

## The Hidden Curriculum Symposium 2016

### Abstract

#### **“It wasn’t what I thought I was making”:** Managing uncertainty in a speculative space

Dr Susan Liggett ([s.liggett@glyndwr.ac.uk](mailto:s.liggett@glyndwr.ac.uk)); John McClenaghan ([j.mcclenaghan@glyndwr.ac.uk](mailto:j.mcclenaghan@glyndwr.ac.uk)), Glyndwr University, N. Wales.

This paper explores some of the problems associated with teaching studio practice within an undergraduate Fine Art course. Will the increasing pressure placed on our graduates to seamlessly transition from student to professional artist come at the cost of an in depth understanding of the material processes involved in their practice? Has the increasingly outcome driven nature of contemporary Fine Art education obscured the necessity of learning to manage uncertainty in the studio, favouring the informed understanding of audience and exhibition practice? Do these factors act against the students’ experience of action and reflection, rather than the realization of concept as form?

The use of the term art practice suggests a process where ideas are tested through actions embodied in materials or mediated through the use of technologies. We are constantly being encouraged to look at the completed and exhibited artwork as exemplar. Does this foster a mimetic process of production rather than one of speculative enquiry where the representation too often stands in the place of practice? How do we as educators teach the ‘medium specificity’ necessary to maintain a tactical dialogue with the unfolding event that is practice?

The paper will explore how these factors impact upon our attempts to teach Fine Art practice to students in universities. It offers subtle tactical teaching solutions rather than strategic curriculum change to ensure that the ‘real curriculum has not moved under the radar’. It evidences how the writings of Barbara Bolt, Donald Winnicott and Donald Schon and more recently writings by painters Emma Talbot and Dan Hays have impacted on the development of a critical studio practice initiative on the BA (hons) Fine Art programme at Glyndwr University.

### Keywords

Fine art studio practice, material thinking, fine art curriculum, speculative enquiry.

**John McClenaghan** is Programme Leader for Fine Art at Glyndŵr University. He has an MA in Fine Art from the University of Liverpool (2008), a BA (Hons) in Fine Art from the Glasgow School of Art (1987) and is a Fellow of the Higher Education Academy. His practice explores time and change within landscape predominantly through painting and assemblage.

Recent Exhibitions include: Facing North (2013), Storey Institute Gallery Lancaster Play Serious, Research Exposition 20-22 NW, Manchester (2012), Distance 2 Sofia, Academia Gallery, National Academy of Art, Sofia, Bulgaria (2011), Y Lle Celf, Visual Arts Exhibition of the National Eisteddfod of Wales (2011), Wrexham Print International (2011) Oriel Wrecsam (Touring Exhibition).

**Dr Susan Liggett** is Reader in Art and Design and head of the Media Arts and Design Research Centre at Glyndŵr University. She has a PhD from the University of Wales (2008), a Post Graduate Diploma in Painting (MA) from the Royal Academy Schools, London (1994) and a BA (Hons) Fine Art from Nottingham Trent University (1989).

Her work explores personal memory within the genres of landscape, figure and still life painting. She also has a collaborative research practice with the artist Karen Heald which explores issues related to mental health and creativity ([in-between-ness.co.uk](http://in-between-ness.co.uk)). Recent exhibitions include: Slippage, CASC, University of Chester (2015); Lynn Painter-Stainer Painting Prize, Mall Galleries, London (2014); In-Between-ness Oriel Sycharth, Wrexham, 2013; Videoformes, Trinity Church, Salford (2012); The Vending Machine, Serra dei Giardini and the Contemporary Art Galleria Perela, Venice (2011).

[www.susanliggett.com](http://www.susanliggett.com)