

Art Schools: A Group Crit

A range of issues confront today's booming art schools and university art departments: What skills should young artists acquire? Should they be shielded from the art market or connected to it? Who needs a studio PhD degree? Here, 13 educators, artists and scholars offer their divergent views.

Thankfully, some might say, there are not great numbers of artworks about art school. So, it's a surprising coincidence that two compelling works on the subject appeared in the same year, 1995. *Educational Complex*, by Mike Kelley, is a scale model of every school the artist ever attended, plus his childhood home. These largely modernist structures, including buildings at the University of Michigan, where Kelley got his BFA in 1976, and Cal Arts, where he earned his MFA in 1978, are linked in an unwieldy tabletop display that suggests a kind of institutional digestive tract. To create the models, Kelley relied on his memory, leaving empty and undefined the areas and spaces he couldn't recall. Speaking about the work recently on the PBS series "Art21,"



Mike Kelley: *Educational Complex*, 1995, acrylic, latex, foamcore, fiberglass, wood, approx. 4 by 8 by 16 feet. Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Courtesy Metro Pictures, New York.



Kelley described how the organization of the structure is patterned on the visual-art training in Hans Hofmann's push-pull formalism he received as an undergraduate painting student and which he labels "visual indoctrination." Although it doesn't exhibit the in-your-face theatrics of Kelley's best-known sculptures and videos, *Educational Complex* is an incisive, almost Foucauldian diagramming of the institutionalization of American art.

The other work I'm thinking of, Alex Bag's *Fall '95*, is an hour-long video that follows a fictional student, played by Bag herself, through eight semesters at the School of Visual Arts in New York. Hilariously satirical of art student poses, the 16-part work charts its subject's evolution from painfully naive first-year undergrad with black nail polish and pierced tongue to self-assured senior who is able to pounce on a teacher's error and articulately denounce the commodification of youth culture.

The label of "institutional critique" can be applied to both these works, but something crucial sets Kelley's and Bag's works apart from most other examples of this ubiquitous mode of art-making—they focus on art schools and university art departments, rather than the museums, gal-

leries and private art collections that are usually the targets of such work. Maybe it's time for educational institutions to take their turn in the glare of critique, something that hasn't occurred on a large scale since the 1960s.

Perhaps the process has already begun. The education of artists has become a growing topic of conversation, both in the media and within academe itself. At the journalistic end, there has been a spate of sensationalistic pieces in newspapers and magazines (both print and on-line) about the phenomenon of dealers, collectors and curators trolling MFA thesis shows for new talent. The 2006 movie *Art School Confidential*, based on graphic novelist Daniel Clowes's original tales, also reflected growing interest in the subject, as did *Frieze* magazine's issue on art schools last September. On the more cerebral side of things, there have been academic conferences and College Art Association panels devoted to the seemingly unstoppable advent of the studio PhD. Between these two poles, one gets the sense, among those teaching at or running art schools and art departments here and abroad, that the field is going through a transformative phase. Driving this process are both larger issues, such as technology and globalization, and more art-specific ones, such as the runaway growth of the contemporary art scene and a generational shift as many professors who began working in the 1960s and '70s approach retirement.

Left, four stills from Alex Bag's *Fall '95*, 1995, video, 57 minutes. Courtesy Elizabeth Dee Gallery, New York.

If successful schools tend to downplay the teaching of skills, many less prestigious institutions continue to impart traditional techniques. —Howard Singerman

In response to these developments, this project of sounding out teachers and administrators on the past, present and future of training artists got under way last summer. The following set of eight general questions was sent out to provide a starting point for the discussion:

1. What have been the most significant changes in the teaching of art over the last decade?
2. Are there new or different skills and areas of knowledge that students require now?
3. Within an academic environment, how does visual-art training relate to other disciplines?
4. One gets the impression that a growing number of students are attending art schools and enrolling in university MFA programs. Has this been your experience? If so, what do you think is driving this growth?
5. What are your feelings about the relationship of MFA programs to the art market?
6. Should collectors and dealers be given access to students? Should students be encouraged to make contact with galleries as soon as possible, even before graduation? In general, what role should issues of profession and career play in MFA programs?
7. Are there significant differences between the U.S. approach to training artists and European or Asian approaches? Is there something to be learned from other models?
8. What, if any, are the significant differences among schools within the U.S.? What makes for a successful art school/MFA program? What kinds of things most often stand in the way of a program becoming successful? And what are the criteria of success?

Some contributors have sought to address all the questions, while others focus on specific points that particularly interest them. While this group, which includes representatives of both Kelley's and Bag's alma maters, is not intended to cover every significant degree-granting art program in the country, it does include individuals occupying a variety of positions at a range of institutions. There are teachers and administrators, employees of large public universities and of private art schools, long-time fixtures and new appointees, East and West Coasters and others located some distance from large bodies of water (something one of the writers, Dave Hickey, warns about—and being based in Las Vegas, he presumably knows what he's talking about). For those seeking a more in-depth view of the vibrant L.A. art-school scene—here represented solely by Thomas Lawson of Cal Arts—a good place to start is the November 2006 issue of *Art in America*, where 19 L.A. sculptors have much to say about their experience studying and teaching in schools such as UCLA, the Otis College of Art and Design, and the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena.

Also included here, for a historical perspective on the subject, is a contribution by scholar Howard Singerman, the author of the fascinating *Art Subjects: Making Artists in the American University* (1999). Another historian of art instruction (among many other topics), James Elkins, writes specifically about the debate over the introduction of the studio PhD.

There's not a great deal of consensus, which is

surely a good sign, especially to those who fear that the training of young artists has turned formulaic, leading to the production of a lot of formulaic art. On one subject, however, nearly everyone agrees—the need to bring more up-to-date technology into the educational process. Yet readers will also find teachers who recommend that students read 18th-century thinkers such as Rousseau and Hume (a tactic employed by Laurie Fendrich) and others who stress social activism as an important component of contemporary art training (Lawrence Rinder, Judith Russi Kirshner).

In the longest contribution, Robert Storr, who recently became the dean of the Yale School of Art, challenges a new generation of art students to come up with an art-discourse vocabulary to replace the dated jargon of postmodernism. He also speculates on what factors go into creating a hot art school, admitting that some of it has to do with luck, with whether a particular group of students and teachers can create the necessary chemistry. Storr thus acknowledges that it's the students themselves that are crucial to a successful program. They are also, alas, the missing voice in this symposium-in-print. If it was hard to select faculty participants from the hundreds of MFA programs around the country, choosing among the student bodies would have been infinitely more difficult. I only hope that they will be among the readers of the following pages and that, if they wish, they make their thoughts heard via letters and e-mails and—who knows—maybe even artworks. It seems an ideal time for a sequel to Alex Bag's 12-year-old piece. How exactly are things going out there, in the student studios and laptop screens of Spring '07? —Raphael Rubinstein

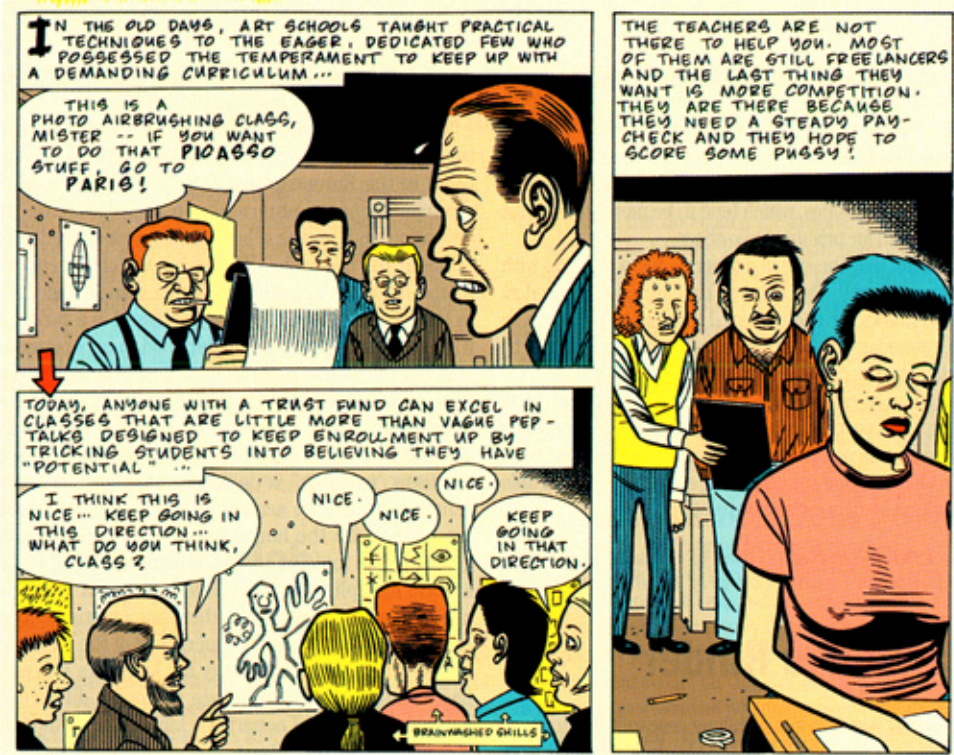
Howard Singerman

Commentators have been complaining about art schools in the pages of art magazines for a very long time, beginning well before Mercedes Matter asked "What's Wrong with U.S. Art Schools?" in 1963. But let me start midstream, and allow Matter's decades-old complaint to introduce the terms and camps that are by now most familiar. The founder of the New York Studio School, Matter argued that the problem lay in the classrooms of the new degree-granting university art departments springing up nationwide, in their credit hours and in their hectoring noise: "Silence is rare. Even a relatively quiet room is never without the intrusion of the instructor—for instruction no longer punctuates the student's work, it replaces it." The most damaging talk, in her view, was that about the art world: "Today, it is possible for a student to go through art school and gain an acute perception of 'what is going on,' a fairly intelligent grasp of the situation, and yet. . . . In old fashioned language, he will never have learned to draw."¹ Though the great majority of America's 200-plus MFA programs are at least on paper organized by *métier*, for many readers Matter's complaint still rings true: the assumption is that young artists no longer learn traditional craft skills.

This view is probably only partially correct. While it may be true that the more successful schools downplay the teaching of skills (here I mean those mostly urban and coastal institutions, whether independent professional schools or the star departments of research universities, that we tend to think of when we talk about "art school"), many less prestigious institutions continue to impart tra-



Founder Mercedes Matter teaching a drawing class at the New York Studio School, ca. 1970s. Courtesy New York Studio School.



Panels from the first page of Daniel Clowes's graphic novel *Art School Confidential*, 1991. Courtesy Fantagraphics Books, Seattle.

ditional skills—and often newer, more technologically advanced ones. These latter schools tend to be public, inland and much more crowded (ironically enough, it was in no small part these schools, and their then-new university-based MFA programs, that Matter was decrying). For those critics who lament the academic devaluing of the artist's traditional skills, what is even more grievous is the sense that students who can draw (or those with too great a sense of the romance of the artist) are mistreated by their art schools; they are pressured to conform or shunted aside: this is the given of Daniel Clowes's graphic novel *Art School Confidential* and of the recent film based on it. There and elsewhere at least part of Matter's "intelligent grasp" has been downgraded into clichéd patter and updated as theory or political correctness. Teaching about the art world or the PC issues of cultural politics has come at the cost not only of traditional skills but of any familiarity with tradition itself and of what Pierre Bourdieu terms the "work of art *qua* object of belief." Andrew Hultkrans cast his *Artforum* story of the rise of Art Center and UCLA in the early '90s and the eclipse of Cal Arts as a cautionary tale, a warning against identity politics and against just the sort of French thing Bourdieu stands for: "Cal Arts' makeover as an academy producing laundry lists of theoretical tropes in lieu of objects was bad news."²

"Deskill" is not just a problem, it is also a critical category, one that survey students can see a lot of in the recent two-volume textbook *Art Since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism* by October editors Hal Foster, Rosalind Krauss, Yve-Alain Bois and Benjamin H. D. Buchloh. Deskill, writes Buchloh, is "a concept of considerable importance in describing numerous artistic endeavors throughout the twentieth century with relative precision. All of these are linked in their persistent effort to eliminate artisanal competence and

other forms of manual virtuosity from the horizon of both artist competence and aesthetic valuation."³ Buchloh insists on artistic, or at least critical, intention, and elsewhere Yve-Alain Bois speaks of Daniel Buren's "deskill sacrifice," suggesting that Buren had conventional skills to throw away.⁴

But what if deskill is involuntary? As Buchloh observes, the term first appeared in the early 1980s in the writing of the Australian conceptual artist Ian Burn, who borrowed it from sociology. It's worth noting here that Burn and Buchloh use the term somewhat differently; for Burn, it is not a critical intervention but an outcome, the inadvertent and contradictory product of an art-school education. Writing, in 1981, about the local effects of teaching New York's styles since the 1960s, Burn says that deskill is not the province of a select group of theoretically engaged artists but the standard operating procedure of all of the "sanctioned styles of avant-gardism," as they have been replicated in provincial schools worldwide. "It has not been uncommon during the past decade for students to experience an avant-garde context in their art school years but to find difficulty in sustaining such attitudes outside of the school and to then discover that they have not been taught skills to allow them to work in any other way."⁵ Here deskill is not only a necessary if inadvertent critique of autonomy—"with few or no artistically valued manual skills involved in the production of the work, it was hard to sustain the idea that the object itself was the exclusive embodiment of a special creative process"⁶—but also the enforcement of it, however degraded: a segregated or professionalized interest enforced by handicap.

As a complaint, deskill suggests that there are essential skills every artist should have. But it is no longer clear what an artist needs to know, or needs to know how to do. It's not so much that we have nothing to teach, but rather that, in relation to the art of the

recent past, there is no particular thing that needs to be learned. In any event, there is no guarantee *how* it is learned. Where craft skill is paraded—by Tom Friedman, say, or Tara Donovan—it appears as a kind of excessive or caricatured manuality in relation to downscale industrial material. And if, in some programs, Buren is taught in lieu of the skills he purportedly sacrificed, he might not be understood according to academic orthodoxy, as institutional critique, but instead as a practitioner of minimalist painting or public art or, like Jorge Pardo or Jim Lambie, interior design. Students might be expected to know how to situate Buren—or Friedman or Pardo—to appropriate or reject them, to find them "interesting" in relation to their own work. Still, it's not clear that this kind of skill, which might only be the ability to package oneself professionally, is what the art school's critics have in mind.

I understand full well why commentators call out for the *métiers*, whether for drawing or for a more rigorous theoretical or philosophical or political grounding. These are calls for something of value to teach, and more than that for a commitment, a content for the term "artist" that isn't atomized or sheerly idiosyncratic, and that might link one artist to another through something other than the market or the media. Nowadays, especially at our best schools, we teach "artists"—both a litany of names and the fashioning of individuality. Instead of working on a practice, it is the artist him- or herself who is worked on, pushed to internalize the art world, to take it seriously and to produce an identity in its image. Over 30 years ago Charles Harrison—like Burn, a member of Art and Language, a group whose critical interests have always included questions of pedagogy—characterized the working-over of young artists as "more psychotherapeutic than pedagogic. . . . While there may be both historicity and method in teaching someone how to draw, there is little of either involved in teaching them how to be artists. It is a cliché that art students are neurotic; maybe art schools keep them that way."⁷ Or maybe nowadays the best known and most successful ones are those that build most effectively on the neurosis; at least that is what Charles Ray suggested about success at UCLA: "Most art schools are about students and teachers. . . . The reason the kids here are getting all this early success is because they're not art students, they're young artists. Young artists get galleries. Students study. Simple as that."⁸

1. Mercedes Matter, "What's Wrong with U.S. Art Schools?" with responses by Howard Conant and Gurdon Woods, *Art News*, September 1963, pp. 41, 56.

2. Andrew Hultkrans, "Surf and Turf," *Artforum*, Summer 1998, p. 109.

3. Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Deskill," in Hal Foster, Rosalind Krauss, Yve-Alain Bois and Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, *Art Since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism*, vol. 2, New York, Thames and Hudson, 2004, p. 531.

4. Yve-Alain Bois, "1967c," in *Art Since 1900*, vol. 2, p. 520.

5. Ian Burn, "The 1960s: Crisis and Aftermath," in *Dialogues: Writings in Art History*, North Sydney, Allen and Unwin, 1991, p. 105.

6. *Ibid.*, pp. 105-106.

7. Charles Harrison, "Educating Artists," *Studio International*, May 1972, pp. 222-23.

8. Dennis Cooper, "Too Cool for School," *Spin*, July 1997, p. 92.

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Leslie King-Hammond

The most powerful change to occur in the teaching of artists in the last decade has resulted from the increasing role within all disciplines of art that makes use of electronics, digital technologies and the Internet. New methods have evolved from the intersection of old and new.

All art students still need a foundation of conceptual, technical and critical training that reflects both tradition and innovation. We should keep adding to our curricula. Students need access to so much more information today because the way artists work now is so open-ended, using so many new techniques and technologies and mediums. Additionally, there is a greater emphasis on critical studies and professional development, including teaching and entrepreneurial skills.

Enrollment at the Maryland Institute College of Art has grown tremendously in the past 10 years; we expect more growth to come. What is remarkable is how good the students are when they come here. They know how to draw, they know how to paint, they know how to think conceptually and technically. The growing development of magnet art schools and community arts programs probably plays a large role in the experience of these students. Of course, we still reinforce technical skills, but more and more we are here to help students with the content and ideas in their work, refining (rather than jumpstarting) their art-making practice.

The art market, especially dealers, should be treated with great caution. Interacting with dealers too early often undermines the conceptual vision of developing artists. Young artists are often swayed by marketplace demands. Collectors often find the opportunity to support student and emerging artists by purchasing their work. This is a plus, as long as the young artist is not swayed by the attention and desires of the client.

Students should be encouraged to seek representation after the completion of the program of study, though blanket statements about this are dangerous. Inevitably, part of the role of institutions is to offer a certain access into the marketplace and art world in general. There are young artists who are ready to show in the public, market-driven art world, and others who are not. Many students should wait until after they are out of the academic arena, well outside their "student work" practices, to seek representation.

We are here for the long term. I still am in contact with students from when I started teaching 30 years ago; I see it as a vital part of my role as an educator to keep in touch with them and to help them when I can.

MFA programs should also be bringing in critics, collectors and curators to interact with the students, to share their professional experiences. We don't want our students to be blindsided by the diversified realities of the global art world, but we do want to create a safe environment to prepare and educate them for their journey.

All art schools are consumed with the question of what makes a "successful" experience. Each school offers different resources, networks, faculty and visiting artists. One thing a really good program will do is to designate individual studio space for the MFA student to work in for the duration of his or her academic experience. The sense of a strong artistic community will often make or break an MFA program.

Private art colleges and schools of art within a university that can commit to intensive curricular programs supported by institutional resources and quality studio and classroom space have the more successful programs. This is in contrast to art departments in colleges or universities, which tend to be more stressed for faculty and for private studio space.

I think that the size of a program has a lot to do with success as well. The balance that we have created at MICA allows for each of our 11 graduate programs to accommodate 10 to 28 students who are mentored by a director, a critic-in-residence, or several artists/designers-in-residence for the larger programs. It is a slippery road to navigate: the graduate programs should be large enough to create a diverse and well-rounded community, but small enough to still be able to offer a lot of one-on-one attention.

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Lawrence Rinder

I recently went on a month-long research trip to study curricula at leading European schools of art and design. European schools practice a variety of educational methodologies, though due in part to the European Union's so-called Bologna Accord (which has mandated the full implementation by 2010 of degree programs based roughly on the American BFA/MFA model) and in part to economic forces, there is a drift toward an American-style system. (One result of budget constraints has been the consolidation of smaller schools into larger consortia or their absorption into universities.) Nevertheless, a number of general differences are still evident between European and American graduate art education.

The beaux-arts model, in which students work—at times exclusively—in the studio of a "master artist" still exerts a strong influence on European art education. Occasional one-on-one contact with a single instructor is the pedagogical foundation of several leading institutions. Even in schools that have shifted away from this approach, students are expected to be very self-directed in their studies. The director of a major German art school reported that his school offers virtually no formal education, but that this is considered acceptable because the students pay almost nothing. Conversely, in most American MFA programs, where students pay dearly, the curriculum is heavily weighted with topical seminars and regularly scheduled critique-based studio classes. While students in American MFA programs often choose a school in order to work with a particular instructor, once enrolled they are typically encouraged to study with other faculty in order to diversify their influences. One benefit of the beaux-arts model is that it places an emphasis on art as such instead of on discipline-specific study. Most European art schools have done away with—or are in the process of eliminating—discipline-based education in favor of an interdisciplinary, project-based approach. The role of the discipline-based master teacher has been largely replaced by a cohort of workshop technicians

who assist any and all students in engaging with, if no longer "mastering," a medium of their choice.

The relatively strong emphasis on seminars and theoretical analysis in American MFA curricula is countered in the European model by, on the one hand, a stronger focus on philosophy in undergraduate art education and, on the other, a more pronounced commitment to "research." Research—which is required by the Bologna Accord to become a standard element in European art education—is expressed in a variety of ways: in some schools it is understood to be a pervasive ethos of the faculty culture; in others, it is localized in thematically focused research centers or institutes; while in yet others, it has become the basis for an ever-growing number of studio art PhD programs. Although the term "research" is decidedly imprecise, it seems generally to refer to academic values more commonly associated with the humanities, i.e., in-depth investigation into a topic or theme, collaboration with non-artistic disciplines, and evaluative criteria based on citation and corroboration rather than on originality or "inspiration." Although the emergence of the studio art PhD—which has just recently hit America's shores—has resulted in a broad debate about the differences between artistic and nonartistic languages, methodologies and evaluative criteria, it is unclear to me what, if any, impact the emphasis on research is having on European students at the MFA level.

One very important distinction between American and European MFA programs is the vastly more international character of the European system. Thanks in part to the Erasmus Mundas travel scholarship, provided by the European Union, students in Europe can move easily from school to school across national boundaries. In the U.S., meanwhile, government restrictions on financial aid make it extremely difficult for non-Americans to afford the high tuition of our schools. Post-9/11 visa restrictions also place an onerous burden on anyone wishing to come to the U.S. for an extended period of study, or, for that matter, on faculty wishing to come from abroad to teach. While American art students presumably travel more frequently than the generally stay-at-home American population (only 21 percent of Americans even hold passports), they are certainly much less cosmopolitan than their European art-school peers, for whom it is common that at least one year of college will be spent at a school in another country. Given these conditions—and regardless of efforts to make curricula more global in content—students in American MFA programs are educated in an environment that all too often replicates our country's debilitating isolation from global diversity and ideas.

The institution where I work, the California College of the Arts (CCA), has recently developed a number of initiatives that resemble experimental programs at the most interesting European art schools. Our new social practices area in the MFA Fine Arts Program, for example, is comparable to the Critical Curatorial Cybermedia (CCC) program at Geneva's Ecole Supérieure des Beaux-Arts. Like the CCC program, CCA's social practice area promotes social engagement as an intrinsic aspect of the art-making process and seeks the intersections among performance, urbanism and activism. Additionally, at CCA, the faculty and students of the social practice area are in conversation with their peers in architecture and

The environment in American MFA programs all too often replicates our country's debilitating isolation from global diversity. —Lawrence Rinder

The notorious Q-word (quality) has been banned from art discourse for decades, but it hovers backstage during every critique. —Laurie Fendrich

design, opening up possibilities for profoundly hybrid projects. Like many of the most interesting European schools that offer degrees in both fine arts and design, CCA is entering the digital age without abandoning its expertise and capacities in more traditional mediums such as wood, ceramics, glass and textiles. We believe that dynamic exchange between artists and designers as they explore both high-tech and low-tech mediums will form the basis of much future innovation.

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Laurie Fendrich

I teach mostly painting and drawing to undergraduates, many of whom take studio courses to fulfill what's called the "creative participation" requirement for a liberal arts degree. Every year, about 20 non-art majors join with the already-declared art majors to form the cadre who move on to take our advanced fine-arts courses. Although only a handful of these students go on to graduate school in art, or end up becoming artists, almost all of them possess an "artistic personality" and have vague longings to "express themselves." They frequently have thin skins (especially when it comes to criticism of their work), an unspoken conviction that they possess a special insight into things that other students don't have, and a sense that something is wrong with the world that making art might correct, at least for them.

Many people who have artistic personalities never become artists, often simply because they lack the requisite desire for fame. On the other hand, many who do become artists have nothing to offer but their artistic personalities. Long ago, actual talent used to be

required of an artist, but the permissiveness of modernism opened the floodgates for anyone who wanted to be an artist to be one. Even though neurobiology and postmodern theory together have made mincemeat of modernism, an enervated form of modern romanticism persists in studio-art classes in the form of "feelings" around which art teachers are forced to maneuver. Admittedly, the sensitive "self" with its deep, soulful yearnings—celebrated by the romantics for its authenticity and autonomy, and for which untold thousands of young Wethers have suffered through the centuries—is now considered a somewhat pathetic phenomenon and consigned to adolescence. Paradoxically, just when the romantic self began to be discredited, the idea that all truths are subjective (what is more romantic than that?) began to expand. In academe subjectivity has been given an honorary doctorate and cloaked in the cap and gown of postmodernist "historicism," i.e., the belief that what you think or feel is almost entirely dependent on when and where you live.

Practically all the art students I've encountered accept historicism as a fact, even if they don't use the word itself. They unquestioningly believe there are multiple truths, and that all truths are more or less equally valid. This historicist "form and pressure" (as Shakespeare dubbed it in *Hamlet*) crops up relentlessly in the studio classroom. In my opinion, it is steadily undermining the mainstay of studio art teaching—the critique. It has been assumed that students' art will get better if smart, earnest art students and their teachers chew some serious fat concerning their work. But the critique is getting into ever-deeper trouble the more "better art" becomes a totally subjective matter. Why not cut to the chase and talk about marketing strategies ambitious students might employ to become rich and famous?

The notorious Q-word (for those of you born since 1980, I mean *quality*) has been banned from official art discourse since about 1975. Even so, it hovers backstage during every critique. Good students and reasonable teachers still know the good stuff when they see it, although they'll only say so with a faux-blue-collar spin: "Hey, that works." So while some art teachers fret over the need for more exotic computer programs, others lobby for more critical theory in the curriculum, and still others argue for more drawing, everyone ignores the real need: to resuscitate a way of talking about art that recognizes the value of art as a *thing in itself*, a thing that is impractical and politically useless.

The best art students—whether they paint pictures, manipulate digital images, or disperse empty beer cans and computer monitors in a darkened gallery—need to learn imaginative ways to step outside their own historicist subjectivity in order to understand the extent to which they are unwittingly trapped by it. Hiding behind talent-immune postmodernist cleverness won't cut it forever. Students should be taught the writings about art of thinkers such as Plato, Aristotle, Leonardo and Hume. The point is not to make them wallow in the past, or to bore them to tears by forcing them to ingest hard-to-read Classical, Renaissance and Enlightenment treatises and essays, but to help them see how they can be truly *radical* only by going back to the *roots* for fresh, new ideas.

Whenever I teach Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Letter to D'Alembert on the Theater*, for example, my students are fascinated by his uncomfortably persuasive argument that art is—as often as not—a very bad thing that can destroy human happiness rather than enhance it. They also make the startling discovery that their own confidence in the primacy of feelings derives straight from Rousseau's ideas. When I teach Ephraim Gotthold Lessing's *Laocöon*, students wrestle with the idea that some things might be so inherently ugly or disgusting that no one—anyplace—can see them any other way. Reading David Hume's 1757 essay "Of the Standard of Taste" rattles their assumptions about the supposedly irrefutable idea of subjectivity. And selections from Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* invite them to ponder the chilling possibility that great art and social justice are mutually exclusive.

The list of readings that can help art students climb out of the late-romanticism-cum-careerist pit in which they're currently trapped is longer and richer than the small selection I've provided here. Syllabi could easily include fiction (e.g., Balzac's *The Unknown Masterpiece* or John Fowles's *The Ebony Tower*) as well as philosophy. To belong to your own times is well and good, but to be flattened by them is both sad and terrible.

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Bruce Ferguson

My remarks are pretty much restricted to graduate art schools, an area very distinct from undergraduate programs. This focus is for two reasons: first, as dean of the School of the Arts at Columbia University for six years I ran a graduate school and know more about it; second, because I worked with the Anaphiel Foundation in



Gareth James, chair of Columbia University's School of the Arts visual arts division, in second-year MFA student Jeremy Eilers's studio, 2007.

Personally, I welcome the fact that MFA programs are directly connected to markets and dealers. —Bruce Ferguson

Miami on and off over the past two years trying to figure out what a graduate art school might look like in the 21st century and what it might look like in Miami in particular. With Steven Madoff, I organized and conducted a large number of symposia with artists, educators, architects, designers and other art-world constituents to develop a program better adapted to the new context of making art. I also spoke at length to Miami artists, collectors, dealers and others about the conditions there for such a school.

As I see it, the most significant changes in the teaching of art over the last decade have been:

1. The introduction of new technologies of communication that affect both the teaching and learning of art and the potential for new esthetics. This is obvious to anyone under 20 but surprisingly is not yet coded into the curricula of most schools, which maintain a strong allegiance to values and even nomenclatures that emerged in the 1960s (presumably when many current professors were students).

2. The almost complete break between art history and the practice of art-making. Art history as it is now practiced is a traditional and conservative subset of history/theory. It very seldom has any direct relation to the social or the personal embeddedness of work in the world and instead lives comfortably and hermetically “on the island of language,” as historiographer Hayden White calls it.

3. The positive influence in studio programs of a kind of academic conceptualism that has resulted in “need-to-know” curricula. This means that rather than a body of knowledge to be handed down by gatekeepers, in the conservative tradition of academia, advanced schools teach students in relation to the individual student’s needs. These schools see art as a methodological field rather than a body of knowledge. Skills in relation to medium and media are taught on this need-to-know basis. From school to school, department to department and even professor to professor, there are no standard criteria in the U.S. for skill-based activities in art, with the exception of basic software programming workshops. On the other hand, there is a set of necessary professional skills, many of them social, that is more a priority than ever before: networking, writing and speaking skills, fiscal planning, the mastery of intellectual property rules. In some cases these skills are being taught directly as part of a curriculum; at other times they are being conveyed by practitioners to whom the students are introduced. Simply put, as the arts have become professionalized, the need and demand for more professional skills have emerged.

People are always rightly saying that art training can and should relate to other disciplines, and ambitious students do take advantage of course offerings that run from philosophy to ethnography to various sciences. In general, however, neither schools of art nor the universities actually encourage such crossover or transdisciplinary work, except at a rhetorical level. In fact, it could be easily argued that structurally such transfer work is made difficult and laborious and probably represents a bureaucratic and academic threat to the larger environment. Despite the ever-increasing practice of artists’ collaboration with other sectors of the intellectual economy, schools are very ill-equipped to deal with this impulse on an authentic basis. Patchwork quilts of “this and that” courses occasionally juxtapose disciplines but seldom is transdisciplinarity truly realized.

The growth of professionalization is being driven by an ever-expanding global market for art. To cite a familiar statistic: in 2005, there were at least 60 significant civic or national art biennials per year as well as many others less known. Add to that simple but staggering statistic the huge number of art fairs (almost one per day on average at my count of 282—although, again, not all are internationally noteworthy); a growing market (the over 300 galleries in New York’s Chelsea are a symptomatic but not exhaustive index); an explosion of private museums; record sales in auction houses for contemporary work; a burgeoning field of art funds; a plethora of publications, consulting firms, art advisors and active investors, then the exponentially increasing number of accredited MA and MFA students is not surprising.

Personally, I welcome the fact that MFA programs are directly connected to markets and dealers. Students enrolling in graduate programs have generally been out of school for a while and are committed and urgent about their professions, evidenced by their coming back into the educational system. They are likely to take on great financial loads by the time they have completed their studies. They are not naive or monastic, and the schools are as much involved in the “real” world as they are. To pretend otherwise, as many programs have done in the past, is irresponsible. At school and elsewhere there are scores of people, books and pedagogies that underwrite a notion of “success” (in its fiscal sense at least) as a sign of *loss* of integrity or *lack* of critical thinking. These attitudes are subtly reaffirmed by some common modes of art-making, especially critical work about consumer culture or work done in the name of the public, for instance. Needless to say, many of the advocates of such approaches are tenured professors, the only people in the world with guaranteed employment contracts.

But even if students are inducted into the real world of fiscal, social and political interests, there are still no guarantees of viable art careers. Yet, I believe that the issue of “success” is a much more interesting and complicated one than the issue of failure. I believe, therefore, that instruction that stresses professional preparation, from the conceptual and theoretical to the legal and administrative, has a place in contemporary pedagogy. To send students out into the world to re-invent the wheel, as was often the case, is both depressing and condescending.

In touring European schools, I find the obvious difference between our studies and theirs is that the European approach is entirely based on charismatic figures and the myth of “free” education. What they mean by this, of course, is education underwritten by government funding. It is not only not “free” but, as a result, European educators and administrators don’t have any idea what it actually costs to educate a student. With the European Union’s demand for unit education, the Continent’s art schools are likely to see the introduction of transnational criteria based on curricula and performance-based budgeting, ending a very long reign of romantic pedagogy. Yet undeniably, charismatic figures are the ones who engage students, whether here or in Europe, and education—being an elusive thing—is often best served by the chemistry developed by the mentor/student relationship.

My sense from comparing schools is that you never get it completely right and that all you do is provide the best conditions possible. Those conditions include respect for the students as artists, availability of necessary skill sets on demand, introductions to urgent contemporary intellectual currents and student colleagues who are diverse in all ways and professionally ambitious. Students do teach students as a major part of the experience of school, a fact that does not receive adequate official recognition. But there are ways to enhance any experience. Jon Kessler, who was chair of the visual arts department at Columbia from 2000 to 2005, introduced a mentor process into the school’s curriculum that oscillates between a classroom structure and a studio-crit structure. It allows students to spend time over two years with a major artist of their choice and it allows a major artist to have intense relations with students without thoroughly interfering with his or her practice. Business schools change their curricula in relation to the way in which business is done, and art schools must be flexible enough to do the same.

Bruce Ferguson is a former dean of the School of the Arts at Columbia University, New York.

Suzanne Anker

From John Dewey to Joseph Beuys to the present, philosophers and practitioners of art education have resisted the imposition of governing rules. Some artists and even some educators would go so far as to say that art cannot be taught at all. I’d like to propose that the issue of art’s pedagogical platform is most effectively addressed today by defining art and its teaching as “epistemic things” that constitute “experimental systems.”

In fact, the recognition of art as an experimental system is already evident in many European teaching models, where art-making and “picture science” are understood as forms of knowledge production. The concepts of experimental systems and epistemic things—especially as the terms are used by the German molecular biologist and historian of science Hans-Jörg Rheinberger—have migrated from the natural sciences into the plastic arts and humanities, providing a novel way to think about discovery and flux. “Experimental systems,” Rheinberger explains, “constitute integral, locally manageable, functional units of scientific research. It is through them that particular scientific objects—epistemic things in my terminology—gain prominence in a wider field of epistemic cultures and practices.”

Rheinberger’s approach to research, innovation and analysis is hardly, if ever, invoked in American art institutions. Yet his ideas might be useful at a time when art schools are trying to figure out what are the essential materials and techniques needed in the contemporary artist’s toolbox, and how to reconcile traditional handmade methods with state-of-the-art image production. One recent new offering at the School of Visual Arts (SVA) that addresses epistemic art is “Visual Science,” a course taught by a molecular biologist and presented in partnership with the American Museum of Natural History.

The ubiquity of digital technologies in the culture at large—and the accompanying social, political, economic and esthetic ramifications—are perhaps the most crucial issues confronting today's emerging artists. At SVA, the fine arts department is currently in the midst of integrating digital technologies—including photography, video, 3-D modeling applications and computer-generated sculpture—into its program so that they will be accessible to all students.

Within traditional studio practices, problem-solving assignments tend to be bound by equally traditional restraints. Students acquire knowledge about materials, various techniques of fabrication and alternative image-making strategies. In short, they learn about the practical tasks involved in producing works of art. What also seems to happen in too many programs is that students aren't taught how to assess what they've done and what they might do next. An essential part of art as an epistemic practice, however, is the stress on reflective thought. Students of epistemic art are urged to keep progress notes, pursue competing solutions, experiment with multiple drawings and schematics; they need to learn how to archive source material and manage information, among other skills.

Today's emerging artists (and their mentors) face an art world substantially different from anything in the past, be it the classic Bauhaus model or the resistance modes of the 1970s. The art student must become conversant with a new set of conditions, and with shifting patterns of meaning and consumption. Both art-making and the art market operate within complex systems in which variables can unexpectedly cascade. The education of artists requires teachers capable of addressing the swiftly changing conditions in the visual arts, people who can help young artists to imagine and even, sometimes, to construct a more viable and sustainable future. In comprehending art objects as epistemic things, perhaps we can get contemporary art to move beyond what seems to be its most recent calling as consumer-driven commodity or vehicle to celebrity.

Suzanne Anker is chair of the fine arts department at the School of Visual Arts, New York.

Thomas Lawson

The art world has become increasingly international over the last decade and information about it easier to find. More and more students, particularly at the graduate level, expect art school to provide the information, access and networking they will need. As a result, nobody teaching at the college level can comfortably present 10-year-old knowledge; everything has to be rethought and updated on an ongoing basis.

To answer the question "What makes for a successful art school?," it seems necessary to address a couple of more fundamental ones first: what is an art school, what is it for, and what does it do? It is perhaps obvious to say that an art school provides training for successive generations of artists, but that in turn opens up so many questions about the nature of art, and the nature of a career in art, that we will never find a place to begin. What is clear is that in order to deliver, a school



Left to right, Josh Stern, John Baldessari, David Cabrera, William Wegman and Todd Jaquit in 1981; at Cal Arts, Valencia. Photo © Luciano Perna Archives.

must have a reasonably clear understanding of its own, historically driven account of what is important. The schools that are deemed successful, that come in at the top in terms of rankings, can point to lists of alumni who have achieved some renown in the international art world of the biennials and art magazines. But it is important to recognize that there are other measures of success, and a good school, one concerned with educational outcomes as much as with art careers, will give its students access to useful strategies for making productive lives out of creative impulses.

Some of the denizens of art schools impact the mainstream culture—graphic designers, animators, game designers, for example—but for the most part art school provides a refuge from that mainstream, a haven for those who seek, however temporarily, an alternative. The chief responsibility of those of us who oversee these precious institutions is to preserve this haven, and to prepare future generations to maintain it. Above all, art school is a place to think about art and how to make it, to learn to form judgments and act on them, to discuss the relevance of art and its practice. The role of the art school is to prepare young artists to live the life, without undue pressure from the conforming ideologies of the market, from "responsible civic discourse" or even from a prescriptive history of art as one generation understands it.

For anyone dedicated to teaching young artists there is a necessity to constantly monitor the state of art. We must continually ask ourselves, what is at stake today? What are the necessary skills for an artist? I would argue that the primary skills needed are analytic and critical: how to understand images and texts, how to think through personal decision-making. What students need are the tools to navigate the world they find themselves

in, which, in terms of images, is a digital one. Some may choose to do this by opting for a number of low-tech interventions, from performances to discussion sessions driven by the instinct to collaborate, to various graffiti-based strategies and so on. To build a foundation on drawing skills, as some still advocate, presupposes a primacy of painting and sculpture that is no longer a given.

In the end, the only instruction that really matters is individual, one-to-one discussion of work in progress or recently finished—the encouragement of a singular voice, within a historical and critical context. Interesting, insightful remarks can come up in class, but they are random events, as likely to be ignored as picked up and acted on.

I think there are two contradictory forces at work in the recent growth of studio programs. At the undergraduate level, more young people are looking for alternatives to corporate culture, interested in experimenting with different ways of being in the world. Growth at the graduate level—increasing competition to get in, increased expectations after coming out—is driven mostly by a recognition that there is now a professional career of some viability to be had in the visual arts, and that the MFA is the essential key to entry. It is these two years that impart a sense of the currently relevant, and allow time to create a body of work shaped by that sense.

The market offers a hot-wired connection to topicality; it creates palpable excitement and a sense of connectedness, not to mention the opportunity for reward. But it also poses a danger of overexposure or premature exposure of unresolved work. It seems to me that structured encounters between *makers* and *makers*—annual open studio days, graduation shows and such—can be productive on a number of levels, but that in general, art school should be a place to fuck up without fear of

Art school should be a place to fuck up without fear of consequences, and to learn from the messes made. —Thomas Lawson

consequences, and to learn from the messes made. It should also be a place to explore other ways of making and presenting art, a place where the market does not reign supreme.

There's a widespread assumption that MFA programs provide the best measure of art schools. I would like to propose a nuanced demurrer. While it is certainly true that MFA programs have become increasingly important in an ever-more professionalized world, I would argue that it is the health of an undergraduate program that best indicates the strength of any school, and that it is there that you find the most significant differences among schools. Institutions that nurture their BFA populations, and seek ways to integrate the raw enthusiasm and unlearned spirit of the best undergraduates with the more focused discipline and broader knowledge of the graduates, foster an environment that benefits all students as they seek the best ways to give form to their creativity. Schools that invest everything in the MFA program, leaving their undergraduates in virtual quarantine, run the risk of becoming isolated, theory-bound and boring.

Thomas Lawson is dean of the School of Arts at the California Institute of the Arts, Valencia.

Saul Ostrow

During the 15 years that I have worked with graduate studio students, the critical and cultural environments that inform their vision of the role of artist and art have significantly changed. While many students still go to graduate school to develop their skills or to get the necessary credentials to teach at the college level, others are increasingly attracted to those graduate programs that promise entrée into the art world. Regardless of students' expectations, the long-term obligation of a graduate program should be to create an environment in which "student-artists" can develop their ability to think about how they will work within a cultural context in which the boundaries between disciplines are being redefined, both technically and conceptually.

When I was a graduate student in the very early 1970s, art was still considered a vocation, and getting an MFA meant spending two years in a program defined by a medium. Painters, photographers, sculptors, printmakers, et al. were nominally and often physically segregated. The standard program consisted of long hours working in the studio, minimally supplemented (and usually only because the accrediting agency required it) with some art history courses and perhaps a seminar in "contemporary issues." As such, given the luck of the draw, intellectual training was haphazard and slipshod at best.

These graduate programs were premised on the view that artists train artists, that art is eternal, fixed by history and form and that, for the most part, an artist made art for him- or herself. The evolution of styles was therefore understood as the product of subjective preferences, individual insights instigated by social and material conditions or, more cynically, by market forces. Given that these programs often lacked a true curriculum, "student-artists" were expected to refine their

vision, skills and concepts under the supervision of a faculty that bickered like old married couples, while encouraging students to work their way through formal and personal issues. Consequently, the primary pedagogic tools were the individual tutorial and the group crit, which were complemented by the occasional visiting artist who came to lecture on his or her career and work, and field trips to important local exhibitions.

Although many graduate programs over the years have begrudgingly adapted to the need to teach theory (or "critical studies") or to develop non-medium-specific curricula, the fact that graduate programs have not significantly changed structurally or pedagogically is a concern for many of us involved in the question of how artists are to be educated. While it is true that most artists continue to make their careers within the gallery system, outside of creating digital arts programs and allowing for individualized curricula, school administrators and their faculties have been slow in responding to the needs of those student-artists who are interested in engaging in scientific research, or who believe a career in art can consist of doing land reclamation projects, revitalizing under-represented communities or working with corporations.

To meet the needs of those students who wish to work outside traditional venues would require that an art school's graduate program have a truly multidisciplinary curriculum offering not only technical and esthetic training but also academic preparation and guidance in those areas that will influence their practices as artists. This means going against the traditional atelier approach because it necessitates establishing a curriculum with a core of mandatory subjects, as well as workshops and laboratory courses.

One of the challenges to producing programs that are in keeping with contemporary art practices is ironically the corporatization of education, which is a reality that cannot be ignored. What this means for those institutions in the business of educating artists is that they must balance their commitment to addressing evolving cultural standards with the institutional tendency to seek those solutions that are most readily marketable. Given that it is difficult for art schools and colleges to revise their curriculum on a regular basis, increasingly they have chosen to introduce career-oriented business courses offered under the heading "professional practices." While there is nothing wrong with this, I believe that, along with advancing a business model of professionalism, a forward-looking graduate program should encourage students to explore the broader social and philosophical networks and frameworks that inform contemporary cultural production. This calls for not only a new pedagogic vision but also recognition that the arts, by helping the dominant culture to absorb new esthetics, concepts, practices and technologies, are the research and development department for our society as a whole.

Saul Ostrow is chair of Visual Arts and Technologies Environment at the Cleveland Institute of Art. He is also leading a task force charged with creating a new center for graduate studies in collaboration with the Cleveland Institute of Art and several Ohio universities.

Dave Hickey

During the 1990s, I ran a graduate program in studio art at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. It was, by my standards, a successful one. About 40 percent of my ex-students now exhibit and sell their own art in national and international venues. Many of them support themselves doing so. Here are some notes on what I learned from the experience:

1. In the present moment, artists are better off training themselves at home and acquiring the benefit of a good liberal arts or art historical education. This, because the model for graduate art education, established in the early '70s by John Baldessari and others (myself included), is 40 years old and virtually obsolete.
2. Art schools are unhappy, ugly places. They tend to inculcate philistine, institutional habits of mind and to teach young artists more about teaching than about art. Since teaching art has been destructive to the practice of every artist I know who teaches, I try never to forget that the few good, serious teachers of art pay a price that's way too high for the privilege of doing it.
3. Teaching art, in my experience, is a genuine privilege that comes with its own oath to "do no harm." It also breaks your heart.
4. Art is a cosmopolitan practice best taught in cities near the water. Teaching art in a provincial cultural environment that does not celebrate and embrace change is totally self-defeating. It transforms art into a compensatory discourse that can help a stranded student maintain his or her sanity for few years in the boonies. It cannot, however, help people who teach under these conditions maintain their sanity. These people are doomed. . . .
5. Teachers of art practice have one overriding obligation to their students: to be intimately familiar with the contemporary standards of art practice, discourse, trade and exhibition against which their students' work will be measured—so their students will know the unspoken rules they are choosing to break or not to break. The art market itself should be dealt with evenhandedly and explained in detail. It is a fact and an option from which students should not be cloistered. Demonizing the art marketplace does more damage to students than exposing them to collectors and dealers who are irrevocably a part of the art world.
6. Art school must be free or cheap. It is virtually impossible for a young artist to establish a mature, courageous practice with a six-figure educational debt.
7. Art students should not be placed under the authority of older practicing artists whose work they are mandated to render obsolete. This guarantees bad advice and destructive criticism.
8. Any teacher of art who conceives his or her job to be "teaching young artists to think critically" should be fired immediately for intellectual dishonesty.
9. All group crits with faculty and students in attendance should be abolished immediately. These crucibles privilege the verbal over the visual and allow faculty members to poison and manipulate peer relations among their students.
10. Nurturing attention paid to an art student should never be confused with attention paid to nurturing art.
11. Unfinished work should be presumed not to exist.

It is virtually impossible for a young artist to establish a mature, courageous practice with a six-figure educational debt. —Dave Hickey

MFA programs have become “idea monopolies.” They are the only game in town if a young artist needs credibility or a network. —Archie Rand

12. Art in the context of an art school always looks bad, especially when it's very good.

13. Regular supervision and oversight of young artists' practice should be suppressed. My rule: “If you're not sick, don't call the doctor.”

14. If art students want to study Continental theory, they should learn German and French and study it in a philosophy department. Because (1) art schools are incapable of distinguishing properly between theory and practice; (2) art school classes in these subjects are little more than uncritical “slow pitch” indoctrinations taught by advocates rather than scholarly adepts; (3) all of the American translations of this work are poisoned by the moment of their making; (4) this entire discourse is now “historical”—a dated, conservative, academic field of study and no longer live talk.

15. Only saints can nurture real talent. I am a writer, not even an artist, and even I can't avoid feeling a twinge of resentment when a pimple-faced twerp with a skateboard under his arm shows me a mature and persuasive work of art. I can see, much more clearly than the twerp, the road opening before him, the obstacles falling away, and it's all I can do not to stick out my foot and trip him. If I were an artist, with a stake in the game, I would probably trip him, and tell myself that it's for his own good. It wouldn't be. Better to buy the damned art and take your profit on the back end.

Dave Hickey is a professor of English at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, where he was previously a professor of art criticism and theory.

Archie Rand

If the music is true the form takes care of itself.

—Cecil Taylor

After World War II visual arts programs were shimmied into academia as a magnet for GI Bill revenues. They are not a good fit, as colleges are rarely the forums they imagine themselves to be, but rather places where students learn accommodating behaviors. Future employers are then assured that the graduate is a team player. This format produces MFA programs that are not outfitted to generate inspiration, as the grading system and syllabi are respectively repressive and cynically superficial. The students are ordinarily directed to tweak their reconstructions of present models. There is then the insistence on verbal self-presentation that rejects any unfootnoted poetics. Idea replaces imagination and reference replaces enthusiasm. Respect for the potential of the student's desire can lapse amid all this. Some of the more savvy incoming students will have already cut back on their own curiosity, anticipating its replacement with a company-issued strategy.

MFA programs wonder if they are supposed to turn out that elusive art star or make available some version of the studio-lite experience to fulfill their pedagogical mandate. Regardless, people will teach using the methods by which they learned. When you look at '60s Yale grads, “Hairy Who” Chicago Art Institute grads, '70s Cal Arts grads and the recent Columbia grads, the students who went on to become well-known artists usually attended as a group during a relatively brief period. Years ago I asked David Salle if he knew that his

Cal Arts class was hot and he replied, “Yes. You know. You always know.”

Sometimes serendipitous student/faculty chemistry flourishes, allowing great fertility. I've seen it happen and in retrospect can recount the details but it's always different. The common factor is student and faculty dedication. Aside from that, there's no rationale behind the guarantees of excellence promised by a grad school art education.

Young artists learn effectively from their peers. That kind of dialogue should be given comfort in an academic institution. A successful MFA program, one whose graduates remain artists, chooses its incoming classes based on sightings of commitment rather than proficiency. A faculty member would be well advised to maintain a humble wonder, despite what experience may caution. Under a diverse faculty, students witness conflicting ardors. Ideally, to the student, the visual buffet is available and nonhierarchical. The transmission of love and the receipt of that love from other artists, mostly dead or inaccessible, and the resultant self-actualization will be made tangible as reliable visual evidence. Cocteau said that poetry is a machine for the manufacture of love and that all of its other properties were lost on him. The acknowledgment of art's powers of intimacy is too dicey for the business of college. It is affection, supported by memory, that gives this activity a social function and a moral component. The cultivation of a student's capabilities for the exchange of affections with art can permit the creation of an appetite for histories and approaches that will allow that student to ingest more than can ever be taught. A concerned instructor can recognize this but, make no mistake, this is a spiritual and only incidentally mechanical activity. Guston remarked bitterly that Reinhardt fired Rothko from the Brooklyn College faculty, where I now teach, because Rothko “spent too much time talking to the students.” In what could be seen as an act of retroactive penance, Vito Acconci has recently been appointed to the Brooklyn College art faculty.

The European style of open discussion as epitomized by Joseph Beuys and, in this country, by John Baldessari, is discouraged by administrative bean counting. Sometimes, it is the unqualified instructor's early horror in the face of an anarchic relentlessness that changes college art-making into a formulaic process that discourages intuition. The question of why artists do this thing and why we should continue can't be addressed logically. This may explain why we get irony that apes the effects of engagement, and a teaching method based on juxtaposition, that academic tool of comparison that dependably produces paradox. Many MFA art products are the result of a system of false discovery that allows a quick grasp to viewers who congratulate themselves as they point out overt contradictions in the work. Most grad students are encouraged to make art that is the equivalent of a term paper—this shuts down entrance for the subjective irrational, the source of real discovery.

It is sobering to note that in the past 30 years, coincident with the increased influence of MFA programs, and making slight allowances for advances in technology, consecutive Whitney Biennial catalogues show remarkably little innovation in approach as to art-making (despite curatorial intent) when compared, decade by decade, to the art movements occurring over the past two centuries.

The unintentional immorality of teaching recent, but beatified, art could lead to an acceptance of cant and disinvite the self-analysis required for an involved experience. Picasso said that the spirit of research was alien to him while he cautioned all artists against taking up teaching, “the other profession.” One version of the story has Matisse asking Picasso how France came to find itself under Nazi oppression and Picasso answering, “The art schools did this.”

The undergrad schools continue to stock MFA applicant pools with a majority of painters. The art of painting trusts that a 2-D surface will be retrieved as a real 3-D and 4-D occurrence. This is a mystical piece of cultural and genetic hardwiring, which MFA programs find hard to accept. They prefer to concentrate on the compositional or on the manual—on the physical construction and presentation of the artwork.

Techniques are teachable, and they are apprehended quickly when the artist understands an unmentionable imperative: that the artist needs to emit involvement. Techniques are whatever you require to give you grounding and to make your work understood. However, because universities think of themselves as fair-minded, they adore playing with theories and exercises yet don't like conclusions. MFA programs can be lazy and would rather contextualize work against a preexistent stance than confront discomfiting responses to doctrine. The truth is that artists really don't ask all those questions that the MFA programs posit are important. They just answer them. But MFA programs need to report to an academic matrix of accountability. What artists actually do, therefore, is ridiculed as juvenile while the sophisticates gather about, in kindness, to encrust the student in acceptable mannerisms.

I respect my friends who believe in a talent that affords a display of conventionally recognizable skills. I, however, believe that talent is courage and desire and that everything else can be learned. Gratitude is the great creative tool. John Coltrane often expressed his thanks to a divine presence. Louise Bourgeois wrote, on accepting an award, “Thank you, thank you much, that is my philosophy.”

Art occurs in a state of grace. This can be patiently explained and somehow understood—there are enough artists to verify it—but then you are asked to teach. This can be exhausting. So it is more convenient to have an educational methodology. However, the result of this compromise is a lowering of expectations. I feel that anyone who walks into your studio and good-naturedly asks, “So, what are you doing here?” is visually illiterate and useless as a critic. The visual has a manifest evidentiary capacity in which specific intent is irrelevant. Unfathomable work deserves a respectful response without the promise of an agreeable or even a correct read.

MFA programs have produced some noteworthy products. Most of them are exciting and beautiful, spewing ambition and intelligence in invigorating presentations. But there's also much that consciously acts as illustration for given philosophical positions or is simply encouraged to be adequately polished, that is, a good version of something that preexists. Not a new tactic and, historically, art that has employed these armatures has usually been termed academic. It is a sugar high and is tacitly understood as such. Being topical, this work partakes in designed obsoles-

cence and is made for those who desire the temporary footing that it offers. An interesting development, akin to the advent of the 45 rpm record. The difference is that this work knows exactly what it is and comports itself as a contender for longevity. The advent of this kind of work is the first fruit of the conditions, not just in the studio but in the market and critically, which graduate schools have fostered. MFA programs have become "idea monopolies." They are the only game in town if a young artist needs credibility or a network. This is as dangerous as it is inescapable. The coralling of unregulated imagination and free thought can lead to problems far more serious than esthetic stultification.

Archie Rand is a professor of art at Brooklyn College.

Judith Russi Kirshner

When the *Harvard Business Review* proclaimed the MFA the new MBA in 2004, it legitimized the business of educating artists, reinforced the celebrity of the artist and designer and confirmed the economic viability of art and design as professions. Driven by a variety of market pressures, art schools and universities, whose tuitions have skyrocketed, have been compelled to become accountable to at least two masters—accreditation by both independent and federal agencies (for example, the Spellings Commission was recently appointed by the Secretary of Education to examine post-secondary education and make recommendations for its reform) and the students whom they are competing to recruit. The promise of professional opportunities and economic security is meaningful to students and parents who pay for tuition increases and especially crucial to those who are underprivileged. Looming over the former goals of critical analysis, modernist discipline and artistic achievement prized in the art academy and university is Richard Florida's thesis of the innovation and productivity of the creative class. To the acquisition of esthetics, add affordability and accountability. Northwestern's School of Continuing Studies program in Arts and Humanities advertises its offerings with a question: "Who says the arts don't pay?"

The "ed biz" is so much a satellite of the "art biz" that a recent cohort of high-profile curators have taken positions in art schools, shifting easily into educational leadership with impressive international connections and credentials that do not emphasize pedagogy. Yet, in Europe the *kunsthalle* tradition has nourished exhibition spaces whose programs are consistently innovative, a good example being Portikus, an exhibition space adjacent to Frankfurt's Stadelshule art academy. Indeed, newer institutions have assumed the rhetoric of institutional critique as their foundational core, incorporating that resistant dynamic into their rationale for exhibitions. This summer's Documenta, which is being directed by Roger Buergel, a professor at the University of Lüneberg in Germany, has foregrounded education as one of its themes listed on its Web page.

In the U.S., some of the very best work is shown in spaces linked to an educational institution, for

example, in university-affiliated galleries such as the Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago, the Hammer at UCLA, and Gallery 400 at the University of Illinois at Chicago, where I am employed. When the visiting-artists programs of art departments become public and attract audiences to campus, they also present marketing opportunities as schools compete to recruit students and funders, both drawn by star power. Visiting artists add currency to curriculum even as they represent models of success and challenge the status quo of permanent faculty, the often dedicated mentors who are the working stiffs of art schools. Media coverage of celebrity attractions, whether artists or curators, accelerates and emphasizes the slippage between conceptual practice and boutique production. Given the quickened pace of global art-market consumerism, it's no surprise that dealers and collectors now seek out affordable discoveries in graduate studios and thesis shows.

Despite the fact that glamorous galleries sweep ever younger artists into their folds, that auction records trumpet million-dollar price tags for living artists and cinematic fictions portray art school corruption, the best art programs foster critical engagement and interdisciplinary collaboration; they interpret and critique rather than mirror the best practices of the field, which they don't define as just the marketplace. I like the *Washington Monthly's* rankings of schools, which challenge the measurements of excellence and alumni popularity in the influential *U.S. News and World Report* college guide. Instead, *Washington Monthly* analyzes social mobility, research and community service, ideals that map easily onto dynamic art programs in which a diverse group of students are encouraged as artists to become self-reflective, intellectually curious and politically engaged.

Social activism can't be taught effectively in a classroom; it requires artists/educators who present models rather than curricula designed to promote this approach. Keeping up with the innovation market is not all bad, since vastly superior education in new media and digital technology is partially responsible for the major curricular shifts in the teaching of art. It is collaborative practice that erases conventional boundaries between designers, environments, scientists and artists. In the best art schools and universities, students find opportunities to span mediums and blend them in hybrid compositions, whether involving oil paint or immersive virtual environments, without the imperatives of commodification and beyond the confines of traditional studio practice. A more insidious challenge is the increasing replacement of language, art history and connoisseurship courses with visual literacy and "service learning" (a phrase that describes teaching students how to work in community settings, formerly called outreach). Many artists graduate lacking knowledge of the rich

diversity of the visual archive that precedes and contextualizes their work. In the specialized, artificially limited context of art academies, a sense of entitlement is assured as artists are trained in a hothouse of other artists and true believers.

Yet not all of our students are narrowly following the professional path to elusive stardom; some come

James Elkins

Ten Reasons to Mistrust the New PhD in Studio Art

The PhD in studio art is news on this side of the Atlantic: there are only two such programs in the U.S. (at Virginia Commonwealth University and the Institute for Doctoral Studies in the Visual Arts in Portland, Maine) and one in Canada (Université de Québec à Montréal).¹ There will soon be many more.² (One is being planned now at York University in Toronto, and talks are underway in several U.S. institutions.) Overseas, things are different: as many as 10 universities offer the degree in Australia, and it is ubiquitous in the UK, Scandinavia, the Netherlands and other countries. It is already expected for a teaching job in Australia and Malaysia.³

So far there is not much serious literature on the subject, and almost all of what exists has been produced abroad, including my own writings.⁴ Here are 10 reasons to mistrust the new degree—followed by one reason why the degree needs to be studied and even implemented, despite all its flaws.

1. Students in the new degrees are expected to do serious research. The length of dissertations varies from around 25,000 to 75,000 words. How many artists with MFAs can write at that length? How often is art improved by a 300-page dissertation written by the artist?
2. Clearly the new degree exacerbates the academization of art. The PhD will keep students in school between two and four years after their MFAs, not including the time they spend writing their dissertations, which might stretch on—as it does with art history PhDs—another five years or more. Artists will be at least 30 years old before they are out in the world.
3. The new degrees have often fallen into solipsism: in the UK, a PhD student might spend 30 to 40 hours per week in the studio and the library, making art and writing about it. The student may have the same supervisor for her art and her research. Under those conditions, it is not uncommon for the dissertations to become extended introductions to the artist's own work.
4. The PhD in studio art is unique among nearly all degrees in requiring two bodies of work: the art and the research. It's as if the art needed to be validated by a kind of labor that the university can reliably assess, but it makes the studio-art PhD an awkward hybrid.⁵
5. The new degree is a double threat: students

for the education. Charged interactions occur in the university, where the artist has no special status but is part of a complex community composed of biologists, engineers and historians. Veterans of campus culture wars, artists are forced to engage and compete with other disciplines. Artists are also forced to become educated alongside the biologists, engineers and historians who, importantly, become educated about art. Artists participate in a system in which their

instructors compete for research grants and tenure alongside scientists and humanists; their success as artists is not guaranteed and their identity as members of a vibrant citizenry is never taken for granted as it may be in the private academy. As educators, the first lesson we have is to listen to students and then recruit those whose lifetime goal is not only to be a painter in L.A. or Antwerp but also to become a researcher. Art student Rick Gribenas, in his second

year at UIC, finds value in "new possibilities as well as new technologies, hobby and 'zine culture, radical thought and activism . . . interactivity, environmental interface and immersive virtual content." Creativity flourishes when there is a critical mass of diverse individuals working side by side in science, literature, theater and architecture, often in an urban setting—think Florence in the 15th century, or Los Angeles in the 21st. Academic freedom continues to guarantee

whose dissertations are in history of art or philosophy will get PhDs in those fields, and in addition they will be able to teach studio art. Small colleges and art schools can employ such people to work in two different departments. It's a "double threat" because—so goes the perception—people with only one specialty will find it hard to compete.

6. In the new degree, students will become more self-reflective than ever: their research will be directed to themselves and their art. To some extent, reflexivity is a general goal of advanced education, or at the least an inevitable by-product. But is self-reflection always a good thing for art? And who can measure it? Or teach it?

7. When the MFA degree was instituted after World War II, it was hastily defined, and even now there is no extended account of the difference between the MFA and the BFA. (There are lots of ad hoc definitions, but no academic definition such as other programs have.) If we don't really know what the MFA is, how can we build on it?

8. The uneven reputation the PhD has in England, Scandinavia, the Netherlands and Australia has to do with the fact that in the UK system—where the proliferation of PhDs and DCAs (Doctorates in Creative Art) started—departments get more money if they have PhD programs. It's been difficult for the degree to escape the suspicion that it is a transparent, even cynical, engine for academic solvency. (And on the other hand, as the new degree spreads, it will put pressure on U.S. institutions to find funding for students.)

9. There is a standard rhetoric for new academic programs in the UK: they have to demonstrate that they possess a methodology for research and that they generate new knowledge. Those two expressions continue to support the introduction of new programs in a number of countries, despite two important problems: no one knows how to define art as research . . .

10. . . . and no one has come up with a persuasive argument that art is a kind of knowledge. A massive literature has sprung up since the 1970s defending art as knowledge, produced by research, but it is a tortured literature, not widely read except by the administrators and faculty of the departments in question.

These 10 reasons to mistrust the studio-art PhD could easily be expanded. There are all sorts of things wrong with it. But there is also a reason why it needs to be taken seriously: it is coming, and there is no way to stop it. Every one of the objections and doubts about the new degree was once leveled at the MFA, but by the 1960s the MFA was ubiquitous. Now the MFA is commonplace and

the PhD is coming to take its place as the baseline requirement for teaching jobs.

My own interest in the degree is to see how it might be done in the most coherent and challenging manner. Because the U.S. academic system does not require catchwords like *research* and *new knowledge* (and the long train of often tortured justifications that they have brought with them), U.S. institutions have the opportunity to rethink the degree, and make it into something truly interesting. If it is carefully conceptualized, it has the potential to be one of the most innovative and genuinely interdisciplinary programs of all: a real challenge to the university, the art school and the students who participate in it.

I'll end with just one thought along these lines. If the art that a student makes is no longer classified as *research*, that frees the academic portion of the PhD to function in the way that it traditionally has, as more or less systematic, professional-level, original research leading to new knowledge. The PhD in studio art affords the opportunity to rethink what such research, or knowledge, might be for. In Australia, some students have chosen research fields very far from their art practice: they have gotten PhDs in anthropology and even chemistry. In some cases, the students' art has no direct connection to those fields: it's just that from their point of view, their art would be helped by a PhD-level understanding of, say, chemistry. In those cases the students have a supervisor in studio art, and another in the relevant field, and neither supervisor is required to spell out the connection between the two. The assumption is that art is a life-long activity, and that the artist herself might not have a clear idea of the relation between the fields. To me, that kind of arrangement is an exemplary use of a university. The juxtaposition of painting and chemistry, or sculpture and anthropology, is genuinely interdisciplinary because neither the supervisors nor the student knows what shape the interaction might take. And such combinations raise fascinating problems from the faculty's point of view: How, exactly, should the chemist supervise a dissertation that is going to be put to an artistic use? What role does art theory, or art criticism, have? When the student writes about her own art, how should her writing be evaluated? By whom?

These are all lovely questions, much more entrancing, I think, than the usual perplexities of interdisciplinary encounters and collaborations. They could even compel the "noncreative" portions of the university to reconsider the place—always marginal, always dubious—of the "creative and performing" arts.

But that's only one suggestion. Provided the

rhetoric that currently justifies studio PhD programs can be left to one side, and they can be openly and thoroughly reconceptualized, they may well prove to be more than just the annoying next step in the academization of art—they may turn out to be the promising next step in the rethinking of the university.

1. This is not counting the several universities that have, at one time, independently implemented PhDs in the studio arts on their own terms, without taking account of international developments currently driving the field; that includes Columbia University and New York University. The Montreal program focuses on science; there is also a program at Concordia University. For the Institute for Doctoral Studies in the Visual Arts, see www.idsva.org.
2. Degrees that resemble the new degree—PhDs in design and in music, in the conservatoire tradition—have been around for a long time, but they are not structurally related to the studio-art PhD, which is closer to the half-dozen PhDs in creative writing that already exist in the U.S.
3. I thank Sam Ainsley, Glasgow School of Art (which also runs a PhD in studio practice), for the information about Malaysia.
4. The first book was *The New PhD in Studio Art*, edited by James Elkins, no. 4 in the occasional series called *Printed Project* (Dublin, Sculptor's Society of Ireland, 2005). The second was *Thinking Through Art: Reflections on Art as Research*, edited by Katy McLeod and Lin Holdridge, London, Routledge, 2005; see also their article, "The Doctorate in Fine Art: The Importance of Exemplars to the Research Culture," *International Journal of Art & Design Education* 23, no. 2, 2004, pp. 155-68. There is also *Artistic Research*, edited by Annette Balkema and Henk Slager, a special issue of *Lier en Boog: Series of Philosophy and Art Theory* 18, 2004; see www.lierboog@dds.nl; and "The Artist's Knowledge: Research at the Finnish Academy of Fine Arts," edited by Jan Kaila, Helsinki, Finnish Academy of Fine Arts, 2006. I thank Timothy Emyl Jones for this last reference. A crucial document in this respect is the UK Council for Graduate Education's internal study "Practice-Based Doctorates in the Creative and Performing Arts and Design." An expanded U.S. edition of the first is under preparation, with new essays by Victor Burgin, George Smith, Judith Mottram, Henk Slager and others. Lynette Hunter at U.C. Davis is also working on an anthology with an emphasis on performance studies.
5. At the University of Plymouth, there is only a minimal writing requirement; that was instituted to solve the double-requirement issue, but it also means the faculty are responsible for determining what might count as a PhD-level art exhibition. George Smith's program, the Institute for Doctoral Studies in the Visual Arts, is the opposite; he does not anticipate teaching studio, but only the related theory.

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opportunities for experimentation, and art schools can become provisional shelters from the pressures of globalization, commercialization and the competitive hunger for the new.

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Robert Storr

The most significant changes in the teaching of art over the last decade have been the ever-yawning discrepancies between critical approaches—as taught in seminars or espoused by visiting lecturers and artists—and the actual conversations in studios, the types of art coming out of them and the conduct of the majority of students and young artists in the world.

The conventional academic discourses—the often patently anachronistic utopian and dystopian theories that long enthralled my generation—dominate the classroom without there being any significant check on theoretical exaggeration, rhetorical inflation or simple challenges to credibility and responsibility, such as, “If you really believe that the end of art and of the world as we know it is nigh, then why are you doing what you are doing, making what you are making?”

It's not that I am particularly optimistic about any aspect of the situation in which we find ourselves today or that I fail to take seriously the basic questions raised by “postmodernism.” As a product of the late 1960s, I have posed them in my own fashion, and aspects of them are, if anything, more urgent than ever. It is just that the experiences that I take for granted as being integral to those questions are now historical, and have little to do with actual lives and circumstances of students who are expected to recite them as a catechism. Walter Benjamin ca. 1938, filtered through the crises of 1968, doesn't add up to 1988 or 1998, much less 2008. Nor is Lacan's distinctly mid-20th-century, and peculiarly French, rereading of Freud necessarily the best place to start a discussion of photography, or of feminist performance today—much less of digitally manipulated photography or abstract painting.

If you're anxious about the rise of authoritarianism—and who isn't—then buck it. Don't just talk back to it in another authority-based language. It's time for post-postmodern generations to make up vocabularies and metaphors of their own—and teach them to their elders. That verbal process goes hand in hand with creating new visual forms. The absence of the former retards or compromises the latter. Or else the emerging generation might radically cleanse the existing vocabularies of dated jargon. “To purify the language of the tribe” was how Mallarmé once defined the goals of modernism. At the moment, scholastic obscurantism is more of a threat to sharp critical thinking inside art schools than the “dumbing down” going on outside them. And it's a huge barrier between people within the art system and those at its peripheries and beyond with whom young artists might want to communicate.

Plain speaking about complex matters is not anti-intellectual, it is the achieved result of sustained intel-

lectual labor. Moreover, poetic expression in the service of critical speculation is not the “soft” alternative to “hard” thinking. Rigor is demanded in both, but if you examine the shelves in most studios these days you will find shockingly few books of poetry or fiction. How many students are asked to read the secondary literature on Baudelaire, Beckett, Borges, the Russian formalists and so on, without ever reading any appreciable number of the original texts, and without ever reading literature as literature?

And, while we are at it, who reads history anymore? Who has hunted the sweeping generalizations now in circulation back to the best researched and argued accounts of actual individuals, events and institutions? As Pound said, a generalization is a check written on the bank of knowledge. How many checks bounce these days because people fail to monitor the balance between theory and verification?

The widening focus of studies in art schools, along with the growth of interdisciplinary frames of reference, has been in progress since the 1960s. This is a good thing insofar as it breaks down the self-imposed limitations—the esthetic parochialism, really—of the old master-student system of studio teaching. Of course, such teaching still has its role, an important one on many levels. But as far back as the Caracci and the Renaissance, art academies were intended to free students from the bonds of traditional guild-based training and give them access to the liberal arts generally, which in those days included history, geography, classical literature, rhetoric and so on. In our day it includes the sciences, the social sciences, critical theory and a host of other fields.

Surely artists have other uses for these bodies of knowledge than specialists in them, and surely they have a right to what Harold Bloom calls the “creative misreading” of what they encounter. But lazy misreading, or the arbitrary or purely polemical misuse of ideas and methods that have their own logic, is another matter, especially when artists claim some of the authority of those disciplines as their own in debate with others in their world. The intellectual tyranny of glibness is as damaging to art as that of dogma—and the two combined are lethal to both art and ideas. If artists speak outside their area of specialization, fine, but if they are speaking within that of someone else, they should be prepared to listen and learn when their speculative approach to the material runs up against true expertise and thoughtful counter-positions. After all, it is not as if everyone doing the “new” social history—much of which is based on intensive archival documentation—accepted Foucault's sweeping and frequently fact-light interpretations as gospel.

Meanwhile, there is undoubtedly a generational



Studio painting class at Yale University's School of Fine Arts, ca. 1880-1910. Courtesy Manuscripts & Archives, Yale University Library.

divide between those who take new technologies as givens and adapt well to their ceaseless metamorphosis, and those for whom they pose a constant, in some cases nearly insurmountable, challenge. Drawing used to be the lingua franca of art education; now, computer and video skills are. There is no going back, though there is no reason to regard drawing as methodologically obsolete, either. Some people are at home with both ways of making and manipulating images. Increasingly, however, we are dealing with two distinct visual cultures, both in terms of the ability to read images and in terms of the ability to bring them into being. But the notion that they are necessarily polarized—that technology has eclipsed the handmade for some vanguard teleological reason or, on the conservative side, that people opt for cameras because they just can't draw—is the purest nonsense. Bruce Nauman, who is one of the great contemporary innovators of sound, video and other new forms, is also a master draftsman, and he draws all the time. Incidentally, he started out as a teaching assistant in Wayne Thiebaud's drawing classes at UC Davis. On the other hand, Ron Gorchov, generally thought of as a “pure” gestural painter of the old school, has used computers to compose some of his recent abstractions. The fact is that artists find their mediums as need and experience dictate. And just as pioneers of electronic means pick up a pen or pencil, many who may be slow if not reluctant to learn new tools will find a motive and a way to do so.

The number of people who elect to study art has grown out of all proportion to those who are likely to make art. But then there were always more aspirants than eventual practitioners. When I went to the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, we were told that if 10 percent of our class were working in the arts in any capacity 10 years hence that would be a high rate from the school's perspective, and a success.

Given the proliferation of art programs, those sta-

Creativity flourishes when there is a critical mass of diverse individuals working side by side, often in an urban setting. —Judith Russi Kirshner

It's time for post-postmodern generations to make up vocabularies and metaphors of their own. —Robert Storr

tistics, if true, must have dropped to under 10 percent nationwide, which makes it all the more important that art schools take seriously the need to prepare students for critical thinking as much as for creative “doing.” Beuys was misleading about everybody being an artist—even many gifted people can’t sustain the effort—and his siren song has lured a good many naive souls into troubled lives and others into confusion about what an artist is. Nevertheless he was on to something in arguing that people with art training who approach problems with an open, improvisatory mind are not inferior in real-world situations to those with focused professional training of other more “practical” sorts, and may in some cases be superior to accredited professionals because they learn early to conjure up and play with unscripted options rather than just plug in known solutions to known problems. Chuck Close told me that when he was at Yale, back in the days when formalists talked endlessly about solving the problems of art—by which they meant making the next move in a game with rules set by critics such as Greenberg—his classmate Richard Serra said, “No, artists don’t solve problems, they invent them.” That is an attitude and a skill that can readily be developed in art school and then applied to surprising effect anywhere one happens to end up.

Historically, art and artists have always moved in and out of the shadow and the spotlight of the market. Only the ignorant, the envious or the hopelessly romantic—plus the rare holy fool—speak of art that is pure, entirely free of the market’s temptations, pressures and rewards. Van Gogh wrote to his dealer brother all the time about selling pictures, even as he was just learning how to make them. And it wasn’t only the money he wanted; he craved validation. So it’s entirely understandable that dedicated young artists should be thinking about how to get their work into the public eye and how to make a living at it. But art schools should not be a dating service that matches the young and the restless with avid art lov-

ers. They should not be in the business—and in an increasing number of schools with aggressive “placement” strategies, it really has become a business—of selling their programs based on the ability of students to sell, and so in effect to speculate or encourage speculation on the early careers of their graduates.

When considering whether or not to open their doors to outsiders, and if so how often and how wide, graduate programs and the students in them should keep in mind that the two to three years spent there will be almost the only time in the lives of young artists when their primary audience is people as informed, as driven and as committed to the long haul as they are. The dialogue that can only take place among peers or with older artists with whom the students have chosen to work is crucial to the roller-coaster ride of doubt and confidence. It accompanies the often disorienting experimentation and abrupt changes in direction students need to go through to arrive at an underlying sense of themselves, and to forge their first—and I stress first—mature body of work. Trading that dialogue and introspection for the usually fickle attention of browsing buyers is a mistake.

Earning a reputation that then needs to be protected for art that may be smart and stylish but is not yet that first mature body of work can slow growth down or in the worst case stop it cold. There is a line in a Carter Ratcliff poem that made a big impression on me when I was in that situation, and even though my “creative misreading” doesn’t do it full justice as poetry, I offer that version for what it is worth: “Becoming famous in a style that is not your own is like going to jail for something you didn’t do.”

The ultimate question, though, is not when you should make an initial move in the direction of the market, or how to respond when it makes its initial overture to you, but how ambitious you are for your work in the long run. How do you pace yourself relative to your particular talents, emotional stamina and powers

of concentration, as well as to the particular demands and rhythms of the kind of work you do? Many of the artists most admired these days—Acconci, Nauman, Baldessari, Bourgeois, Polke, Kelley, McCarthy—were comparatively slow to find any real market success, much less market security (if such a thing even exists). So anybody wanting to be an overnight wonder and a radical paradigm-shifter should read very closely the bios and exhibition and collecting histories of those they look up to. If a classmate “takes off,” so be it. As the ferociously savvy Alex Katz once said in these pages, “A jerk is somebody who competes with the wrong guy.”

At the Art Academy in Düsseldorf where Beuys,

Richter, the Bechers, Immendorff and so many extraordinary artists studied and taught, the old master-student system still exists, and it can work. But one has to remember that for every relationship of this kind that develops—Immendorff and Palermo with Beuys, for example, or Gursky, Ruff and Struth with the Bechers—there were hundreds of cases of students who became fixated on or overwhelmed by their mentors. Broader access to faculty in various disciplines and of diverging esthetic convictions, plus discussion centered not only on the professor’s wisdom or experience but also on student-to-student dialogue, are the better way so far as I am concerned, though for the lucky and the strong like Immendorff—but not Palermo, who suffered from his discipleship—being “the student” of Beuys must have been a heady way to start out. My only “famous” teachers were Ed Paschke and Peter Saul. I learned a lot by arguing with them, and from their challenges to prevailing modernist “good taste.” But there was never a question of being their protégé, since both of them thought what I was doing—first “eyeball” realism, then “eyeball” abstraction—was completely hopeless. We’ll see.

There are many factors that make art schools click—and usually it is for a decade or less, after which they need to be jump-started again. The first is the care with which students are chosen and the luck they and the faculty have in the chemistry—shared concerns, mutual support, intimate rivalry and what-the-fuck-give-it-a-shotism—that is generated among members of a given class or two. This is what made Yale, Cal Arts, UCLA and some of the London schools hotbeds at different times. As I suggested, big-name professors are not essential; a lively visiting-artists series attended by all students regardless of medium or general orientation is. By the way, as Cal Arts and UCLA show, you can’t go wrong hiring John Baldessari.

Otherwise, the faculty must be serious and generous about the teaching part of their vocation—just “putting in time” should be grounds for early retirement—and they have to be fully engaged with their own work and in touch with the wider world, even if that world hasn’t always or even ever paid them much attention. Defensiveness and turning one’s back on what is really happening out there kill the imagination (which is not to say you need to automatically like or approve of new art). Along with the most virulent of all, bitterness, these are the occupational illnesses of those of us who teach, and they are highly contagious in small communities of faculty and students. Articulate pleasure or passionate but respectful displeasure in the work of others is also contagious; these are models of engagement as important as anything else one can transmit to—or awaken or confirm in—a young artist. But basically students-as-young-artists are on their own by the time they arrive, and the professor-as-older-artist is, too. At its best, art school is the more or less productive meeting of as many supple and unpredictable minds as can be arranged. It’s the partially organized but largely ad-libbed exchange and differentiation of interests among a group of semi-strangers, all of whom are playing for keeps. □

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Yale's Art and Architecture Building, designed by Paul Rudolph, 1963.
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