

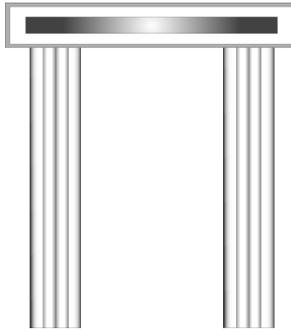


Jacob Willer

**What Happened
to the Art Schools?**

POLITEIA

A FORUM FOR SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC THINKING



POLITEIA

A Forum for Social and Economic Thinking

Politeia commissions and publishes discussions by specialists about social and economic ideas and policies. It aims to encourage public discussion on the relationship between the state and the people. Its aim is not to influence people to support any given political party, candidates for election, or position in a referendum, but to inform public discussion of policy.

The forum is independently funded, and the publications do not express a corporate opinion, but the views of their individual authors.

www.politeia.co.uk

What Happened
to the Art Schools?

Jacob Willer

POLITEIA

2018

First published in 2018
by
Politeia
14a Eccleston Street
London
SW1W 9LT
Tel: 0207 799 5034

E-mail: secretary@politeia.co.uk
Website: www.politeia.co.uk

© Politeia 2018

ISBN: 978-1-9999171-8-0

Cover design by John Marenbon

Politeia gratefully acknowledges support for this publication from

The Foundation for Social and Economic Thinking (FSET)

Printed in Great Britain by:
Blissetts,
Roslin Road, Acton, London, W3 8DH

PREFACE- by Sir Noel Malcolm

The creative arts – including visual arts of all kinds – are, we are told, flourishing in Britain. This is one of the areas in which, to use a cliché still favoured by politicians, we punch above our weight. Around the world, works by the ‘Young British Artists’ have been exhibited, admired, imitated, and bought and sold for huge sums. There is a buzz in our art schools, and a new generation of talented young people are eager to study at them, to gain the skills that will enable them to make their own artistic reputations.

What skills will they actually acquire there? Practical skills in various kinds of new media, no doubt, and the ability to generate provocative and interesting ideas, stimulated as much by theoretical arguments as by the study of previous artists’ work. But the traditional skills of drawing and painting, which for hundreds of years formed the substance and the purpose of all serious artistic training, have been downgraded to such an extent that few students are enabled to acquire them, and those who want to are sometimes given to understand that this might harm their artistic progress. Over the last half-century or so, a profound revolution has taken place in our art schools – profound, with far-reaching effects, and yet almost unnoticed and uncommented upon by the outside world.

The Charles Douglas-Home Memorial Trust (which has a board of Trustees led by Jessica Douglas-Home and Christopher McKane) commissioned this work from Jacob Willer, in order to cast light on this important and neglected issue. The Trust commemorates the author, journalist and Editor of The Times Charles Douglas-Home, who died tragically young (aged 48) in 1985. Our normal practice is to make an award each year which involves commissioning a study, typically by a young writer of promise and distinction, on a topic which would not be properly covered by the normal run of journalism. We were delighted when Jacob Willer, who is an artist as well as a writer on European art, agreed to take on this subject, and even more pleased when we read the work he produced. It is based on thorough research, including interviews with many practitioners and teachers who witnessed these changes in the art schools; it is perceptive, principled, and cogently argued. We were also extremely pleased that Politeia, which has a long record of major contributions to debate and

policy-making in the field of education, agreed to collaborate with us and take on the publication of this substantial pamphlet.

To react against a negative change is not to be a 'reactionary'. As readers of Willer's work will see, he is not asking us to turn back the clock and make everyone paint in the style of some previous epoch. His argument is subtler and deeper than that; and indeed, some of his strongest criticism is reserved for those private drawing schools which do teach a kind of frozen-in-time pastiche classicism. Willer's view is that in learning the essential methods of representing the world around us on a two-dimensional plane, we acquire skills and habits of the hand, the eye and the brain, from which any style that we go on to develop can only benefit. We also thereby learn to recognise much more fully the greatness of all the great artists in the Western tradition, from Giotto to the twentieth century; and there is no good reason to think that art, to be fully modern, must be radically cut off from its past.

This is an important text, which should be read not only by people in the art schools but by all who think that the visual culture in which we live is something that really matters.

THE AUTHOR

Jacob Willer studied Fine Art at Oxford and continues to paint, while working as an art critic. He has written for *Standpoint* and *The Spectator* and has taught and lectured on Art and Art History. He focuses on a range of subjects from art education to the art market as well as on primitivism, kitsch and the 'cool' of avant-garde, the role of connoisseurship, and cultural appropriation and appropriate subject-matter for paintings. He also writes profiles of underrated painters and reviews books and exhibitions.

He is particularly concerned with how the history of art – or rather the tradition of art – should be made relevant, the subject matter of a book in progress. It aims to be a general guide to appreciating European paintings of all ages.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I	What Happened to the Art Schools?	1
II	From High to Low: All Becomes Relative	18
III	Art for Criticism's Sake	25
IV	Reaction at Last: But to What End?	32
V	Conclusions	42
VI	How to Put Things Right	48

I

What Happened to the Art Schools?

In the summer of 1791, Sir Joshua Reynolds was nearing the end of his presidency of the Royal Academy. Clearly he was worried about what would come of the place in his absence, as he began writing notes for an *Ironical Discourse* to satirise a new attitude he had observed among some of his younger colleagues. He left it only as a rough draft, and it was not published until 1952, so presumably it went unread by all but his close friends; yet it is an important document, sardonically anticipating many of the criticisms that William Hazlitt and, more famously, William Blake, would make of the serious Discourses that Reynolds had been delivering annually to the Academy students since 1769. What is more, the *Ironical Discourse* gives an almost perfect prediction of the ethos that dominates in most art schools today. Since the caricature has become reality, it is difficult to laugh. Reynolds imagined a modern art teacher declaring:

Destroy every trace that remains of ancient taste. Let us pull the whole fabric down at once, root it up even to its foundation...The world will then see what naked art is, in its uneducated, unprejudiced, unadulterated state.¹

Today's radicals in art, with all their different stripes, do not necessarily remember their common Romantic ancestors against whom Reynolds was reacting. But on this goal – the denuding of art – they are still agreed. They may not have managed to reveal art, finally, in her glorious and unadulterated state, but they have certainly succeeded in stripping her of her education.

Almost everywhere, drawing and painting have come to be seen as no more than art's old ceremonial vestments which, as instruments of prejudice, need to be discarded. A recent and influential volume, *Art School (Propositions for the 21st Century)* (MIT Press, 2009), collects twenty-two essays by, and interviews with, leading art masters from America and Europe about how art should now best be taught; and over its three hundred and forty pages 'drawing' is mentioned only once, in passing, by an interviewee responding to a question about whether art

¹ J. Reynolds, *The Ironical Discourse*, collected in *Portraits*, William Heinemann Ltd, 1952, p. 140.

departments should ever be organised by ‘discipline’. As for painting, there are coded allusions, e.g. “... the fetish of particular artistic techniques, processes, and formats”.² And there are allusions to the few teachers left who may still encourage painting – teachers with “a dying agenda”, who “fail to secure and promote radical thinking”, who “seek followers of tradition regardless of students’ true needs”, and who tend to be “threatened by new and visiting faculty, women faculty (though some of them are women who took on the ways of bullying masculinity in order to succeed in a world of men), gay and lesbian faculty, faculty of color, and combinations thereof.” Painters, with their noxious concern for tradition, are thus made to seem a disordered lot, doing “harm to students... rather than educating them”.³ The only entry in this book’s Index relevant to painting is, ‘painting, rejection of’ – and there are only three page references.

Yet it is still the case, and probably always will be, that young people who consider studying art do so in the first place because they once liked to draw. And many of them, on admission to an art school, will begin by attempting to paint. The more promising among them may paint in a spirit of defiance; but they mostly paint ineptly, for they are never taught. Without practical guidance they fail to improve; and out of frustration but, I imagine, with some relief, they soon enough lay down their brushes and drift towards other newer ‘disciplines’, just as their masters might wish. The ‘death of painting’ may have been exaggerated by some critics; but of course the repeated dismissals of the value of painting, especially within art education, contribute directly to painting’s dereliction.

The Ending of the Old Ways

Since the first dawning of Romanticism, it has often been said that art cannot be taught. True enough; but the traditional crafts of drawing and painting, from which art has bloomed in such splendid variety, can be taught, and always were taught by the same exercises. Henry Fuseli justified the usual process of study,

² J.T. Schnapp and M. Shanks, ‘Arteriality (Rethinking Craft in a Knowledge Economy)’, in S.H. Madoff (ed.), *Art School (Propositions for the 21st Century)*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, The MIT Press, p. 145.

³ E. Pujol, ‘On the Ground: Practical Observations for Regenerating Art Education’, in *Ibid*, p. 7.

What Happened to the Art Schools?

as developed from the Renaissance, in his Seventh Lecture delivered as President of the Royal Academy Schools. Students copied masters' designs, mark by mark, to learn accuracy and to train themselves out of any individual quirks. They drew from plaster casts of antique statues, to learn how to translate three-dimensional forms into two by modelling with light and shade. From such exemplars of already artful form, they would then come to discern what must be common to all figures and what is particular in expression. Thus they would imbue themselves with the Classical spirit through Classical style, learning how "the union of simplicity and variety produces harmony",⁴ until eventually – when at last they were ready to draw from a live model – they would be better able to judge "what was substance and possession in the individual, and what was excrescence and want, what homogeneous, what discordant, what deformity, what beauty".⁵ Only after so many years of such preparation was a student ever admitted to the Life Room, where he was supposed "to avail himself of the knowledge he acquired from the previous study of classic forms".⁶ Testing the student's skills against the live model was meant "to confirm him where he is right", and "to check presumption"; but above all it was the first step towards artistic independence: now with raw nature before him, the student would have to find "his own eyes".⁷

But if the exercises were always the same, the ways in which they were offered could vary considerably according to the ethos of school and master. From the time of Reynolds right through the nineteenth century, the greatest consideration was given to how this traditional course of teaching should be made to serve new art, particularly in France. In France the problem was raised not just by the Romantic fixation on originality and genius untamed, but also, on the other hand, by the dominant ethos at the Académie des Beaux-Arts which, with its ultra-rigid routines, seemed to be policing style so uniformly that the students could produce only pastiche. A re-assertion of "true principles" seemed urgent,⁸

⁴ H. Fuseli, 'Seventh Lecture', in *Lectures on Painting, Delivered at the Royal Academy*, London, Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, 1830, p. 14.

⁵ *ibid.*

⁶ *ibid* p. 16-17.

⁷ *ibid.*, p. 17.

⁸ H. Lecoq de Boisbaudran, *The Training of the Memory in Art and the Education of the Artist*, trans. L.D. Luard, p. 103.

and the best of the new programmes developed in the period lasted well into the twentieth century. In London, the new ideas were most enthusiastically perpetuated at the Slade School of Fine Art, which already had a good French pedigree. Sir Edward Poynter, professor from 1871-76, had studied in Paris under Charles Gleyre, who had taught Monet, Renoir, Sisley and Whistler among others. The professorship then passed to Alphonse Legros, who had also studied in Paris but under Horace Lecoq de Boisbaudran, the most inspiring teacher of the period and the author of *The Training of the Memory in Art and The Education of the Artist*. (First translated into English in 1914, this text has become a cult classic among beleaguered painting teachers because it is so thorough in its explication that it gives hope of some future return to standards.) Henry Tonks arrived at the School in 1892, and shortly thereafter the Slade became the most effective school of drawing and painting in the country, and perhaps the whole continent (in France, the best painters still learnt most of their craft outside of art schools, in the private studio of a master).

Under Tonks, whose professorship lasted until 1930, Slade students had to draw throughout their first year, starting in the Antique Room and graduating to the Life Room when they were deemed proficient enough. For the remainder of the course they would paint, though almost only the nude or the portrait – slow as this may now sound, it was a significantly accelerated version of what still went on in Paris. There was a Summer Composition Competition, for which students had to respond creatively to a given subject on a large scale; but otherwise, any original finished work was to be done in the students' own time. Additionally, there were lectures in perspective and anatomy, and plenty of copying in London's museums. Nineteenth and twentieth century painting was almost never mentioned:⁹ Tonks would say "If you want to build a house you don't start with the roof, but with the foundations".¹⁰ Yet the students were well aware – and respectful of the fact – that their masters had known the Impressionists personally.

How art should be taught was not a vexed question for Tonks: "He always asked prospective students "Why do you want to come to the Slade?", and the answer

⁹ H.Lessore, 'Henry Tonks as I remember him, in his setting – Slade', in L. Morris (ed.) *Henry Tonks and the 'Art of Pure Drawing*, Norwich School of Art Gallery, p.10.

¹⁰ *ibid.*

What Happened to the Art Schools?

they were supposed to give was “because I want to learn to draw.”¹¹ Tonks had trained as a surgeon, and his professional precision and diligence rubbed off on everyone around him at the School. Looking through the catalogue of the UCL art collections, which contain many prize-winning paintings by old Slade students, the consistent level of competence is remarkable. The level of what is most conveniently called ‘inspiration’ was, of course, less consistent; but it appears obvious that Tonks’s straightforwardly conservative programme was a boon whenever inspiration really did strike. Among his students were the acknowledged pioneers of Modern British Art: David Bomberg, Mark Gertler, Augustus and Gwen John, Winifred Knights, Percy Wyndham Lewis, Paul Nash, C. R. W. Nevinson, William Orpen, Stanley Spencer, Rex Whistler and William Coldstream.

A strong emphasis on the early Renaissance, which was a legacy of the Pre-Raphaelites and the Aesthetic movement, was meant to help in training students down to those ‘foundations’ of their art; happily, it also kept their work fresher, less murky and musty than it might otherwise have been. There was the same emphasis at the Royal College of Art, where students had to study geometry as well as architecture, just as Renaissance artists had done. There were connections with the Slade, as Paul Nash and Gilbert Spencer (Stanley’s younger brother) both taught at the College at various times; and notable students in the ‘20s included Edward Burra, Edward Bawden, Charles Mahoney and Eric Ravilious. The Principal at the time was William Rothenstein, a distinguished painter in his own right who had, like the Slade professors, known such Parisian luminaries as Degas. To a student such as Cecil Collins this was “a very, very exciting and stimulating thing”, because “the residue of an inherited, transmitted culture was present”.¹²

But that residue was not exciting enough for the next generations of students, who knew how relentlessly Modern art was accelerating away from them – and they knew that if they only learnt an Impressionist touch, second-hand, they would never keep pace. As direct representation seemed less and less a concern

¹¹ Coldstream interview, in Morris, *op.cit.*, p.11.

¹² P. Huxley (ed.), *Exhibition Road, Painters at the Royal College of Art*, Oxford, Phaidon, 1998, p. 78.

of avant-gardists in Paris, students in London were losing patience with Tonks's insistence on accurate observational drawing. As Thomas Monnington remembered, the "absolute importance of discipline increasingly disappeared" as the students grew disillusioned. This was partly because "...drawing was no longer a really exhaustive search, it had become superficial and therefore people were no longer interested. Drawing had increasingly become a matter of making things look like good drawings..."¹³ There is a strong connection between the perception that a course of study is old-fashioned and irrelevant, and the production of drearily mannered work – even when the master is conscientiously trying to avoid teaching anything that could lead to "a conventional view".¹⁴

Tonks himself was quick to identify the problem that would, in one way or another, determine every change in art education through the Modern and Post-Modern periods:

I am inclined to think that a new type of man altogether began to find his way at this time into the schools, one who would never have thought of trying to become an artist 50 years ago... he felt that he had no aptitude for drawing; on the other hand he felt he had ideas, better, perhaps, than the artists he was looking at... not realising that it is the treatment of the subject that makes it into a work of art – or not. He saw that no great power of drawing was necessary to produce a picture of ideas, so he made the plunge – perhaps plunge is too violent a word, he sidled into art.¹⁵

Attitude and ideology were entering the art school. Art was becoming more a matter of taking a stand and making a novel statement, and less a matter of making a good – or even beautiful – picture to the best of a painter's knowledge and ability; and so the study of art would change, because the taking of stands and the making of novel statements require less practice than painting well. Before, art may have been a simpler thing; the terrible mistake was to think that art had been an easier thing – or even a less important thing.

¹³ Monnington in Morris, op. cit., p. 15.

¹⁴ Tonks in Morris, op. cit., p. 30.

¹⁵ Morris, op. cit., p.54.

What Happened to the Art Schools?

For a while longer, anyway, progressive ideas and good painting were not necessarily in conflict. William Coldstream – whom Tonks may well have thought of as that “new type of man” – returned to the Slade in 1949 as professor, and an even more productive phase in the School’s history began. Coldstream brought with him a number of his close associates and former students from the Euston Road School, and from Camberwell where he had been Head of Painting. At Camberwell, Coldstream had managed to revitalise the study of observational drawing and painting, exciting students with a new method which came to be called ‘dot-and-carry’, whereby the painter’s field of vision was mapped onto the canvas, gradually and minutely, via measurement against vertical and horizontal marks. When he brought this method to the Slade, the Life Room was turned into a place for restless perceptual analysis.

Coldstream also enlivened the dusty atmosphere of the Slade’s Antique Room, adding plants and an aquarium (Paul Klee had advised his students to draw from his fish tank, and if this was Coldstream’s inspiration it showed an interest in Bauhaus methods). The casts no longer had to stand as symbols of the art schools’ devotion to a crumbling tradition, instead they could be opportunities for Still Life – or they could be ignored altogether if the students preferred simply to paint plants and fish.

With these adjustments – and by his own presence – Coldstream yet managed to instil a spirit of diligent enquiry equivalent to that which he had found at the Slade under Tonks. Euan Uglow was the most precocious of the ‘dot-and-carry’ followers, soon taking the method to new extremes and, with it, achieving a powerful new pictorial clarity. But in the ‘50s the Slade was also producing painters as diverse as Michael Andrews, Craigie Aitchison, Paula Rego and Victor Willing.

During the same period, under the professorships of Rodrigo Moynihan and Carel Weight, the Royal College of Art had a faculty of equally distinguished, and some very famous, painters. John Minton was influential, and Francis Bacon was a frequent visitor. Among the students were Frank Auerbach and Leon Kossoff, John Bratby and Edward Middleditch, Peter Blake and, soon after, the ‘Pop’ generation including Patrick Caulfield, R.B. Kitaj and David Hockney, as well as Bridget Riley.

Auerbach and Kossoff, though, owed less to the teaching at the College and more to the weekly Life classes they took with Bomberg at Borough Polytechnic. With surprising poses, in dramatic lighting, Bomberg demanded of his students a sentimental engagement with the presence of the model, and a physical engagement with their materials. He wanted to draw out the students' personal visions; but he was still a rigorous teacher and "generalities would not do". He believed "one must be specific, but specific according to one's own idea".¹⁶

Though Bomberg's 'expressionistic' and Coldstream's 'analytical' approaches to the Life Room would produce drastically different work, they were to some degree aligned: both emphasised direct, perceptual representation, to make working from Life 'relevant' again; and in doing so both shifted – and began to redefine – the very purpose of working from Life in the study of art. Both would transform the Life Room from a facility for the practical and critical education of the painter into a space that allowed for artistically stimulating experiences.

In other 'advanced' art schools even more experimental approaches were being tried out. The literature on British art education is full of references to the 'maverick' teacher Harry Thubron, who revolutionised Leeds College of Art. In 1963 Thubron was in London to conduct a ten-day course at the Byam Shaw School of Art. There, in an attempt to achieve the atmosphere of a Turkish Bath,¹⁷ he filled the Life Room with nude models walking around, forcing the students to confront – and if they could, to contemplate – "the quivering arse" through instantaneous drawing.¹⁸ It was a search for vitality at any cost (and no wonder there would soon be a feminist reaction against all Life Room practice).

The Coldstream Reports: Making Modernism Official

Yet there were still as many as a hundred and eighty local arts schools and colleges in Britain, most of which continued to teach drawing in a traditional way. During the Second World War, faculty from the Royal Academy, the

¹⁶ R. Oxlade, *Bomberg and the Borough*, cited in K. Aspinall, *Leader Among Equals: The 'School' of Bomberg in Context*, 2016

¹⁷ Quoted in B. Williamson, *Recent Developments in British Art Education: 'Nothing Changes from Generation to Generation except the Thing Seen'*.

¹⁸ *ibid.*

What Happened to the Art Schools?

Royal College, the Slade and other prestigious London schools had been dispersed around the country and founded discrete artistic communities, from the West Country to the North, so the teaching was often of a higher standard than might have been expected. While the Slade was open to accepting very young and inexperienced students if they were gifted – or well-connected – enough, Royal College Students had all begun their education at smaller local institutions. Most famously of all, Hockney had studied at Bradford Regional Art School where, from 1953 until 1957, he was drawing constantly. Arriving in London he expected to be intimidated by the most accomplished students at the Royal College, but he was surprised to find he was already better practised than they were.

Hockney's course of study was ordinary for the time; it is only notable now because it was made unavailable to following generations. In 1959 – the same year Hockney started at the Royal College – William Coldstream was appointed to Chair of the National Advisory Council on Art Education; and the reports submitted by his committees between 1960 and 1970 had such a momentous impact on art education in Britain that reverberations are still sensed today.

The Coldstream Committee was to recommend improvements on the National Diploma in Design – the standard qualification offered by art colleges since 1946 – which was by then deemed to be failing. The NDD required four years of study, usually from the age of sixteen. The first two years were dedicated to technical training and led up to an Intermediate Examination in Art and Crafts that tested competence in Life Drawing, Anatomy, Architecture, Modelling, and even Drawing and Painting from Memory (which suggests the lingering influence of Lecoq de Boisbaudran's teaching ideas), along with 'applied' disciplines such as Costume Life Drawing and Creative Design for Craft. For the next two years, students would specialise, choosing major and minor subjects.¹⁹

Though the NDD course was rooted in drawing practice, and the art colleges that offered it still revolved around the Life Room, its final emphasis was on

¹⁹ L. Tickner, *Hornsey 1968 – The Art School Revolution*, London: Francis Lincoln Ltd, 2008, p. 14-15.

vocational, decorative crafts.²⁰ The concern of the Ministry of Education was that the NDD was producing too many specialists who could not find employment, since their trades were being mechanised; whereas the concerns of Coldstream and others on his committee seem more to have been that the NDD did not offer the intellectual grounding that was essential for those students who might hope eventually to engage with Modern Art. Negotiating between these concerns would not be simple.

The Reports led to the replacement of the NDD with the Diploma in Art and Design. The new Dip AD was a three year course – usually to follow on from one or two years on a Foundation Course which replaced the old Intermediate level – and it was intended to be equivalent, in structure and prestige, to university study. Controversially, entry onto the Dip AD would require that an applicant held a minimum of five ‘O’ levels, though exceptions could be made for the most talented students if they were able to give good reasons why they had failed to meet the minimum educational qualifications.²¹ This contradiction is typical of Coldstream, the intellectual, who was yet used to bending the rules freely for his best students at the Slade. It is not the ability to meet requirements, but the extra time it took to do so, that should have been controversial.

In 1970, the last of the reports – the Joint Report – was submitted by the Coldstream Committee, together with the Summerson Committee which had been established to implement the Coldstream Committee’s recommendations on the ground. The Foreword to the Joint Report stated that “...it is in the interests of many young people that they should not commit themselves too early to a career in art and design and that they should be able to continue their general education, without undue specialisation, up to the age of eighteen.”²² That much is unarguable; the problem is: what about those rarer young people who would only ever commit themselves to art? They would just have to start later, and practice less.

²⁰ *ibid.*, p. 15.

²¹ W. Coldstream (Chairman), *The Structure of Art and Design Education in the Further Education Sector (Report of a Joint Committee of the National Advisory Council On Art Education and the National Council for Diplomas in Art and Design)*, London, Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1970, para. 71.

²² *ibid.*, Foreword.

What Happened to the Art Schools?

The Report did still recognise “the continuing need to provide a range of vocational courses for those leaving school at sixteen or seventeen who wish to enter them and have suitable abilities”.²³ A different standard, then, for a different ‘type of man’. Art was being loosed from craft, to become an academic subject and not a vocation: the implications for the study of drawing and painting are obvious and immense.

On Fine Art studies within the Dip AD, the Joint Report stated:

*Whilst painting and sculpture or a combination of the two will, we expect, continue to be the main preoccupation of students in this area, we do not believe that studies in fine art can be adequately defined in terms of chief studies related to media. We believe that studies in fine art derive from an attitude which may be expressed in many ways. Their precise nature will depend upon the circumstances of individual colleges.*²⁴

With craft out of the way, attitudinising could take full precedence over practice; and almost as soon as that happened, their expectation was proven wrong: painting and sculpture did cease to be the “main preoccupation” of Fine Art students.

It says something important about the times, that critics of the reforms did not draw particular attention to this passage on Fine Art. But the Joint Report really did become a fiasco as committee members argued over what emphasis – and what definition – should be given to art historical study. Fifteen per cent of the Dip Ad was given over to non-studio, or ‘academic’ work; and this portion was called Complementary Studies, of which Art History was only to be a part.

We see a prime objective of complementary studies as being to enable the student to understand relationships between his own activities and the culture within which he lives as it has evolved. Such studies should therefore offer him different ways of looking at art and design, and

²³ *ibid.*

²⁴ *ibid.* para. 26.

*begin to build up a background against which he can view the experience of the studio.*²⁵

The implications are dangerously ambiguous; the Joint Report tried yet failed to correct misinterpretations of Complementary Studies as outlined in the earlier Reports. Norbert Lynton foresaw that “It will take brilliance and monumental fortitude to stop the obligatory ‘some serious studies in the history of art and design’ deteriorating into coffee-table-book exercises or cliché-ridden and premature harangues on the contemporary art scene.”²⁶ The Dip AD would encourage the following of fashions rather than the learning of principles; and for all the breadth it meant to add by applying “historical, scientific and philosophical methods”,²⁷ it would inevitably make the study of art shallower. Nikolaus Pevsner jotted a despairing Note of Dissent on the Report:

*... as the fifteen per cent can according to Chapter 3 be divided between history of art and other complementary studies, the result could be say two hours a week for one year for the history of art – too little to learn facts, far too little to understand them – and four hours for “philosophical methods” and the “relationship to society” of the study of art and design – subjects on these levels almost of necessity vague and as an intellectual discipline unprofitable.*²⁸

His frustration with members of the Coldstream Committee is palpable: “...to understand one must know the facts; to know the facts one must learn the facts, and to choose relevant facts one must command a surplus of facts. That is the unpalatable truth... Unpalatable to many students, unpalatable also to some of the staffs teaching studio subjects.”²⁹

At least as important as the ambiguity of the definition of Complementary Studies, and how that would let art historical studies shrink beside more

²⁵ *ibid.* para. 38.

²⁶ Quoted by M. Quinn, *The Pedagogy of Capital: Art History and Art School Knowledge*, in M. C. Potter (Ed.), *The Concept of the ‘Master’ in Art Education in Britain and Ireland, 1770 to the Present*, Ashgate, 2013, p. 224.

²⁷ W. Coldstream, *op. cit.*, para. 39.

²⁸ N. Pevsner, *Note of Dissent*, in *ibid.*

²⁹ *ibid.*

What Happened to the Art Schools?

fashionable socio-cultural studies, was the clear separation made between studio work and non-studio work within Fine Art. The formal separation of theory and practice implies a false distinction between the intellect and the imagination, and even more between the mind and the making hand. The separation was ensured by the Committee's insistence on putting Complementary Studies "in the hands of staff... whose teaching... is based on intellectual disciplines and processes which are distinct from those of the studio".³⁰ This would fundamentally change the organisation and the character of British art schools.

Ruskin Spear, then teaching at the Royal College, explained the effect: "They [the students] were force-fed; made to 'read all about it'; to know through reading books—painting itself became almost a secondary activity. It was assumed that if you read about it you could do it automatically'."³¹ That the Committee felt the need to affirm in their Report that Complementary Studies should "inform", but not "dictate", the creative aspects of a student's work,³² suggests they were quite aware of the risk they were taking.

The Committee members were well intentioned, of course. Perhaps their aims were so lofty they could only be vague: they wanted to liberalise art education, allowing each college the freedom to design its own curriculum. At the same time they wanted to promote academic discipline; and they wanted this done by only the most expert teachers, meaning practising artists in the studios and subject specialists in the area of Complementary Studies. Committee members strongly disagreed with each other over details; but in the overall ambition of the project one senses Coldstream's presiding influence – the liberalising and intellectualising agenda seems to take the Slade's functioning as the model.

At its most productive times, the Slade may have seemed an ideal art school, but it was no use as a model for others. It had a long and celebrated tradition; it had many influential artists on its staff; it had the easiest access to London's museums and galleries; and for those very reasons it had its pick of students. It had also been part of a great university from its foundation: affiliation with the Warburg Institute meant the likes of Rudolf Wittkower and Ernst Gombrich

³⁰ W. Coldstream, *op. cit.*, para. 39.

³¹ P. Huxley (Ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 57.

³² W. Coldstream, *op. cit.*, para. 38.

were available to design and teach art history courses; and professors in subjects across the humanities and sciences, working in the same quad, could be called upon to offer complementary studies when needed. Perhaps the Slade thrived even more for Coldstream's own personal influence – though he could seem aloof, his pragmatism, his distaste for pretension, and his avowal of the highest standards in art, won out.

Regional art colleges could hardly measure up. Only about a half of them even submitted applications for Dip AD courses, and then less than a third of the applications were approved, leaving sixty-one courses at twenty-nine colleges nationwide – ten of which were in Greater London.³³ The Coldstream Committee had meant to make the teaching of art in Britain more diverse, but their proposals had the opposite effect. Colleges that did not – could not – offer the Dip AD, lost funding; and students on non-approved courses were less likely to gain grants.³⁴ Under such pressure, colleges either closed or dissolved into larger polytechnics. Ruskin Spear called it “The Great Purge of the Art Schools”.³⁵

After a decade of fiddling with the structure of the new Diploma, the Committee succeeded only in making the study of art less accessible to those they most wanted to encourage: young people from provincial areas with talent but limited means. Besides ‘purging’ the land of so many art schools, in their last Report the Committee made what seems another disastrous decision: that fine art should no longer be regarded as “necessarily central to all studies in the design field”.³⁶ Thus the wall they were building between art and craft became physical as well as ideological, further diminishing the experiences and opportunities of those working-class students who had enrolled in the first place only to learn a trade. Inadvertently, the Coldstream Reports all but made sure that the Hockney story – in which a working-class boy with a simple love for drawing but little formal education found the instruction and encouragement he needed at a local school and from there worked his way to the Royal College of Art – could not happen again.

³³ L. Tickner, op.cit. p. 19.

³⁴ S. Harries, *Nikolaus Pevsner: The Life*, London, Chatto and Windus, 2011, p. 617.

³⁵ P. Huxley (Ed.), op. cit. p. 57.

³⁶ W. Coldstream, op.cit., para. 42.

The Enduring Influence of the Bauhaus, and the Triumph of ‘Abstraction’

The damage that the Coldstream Reports did to art schools is evident and quantifiable. But their direct responsibility for the decline of traditional drawing and painting in art schools can be – and often is – exaggerated: however reckless the Committee’s recommendations, even before the ‘60s drawing and painting were seriously imperilled, and the further damage done to them would have happened anyway – after all, the same happened in art schools across Europe and the USA.

What cannot be exaggerated is the deleterious effect of ‘Bauhaus-thinking’, which was catching on well before the Coldstream Committee first sat; and here a distinction has to be made between what the Bauhaus’s founder had meant his school to be, and what it came to mean to modernising educationalists in Britain. Walter Gropius’s *Bauhaus Manifesto and Program* (1919) is delightfully simple, and today it reads as a perfectly conservative document. Not a word of it would trouble even the fustiest old art master:

*Architects, sculptors, painters, we all must return to the crafts! For art is not a “profession.” There is no essential difference between the artist and the craftsman. The artist is an exalted craftsman. In rare moments of inspiration, transcending the consciousness of his will, the grace of heaven may cause his work to blossom into art. But proficiency in a craft is essential to every artist. Therein lies the prime source of creative imagination.*³⁷

The intention was to create something equivalent to the medieval guild system; and the concept was so thoroughly elaborated that Pevsner, in his book, *Academies of Art, Past and Present* (1940), would call the Bauhaus programme “a work of genius... as fascinating in its vitality as it is comprehensive in its scope, and sound in its details”.³⁸ Pevsner was most impressed with its attempt to answer what he called “the social question”³⁹ in art education: he thought it worse than irresponsible that art schools should train all students to be ‘fine

³⁷ W. Gropius, *Bauhaus Manifesto and Program*, Weimar, 1919

³⁸ N. Pevsner, *Academies of Art, Past and Present*, Cambridge, CUP, 1940, p. 279.

³⁹ *ibid.*, p. 284.

artists' in the knowledge that only the tiniest fraction of them could ever succeed. The Bauhaus's proposed return to a system of masters, journeymen and apprentices seemed a more realistic way to find suitable employment for all. But of course employment in any capacity depended on the need for – or the *use* of – the art that would be produced. This is the second and far more difficult part of the social question: what is the true role of art in the industrialised society?

Pevsner thought that art could only be made to partake again in the life of the community if it “joins forces with industry”;⁴⁰ so did Herbert Read – then Britain's most vocal Modernist and a founder of the ICA – who also took inspiration from the Bauhaus in a number of books including *Art and Industry: The Principles of Industrial Design* (1934) and *Education through Art* (1943). If Pevsner's interest was primarily practical, Read's had become utopian. Read would prove the more influential.

Modernising art teachers would tend to forget about the practicalities of the social question as their excitement grew at the possibility – the collective dream – suggested by the Bauhaus of an entirely new formal vocabulary for art, absolutely true to its materials, to be discovered through creative experimentation. A course in Basic Design, derived from the Bauhaus's Foundation-level *Vorkurs*, was offered at the Central School in London from the '30s, and its pioneering teacher, William Johnstone, identified the problem it was supposed to remedy: “A student would often come to a senior art school already cluttered up with a great amount of undesirable and obsolete techniques while still lacking a realistic grammar of art from which he could begin his more advanced study of design.”⁴¹ Herbert Read was less shy about identifying what those “undesirable and obsolete techniques” might be: “No harm would be done to art, in any vital sense of the word, if all this vast machinery of life classes and antique classes were abolished.”⁴²

In pockets around this otherwise ‘aesthetically-backward’ country, from Cardiff to Newcastle, more and more art schools were being re-dedicated to ‘un-

⁴⁰ *ibid.* p. 293.

⁴¹ Quoted in N. Llewellyn and B. Williamson (Eds.), *The London Art Schools – Reforming the Art World, 1960 to Now*, London, Tate Publishing, 2015, p. 27.

⁴² *ibid.* p. 63.

What Happened to the Art Schools?

teaching' their students in order to build up in them a "new sense of values".⁴³ The Coldstream Committee's earlier Reports had laid more emphasis on training in drawing, particularly at Foundation level;⁴⁴ but in the end the Modernist ideology won out. The Committee itself was divided, and Coldstream was personally quite opposed to Basic Design;⁴⁵ but just at this moment Abstraction was taking over in London's galleries, so Basic Design, which combined a pseudo-science of pictorial form with new-age ideas of intuitive creative expression, now seemed to have the market as well as the critics on its side.

Art schools could not be insulated from the cultural climate – especially in London. Coldstream knew it well because the Slade was already in upheaval: Timothy Hyman, then a student, remembers how "Abstraction made a nonsense of all academic courses."⁴⁶ In his memoir, Hyman writes: "There was never any question of our hiding behind some academic fiction of acquisition of skills, technique, craft... It was my ill-fortune to enter art-school at a moment when a lively debate – one might call it, a Civil War – between Abstract and Figurative painters had come to an end, with Abstraction very much the victor."⁴⁷

In '60s Britain, Modern German methods of teaching from the '20s were catching on because Modern American painting of the '40s and '50s was becoming fashionable. Somehow this made our home-grown Modernists feel very up-to-date. And it made them feel part of something *international* – that was important.

From the last generation of British art students trained before the reforms, came all the figurative painters now known collectively as the 'School of London', whose works are now acclaimed by critics and prized by museums and collectors around the world much more than any British abstract painting. The old Modernist ideologues who won out in the '60s – so certain of being on the right side of history – were wrong.

⁴³ Richard Hamilton on his course at Newcastle, interviewed for *Studio International*, quoted in *ibid.* p. 32.

⁴⁴ W. Coldstream, *op. cit.*, para. 47.

⁴⁵ L. Morris (Ed.), *John Wonnacott and John Lessore, The Norwich Life Room*, 2014.

⁴⁶ Interview.

⁴⁷ T. Hyman, *Memoir*, unpublished.

II

From High to Low: All Becomes Relative

As soon as art schools began trying to keep pace with the advance of Modernism, and celebrating breaks with the artistic past, another break with all old methods of art education was effected: before, teachers had taken it their solemn duty to protect young and empty minds from falling for fashionability. In his third Discourse, Reynolds wrote that "... the modern artist, before he can see the truth of things, is obliged to remove a veil, with which the fashion of the times has thought proper to cover her".⁴⁸ If Reynolds is too predictable a voice on the matter, here is Matisse, who had also run his own art school: "The young painter who cannot free himself from the influence of the preceding generation is bound to be sunk."⁴⁹

Matisse believed that the only way for a student to escape fashion was to become immersed in history, and to build his own tradition "by reconciling the different points of view expressed in the beautiful works by which he is affected".⁵⁰ Yet the dogmatic Modernist educationalists worked against this sort of historical thinking, because they did not at all regard their students' minds as too easily impressionable but as already overburdened with traditional or, in their view, old-fashioned, knowledge: they had to "do some erasure", precisely in order to keep students under the influence of the preceding generation – the teachers' own generation.⁵¹

If they were somewhat successful in keeping the students' minds emptier than before, they had more trouble in shutting those minds down as they wished: unsurprisingly, the young students were quicker to follow fashions and they left the teachers behind. No sooner had the Bauhaus crowd in Britain won a place for Basic Design in the mainstream curriculum, and gained the opportunity, finally, to practice Modernism in new Bauhaus-style buildings (for example, the now demolished Chelsea campus on Manresa Road), than the students lost interest in process-driven formalism and turned to Pop Art instead.

⁴⁸ J. Reynolds, *Discourse III*

⁴⁹ H. Matisse, *Observations on Painting*, 1945, collected in J. Flam (Ed.), *Matisse on Art*, revised edition, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1995, p. 158.

⁵⁰ *ibid.*

⁵¹ Richard Hamilton, quoted in *William Johnstone: International and Interdisciplinary Art Education*, H. R. Westley and B. Williamson, in Llewellyn, *op. cit.*, p.32.

What Happened to the Art Schools?

Most of the leading Pop Artists had been trained the old way as painters; yet they objected to the piousness of High Modernism, particularly of the Bauhaus type, which, far from making art partake again in common life had succeeded only in abstracting it away into further irrelevance. ‘Fine’ artists were finding themselves unable to compete for attention with advertisers, filmmakers, and other producers of mass culture, so they joined them instead. And their ‘Pop’ work sold fantastically well. This was the first death knell for Modernism. And Pop Art’s effect on art schools – through its effect on art students – has proved at least as important as that of Abstraction: the ideological victory of Abstraction had made figurative art seem a thing of the past; but Pop seemed to detach Fine Art from any recognised tradition which had been, or ever could be, taught, and dump it just in the here and now – in the continuous present.

This must have been a major part of the reason why Lynton, Pevsner and Spear were so worried about the Complementary Studies programme: Art History courses needed special protection because, at this very moment, all historical perspective was at stake.

Gombrich had this to say, in 1966, on the developing hostility in art schools to the study of Art History:

For of course if there is any creed that unites many young artists today it is the creed of anti; anti-intellectualism, anti-academicism, anti-authority. Art history is intellectual, it is academic, it is even authoritarian, for it teaches that Michelangelo was a great artist and you can like it or lump it.

Art History was often declared entirely irrelevant.⁵² Gombrich continued: “But underlying these protestations I think I can discern another proposition which is a little more serious and certainly much more widespread. It is the suspicion that art and history may be mutually exclusive.”⁵³

Gombrich was right in his diagnosis, but less clear about the cause: he blamed this rejection of history on “a certain doctrine about the nature of art” – by

⁵² H. Cohen, *British Library Interview*, tape 5/9, min. 9-10.

⁵³ E. Gombrich, *op.cit.*

which he meant romantic primitivism – which held that “the artistic gift as such is incompatible with intellectual discipline”.⁵⁴ Yet the new rebels – teachers and students alike – would make radical amendments to this old doctrine. They were in fact coming to reject the idea of an artistic gift as such, and to consider art more as just another sort of intellectual discipline. Art History was irrelevant to them, because its concerns did not seem intellectual *enough*: to them, the history of art was about so many sad, bored, and boring old painters who, while still chained to tradition, had to labour away like craftsmen. Their protest was as much against the art as the history, in Art History.

The anthropologists brought in to teach Complementary Studies would provide a particularly important justification for Pop, as ‘cultural relativism’ cancelled out the distinction – a Modernist obsession – between ‘High’ art and ‘Low’. That distinction, though always uncomfortable, had only ever been made to protect the artistic spirit in the modern world; yet in the early ‘70s, Art History was being replaced in art schools by the study of Visual Culture.

The Code of Interdisciplinarity

The compatibility of practical discipline – not intellectual discipline – with art, was under deepest suspicion. By this point, practical instruction was so unfashionable that art courses were being designed to prevent it. Students were admitted to art school primarily to learn how to think like artists – which meant thinking in a way that no artist before the ‘60s had ever thought.

A favourite case study is the ‘Locked Room’ experiment, led by Peter Kardia at St Martin’s in 1969. Students were locked together in the studio each day, with no brief, just a given material. They were not allowed to communicate with each other. On some days, they would arrive to find that their work had been removed and replaced with a new material. This may have been the last decadence of the Bauhaus idea of process-driven creation – now directionless, just creation for creativity’s sake – but at the same time it reflected the new desire to escape the old definition of art and to intellectualise it away from practised craft. The act of making was now just a part of a sociological

⁵⁴ *ibid.*

What Happened to the Art Schools?

experiment; and the students were supposed to be able to reflect back, with critical detachment, upon the exalted state of disorientation they achieved through it. Kardia had contrived a course for them on Perception, led by psychologists, naturalists, physicists and philosophers,⁵⁵ through which they were to understand themselves better as primitive, instinctual – artistic – beings. This terrifically conflicted and confused approach to art teaching has become known as ‘interdisciplinary’.

Where the Bauhaus had meant to develop its students as creative beings, unlimited by any particular skillset and ready to improvise with whatever modernity might throw at them, the new ‘interdisciplinarity’ seems to have been contrived more to keep students away from skills altogether – skills being a potential hindrance to the roving imagination.

One of the essays in *Art School (Propositions for the 21st Century)* even explains, succinctly and approvingly, that “skills in craft manufacture” have been replaced by “learned sociability and the comprehension of certain codes of behaviour” – which might sound even more sinister than brainwashing. However, “this switch was never made explicit in most academic curricula”.⁵⁶ The term ‘interdisciplinarity’ is by now used so often, simply to reassert that the switch has taken place. But perhaps ‘interdisciplinarity’ could best be defined as an absurd inversion of romantic primitivism: instead of channelling the primitive mind through the wide-ranging hand, the wide-ranging mind should be channelled through the primitive hand – if the hand ever has to come into it.

Obviously the art student could not be a good anthropologist, ecologist, philosopher, physicist, psychologist and sociologist, so the interdisciplinary curriculum was, in effect, anti-disciplinary. The attempt to turn artists into universal intellectuals left them embarrassing amateurs in everything – especially in that which had previously been understood as art. They could only be dabblers in ideas; and if they ever tried their hands at paint, they would of course be daubers.

⁵⁵ A. Massouras, op. cit., p. 40 – 41.

⁵⁶ C. Esche, *Include Me Out: Helping Artists to Undo the Art World*, in Madoff (Ed.), op. cit. p. 103.

Despite the intellectual pretence, the interdisciplinary art school envisioned itself more as a creative hub than a place of learning; and as soon as the students had accepted the approach they would be treated as fully-fledged artists, ready to ‘collaborate’ in their teachers’ experiments.

It was clubby. It may have seemed pluralistic from the outside, but the interdisciplinarians were intolerant of dissenters. Students who came to their schools still wanting to learn a traditional craft – “to learn to draw” – were treated as a nuisance. Art education was being redefined as an instrument of social progress.⁵⁷ In this context, to practice painting was to take a controversially conservative position.

Immaculate Conception: The Status of the Post-Modern Artist

The Renaissance has left us with a deep anxiety about the social and intellectual status of the artist. Pevsner began his history of Art Academies by outlining Leonardo da Vinci’s view that it was an odious thing for painting ever to have been named among the mechanical arts.⁵⁸ Michelangelo agreed: he wanted “young noblemen as pupils and not plebeians”, because one paints with the mind, not the hand [“*si dipinge col cervello e non colla mano*”].⁵⁹ The French Académie des Beaux-Arts was conceived in the same spirit, separating the ‘arts nobles’ from ‘arts mécaniques’, “to sever once for all the artist from the artisan”.⁶⁰ And Romanticism would raise the artist even higher – Schiller declared the artist must live “on the summits of mankind”.⁶¹

Despite attempts right through the nineteenth century to put design and manufacture back together in the hope that industry might gain in art – attempts which culminated in the Bauhaus – it is clear that after the ‘60s the Romantic idea of the artist won out in education. Soon it would hardly matter if in drawing the hand only followed the mind, because post-modern artists – universal intellectuals with the degree to prove it – were simply too *good* to get their hands dirty. The new artist of ‘ideas’ would claim descent solely from

⁵⁷ L. Tickner, op. cit. p. 70.

⁵⁸ Pevsner, op. cit., p. 30 – 31.

⁵⁹ *ibid.*, p. 33.

⁶⁰ *ibid.*, p. 171.

⁶¹ *ibid.*, p. 149.

What Happened to the Art Schools?

Duchamp; Picasso and Matisse were suddenly old and irrelevant and so too, even, were those paint-splattered New Yorkers – post-modernists were in no position to object to the pretentiousness of ‘artistic expression’, but they rejected it anyway because the whole rigmarole to them seemed so vulgar.

‘Expression’ could also take too much time. There was a growing emphasis on showing work early. From 1949, an annual exhibition of *Young Contemporaries* was organised in London to help introduce art students to the market. *Young Contemporaries* was such a success, especially with Pop Art, that by 1967 it was being staged at the Tate (it was later renamed *New Contemporaries* and found a permanent home at the ICA). Now galleries as well as teachers were treating students as fully-fledged artists, so naturally students began to worry less about practicing and more about amassing a body of work.

Learning to paint had always been a slow business: it must be remembered that while some painters of the Renaissance produced so much so young, they all already had many years of apprenticeships behind them, having begun their professional training as young as ten years old; and before the ‘60s the most dedicated modern painters – humbled as they were by an awareness of how their circumstances had changed – tended to accept their position and prepare themselves to wait years, maybe decades, before producing work deemed worthy of showing. But the art world was now hungrier than ever for youth, and new students sensed that if they did not court the public straight away they might miss their opportunity. They were arriving at art school later in life, not necessarily with any background in disciplined drawing; meanwhile the course of their instruction hindered practice while the rush to produce for the market disincentivised it. No wonder, then, that so many decided simply that painting was not the way forward. Painting was commercially inefficient because it was slow; moreover, it would mercilessly expose all inadequacies in education. The ‘ideas’ artist’s snobbery over craft is not just about status, it also involves this fear of being found out.

Also in the ‘70s the market began to pay more attention to photography as an art medium, so art schools, which had to keep up, suddenly all needed darkrooms;⁶²

⁶² Stephen Farthing, interview.

and painting was pushed further into the shadows. For the art student, photography had clear advantages: it produced almost instant results, and did not require years of practice; it was edgier, because it recorded the modern world in modern, mechanical fashion; its view was thus untainted by the prejudice inherent in traditional craft, and was of more anthropological interest; and photography allowed for potentially limitless reproduction, promising to democratise the image and pull down the old hierarchies of art, thus ticking important ideological boxes. ‘Concepts’ were coming to the fore in art, but simultaneously painting was losing ground – losing its currency, its appeal, its justification – even as a means of picture-making.

III

Art for Criticism's Sake

Yet right through the '70s, students brave enough to take that conservative position and devote themselves to painting could still have found a sympathetic master in almost any art school. The dust from the upheavals of the '60s would not fully settle until the '80s. Teachers left over from the era before the Coldstream Reports were beginning to retire, and with them a tradition was being lost. Complementary Studies was dictating the courses more and more – under the guise of interdisciplinarity – and the place the Old Masters had traditionally held in the imagination of art students was taken by “textual masters”.⁶³ The quality, the *seriousness* of art was from now on to be measured by how closely it illustrated the radical theories – or embodied the attitudes – of French intellectuals such as Barthes, Baudrillard, Derrida and Foucault. Clement Greenberg, whose criticism had been instrumental in the triumph of Abstraction, and thus in the triumph of criticism (he was, in his own way, a prototype of the ‘textual master’) was contemptuously dismissed; Walter Benjamin was held up instead as the great precursor to the *soixante-huitards*. Art would thus be taught entirely as a function of criticism, when criticism was properly a function of art.

It could be argued that painting is an essentially sensuous and contemplative medium – in modern terms, an expressive medium – and, as such, it struggles when forced to become expository; it is beyond argument that wherever art educationalists pushed theories and adopted attitudes opposed not just to the act, but to the whole notion, of deliberate artistic expression, the teaching of painting was suppressed. Lecturers repeated – and continue to repeat today – how in the age of mechanical reproduction the artistic medium is nothing to look at, just a relic of bourgeois aesthetics; thus in art intention should count for zero, interpretation is everything and the ‘author’ is dead. The painter in the post-modern art school now ceased to be a conservative and became a subversive, or a pariah.

Prospective students soon knew which art schools they would do best to avoid and, on the other hand, which still supported painting – certain schools had quietly become refuges for more traditional practice. Uglow made sure that the

⁶³ K. Reed-Tsocha, *Study the Masters? On the Ambivalent Status of Art History within the Contemporary Art School*, in M.C. Potter (Ed.), *The Concept of the ‘Master’ in Art Education in Britain and Ireland, 1770 to the Present*, Ashgate, 2013, p. 234.

Slade's Life Room kept going, and he also taught at Chelsea; at the Royal College, Peter de Francia was inspiring as he fought against the culture of commercial "stardom" that had prevailed since Pop; the Royal Academy ignored all trends as best it could under Peter Greenham, while Norman Blamey was an influential lecturer and tutor; Edinburgh and Glasgow stuck to their respective traditions – more academic or more expressionistic –with both emphasising a regular routine of life drawing until the end of the course; Cheltenham and Winchester still taught colour theory and historical methods of paint handling; and, perhaps most interestingly of all, there was Norwich. Norwich had not merely carried on; Edward Middleditch, as Head of Fine Art, had employed the painters John Lessore and John Wonnacott – both unapologetic traditionalists – to open a new Life Room and revive exactly the sort of training that the best art schools would have offered before the Coldstream Reports.

Lessore's mother had been a student of Tonks; his father had worked with Rodin; he himself had studied at the Slade; but his own teaching method was based more on that of his uncle, Sickert. Wonnacott was also a Slade graduate and, much affected by the teaching he received there from painters as accomplished as Frank Auerbach and Michael Andrews, he sympathised with the "sense of frustration and jealousy" new painting students felt at being denied such opportunities.⁶⁴

Together, Lessore and Wonnacott developed an intensive course with anatomy instruction, geometry, cast and life drawing and painting, drawing from memory, scaling up drawings for murals, materials and techniques of the Old Masters, as well as constant discussion of the Old Masters' artistic relationships. Old Master paintings were even restaged with models in the Life Room; and the only additional reading was from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and the Bible, in order to know the subjects – no critical theory at all.⁶⁵ Lessore and Wonnacott painted alongside the students in an airy and beautifully bright room overlooking the river. The project lasted only from 1978 until 1985, when embarrassed authorities put a stop to it; but it proved what could still be done.

⁶⁴ J.Wonnacott, *From the Slade to Norwich*, in *John Wonnacott and John Lessore: The Norwich Life Room*, L.Morris (Ed.), Arts Council, p. 28.

⁶⁵ L. Morris, *The Norwich Life Room*, op.cit., p. 13.

What Happened to the Art Schools?

In the '90s the emergence of digital imaging repeated the blow dealt by photography to painting, with even greater force. This was not so much a challenge to painting's efficacy, or viability, as a means of artistic picture-making, because painting – in its traditional role, at least – was already all but written off. But art schools now needed to find space for banks of shiny new computers and it was the grubby old media that would have to make way.

Printing studios were the first victims, and many printing technicians had to be retrained as digital technicians or lose their jobs.⁶⁶ As a result, the whole atmosphere of the art school changed: the “disconsolate scent” of turpentine wafted away,⁶⁷ and the studios, with their clean white walls, cheap carpets and pale pine desks felt as sterile as any advertising office.

What Wonnacott saw as the gradual takeover by the “media studies model of art education”,⁶⁸ was completed soon after, following the astonishing success of *Sensation* at the Royal Academy, the 1997 exhibition of Charles Saatchi's collection of Young British Artists (the best-known of whom had studied together at Goldsmiths). The exhibition was perfectly timed, with *Cool Britannia* returning as a youthful new Prime Minister had rock stars round to Downing Street for champagne. In retrospect, this moment may seem a careful caricature of '68-style rebellion, to mask continuous decline; but superficiality was the point and everyone wanted a piece of it.

It is difficult to attempt to define the zeitgeist of the very recent past; but if changes in art and the corresponding reforms in art education had been, since the '60s, about being as modern or as post-modern as possible, they now became simply about being cool. And if '60s Pop Art was – or mostly positioned itself as – an intellectualised commentary on the rise of popular culture, what the YBAs produced really and truly belonged to popular culture, with the distinction between High and Low fading from memory. The cool new art was promoted as an important weapon in Britain's 'soft power' arsenal, and the art schools had to produce more of it.

⁶⁶ Stephen Farthing, *Interview*

⁶⁷ J. Updike, *Still Life*, in *John Updike: Collected Early Stories*, Library of America, 2013.

⁶⁸ L. Morris, *The Norwich Life Room*, op.cit., p. 28.

Stephen Farthing, who was Master of the Ruskin School of Fine Art in Oxford at the time, saw that art was becoming little more than a “lifestyle add-on”.⁶⁹ Another new type of student, then, was arriving at art school, perhaps less ideological and more fashionable – seeking the glamour. And when Farthing left his post in 2000, staff from Goldsmiths were rushed in to run the Ruskin – as they were at schools as far flung as Glasgow – to sprinkle their celebrity dust. The Goldsmiths formula was not difficult to replicate: it was only necessary to remove any remaining structure from studio activities; and most art departments were very nearly there already. Since 1992, when the polytechnics had become universities and began awarding degrees in Fine Art as though it were just another academic subject, art courses revolved more and more around the lecture theatre and library, while studio instruction withered away. But Goldsmiths got there first. Damien Hirst remembers applying in the ‘80s precisely because Goldsmiths did not have a defined Painting or Sculpture course – students did just as they wished, and “if you wanted a tutorial, you had to ask for one”.⁷⁰

The methods and materials of contemporary art had become chaotically diverse. Since no sort of practical instruction could be relevant to all students, it was decided that none should be given. No “erasure” anymore – after all there was nothing to “un-teach”, and no one to “de-skill” – so anything goes. Art education was only supposed to be about how – and, implicitly, what – to think, never about how or what to do; the only direct teaching was to be in that area once created for Complementary Studies, where the interdisciplinary ethos carried on (today it is evolving into ‘transdisciplinarity’),⁷¹ while for the studios an “open curriculum” was preferred.⁷² Jacques Rancière – the youngest of the soixante-huitard intellectuals – was now the name to drop. In his book, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*, 1987 (translated in 1991), he argued that in education the quality of the learning

⁶⁹ S. Farthing, *Interview*

⁷⁰ Damien Hirst *Interview*, <http://www.gold.ac.uk/our-people/profile-hub/art/ug/damien-hirst/>

⁷¹ J.T. Schnapp and M. Shanks, ‘Artreality (Rethinking Craft in a Knowledge Economy)’, in Madoff (Ed.), op. cit. p. 151.

⁷² J. Lee, ‘*Without a Master*’: *Learning Art through an Open Curriculum*, in M.C. Potter (Ed.), op. cit., p. 254.

Joanne Lee (reflecting on Nottingham Trent Uni course

What Happened to the Art Schools?

environment was always more important than what a teacher might actually know.

Joanne Lee, who has applied Rancière's ideas to the Fine Art course at Nottingham Trent University, remains convinced that practical art education "can and must be achieved without a Master".⁷³ Yet if she sees no problem with the theory, she admits there are problems in applying it that have to be overcome. "Some students find identifying and pursuing their own interests very difficult: ... they would honestly prefer to be told what to do rather than undertake the difficult work of thinking for themselves. Such students do not want to be 'intellectually emancipated'..."⁷⁴ She dismisses these students as simply wanting "a good degree, which means being told exactly how to succeed at a rather superficial level", and that may in rare instances be true, though students choosing Fine Art are usually under no illusion that good degrees will lead to artistic success.

In most cases, probably, the students she refers to – the problems to be "overcome" – are those who have stuck to their guns and insisted on painting, perhaps even from observation, and have asked their teachers for the guidance they naively expected to receive in this endlessly difficult task. They would in fact be the students who were clearest of all in "identifying and pursuing their own interests", the only students doing the "difficult work of thinking for themselves" and not just thinking as their non-teaching teachers would like.

It is literally beyond satire, for Joanne Lee would think that the modern teacher as imagined by Reynolds in the *Ironic Discourse* did not go quite far enough when declaring:

Genius, as it disdains all assistance, so it defies all obstacles. The student here may inform himself whether he has been favoured by heaven with this truly divine gift. If he finds it necessary to copy, to

⁷³ *ibid.*, p. 261.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 259.

Jacob Willer

*study the works of other painters, or any way to seek for help out of himself, he may be sure that has received nothing of that inspiration.*⁷⁵

It is right that the best teachers have a touch so light that their guidance may seem imperceptible, and we have known it since Socrates. But that is a lightness that comes with wisdom.

Teachers in the contemporary art schools are not affecting ignorance in order that their students may come to personal conclusions: their ignorance is all real. These teachers are mostly young; and having studied art during the last twenty years, they would themselves have received little to no practical or historical instruction. They might hardly ever have tried to apply paint to canvas. They do not begin to know what they do not know. Constable famously said that “A self-taught artist is one taught by a very ignorant person.”⁷⁶ Nowadays, the university-educated artist is likely to have been taught by a very ignorant person too.

It is also right, as Rancière’s theory suggests, that the quality of the student peer group is a crucial factor – we saw it proven in how the School of London painters inspired and motivated each other to greater heights – and no good teacher would ever have denied it. Reynolds said it best, long ago in his First Discourse:

Every seminary of learning may be said to be surrounded with an atmosphere of floating knowledge, where every mind may imbibe somewhat congenial to its own original conceptions. Knowledge, thus obtained, has always something more popular and useful than that which is forced upon the mind by private precepts, or solitary meditation. Besides, it is generally found, that a youth more easily receives instruction from the companions of his studies, whose minds are nearly on a level with his own, than from those who are much his

⁷⁵ Reynolds, *The Ironical Discourse*, op. cit., p.132.

⁷⁶ C.R. Leslie, *Memoirs of the Life of John Constable*, Phaidon, 1995, p. 263.

What Happened to the Art Schools?

*superiors; and it is from his equals only that he catches the fire of emulation.*⁷⁷

But given that the peer group is so important, it must be considered what sort of students a Fine Art course with an ‘open curriculum’ is likely to attract, and whether the experience among such students should be of any use at all to the odd aspiring painter.

The damage inflicted on art education from the late ‘90s through the 2000s is comparable to that done during the ‘60s. Any diversity in the major art schools – any small remnant of tradition – that had managed to survive the Coldstream reforms was now killed off.

It was a time of even more bureaucratic consolidation. The London Institute, which had been formed in 1986 by the administrative linking of Camberwell School of Arts and Crafts, the Central School of Art and Design, Chelsea School of Art, the College for Distributive Trades, the London College of Fashion, the London College of Printing, and St Martin's School of Art, became the University of the Arts London (UAL) in 2004. In 1989, Central and St Martins had already merged into one school, and in 2003 Byam Shaw School of Art was absorbed into it. In 2006, Wimbledon School of Art also joined the new UAL. There was inevitable centralisation, especially as UAL decided to combine all of their Foundation courses into Central St Martins (CSM) or Camberwell; and the scaling back of Foundation courses points to the further de-emphasising of preliminary skills.

The pressure to jump onto the “media-studies” bandwagon was even felt at the RA, when in 1998 Leonard McComb was replaced as Keeper of the Schools and traditional practice effectively ended. It was felt at the Slade too, when in 2000 Uglow died and more ‘forward-thinking’ – or fashionably-minded – staff seized the opportunity to alter the school’s long-founded reputation for observational Life Room painting. It seemed there would be nowhere left.

⁷⁷ Reynolds, Discourse I.

IV

Reaction at Last: But to What End?

From the early '90s, HRH the Prince of Wales was already sponsoring attempts to revive old architectural standards, and his new Institute of Architecture laid particular emphasis on drawing, while employing former affiliates of the Royal Academy of Arts to teach it. As the situation on Fine Art courses was worsening, this project evolved; and in 2000 the opportunity was taken, along with the painter and RA graduate, Catherine Goodman, to found the Prince's Drawing School. The timing was perfect: since so many teachers of drawing and painting were being pushed out of other schools, Goodman was able to recruit the most inspiring of them for the new Drawing School.

The school's model was contrived so that short, paid, part-time courses for the public – in life drawing, drawing from the masterpieces in the National Gallery, or drawing around the streets of London – could fund an intensive, and by now intensely selective, post-graduate 'Drawing Year' which, just like the RA, provides free studio space and support.

The Drawing Year collects up those 'problem students' who had, by resisting 'intellectual emancipation', found themselves isolated, neglected, and not infrequently persecuted on Fine Art courses at other art schools. Here they are allowed to learn perspective, etching and much else that could once have been taken for granted. And they can hear lectures and take criticism from some of the most eminent thinkers and scholars on art, as well as esteemed contemporary painters of different ages and styles. But perhaps the most obvious benefit of the course is that these students now have a way to find each other, take confidence, and redouble their commitment to their work.

The enthusiasm at the Drawing School was soon infectious enough that other art schools, having endeavoured to rid us of such stuff, began to worry. They would discourage and, if necessary, forbid students from setting foot in the Drawing School: one student recounted to me how in 2014 a teacher at the Ruskin School of Art, where she had been offered a place, told her that if she were to attend a course at the Drawing School first, as she wished to do, the Ruskin would no longer touch her because the experience would "put her in a box she would never get out of". It seems that as far as this Ruskin teacher was concerned, exposure to a teaching staff of committed painters – including the likes of John

What Happened to the Art Schools?

Lessore and Timothy Hyman – would be the young student’s ruin. Presumably, the more the student should involve herself with drawing practice, the less effective the particular cure then on offer at the Ruskin would become (the Ruskin officially changed from a ‘School of Drawing’ to a ‘School of Art’ in 2014, to make clearer what it would not stand for). The factionalism within art education is so antagonistic that the interests, let alone the wishes, of the student hardly came into the argument. Clearly, the teacher at the Ruskin considered what goes on at the Drawing School a sort of indoctrination – a competitive sort of indoctrination, perhaps. But that is not her whole objection. She also considers drawing a narrow-minded pursuit, and worse, she considers it terribly ‘retro’.

Just as in the ‘60s when the Bauhaus partisans finally won out, progressive art educationalists of recent years have failed even to entertain the possibility that it is they who are behind the times – that it is they who might be stifling art. Despite their futile efforts, today the tide is turning. The Prince’s Drawing School has continued to grow in size, now offering a Foundation course (with the staff from what was the Byam Shaw Foundation before the CSM takeover); and it has continued to grow in reputation too: in 2014, with the approval of HM the Queen, it became the Royal Drawing School, and thus a more significant and seemingly permanent feature of the art school landscape.

The success of the Royal Drawing School may be singular, but it has not acted alone in breaking down the institutionalised prejudice against craft. Anita Taylor, who has had a distinguished career as a Lecturer, Professor, Principal and Head of Department in art schools right around the country, and who is now Dean of Bath School of Art and Design, felt it necessary to undertake more work outside of the system for the promotion of drawing. In 1994 she first organised a national competition which would, in 2001, gain support to become The Jerwood Drawing Prize. By now it is the largest and longest running annual drawing prize in the country, and it results in a touring exhibition (the Jerwood Charitable Foundation has recently ended its association but the Prize is expected to carry on with different sponsorship).

Taylor’s interest is in popularising the practice of drawing; in the first place, that means proposing that drawing is a worthwhile activity for all. Her more recent

‘Drawing Projects’ scheme based in Trowbridge, offering classes and staging its own exhibitions, is meant to encourage the development of a local community around drawing – it is meant to demystify drawing, perhaps to ‘de-artify’ it and thus make it more accessible, more enjoyable, and potentially more useful.

At Falmouth School of Art – now part of Falmouth University of the Arts, but still in its old location, and with a strong tradition particularly connected to the St Ives artists – a new BA course in Drawing was designed by Philip Naylor in 2011. The idea here, too, was to separate out the practice of drawing from Fine Art – a degree Falmouth also offers – to give drawing the focus it needs, and again to de-mystify it. Naylor cites the Bauhaus as a major influence;⁷⁸ but thankfully, rather than Modernist stylisation, he is concerned with Gropius’s idea of art as an extension of craft, and his belief that all truly expert craft should be able to find – or to create – an application. He shares with Anita Taylor this conviction that drawing can, and should, be made relevant again.

Bournemouth University of the Arts also has plans for a BA in Drawing, to be offered from 2018, in a blue, shiny, curvy, statement-making building designed by Sir Peter Cook RA, which they claim is the “first purpose-built drawing studio to be constructed at an art school for more than a century”.⁷⁹ Though the ultimate proof of how dramatically the tide has turned may be the Turps Banana Art School, opened in 2012 by Marcus Harvey. Harvey is a graduate of Goldsmiths in the ‘80s, an old friend of Damien Hirst and one of the original YBAs collected by Saatchi – he is still most famous for his painting of Myra Hindley in the *Sensation* exhibition. The school was founded in response to the “growing disquiet about the quality of painting tuition, inadequate tutorial input and isolation in traditional studio set ups”;⁸⁰ but taking account of who is involved, the timing of its founding strongly suggests – and might even confirm – that mucky old painting practice is suddenly cool again.

Indeed the youngest contemporary art galleries are now full of paintings – some of them only show painting. The popular painting style is rough and ready, with drips and splodges; so clearly the snobbery about getting one’s hands dirty is

⁷⁸ P. Naylor, *interview*.

⁷⁹ <https://aub.ac.uk/campus/drawing-studio>

⁸⁰ <http://turpsbanana.com/art-school>

What Happened to the Art Schools?

gone, and may even be reversing itself in this fashionable moment when luxury and exclusivity are always signalled by the word ‘artisanal’. But that does not mean that the prejudice against expert craft in art has yet been fully challenged and broken down. The drippy, splodgy, homemade aesthetic seems carefully contrived to position the new painting against all traditional refinements. This is not necessarily a direct result of the way drawing and painting are treated and taught on the new courses; yet it is obvious that the new courses are offered with the same old anxiety about appearing ‘fogeey’. The drive to work against the pretentiousness and the sheer silliness abounding on Fine Art courses, and to reaffirm, by concentrating on drawing and painting, that art comes through making, is most welcome; but between the various recent efforts at stimulating – and responding to – a new enthusiasm for the practice of drawing and painting, little attempt has been made to reach a common definition of what drawing and painting actually are, or should be, or can *do*.

The ‘Classical Realist’ Movement: Artisanal Kitsch

Too often on the new drawing and painting courses, just as on Fine Art courses, anything goes. Prospective students do their research and see that though an art school like, for example, Camberwell, may offer a BA in Drawing, the course is designed only to help students “develop their understanding of the subject in relation to wider issues in art, and... to look at how drawing is used in other disciplines such as architecture, choreography, mathematics and science”.⁸¹ There is no mistaking, then, that this is offered as a course in thinking, not doing – the topics to think about, as usual, might concern anything except the artistic tradition. Camberwell also offers a BA in Painting, but the students’ work would appear almost indistinguishable to an innocent visitor from that of the Fine Art students – not all of the Painting students are even painting.

The most ambitious students today – the most intellectually confident, and often also the most intelligent students – naturally resent being treated as conscripts for ‘intellectual emancipation’, then being left alone at play. They want guidance in work – they really want, again, to learn to draw – and so some of

⁸¹ <http://www.arts.ac.uk/camberwell/courses/undergraduate/ba-drawing/>

them decide they must reject the whole idea of the modern art school and turn instead to the ‘Atelier’ system, which has recently grown up in parallel.

The new ‘ateliers’ claim to teach with the good old methods from before the rot set into art education, so students graduate from copying master designs, to casts, to drawing from Life. The idea of a return to such routines – the daring to suggest that what worked before might work again, so why not give it a try – is, understandably, cheering to generations of art lovers who feel their subject has been betrayed; but if they were to set foot in these ateliers they would quickly realise that all is not so well: the dedication to traditional standards of craft here is as mistaken as the intellectualism in the interdisciplinary art school. Fuseli had made a point of justifying the old methods so that his students understood to what ends they laboured, and why, despite the tedious repetition, it might be worth it; but the new ateliers seem to justify nothing, and the students do not seem to understand.

They seem to labour this way mainly because they think it is old-fashioned: the idea of the atelier also has that trendy, ‘artisanal’ appeal; and there is no anxiety about appearing ‘fogy’ here – indeed they take pride in it. Ateliers claim to teach the “secrets of the old masters”, and they present themselves as keepers of the flame passed on from Raphael. The problem is, the last little flickering of that flame died long ago. It was in fact extinguished – well before Modernism ever took hold in art schools – with the institution of exactly the sort of teaching methods that the ateliers now try to revive, when, under the influence of Jacques-Louis David, the Académie Royale was abolished then reformed into the École des Beaux-Arts.⁸²

The ‘secrets’ were lost: in 1876 Lecoq explained how David forbade to his pupils the old instructions about materials, and, “This is the reason why his school, from which sprang, almost exclusively, the artistic generation before our own, has only been able to hand on to us defective technical processes with no authority behind them.”⁸³ Renoir complained: “The [Renaissance] painters were

⁸² *Jacques-Louis David: New Perspectives*, ed. D. Johnston, Newark, University of Delaware Press, 2006, p. 35.

⁸³ Lecoq de Boisbaudran, op. cit., p. 144.

What Happened to the Art Schools?

all practising the same craft. It is this craft that we none of us entirely know, because, since we were emancipated from tradition, no one has taught us."⁸⁴

But the new ateliers do not know what they do not know. They fail to realise that the Académie was not a guardian of true tradition – that though it may have been a conservative institution, it was a product entirely of the French Revolution; so when it championed old styles for revival, it did so in modern ways for modern reasons. In emulating those same “defective technical processes” – the obvious failure of which had at the time actually provoked, in reaction, the most thorough and successful re-thinking of art education – the ateliers commit themselves to the production of, at best, pastiches of pastiches of traditional painting.

Instead of old ‘secrets’, it is really only a formula for drawing and painting that they teach – a cheat that can be learnt quickly on an expensive summer course, perhaps in Florence, directed towards the polished *reproduction*, instead of a critical *representation*, of the object before the student. All the atelier students’ work ends with the same slick, sickly look; as Sickert said of work “based on an ideal of neatness and nothing else”, done by people with “no real feeling for art”: “The life goes out of it – it is disgusting.”⁸⁵ And all the students are taught to make the same mistakes: edges are blurred; shadows fall off into deep, dead darks; chalky mid-tones are perked up by a few exaggerated highlights; and atmosphere is not created through colour, it is only hinted at by some self-conscious, swishy marks added at the end.

Lecoq had witnessed the original – and infinitely more diligent – employment of such formulaic methods back in the nineteenth century, and despaired. His assessment of the usual results is worth quoting at length:

Instead of showing in their first attempts the modest diffidence which is a sign of conscientious and pains-taking work, they set down forms that are

⁸⁴ Renoir, C. Hayes, Hamlyn, 1984.

⁸⁵ W.R.Sickert, *The Margate Lectures*, collected in *The Complete Writings on Art*, Walter Sickert, ed. A. Gruetzner Robins, Oxford, OUP, 2000, p. 665.

*entirely false, and violently exaggerated effects, with an assurance that almost eclipses that of their elders.*⁸⁶

And:

*Real assurance, such as one admires in the work of great draughtsmen, can only come from feeling developed by study. Sham assurance, that is, “the cocksureness of ignorance,” is the most regrettable and dangerous of vices. It destroys all development and progress at the root. Modesty, and an inclination to naïve investigation are, on the other hand, the most precious of all qualities in a beginner. He will gain assurance as he increases in understanding and in vividness of impression, and such assurance will never degenerate into presumption.*⁸⁷

Some of these ateliers seem to function mostly as finishing schools; yet we must worry for those more serious students who go there to learn basic principles and gain a technical grounding with the idea of eventually developing their own practice in their own way – of finding their own eyes, as Fuseli put it – because they will struggle to free themselves from the influence of their ‘masters’ and will probably be sunk. No doubt the teaching of art by formula does damage to their perceptual abilities; but not as much as is done by the inculcation of false ideas. Ateliers pretend to offer only practical instruction without – or as an antidote to – the sort of politicised agendas that drive other art courses, while they do just as much indoctrination of their own. In fact they belong to a well-defined movement.

An American organisation called the Art Renewal Centre (ARC) gives its own accreditation and funds scholarships to ateliers worldwide, while its website features essays such as “20th Century Art Scam”, explaining:

The period of art history from 1850 through 1910 was thrown into near obscurity. But it was precisely this period that produced some of the greatest art and artists in the history of humanity [the author is not here alluding to the work of Manet, the Impressionists, Cezanne or Van

⁸⁶ Lecoq de Boisbaudran, op. cit., p. 60.

⁸⁷ *ibid.*, p. 172.

What Happened to the Art Schools?

Gogh, but that of Bouguereau and Meissonier]. *I will show you fine examples of that art, why it is amongst the world's greatest, and explain just what happened to cause its near total annihilation from the art history that has been taught in most of the 20th Century. It was a period when 500 years of accumulated knowledge, stretching from the early Renaissance to the present, reached its absolute peak of development.*

It is fine to argue that art historians have unfairly neglected the conventional painting of the nineteenth century; but it is altogether another thing to start declaring that such painting was in fact the best ever done.

It becomes clear that the ateliers' strange focus on late nineteenth-century art, though ignorant, is not completely accidental: essential to their ethos is a wilful distortion of history. Students are led to believe that Picasso was a fraud – that, unable to live up to the academic standards of painting, he conspired with savvy art dealers and 'propagandising' critics to rubbish those standards for all. It is certainly true that Modernism was in part a reaction against what Academicism had become; but it is horribly misleading to suggest that the stylistic crisis of Modernism followed in the wake of paintings like Bouguereau's, not because they were so bad but because they were so good. To ignore the fact that Bouguereau's painting was just another expression of stylistic crisis is to remove art entirely from its cultural context, and thus to trivialise it. This way, there is no chance to learn fair judgement, and students' taste is corrupted.

The ARC, and the ateliers under its influence, promote 'Classical Realism' – a contradiction in terms, to anyone concerned with the history of artistic styles. The students are duly confounded: instead of being initiated into the true tradition they are locked out of it, finding that, according to the criteria for excellence they have learnt, they can only really admire work from that odd period of 1850-1910. They might make slight exceptions for older painters like Rembrandt, Van Dyck, Velazquez, and maybe Caravaggio, but only because they glimpse them through Sargent's eyes as all dark brown slather and glistening white highlights.

Some atelier teachers – especially back in Britain – may well wish to diverge a bit from the doctrine, but they are constrained because they need ARC support for their funding and their reputation. Many of the students only apply because they have already discovered the ARC online and have been excited by its provocative, apparently iconoclastic stance. Online, there are also other similar sources.

Odd Nerdrum, a former pupil of Joseph Beuys with a gift for self-promotion, imagines himself as a Rembrandt reborn in the wild Norwegian woods. He runs an influential website meant to provide ‘enlightenment’ for the community of “classical figurative painters and sculptors”. It is called World Wide Kitsch; and its influence may even be worse, because the conspiracy theory that it peddles is better aimed at adolescent proclivities.

Rather than fixating on the nineteenth century while complaining about the Modernist bias against its sentimentality, Nerdrum argues instead that all great art is – like his own – simply kitsch: Raphael was kitsch, and Rembrandt was kitsch. Kitsch becomes a “badge of honour”; and Nerdrum’s followers see themselves as fighting for heart over head in art – for simple, direct, authentic feeling. Yet it is so self-regarding that they can only respond to the clunkiest and most outlandish effects of the sort Nerdrum himself specialises in painting.

When kitsch is taught as the be all and end all of art, even the masterpieces of the Renaissance begin to appear disappointing. A picture of Masaccio’s *Death of Ananias* happened to be posted to the Facebook page of World Wide Kitsch, where it garnered fewer ‘likes’ than many Russian academic paintings and only a single comment, which read: “Odd Nerdrum is so Much More Deep – Richer [sic]...” Here is painful proof of the extent of the damage done to innocent young students who only sought a master to learn from, and who found the proponents of Classical Realism only too willing to instruct them. With its ‘secrets’, its conspiracy theories, and its enforced subservience to its funders’ message, Classical Realism is like a cult.

Every action has its equal and opposite reaction; and so with the master-less ‘transdisciplinary’ art school in which anything goes but old art, along comes the Classical Realist atelier. Their insistence on craftsmanship may in itself be

What Happened to the Art Schools?

laudable; and they may indeed be right to complain about the shallowness and insincerity of post-modern art; but the ateliers are also entirely post-modern, whether they know it or not. Indulging in the same terminological wordplay, they too seek intellectual justifications for their fixation on kitsch – it is ironic that they think they distinguish themselves simply by treating kitsch without irony.

Not coincidentally, Andy Warhol played a part in this movement for the revival of ‘traditional’ skills, as a co-founder – along with other prominent collectors of late nineteenth-century French Academic art – of the New York Academy of Art (a school that does not fully subscribe to the Classical Realism manifesto, but which must have helped inspire it). The ateliers teach a standardised brand of nostalgia-tinged post-modern bad taste; but that they do so in the name of tradition demands the strongest challenge from those who really care about the tradition and hope to save something of it, and for it.

V

Conclusions

The intellectualisation of art education happened relatively recently only because measures taken during the nineteenth century, tying Fine Art more closely to Applied Art in the hope of improving industrial design, caused a delay. It had to happen eventually, since art had already been intellectualised – in the 1790s, Schiller wrote: “The older poets touch us through nature, through sensual truth, through the living present; the modern ones touch us through ideas.”⁸⁸ It was – and still is – the time of the Man of Ideas. But Schiller was clear: this meant a break with tradition; perhaps it even implied the end of the tradition as art became primarily a commentary on, and criticism of, itself. Excellence in craft amounted to less than ever before; after the tradition – as the complacent, vacuous academic art of the nineteenth century goes to show – the craft was no longer carrying enough meaning to sustain the old subjects.

Whatever the root cause, or causes, of the change, it was obvious that anyone training as an artist would have to be intellectually prepared for the new situation in which there was no agreement over what art was, because the very sense of what art was *for* was disappearing. Artists would have to develop their own justification for their work; painters could no longer think of themselves simply as ‘practitioners of painting’, they would also have to know how to give an answer to the question, *why paint now?*

The English art schools could not carry on ignoring the pertinence of this question. Already back in 1880 Ruskin was regretting that “the art-education of our Government schools is addressed so definitely to the guidance of the artisan”.⁸⁹ Coldstream had the same regret, and he meant for art to be treated more seriously in this extended period of crisis.

He and his committee cannot be blamed for everything that went wrong in art schools: the gradual demise of disciplined practice; the degrading of drawing and painting as art media; the dissolution, under the influence of critical theory, of the study of art into the study of everything else, without history, without

⁸⁸ F. Schiller, *On the Naïve and Sentimental in Literature*, (trans. H. Watanabe-O’Kelly), Manchester, Carcanet New Press, 1981, p. 40.

⁸⁹ J. Ruskin, *A Joy Forever*, p. 135.

What Happened to the Art Schools?

even the idea of quality, until the average student came to see art as a matter of therapy and politicised fashion statements. The zeitgeist was behind all that. But Coldstream, and those on his committee who shared the best of his intentions, certainly can be blamed for not foreseeing what destruction their reforms might allow, and for not doing more to try to counter the zeitgeist. They were naïve; they were themselves too much the intellectuals, unaware how rarefied their milieu really was – and unaware that rather than being extended it would be driven underground by their reforms.

The intellectualisation brought about in art schools was entirely phoney, motivated by a heightened anxiety among art teachers – teachers who did not have the same intellectual confidence as Coldstream and his ilk – about art’s status now in the sphere of higher education. Once so many art schools were fully absorbed into institutions of higher education – universities, eventually – that anxiety was compounded by the need to redefine Art as a research-based subject so as to secure departmental funding.

Modernism – as an attempt at finding a justification for art in a secular and scientific age – had already insisted that art should be ‘experimental’; and now art really had to be taught under the pretence of scientific enquiry. The more it was taught that art was the product of experimentation, the less it would seem that art should be perfected by constant practice, and the less it would seem that art should be the product of – and expression of – tradition. Indeed experimentalism came to seem the way out of tradition.

Less educated art teachers believed that they were finally making art cleverer, even though, as Edgar Wind pointed out in his excellent book of essays, *Art and Anarchy*, “artists today understand far less of science than they did in the sixteenth or seventeenth century.”⁹⁰ Emancipation from tradition leads to all sorts of ignorance; thus the interdisciplinarians seem to have been unaware that a traditional art education was more truly interdisciplinary than anything they could implement. In the very first academies of art, such as Zuccari’s Accademia di San Luca founded in Rome in 1577, painters would have received lectures on mathematics and physics, because they were essential to their studies

⁹⁰ E. Wind, *Art and Anarchy*, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1964, p. 20.

in architecture.⁹¹ Artists were made broad-minded then out of necessity, not for the sake of inspiration.

As Gombrich noted in his *Reflections on Teaching Art History in Art Schools*, “Some artists were tremendously articulate, and I am not only thinking of Leonardo, the great scientist, of Michelangelo, the great poet, or of Rubens, the scholar and diplomat, but also of Delacroix, the diarist, of van Gogh, the incomparable letter writer, even of Cezanne whose correspondence with his school friend Zola shows a most educated and a most articulate writer.”⁹² The intellectualising modern art teachers were soon so well emancipated from tradition that they hardly even knew how poorly they measured up – intellectually as well as practically – to older artists. Edgar Wind echoed Gombrich’s point and went on to state: “I have never met a significant painter or sculptor who did not speak and think exceedingly well.”⁹³ No one who moves in art circles these days could fail to notice that painters almost always come across as better educated yet still more curious, subtler and more coherent in conversation than the ‘conceptual’ artists who put such store in the importance of their own ideas alone. Partly this is because dedication to a traditional craft naturally develops one’s historical sense: when one is all too aware of what has already been done one can find neither the cause nor the time for such boasting – instead, practice comes to seem most important.

As the Fine Art degree was becoming widespread there was, at last, growing agreement about what art was (if not what it was for): art was only whatever the artist said it was. It is the most dismal definition – really an anti-definition; and, because the study of art had to be more self-directed to justify the awarding of degrees, art schools too easily fell upon an ideal of master-less education. They came to offer nothing more than an environment in which anything goes; but ‘anything goes’ really means ‘anything but’ – anything but dedicated practice.

Fine Art degree courses are designed for students to explore their animalistic creativity, in order to satisfy tired critical theories and thus to demonstrate that art can be anything except what it used to be. They succeed in this depressing

⁹¹ Pevsner, *Academies of Art Past and Present*, op.cit. p. 51.

⁹² E.H. Gombrich, *Reflections on teaching art history in art schools*, paper given 4th January, 1966.

⁹³ Wind, op. cit., p. 58.

What Happened to the Art Schools?

demonstration only because their routines leave no room for the intellectual subtlety, or the patience and humility, that the proper study of painting requires. On the Fine Art degree course painting is almost set up to fail, to prove its own irrelevance in contemporary art.

This problem is everywhere. Explaining why it had been necessary back in 1963 to found the New York Studio School of Drawing, Painting and Sculpture, Mercedes Matter put it thus: "... I consider art education, in so many cases, a farce, a packaged deal: the student receives the compensation of a degree in exchange for giving up the training he really wanted to have. A Bachelor of Fine Arts degree is usually a certificate of the fact that its recipient has *not* been studying art at Such-and-Such a college for four years."⁹⁴ In Britain, it took longer for those most concerned with the teaching of drawing and painting to come to the same realisation, in large part because the absorption of British art schools into universities had been such a gradual process; but by around the year 2000 there was a common understanding that here too drawing and painting would have to be separated out from the Fine Art degree.

Just as 'Beaux-Arts' came to denote a lamentable style of teaching, so might 'Fine Art' now – and the most promising developments in art education have positioned themselves against it. The Royal Drawing School recreates, perhaps as well as is possible nowadays, what the art school experience was like at the last moment when making art was still generally considered a matter of practice and conviction, not 'research'. The Turps Banana Art School, in its post-YBA stance, seems to be giving young painters a new confidence that painting really can be 'relevant' again – that they no longer have to accept that the position they are taking is so conservative. And there is overlap between these two schools, since many students attend one and then the other.

Yet it must be admitted that, despite their enthusiasm, in general the students' work is not competent enough to impress as it could. Romantic primitivism, that superstitious old doctrine according to which too much learning will harm the imagination – as if Michelangelo's expertise ever restricted his invention! – is still being pushed by painting teachers, especially those who are less confident

⁹⁴ M. Matter, *How do you Learn to be an Artist?* The New York Times, Sep 2nd 1973.

of their own education. If only Reynolds's *Ironical Discourse* could be made compulsory reading then students and teachers alike might be embarrassed away from such ideas – romantic primitivism could not seem so new and exciting with the knowledge that it was already tiresome centuries ago.

The principal factor in the average quality of the work must, however, be the students' lack of preliminary study. Postgraduate study really should not have to be about remedial drawing lessons. In the nineteenth century it was always assumed that the rudiments of the craft would be learnt in a private studio before a student even applied to a school like the *École des Beaux-Arts*, which, while offering what it would have seen as corrective instruction, was meant more to provide workspace, routine, community, and contact with a variety of recognised masters with different points of view.⁹⁵ The story of modern art education may be told most simply as the cancelling of the first part, the repetitious study of the craft, to focus more and more on the second part, the introduction to the daily concerns of the mature and independent artist.

Before the Coldstream Reports, students working towards the NDD in local art colleges had at least practised for years, from a young age, before entering the pressurised and disputatious environment of, say, the Royal College of Art. The Foundation Course, as recommended in the Coldstream Reports, was always a compromise, intended to ensure that something like a basis in craft was still offered. But even the best – most rigorously practical – Foundation courses were too short, at only a year long, and the students, now being school-leavers, were already too old to be making a start.

On glancing through any catalogue of Modern British painting, the results of the change are starkly apparent: most of the artists trained before the '60s seem timidly drifting, lagging, even lost in the wake of the Parisian avant-garde, but almost without exception their work is very well constructed; while the work of artists trained after the '60s – after the “destruction of drawing in the art schools” which Hockney called “almost criminal”⁹⁶ – is bolder in conception and more exuberant in execution, yet gravely lacking in structure, in density and

⁹⁵ A. Boime, *The Academy and French Painting in the Nineteenth Century*, Phaidon, 1971, p. 23.

⁹⁶ D. Hockney, in Interview with Peter Fuller, 1977.

What Happened to the Art Schools?

intensity – the expressions may seem harder hitting but they cannot reach so deep.

The most accomplished students today are struggling to attain a competence in drawing that, before the '60s, would have been considered the minimum standard at any serious art school. Enthusiasm may be high again, but standards are low. Of course many students and teachers are unaware of how standards have dropped, and many gallerists and collectors are unconcerned as long as the product appears visceral and decorative enough; but those who are aware and concerned must recognise that any rise in standards will take more than one generation to achieve. The Royal Drawing School has already brought in short courses for schoolchildren, and there are further plans to collaborate on extending the more serious practice of drawing to younger age groups, with the idea that drawing should be taught as a life skill. But the idea is not new. In 1882, William Morris declared: "Everybody ought to be taught to draw, just as much as everybody ought to be taught to read and write."⁹⁷ Ruskin had made similar appeals.⁹⁸ Even in more favourable times, such famous pleas fell on deaf ears.

⁹⁷ Pevsner, *op. cit.*, p. 263.

⁹⁸ J. Ruskin, *Education in Art* (collected together with *A Joy Forever*, Simplicissimus reprint) para. 153.

VI

How to Put Things Right

Agree Definitions, and Allow for Structured Practice towards a Liberating Technique

In a perfect world, an A-level in Rudimentary Drawing instead of Fine Art might serve as a preliminary to further study at art school; but for this and any other drawing course – never mind the problem of finding any number of people able to teach it – a working definition of drawing must be agreed that does justice to the excellence achieved in times past, and suggests what the use of such excellence might be in today's society, both in and outside the art world.

Hesitancy about defining what set of skills – of the eye and the hand and, above all, the brain – and what processes make up the rudiments of drawing, is due to the muddle left over from Modernism. It has been assumed that since Modernist styles diverged so far from naturalistic representation, and since photography makes such quick and easy work of reproducing appearances, the old art school exercises, which were directed towards developing observational accuracy – copying, drawing casts, and working from life – are of less use.

Though it may be true that naturalistic representation will not be enough to justify painting as a means to art, it is obvious that a painter's accuracy, however outlandish his style, in the end determines the quality of his expressions. And the best way to learn accuracy – an accuracy which should, with the right guidance, lead to understanding – is still by those same old exercises, directed at observing and representing the human form. As Lecoq explained: "The reasons for employing as copies drawings of the human face, especially in teaching beginners, are very strong. They are much more vividly impressed by the particular character of a face than by the character of any other object."⁹⁹ Anyone who has ever drawn a human face knows this simple truth, that recognisable character is found only by the most fractional adjustment of lines; thus by drawing the face one learns how much to ask of oneself in drawing, always, whatever the object. Unfortunately, today's art teachers have not necessarily tried to draw a human face for themselves.

⁹⁹ Lecoq de Boisbaudran, p. 120.

What Happened to the Art Schools?

Students – and many teachers alike – ought to be reminded that the best Modernist painters, Beckmann, Matisse and Picasso, all went through those old exercises; and it is clear that they understood how much it profited them because they always recommended such study to others. They were not ‘put in a box’ by the experience; rather, it liberated them. Yet it is also clear that for the students at the new Classical Realist ateliers who are put through apparently similar exercises, the experience is only constricting. Then again, a total lack of technical instruction is inevitably constricting.

Bouguereau himself insisted that: “... no will, no perseverance, no obstinacy during one’s later years, can ever make good a lack of practice. And is there any anguish like that of the artist who feels the realization of his dream compromised by the impotence of his execution?”¹⁰⁰ Quite right; yet we may well judge that Bouguereau’s own dream was compromised by the false facility of his execution. It is easy to see why so many art teachers try to duck this complicated problem altogether. But they had not always ducked it; and if it is ever to be faced again, we must be careful to distinguish between a constricting technique and a liberating technique.

The Baroque painter, Charles Alphonse Du Fresnoy, wrote a Latin poem on The Art of Painting which was so full of good sense that a century after its composition Reynolds was still treating it almost as gospel. Du Fresnoy was in contact with the most highly esteemed graduates of the Carracci school, such as Francesco Albani, yet even back then in the mid-seventeenth century he knew the risk – and the real fear – of constricting technique. He explained his “liberal purpose” thus:

Nor shall my rules the Artist’s hand confine,
Whom Practice gives to strike the free design;
Or banish Fancy from her fairy plains,
Or fetter Genius in didactic chains...¹⁰¹

The re-discovery of a liberating technique will depend not just on practice, but on practice directed by what Lecoq so confidently called “true principles”.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ W.A Bouguereau, in *Artists on Art*, eds. R. Goldwater and M. Treves, Pantheon Books, 1974.

¹⁰¹ C.A. Du Fresnoy, *The Art of Painting*, trans. W. Mason, printed by A. Ward, 1783, p. 4, ll. 41-45.

These principles must be rationally deduced and re-asserted. Modern educators may be wary of such notions; but however the process is called, it could begin with a more conscientious historicising of painting practice.

Bring Art History back into Practice

A careful balance must here be maintained. As Reynolds explained in a note to Du Fresnoy's poem: "If Practice advances too far before Theory, her guide, she is likely to lose her way, and if she keeps too far behind, to be discouraged."¹⁰³ ['Theory' here of course meant traditionally-held principles, not critical theories.] To achieve the correct balance between theory and practice, in the first place Art History would have to be re-emphasised as something more than 'complementary' study, so that it seeps out of the lecture theatre and permeates the studios – so that "the theory of art can be *felt*".¹⁰⁴ Old art must be brought to life, and then the students will know that it is forever relevant. Tonks had managed to do just that, as John Fothergill recounted in 1907:

*[The Slade's] attitude towards the Old Masters is not one of ceremonies and conventional admiration; it suggests no attempt to bandage the eyes of the student and blind him to what is not to be found in their works. It is rather a love of, and familiarity with, the old work, a habit of living easily with it and constantly referring to it for help in difficulties.*¹⁰⁵

It sounds ideal. And as for what should be taught in the lecture theatres, Gombrich had these wise words:

...if I were given the task of teaching art students now (and, in addition, a few sabbatical years to prepare myself for such a course) I should not try to teach them the history of styles which marches from Romanesque via Gothic to the Renaissance. I should try to investigate with them what it was like to be an artist in the past,

¹⁰² Lecoq de Boisbaudran, op. cit., p. 103.

¹⁰³ J. Reynolds in C. A. Du Fresnoy, op.cit., p. 71.

¹⁰⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ Quoted in M.C. Potter (ed), op.cit., p. 132.

What Happened to the Art Schools?

*what tasks he had to perform and in what concrete contexts the works of art took shape which we still admire. It sounds easy and even trite, but if you tried to take this programme seriously you might soon find that the relevant information has hardly begun to be sifted and assessed.*¹⁰⁶

The art historian Michael Podro – whom Pevsner had invited onto the art historical panel that was part of the Council for the implementation of the Dip AD – did devote much of his time to teaching in art schools, giving special consideration to what it was that art students in particular might benefit from knowing. Perhaps his most innovative move while at Camberwell in the ‘60s was to write a course called ‘The Training of the Artist’, explaining in eight lectures exactly how artists had been taught in every period since the Renaissance.¹⁰⁷ Podro’s efforts may seem even more admirable, because back then he was mostly preaching to the unconvertible – those rebellious students who were rubbishing the Arnoldian view of culture to stay blissfully ignorant in the new dawn.

John Updike’s 1959 short story, *Still Life*, based on his experiences at the Ruskin School in Oxford in 1954-5 on a Knox Fellowship, gives an invaluable sense of the atmosphere in an old-fashioned art school just before the reforms, and reminds us of the struggle against Art History – against the art and the history – that Podro would have faced. Updike describes how it seemed to the students that the plaster casts of classical statuary “swarmed down the corridors and gestured under high archways in a kind of petrified rot.” While drawing from those casts, Robin – the love interest in the story – says: “Gives me the shivers all over, being in this rotten place... If these old things are timeless, I’d rather be timely by a long shot.” But many of today’s students are different, as the growing popularity of the Classical Realist movement goes to show.

It is not that the Arnoldian view of culture has completely returned; it is more that anything old-fashioned, such as drawing from casts, to them seems mysteriously important, perhaps as a clue to a way out of both Modern and Post-Modern culture. They are likely to think that the teachers still pushing romantic

¹⁰⁶ Gombrich, *Reflections of Teaching Art History in Art Schools*, op. cit.

¹⁰⁷ *Art History in the Art School*, B. Williamson, in Llewellyn (ed.), op. cit., p. 78.

primitivism, or ‘visual culture’ as a means to deconstruct art, are the real fogeys; such students are interested only in learning to do things *right*.

For this reason, a new historical course of *The Training of the Artist* could find a receptive audience, and provide a useful corrective for the easy answers given in the Classical Realist ateliers, by making plain that though certain exercises have always proved useful, there never has been one right way to draw or paint. In conjunction with a course such as Gombrich advised, on what it was like and what it meant to be an artist in different times and places, they might then come to understand how everything in painting was justified by the need for art, and that the sort of smudging around and polishing off that is characteristic of the official art of the nineteenth century is, far from being the right way, only decadence – the result of a loss of artistic purpose.

Art teachers tend to write off the students who have gone to the Classical Realist ateliers as unteachable. Undoubtedly the over-confidence that comes with the students’ belief that they have learnt the ‘secrets’, and the corruption of their taste towards the cheapest effects, makes teaching them hard work. But an effort has to be made to engage them, because they are young people seriously interested in learning about painting, and if they went about it the wrong way they did so mostly because no similarly practical or apparently rigorous course was on offer elsewhere. Art teachers may complain of the result, but it is partly their fault for not offering a good enough alternative.

With the appropriate art historical grounding and practical justification, there seems no real reason why the old exercises could not be brought back to art schools in some form – only the most doctrinaire primitivist could object to art students now having the opportunity to experience what it would have been like to study art before. The Classical Realists might be tempted back into the mainstream; and then for those other students who are not so concerned with what is old, such a course of study could at least worry them about their complacency regarding traditional skills by reminding them how many more thousands of hours old artists had put in. There are lots of reasons no one can paint like the Old Masters anymore: our culture has changed. But all students should at least be aware that their chances would be improved were they similarly trained. The technical superiority of the Old Masters may seem

What Happened to the Art Schools?

astounding, but it is quite explicable; and it should be explained, in order to emphasise the greater mystery of the Old Masters' poetic imagination.

To Make Art Fine Again, Align it with Craft

Even if there were general agreement to bring about such changes to the study of art – and that in itself would be miraculous – it could not be done quickly. Perhaps only a handful of teachers today would be capable of teaching the resulting course. There is, in the meantime, an easy step that could be taken in the right direction: the study of Fine Art should be brought back closer again to the study of Applied Arts. And it should be done for the opposite reason than that for which the two were brought together during the Industrial Revolution: not so that the artists' sophistication might rub off on the designers, but so that some of the designers' competence and diligence might now rub off on the artists.

Walking around almost any art school now, you see the respect for standards in drawing improve dramatically as you leave the Fine Art department and head into Illustration, Animation, Games, or Theatre Design. Some of the teachers who are most serious about drawing have found their way into these departments, having jumped or been pushed from Fine Art. But the greater difference here is with the students, because they are studying only to refine a skill that is necessary in a competitive workplace and not to express themselves, loosely, in their own way in their own time. In the larger art schools that still have Life Rooms you may come across the odd rebellious Fine Art student still trying to study the figure, but he or she will always be terribly outnumbered by the Applied Arts students – even the Classical Realist ateliers attract Games and Animation students who need to know more about the body in movement.

The most instructive case study for the benefit of keeping the Fine and Applied close together, is the City and Guilds art school, which has always been independent and less affected by fashions. There they run a Fine Art course, but also a unique course on Historic Carving – divided into Ornamental Woodcarving and Gilding, and Architectural Stone Carving – accepting only a small number of students who might wish to develop a professional practice, perhaps in building restoration and masonry.

For the students of historic carving, there is no faking it: they will have to master the craft to get a job in such a limited field. The course takes them through the methods and materials, when they were used and what for. It may be an Applied Art course, but it is more like what a Fine Art course used to be. The Historic Carving students share the Life Room with the Fine Art students, but they turn up earlier, work harder and, on average, draw much better: they draw with purpose, to understand, quite as the best – and most artful – draftsmen always have. Perhaps some of the Fine Art students beside them may be spurred on by their example; and, wondering why they cannot perform these basic skills to the same level, they might grow competitive about it. No doubt all of the Fine Art students recognise the deficit in skill; but there is also a danger that those who are not motivated to keep up simply decide – hiding their envy – that the fact that these historic carvers draw better just proves how trivial drawing skills now are.

The Historic Carving course does, in fact, attract some students who have dropped out in disappointment from Fine Art courses – the same sort of students who just want to learn by making, without critical theory, who might otherwise end up in the Classical Realist ateliers. But the most appealing thing about the course is how gently and naturally it introduces those students who meant only to learn a craft, to the glories of art. On a visit to the school it was moving to hear a mature student, who has already had a career as a mason to which he will return, talk with the most grateful enthusiasm for the statuary he saw in Rome where he had recently been sent on a scholarship. He was obviously touched and invigorated; having practised the craft himself, he was ready to see truly what was there – he discovered art, as a living process.

That we can never know who will be struck by art, or when, is the best of all reasons for putting art and craft back together again, more as they were before the efforts of the Coldstream Committee to make Fine Art an ‘academic’ subject. Jane Greenham, who has taught at the Ruskin and at the Royal Academy, remembers her time most fondly at Maidstone College of Art, where the students were mostly “sombre” and “uneducated”, but, “they made good work and one felt it was really worthwhile teaching them”.¹⁰⁸ As there is no

¹⁰⁸ Jane Greenham, *Interview*

What Happened to the Art Schools?

accounting for artistic talent – for sensitivity, and deeper understanding, and creative spark – there is all the more reason for art schools to stress craft, which can be accounted for.

It is worthwhile noting and reflecting on the fact that in the '20s at the Royal College of Art, the students who went on to be the most celebrated artists, Eric Ravilious and Edward Bawden, were enrolled at the Design School not the Painting School; and as their talent became obvious, students at the painting school were envious and wished to be relegated to Design where all the art was happening.¹⁰⁹

Perhaps it is especially important that today's more fashionably-minded art students, all carrying an instantaneous image-maker in their pockets, learn what it is – what it feels like, and what it means – to craft an image by hand and mind. As Nicholas Hilliard explained, in *The Arte of Limning*, c.1600:

*For it cannot be said that a man, be he never so cunning by teaching or natural inclination, yet it will grow out of him as hair out of the head, or fall from him whether he will or no, but with great labour; and this comfort shall he have then above others, even a heaven of joy in his heart to behold his own well doings remaining to his credit forever.*¹¹⁰

Expert craftsmanship may be difficult to acquire; but in no small part because of that difficulty, it is a pleasure to acquire; and the pleasure is redoubled with the dignity gained from honest work – this is as true now as it was four hundred years ago. Though today's students may come from the 'selfie' culture, they can escape it – even into art – as soon as they realise what other, opposite, rewards are to be found through dedicated practice.

Study from Life

Study in a Life Room may be especially useful, but not necessarily for the reasons usually given. When I began researching this essay, I was worried by the complacency of so many critics of contemporary art schools who seemed to

¹⁰⁹ Huxley (Ed.), op. cit. p. 10.

¹¹⁰ N. Hilliard, *The Arte of Limning*, Carcanet Press Ltd., new edition 1980, p. 47.

assume that if Life Rooms were just put back then all problems would be solved. I was aware of how pointless Life drawing can seem when it is not well explained to the students what the exercise is for; I had seen how little the students then gain from it – most never improve. Even the more advanced and engaged students, who do try to profit from the exercise, often find themselves stuck without the proper instruction; as Sickert had said: “You can’t keep on painting a very nice woman who comes from Chelsea and takes her clothes off and sits on a box and think that will teach you how to paint a picture like the ‘Battle of the Centaurs’.”¹¹¹ I was also aware of how the Life Room scenario has at times been subverted, exploitatively, to become less about an exercise in drawing and more about a visceral experience. And when that is done – when it becomes only about how do *I* feel about this – then it is all in vain.

Yet it occurs to me now that there are secondary benefits in the experience of the Life Room, as long as it properly controlled. If offered as a privilege to students who have already advanced through basic drawing lessons, Life drawing may serve as an initiation: since this is something that artists have always done, the students should be impressed by a sense of duty to the tradition. Entering a Life Room for the first time is strange and shocking; this is the inner sanctum of the art school, and the very presence of the nude model naturally keeps order. The ritual is one of respectfully hushed contemplation; and, crucially, it is contemplation of the *other* – of an existence beyond the self, laid bare. As a result of the experience, the students may become less self-conscious in their work; and best of all, they may be better prepared to understand art as an act of worshipful witness, which is what it has always really been.

Relevance is not Fashionability: Let Painting Stay Painting

The objections to a renewed emphasis on traditional craftsmanship – no matter how thoroughly it were contextualised – would be predictable enough: they would ask why we should start initiating students into a practice that has no proven cultural relevance anymore. The hero in Updike’s story, falling under the influence of his teacher’s “musty aesthetic”, “...began to feel that indeed there

¹¹¹ In Gruetzner Robins, op. cit., p. 662.

What Happened to the Art Schools?

was, in the precise contour of a shoulder and the unique shape of space framed between Apollo's legs, something intensely important." But to feel that, was he also losing touch with the modern world around him? Was his discovery of art just a retreat into the past? The question was not often asked back then, but now it plays on every mind concerned with art education. And of course, different sorts of educators arrive at different answers.

The response at Central Saint Martins has been to relocate behind Kings Cross, just across the road from Google's London headquarters and other tech firms, as part of an endeavour to help students out of the studio and into the modern world. CSM wants to make students as professionally adaptable as possible, confident in working with people from other fields, perhaps to be aesthetic consultants for new global technology – another utopian project. The school building itself – a converted granary – is spotless, with sliding doors, a bank of receptionists, designer coffee shops, a covered atrium, and a whole floor of offices for its administrators. It is impressive; and the students will not be intimidated by the fashionable corporate world if they do eventually make it there. However positive, however daring CSM's move may seem, it was taken to avoid the risk – already minimal at an interdisciplinary art school – of getting too stuck on art and thus holding the students back.

Yet at the newer schools devoted to drawing and painting, there is a real risk of cosiness – of mistaking what is merely a private club, for a community. While their proposition is attractive to many students, there are other students who are no less committed to painting who yet feel they must face up directly to the challenge of the idea that art can be anything, and so they make their way back to Fine Art – as if having to separate out a Drawing or Painting course were really an admission of defeat. Theirs is an admirable stance; but for whatever they gain in self-direction and determination from the experience, there is the worry that they miss out on the simple practical advice that only an experienced painter can give them and which might save them years of error.

This problem of relevance – and students' worrying about the relevance of their education – came along inevitably with progressive avant-gardist thinking. It arose before the '60s; but there can be no doubt that it was exacerbated by the reforms that were meant to solve it, when they turned an education for art into

the study of what is fashionable in art. The re-assertion of ‘true principles’ may help here too: is it impossible that an art school could find a justification for the relevance of its curriculum in its efforts to avoid any hint of fashion, just as used to be done?

Relevance in artistic expression is the same thing as significance – it cannot be accounted for because it is only another product of talent. Deliberate efforts to make relevant art are always embarrassing, because they are no more than efforts at following fashion. The argument would be simple: since we cannot know what will appear relevant in the future, we cannot teach the making of relevant art; but by concentrating more on historical standards in art we can help the students to develop their talents, thus increasing the possibility that one day they should be able to produce something of ‘relevance’.

It is all very well for CSM to direct its students into “making something authentic to their experience”.¹¹² There just seems no good reason to assume that whatever they make will be relevant as art just because it is authentic, if they do not have the artistic means to realise their vision; and there seems no good reason to assume that they would not have a better chance of making something relevant as art – which would still, necessarily, be authentic to their experience – if they knew more and cared more for the historical standards in art. And what if painting were about to become all the more relevant as an art medium?

Walter Benjamin declared that in the most perfect reproduction only one thing is lacking: “... the here and now of the work of art – its unique existence in a particular place. It is this unique existence – and nothing else – that bears the mark of the history to which the work has been subject.”¹¹³ But what if he was not quite right? Defiantly, there is more to the original artwork than the mark of history: there is also the mark of the expert hand, more precious because, as it follows thought and feeling, it is personal and not merely historical – it is expressive as well as communicative. An art object’s “sensitive core” is not, primarily, its “authenticity”;¹¹⁴ it is the personality imprinted by the artist,

¹¹² Mark Dunhill, *Interview*.

¹¹³ W. Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*.

¹¹⁴ *ibid.*

What Happened to the Art Schools?

through craft. We might value that even more nowadays, because it is so lacking in all the mechanical imagery around us.

The case can and should be made: art is personal, and it happens in the making. But that does not – must not – mean a return to a Romantic “hyper-individualism”. Deanna Petherbridge, Professor of Drawing at the RCA from 1995-2001 and author of *The Primacy of Drawing: Histories and Theories of Practice* (Yale, 2010), suggests that in addition to students “learning to see (critically), and learning to represent through acquiring skills *other...* [than those of] photography, video, computer editing, etc...”, any return to the ideal of art as an “act of witness” will be predicated on how well that ideal can be argued out for our time.¹¹⁵ A hundred year after Duchamp’s *Fountain* – the first downgrading of drawing and painting – the arguments will have to be subtle; but if they are subtle enough, then the students might be persuaded of the relevance – the permanent relevance – of art, before worrying so much about the relevance of their subject-matter.

The act of witness is specifically personal; but it ought also to be a faithful reaction to – or reflection on – the world beyond the self. By arguing for art as an act of witness, therefore, it becomes easier to discuss again what might be the proper standards for art. And with a return to standards, it would of course become much easier to teach.

Then it might simply be contended, as it was by John Constable, that art – art achieved through drawing and painting – is “a regularly taught profession; that it is *scientific* as well as *poetic*”.¹¹⁶ [Though it must be made clear that the ‘scientific’ component is not some strange complementary study to be delivered in the lecture theatre; rather it is embedded in the practice – it is what Leonardo called the “*scientia della pittura*”;¹¹⁷ it is Lecoq’s “true principles”.] The contention could be extended to make plain how unhelpful it is to separate theory from practice, the mind from the hand, the intellect from the imagination or the critical from the creative, because in the best art the making and the meaning – the science and the poetry – are always one.

¹¹⁵ D. Petherbridge, by email.

¹¹⁶ Constable, in Leslie, op. cit., p. 259.

¹¹⁷ Pevsner, op. cit., p. 30.

The mystery of art, when it strikes us most profoundly – when it just seems *true* – is that the distinction between subjectivity and objectivity has dissolved. And expert craftsmanship – accurate, articulate, yet also self-expressive – is the only means to that dissolving into relevance.

Teach Liberally

Teachers must be dissuaded from ever fighting their own battles through their students; the most effective teachers – those who promoted a liberating technique – have, in their wisdom, always known to teach in a liberal manner too. Of course Reynolds firmly believed that art should be a regularly taught profession, and yet he was careful to remind his students that “... a man, looking for real and lasting reputation, must unlearn much of the common-place method” that he himself was suggesting as exemplary in the work of Old Masters.¹¹⁸ Students, in order to become artists, must eventually find their own way. And to that end Reynolds urged his students to forget who was speaking to them and, ultimately, to take responsibility for themselves: “We can teach you here but very little; you are henceforth to be your own teachers.”¹¹⁹ He was wise enough to know that “We prefer those instructions which we have given ourselves, from our affection to the instructor; and they are more effectual, from being received into the mind at the very time when it is most open and eager to receive them.”¹²⁰

Lecoq made a related point, addressed directly to teachers rather than to impressionable students: “Teachers must recognise that, in the application of any method, its fundamental and characteristic principle must be rigidly observed. The same is not true, however, of its auxiliary means, which should be varied to suit different temperaments and should be applied in the way that helps them best in the direction of their natural bent.”¹²¹

The failure to recognise this, under the pressure of Modernist progress, was calamitous for art education and, as it follows, for art. From the Bauhaus

¹¹⁸ Reynolds, op. cit., Discourse XIV.

¹¹⁹ *ibid*, Discourse VI.

¹²⁰ *ibid*, Discourse II.

¹²¹ Lecoq de Boisbaudran, op.cit., p.57.

What Happened to the Art Schools?

devotees who, encouraged by Herbert Read, fought for Abstraction and against Life Rooms, to the Coldstream devotees who at the same time fought for ‘point-to-point’ drawing in every art school to wipe out the Beaux-Arts tradition, right through to the development of the ‘anything goes’ curriculum which really meant ‘anything but’, true principles were forgotten and art teaching – perhaps inevitably – became wildly illiberal.

Any reform in art teaching now should be aimed above all at returning to the liberal implementation of true principles; art programmes must endeavour to stop initiating students into only post ‘60s art, as the mainstream interdisciplinary schools do, or into only late nineteenth-century academic art as the Classical Realist ateliers do, or into only modernist painting as many of the left-over painting teachers do, brought up as they were with the doctrine of romantic primitivism. Students would be better served by a system designed to give them a fair introduction to the whole tradition – to the best which has been thought and painted – and to give them the freedom to build their own relation to it.

However disappointing his agenda may seem when written out in the Reports, Coldstream himself ran the Slade so liberally that it was very nearly, and truly, ‘anything goes’; and the results – the diverse artists of that ‘50s generation – speak for themselves. But not only did the students then have more background in drawing, they had a teacher who knew what good painting was. And that was down to Tonks.

Tonks, worrying that the young Coldstream was yet too much the ideas man – that his hand was not well enough trained to keep up with his mind – recommended his going on after the Slade to study with Sickert, where he might learn by example how a serious intellectual can also take his craft seriously. In addition, Tonks arranged more lessons for Coldstream with an elderly acquaintance who had trained as a coach painter. Coldstream was greatly affected by this encounter: “He [the coach painter] had enormous manual skill, and he taught me how much paint should be put on the brush and how to do a straight line. He taught as one might teach golf or billiards, and I liked that

attitude.”¹²² It is this sort of sensitivity to the needs of the individual – especially technical needs – that the current system of art education tends to restrict.

Allow for More Diverse and Specialised Courses

Following the success of the Royal Drawing School, a number of smaller schools have opened, such as the Essential School of Painting and the New School of Art, mainly offering shorter courses focused on particular practices and techniques, for example painting the nude, or the urban landscape, or the use of egg tempera. The courses are all led by artists working primarily in these specialised areas, and teaching according to their own experience – teaching only what they know best.

At the moment, such courses tend to attract an older crowd, mostly because they are quite expensive and, since they cannot give recognised qualifications, the students cannot apply for loans. Art students can only afford to go to art schools because the art schools award degrees; but while the art schools are attached to universities, they have to downplay the craft on their courses somewhat, in order to secure their funding. A quick solution might be for art departments to admit what they cannot do, and begin to cooperate with these smaller schools, sending students out for the remedial classes they might need or the specialist assistance they might want.

Short ‘Masterclasses’ and ‘Workshops’ are already very popular in America with student painters, and this sort of system could be expected to produce superior results. After all, we know that the best painters in history learnt their craft directly as apprentices to established masters – masters whose tastes and styles and other prejudices could be taken into account when applying – rather than only in art schools which have to be everything to all students.

In *Academies of Art, Past and Present*, Pevsner traced the birth of every art academy or school – from the very first, established in Florence only after Michelangelo – to almost exactly the moment in which a local artistic tradition was dying; and he quoted Fuseli, summing it up: “All schools of painters, whether public or private, supported by patronage or individual contribution

¹²² Morris, *Henry Tonks and 'The Art of Pure Drawing'*, op. cit., p. 13.

What Happened to the Art Schools?

were, and are, symptoms of art in distress, monuments of public dereliction and decay of taste.”¹²³ Art is now in crisis as much if not more than it has ever been, and so we really need art schools to foster artistic community – at this moment, we need to club together. But if a workshop model could be established alongside the schools, to consolidate the students’ particularly skills, we might see benefits sooner.

A New Justification for the Art School

But what if standards of drawing and painting were to rise, without effecting any ‘relevant’ art? That is possible, even most likely; and it raises again that “social question”. CSM graduates may more easily find work outside of art than students trained only to be competent at drawing and painting – CSM, across all its many courses, is offering not so much an education directed at producing relevant art, as an education relevant to the world beyond the art school. Falmouth’s Drawing degree course aspires to something similar; but while it is still possible, and always laudable, to argue for drawing as a life skill, as a way of collecting and organising thought that is equivalent but different to writing – and which has for that reason been used by great writers such as Goethe – it has to be admitted that most of the old applications for drawing are lost.

Ruskin thought drawing essential for its “power of notation and description”, defining it as concerned with “the record of form, just as arithmetic is concerned with the record of number”.¹²⁴ But photography does that better, and quicker. The grand idea of the Bauhaus, to reinvigorate modern design through craft and break down the art world altogether by returning to the medieval guild system, has obviously failed. So we are back to where the modern art school started, the situation that led Caspar David Friedrich to exclaim: “Does it really mean rendering a service to art, if our academicians toil to force nothingness up to mediocrity? I think, not.”¹²⁵

But I think, yes: a good training in drawing really does render a service to art, even if the drawings the students produce are no better than mediocre. It rarely

¹²³ Pevsner, *op. cit.*, p. 195.

¹²⁴ Ruskin, *op. cit.*, paragraph 153.

¹²⁵ Pevsner, *op. cit.* p. 204.

leads to a career, but learning to draw is a process of sensitisation, to art and to the world – and to the world through art. This is the virtue of humanistic study, as extolled by Ruskin: “That you wonder more at the work of great men, and that you care more for natural objects.”¹²⁶ Lecoq thought that the general teaching of drawing “would increase the taste for art, and would help to create a public who understood and cared for it, such as artists are always looking for in vain.”¹²⁷ William Morris finished the point:

*The sum of my opinion is that it is not and cannot be the proper business of the Schools of art... to create professional painters or designers, but to teach people to draw and to paint, and to give them information as to the history of the arts, so as thereby to further (spread) the genuine taste for and appreciation of art the wide-spread feeling of which can alone produce true artists.*¹²⁸

In all this is the best answer to the social question – we can be more sure of that now, since we have seen what a society that does not offer a proper training in art comes to look like. There is no new art when old art is not respected, revered, adored as it should be. But it goes both ways: old art lives on in the new; and when there is no new art to carry on the line, the significance of the old will be forgotten.

¹²⁶ J. Ruskin, *Remarks Addressed to the Mansfield Art Night Class, 14 Oct 1873*

¹²⁷ Lecoq de Boisbaudran, op. cit., p. 20.

¹²⁸ W. Morris, *The Collected Letters of William Morris, Volume II, Part B:1885-1888*, Princeton University press, 1987, p. 609-10.

Interviews, Bibliography and References

Interviewees

Kate Aspinall
Phillip Booth
Camilla Cannon
Aisha Christison
Catherine Coldstream
Mark Dunhill
Stephen Farthing
Elizabeth Flood
Sophie Glover
Catherine Goodman
Jane Greenham
Tom Groves
Alison Harper
Israel Hershberg
Eileen Hogan
Timothy Hyman
Ken Kewley
John Lessore
Diane Magee
Lynda Morris
Orlando Mostyn Owen
John Myers
James Napier
Philip Naylor
Andy Pankhurst
Deanna Petherbridge
Neil Powell
Anita Taylor
Alister Warman
Magnus von Wistinghausen
Jo Volley

Bibliography

Boime, Albert, *The Academy and French Painting in the Nineteenth Century*, Phaidon, 1971.

Bowen, Ron, *Drawing Masterclass*, Bulfinch, 1992.

Camp, Jeffery, *Draw: How to Master the Art*, DK, 1984

Camp, Jeffery, *Paint*, DK, 1996.

Dubery, Fred, and John Willats, *Perspective and other drawing systems*, VNR, 1983.

Du Fresnoy, Charles Alphonse, *The Art of Painting*, trans. W. Mason, printed by A. Ward, 1783.

Field, Dick, *Routledge and Kegan Paul, Changes in Art Education*, 1970.

Flam, Jack, ed., *Matisse on Art (Revised Edition)*, UC Press, 1995.

Fuseli, Henry, *Lectures on Painting, Delivered at the Royal Academy*, Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, 1830.

Goldwater, Robert, and Marco Treves, eds., *Artists on Art*, Pantheon Books, 1974.

Harris, Susie, *Nikolaus Pevsner: The Life*, Chatto and Windus, 2011.

Hayes, Colin, *Renoir*, Hamlyn, 1984.

Hayes, Colin, *The Technique of Oil Painting*, B T Batsford Ltd., 1965.

Hazlitt, William, *Table Talk: Essays on Men and Manners*, Bell & Daldy, 1871.

Hilliard, Nicholas, *The Arte of Limning*, Carcanet Press, 1992.

Huxley, Paul, ed., *Exhibition Road, Painters at the Royal College of Art*, Phaidon 1988.

Johnston, Dorothy, ed., *Jacques-Louis David: New Perspectives*, University of Delaware Press, 2006.

Lecoq de Boisbaudran, Horace, *The Training of the Memory in Art and the Education of the Artist*, trans. L.D. Luard, 1914.

Leslie, C. R., *Memoirs of the Life of John Constable*, ed. J. Mayne, Phaidon Press Limited, 1995.

Llewellyn, Nigel, with Beth Williamson, eds., *The London Art Schools – Reforming the Art World, 1960 to Now*, Tate Publishing, 2015.

Madoff, Steven Henry, ed., *Art School (Propositions for the 21st Century)*, MIT Press, 2009.

Morris, Lynda, ed., *Henry Tonks and the ‘Art of Pure Drawing’*, Norwich School of Art Gallery, 1985.

Morris, Lynda, ed., *John Wonnacott and John Lessore, The Norwich Life Room*, 2014.

Morris, William, *The Collected Letters of William Morris, Volume II, Part B:1885-1888*, Princeton University press, 1987.

Pevnsner, Nikolaus, *Academies of Art, Past and Present*, Cambridge, CUP, 1940.

Potter, Matthew. C., ed., *The Concept of the ‘Master’ in Art Education in Britain and Ireland, 1770 to the Present*, Ashgate 2013

Ruskin, John, *A Joy Forever (1880 Edition)*, Simplicissimus Book Farm, Digital Reprint.

Ruskin, John, *The Elements of Drawing & the Elements of Perspective*, J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd, 1907.

Ruskin, John, *The Laws of Fésole*, University Press of the Pacific, 2004.

Reynolds, Joshua, *Portraits*, William Heinemann Ltd, 1952.

Reynolds, Joshua, *Discourses on Art*, ed. Robert R. Wark, Yale University Press, 1997.

Sickert, Walter, *The Complete Writings on Art*, ed. Anna Gruetzner Robins, OUP 2000.

Schiller, Friedrich, *On the Naïve and Sentimental in Literature*, trans. Helen Watanabe-O’Kelly, Carcanet Press Ltd, 1988.

Shlemmer, Oskar, *Man – Teaching Notes from the Bauhaus*, ed. Heimo Kuchling, preface by Hans M. Wingler, trans. Janet Seligman, Lund Humphries 1971.

Oil Paintings in Public Ownership in London: The Slade and UCL, The Public Catalogue Foundation, 2007.

Speed, Harold, *Oil Painting Techniques and Materials*, Dover Publications Inc., 1987.

Speed, Harold, *The Practice and Science of Drawing*, Dover Publications Inc., 2003.

Syed, Matthew, *Bounce: The myth of talent and the power of practice*, Fourth Estate, 2010.

Thistlewood, David, *Critical Studies in Art and Design Education*, Longman, 1989.

Tickner, Lisa, *Hornsey 1968: The Art School Revolution*, Frances Lincoln Ltd, 2008.

Updike, John, *John Updike: Collected Early Stories*, Library of America, 2013.

Vasari, Giorgio, *Vasari on Technique*, trans. Louisa S. Macle hose, Dent & Company, 1907.

Wind, Edgar, *Art and Anarchy The Reith Lectures 1960, Revised and Enlarged*), Knopf, 1964.

Articles, Papers, Interviews, Recordings

Aspinall, Kate, *Leader Among Equals: The 'School' of Bomberg in Context*, 2016.

Benjamin, Walter, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, 1936.

Coldstream, William, *The Structure of Art and Design Education in the Further Education Sector (Report of a Joint Committee of the National Advisory Council On Art Education and the National Council for Diplomas in Art and Design)*, London, Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1970.

Coghlan, Niamh, Peter Kardia, *Aesthetica Magazine*, 2010,
<http://www.aestheticamagazine.com/peter-kardia/>

De Duve, Thierry, *When Form has Become Attitude – and Beyond*, 1993.

Gombrich, Ernst H., *On Pride and Prejudice in the Arts Address to the Art and Architecture Group*, London, June, *Pentagram Papers*, Vol. 26, 1992.

Gombrich, Ernst H., *Reflections on teaching art history in art schools*, Ernst H. paper given 4th January, 1966.

Gropius, Walter, *Bauhaus Manifesto and Program*, Weimar, 1919. Hirst, Damien, Interview, <http://www.gold.ac.uk/our-people/profile-hub/art/ug/damien-hirst/>

Kaye, Sean, Review of 'Creative License: From Leeds College of Art to Leeds Polytechnic 1963–1973, James Charnley', in *Visual Culture in Britain*, 2015.

Lawrence, Ranald, *The Evolution of the Victorian Art Schools*, 2014.

Le Brun, Christopher, interview, in *ArtSpace*, Dec 17, 2016.

Massouras, Alexander, *Patronage, Professionalism and Youth: The Emerging Artist and London's Art Institutions 1949-1988*, London Consortium Birkbeck, University of London, 2013.

Matter, Mercedes, How do you Learn to be an Artist?, Mercedes Matter, NYT
Sep 2nd 1973.

Pigman, G.W. III, Versions of Imitation in the Renaissance, in Renaissance
Quarterly, Vol. 33, No. 1, 1980.

Williamson, Beth, Recent Developments in British Art Education: 'Nothing
Changes from Generation to Generation except the Thing Seen', 2013.

British Library recorded interviews with Jane Greenham, Harold Cohen,
Bernard Gay, Tess Jaray.

Subscribe to Politeia's Publications!

For £35 a year you will receive an electronic copy of each of our publications, plus hard copies of two new publications on request, and, if you wish, free hard copies of your choice from our back catalogue. You will also receive advance notice and invitations to Politeia's conferences and flagship events, with guest speakers from the UK and overseas.

More information can be found on our website: www.politeia.co.uk. Or, write to the Secretary, Politeia, 14a Eccleston Street, London SW1W 9LT, or at secretary@politeia.co.uk

A Selection of Recent and Related Publications

Intangible Assets: Funding Research in the Arts and Humanities

John Marenbon

History in the Making: The New Curriculum: Right or Wrong?

D. Abulafia, J. Clark & R. Tombs

Reversing Decline: Vocational Education and Training for a Highly Skilled

Workforce

Sheila Lawlor

Brexit: Options for the Irish Border

Ray Bassett

Negotiating Brexit: The Legal Basis for EU & Global Trade

David Collins

Better for All – Trade Liberalisation: the Economics

Andrei Potlogea

The Brexit Settlement and UK Taxes

David B. Smith

Commercial Law After Brexit: Next Steps for the UK

Thomas Sharpe QC

Deal, No Deal? The Battle for Britain's Democracy

Sheila Lawlor

Paying for the Future: Working Systems for Pensions and Healthcare

L. Shuknecht, M. Dauns & W. Erbert

Over the last fifty years, art has been radically de-skilled. In *What Happened to the Art Schools?*, Jacob Willer considers what went wrong in British art schools, and how to put it right.

The author, himself an artist, explains that one side in a war of cultures has enjoyed a steady onward march. Today, prospective students must choose between the mainstream schools, where art is regarded as part of the popular culture, another ‘lifestyle add-on’; or romantic modernist schools, which permit drawing but not its systematic study; or kitsch revivalist schools offering systematic study but on false principles.

Willer urges that the whole system of art education should be reformed with drawing and painting taught alongside applied arts, and the opportunity for regular practice, so students regain a respect for craft. Transient fashions should be ignored, and basic principles re-argued.

POLITEIA

£8.00