

Tuesday 15th June 2010

Transcript of the Question and Answers following the presentations

SESSION 2: *Training Visual Arts Teachers in France And Britain* – Chair: John Steers (National Society for Education in Art & Design)

John Steers: Silas Rhodes [American educator and co-founder of the School of Visual Arts] wrote about education through art shortly before he died in 1965. In that it he says that education through art contains enough dynamite to shatter our existing education system and to bring about profound changes in society. There is still a bit of that in me anyway and we all need a bit of that if we really want to have the maximum impact of what we do.

Henrietta Hine: I just would like to revisit the issue that we began to discuss yesterday in terms the place Art History has in these programmes. Historically in my own career I have been involved very much in this kind of model of work. Now that I'm working in an academic art history institution I am increasingly interested in where we can bridge these two areas of practice because they are very strong but often they are a bit separate. I'd like the panel to have some ideas of how can we develop this in the future, maybe revisit our models, how can we re-evaluate them and move on to something different.

Lesley Butterworth: In the artist-teacher scheme it was very much focused on contemporary visual arts practice and contemporary crafts. This has come from a response from a publication published by the Arts Council and funded through the National Foundation of Education Research. Basically this piece of research looked at where art teachers were working in terms of art context. As John said earlier, art teachers are working very confidently within the 20th century art context. But very little work is being done with 21st century art, contemporary and historical art. We have chosen to focus on the contemporary. I would like to signpost you to the excellent work that the National Gallery do. Penny and I have been privileged to work there on different occasions. They have excellent programme called 'Take One Picture' that really does celebrate school teachers understanding of Art History. It is very much a gallery process. This again is relating back to working at the National Gallery on a schools partnership programme where we introduced secondary schools students to historic works of art working with contemporary practitioners, some were artists and some were writers. In fact we did a lot of cross-curricula work too. I think you can use a kind of contemporary practice methodology if you want to address historical works of art but you can also and I think you have to have an understanding of and articulate the content and the context of the pictures, or the sculptures or the films that you're showing to young people and to teachers. I think it is often easier for young people to take that kind of contemporary art methodology and personal response before you get into the art historical realm. The way we address that in the work that I did was that we chose universal themes, so if you talk about the Journey through Life you can find all kinds of pictures, sculptures that address that throughout the centuries and you can also take a kind of contemporary response to that. About the de Louthembourg picture somebody made a contemporary response so that was the way we did it.

JS: I just make one comment in relation to that. The artist teacher scheme is true, it deals with contemporary work by and large. When Gabriel [Vacher] was talking earlier, he said that he found that some of the intellectual context where he was working was not too great and I think that would be common. There are two reasons for that, firstly anti-intellectualism in this country. I think it's absolutely true that a lot of art and design practice in schools is a-theoretical, it is so much based on practice. The theory is often ignored. The art-teacher scheme has been a bit of a confidence trick, it wasn't meant to be. A lot of teachers have enrolled on the scheme because they wanted to re-engage with their own practice because they have given up painting because of the pressures of school-life. Two things have happened as a consequence. Firstly, in terms of their practice that has changed. If they were textile artists or painters they have often changed in the kind of work they are producing to work in a much more contemporary genre, often working with digital media and that's followed through into schools. Perhaps the biggest con was that they were not prepared for the intellectual demands of the course. The part they found hard was coming to terms with the theoretical discussion from the curatorial staff in the museums about contemporary work. I guess one or two actually dropped out as a consequence of that. Those who stuck with it actually that was the most important part because I now have the confidence to take my students into galleries whereas I didn't before. I wouldn't take them before because they'd ask questions like 'Why's that art, Sir? That doesn't look like art. I could do better than that, my cat could do better than that!' They felt they had had the arguments, they knew what they were talking about. They could begin to answer those questions. Possibly a knock-on effect of that is they would also feel more confident about talking about art and artifacts from early periods not just contemporary.

New speaker: An artist is not just an artist; he is also an art historian. There is no need to separate the artistic practice with the same process that the art historian goes through. This dichotomy between art and art history does not work at the core of the artist's practice.

Irene Baldriga: In Italy we have the opposite problem because we do teach art history and we do not teach creativity. We have too much art history and not enough creativity. It is exactly for the same reason that we look for the collaboration of artists especially when we collaborate with contemporary art galleries we are looking very much for the presence of artists. And they help us to fill this lack of creativity. The artist is a mediator for us, with the art history teacher, and helps us very much to introduce the students to the creative aspect of art. We are actually facing the same problem but from a different perspective. The artist as a mediator can help us through the space of the museum, within the space of the museum, which is a sort of mediation. This aim, this objective, this goal can be fulfilled. The artist can help very much. The standing of contemporary art is so important, because it helps us so much to introduce students to the real problem of art...what is art? Thanks to the museum very much.

HH: What I didn't say is there is another side to that programme that I described which is for early career artists and gallery educators (primarily for artists to go into school and use their own practice to work with the teacher who is experienced to deliver parts of the curriculum. There are many artists in the UK who want to work in schools. They need to really get an understanding of the educational context. They work with young people, they take them to a gallery, they address contemporary art, in a gallery as well as working with young people through their own practice.

JS: One of the art teacher education programmes, the one in Cardiff in Wales, actually starts off that teacher-training course by putting all their students into primary schools as artists in residence for the first three weeks of the course. That has always been a profound experience for them, it helps them get used to the school atmosphere but they're there very much in the role of artists. It is something that has been running for twenty-five years now and it does seem to be very successful. It's a shame it doesn't happen in England: the pressures of authority.

Henri de Rohan Csermak: Back to Henrietta Hine's question- in most conferences (not this conference) we talk about what gallery education and museums bring to the education system. We can reverse that question and ask what working with education brought to galleries and museums. And as I can see maybe the main gain is an attempt to use the methods to approach contemporary art to ancient arts. I was very impressed by the exhibition: Painting with light. The didactical approach of Impressionism in its technical, scientific dimensions was very much inspired by what we've seen for now ten or fifteen years in working with galleries in the education system. That is an interesting aspect of approaching ancient art with contemporary methods. There remains to be an interesting paradox. In the general public there is still a huge barrier, freely and readily confessed, towards contemporary art. I understand very well when I look at Monet, at Renoir, a portrait by Gainsborough, a Constable landscape. I don't have the kit to understand contemporary art. In the education system it's exactly the opposite, it's difficult for us to understand the art of the past, we don't know how to address it. It's still much easier for us to work on contemporary art. That doesn't cease to amaze me.

I think the paradox resides in the difference of response of even the same person as the teacher in the educational milieu and as an art consumer or cultural consumer when he is in the general public. When I talk with teachers 'sur le terrain', it was wonderful I went to Paris I saw this or that exhibit, it is always art of the past, Impressionism and before except when it is a contemporary star, but even then they are very critical. When they are in the classroom they address contemporary art and they find it much easier.

John Steers: I don't think that this is the same here. A lot of art and design teachers here are drawn to the contemporary exhibitions and they tend to ignore exhibitions from earlier periods. One exhibition possibly is going to be the current exhibition at the British museum of Renaissance drawings, which seemed to attract attention. Most teachers are keen to see the most up-to-date of whatever you want to say. Not before 1945 in one sense or 1870.

Christina: I'm an artist and a teacher. Where I currently work there has been really a preference from the management at school that galleries are brought into the school, rather than allow the students to get outside and experience the gallery. Is it that something you've noticed, Penny?

Penny Jones: Afraid so. It is for many reasons: one is a health and safety element. The big thing for us is cover. It is basically that teachers aren't allowed to leave their classes to be covered by a stand-in teacher and that means even though we offer them five days paid cover, to come to two training sessions, to be in the gallery and take the students out, they can't go out for five days. It is a big issue. I'm sure that anyone working in a gallery here says they are prepared to do outreach work. There are more and more online resources, it's not the same as obviously coming to a gallery. If you're working

with A-Level students you can take measures that enable them become independent learners to go to galleries on their own, after school or with a teacher there. And there is a tension, because on the one side the Inspector is saying take them to galleries and the government saying no you can't take them out.

JS: There is a real contradiction there. It is a case of not joined-up government. We've got learning outside the classroom, which is notified by cultural, media and sport and cover. They are in opposition. It's hard to see how this will be resolved. With a change of government they'll probably both go!

New speaker: I see that you mentioned the diploma in crafts and retail. How important was it for your subject to benefit by the creation of diplomas. And my question is attached to what has just been decided by this government that we should get rid of ...diploma. One of which was very important to me and was called Diploma in Languages and International Communication.

LB: Well obviously we wanted to encourage galleries to become sights where work related learning could take place. That was the government directive, call it the attachment model and clearly we're in the business of helping these galleries particularly moved forwards and adjust their practice and what they offer in the context that they find themselves. And certainly the colleges and schools who have worked with galleries thought that was useful, get an insight into how these places operate. There are other agendas to think about, it's about diversifying a work force in the visual arts. Diversifying in the curatorial, historical area. There are lots of issues there.

JS: I think that the new diplomas are probably perceived, although it's not intentional, in competition with more academic qualifications. Conservatives will want to revert to what they recognise as the academic gold-standard of A-Levels. I think they're wrong in that. We are sceptical about aspects of the diploma programme. Certainly in relation to the creative media diploma, we do feel that it is far too complex, has too many elements. The feedback from teachers tends to be that it is difficult to manage. We have been through this before and it will have to be slimmed down in some way. On the other side it is clearly very popular with the students that have taken it up and I can fully understand why. I think that rather than the monotonous drip feed of an hour of this and an hour of that there is time for people to really become immersed in the subject and develop their interests. Again who knows what the future bring, we know that they're not going to expand their programme, whether they'll stay with the existing programme we'll wait and see!