

# Reminder



**10TH** ELIA BIENNIAL  
CONFERENCE GOTHENBURG  
*Speeches and reflections*



European  
League of  
Institutes  
of the Arts

## FRONT COVER

“Greenhouse Gas”

Installation by Sunand Prasad and Chris Wainwright  
 Disko Bay, West Greenland  
 From the 2008 Cape Farewell Expedition to Disko Bay  
 Photo: Chris Wainwright

## BACK COVER

“Red Ice No.3”

From the 2008 Cape Farewell Expedition to Disko Bay  
 Photo: Chris Wainwright

The European League of Institutes of the Arts – ELIA was founded in 1990 and is the primary independent membership organisation of major arts education institutions and universities representing all subject disciplines. ELIA has a membership of more than 350 arts institutions in 47 countries. Through its membership network ELIA promotes dialogue, mobility, research, sharing of best practice and activities between artists, teachers, administrators and leaders, altogether representing more than 250,000 art students. ELIA represents and promotes the importance of the arts and higher arts education and is internationally recognised as an influential body.

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INTRODUCTION	2
Carla Delfos, Executive Director of ELIA and Ulf Dalnäs, Chair Local Steering Group, University of Gothenburg	
OUR CORE VALUES	3
Chris Wainwright, President of ELIA	
FACTS AND FIGURES	4
Sally Mometti, Conference Manager	
KEYNOTE SPEAKER	6
Transcription of Peter Sellars’ speech	
VIEW FROM THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION	12
Transcription of Vladimir Šucha’s speech. Director for Culture, Communication and Multilingualism at the Directorate General for Education and Culture of the European Commission	
THE SYMPOSIUM COMMENTATORS:	
SYMPOSIUM TALKIN’ LOUD AND SAYIN’ SOMETHING?	16
The Delight of Giant-Slayers: Or Can Artists Commit Their Lives to Paper? by Raimi Gbadamosi	
SYMPOSIUM 2010: STANDARDS NOT STANDARDISATION	24
The Art of Assessment by Bill Barrett	
SYMPOSIUM WHO IS RESPONSIBLE?	29
Reflections on the 10th ELIA Biennial 2008 by Venu Dhupa	
SYMPOSIUM THE ARTS AS DIALOGUE?	32
Art Schools, Culture and Cultural Change by Ron Burnett	
SYMPOSIUM WHAT IMPACT?	36
Becoming the Change We Wish to See...? by Chrissie Tiller	
<i>Final reminder</i> LINES OF ENQUIRY	44
by Chris Wainwright	
HOST AND BENEFACTORS	53



We are very proud to present this publication about the 10th ELIA Biennial Conference in Gothenburg. We hope it will serve as a memento of the conference and a source of inspiration in the future.

From the very start, the ELIA Biennial Conferences have been key to the ELIA organisation. Since the first one in 1990, these events have taken place throughout Europe: Amsterdam – Strasbourg – Berlin – Lisbon – Helsinki – Dublin – Barcelona – Lucerne – Ghent – and in 2008 it was hosted by the University of Gothenburg in Sweden. Through the years, the ELIA Biennial Conferences have proved to be a genuine melting pot for anyone involved in the arts. They are excellent occasions to share experiences, to get to know new people and to be inspired by innovative insights and new developments in Higher Arts Education and Research.

The 10th Biennial Conference, which ELIA prepared together with the University of Gothenburg, was special in many ways. There was of course the large tent set up right in the middle of town and open day and night as a hub for delegates. But the event was also special due to its visual theme, the cultural programme that was integrated with the content and the diversity of the delegates who came from around the globe. For more in-depth information about that conference, please visit the ELIA website, [www.elia-artschools.org](http://www.elia-artschools.org).

We hope you will enjoy this reminder of that conference and that we will all meet again during the 11th ELIA Biennial Conference in Nantes, France.

June 2009

ULF DALNÄS  
*Chair Local Steering Group,  
University of Gothenburg*

CARLA DELFOS  
*Executive Director,  
ELIA*



Photo: Marcus Stenberg

## Our Core Values

### By Chris Wainwright

While addressing the contribution of the arts and arts education in promoting and nurturing creativity, innovation and responsibility in our societies, ELIA has identified the need to address, promote and advocate a strong and viable future for arts education at a time of significant global change and uncertainty, fuelled by recent seismic shifts in the world's economies. Clearly the arts and arts education will not escape the effects of change and it is more important than ever to speak with a confident and collective voice about the value of the arts in such a climate of upheaval. What is clear is that the solutions to our world problems cannot be changed by the failed self interested processes and ideologies that created them. New and imaginative approaches are needed to secure our sustainable futures. The arts and creative education with their unique approaches to problem solving through the valuing of innovation, experimentation, and the harnessing of imagination, have a crucial role to play in setting our future agendas. Central to ELIA's position as a representative and advocate of arts education in Europe at a time of shifting economically driven agendas are the following core values:

- Maintain and value the unrestricted critical and questioning role of artists as a core attribute and purpose of creative education and as a necessary function of a balanced and responsible society.
- Promote the value of arts research and enterprise as significant contributors to opportunity and knowledge generation and as vital creative, intellectual and groundbreaking engines of innovation and change in society.
- Promote and facilitate greater collaboration and cooperation between the arts and sciences that draws upon shared concerns, approaches to problem solving and the potential for creating new visions, solutions and compelling arguments for the role of creativity as a catalyst for invention.
- Explore structurally sustainable and strategic ways of reinvesting in higher arts education that draws upon the resources and massive increase in cultural provision and participation in the arts in the last two decades. It is specifically important to ensure that the cultural industries, the public and private sectors invest in new talent creation as a means of ensuring a vibrant and continuing high level of cultural product fit for the recent explosion in cultural infrastructure. Higher arts education has benefited the least from this increase in cultural expansion.
- Profile cross-disciplinary thematic enquiry and create new sustainable partnerships that reflect a complex society. There is a proven case that there can be a cultural response and approach to the pressing issues of our time such as climate change, poverty, exploitation, greed and oppression. This also represents a challenge to the nature of what is a legitimate curriculum portfolio for creative arts education.



Photo: Marcus Stenberg

CHRIS WAINWRIGHT  
*ELIA President  
May 2009*

## Facts and Figures by Sally Mometti

As Conference Manager of the 10th ELIA Biennial Conference, I would like to share some facts and figures concerning the organizational aspects of the conference.

### WHO WERE THERE?

The 10th ELIA Biennial Conference was attended by 477 people, 62 of whom were speakers in one of the plenaries, symposia, or discipline sessions. If you add eight members of ELIA's office staff and 20 student helpers, a total of 505 people were present.

We had delegates from 44 different countries. This time was special in that, thanks to a grant from the Swedish Institute, we were able to invite delegates from outside Europe. As a result, invited guests from Ghana, Egypt, Jordan, South Africa, Tunisia, Palestine, Senegal, Georgia and Tanzania were in attendance. Having these delegates present during the conference contributed a lot in terms of hearing different perspectives on Higher Arts Education and building bridges to other continents.

### WHAT TOOK PLACE?

The conference programme included three plenary sessions, five symposia with consecutive sessions spread over two days, ten discipline sessions, and open houses at various faculties. Every evening, live presentations in the tradition of Pecha Kucha were held in the tent. This tent, built in the middle of Götaplatsen, in the very centre of Gothenburg, was the heart of the conference, where attendees met each other at night for a drink and visited the Interactive Forum during the day.



Photo: Marcus Stenberg

*The grand opening was enlivened by a performance of "Burst Before We Break!", a project by composer Staffan Mossenmark and choreographer Efva Lilja, with students from Stockholm and Gothenburg.*



Photo: Marcus Stenberg

The grand opening on Wednesday included inaugural speeches by Vladimír Šucha (Director for Culture, Communication and Multilingualism at the Directorate General for Education and Culture of the European Commission), Lars Bäckström (Governor of Västra Götaland County) and Margareta Wallin Peterson (Pro-Vice-Chancellor, University of Gothenburg). You will find Vladimír Šucha's speech in this publication.

On Thursday, Peter Sellars gave a 90-minute keynote speech. Peter Sellars is one of the world's leading theatre directors and spoke in his speech of how to train students to play a useful role in the Depression we are now facing and how to skill artists, but also of how the Greeks sustained democracy with culture and how we should be as creative in our generation. You will find an edited transcription of that speech in this publication.

The closing plenary session presented a round-table discussion with five commentators from outside the field of European Higher Arts Education. These commentators each attended one of the symposia and were invited to give their reflections on the symposium issues. After the conference, the commentators wrote an article containing their reflections and thoughts and you will find those five pieces in this publication.

The conference programme was quite extensive and built around five symposia, which formed a very important part of the conference. Those symposia held consecutive sessions spread over two days. The symposia were as follows:

**SYMPOSIUM 1:** "Talkin' Loud and Sayin' Something?" – organized by Johan Öberg – presented four perspectives of artistic research and was connected to an exhibition on artistic research at the Museum of Art.

**SYMPOSIUM 2:** "2010: Standards not Standardisation" – organized by Kieran Corcoran and John Butler – discussed the management of quality in European Higher Arts Education.


**SYMPOSIUM 3:** "Who is Responsible?" – organized by Chris Wainwright – took as its core theme the debates surrounding the future direction and agenda for the art school.

**SYMPOSIUM 4:** "The Arts as Dialogue?" – organized by Michel Métayer and Thera Jonker – explored the notion of intercultural dialogue through interactive experiments and a discussion on the "I See You" film, which ELIA produced in 2008.

**SYMPOSIUM 5:** "What Impact?" – organized by Marje Lohuaru and Lars Ebert – talked about rethinking Higher Arts Education within the creative economy.

I hope you will read this publication with interest and that you will enjoy it! And of course we hope to see you in Nantes, France, in 2010, for the 11th ELIA Biennial Conference, which will be organized by École Régionale des Beaux-Arts de Nantes.

SALLY MOMETTI  
Conference Manager  
10th ELIA Biennial Conference



*“Art is not about art – it never was. Art is about everything else. We’ve been in a depressing period where art was about art. And now we have to move back.”*

## Keynote speech by Peter Sellars

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It’s great to be here with this particular group of people, because now, you wake up in the morning and say: “Thank God I’m an artist and not a banker.” And that was unimaginable a little while ago. What’s so great is that when a major system – a monstrous, evil, incorrect and bankrupt system – collapses in front of your eyes, you don’t actually have to kill it. It dies of its own accord or, as they say in the environmental movement, of unsustainability. It collapses by itself and we don’t have to murder it.

What we do have to do, however, is make sure the alternative is great. That, really, is the mission and the work of these urgent years, because finally, these big, dreadful systems are going the way of mastodons. It’s a very exciting moment. But what do you replace them with? What are the functioning alternatives that provide rightful and genuine bases of equality?

I’m obsessed with historical inevitabilities. Certain things have gone so far in the wrong direction that they need a historical corrective, and that corrective happens miraculously. I really want to stress this question of miracle, because our specialty in the arts is that which is unlikely. Every day we see what is likely. It’s tiresome. It was unlikely in 1989 that Nelson Mandela would be the next president of South Africa. And then, the unlikely thing happened. This is what changes history. Then you have what Edward Sullivan called the reversal which leads to recognition. This recognition, what it means to look again, to think again, is what the arts create. What goes beyond the usual and the moment to reconsider, to reconceptualize, to re-imagine, to re-enter, to re-engage – and start again.

And we have this incredible moment to start again, to start to build a new financial basis for the world. It’s very depressing that people are trying to restore the old order, when the old world is not possible. The last thirty years have created gigantic wealth for one percent of the world and have tripled world poverty. In no previous era of the earth, has poverty tripled. Fifty years from now, they will look back on this generation and say: “What were they thinking? Did they not know? Did they not notice? What on earth would have allowed people to let that happen?” I’ve been in New York these last four weeks, during the financial meltdown. The most important thing to remember is that the 1929 crash was very loud, but a media event. The depth hit in 1931, 1932. What we have to realize is that we are looking forward into that and that we are creating Depression-era art.

What you are training your students to do is how to play a useful role in a Depression. How can people serve? How can a new generation be prepared to enter the non-cash economy?

Before capitalism, most human relationships were non-cash based. As soon as your relationship is not based on money, you have to have an actual relationship. And that’s what we create as cultural workers – the arts of peace, which are the arts of relationships. Creating relationships and opening channels of communication. All violence is the result of lack of communication. Because you don’t recognize that I exist and you refuse to acknowledge my presence, I have to put a bomb in your car. So when you open the door and the car explodes, you might begin to notice there’s someone here you have not been speaking to, there’s someone here whose humanity remains unacknowledged, there’s someone here who remains less than human, less than equal. If artists are professional communicators, we really need to move in new, positive and strong ways right now.

The anti-intellectual mood, which began in the 1980s in the Reagan era, was very intense. Steven Spielberg could make *E.T.*, which is the perfect example, showing that any six-year-old knows more about the universe than all the NASA scientists put together. Intellectuals were disqualified, but then intellectuals took one more step and disqualified themselves. They began communicating with each other in a discourse that could only be engaged in by other intellectuals, and so they effectively removed themselves from civic speak and the public stage. And the art world went in the same direction. So now a few people with an advanced degree can perceive what this artist is doing and the rest of us say: "What's that?"

I'm sorry, but that's just not good enough! It's in fact a disaster. Don't get me wrong: I love art that questions, that makes you let go of your assumptions, that is provocative, disturbing. Always there was a place for that which we cannot grasp and renders us humble, but not that which renders us stupid, not that which renders us irrelevant. We are now in a period in which I would classify a lot of art as "playing with your food". Somewhere in the world, people have nothing to eat; here we have so much that we can play with it. For me, this is morally wrong. It's just too late in history to not notice how serious things actually are.

In the Bible, Jesus says that if you look at somebody and think, "What a fool," you have worse than murdered him and you will bring him hell forever, because actually you're thinking, "I can kill you, but it's unnecessary." The murder was already committed in your eye. We live in the age of the evil eye. We don't know how to look at each other. Art should train you to look at each other and see with the eye of equality.

The Greeks understood that to sustain democracy, there has to be culture. We've all inherited the cultural structures from the imperial era, this nightmare of a top-down structure. What we as cultural workers have not done enough is to create democratic structures that find a way in which the voices of those who have not been heard, become heard with equality. It's so important that the European project works, but it needs to be fortified and energized by culture. We need new traditions.

Another thing the Greeks understood very well was that democracy needs to be sexy: there needs to be erotic pleasure. It can't be this dreadful obligation; it has to be charged with erotic energy. The Greeks had nude sculpture everywhere, celebrating youth. We have a nightmare of a civilization run by old men, whereas the Greeks celebrated, honored and recognized how magical the moment of youth is.

Honor this amazing time in all of our lives, where our idealism is at its height and our body reflects strength, new energy, erotic charge – that is what we can build a civilization on. We live in an era where we are attacking youth, disregarding youth, criminalizing youth: youth is the problem, not the solution. And obviously, the problem is the solution.

We shouldn't tell young people to wait, but instead that they know more now than they will ever know, see more than they will ever see, because every year from now, there will be more reasons to see less. Youth is that moment in your life when you are looking at everything, when the world is wide open and when you put your body where your convictions are. It's not just talk, it's matching your actions to your belief system. The Greeks understood how to honor the most beautiful thing we have: a new generation.

The last thing the Greeks did to support democracy was to create a big ear on the outside of town, carved into the side of a mountain. Democracy is not just about speaking, it's about listening. We have lots of spaces for people to talk, yet we don't have listening spaces. The architecture of the amphitheaters that the Greeks built around the Mediterranean was based

on acoustics. In our decadent period, architecture is about what things look like, but in earlier centuries, it was about what they sounded like. The whole theater was designed to elevate the human voice.

If you voted, you had to go to the theater. If you couldn't afford it, you were sponsored. And if you look at the titles of almost every Greek play, it is the name of a woman, a foreigner, a child or a slave. All the people who could not speak in the senate had the most magnificent platform designed for them with poetry, music and dance, so that their words, their actions and their histories were heard by every citizen. That's what the Greeks did to sustain democracy, and I believe we need to be as creative in our generation.

In the Depression we're facing, I of course think of the Depression of the 1930s in America. In my opinion, this is one of the reasons why America was able to play a positive role in World War II. The Roosevelt Administration created the WPA, Work Progress Administration. They hired unemployed people, the poorest people in America, who were desperate and hungry and ashamed, and they hired artists – to rebuild America. They asked these people to build schools, libraries, post offices, roads and bridges. America reinvested in itself, in the weakest part of itself. It took its most fragile citizens and put them to work, and thereby it found its strength.

If you've ever been in one of these post offices built by these artists, you will know it's incredible. In art, any gesture is just a gesture until you add some intentionality to it and then the gesture becomes something beyond itself. For the people building this post office, it was not work for hire. It was dignity, a chance to redeem their lives, a chance to demonstrate their work, a chance to climb out of hell and find a heaven made with human hands, a sense of accomplishment. When you step into one of these buildings and you see the murals created by those artists, you feel the greatness of a moment in time and you feel the intensity of this building that was created as a genuine recovery project and as a recovery space.

How we now create recovery spaces in this next decade, and probably after, is what really concerns our students.

I've been spending a lot of time recently in East Congo. One of the things I just have to ask you to do with your students is to make sure that they will spend time living and working in Africa, Asia or Latin America, in the places of the world where history is being written now. The places where you have to work with your hands, have to be creative, because transportation, banking, health care simply does not work. In Congo, there is only one thing that does work, and that is culture – and people depend on it. When you travel to Congo with artists, you're met with respect, because artists are trying to create a human space in an inhuman place. Artists are the last defense of dignity, of a vision and of future in a place where you can see no future at all.

Once you've visited Congo, you come back to East Los Angeles with a different frame of mind. You see where you live differently. And when I say visit Congo, I don't mean going as a tourist. I mean really doing useful, productive work. If you're there as an exchange student, you're there to offer something, you're there to create a basis of equality. To me, one of the most important things for young people right now is to be faced with something serious, early on.

Art is not about art – it never was. Art is about everything else. We've been in a depressing period where art was about art. And now we have to move back to a period where art is about creating the connecting spaces for what is not available in the world at the moment. What we must skill our students to do is negotiate. In a time where there is a last, desperate attempt to build walls to keep other people out, our project as artists is to create a shared space, where people are working together at a very sophisticated level across differences and to show our politicians that that's possible. The way in which we constitute these creative communities – that is our work

in this generation. Our generation is not yet negotiating; we are still trying to find a table. The project for our students is to make the table at which people can sit down as equals.

How do you teach this as art? How do you skill an artist? If you work in programs for homeless people, you'll know that everyday, like everyone else, they need to eat. Social work wears you down, so many social workers are burned out. They are genuinely happy to see artists come into the project, because it lifts everything and creates a new, more positive energy. When you feed people in a homeless project, it's because they need to eat, of course, but they're going to be hungry again tomorrow. The role of the artist here is to shift their self-perception. You're equipping them with the materials to articulate their situation for themselves and others. You're creating a set of relationships. Most homeless people are out there alone and can't relate to other people. And after that program, that meal lasts a lifetime. The moment where your self-image changes, is the moment your life changes.

In art, you take what you have and you make something amazing out of it. It is the original inexhaustibility; it is the original place in which our lives connect to infinity. We're everyday convinced of our limitations, of our insignificance, of this big mechanism that is moving without us. It's not true. As human beings, our nature is infinite.

Art is about reversing hierarchies of importance, creating a human space, creating radical equality, creating the moment where the unimportant people are overwhelmingly important and beautiful. What most human beings need is some form of attention, and as artists we should tell the world to pay attention. The opposite of the evil eye, the look that kills, is seeing and being seen.

I did a big immigration and refugee project a couple of years ago. It was organized in eight countries, and one of the biggest things we were able to do in all eight countries was to engage all sides of immigration and have them debate with the people involved. Every night there were twenty-six kids out of detention centers without papers on stage. But the first part of the evening was always the Minister of the Interior or a border guard – people who are actually dealing with this question of immigration every day – having dinner together with the refugees. On the opening night in Vienna, a politician who had based his career on attacking and deporting refugees actually sat down and talked with these people for the first time. We created this space, which was a place for public, honest conversation, away from rhetoric and rules.

Our system has so deeply set up dishonesty. Immigration judges and border guards are not allowed to trust their instincts or opinions; they are given very precise instructions. Meanwhile, the refugees are being told that Immigration will only accept three stories, and unless you tell one of these stories, you won't get in. So of course, they will tell the story. In the most important minutes in the lives of both these people, both are lying. We have institutionalized the lie.

Can we create a space for more honesty? Where people are able to say difficult things? This was an art project that allowed an honest conversation between an Immigration judge and an immigrant. We could create a space for honesty that does not otherwise exist.

After the dinner, the audience came for a play, written by Euripides 2500 years ago, where they heard the same things they had just heard at dinner, except now it was poetry. They saw that people were also struggling with this topic 2500 years ago. It's not just us; this topic is genuinely difficult and there are no simple answers.

I mention these kinds of projects, because our job as artists now is to make as much energy around the context as on the artwork. Everything is about context, and context is missing

everywhere. Your freedom fighters, my terrorists. Same gesture, but I read it as a threat and you read it as liberation, because we have a different context. How do we create a shared context?

The point of the arts is that we take on things that we don't know how to solve in our generation. Still, we have to start now. Martin Luther King did not end poverty in America, but the fact that he tried goes across the centuries. That's why in theater we tell the stories of people who failed: *Oedipus Rex*, *Electra*, *Hamlet*, *Romeo and Juliet*. It didn't work out for them, but the fact that they tried something anyway is why we tell our stories.

We now come to the absolute barrenness of this stupid culture of success that has destroyed itself in the last three weeks. Because we see how dreadful success actually is and how it was always a lie. And now, as we move in a world in a deep Depression, we can get to know our failures much better. Art is about how you are able to fail, how to deal with the things that frustrate you, all the things you don't know. Art is about lifting those things into the spotlight. What makes us equal is not our success, but our failures, our struggle with the same things. Art can bring forward all those things that we are not proud of and don't know how to deal with.

As artists, we create an atmosphere of change. Legislation cannot change what people believe in their hearts. That is why the Greeks created their cultural projects, because the thing that is going to shift the climate is culture. As an artist, you have to be the thermostat that regulates the temperature.

*"The Greeks understood that to sustain democracy, there has to be culture."*

*"Burst before we break", a performance with students from Gothenburg and Stockholm.*



Photo: Johan Wingborg



*“Nothing can be done without actors from the culture sector.”*

## View from the European Commission by Vladimir Šucha

*Edited speech given at the ELLA Biennial Conference in Gothenburg, October 2008, by Vladimir Šucha – Director for Culture, Communication and Multilingualism at the Directorate of Education and Culture of the European Commission.*

The message we conveyed in the previous conference was that nothing can be done without actors from the culture sector; your involvement and your commitment are crucial. It is important that we all take responsibility for pushing things forward. Only then can we truly make progress.

As Europeans we currently face major challenges including: climate change, ageing populations, migration issues, gaps between creativity and economic outputs in Europe, defining the role of EU governance in a globalising world, and better communicating the legitimacy of the European project. How can we reflect upon and respond to these challenges? What role can you play? What can we achieve together through education and culture – particularly culture?

Our main goal is to cultivate the creative potential of each individual citizen as the foundation of our collective culture. This is the basis of our work and the solution we can offer European society. When I first came to the Commission, I was surprised by the absence of a European cultural policy – culture was perceived to be solely the domain of the Member States. I disagree. If culture is individual, if culture is linked to each human being, then it is local but also national, European and global. And I think that there is room for useful cooperation at European level.

In 2007, for the first time, the Commission proposed a new strategic policy document through which the concept of European cultural policy has become a political agenda. This agenda has three key priorities. The first one is cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue. Although the wish to promote intercultural competences and mobility in the cultural sectors has already been recognised, we do not yet fully understand the make-up of intercultural competence and urgently need further work in this field, starting in universities and art institutes. Secondly, there is culture as a catalyst for creativity. This prioritizes the promotion of creativity in edu-

cation, capacity building, and the development of creative partnerships with other sectors. For example, partnerships between companies and artists can be mutually rewarding and need to be developed on a larger scale. The third key priority is culture as an element of international relations. This stipulates the integration of cultural dimensions in all external and development policies and the implementation of the 2005 UNESCO Convention on cultural diversity. Culture is fundamental to democracy and the opening up of societies. If we fail to explore this potential, we will lose a key dimension of our external relations. We must build infrastructure and develop health care, but if we do not also support the openness of a democratic society, we support nothing.

In order to implement the priorities defined in the agenda for culture, we need to engage with the cultural sector. If communication channels are closed, everything is lost. Together, we must show the importance of culture for regional development and create a space for culture to be supported by regional development initiatives. This is a shared responsibility.

To facilitate exchanges with both the cultural sector and culture administrations, the Commission has developed three new working methods: structured dialogue with the cultural sector in the form of cultural platforms, improved coordinating efforts between the Member States and the Commission through the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) and the mainstreaming of culture in other Community policies.

Four OMC groups have been set up, comprising national experts from across European Member States. They facilitate the transfer of expertise and are expected to generate practice-based recommendations for policy development. Five priority themes were endorsed by Ministers of the Council in 2007, and these form the work plan for the next three years. They are as follows: mobility of artists and culture professionals, mobility of collections, synergies between culture and education, cultural statistics, and unlocking the potential of cultural and creative industries.

The Commission also invited cultural civil society to build new structures that will address their needs, and three platforms have been created accordingly: the Platform for Intercultural Europe (formerly the “Rainbow Platform”), the Platform on Access to Culture, and the Platform on Cultural and Creative Industries. I am happy to say that ELIA is present in all these platforms. These structures are intended to empower the cultural sector and to encourage a strong voice in contributing to policy recommendations. Along with this strategic vision and the development of policy, the Commission is also undertaking the less glamorous work of fitting new developments into existing legal frameworks, as well as simplifying existing instruments and creating new ones that we hope will have greater impacts on culture.

The way forward can now be defined: by revitalising existing instruments we can simplify the Culture Programme, better define the role of European Capitals of Culture, maximise the findings of European Years and identify synergies between the existing EU instruments such as structural funds, research, foreign-policy instruments and education. We are also in a position to pave the way for new, emerging instruments in the coming EU budget. Both an increased political awareness of the role of culture, supported by the forthcoming Green Paper on creative and cultural industries, and a better understanding of mainstreaming in relevant policy areas form a strong basis for future developments.

Now is the time to present your ideas to us. 2013 may feel far away, but it must be considered today. We organised the first Cultural Forum in Lisbon in 2007, an EU-wide platform for the sector to debate the content of the European Agenda for Culture. We need your ideas to go forward together, so please consider this an open invitation to the next Culture Forum in Brussels, in September 2009.

# 5 ARTICLES BY COMMENTATORS



Photo: Marcus Stenberg

*“Is artistic navel-gazing the logical, if absurd, onanistic endpoint of a desire to call whatever an artist does, research?”*

## The Delight of Giant-Slayers:

or

## Can Artists Commit Their Lives to Paper?

### By Raimi Gbadamosi

*Raimi Gbadamosi is an artist, writer and curator. He received his doctorate from the Slade School of Fine Art, researching the use of black people in British Advertising. Recent exhibitions include SHRINE (Glasgow 2005); 600/60/6/6 (London 2005); Child's Play (London 2006); Temptativa d'egostar un lloc (Africa, Spain 2008).  
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#### MEMORIES OF GOTHENBURG

Half of the people can be part right all of the time,  
Some of the people can be all right part of the time.  
But all the people can't be all right all the time  
I think Abraham Lincoln said that.  
“I'll let you be in my dreams if I can be in yours,”  
I said that.  
(Bob Dylan<sup>1</sup>)

That which is seen as an end in itself will almost always become a means to yet another end. Such is the fate of research, such is the desire of art.  
(Raimi Gbadamosi)

Against an opening backdrop of passionate calls for inclusion and social responsibility firmly rooted in a self-satisfied hierarchy which places western authority at the pinnacle of progress whilst locating Africa and blackness as a constant wretched supplicant, and privileged students are set projects to seek and find an enslaved person, I find myself engaging with the nutty questions of artists researching, artistic research, artists' writing, artists producing art, and artists querying the validation of practice and practitioners.

Taking its starting point from the curated exhibition *Talkin' Loud and Sayin' Something: Four Perspectives of Artistic Research*, the reality of research as a basis for art practice, and a validation of that practice formed the focus of four intriguing presentation and discussion panels.

Criticised as falling into an institutionalised, Cognitive Capitalistic endeavour, submitting itself to the demands of the Bologna Proclamation, Art-based research was initially treated as a suspect commodity. This was in the face of realising that formalised discussion *has* proven itself incapable of addressing the realities of Artistic Research.

Artistic research therefore needs renewal as a matter of course, where the artist is the lighting-rod between the resultant art object and the object or subjects of Artistic Research. The vexing question of the material distinction between “art” and “art research” continuously reappeared, perhaps because there is an uncomfortable understanding that the institutionalisation of yet another form of art practice will stifle its desire and ability for innovation and development.

The almost automatic production of content generated by research, initiates queries of the very necessity of the artist at all in the creation of the eventual artwork. One can only conclude that the artist is not one singular manifestation of unique ability, but many.

#### QUESTION: ARTISTIC PRACTICE OR RESEARCH PRACTICE – WHICH IS DESIRED?

The focus on art, rather than on theory or theories of artistic production, certainly helped to forge an opinion or understanding of what the emerging problems associated with artistic research were. But this in turn led to the perplexing contradictions on what the role of research is within the arts: Is the research being carried out for itself or for the unspoken desire for the acquisition of a doctoral degree and recognition within the Academy.

Personally, the focus on the sociological and anthropological as emerging valid methods and subjects of research, not to mention the voyeuristic reliance on the representation of the physical, racial, social, sexual, and economic other as source material (even when this is an extension of the “self” as a form of self-exoticism) do leave questions on the acceptability of form, which veers towards the tame inevitability of video and photography in the framing of “truth” so carefully collected.

The subsequent abdication of any responsibility to make “art” out of the gathered material seems to be one of the reasons there are difficulties in defining and accepting “artistic research” Even if one is sympathetic to the attempts made by artists to not make artifice out of life. And yet this is what art does, it fixes the mental moment (of varying lengths and intensity), and seeks way to re-present them.

Now comes a series of Notes of Contradiction:

1. The artist is presently being treated as an anomalous specimen where research is concerned. The understanding is that artists make things, other people produce the material artists rely on. The gathering and categorisation of original material is not deemed the artist's forte.
2. There is confusion amongst practitioners about the role of what is deemed “artistic research” as a new departure within the visual arts. If artists research as a matter of course, what is it these artists set aside as carrying out “artistic research” are doing that is so special?
3. The reification of the artists' amateur status is overly applauded and invoked as markers of “authenticity” and lack of an agenda, beyond the gathering and display of material. Editing and selection is treated as benign accidents, leaving the “pure” substance in full view of the reader. All of this is in place, conveniently forgetting that the artist is still performing their professional role of artist. This duality simultaneously reifies and diminishes the artist and their contribution. One is left with a backhanded compliment that leaves a sour taste in the mouth.
4. Artists are being lauded as the new humanists, being able to pose questions the less-than-human “professional” inquirers seem no longer capable of.

But back to the beginning and the grand vision of academic inquiry: When these wretched slaves are found, what are the students to do?

That was the response to the ELIA conference, since then, there have been more thoughts to dwell on.

#### POSSIBILITIES OF AUTONOMY

Artistic Research needs to be truly autonomous of institutional agendas it to enrich the Academy, otherwise research will simply become an institutional point gathering exercise, with projects perceived capable of bringing in the highest number of immediate grading or assessment points receiving enthusiastic support. This will also over-determine the type of researcher allowed in; candidates with a track record of exhibiting, attracting publicity, and securing funding will be the first in, while less appealing innovative research may not be supported by the institution because its immediate point gathering applications may not be apparent.

This is not saying that successful researchers should not be encouraged to engage with the Academy, it is just that the Academy is there to provide freedom for and to research, not endorse extant activity in an attempt to second-guess success. It is understandable that institutions need formulae to address who will, and who will not be allowed into the Academy to carry out research, but formulae can not address the realities of Artistic Research.

#### ARGUMENTS

Research<sup>2</sup>, as an activity, is an undeniable and recognised fundamental element of art production. As such, researching is simply part of what an artist does. What quality of research does an artist need to engage with to in order to qualify as an Artistic Researcher worthy of reward by position or research degree has become the vexing question. Is the continuation of research needed by an artist to enrich their practice in the first place deserving of accolade beyond its mere existence? Is there a morality to research that demands it be done for the benefit of others if it is to be rewarded? Is the academy finding a way of revalidating art practice beyond the marketplace, where artists are supposed to hone their craft? How does the artist express their research beyond the art object? How is knowledge transferred when the unique art object is not continuously available for scrutiny? How can an artist enter into a truly reflexive space when they are looking at themselves? Is artistic navel-gazing the logical, if absurd, onanistic endpoint of a desire to call whatever an artist does, research?

#### THOUGHTS

The cult of the individual, or the “star system” endemic of the art system at large, has made the presence of research almost invisible for most people. It appears preferable that artworks are simply brought into being through the “genius” of the maker. The idea that considerable amounts of research (relying on the knowledge of others) may have gone into the production of an artwork seems to diminish the impact of the artwork, and reduce the inspiration of its maker. Consequently research has been played down, and brilliance played up. The domination of “mystical creativity”, and “personal experience” as the bedrock of artistic cultural production has been one of the reasons why research, as an activity within the arts may be having a hard time being recognised as a valid activity by other branches of the academic tree. The art world wants all things its way. It wants to say that research need not, or can not, be reproducible or questionable by any authority other than the artist carrying out the research (In essence the artist is allowed to validate their own activity and retain the aura accruing to unique objects.), while at the same time it wants the academy to recognise the research being done using measurements wholly separate from the artist as maker, in order to benefit from the gravitas only the academy can give research activity. (If the exact same research were being done through commercial gallery funding, no one would expect accolades beyond sales and press for the artist involved.)

#### CREATION

Research requires negotiation as a matter of course as there seems to be a desire to create a “Artistic Research” movement within art practice. Creating movements are difficult in our post Post-Modern epoch. The death of the adamant manifesto, and recognition of diverse voices makes it hard to convincingly propose “Art-Researchism” for instance, with revolutionary demands of research for all, the abandonment of intuition, and the reification of the record. This will herald the moment in history where funding bodies are seen as the true artistic collaborator, and the academy takes centre stage for being more than a repository of knowledge, but the place where art is created for society at large. The Academy will not be the place to disagree with and depart from, but the ultimate desired destination of cultural production, where the garland awaits for achievements reached within cultural reach of the Academy itself.

Of course, there is artistic discourse, of which the Academy is a very important part, but being an important part is not the same as being the point from which all things radiate. Consequently the Academy may find itself in an awkward position of being the place artists return to, rather



Photo: Marcus Stenberg

than the place they emanate from. It may have the impact of removing the ability of the Academy to function as safe haven for ideas and experimentation as it finds itself in competition with the market it simultaneously supplies.

#### THE DIFFERENCE

What is the difference between an artist researching and artistic research? The crux of this dilemma is the impossibility of defining what each of the significant parts of the question is. Any attempt at defining “art” will soon ail, so will attempting a definition of “artistic research”. And yet one thing is appearing, artist researching and artistic research are not one and the same. The former is what artists “do” to “make”, the latter is what artists “do” and “show”. Now one can do research, but making it will lead to some unanswerable questions. Similarly “doing” art as activity is not impossible, but the act is still construed as making. Thankfully the impossibility of making one into the other means that a distinction will remain in place, and this separation of means and end will remain significant. Any attempt to collapse the two categories will lead to an uncomfortable alliance between that which informs a work and the work itself. I suppose the emerging problem is that material gathered to make “work” has become the material shown as “work”. Perhaps some editing takes place, but the research has become the product. The conundrum facing an earlier generation articulated by Marshall McLuhan of the medium taking over the message has reared its head yet again.

Art and Artistic research are best seen as two separate categories that meet through and within the artist. Artistic Research may exist as an archive, and art may exist as commodity, but they can and still only relate to each other through the active agency of the artist. There is a danger in seeing the possibility of either aspect without the involvement of the artist. Paradoxically it is the Academy and those artists seeking validation through the Academy who are making arguments for the “death of the artist”, by asserting that Artistic Research can exist in its own right. Emerging as a valid riposte is the contention that anyone at all can carry out artistic research, as long as they are carrying out research. The desire to retain control over the territory of Artistic Research, separate from research as activity available for engagement and completion by anyone suitably intellectually and financially equipped, with the “right” motivation, becomes a contradiction in terms.

So what is the use of the artist in Artistic Research? Perhaps all that is needed, as mentioned, is a good researcher, versed in the codes of academic research methodologies, a researcher able to explain why they have done what they have done. And why artistic research in the first place, if research is research is research, whether done by a chemical engineer or psychiatric doctor? And to further complicate matters, if Research Artists choose to carry out research almost always within some other discipline (perhaps to separate the activity as research rather than continuation of their own artistic musings), why should anyone from within the invaded discipline take the artistic intervention seriously, when the artists’ next research foray may very

likely be in some other discipline altogether?

The intention for research by the artist is art, not information: If the intention were simply informative, the process becomes journalistic. There are parts to Artistic Research: It can be seen as comprising two strands: Artistic Practice and Research Practice. Both merge together to form something uniquely artistic. Where Artistic Research is located is difficult to determine; whether in the artwork (which ultimately emerges) or the mass of material gathered in search of information (raw material for knowledge) is one still not answerable. As focus shifts to Artistic Research, striving to prove that art activity is valid as research, and deserves to be taken seriously (meaning that artistic research should be seen as any other kind of research), little can be made of the creative process (this being the unique quality of the artist carrying out any kind of research in the first place).

#### STATEMENT OF INTENT

The overarching desire of Europe to create itself as the birthplace of the University underpins discomforts the present Academy suffers. The three main documents which form the fundamentals of the European impetus: Bologna Magna Charta Universitatum of 18 September 1988, The Sorbonne Declaration of May 25 1998<sup>5</sup>, and The Bologna declaration of June 19 1999 have all striven to express the desire for Europe to be seen as the basis of World knowledge. While worthy of attainment, the treatment of Higher Education as a competitive element, stressing governmental controls over academic idiosyncrasies, means inevitable demands for award standardisation will create a loss in unique research capability. Fears of the East, and dismissal of the South point to an academic extension of Fortress Europe, but that is another story altogether.

#### ARTIST AS SPECIMEN

In a situation where the artist is presented as an abnormality for being involved in “research”, scrutiny is needed. The artist is rendered suspect for having the wherewithal to step outside the mythical studio and engage with actualities. Foray into the “real world”, a hallmark of artistic research, keeps the “researching” artist under the inquiring gaze of “non-researching” artists and non-artists alike.

Demands made on Artistic Research rely on notions of truth, that what is seen is truth, or if it is a falsehood, the falsehood has to be also true. Markers are necessary to make these truths apparent, so that art can retain similar authority for the viewer, akin to the authenticity of the “traditional” artwork. While the elements that make up authenticity will remain in a state of flux, there remains a certain vestige of cultural continuity which allows the resultant object the status of art.

An over-emphasis on research as a form in its own right will create work that will soon only be identifiable as “institutional art”. The inevitable collapse of research method into Art does not want to acknowledge that art is discussion-based and context-specific.

There has been an abdication of the responsibility to make art. What has occurred is the presentation of “authentic” material as the finished art-piece, or finished art-pieces as holding/being the “authentic” research material (or evidence of the research). Artists are possibly involving themselves in some sort of faux social action that makes an implicit claim of morality, which invalidates any questioning of the resultant object. But then this may be the intention, to produce work that does not rely on pre-production reflexivity.

#### RESEARCH AND THE ARTIST<sup>7</sup>

There is much the artist has in common with Jack and his magic beanstalk, the artist seeks their fortune, swaps their valued cow for “magic beans”, and steadily climb the consequential growth, striving to reach the clouds and their fortune. (This includes ‘confusions’ of discovery, and the magical and pecuniary rewards of concerted inquiry.)

The reification of Artistic Research may be the Academy instinctively fighting back, striving

to recall the Avante-Garde firmly back into the boundaries of educational establishments from the marketplace. Innovation will become synonymous with the power of accreditation. It may however be a desire to return art practice to a basis of research and development.

What is the artist to do? Research has become the new way to go. It is not that art is not in the place where it ought to be, it is just that art does not know where it ought to be, so the possibility of a new approach to making and disseminating art has landed on the shoulders of research. Where is art to go? What is it to do? What is the fate of art? The future is unknown, which will only become visible through thorough investigation, and ironically research of the unknown is the answer.

#### TELLING STORIES

There is a relationship between folk tales and artistic research: The initial moral query; the need to engage an audience; creating relevance for the audience; production of knowledge; possibility of alternative endings; the ultimate art piece. *Jack and the Beanstalk* is a good metaphor that will allow a sidelong look at the questions Artistic Research has raised as being a possible new discipline within the arts. I feel a lone character emerging from obscurity into self-awareness, undergoing a transition from not knowing what they actually want to do, to discovery and self awareness might provide some pointers. Telling a Folk Tale, (or is it a Fairy Tale) has become the best way to end this critique.

#### THIS COULD BE JACK AND THE BEANSTALK

Once upon a time, Jack was either the idle or spoilt unemployed son of a widow suffering from fever and ague living in abject poverty together in a cottage somewhere, or in a village far from London. After a hard winter there was either nothing left to sell, or their cow, Milky White, had stopped producing milk to the point that they resolved to sell the cow to raise money for food. The mother sent Jack to market with the cow, where he meets a man or a butcher along the way who offers him five magic beans in exchange for the cow. Jack happily accepts the magic beans and heads back home to his mother. Mother is either resigned or angry, sends Jack to bed without supper, or shares what is left in the house with him. The beans are then thrown out of the window into the garden or carefully planted. The next morning a beanstalk had grown up to the sky, and Jack climbed up beyond the clouds where on reaching the top of the beanstalk, he arrived at a long broad straight road; or a barren desert; or a finely-wooded beautiful country with sheep-covered meadows with a crystal river running through it. Jack then either walked along till he found a great big tall house; or met with an elegantly dressed beautiful young woman with a white wand topped with a golden peacock; or he met a strange looking woman in a pointed cap of quilted red satin turned up with ermine walking with a staff. After either being told nothing or that a giant had killed his father, a knight or rich man, and who promptly dispossessed Jack and his mother, Jack made his way to a castle or a large house. On arrival he met the giant’s or ogre’s compassionate wife who took him in and fed him in return for either being a page or out of the kindness of her heart. On the giant’s arrival for breakfast, his wife hid Jack from her husband in an oven or a large wardrobe to protect Jack from being eaten. The giant then roared:

Fee-fi-fo-fum,  
I smell the blood of an Englishman,  
Be he alive, or be he dead,  
I’ll have his bones to grind my bread.

Or

Fe, fa, fi-fo-fum,  
I smell the breath of an Englishman.  
Let him be alive or let him be dead,  
I’ll grind his bones to make my bread.

Or

Wife! Wife! I smell fresh meat!

*“It is not that art is not in the place where it ought to be, it is just that art does not know where it ought to be”*

But his wife disabused him of the possibility of new food's presence, telling him that it was either the fresh steak of an elephant; scraps a little boy had for yesterday's dinner; or people in the dungeon. After his breakfast the giant fell asleep and Jack proceeded to steal or repossess a bag of gold coins. Jack went home, to return either as himself or disguised to acquire a golden-egg laying brown hen, and finally a golden self-playing harp. As Jack was taking the harp it called out to the giant who chased Jack to, and down the beanstalk. Jack made his way to the beanstalk's base where he called to his mother for an axe or hatchet and cut the beanstalk down. The giant then fell from a height and broke his crown, or landed on his head and broke his neck, and died. Jack then either went back into the sky with his mother and booty in a peacock-drawn chariot to take possession of a castle and rule over people, or apologised to his mother for his previous fecklessness and became a dutiful and obedient rich son, or he became very rich and married a great princess and lived happily ever after<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Dylan, Bob. "Talkin' World War III Blues" on The Free-wheelin' Bob Dylan Columbia Records. 1963.

<sup>2</sup> Research is a process of investigating a subject from different points of view. Research is attached to an idea of "truth". As complicated as this may seem, there is an implicit understanding that what is discovered can be used by others as the basis for their own research, allowing them to assume that what they are relying on is thorough and "correct" as far as is possible. Research allows for the formation of a relationship between a subject and the person through the level of interaction engendered in reading up on it, reflecting, playing with the ideas, living the experiences, then latching on to specific areas of interest and following up on them. Research is a way of educating the self and others.

<sup>3</sup> Research made manifest: The fact that artists carry out research for the simple reason of making artworks helps to qualify what the research is all about. Artists, like any other professional, will carry out research for their own pleasure, and like other professionals will accept this as a norm. Questions therefore emerge as to how research carried out by artists can be made manifest if not through produced artworks. If the result is any type of written text, what is the research's position in this context?

<sup>4</sup> Safety in the Cloisters: The Academy needs to present the possibility of research safe from marketplace pressures. The paradox is that Research is time sensitive; the sooner Research makes its way to the market the better. Coinciding with potential obsolescence is the need to extract immediate value from Academy-based Research. As few intellectual proprietary commodities are capable of refreshed marketability, managing Research within the Arts takes on new importance.

<sup>5</sup> Universities were born in Europe, some three-quarters of a millenium ago. Our four countries boast some of the oldest, who are celebrating important anniversaries around now, as the University of Paris is doing today. In those times, students and academics would freely circulate and rapidly disseminate knowledge throughout the continent. Nowadays, too many of our students still graduate without having had the benefit of a study period outside of national boundaries. (The Sorbonne Declaration, May 25 1998)

<sup>6</sup> We hereby undertake to attain these objectives – within the framework of our institutional competencies and taking full respect of the diversity of cultures, languages, national education systems and of University autonomy – to consolidate the European area of higher education. To that end, we will pursue the ways of intergovernmental co-operation, together with those of non-governmental European organisations with competence on higher education. (The Bologna declaration, June 19 1999)

<sup>7</sup> Some un-broached questions: How are subjects and material seen and treated? When the research is viewed, who speaks the loudest? Is the relationship between artist and subject where this new art resides? What will be the influence of practice-based PhDs on the general practice of artists? Is Artistic Research only available to PhD research candidates? Is Artistic Research simply an expected continuation of an artist's practice? What is the difference between Art Research (research carried out to make a body of work) and Artistic Research (research which is the body of work)? Is the play on words; Research-based Practice and Practice-based Research a valid difference, or an attempt to diffuse matters? What does one artist write for another artist to reveal their secrets?

<sup>8</sup> Jacobs, Joseph. *English Fairy Tales* G. P. Putnam's Sons and David Nutt, New York and London:, 1898. pp. 59-67; Lang, Andrew. *The Red Fairy Book* Longmans, Green, and Company, London 1890, pp. 133-145; Hartland, Edwin Sidney. *English Fairy and Other Folk Tales* The Walter Scott Publishing Company, London, ca. 1890. pp. 35-46.

*"The Academy is a very important part of art discourse, but being important is not the same as being the point of radiation."*



Photo: Johan Wingborg

## SYMPOSIUM 2

### The Art of Assessment By Bill Barrett



Photo: Marcus Stenberg

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This article is a response to the symposium “2010: Standards Not Standardisation”, which was held at the ELIA Biennial Conference in Gothenburg, Sweden, in October 2008. It is also a commentary, from the perspective of private higher-arts education in America, on trends in Europe relating to quality assessment and institutional evaluation.

Concern over the quality of education – at all levels and by many constituencies – has become a common theme throughout much of the world in the past ten to fifteen years. This usually emanates from governments, is echoed by the press, and internalized by parents and students. This concern is then fueled by increasing globalization, which creates anxiety over national competitiveness and then leads to a focus on educational quality as a means to cure perceived deficiencies. The Bologna Process added further momentum to this movement, as did the Spellings Commission in the United States. And it is virtually certain that our current economic slowdown will extend this attention further.

Broadly speaking, of course, it is always good to be looking for ways to improve whatever we’re doing – teaching, advising students, developing the curriculum, managing the budget, and so on. Yet there are many people in both Europe and the U.S. who are beginning to wonder whether the current assessment/evaluation emphasis is at least misguided and at most has gone too far. Many believe it draws attention away from other important issues and raises the threat of standardizing higher education to the point that all uniqueness and diversity are driven out of the system, to the detriment of everyone. I believe there is validity to these fears. However, I also believe it is possible for education leaders to push back in a way that ensures more autonomy for institutions and preserves variety and choice in higher education.

It is most interesting for me, coming from America and having considerable experience with the U.S. accreditation process, to see what is taking place in Europe right now with regard to institutional assessment and evaluation. Partly this is because I am used to a very different political and educational system here. The U.S. higher-education system is quite variegated compared to that in Europe, consisting as it does of both government-supported, private non-profit, and private for-profit colleges. It is also quite decentralized: the federal government has relatively little control over educational matters in private colleges (though the overseeing of public colleges by their respective states more closely resembles the European system). The European model, as you know, is characterized by much more national, central control over most aspects of higher education. And now Bologna is increasing that centralization.

In the U.S., the government’s main role in higher education is related to student financial-aid programs and the policies deemed necessary to regulate those programs and to achieve certain national goals relating to integrity and access. The federal government has no control over curriculum content, teaching philosophy, hiring policies, college admissions, and other key aspects

of the nature and functioning of colleges; these are delegated to the college itself under the loose guidance of non-governmental, private accrediting agencies. These agencies are governed almost entirely by the colleges themselves. The federal government is indirectly connected to this accreditation process – because it requires colleges to be accredited in order to participate in the federal student financial-aid programs, and because it reserves the right to review the functioning of the accrediting agencies – but not to the colleges those agencies accredit.

Thinking of these differences, I am reminded of two events that occurred in September 2005. *The Economist* published a special issue on higher education. In it, the editors bemoaned the heavy-handed, centralized, cumbersome system that prevailed in most of Europe, stating that it tended to produce a slow-reacting and less entrepreneurial system. They urged Europe to loosen its grip on higher education and to adopt the flexible U.S. system, saying, “The beauty of the U.S. system is that there is no system.”

At the same moment, the U.S. Secretary of Education, Margaret Spellings, announced she was forming a special commission charged with reviewing the entire U.S. higher-education system (in one year, no less) and recommending ways to create more consistency and comparability system-wide. She strongly suggested that our decentralized, exceedingly diverse system might have to be sacrificed in the name of improving quality and oversight.

It was an ironic moment: a leading publication in Europe and the education leader in America both calling for the adoption of the other’s system as a means of improving higher education. Moreover, both said these changes were essential to assure national competitiveness in the global marketplace of the future. Same goal, two widely divergent solutions. It is fair to say that neither proposal got off the ground.

In the U.S., the “Spellings Commission” – as it was informally called – recommended some radical changes to higher education, including giving the Secretary of Education more direct control over colleges, curricula, and accreditation. There was intense lobbying and debate over these proposals over the next two years. But eventually the higher-education system convinced our Congress that these proposals would damage all that was beneficial about the U.S. system. Thus the U.S. Higher Education Act that was approved in August 2008 pointedly barred the Education Department from exercising any more control over curricula and accreditation than was currently authorized.

Meanwhile, in Europe, *The Economist* was all but ignored. The Bologna process continued to gain momentum, leading to the European Qualifications Framework, National Qualifications Frameworks, quality assurance initiatives, and tuning. I suspect the last few years stand as good examples of just how hard it is to change any deeply entrenched system. It also reminds us of the saying: “What you see depends on where you stand.”

The main reason I am interested in events in Europe is because I have spent nearly 15 years working in and with the U.S. system of private, self-regulated college accreditation. It is a model I heartily recommend to other countries. In this process, colleges control their own missions, curricula, and educational philosophies. They are reviewed every five to ten years by various accrediting agencies – from as few as one general agency at smaller, general-purpose colleges to numerous specialized agencies at larger, multi-purpose universities.

During these periodic reviews, the colleges begin by completing a document called a self-study. This involves describing the college’s purpose, structure, and programs, then describing the results of a self-evaluation of the effectiveness of the school and its programs, and finally listing what steps will be taken to improve the college. In effect, colleges are asked: “What do you

do, how well do you do it, how do you know how well you're doing it, and what will you do to improve?"

This self-study is followed by a campus visit carried out by a team of trained, experienced evaluators drawn from a pool of experts. This team reads the college's self-study and looks over the campus for two or three days. Then the team delivers an opinion as to the accuracy of the self-study, the extent to which the college is meeting its mission, and how it might improve those efforts in the future. (More often than not the team agrees with the college's appraisal, though it is not uncommon for a team to say the college has not been sharp enough in its self-evaluation, and in some rarer cases the team may say the school has been too critical of itself.) Finally, the self-study and the visiting team's report are reviewed by an elected, experienced review panel operated by the accrediting agency, which renders a final decision to grant, continue, or revoke accreditation.

In reality, accreditation is somewhat difficult to achieve, usually involving a number of preliminary actions (known as candidacy status) prior to full approval. And once granted, accreditation is rarely revoked. This is because most cases of deficiency or poor performance are handled by requiring that progress be shown via short-term, focused reports, sometimes followed by brief campus re-visits. The government makes periodic reviews of the agencies' policies and procedures, and then accepts those accreditation decisions as sufficient for participation in the government student-aid process.

The whole accreditation process emphasizes continuous, internal assessment and constant improvement on the part of the college, with expert advice and analysis being provided by experienced peer reviews. It is not punitive; rather it is progressive and developmental. Best of all, it does not encourage standardization; rather it honors unique missions and institutional diversity. The government sets broad standards for the accrediting agencies. The agencies set broad, overarching standards for the colleges. And the colleges bear the major burden for assuring success and improvement. There is broad agreement on standards throughout the system, but not at the expense of diversity and special purpose. The external reviews place a strong emphasis on "home rule" and institutional commitment to regular investigation and improvement.

Having spent a number of hours listening to and understanding the assessment process now being developed under the Artesnet Thematic Network (previously under the Inter}artes Network), I believe it is both a desirable and necessary undertaking, and an admirable parallel to the accreditation system in the U.S. As in my country, the over-arching standards (qualifications frameworks) are broadly constructed and, while setting out general goals, do not tie the hands of the college administrators in any serious way. And the more specific objectives now being developed for the individual fields of study (tuning documents) are being developed by committed and experienced people from within the fields themselves, thus offering a buffer against unreasonable government interference. Moreover the internal analysis required of the colleges appears to place substantial responsibility where I believe it should reside – with the college itself – and the external reviewers appear to work as colleagues rather than disciplinarians.

I do agree with concerns that Bologna process may be going too far and may risk creating a homogeneous, uncompetitive system of European higher education. But I believe that the Artesnet exercise is the best possible antidote to such threatening developments. In my view, institutional self-study and self-assessment, coupled with informed peer review, represents the best possible defense against the looming possibility of standardization and heavy-handed government control. As *The Economist* suggested in 2005, the supposedly fractured and disjointed American system of higher education permits great variety, competition, and entrepreneurship to flourish here. If done right, I believe Artesnet is the best path to achieving those goals in Europe.

The onus will be on the various participants in the system to make it operate with enough rigor and integrity that it will become accepted as the most effective way to assess colleges. The colleges must be introspective, honest, and self-critical. It is not sufficient for them to say they're doing everything just fine, thank you, for no one is prepared to believe that. The visiting teams will have to be rigorous too, of course, although they must also be fair and balanced. Criticism must be valid and clear, and based on fact. However, it must also be tempered by an understanding of the college's unique mission, history, and context; otherwise the visitors' assessment will not be accepted by the college or the public.

In the U.S., the self-study is handled by the college's staff and faculty as part of their regular activities, and the campus visits are performed by volunteer evaluators – faculty and staff from other colleges – who do this out of a sense of duty to their colleagues and to the field as a whole. (There are some paid staff at the agency level.) In the U.S., we understand that keeping this system healthy and effective makes it much less likely that the government will find fault with us and begin to insert itself into the process. This involves a large amount of work and care on the part of staff and faculty colleagues, but the alternative (having the government do it) is considerably worse.

So too with Europe, I believe. The qualification frameworks must be just that – a framework, not a rigid box. The tuning-level documents should provide general guidance and expectations, while also allowing variations and distinctive philosophies to shine through. Not all colleges are the same, nor should they be. Nor are our students all the same. Different skills and personalities require different colleges, too. A vibrant system of higher education depends on competition and difference and choice to remain healthy.

Even though many people will argue that Bologna is unnecessary and excessive, my sense (in spite of some student protests around Europe) is that it is not now politically possible to "roll back" Bologna. However, it is possible to stop it where it is now, and to create a new system of self-assessment and peer review as the cornerstone of quality assurance. I believe this is the promise and the beauty of the Artesnet system now being developed. It can involve colleges and it can help colleges. It can apply sharp, supportive review without doing harm. I would urge colleagues in European higher-arts-education institutions to embrace this self-evaluation process while simultaneously resisting further external regulation.

In spite of occasional disagreements in the U.S., the system here has worked extremely well. Colleges take responsibility for reviewing themselves honestly. The visiting teams act wisely and fairly. The academy continually develops the accreditation system. And the government (most of the time) is held at bay.

*"It is not sufficient for colleges to say they're doing everything just fine, thank you, for no one is prepared to believe that."*



Photo: Johan Wingborg



Photo: Marcus Stenberg

## SYMPOSIUM 3

### Reflections on the 10th ELIA Biennial 2008 By Venu Dhupa



Photo: Marcus Stenberg

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ELIA is new to me, despite my work in other European Union forums, including the European Cultural Parliament, the European Network for Cultural Administration Training Centres and the European Theatre Forum. I assume I was invited because of my background as a practitioner and cultural activist in the arts in the UK, with a reasonable working knowledge of higher and further education. I have worked at chief executive level, at a regional and national strategic level and as a board member of a number of cultural bodies and a further- and higher-education organisation. My interests are where the arts brush with politics and social change. This is not always an easy place to operate.

This report briefly shares my views and impressions of the conference for the time I was able to be present, noting that I was also delivering a presentation and facilitating a session in the “Who is Responsible?” symposium. I express an opinion about the issues that the higher-arts education sector seems to be facing and that emerged to me as a result of my discussions with participants. I have not read widely on the subject, so please consider this as an opinion piece only.

However wonderful and relevant a keynote speaker may be, after about 45 minutes I want to interact in some way. We need to feel that we are active, engaged, alert and participating, and that will drive us to make a difference. To facilitate individuals in this endeavour, there must be space for partnerships to be brokered, and for this to happen, people really have to want to be at the conference. Therefore, I think it’s entirely legitimate to ask people to compete for a place, depending on the content and strategic trends. With everyone sharing their ideas and views generously, the content is more likely to be rich, robust and insightful and to lead to activity. As we stagger towards a more integrated Europe, I think ELIA needs to encourage interdisciplinary and cross-sector understanding and activity.

The concepts and ideas in the keynote address were highly stimulating with clear linkages to our daily lives and our daily work. I will certainly take action as a result of the “disposable people” issue. I wondered what the European Union bureaucracy might make of the challenge to our emotions?

The presentation by the clearly empathetic and highly knowledgeable Director for Culture, Communication and Multilingualism from the European Commission juxtaposed against the keynote address highlighted the tensions within the sector itself. The crux of it is: a great deal of time is spent focusing on the “how” of what is done rather than the “why”. Should we be offering a creative education that develops rounded citizens who can be adaptable and work across fields, or are we making artists?

This is the most fundamental of issues, tied up with unresolved questions around the European

identity. We are educating our students for circumstances we don't know will exist. We have to educate them into a way of "being" rather than towards a finite shape. This may be imparted through the exploration of a single or multiple disciplines and it will require us to draw on specialists and those outside our sector. Through this creative learning, individuals will be better able to engage with strategic issues around democracy, poverty, international engagement, diversity and the environment. Why then are most of our systems and curricula designed for another era, perhaps one in which we all felt more certain in the world? Apart from this main issue, I picked up a number of sub-issues and challenges linked to it, which I'll share briefly.

Everyone acknowledged the need to work in partnership, but do we truly embrace what working in partnership means or do we just want access to more resources? It was encouraging to hear that individuals and institutions were open and alert to the possibilities, but when one looks at the "others" set of organisational values and priorities, processes and systems, one has to ask how many of these associations will actually come to fruition? We need to be more flexible, move more quickly, create systems that will empower the experts to be creative and give ourselves room to manoeuvre within overarching strategies.

There seems to be a cluster of issues around finding students and what needs to be unlearned before proper learning can take place. Are they good enough for entry into a prescribed world or should we be more flexible with the thresholds for participation? There was discussion around "our" views of "their" talent as contrasted with their own view of their talents. However, there was not much discussion about who "we" are and who "they" are. There was anxiety about art being taken out of the secondary curriculum, but not much debate about the generic aspects of creativity. These aspects will become more interesting as we progress with the goal of life-long learning. It made me think back to a comment in the keynote address about working with what is available and seeing "the individual beauty in an individuals' condition." It is critical in my view that we acknowledge the right of every individual to participate, whether that be in the arts or society. This makes a huge difference to the quality of life and the connection to wider values, the common public space and political ideals. More critically it unlocks the imagination and the potential for new ways of moving forward together at a time in history when we can see the seeds of greater fracturing and exploitation.

There was a huge desire at an individual level to support the pioneer – the adventurer – and an understanding that pioneers may need to go outside their geography, their discipline, their zone to innovate. However, there was a seeking of assurance against risk, that role models would be rooted, and that risk takers would deliver. There wasn't a capacity to trust that an experiment would be relevant to the student experience; it had to be articulated and preferably in advance!

There were big questions around the slowness and inflexibility of the institutional machine. For example, if we are supposed to be relevant, why does it take years to get courses approved? This also placed added pressure on the staff. If students have gone out to work with others and they return with new models and ideas, how will the staff within the institutions be able to cope with the new expectations? In an environment where practice has traditionally not led policy, a key question emerged: How can we mobilise institutions to respond to the artist?

There was anxiety that policies were being informed by market forces rather than by intellectual argument. I detected this was mainly an anxiety about the creative industries. Current behaviours and models in our institutions are not producing the skills and behaviours that will ignite the growth of the creative industries, and we are under pressure from the rhetoric of governments to produce the goods. We may need to look at courses that have different modules or structures, or that engage more with industry. But are we up to dealing with this kind of talent management, and might it make us obsolete? Clearly there are issues around understanding

entrepreneurship and how to encourage entrepreneurship in large-scale organisations. This, by the way, is something I have been exploring for some time, at the moment using the British Council as a case study.

There was a lot of talk about "our students" and what was best "for them." That suggested a curious preciousness, which indicated to me that they are not viewed as equals in the questions of educational development. If not equal – and by implication, therefore, less responsible – then these 35,000 graduates per year are not in the shared struggle. They are a force to be mobilised if the direction is clear, but there was inertia around some of the things that need addressing, and I'm afraid I couldn't really put my finger on why that is. It would be tempting to point the finger at the quality of leadership, as has happened in many other sectors. Then we could all expend huge resources on developing leadership, which generally results in a raft of packaged and/or repackaged opportunities being targeted at the favoured few with the current perceptions of leadership and the dominant value system being reinforced. Better to support the maverick, in my view, and listen hard to the cohort.

Then I think there are the issues that are facing every business. These were touched upon in conversations but not explored specifically at ELIA. Maybe there could be an exercise in context-setting at a future conference. These are issues concerning the ability of the sector to cope with the changing trends in demographics, the labour market, globalisation, emerging technologies and the diminishing availability of finance. Are we ourselves in a position to formulate views and options within an environment of fast moving trends? Should we open this Pandora's box, or will we cling to the comfort of academia?

I will make a few remarks in conclusion. Many of us will not have the ingenuity or force of personality to shape the circumstances in which we wish to operate. We participate in sessions like ELIA's to enrich our lives, to expand our view of the world, to meet people in associated disciplines and to enjoy the debate. There are pressing subjects such as the necessity to engage with industry, the idea of thematic inquiry – which a recent report<sup>1</sup> from the UK indicates is the way forward in Primary Education – and the need to encourage engagement beyond the European Union. What none of us (who were privileged to attend) should forget is the pressure to convert this activity into concepts and models that will allow us all (whether staff or student) to enter into shared communities of knowledge and gain from them. This seems to me to point to a need for the revision of hierarchies, including examining the barriers and assumptions within them. As well as a review of the character of study so that it can offer a route to empowerment – thus far only available to the few.

I want to thank everyone involved in my ELIA experience. I have learned a great deal from the seminars and am full of admiration for the energy and commitment of the group of dedicated staff who are exemplary in their professionalism and abilities. I have given a personal and probably provocative view of the conference and the issues raised, but for me there is so much at stake, so there is no point in beating about the proverbial bush. Very soon we will be operating in a world where as individuals we will have multiple employers, where we will have niche expertise that we have to broker into projects and partnerships, and where to begin to seek resolution to global challenges we will need to work across cultures and sectors. Some of us are already there. My view is that there is a need to turn out robust, well-balanced individuals who are able to survive and experiment, who understand risk, who have the ability to draw on their intuition as well as their talent and technical skill. This is paramount. To be part of shaping a cohort that can work across sectors and collaborate to compete will be critical to our economic health and our social well-being. As stated in the keynote address: "to exempt ourselves is unforgivable." Soon it will not only be our privilege to encourage and enable other younger individuals in this way; our very survival may depend upon it.

<sup>1</sup>Independent Review of the Primary Curriculum, commissioned by the UK Government and delivered by Sir Jim Rose in December 2008.

## Art Schools, Culture and Cultural Change By Ron Burnett

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Photo: Marcus Stenberg

"Culture is (1) that relational (ca. 1848), (2) complex whole . . . (1870s), (3) whose parts cannot be changed without affecting other parts (ca. 1914), (4) mediated through powerful and power-laden symbolic forms (1930s), (5) whose multiplicities and performatively negotiated character (1960s), (6) is transformed by alternative positions, organizational forms, and leveraging of symbolic systems (1980s), (7) as well as by emergent new technosciences, media, and biotechnical relations (ca. 2005)." (Michael Fischer, "Culture and Cultural Analysis as Experimental Systems," *Cultural Anthropology*, Vol. 22, Issue 1, pp. 1-65, 2007)

The creation, study and communication of culture and cultural forms is at the heart of what art and design schools do in the 21st century – a fairly substantial shift from their craft-oriented and vocational history. Up until the latter part of the 20th century, art schools were centered on studio-based educational and learning models. Now, they are a mixture of liberal arts, practice-based professional-training programs and multi-disciplinary learning models. Art and design schools have transformed into clusters of many disciplines with an emphasis on a broad-based education to prepare students for active roles in the evolving creative sector.

These changes have led to a more profound understanding of the social, human and economic benefits of what many are describing as the cultural industries: a convenient though reductive way of grouping a vast and heterogeneous number of creative endeavors. Reductive, because there is no natural or inevitable link between culture and industry, however we may try to generate relevance from creative work. Reductive, because the best art is often incapable of being placed into a simple economic relationship with viewers, consumers and collectors. Reductive, because although the arts inevitably produce objects, materials and ideas, much of what constitutes creativity is ephemeral and lacking in concreteness. In other words, there is a contingent relationship among creativity, output and understanding, and there may be economic benefit, although that is not a condition of creative work or output.

Contingency can be thought of this way. Any relationship between creators and audiences will necessarily depend on a whole host of variables. These variables can range from the context in which a work of art is placed to the manner in which it is received. The variables can include notions of canons, institutionally acceptable and normative standards of quality and communications and the needs of the state to define the range of what constitutes its languages of expression. The variables also include the institutions that house the nation's collectively agreed-upon values as expressed through their culture as well as the central notion that cultural value is based upon financial reward.

Although much of the debate about the cultural industries now seems passé because the term has become so naturalized, the role of art schools, as with any centers of research and teaching, should be to investigate the validity and usefulness of the terms that are in use. This is especially the case if those terms come to have an influence upon the development of curriculum and learning and also help to define the assumptions students have about the outcomes of their education.

There are, however, some important benefits to the use of the term "cultural (or creative) industries". These were at the heart of some of the most important discussions at the 10th ELIA Biennial Conference, held in Gothenburg, Sweden, in late October, 2008. Benefits can be drawn from new ways of contextualizing creative work and research. In fact, understanding that research is crucial to the practice of artists and that the implications of creative research for a wide range of human needs and activities can actually be measured is central to policy development in the arts in Europe and elsewhere. Highly skilled artisans, artists, creators and designers are perhaps among the most sophisticated researchers that our society produces. In order to succeed, they have to understand not only the context of their creative work, but also the impact of and possible market for their ideas and objects. They have to develop sophisticated models and prototypes to test their ideas, and they have to be able to translate their research and practice into something that can be understood by many different people, often with quite differing interests. They have to have skills that might best be described as ethnographic so as to understand, if not sense, both the demands of their communities and also the kinds of resistance those communities have to change and new insights. They have to negotiate complex collaborative arrangements to produce cultural value that will reflect great technical expertise as well as vision. Research, in all its varieties, is fundamental to all forms of learning and to the development of new knowledge and is the foundation upon which new, useful and great ideas come into the public sphere. The assumption that there is one method or one way to arrive at results is something that most good researchers would argue against. The danger, however, is to confuse economic benefit with learning and to conflate creativity with output, as has often been done with the traditional disciplines.

It is important to remember that art schools were never created on the presumption that they were paving the way for a career path that was measurable and hence quite specific to the needs of industry. Challenges of craft, technique and creative output under often difficult circumstances were of greater "value" than sales or economic influence. Notwithstanding the historical relationships that artists have always had with benefactors, part of the allure of creative expression has been the manner in which artists have challenged the status quo and not promoted it. Part of what has made it possible to produce art has been a deeply felt critical view of contemporary culture, its orientation and its products. The quick acceptance of the term cultural industries has been the result of various pressures, not the least of which is the continuing manner in which art schools are funded and the expectations of the state that defined benefits from learning can be categorized and valued. The fact that art schools are now measured in part on the basis of the success of their graduates means that the curriculum has to increasingly reflect the presumed trends and direction of the economy.

I will not analyze the rather weak analytical base upon which the creative industries have been grouped. Rather, my concerns are with the role of education in this process of categorization. The use of the term creative industries began as a tactical reflection on the economic benefit of creativity to society. Tactical, because it suddenly allowed art schools to claim a measurable effect to their work and to their curriculum. It has now morphed into a determining element of what we do as teachers and administrators in the arts. It is therefore important to note that there was not much critical evaluation at the conference of the manner in which government policy has been translated into curricula. ELIA has to decide as an organization whether it

will pursue policy through the legislative frameworks imposed upon it, or act as a space within which teachers and administrators can frankly share their worries and skepticism as well as their hopes and aspirations.

To some degree, many of these issues were raised in that part of the symposium that dealt with quality assurance and questions of standards and standardization. It is clear that we are all under tremendous pressure in this regard. The Bologna Accord and its implications have to be taken very seriously. The historic mission of art schools is under threat, and perhaps for some, if not for many, the potential transformation that may arise from these changes is a good thing. For me, the translation of learning, especially in the creative areas, into measurable outputs is an illusion. Perhaps we have to be far more strategic in our use and interpretation of these policy initiatives. Perhaps we need to develop strategies that take account of the demands of government without necessarily converting the curriculum into an outcomes-defined and categorically narrow base within which students assume that there is a natural relationship between what they learn and what they become. Perhaps in a way that individual schools cannot, it is the responsibility of ELIA to open and maintain a space of frank discussion about these challenging issues and to help communicate some of the more glaring contradictions to governments.

The symposium had a number of sections, and I was directly involved with “The Arts as Dialogue: On the Place of the Arts in Multicultural Societies.” The sessions I was involved with dealt in part with the ELIA film project, “... I see you.” Many art schools cooperated in the production of these films and the project is a wonderful one. As Chair of one of the sessions, I raised the following issues for debate:

- What can and cannot be said among and between different cultures?
- Can we deepen notions of the border, the interstitial, the in-between and the impact of national identities on identity itself
- How do we look at history, conflict and the relationship of the arts to dialogue and interchange?
- Can culture and images carry the weight of intercultural dialogue? Should they?
- What forms best suit how cultures express themselves?
- What role does religion play in cultural difference and cultural norms?
- How do we recognize ourselves within culture and cultural artifacts? To what degree can we make claims about identity through cultural production?
- How does genealogy contribute to understanding the local, the translocal and transnational?
- What role do new technologies play in this debate? Should we be looking at social networking for some explanation or clarification of these issues?
- How can dialogue be resisted? Should it be resisted? What happens if dialogue is not possible?

Again, it is not possible to summarize the breadth and quality of the discussions. One point stood out for me, however. The question of whether dialogue should be resisted was raised a number of times. It seems counterintuitive to suggest that one of the most important of human activities should be resisted. My sense is that the question was being asked around resistance in general. In other words – and this is very important to the future of art schools – what does it mean to resist both conventions and social presumptions of value? How can that resistance produce new forms of dialogue and new ways of acting upon and seeing the world? Can resistance be one of the sources of new ideas and new art? Can resistance be taught? Should it be? The multicultural realities of European societies, combined with the inevitable tensions of change and economic hardship, make the challenges of communications and interaction even more important. The roles that educators must play in this evolving landscape are central, and there is no doubt that arts education and learning is one of the best ways of bridging the gaps.

Cultural differences are not defined by solidity and impenetrability. Films, images and sounds are among those arts most capable of stimulating intercultural connections and communication. “... I see you” points the way towards a new set of activities that ELIA could pursue.

I began this short piece with some criticism of the cultural industries as being an all too weighty metaphor for how art students should learn and how institutions should be evaluated. I end with some thoughts on learning in the arts and the need to continuously search for new paradigms of teaching and learning. Art schools are often very conservative places. This may well be the result of their size, but it may also be a condition of craft-specific disciplines that are overly dependent on models of creation that tend to be focused on technique and not on critical theory and critical analysis. I have no easy prescriptions for this challenge, especially as it relates to the future direction of ELIA, but here are some thoughts:

- We need to consider developing a new model of partnership and collaboration among the community, artists, computer scientists, engineers and multimedia creators.
- We need to look at how we can bridge the gap between those who are information rich and those who are excluded from the key sites and venues of knowledge production and dissemination.
- We need to enhance and innovate in the development of arts-based curricula at all levels of our institutions and, by virtue of that, to create new pedagogical models across our disciplines.
- We need to build consensus around the need for the arts, their impact on the well being of the community and the fundamental role of the arts in sustaining the social health of our society.

I have one final comment on the role of new media in the context of art schools. It is clear that digital technologies are transforming the cultural, economic and social landscape of many countries. There are economic and social benefits for adults who can complete their learning goals without the cost and disruption of leaving their community and for younger learners who are able to complete specialized secondary-school courses and obtain further education while living in their home communities. At the same time, as these technologies are providing a rich set of opportunities to a large number of people, they are also highlighting the differences. These include the disenfranchisement of people living in rural and inner-city areas and the increasing sense of isolation that many community members feel in relation to each other and to the broader society of which they are a part.

Information and communication play a significant part in linking us. They can also divide and segregate the various sectors of our society and exacerbate the sometimes-obvious and sometimes-hidden barriers that prevent people and communities from reaching their potential. This has implications for our democratic institutions and may profoundly affect our ability to respond to the creative possibilities that emerging technologies provide. And yet, these new technologies can facilitate the communicative process that is so essential to the well being of the community. Networked connections can allow and encourage people to seek ideas and models for social action in a variety of places and from a variety of sources. New kinds of public discourse could evolve, based on information that promotes understanding and action.

So, I see the challenges of the next few years as being focused on structural institutional transformation, the impact of digital technologies, multicultural dialogue, and profound curriculum change. None of these issues will be easy to deal with, but the inherent creativity within art schools suggests that we are well equipped to provide at least some solutions.

*“The danger is to confuse economic benefit with learning and to conflate creativity with output.”*

## SYMPOSIUM 5

### Becoming the Change We Wish to See...? By Chrissie Tiller



Photo: Marcus Stenberg

*Chrissie Tiller is an arts, education and cultural policy consultant and founder of Elegant Solutions – Chrissie Tiller Associates. Alongside her work as a director, producer, writer and teacher in the performing arts, she has initiated a number of strategic and influential programmes in Central & Eastern Europe, the EU, the UK and Japan, focusing on the role of the arts and culture in social, political and economic change. She set up and currently directs an innovative MA programme “Artists in Society – Cross-Sectoral and Community Arts” at Goldsmiths College, University of London. contact@cta-elegantsolutions.com*

As a response to the 2008 ELIA Biennial Conference in Gothenburg, and the questions it raised, this article can never be anything other than subjective. The inevitability of conferences is that we make our individual journeys through the four or five days, bumping into old friends, making new ones and never quite escaping from a sense that the really important conversations might be happening elsewhere.

But there is an irresistible challenge in being invited to take a critical, and more distanced, overview: particularly one that invites feedback on future directions for Higher Arts Education Institutions and ELIA. Like everyone, I have views – and there is nothing more enticing, or daunting, than being given the time and space to voice them.

I know that I will speak from a very specific (and no doubt very UK) perspective. Despite currently finding myself, for a part of each week, Director of an MA programme at Goldsmiths College in London<sup>1</sup> my personal engagement with Higher Arts Education Institutions has been intermittent and sporadic. As the product of a post-war initiative to get first-generation young people from working families into universities (what we might now call “widening participation”), Higher Arts Education was never an option. Theatre School was something best left to nice middle-class girls who wouldn’t need a job once they had graduated.

Instead, I studied English (Language and Literature) and then – one actor husband, two children and several years of teaching later – completed post-graduate theatre training. Setting out to work as a writer and director in theatre in the 1980s, I soon came up against the harsh realities of UK arts funding. It was clear that if I wanted to run my own theatre-in-education company, I would have to familiarise myself with whatever current government initiative was going. In those days (under a Tory Government!) the Enterprise Allowance Scheme – set up to get people off the unemployment register – became a gift for young theatre makers, musicians, visual artists. Not only did we get unemployment benefits, but we were able to earn £50 a week on top: we were being paid to make art.

Since then, creating work in the UK, across Europe and beyond, I’ve discovered my capacity for “ducking and diving” has been as valuable as any artistic inspiration. Over the past 25 years, I have written funding applications for projects I’ve called Art and Social Change, Art and Engagement, Art and Access, or Art and Participation. I’ve spoken at conferences about the contribution of the arts to the creative industries, the creative economies and/or cross-sectoral partnerships. I have delivered papers on Drama for Empowerment, Theatre for Citizenship, and Arts for Intercultural Dialogue and have run workshops with drama teachers in Ramallah,



Photo: Johan Wingborg

health-service managers in Bradford and theatre makers in Belgrade that involved the same activities but a different narrative.

I haven't done this out of any sense of cynicism. I have just learned not to care what government or funding bodies want to call what I do, as long as they provide me with the possibility of doing it. What I do care passionately about is the contribution that the arts can and do make to the quality of people's lives. And everyone's right to engage with/participate in arts and cultural activities, whether they are in a school, a prison, a hospital, a community centre or a refugee camp in Lebanon. This makes me an equally passionate advocate for students being given the opportunity to make work that is socially, politically, purposefully engaged and for them being introduced to the exciting range of places they could find themselves working in once they have left the conservatoire/arts school.

When ELIA and other arts and cultural networks used to ask me to speak about this in terms of employment and mobility, it was often felt to be a UK issue. Most artists trained at conservatoires or art schools in the rest of Northern, Central and Eastern Europe expected to have a job for life in an orchestra, opera house, dance or a theatre company; or assumed the state would buy those creative pieces that no-one else wanted. But that is no longer the reality. State funding for the arts is retreating right across Europe, and artists and designers now need to find their work in all sorts of different settings.

So how do we best confront this changing reality? Like Peter Sellars, I have been studying what took place in the US in the 1930s. In particular, I've been looking at how, faced with the Wall Street Crash and anxious to move the American people quickly out of the poverty and suffering it had brought about, Roosevelt conceived of the New Deal. Not only for the economy but also in terms of artistic enterprise. His conviction that "happiness" was not to be found "in the mere possession of money" led him to work with artists to think how engaging people with arts and cultural activity might create a sense of shared identity and mutual values.

As a result of this thinking, 7% of the total WPA (public job-creation scheme) budget was directed towards new arts programmes. Tasked with "promoting American art and culture and giving more Americans access to an abundant life", the arts underwent a period of incredible vitality and creative renewal.

WPA arts projects pioneered the concept of integration and equal opportunities. Younger artists such as Rothko, de Kooning and Pollock were given public commissions while actors and directors such as Arthur Miller and Orson Welles learnt their craft as part of the Federal Theatre Project. The Writers Project offered emerging black writers such as Zora Neale Hurston and Richard Wright the opportunity to develop alongside national figures such as John Steinbeck and Saul Bellow, orchestras began to perform and commission works by black composers, and for the first time in history, the stories of slaves were written up and collected. A notable 40% of the artists funded by the programme were women.

Of course, like all government-led schemes, the New Deal was far from perfect. The WPA arts projects were soon dismissed by the right wing for being "state art". But what it did do, was bring about a "cultural revolution" that brought the arts into the centre of ordinary people's lives, for a brief but significant moment.

I have a sense that this current "credit crunch", "market crash", "recessionary period" could present a similar tipping point, should we want to take up the challenge. But it is much less likely to happen at a government level. I am in agreement with Sellars that the art schools could play an important role in forming the vanguard: charging themselves and their students with

the role of "imagining a world they would like to live in, creating that world – and living in it." It is a huge task and one that requires a different level of engagement: for many art schools this would take a radical re-thinking of priorities and values.

The metaphor of a stuffed polar bear, as the signifier for this 10th ELIA Conference, was offered as "a timely reminder of the more fragile aspects of our world" and of "our responsibilities and need to orient ourselves and our actions toward the future." But viewed from the world outside, it might just as easily be taken as a symbol for the taxidermic specimens some of our art schools have become. As a Finnish sculptor, one of my MA students, recently commented: "Artists across Europe are being forced to confront 21st-century realities whilst the art schools continue to offer a 1970s training".

So how do we respond to the seismic economic, social shifts that are affecting our society? To what extent do we feel it is part of our remit "to reflect and comment on the broader issues of our time, such as climate change, social integration, intolerance, migration and terrorism"?<sup>3</sup>

John Donne might argue that no art school, like no man, "is an island". The global shifts affecting our world are increasingly difficult to ignore. They demand that we create new partnerships and alliances, and ELIA is in a unique position to facilitate and champion such meetings of minds. But in order to do so, it will need to think carefully about whom it brings to the table and how it invites them to take part in the conversation. In a Europe of growing diversity and shifting demographics, it will need to champion change: to throw down the gauntlet not only to the arts schools themselves but also to our potential partners in the worlds of science, politics or social enterprise.

Not that I am suggesting that such a dialogue is not happening or that it was not a powerful thread running through the conference. Unable, through logistical constraints, to take part in symposia such as Arts as Dialogue or Talking Loud and Saying Something, I was excited by the issues they touched on. I relish the battle to prevent Higher Arts Education from becoming a mere "toothless hostage" to either "creative economics" or "academic conformism". And I look forward to learning how schools are taking a lead on celebrating diversity and "difference" without eliminating the "creative tension, conflict and movement" that are central to artistic creation.

It was encouraging to hear about MA courses that are already turning out artists whose work is more cross-disciplinary, responsible and outward-facing. But Calvin Taylor's emphasis on the fundamental interdependence of creative practice and critical analysis, contextual studies and professional formation raised an important issue<sup>4</sup>. While it is not difficult to see how our Higher Arts Education Institutions are engaging with the first two, it is much less clear what most are doing to develop the latter. In particular, how are they enabling students to gain the skills of the cultural worker, acting as "broker, interlocuter, facilitator, or animateur" for the society around them?

At past ELIA conferences it has often been suggested that these "non art-form" skills are best acquired on return to higher education: after students have been out in the world, making whatever living they can, plying their trade in whatever circumstances they have found possible. This symposium showed there is a growing sense of urgency around this question, and delegates were almost unanimous in wanting to introduce such skills as part of students' initial training.

In the plenary presentation I spoke about three moments I would take away with me. Having had more time to think about these choices, I want to return to them. For me they encapsulate the current considerations for ELIA and Higher Arts Education.

The first was watching a young girl climb, with no safety net, to the top of a rope fixed to the ceiling of a concert hall: not only a compelling metaphor for the world into which we are sending our young artists but also prompting questions about their education.

What kind of training do we want to offer our students that will help them survive as artists? How can we create the kinds of safe spaces that invite them to experiment, take risks and explore possibilities whilst also offering them skills that will enable them to go out into the world and earn a living – a world where even the safety nets previous generations might have counted on are now non-existent? In doing so, how prepared are we to rid ourselves of time-worn concepts of success and failure and think more widely about what being an artist might mean in the 21st century? And to consider what implications that might have for our curricula, our classroom practice and our students' learning?

The second happened when I walked into what I feared might be a rather dry research seminar, to be greeted by a musical performance of exquisite beauty – a piece of medieval plainchant.

It made me wonder how – in a world focused on innovation, new media and virtual realities – we can ensure that our students have access to the widest possible range of artistic experience? How can we take what is of significance from the past and make it resonate in the present? Not in any sense of bowing to current fashion or compromising artistic and cultural legacy but in creating meaning within a 21st-century context. How do we enable our students to contextualise their own work within that wider political, social or cultural perspective? To value, as with the plainchant, what riches it might continue to offer an audience today, in this case when there are so few opportunities to delight in stillness, simplicity and solitude?

The third was hearing something that I felt I should have known already: that all Ancient Greek plays, except one, had, as their title, the name of a woman, an outsider or a slave. Yet all of these groups were denied citizenship and a voice at the table.

It reminded me why I find it so important that we ensure that the invitation from Higher Arts Education is an inclusive one. Paying lip service to legislative targets on diversity, disability, gender, ethnicity or class is one thing; a real commitment to equal opportunities (at institutional, staff and student levels) is something different. Glass ceilings of all kinds need to be shattered. New pathways to learning need to be created and more inclusive pedagogies developed. The life skills and experience of those who have been unable to follow traditional routes to higher education need to be recognised and validated. The quality of our intercultural dialogue needs to be enriched by transnational programmes, increased mobility and student and staff exchange.

I think we should re-think the role of the full-time academic. That we should insist that all arts teachers be working practitioners, spending part of each term making their own work and/or earning an independent living. I know this is probably not a workable reality. But even if we are forced to work in institutions, we should continue the fight against institutionalisation.

And if ELIA wants to lead us through this exciting period of change?

I think it might make an important start by taking a look at the structure of its conferences. We mainly attend conferences for one, or all, of three reasons: to hear something inspirational, to make a contribution to the debate and to meet people. The ELIA Biennial Conference satisfies two of these wonderfully. Where I think it might make an important difference is in giving more of its members a voice. I have recently become a convert to Open Space Technology. As a model of self-organisation it enables groups to address complex issues by establishing their own

agenda and taking joint responsibility for the outcomes: lending itself brilliantly to our world of arts, creativity and learning.

Ghandi advised us to “become the change we wish to see”. In setting up its conferences as a paradigm for the more open, diverse and inclusive debate that it wishes to have take place in Higher Arts Education, ELIA could provide us with an even more important and influential model of access and participation.

<sup>1</sup> MA in Cross-Sectoral and Community Arts

<sup>2</sup> entrepreneurial?

<sup>3</sup> “Who is Responsible” symposium

<sup>4</sup> “What Impact” symposium

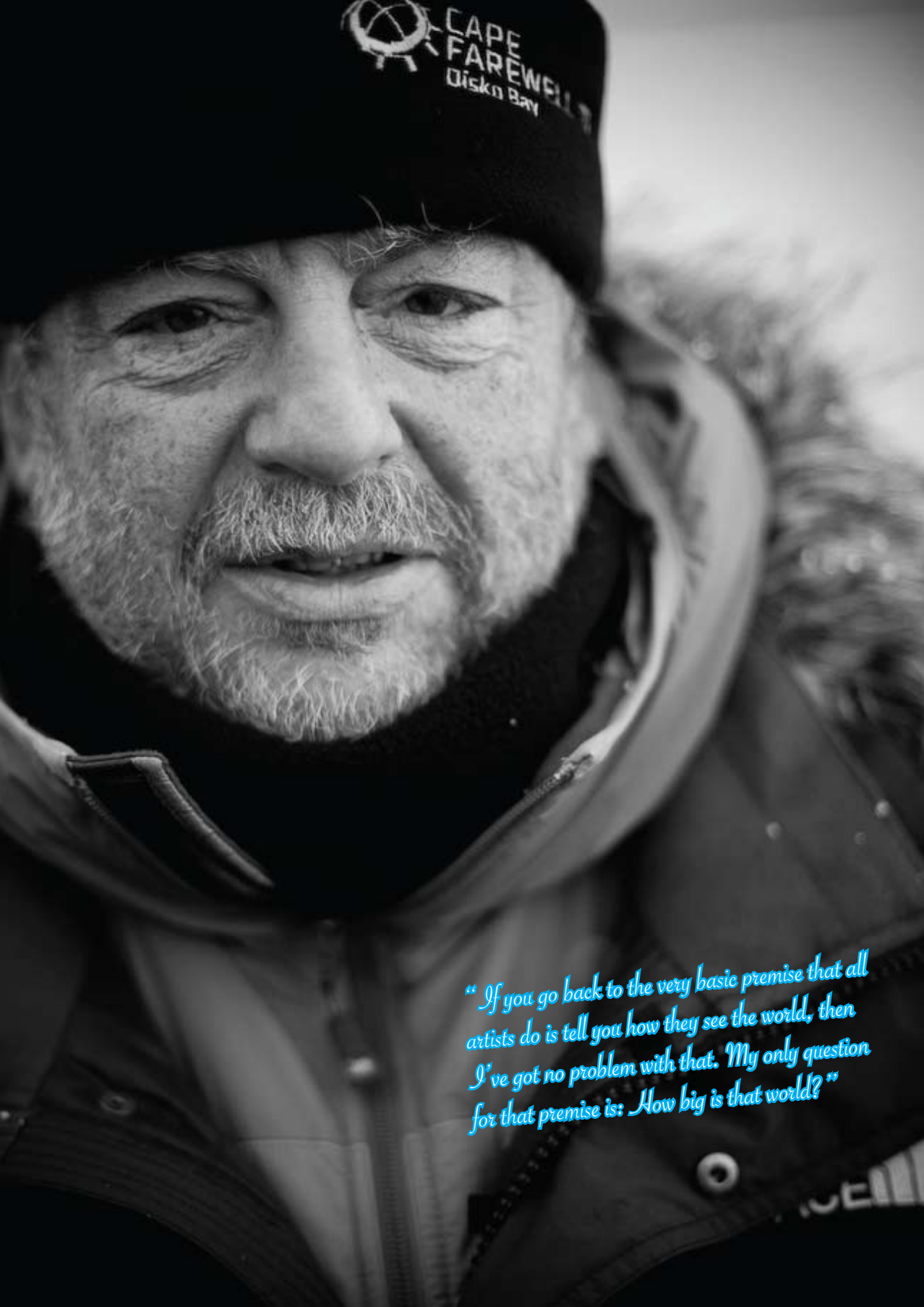
*“We should re-think the role of the full-time academic and insist that all arts teachers be working practitioners, spending part of each term making their own work or earning an independent living.”*



Photo: Johan Wingborg



Photo: Marcus Stenberg



*“If you go back to the very basic premise that all artists do is tell you how they see the world, then I’ve got no problem with that. My only question for that premise is: How big is that world?”*

## Final reminder

### Lines of Enquiry by Chris Wainwright

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This text is primarily a reflection on the symposium “*Who Is Responsible?*” from the 10th ELIA conference in Goteborg 2008, that proposed a series of questions, discourses, and challenges for art education intended to stimulate future agenda setting with reference to cross disciplinary thematic “*Lines of Enquiry*”. It also contains an edited interview with David Buckland, Director of Cape Farewell and one of the main contributors to the symposium.

The notion of emphasising “*Lines of Enquiry*” may not constitute a new or radical approach to curriculum structuring or a means of engagement with social, political and broader contexts for practice, as there are many examples relating to feminist and post feminist agendas, race, political and social activism to name but a few. There is arguably, at this moment in time, a real sense of urgency for example, in relation to addressing, or at least working with a sense of awareness of the dramatic effects of climate change. If the assertion that climate change is caused by the way we live our lives, then surely there is a legitimate case to engage artists in the process of addressing the issue on the basis that one of the primary historical and contemporary preoccupations of artists is to show us how they see the world; right now that world is changing at an alarming rate!

The symposium provided a context for focusing on the debates surrounding the potential future directions, agendas, and roles for artists and the modern art school. It also raised the issue of what constitutes a legitimate curriculum and reference points for artists who evidence a commitment to addressing thematic issues such as climate change, through involving other disciplines, agencies and partnerships and to what effect this has on “individual practice”.

The diverse constituency of participants in the symposium debated the relationship between subject disciplines and a wider set of parameters of social and cultural conditions that affect, and in turn are affected by, cultural practice. It created an opportunity to present a case for arts education to establish a thematic orientated structure predicated on “*Lines of Enquiry*” as a relevant axis for creative education and questioned the more established subject specific practices, that currently characterise the majority of our institutional approaches to curriculum construction and the learning experience in art schools.

It is arguable that informed and critical cultural practice draws its momentum from a reflection on, and an awareness of, current pertinent social, cultural and political aspects of life more than from the arts disciplines and practices. Contemporary artists are primarily occupied with addressing and commentating on how they see and reflect the often complex, contradictory, stimulating and problematic world that they live in. This is not to suggest that there is a lesser value in engaging with the traditions, history and the heritage of the arts, much of which is highly relevant to contemporary practice and provides both evidence and inspiration in relation to artists who have focused on social and political issues in the past. A key aspect of these debates is essentially one of emphasis and concerns a clarification of the context for the artist and for how the artistic practice is located and intended to function.

A legitimate reservation with regard to the creation or identification of a community of critical practice in an art school, through the collective engagement with thematic “*Lines of Enquiry*”, might be the danger of creating a prescriptive instrumentalism in artistic practice and a compromise to the learning experience that threatens individual expression. Clearly there is

room here to engage in a process of discourse that challenges and potentially destabilises both sides of this argument and seeks to actively problematise the simplistic notion of thematic “*Lines of Enquiry*” at the same time as robustly challenging the assertion of individually centred practice. I believe the forum for such debates should be located within the modern art school and be driven by a wide range of informed, confident practitioners and researchers.

Arguably there are key questions arising from this process of dialogue and interchange, “*Who Is Responsible?*” What is the role of the artist, the art institution and what are the subsequent challenges for artists and designers to reflect and engage with broader issues of our time such as, climate change, social integration, intolerance, migration and the effects of our endangered economies. How do artists and our art institutions function purposefully in relation to these and other external factors and who are the key partners and how do they develop a complex network of relationships to make this work?

Is it not also time to rethink and re-draw the map of the relationships both within the art institution and outside it and place a greater emphasis on learning and cultural practice as a reflexive process that is both inclusive and proactive in addressing the notions of context, quality, the relationship between theory and practice, and what we mean by knowledge generation and research with reference to the specific characteristics of the arts and how this interfaces with other non arts disciplines such as the sciences?

The specific debates surrounding the importance of research, the function of discourse, recognition of process as a form of practice and the role and purpose of the artefact, are well articulated and continually critically interrogated within the academic institution. There is a danger, however, for these debates to become hermetic, or to lack a sense of urgency in the opening up of dialogue outside the formal institutional education sectors and fail to reflect and engage with the world we live in.

It is therefore vital to create conditions that support sustainable approaches to a negotiated and inclusive cross disciplinary cultural production, that demonstrates how artists can contribute to the creation of a socially engaged community of artists/educators. In turn, this stimulates a contribution to the discussions and models for creating an expanded role for the art school in the 21st century.

There are inevitable problems for institutions embracing a model that raises questions for artists when initiating projects based on a responsible socially engaged practice. These relate in part to questioning the nature of collaboration, partnerships and networks, and the need for artistic intervention to raise awareness and contribute to, or effect change. There are fundamental issues concerning the definition and role of the art school itself when challenged by a model that proposes legitimate questions around areas such as authorship, creative intervention, and participation in a more fluid and contingent relationship where the art school is only one of a number of engaged agencies. There is also a need to recognise the participatory nature of this approach to cultural production that acknowledges and reflects the conditions of those placed in the assumed position of its receivers, or audiences. Such conditions could stimulate, challenge and question the possible role for the artists of today if models of inclusive cross disciplinary cultural practice are adopted, developed and interrogated in our art schools, and by a wider public.

The art schools’ relationship with its external communities and the development of sustainable partnerships is central to its purpose that now goes beyond the traditional function as a detached onlooker, a commentator and reflector of the world seen and interpreted through the eyes of a privileged creative class. There needs to be a considered and strategic approach

to positioning the art school in being identified, as a generator of progressive and inclusive educational opportunities and as a centre for innovative cultural production that creates social as well as intellectual capital.

This of course raises further questions about how the art school is both populated and supported. How we develop pedagogic models that embrace the need to contribute to and influence society in order to amplify both individual and collective voices on important and increasingly pressing social and political issues affecting our lives. How we can achieve this whilst retaining our independence, promoting experimentation and originality is arguably one of our greatest challenges for the future.

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*The following text is an extract of conversation between myself and David Buckland, artist and Director of Cape Farewell, an artist led organisation that creates a cross disciplinary dialogue between artists, scientists, musicians and key individuals from the wider creative sector and promotes as its core assertion, the importance of foregrounding a cultural response to climate change as one of the most significant issues of our time.*

The interview was conducted in April 2009 as one of a number of activities and reference points leading up to the launch of The Graduate School at Camberwell, Chelsea and Wimbledon colleges (CCW) at The University of The Arts London in September 2009. One of the defining characteristics of this new Graduate School is its commitment to creating an awareness and focus on commonly identified important cross disciplinary debates such as climate change, identities and technologies amongst the well established taught post graduate, research and research centre/groups networks that exist across the three colleges. Central to the Graduate School ethos is the importance of creating a diverse range of sustainable external partnerships and relationships that reflect broader cultural and social concerns and create new opportunities and agendas for artistic practice and research.

In September 2008, David Buckland led the seventh Cape Farewell expedition to the High Arctic, taking a team of 40 artists and scientists to Disko Bay off the west coast of Greenland to see the Jakobshavn Glacier, which is losing 20 million tons of ice every day. In addition David Buckland and myself the artists included Lori Anderson, Sophie Calle, musicians Jarvis Cocker, Ryuichi Sakamoto and KT Tunstall, architect Sunand Prasad, poet Lemn Sissay, filmmaker Peter Gilbert, and comedian Marcus Brigstoke while previous voyages have included novelist Ian McEwan, artists Antony Gormley and Rachael Whiteread among many others.

DB: Cape Farewell came about from artistic enquiry. I’d come across mathematicians who were model building in the late ’90s. They’d constructed what is now a very famous climate model the HadCM3, that had the structure and integrity for looking into the future climate of the planet. They had a really big problem – they knew that climate change was a reality, but the language they were using was the language of graphs and scientific data. The public wasn’t engaging, so Cape Farewell was set up to construct a different language of talking about climate change. The idea was to gather the best creative brains we could find, embed them with the scientists, go up the Arctic, put them in this extraordinary frontline situation with climate change and give them an open invitation to work with this as an idea. Sixty or 70 artists have been through the programme, and they’ve all come up with amazing ways of thinking about climate change. The artists are challenging the way we live, our values and lifestyles. There have been seven expeditions so far; five with

major artists and scientists and two with 16 year-old youths. We made a strategic decision last year to work with university students rather than youths, because you can embed students with the artists, and it's not a separation. They can feed off each other.

CW: I'm interested in the strategic decision that Cape Farewell took to work with young, emerging artists rather than youths. It suggests to me that within that choice there's also a challenge; that part of the motivation for working with students is not just to offer them the opportunity to engage with Cape Farewell, but to pose the question, "we think this is important that you engage with climate change, what do you think?" From where I'm sitting, I see it as a challenge for students as much as an opportunity. I don't know if that's the intention or not.

DB: It's the same challenge for the artists. We work with the best artists we can find and ask them to address climate change. With the exception of one or two, they're not environmental artists. There's been a big debate on whether that is a legitimate ask since the inception of Cape Farewell. You're asking if that is a legitimate ask of the student to say, "you can be the best painter, film-maker, fashion designer, but I want you to address climate change".

CW: As somebody who's responsible for running an art school, I'd say it is a legitimate question, because it challenges the notion of curriculum and of self-expression. It challenges the notion of the art school being the place where people can develop their individual and collective creative ideas. There are some contentious arguments about the values of creative education that have actually moved away from some of the core responsibilities that artists have to address – social, cultural and economic issues – as well as those issues about individual creativity.

If you go back to a very basic premise that all artists do is tell you how they see the world, then I've got no problem with that. My only question for that premise is how big is that world? Is that the world you live in from day to day going from your flat to your studio, to the supermarket and home again, and your experiences about that? Or is your sense of how you see the world influenced by issues such as climate change? So it's about the breadth, the reference and not so much about challenging the premise of what an artist should be. It's actually more to do with saying, "if you are somebody who has a creative ability to see the world in a very particular way and tell people about it, and tell them about it confidently and in a way that's engaging through exhibitions, music, performance, then that world that you're seeing ought to have some relevance to other people".

DB: There's also a greater notion of being right at the edge of knowing something, that edge where you're just trying to make sense of something that you can only just about touch, and it's probably an emotion. That is also a totally valid enquiry for me. The artist's job is to grab those things that are way out on the edge and somehow be able to articulate them.

But the thing about the climate change is that the whole structure of society in which we live has evolved into something that is not sustainable. Six billion people cannot carry on living like this. But the solutions are right on the edge of something out there and it needs artists to try and articulate that curiosity.

CW: Remember when you said to me, just before the trip, "it's okay to come along

and fail". By saying it, you're creating the pressure not to fail. You've upped the ante.

DB: I know.

CW: There were times on that voyage where people were completely at a loss as to how to deal with what they were experiencing, not because of a lack of confidence in their ability as artists or musicians, but because of the sheer enormity of the question. You can ask the question about climate change sitting here in the city, because there's lots of other things that you're asking questions about in the same time, the same day. When you're in the Arctic, the only question is climate change. The more you thought about it the more you became completely incapable of understanding why we've got to the position that we're in. And I saw that as a sense of failure. Not personal failure, but just failure to be able to assimilate the enormity of the problem.

DB: This planet has certain major natural forces that are in balance. They are forces beyond imagination; the whole of the northern ice cap in the North Pole or the whole mass of ice on Greenland. They're so big that you can witness them, but if someone tells you they're not going to exist in five years' time, you can't even imagine the consequences. It is extraordinary that human activity can change one of those forces. Six billion of us doing the same thing is causing it.

CW: And you feel that pressure when you're there with a small group of people right at the cutting edge of where that's happening. You're carrying the burden of six billion people's activities on your back.

DB: Ian McEwan said when he was up there he realised one day that, except for probably a hundred people, everybody was south of him. It touches on artists dealing with being right on the edge of something and trying to drag it back. Every artist that's come back has told a personal story, that's how they dealt with it. They've managed to make a human scale out of this enormous question and that is the most exciting thing that's come out of the whole process of the Cape Farewell project. Most of the work that the artists have done has not been in the Arctic, it's what they've done since they've come back.

CW: One of the most interesting institutional and educationally challenging things to deal with is how you marry up the concerns of art and science in such a way that is both analysing a situation, but putting something out in a way that people will engage with.

DB: When we first started, neither the scientific community nor the artistic community knew the outcomes. They trusted that through a process of doing, we would actually achieve what we couldn't think. The scientists at first thought the artists would illustrate their problem and then they soon realised that that's not what artists do. They somehow took hold of this amazing piece of scientific thinking and then transposed it into something completely different and came up with another way of visioning what the scientists were doing, but connecting it to human activity, the human story.

CW: The musician Ryuichi Sakamoto is an emblematic example of how an art and science collaboration can work in a way that is completely unexpected.

DB: The geologists were towing a blaster behind the boat that would put sound down through two or three kilometres of sea to the rock at the sea bed. The idea was that as the actual land mass of Greenland is underwater, as the ice melts in the middle of Greenland, the land will rise and cause fusions in the seabed. So the geologists were trying to see if there were any major changes in the rock structure. As they were doing this they came up with these incredibly beautiful drawings of data that showed the seabed. Ryuichi asked them about the information and what form it was in. They said, “it’s digital information. We just take it into the computer and we digitalise it”. He said, “I can turn it into music. I’ll make a symphony that’s half a million years old”. And that’s what he’s done – he’s written a piece of music that is influenced by that whole process of taking the data and transforming it into a different way of thinking about time itself. Fabulous.

CW: What that does is take the scientist’s data and puts it into a public domain in a way that science could never achieve through its own mechanism of scientific journals, scientific conference, or government reports. Ryuichi would reach a few thousand people a night with that information.

DB: Easily, and the story reaches thousands more, it’s just brilliant. That’s endlessly happened.

CW: What always amazed me was not just the potential for collaboration, but that in very short spaces of time people got it. People collaborated more quickly than they might have done if you’d had this slow evolving relationship over a number of years.

DB: It’s an interesting experiment to run in the University, because you have painters, sculptors, etc, and you get them all addressing this one collective issue for a year. You’re throwing people together and setting up a paradigm of a potential collaboration.

CW: For me that reinforced a core belief that if you create a strong thematic, it forms a glue between different disciplines. I was completely knocked out by how musicians, artists, poets, geologists and beatboxers came together in a way that was only possible because of the collective focus on climate change. For me, it strengthened the belief that within the creative educational context, we can set up big agendas for creative people to address, whether they’re designers, filmmakers or ceramicists. You can bring these people together meaningfully, get everyone focussing on a much more important issue than what they do as an individual, and exciting things will come from that.

DB: What you’ve just said there is quite a challenge to a lot of people. It’s a bit like me saying, “you can be allowed to fail”.

CW: I’m always conscious that whatever I do, the students will benefit from it. The opportunity came up for us to get involved with Cape Farewell’s evening at the Tate in February. We used the same students to respond to and reconstruct a piece of work that Sunand Prasad and I did on the voyage, this series of four balloons in a cube that represented one cubic ton of carbon dioxide, which is a tenth of what each of us produces each year. We made this very temporary piece of sculpture on the beach, and we thought we’d use the programme to reconstruct it. What a great experience for the students – they got Sunand, who’s the President of the Royal

Institute of British architects, and me as tutors, they got materials, they got exposure and they got 24,000 people coming to the Parade Ground to see the work. We asked them to respond to the idea of a ton of carbon. Industrial design and fine art students worked on it for a week and produced an interpretation of our work.

Now they want to do something more with it and redevelop the project. So we seeded that with a group of people, but one of the really important things is putting a bit of pressure on them to do something, to produce something for an event. “You’ve got a week to do it. It doesn’t matter if you fail.”

DB: No pressure!

CW: It creates an anxiety in them that indicates they’ve got something really important to do. It’s fantastic seeing people rise to that challenge. We can create real opportunities that aren’t just about making work about climate change, they’re about the students making things happen. We can say to them “this is a project about now, which is about a problem about now and the time to deal with it is now. So don’t put it off. Don’t over-theorise the process”. And, to use one of your terms, David, it’s about making. It’s bringing about awareness through actually doing something. That’s not to say there isn’t a sound theoretical or intellectual basis for it, but it’s about direct action to a fairly direct problem.

DB: But you’re always aware of not making that a wasteful process. You make it as efficient as possible. So there’s a fine tuning to it, but it’s not blind just making. That’s the artistic process...

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

CHRIS WAINWRIGHT  
May 2009

*The conference tent in the middle of Götaplatsen.*



Photo: Johan Wingborg



Photo: Marcus Stenberg

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