Becoming an Artist?
Routes for aspiring artists and designers wanting to join an arts school
Introduction

This report provides an overview of the ELIA Seminar “Becoming an Artist? Routes for aspiring artists and designers wanting to join an art school” which took place from 13 to 15 March 2019. The seminar was hosted and initiated by ELIA member Beaux-Arts Nantes Saint-Nazaire, and adopted by ELIA with much enthusiasm. The topic was closely related to diversity and inclusion: one of the five key focus topics of ELIA’s strategic focus 2016-2020.

During this seminar 109 people from 12 countries – including speakers, moderators, steering group members and organisers – came together to actively discuss and analyse selection criteria; admission processes and the creation of a multitude of preparatory programmes. Through engaging dialogues, delegates also identified new strategies for Higher Arts Education institutions regarding the future of students.

Preparation

In order to facilitate an in-depth seminar, Beaux-Arts Nantes Saint-Nazaire completed research which was based on available French studies and interviews from various institutions in France and abroad. This research was commissioned and presented by:

Caroline Mierop, Project Manager, Honorary Director, ENSAV-La Cambre, Brussels, and

Isabelle Tellier, Project Manager, Professor and head of the research project on preparatory programmes to art schools in Europe.

The full report and additional material, as well as the article published by Le Monde newspaper on this seminar, are available on the ELIA website.
ORLAN, French artist

ORLAN began the seminar with a critical approach to the title “Becoming an Artist”, which she said suggests that students only become artists through the education system. She posed questions on the role of art professors, as well as on the critical approach students should develop, saying an artist is an eternal student who always searches, does art, combines and analyses information with critical distance. Artists should be able to reflect and position themselves into the world. Instead, the category of artists who follow frames should slowly disappear in order to prevent ideocracy.

Reflecting on the education system, ORLAN said someone could assume that selection criteria and frames imposed by art schools do not give freedom to artists. As a result, students look for other ways to enter, such as other arts or alternative ways of experimentation that can shape them and their own art form with the aim of building their personality. In contrast, art schools should prepare more their students for the difficulties in society and the challenges that inevitably come later.

Finally, the first keynote speech by ORLAN focused on gender discrimination and its implications through the jury, concluding that selection standards may not give other perspectives and prevent diversity inside the system.
Marc Partouche, AICA General Secretary, former director of École nationale supérieure des Arts Décoratifs (EnsAD), Paris

Marc Partouche opened his speech with an introduction to the selection criteria situation in France, referring to the higher institutions, most of which have adopted the Bologna Process and depend either on the Ministry of Culture and/or Education, or on local authorities.

He referred to the five major transitions in art education:
- **1920** – Malevich and Duchamp, evolution of modern art/avant-garde
- **1945’s quantitative rift** – from a minority and elitist education to a broader teaching, with large number of students who apply
- **1970’s technical rift** – new technical tools are used in artistic practices (photos, video, etc.)
- **1990’s institutional rift** – in Europe there is transmission of knowledge and research but also cultural institution, exhibitions etc.
- **Today’s democratic rift** – large number of formations and candidates. As a consequence, it is difficult to find means and (public) funds. There is a need to change the current approach, which accentuates social and cultural fracture.

Partouche continued his speech with reference to the main differences between universities and art schools. Firstly, the standard criteria universities have for teachers and students in contrast to art schools, which have more open criteria and focus on practicing and promoting teaching through projects. Secondly, universities have specific goals for their graduates to find professional employment, whereas art schools have less specific aims. He also emphasized the four challenges art schools are facing in France, and across Europe:
- **Markets**: The training market is the world’s largest market as training constitutes a key sector
- **Standardisation**: Art schools are invited to standardise (ex. teachers, diplomas)
- **Funds**: In many cases are restricted
- **Equal opportunities**: Cultural knowledge

Based on these challenges, Partouche concluded his speech by presenting projects he developed, with the aim to break the hyper-selection system in France and Europe to make it more inclusive.
Debate

Why is it important to realise a selection at the entrance of art schools?

Panellists:
Lars Paschke, Fashion designer, University of the Arts Berlin
Joseph Rustom, Deputy Director, ALBA – Académie Libanaise des Beaux-Arts

Moderator:
Lars Ebert, Independent advisor for ELIA, co-founder of EQ-Arts

The debate started with an introduction by Lars Ebert, explaining that on this topic, higher arts education institutions are not isolated, but instead work within ecosystems through which we relate to communities around us, such as an urban or rural areas, or to the political picture, especially on the European scale (for example, STEM to STEAM discussions). Limiting artists, especially those who have key position in our society is counterproductive to the political tendency. Therefore, the question of the topic is more of a strategic question, in order to identify the kinds of quality.

Based on the question “WHY” we select, each speaker presented the model of their institution analysing what they do and why they do it in relation to their ecosystem.
A voluntary selective entrance process

**Lars Paschke, Fashion designer, University of the Arts Berlin**

Lars Paschke explained how each department of University of the Arts Berlin (UDK) has its own policy for the selection. As a fashion designer, he analysed the selection procedure of the BA program in Design at UDK. He explained that most students take private preparatory/portfolio courses in order to submit their portfolio, which is not considered an obstacle since the committee can select students based on specific criteria that makes the process planned and not impersonal. These criteria include design/art talent skills, constructional and problem-solving skills and in some cases, a special artistic homework.

A wide-open entrance process

**Joseph Rustom, Deputy Director, ALBA, Beyrouth**

Joseph Rustom focused his speech more on the political and economic context explaining the relationship between Lebanon and French government and the different communities that impact the country.

He explained how the selection criteria are linked to the history of the institution and how admission criteria can vary, due to the reliance on the support of diverse teachers and allowances for the integration of different communities, since social impact is very important for Lebanon.

The model ALBA has developed also proposes, in some cases, financial support to students through grants and scholarships, as well as the possibility of extension of the period of studies, especially in cases where students can aid in the institution’s development.

Based on those two presentations, the discussion continued on the five main points Lars Ebert detected though the two presentations that are linked to the question “Why to select”:

- stakeholders
- conservatism (the system needs to be revised)
- competition (ranking, competition among students)
- quality in various aspects (centredness / learning experience and responsibility to students)
- diversity / homogeneity

Further conclusions from this conversation are summarised below:

- The institution and art teachers have responsibility for their students
- If we need more artists (quantity) in order to create diverse artistic practice we need to rethink the whole disciplinary education. Increasing the number of students requires spaces for these students to grow into the art sector. We also need spaces for these people to contribute to the society with their specific knowledge, this creates the question “how specific then should education be”?
- Selection, which creates a homogenised body, might prevent students from growing up in a system with their specific strengths or even excludes them as they do not meet the criteria institutions have. Therefore selection, in most cases, creates homogeneity, however selection could also be used as a tool to diversify, leading to a positive form of discrimination.
Case Study Presentations

The plenary session aimed to provide a general presentation of case studies from the following institutions:

• **HEAD – Genève**: A “step-by-step” selection process, co-organized with a partner art school
  Presenter: Lysianne Léchot Hirt, Dean of Studies

• **ENSCI Les Ateliers, Paris**: An atypical entrance test
  Presenter: Yann Fabès, Director Atelier de Sèvres, former Director ENSCI Les Ateliers, Paris

• **Royal Academy of Art The Hague**: A joint program between local high schools and the School of Art, and a “Young Talents” education sector
  Presenter: Zanne Zwart, Head of Preparatory Courses

• **The Glasgow School of Art**: A broad offer of preparatory programmes
  Presenter: Thomas Greenough, Head of International Academic Development, and Shona Paul, Head of Professional and Continuing Education
CASE STUDY 1: Knocking on Heaven’s Door - Some reflections on Art and Design Schools admission processes... and how to better ensure that they do not enforce inequalities
HEAD – Genève
Lysianne Léchot Hirt, Dean of Studies

The research project Art School Differences1 was led in three Swiss arts schools between 2014 and 2016 and demonstrated that admission processes at stake were reinforcing social, ethnic, cultural and gender inequalities through systemic exclusion mechanisms based on representations and values that are widespread amongst art schools’ faculties and management.

The vocational paradigm2 and the cultural privilege
Selection of “the best” or “the talented” is deemed indispensable. Identifying an artistic potential is the crucial goal, and although seldom specified, these criteria overcomes all other criteria, such as for instance previous educational achievements. The semantics of talent, vision, creativity dominate the discourse. The result is that only candidates that already fit the contemporary mainstream perception of what an artist or a designer must be are successful in the admission.

The illusion of internationalisation and the money paradox
Art schools are actively recruiting international students. Although studies observe slight differences between disciplines, admission processes reject specific foreign groups, known as “resident aliens” in favor of international upper-middle class “Welt Wanderer”. Despite their privileged cultural capital art & design students count as the highest group of grant recipients.

These phenomena create a general “parochial bias”. Artists and designers (arts school faculty) reproduce social exclusion and favor “insiders” when assessing candidates.

Changing collective faculty mindset and fostering transparency in the selection process are key, as well as proactive equality policy within faculty. Applying a diversity standpoint when publishing promotional material is also important.

HEAD – preparatory class CFP Arts (secondary level professional school)
Since 2012 HEAD has an agreement with Le centre de formation professionnelle Arts (CFP Arts) hosting its preparatory class (50% of students coming from the professional secondary and 50% coming from the academic upper secondary level). This has led to HEAD maintaining a ratio of 40% of its students coming from professional training (apprenticeship) and 60% coming from academic background. More important, no significant difference is perceivable at diploma level or in terms of curriculum duration between these two groups.

www.head-geneve.ch

1 https://blog.zhdk.ch/artschooldifferences/fr/
CASE STUDY 2: Preparatory courses fine art and design
Royal Academy of Art The Hague
Zanne Zwart, Head of Preparatory Courses Fine Art and Design

The Dutch education system exists of one Primary Education start for all children aged 4 to 12 year. After that Highschool starts with Lower Secondary Education and splits into different levels. The level of Pre-vocational (VMBO) is 4 years and prepares for Senior Vocational Education (Mbo). The level of Senior General (Havo) is 5 years and prepares for Higher Professional Education (Hbo). This is where art academies belong to in The Netherlands. The level of Pre-university education (Vwo) is 6 years and prepares for University.

At the Royal Academy of Art The Hague there are a variety of Preliminary Courses to let students prepare towards a study at an art academy. During your primary education, secondary education or after you can prepare or orientate on the diverse range of bachelor studies the Academy has.

Academy offers 6 different tracks:
• Kidsclub for primary school groups 7 and 8 (age 10-12 year), weekly on Friday where they work with another material every week. They get familiar with the academy, a variety of materials, working in a group and can build on their portfolio for admission towards the School for Young Talent or Art Plan Schools.
• Art Plan Schools/ Partnership with secondary schools, weekly half a day of education at the academy taught by academy teachers from the bachelor departments. Every class is given 5 modules of 6 classes in a year where the module can be one of the bachelor departments (Graphic Design, Fine Arts, Art Science, Interactive/Media/Design, Interior Architecture & Furniture Design, Photography, Textile & Fashion) or a workshop (silkscreen printing, graphic printmaking, wood, metal, multimedia, ceramics).

The Academy has a collaboration with these secondary schools:
• Segbroek College The Hague
• Christelijk Lyceum Zandvliet The Hague
• Bonaventuracollege Leiden
• Rijnlands Lyceum Wassenaar
In the first 3 years (classes 1, 2 and 3) students work according a schedule so that they at least once come across every department/workshop. In the upper classes (years 4, 5 and 6) a personalised track is followed where the student works towards a portfolio (and admission) for one of the departments. Content of these classes is more concept development based.

This is a preparation for the Preparatory Year and bachelor departments.

- School for Young Talent is a secondary school that the Royal Academy of Art has together with the Royal Conservatoire and Conservatoire’s Dance Department. Students have their own atelier inside the academy and follow classes 4 times half a day per week, including Saturday morning. They follow their regular school classes in the building of the Conservatoire together with their music and dance fellow students. They split up every day to follow their own discipline. The art students leave that building to come to the Academy. There is an intensive collaboration between these institutes and they work together to create the ideal situation for each student. The number of students who do admission at an art academy (worldwide) that is accepted is 100%.

This is a preparation for the Preparatory Year and bachelor Departments

- Specce. This is short for “Special Combined Education” and is a track where a secondary school student joins classes with School for Young Talent or Art Plan Schools. For some reason they cannot attend these schools themselves, for example because of the school system (they are at an international school or Rudolf Steiner School)

- Preparatory Year is a fulltime 1-year course for students after secondary school and before the bachelor. The number of International/EU students is around 60-70%. The ages are 17 and up. In combined classes with a variety of subjects the student follows three stages: orientation, immersion, preparation for admission. It prepares for all bachelor departments.

- Orientation Course is a Saturday course for students and adults who want to orientate on art education (mentality, attitude). It can be followed twice a year. One course is 15 Saturdays and contains orientation on all our bachelor departments. The ages vary between 16 and 60. It prepares for the Preparatory Year and all bachelor departments.

https://www.kabk.nl/en/programmes?courseDegree=preparatory
CASE STUDY 3: The Glasgow School of Art
Thomas Greenough, Head of International Academic Development
Shona Paul, Head of Professional & Continuing Education

The Glasgow School of Art (GSA) has run a number of preparatory programmes to support portfolio development and access to GSA and other creative institutions for over 20 years. Students have a high success rate and between 85 and 90% progress to their chosen courses each year. However, it was recognised that the fee-paying provision was only available to those students who could afford it, and was often adding another year to study for students who may already have invested time into developing their skills and folios.

Alongside this well-established course, over the last 10 years GSA has developed a programme of delivery which not only seeks to support students in developing their portfolios and successful transitions to art school, this provision is specifically targeting those students from low socio-economic areas, and schools which have lower than the national average of pupils who progress to higher education.

As a specialist art and design school, diversity within the student body is seen as key to supporting diversity within the studio environment and so in the resultant work of the students. The studio creates the environment for collaboration, within and across disciplines, for critical inquiry, experimentation and prototyping, and is the environment in which we collectively generate new ideas and solutions and where innovation thrives. This is only strengthened through diversity.

Working intensively with students during the last 3 years of their high school and specifically targeting those students from specific schools, low socio-economic areas and limited experience of higher education in the family, GSA has developed a programme of activity, within a progressive framework aiming to scaffold student learning through developing technical ability to discipline focused input and applicant support closer to the point of entry.

S4 Pupils – The focus of activities for S4 is to raise aspirations and begin to develop technical ability at an early stage, supporting the school curriculum and increasing awareness and understanding of contemporary art and HE.

S5 Pupils – Activity for S5 pupils builds on those offered in S4, fostering independent working and art & design practice. This enhances pupil’s work in school and introduces them to the critical thinking skills required to develop a strong portfolio for access to art and design based undergraduate programmes of study.

S6 Pupils – The activities provided for S6 pupils are more discipline focused, differentiating specific input in respect of art, design and architecture, preparing pupils for the development of a portfolio that is ready for submission as part of an application to higher education. It draws on an established model that has a demonstrable impact on successful application to GSA across all subject disciplines.

At GSA this has seen increases in students graduating from the SIMD 20 (lowest quintile of multiple deprivation) from 9% in 2013/14 to 19.3% in 2017/18. Around 9% of these graduates are graduating with a first class Honours Degree.

Alongside this work, GSA has started to formalise partnerships nationally and internationally through articulation agreements. This sees increasing numbers of students start their degree study at local colleges, international institutions and progress to GSA to complete their studies with full credit awarded for previous study. This sees students entering at an advanced point within the degree structure often at second or third year and complete their degrees at GSA. Again, supporting a diverse student community and studio environment.
WORKSHOP 1: When and How to Select Future Students?

Moderator
Godelieve Vandamme, Quality Process Coordinator, ENSAV-La Cambre, Brussels

The group attempted to identify challenges regarding the selection process. Conclusions of the workshop included:

• Art schools deal with a community of life; when skills are already required for certain programmes, selection is unavoidable.
• Difficulties; institutions should not look too much for talents, they should instead look for people who suit their schools /programmes.

Some suggestions included:
• Organization of the studies in a model that breaks the 3 - 5 - 8 system
• Attention to the rhythm of the studies
• Follow up with the students
• Ways to fight discrimination (with examples, such as the multiplying jury or media channels)

WORKSHOP 2: When and How to Prepare Future Students?

Moderator
Mara Ratu, Vice Rector for Institutional Partnerships, University of Art and Design Cluj-Napoca

The group attempted to identify the challenges of the preparatory courses. Conclusions of the workshop included:

• Address diversity and build inclusiveness at both student and teaching stuff levels
• Use accessible language
• Ensure financial accessibility
• Avoid reinforcement of the dominant culture
• Deal with localizing vs. de-localizing
• Resisting the neo-liberal logic in education

Based on these challenges, the participants were organised in 3 groups in order to work on the following topic: “Imagine a preparatory course able to respond to the above-mentioned challenges, as well as to the needs of your generations”. The results of the three workshops which were led by Zanne Zwart, Thomas Greenough and Shona Paul, and Isabelle Tellier were also presented at the end of this session.

See photos on the following pages.
UTOPIA: Preparation to the World

- Staff: science, psychological workers, broader not only artist.
- Dialogue with surroundings, coaching staff.
- Diversity of fields, direct choice to find context, become aware of students' references.
- Needs change.

Involves people of lower classes who want to develop - how can we act?

Content: make timetable + curriculum around practical skills, how to arrange "life." Re-imagine art academy "no school," open space where students develop themselves.

Student + costumer. Who pays? Border context (played by national).

Success: orientation (external)

Higher level (for BA) preparation (internal)

Continuation numbers in media: get out too narrow.

Make action informed + choices. Prepare to be active.

"Teaching is more difficult than learning, because what teaching calls for is this: To let learn.

↓ M. Heidegger

Active"
Workshop led by Thomas Greenough and Shona Paul

Workshop led by Isabelle Tellier
Closing Plenary

The Closing Plenary included feedback from students\(^3\) after their involvement in the workshops; the reflections from the Steering Group\(^4\) in order to identify potential actions to be taken as a result of the event; and the conclusions from David Robert, Deputy General Director of SINGA France (ONG), former journalist at the Journal des Arts, after his active participation and critical dialogues with the delegates of this seminar.

The students felt that the preparatory efforts of art schools are important, especially since through them the youngsters can get familiar with the possibilities within the arts, they can get to know themselves and their (hidden) skills, the ways how to express themselves, but also receive a proper criticism, which enables personal growth. However, there is still a closed bubble in the sector and a feeling that we have been speaking among ourselves. There are many potential art students out there, but they have not been part of the conversation. In the future, we should ask youth generation that is not in the room how we should talk to them and how we should connect with them, so that they will not be excluded.

The steering group agreed that there are many discussions in Europe about the topic of the seminar that creates awareness of the school systems and how to get into art schools.

Pierre-Jean Galdin highlighted that art schools should be involved in the preparatory classes and create connections with primary schools. He also talked about curricula diversity through European dimension in art schools’ panels and the need for reflection on those with disadvantaged backgrounds.

Sanne Kofod Olsen continued the conversation by referring to the discrimination and economic issues that arise from the pre-school programmes. The pre-training concept started almost 30 years ago, following suggestions that training should start from a very early age and pre-school programmes may prepare people to get into art schools. Consequently, a lot of these schools require, in most cases, payment which is already an exclusion mechanism at a very early stage (very formative). On the other hand, this phenomenon creates diversity as it requires parents to encourage children to go to these schools. It is an on-going situation that needs reflection on the selection and on how the selection is pre-defined by the preparatory schools and certain tendencies in society.
Mike Fox remarked that the selection process is a human process with real impact on the lives of the applicants. Selection committees need to learn how to reach these diverse groups and how to validate the culture and the qualities these people have from their own communities/backgrounds as a way to achieve diversity and empowerment.

The workshops outcomes and steering group discussion clearly suggested that the selection and preparation processes to arts schools is an important topic ELIA should pick up and integrate it into its work. The ELIA Executive Director Maria Hansen responded that this request will be brought to the ELIA Representative Board for further discussion.

At the end of this session, there was a presentation by David Robert drawing the conclusions of this seminar, including some comments based on discussions/personal interviews and a survey that was distributed by him during this meeting in order to identify what delegates expect from the educational system. He presented these results as a roadmap for how art schools can be made inclusive, thanks to, or despite, the selection system.

He also emphasized the crowding out phenomenon and its effects in the arts education system. Finally, Robert spoke of the term inclusion, which is closely connected to empathy and communication. He emphasised the importance of including refugees and explained how important is for them to use their mother tongue in order to understand and communicate, and the necessity to include them as they can be a link between the world and art.

Closing remarks were given by David Martineau, President of Beaux-Arts Nantes Saint-Nazaire and Deputy Mayor for Culture of Nantes Metropole, who thanked the delegates and speakers, and emphasised the importance of the seminar’s topic not only for the Beaux-Arts Nantes Saint-Nazaire but as well for the development and cooperation of the arts and education sector in the region.

The seminar ended with the suggestion for another potential ELIA meeting in two years in the same form with more statistics, overviews and presentations of the tendencies in Europe in order to analyse and shape the perspectives of preparatory schools.

3 Hoël Duret, Artist, former graduate at Beaux-Arts de Nantes, Una Cahill, Student Union President at Limerick School of Art and Design, Lina Lundberg, Student Union of the Faculty of Fine, Applied and Performing Arts, University of Gothenburg
4 Pierre-Jean Galdin, General Director, Beaux-Arts Nantes Saint-Nazaire. Sanne Kofod Olsen, Dean, Faculty of Fine, Applied and Performing Arts, University of Gothenburg. Mike Fox, M.A. Senior Lecturer, Limerick Institute of Technology, School of Art and Design.
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