How to create a sketchbook – resources from UCA library and archives

Books and Articles related to sketchbooks:

In recent years a large amount has been published about sketchbooks and their impact as art works and how they inform practice and allow evolution of ideas and invention to happen.

Searching the Library Catalogue provides access to a wide range of source material related to sketchbooks. Below, lists some of the key sources of information on sketchbooks to get you started:

- Robinson, Gillian, Mountain, Alison, Hulston, David (2011) Think : Inside the sketchbook. London: Collins Education
- Triston, Julia and Lombard, Rachel (2011) How to be creative in textile art. London: Batsford

Articles:

- Stanton, Jane (Summer 2013 issue 22) Seven thoughts on the cult of the sketchbook. In: Varoom! The illustration report pp. 26-29

It might also be useful to consider the use of film; in seeing how sketchbooks can be used in both the film Street Dance and In the City of Sylvia we see the main characters use a sketchbook to record memories, thoughts and explore possibilities in finding solutions for their creative thinking.
Summary paragraphs on why you should create a sketch book:

What is a sketchbook?

The sketchbook can be known by an array of alternative forms from notebook to journal, from sketchbook to workbook, but essentially it is a container for your voice on your observations, thoughts, explorations and experimentations. You can explore and develop ideas and find solutions to developing your work. The most important point of a sketchbook is it is personal to the maker and is how you define it. Therefore it does not matter on the form it takes or what goes in it or how it is done. A Canterbury UCA student said it was like a form of “visual vomit an effective outpouring of what is inside you”. It is important to recognise that sketchbooks are active spaces and involve observation, experimentation, reflection and invention.

So why use a sketch book and for what purpose?

Using a sketch book, will become your reference book to your experiences and observations and can be used to inform your working practice now and in the future.

It can be the opportunity to make personal evaluations and analyses as well as clarifying your vision and thoughts. A key element is experimenting, seeing how things can be done, and trying different ways to find a solution. Nothing is wrong in a sketchbook and like a dream can be liberating in how you explore ideas.

Using it can stimulate ideas and provide possibilities to explore and allow space for immediate and spontaneous work.

It can also be the opportunity to create new relationships between ideas and recordings that were to that point undiscovered.

How can a sketchbook be developed?

Sketchbooks are unique to the maker and therefore what goes in them can be unique and personal. However they can contain a variety of working methods from quick drawings and notes, photographs found items and samples to technical information, design development, annotations, measurements and instructions.

The most important consideration however is this is an opportunity to try out. Anything that you add has a value and a purpose if not at that moment in time but may in the future.

A bit like a math’s book where a teacher has asked you to show your workings out – because seeing how you get there is just as important. If you try something that doesn’t work, it doesn’t matter because you have been trying something out, evaluating its success and moving on to
new ideas and solutions. It also allows you to revisit, re-use and refine when these workings are documented.

It also documents the journey you have undertaken and is an opportunity to pause, record, reflect and move on.

To get the best out of sketchbook you should be open minded, inquisitive, adventurous, confident, reflective, critical, and it should be about you at that moment in time.

There is no instant formula for a successful sketchbook. A sketchbook is about evolving a personal way forward and it takes time and commitment to discover how it can work for you. As you become critically engaged and involved with your ideas the sketchbook begins to support your practice.

**Key traits of undertaking a sketchbook:**

This next section looks at the key traits in undertaking a sketchbook. The Lynne Dennis archive demonstrates the key traits within the undertaking of sketchbook work. Lynne Dennis was a student who worked in the Guild of Embroiderers. The University for the Creative Arts holds eighteen of Lynne Dennis sketchbooks dating from 1986-1994. The catalogue record can be accessed [here](#) and you can email [archives@ucreative.ac.uk](mailto:archives@ucreative.ac.uk) to access.

- **Inspiration and starting points**

  A sketchbook does not need to start at the beginning and can be formed from anything, you are then free to explore the sequence of how your ideas are constructed, allowing juxtapositions to form, inventions to develop and interfaces between un-seemingly related ideas to form.
The Lynne Dennis archive demonstrates the beginnings can come from anywhere. From a defined project brief to a thought, the starting points are endless. Demonstrated throughout her sketchbooks though are the points that have caught her imagination, from embroidery to object, sketch to photograph, quote to a process.

- **Observations**

  Observations and recording are fundamental trait of sketchbooks, allowing enquiry and a sense of purpose to be developed. What makes you choose to observe/record, put down a mark select something for inclusion in your sketchbook. These observations can form the beginnings of a direct or indirect route to the destination that may ultimately form. Of course these do not need to be used immediately and only in the future will it become clear if these observations and references go on to inspire and create new ideas.
The above illustrations are sketches and notes of observations made in the study historical embroidered items.

- **Collation of relevant source material**

Lynne Dennis’s folders allow a whole body of work to form from technical notes, samples, sketches and analyses, the collection shows how the thought process has taken her through the work and also can act as a reminder for things learnt, which can be reignited in future work. In the example below Lynne Dennis uses an illustration (a photo detail) taken from a
box –inner drawer at the Fenton House Collection. It is the starting point for a project that was about gaining skills in Stumpwork.

- **Sketching**

  A key trait of the sketchbook is the immediacy of the sketch. In the widest sense this is committing mark to surface, and this can be at its simplest a few stated marks on paper. However the sketch can be formed in a range of media a range of application and form.
In the above examples Lynne Dennis takes her inspiration from a photograph in a magazine, the first sketch is a quick colour pencil on paper sketch, followed by the next sketch of paint on fabric. The final illustration shows how Lynne Dennis creates a sample through drawing with thread.

- **Experimentation and Exploration**

  The sketchbook is the place to try something out, to ask questions. This is particularly relevant in seeing how to do something, making it work – it doesn’t matter if it remains incomplete or does not turn out the way you expect, because it is forming the next question the next solution in your thought process to be used towards this destination or a future destination.
In this example from the Lynne Dennis sketchbooks, we can see how Lynne documents an accident and how she subsequently goes on to develop this into a potential new source material and launch pad for invention.

In these next examples Lynne Dennis experiments with discarded denim to create effects:
• **Seeking solutions**

A sketchbook is a space that allows you to seek a solution, an exploration of possibilities to enable a solution to be sought.

In this example, Lynne Dennis notes how she uses her image of the Holly Blue butterfly to enable her to rectify a fault in the background fabric. She also notes the way of working the butterfly to ‘throw up the blue colour’.
A space for making technical notes on process

In the Lynne Dennis archive, there are many examples of how process is detailed. This approach allows techniques to be revisited at a future point as well as enabling the thought process from conception to solution to be documented.

In the example above Lynne Dennis demonstrated the processes used to create a leaf with a central vein and then includes a worked example of the process.
• **Analysis**

Sketchbooks are an ideal space for recording an analysis of your work. The analysis can form a start pointing for future work, but also to record your feeling and thoughts about the development of the work into a memory of a moment in time and where you are in the creative journey, a cultural reference point.

In Lynne Dennis’s work she records the outcome of the project she has undertaken.

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**Evaluation of Project 2**

**The pictorial design:**

I wanted a mirror image, above and below a median line. On reflection this median line should not have extended to the edges of the picture. It has interfered with the perception of the balcony.

**The materials:**

I'm generally happy with the materials used, with the exception of the first framing attempt. This was a big mistake. I should have waited patiently to find a more appropriate fabric. The problems arising are detailed in the notes on framing.

**Suitability of techniques and scale to design:**

I thought these compatible.

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In this next example Lynne Dennis records her feeling on the process and outcomes of the work she has undertaken.
Contextual information on the City and Guilds Embroidery Studies:

Much of the works within the Lynne Dennis sketchbooks are concerned with the work she did as part of the City & Guilds course.

The purpose of City & Guilds courses is to enable people and organizations to develop their skills. From the evidence available Lynne Dennis undertook City & Guilds 7802-57 Skills certificate in Stump work and 7802 Creative Skills Certificate - Core unit in Design Principles.

There is also evidence to suggest that some of the City & Guilds certificates were undertaken at the Inkberrow Design Centre. Correspondence is contained within one of the Lynne Dennis folders, about a City & Guilds course with the Inkberrow Design Centre.

The Inkberrow centre was established as an independent training centre established in 1992. The Design Centre gained total City & Guilds independence status in September 1997.

Much contained within the folder are dedicated to practical notes – including day courses that Lynne Dennis attended on a range of embroidery techniques.

Current research suggests these courses undertaken by Lynne Dennis in City & Guilds no longer currently exist but have been developed to form new courses.

Lynne Dennis was also a member of the Embroiders’ Guild who also offered City & Guilds certificates and it is possible this was the route undertaken.

Access the Lynne Dennis archive by emailing archives@ucreative.ac.uk.

Further sketchbook resources

It’s important to note that these sketchbooks are only one example of a vast number of sketchbooks held in archives that you can use for inspiration.

These include:

- Artist sketchbooks held at The Tate
- Architect sketchbooks held at the V&A
- John Constable’s sketchbooks at the V&A

You can find the Lynne Dennis sketchbooks at UCA here. You can also search for more of UCA’s sketchbooks on our catalogue.