such as WhatsApp, TikTok, and the school intranet Wilma – and games

consoles hint at daily communications, sources of information, leisure activities, and the homework done. This technological apparatus alongside food and physical exercise are repeated across diaries, which attests to the repetitive and limited range of activities and social relations that the youths endured during lockdown.

What can we learn of youths' experiences through images?

Two unique historical events that have been widely accounted for in articles, textbooks, artworks, and documentary sources were also captured in the found drawings examined in this article. They have served to make an inventory of what early youth found remarkable, how the events stimulated their emotions, and, more broadly, how – related or unrelated to these events – young people expressed their identities, habits, environments, and material worlds. Regardless of the artist's skill, which might have played a part in limiting who participated and what was collected, we have considered all pieces as equally rich expressions of personal testimony, as valid as verbal or textual sources. We close this viewing guide by returning to its initial purpose to encourage researchers (familiar or not with visual methods), archive practitioners, or anybody who finds or plans to collect visual material made by youths to consider their interpretive potential if considered as a documentary record of their day and age. To examine this potential, we set aside our own research agendas to examine the material side-by-side, conducting consecutive ‘viewings’ of the material and asking what we can learn about the makers and their experiences through the images. The result is a guide to approach this or other visual material and to inspire research questions.

This said, it needs to be acknowledged that it is impossible to disassociate ourselves from our personal experiences and perspectives. We were in our early teens in the years that the ECF competition was organized and experienced the pandemic in Finland. We often reflected on these encounters and shared references with the artists in our meetings, but instead of considering them as interference, we used them as means to gain (historical) empathy with the groups of people whose work we were examining. Furthermore, when looking for similarities and dialogue between drawings depicting events occurring thirty years apart, this helped in allowing the images (not the individual events or our knowledge about them) to guide our selection and interpretation.

There was a lot of selection from the initial found material to make both datasets easy to display and compare side-by-side. The 1993 ECF competition included 110 essays and more drawings by both younger and older children, of which Selin selected the 58 drawings made by the 13- to 15-year-olds. This reduction was done to match the age of the makers of the 27 quarantine diaries. In turn, Matres conducted an inquiry into the COVID-19 documentation initiatives in Finland and compiled an additional 48 diaries written by 11- to 18-year-olds found in other museums and archives. This wealth of material provided us with more contextual information and has enabled us to test the analytical potential of the visual material, because the written material provided confirmatory evidence to support our selection of categories for each of the thematic ‘viewings’. This also reflects the reality that visual materials seldom come in isolation, and that people record life with a wide variety of media, which can be collected and found.

As the cultures of Western societies are predominantly of a visual nature, and literacy of the visual arts is embedded in basic education, drawings are excellent conveyors of what was impactful to children and youths. In this ‘viewing guide’, we have grouped images that ‘dialogued’ within and between datasets. This brings us to reflect on the four viewings, which relate but are not directly drawn

from Mauthner and Doucet's original foci (events, plots, the self, social relations, and power imbalances) or elements found in autobiographical narratives (embodied experience, feelings, private lives, and temporal layers). In the selection of themes, we did not predefine categories but looked for repetitions in the subjects and objects depicted. Images can become iconic because a motif is repeated, like the Berlin wall and flags in the first dataset and the use of newspapers in the second dataset. These repetitions guided our first viewing, where we gathered a catalogue of news, and subsequently the reproduction of the youths' information habits and environments. In addition to the historic events, the youths were the protagonists in these drawings, and this inspired the second viewing that collected expressions of identity and identity making. In addition to remaining close to the events and its protagonists, we approached the drawings on the third viewing with an interest in the more introspective images, those that could inform us about the emotions these events or living through that time evoked in young people. Finally, and relatedly, the materiality of the drawings and the environments and objects depicted were examined to glimpse at their own sensory worlds. The presence of these things in both sets of drawings helped us recognize what we should pay attention to and write about. However, it is just as important to pay attention to the absences – what is not included. This was particularly striking in the quarantine diaries – the absence of certain motifs, such as groups of people and places where youths hang out.

Finally, this article offers recommendations to collecting initiatives – first, about the expressive strengths of drawings, but also about the need to better document the contexts of making and collecting them. The lack of documentation about whether the judges of the contest followed some criteria to select or reject works, or if students during the pandemic diary project received instructions from the teacher drive us to recommend including children and youths in curatorial processes that may better reflect their own decisions of what is meaningful and worth preserving. Childhood and youth and their own visual cultures are increasingly common in present-day research, and the media saturation in which youths live today only reinforces the need for media-specific guidelines, but historically we can find plenty of images that might remain underexamined for fear of not having the right visual research methodology. This article offers such guidance.

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²⁵ According to the museum curator, the art diaries were the second part of an ongoing collaboration between the Regional Kymenlaakso museum, a local art education association, and an art teacher (#tallennatäähetki). The motivation of the museum to participate in this project was that they had recently collected oral history from people who came of age in the ’60s, ’70s, and ’80s. #Tallennatäähetki was to document contemporary youth, and in addition to the diaries, short films were made in the autumn of 2019.

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