

THE GEORGE FULLARD ELECTRONIC ART BOOK PROJECT

By John Kirby*

Abstract: The paper describes the process which led to the production of an electronic book and demonstrates the use of the medium as means of bringing art to diverse audiences. Sheffield Hallam University possesses a large number of drawings by the sculptur George Fullard (1923-1973). Concern over conservation led to a discussion of how to provide access in the future. The result was an electronic book, available as a multimedia CD-ROM but which could also be made available on networks. Particularly important is the provision of an information resource that can be used at a variety of intellectual and interest levels.

George Fullard was born in Sheffield in 1923. As a teenager he enrolled at the Sheffield College of Art where he studied until he was eighteen. He then enlisted in the army and was seriously wounded in the fighting in Italy. He never fully recovered his health and died in 1973, just as he was gaining a substantial reputation as an artist.

Before leaving the College he completed a portfolio of drawings which were inspired by the scenes around him in the aftermath of the Sheffield blitz of December 1940. In form the work consists of a series of completed drawings and a large sketchbook. This made up part of his application for a place for further study at the Royal College of Art in London, which he took up after the war. The drawings were returned to the College, which is now part of Sheffield Hallam University, and added to the collection of the Library, where they lay in relative obscurity until the late 1970s. Although there were a number of exhibitions of Fullard's work none included any of these early drawings. Indeed, one curator bemoaned the lack of any of Fullard's student work! Unknown to him there was a rich collection hidden away in Sheffield.

In the 1970s the Fullard drawings, along with a larger body of student work, were noted as being part of the Library and added to the main catalogue, but they still remained unexhibited. In 1987 eight of the more finished works were shown in an

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exhibition at the Mappin Art Gallery which documented the development of the Sheffield School of Art from its beginnings in 1843.

In 1993, as part of the 150th anniversary of the founding of the School of Art, Sheffield Hallam University held a series of exhibitions in Sheffield galleries and public spaces. One of these was of the Fullard drawings and sketchbook. The resulting interest in the show from the people of Sheffield and from academics and researchers surprised even those of us who have been Fullard fans for many years. The value of the drawings as a precursor of Fullard's later work is clear and the origins of the subject matter of much of his sculpture can be traced back to these youthful sketches.

The run of the exhibition was extended due to popular demand and there has been considerable subsequent interest in the works. This has led to our dilemma, which must be shared by many. As a librarian I am committed to making material and information available to enquirers. At the same time I am placed in the position of a curator of a collection of valuable works of art, which are unique and extremely fragile. While we were happy to allow people to look at the drawings, we were concerned at the damage that could be caused simply by turning the pages to find the required image. How were we to provide access to the drawings while at the same time preserving them?

We considered a number of possibilities. Because of the physical nature of the sketchbook, mounting and framing the images was not possible. We thought about producing a facsimile of the sketchbook and the completed drawings. This would be an expensive option, a large format book with a low print run; we could not expect to sell thousands of copies! While we would recreate the shape and form of the original, it would lack the additional information that we also wished to include and would probably not be of interest to the general public. We considered a book of selected drawings, showing the more finished pieces from the sketchbook, perhaps with some photographic material of similar scenes. We may still produce this, it would have a local appeal and would probably sell quite well. But this book could not include more than a few of the 250 images that we have; it would not include many unfinished sketches or show the way that Fullard's thought processes and ideas changed in the development of producing a completed drawing; the crossings out may be more important than the final versions.

We also wanted to include a large amount of research material, much of it unique or archival, and to bring together writings by and on Fullard from the scattered sources; we did not want simply to provide a bibliography but the texts themselves. In short, what we wanted to produce was a book that would meet the

needs of children, academic researchers and members of the general public; that would include an enormous amount of data but would be accessible to all. In other words, something impossible!

The development of new technologies, however, has allowed us to start to produce a new form of document, an *electronic art book*. It includes reproductions of all the works, with a wide variety of other information. For many users of the material, access on a screen is perfectly adequate and if necessary images can be identified for later study of the actual drawing. The selection process, however, the looking through the collection and turning the pages is done electronically with no damage to the originals. In addition there is access to a range of documentation to support a study of the drawings.

Because of the way that the electronic book exists, it is possible to continue to add data to it. Unlike a printed book, this document can easily be changed and developed as new information becomes available. It will also be possible to generate other publications from this data, both in electronic and print formats, so that if we decide that we *do* want to publish a book of drawings of Sheffield in war-time, we can select from the electronic information we have already created and manipulate that information into page layouts etc. The Fullard project is also linked electronically to another project that we have already developed in the University which documents public art in Sheffield. If the user is interested in Fullard's sculpture *The Walking Man* outside the Town Hall, for example, he or she can find out more about the artist by moving from the public art file into the Fullard file and back again. We consider this potential interlinking of information to be one of the most exciting elements of the project.

While the electronic book contains a lot of material that might appear in a familiar book form, photographs, drawings, texts, maps, there is also the opportunity to use a wider range of information carriers, such as video and audio recordings. At present the use of video is a little restricted in terms of the size of image possible, but this will certainly change, as technology develops, to allow full-screen video. The potential to use videotape of interviews or to move round a piece of sculpture showing different viewpoints is particularly useful. Already we use sound to add interest both to still and moving pictures, and, more importantly, to record interviews, commentaries etc.

The George Fullard electronic book contains a variety of information and the elements of the document are built round a series of "chapters". Each of these consists of a basic narrative connected to additional information, photographs, contemporary documents, visual and audio material etc. The main "chapters" in

the book are the catalogue of works, a biography, critical documentation, the Sheffield College of Art, and Sheffield during the early years of World War II.

The catalogue of Fullard's work is still incomplete; this is an area of the work that has yet to be tackled systematically, but it does include images and documentation on a number of later works as well as all of the Sheffield material. The catalogue has its own „content page“, providing a choice of entries to the images. These entry points include student drawings, the sketchbook, later drawings, sculpture, and themes.

Each completed drawing has been reproduced, and in a number of cases additional details from these have been included. The drawings in the sketchbook are reproduced a page at a time, the first image showing the whole page of drawings and their arrangement on the sheet. Some of the drawings are then shown in groups, where they clearly have a strong relationship to each other in terms of subject matter. Then each single drawing is reproduced separately. The subject of each image is coded into a series of headings of particular relevance to Fullard's work, for example, wheeled objects, woman carrying a child, so that the linkages can be made between works on similar themes.

The biography consists of a fairly short factual narrative to which is connected a series of bits of further information. This additional material can be accessed by clicking onto highlighted areas in the text or onto buttons at the bottom of the screen. An example of this access to additional information is a map of Sheffield in 1939 showing where Fullard lived, where he went to school, the Art College, Graves Art Gallery etc. Clicking onto these points on the map will take you through to pictures and text information about those places, data which is held in the College of Art "chapter". The information is therefore built up in a series of layers, which can be accessed or not, depending on the user's interest.

The critical documentation "chapter" has a bibliography and a short narrative that charts Fullard's development as an artist, linked to a number of texts from periodicals, books and other writings; we felt that the inclusion of the full texts was important as many of them are not readily available except in a specialist art library. (I have to confess that we have not managed to track down all the necessary copyright clearance yet for all of the articles, but we are working on that!) This section also includes unpublished material, student dissertations, essays, seminar papers etc. We will encourage anyone who does some work on Fullard to deposit a copy of their writings with us so that they can be made available for later users.

Our experience of researchers into other Sheffield-born artists, such as Frederik Varley, shows that they are very interested in the art education of the subject of their study. We have therefore included information on the College of Art at the time of Fullard's attendance, drawn from a variety of archival sources, including photographs of students and their work, the prospectus for 1939, entries from the student records, information on influential teachers such as Eric Jones etc. Similar, information is provided on the art galleries in the city that relate to their state in the late 1930s and early '40s, details of collections and exhibitions which Fullard saw etc. These sections are built round a narrative prepared for the 1993 exhibition.

The final "chapter" is on Sheffield at war, using photographs, reminiscences and contemporary documents linked by a narrative written by a local historian. This provides the background to Fullard's drawings, the environment which provided so much of his subject matter.

While the concept of the "chapter" is derived from the book, the electronic art book uses these merely as a skeleton structure for the data. The reader's use of the information is not bound by the linear form of the book, or entirely governed by the way that material is selected and mediated by the author. Here is a much freer information environment that places control in the hands of the user to a large extent. By providing access to a large body of material the electronic book enables the user to pursue his or her own interests for a far greater extent than in the conventional book.

The reader can choose his or her own route through the book. There are a series of basic narratives provided that allow a coherent voyage through the information. At any point, however, the user can go back to the contents page and select a new subject area in which to browse. There are also a large number of points within the information at which one can move between the "chapters". I have already mentioned an example of this facility above, of moving from the biography into the College of Art section. This kind of jump is provided for at many points, then by clicking on the *Back* facility users can retrace their steps or alternatively could continue on a new train of enquiry.

Another example of this linkage is in the critical documentation, where clicking on the highlighted name of a drawing or sculpture mentioned will display the image held in the catalogue of works. The drawings and the sketchbook are also interlinked internally, the user can select drawings of a similar subject from elsewhere in the body of work, and linked externally to similar themes in later work illustrated in the catalogue. Some of the drawings also link to photographs in the biography or in the Sheffield at war sections.

At present this electronic book exists only within the University as a research project. The next phase however will allow several options for development. We *could* produce printed books on particular subjects selected from the database, but we are much more likely to produce a CD-ROM version. Such a CD could be made readily available to anyone; an immediate use would be in the City Art Galleries as additional information to support their displays of Fullard's works and many of the local schools have also expressed an interest in having access to the information in the classroom.

The information could also be made available as part of a larger electronic package that includes information on public art in Sheffield and a new project that will document the output of the city's cutlery and metalware industries. Other opportunities for disseminating this information include the local cable company and of course there is the potential to make this project available on the Internet for all the world to see. For the moment, however, our aim is a little less adventurous; we are working to build a series of interlinked projects that will make the cultural heritage of Sheffield available to the people of the city, providing access to information in a new and, we hope, exciting way.

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