

Making Public: The Fine Art Degree Show

Friday 12th April 2019

Morning Location: Broadcasting Place, BPAG02, Leeds Beckett University, LS1 3HE

INTRODUCTION

As a network we are primarily interested in what and how people are producing and how educators and art practitioners are responding to contemporary challenges and contexts across the sector.

The keynote/guest speakers are Kirsty Ogg (Curator of The New Contemporaries) talking about the link between degree shows and the New Contemporaries/graduate exhibitions. And Paul Winstanley whose book [‘Art School’](#) documents British Art Schools use of studio and exhibition spaces (usually when empty).

Most institutions across the UK that offer Fine Art and Art related degree courses have a “degree show” in the form of a final year exhibition; it is frequently perceived as a standard expectation but is it a platform that meets the diverse needs and ambitions of the whole student cohort?

Are there practices that have successfully incorporated the range of experience that is being pursued across the student body?

What are the pre-requisites for success or the fulfilment of expectations and how are those metrics impacting on the student condition or their approach to independent learning?

Are art schools and courses managing the degree show differently at graduate and postgraduate levels?

Are there alternatives that are being trialled and are they affecting reforms or shifts in the delivery and design of teaching and learning?

Are we preserving a form of exposition that is constraining learning outcomes?

Is there a fear of teaching and learning resources being eroded as a consequence of changes in our behaviour as educators?

Do we sufficiently trust our managers and decision makers in the context of change and shifting requirements or reference points?

How does the art school or art course represent its regional geography and how is the exposition of final year work influenced by the local socio-economic landscape?

The 'Degree Show' is often used as a tool of assessment and sometimes heralded as the event that students spend three years working towards. It is a historical expectation of a Fine Art education and also one that tends to receive endorsement by the institution. It can be a celebration of work. It might be framed by competition or specific expectations of being 'noticed' or achieving sales but can it match those expectations?

A degree show framing of art work may still seek to replicate the white cube though it is more likely to be constrained by the limitations of space and facilities. The very concept of a show or exhibition may not suit all contemporary expanded art practices, where a proportion of students operate in a post-studio context in which interdisciplinary working and collaborative practice are strongly encouraged. Is it appropriate to question the relevance of a degree show in an age where more and more students are moving into post-graduation worlds of working: with context and site, alongside social communities, in response to public realms, through media and on-line environments, or in assistive roles or as facilitators in applied fields.

Do we need Degree Shows? How representative are they of our context for teaching and developing arts practices for contemporary society? Have they become institutionalised or instrumentalised for what they might offer our institutions in terms of public engagement? Are there alternatives? Has the degree show become outdated/outmoded? Is the ownership still really with the student body and to what degree are exhibitions curated, censored and utilised as marketing material for an increasingly commodified higher education system?

Contributors were invited to respond to themes including but not limited to:

1. Alternative models of exposition and public engagement
2. Student choice, voice and perspective
3. Sustainability and Resourcing
4. Space makers: The impact of an era of new buildings in UK higher education
5. Relationship of the Degree Show to Teaching, Learning and Assessment
6. Varying notions of display and dissemination
7. Curating and interpretation
8. The role of the University/Art School Gallery
9. Beyond the institution
10. The role of the degree show in supporting graduate outcomes.

Often, students tell me how much they dread their degree shows; it's not a celebration, but a competition. They've been equipped with a complex set of anxieties but no basic coping strategies, like inviting other people to come or contribute. The function of the degree show is not questioned, they just accept the stupid formats, like VIP breakfasts – why don't you just make tea and toast for everybody?" 2008-2009, BA Fine Art/Contextual Studies, Dartington College of Arts, Devon;

2009-2010, MA Fine Art, Camberwell College of Arts (UAL). rosalieschweiker.info

I remember my undergrad degree show feeling like it should stand for everything that I wanted to be as an artist, and for all of the years I had been studying. But in hindsight, it was the very beginning, a sort of testing ground

Holly Hendry 2013 graduate

Your degree show – whether at BA (degree) or MA (postgraduate) level – is a valuable opportunity to showcase your work to a wide range of people working in the art world. Curators, writers, other artists, gallery directors and many others visit degree shows as part of their research into artists they might want to work with in the future. It's important that your show looks its best at all times, and that you are available and contactable in the months following your show.

Artquest Website 2018

A crucial early showcase is the art school degree show, which, following the influential example set by Goldsmiths' Visual Arts Department in the late 1980s, has now become increasingly professional in presentation. The degree show also provides a valuable opportunity for a wider public to have access to challenging contemporary art in its earliest incarnation.

Louisa Buck (2004) Market Matters

9.00am Conference starts. Coffee and registration

9.30am - AGM

10.00am-10.10 Introduction Dr Lisa Stansbie, Dean of the School of Art, Architecture & Design and co-chair of NAFAE.

10.10-11am Keynote Paul Winstanley will be talking about his Riding House publication *Art School*.

Filled with photographs of unpopulated studios, Paul Winstanley's exploration of British art schools highlights their importance at a time when the art school system's existence is more fraught than ever. In his latest series, Paul Winstanley documents undergraduate studio spaces from over 50 art colleges across the United Kingdom. These rough and ready, nearly neutral spaces are photographed as found: empty between school years. Collectively, the works highlight the abstraction of the interior with their temporary white walls, paint stains, neutral floors and open spaces. Photographed in this manner, their sterile nature is juxtaposed by their intended purpose of fostering intense creativity for a future generation of artists.

11.00 - 12.00 Three speakers 15 min each presentation +5 min Q&A each, Chaired by Justin Burns, Head of Art

11-11.20 Gina Wall, Deputy Head, School of Fine Art, Glasgow School of Art Showing Off

This paper will present three short case studies of divergent practice across the School of Fine Art which will demonstrate the distinct ways in which our nuanced approach to degree show aligns with the core aims of our respective programmes and the ethos of the School of Fine Art. The paper will also reflect upon the relationship between the degree show and learning, teaching and assessment to explore the different ways in which programmes remain consistent with their diverse aims, while ensuring that the degree show format retains its currency.

11.20-11.40 Martin Newth, Programme Director, Fine Art, Chelsea School of Art

Event-based Curriculum.

The term event-based curriculum is coined to describe a learning experience which, rather than following an individual, assessment-driven approach, emphasizes external-facing, collaborative events in which students participate. The new BA curriculum at Chelsea, which instead of focusing on the narrative of assessment, seeks to place the emphasis of a series of events in which the students engage, each of which has a currency within (professional) art practice.

11.40-12 Thomas Rodgers

The History of Leeds School of Art

[Tom Rodgers is still writing his short abstract for this...so please leave space for around 75 words. Thx]

12.00 - 1.30pm - Lunch Reception Area and exhibition on The History of Leeds Art School by Thomas Rodgers (and time to walk to Leeds City Art Gallery for the afternoon papers in the Henry Moore lecture Theatre at Leeds Art Gallery)

Afternoon Location: The Henry Moore Lecture Theatre, Leeds Art Gallery, Leeds, LS1 3AA

1.30pm - 2.30pm - Three speakers 15 min each presentation +5 min Q&A each, Chaired by Dr Kiff Bamford

1.30-1.50pm Andy Broadey, University of Central Lancashire Democratising the University Gallery Space.

Under the curatorial direction of a group of democratically elected steering group of students, the gallery was transformed into a radical space of live art production and display. this occupation-as-exhibition functioned as a space of collective pedagogy, co-labour and 'dissensus' (Rancière 2009); a 'war machine' (Deleuze and Guattari 1980; Deleuze

and Parnet 1977) which smoothes the ‘striated space’ of the neoliberal university and de-territorialises the current individualistic focus within arts education.

**1.50pm-2.10pm Richard Hudson-Miles, Kingston University
Reading the Art School: Politics and Ideological Struggle in Degree Show Publicity**

By revealing this ‘answer without a question’ which the neoliberal art school reproduces constantly but cannot admit this paper suggests that we can begin to ‘find the question itself elsewhere’. Therefore, it concludes by demonstrating how this question is explicitly posed in the publicity for the degree shows of the various autonomous art schools formed as free alternatives to the neoliberal UK art school following its ‘economisation’. Drawing upon the thought of Jacques Rancière these publicity images will be read as the dissensual counter-politics of ‘the part which has no part’ declarative images of ideological struggle subsequently personified in the act of artistic and pedagogical subjectification.

2.10pm-2.30pm Dr Katrine Hjelde, Senior Lecturer, Chelsea College of Arts

‘Make public?’

The student exhibition is a format and a genre which is under theorised and underhistoricised. It is not properly contextualized or explored within the field(s) of contemporary art or fine art pedagogy. Rike Frank and Tirdad Zolghadr have stated in relation to the Degree show that ‘the particularities of the format, its potentials, dialectics, and attendant Institutional power relations are not productively discussed’ (2016). This presentation maps and explores these ‘blanks’ where the student exhibition – in particular the Degreeshow, does not emerge critically, or indeed at all, in pedagogic literature, in Fine Art Course Documents, in curatorial theory, in art discourse or in terms of the position of the Art School in society.

2.30 – 2.45 short 15 minute comfort break

2.45.00pm – 3.45- Three speakers 15 min each presentation +5 min Q&A each, chaired by Dr Jill Gibbon

2.45pm-3.05pm Wayne Lloyd, Programme Leader, Fine Art UWE, Bristol

My case study discussion will focus on two ambitious, public facing exhibitions staged by Fine Art students during their final month of learning at UWE, Bristol: a student led exhibition for Spike Island's open studios, and their degree show. By comparing these two fundamentally different events I will examine significant differences in relation to art, professional practice and audience reception that suggest that a conventional Degree Show may hold less possibility than alternative, student led events.

3.05pm-3.25pm Steve Bulcock, Head of Undergraduate Studies and Rebecca Court, Head of Postgraduate Taught Programmes, Birmingham School of Art
Perpendicular Pedagogy, Parallel Presentation

For the art institution as a space that has encouraged, prompted and facilitated experimentation, provocation and ideas of working beyond the gallery context it is somewhat surprising that 45 years from its conception, we still refer back to this inherited model of the degree show. In recognising that the adopted practices of the degree show may not best fit the needs of today's students this paper aims to question the site, role and purpose of the degree show in relationship to learning, teaching and assessment. Fundamentally if art school is about teaching people to be creatives, surely, we have to shift the pre-requisite of the degree show to be an event of creative learning and proposition that is owned, re-invented, made purposeful and realised by the hands of empowered students?

3.25pm-3.45pm Daniel Goodman, Artistic Director at System Gallery, Newcastle

Artist-run Initiatives: The Fine Art Degree Show and Beyond

The positive economic impact of creative industries is widely acknowledged but severely mismatched by the poor career prospects of creative graduates. For most UK graduates, artist-run initiatives are the first step into the wider art world, often through informal unpaid work which is seen as career enhancing. They are vital in the development of emerging art practices and countering the alienation felt at this vulnerable career stage through offering participation in collective action and networks. This provocation is an attempt to explore the possibilities of collaboration between universities and artist-run initiatives to combat alienation felt among recent graduates through using the Fine Art Degree Show as means to introduce them to these alternate support-structures.

3.45pm-4pm Short 15 minute comfort break

4.00pm – 4.50pm - Keynote Kirsty Ogg, talking about the history of the New Contemporaries.

New Contemporaries is the leading organisation supporting emergent art practice from UK art schools. Since 1949 New Contemporaries have consistently supported contemporary visual artists to successfully transition from education into professional practice, primarily by means of an annual, nationally touring exhibition. New Contemporaries remain responsive to change in the art world and the needs of emerging practitioners. Participants for the annual touring exhibition are selected by a panel comprising influential art world figures including curators, writers, and artists. Often, the selectors have been a part of previous New Contemporaries exhibitions giving them a unique insight on the experience.

4.50pm-5pm: Closing remarks: Dr Lisa Stansbie

5pm Conference closes & drinks in Foley's public house, opposite Leeds Art Galley for those who wish.