i-MAD

Your guide to Media, Art and Design
Ever since artists have been concerned with breaking the rules, teaching art has been a difficult, and at times an impossible task. In 2001, there was a book published called Why Art Cannot be Taught. Fair enough: if you do as you’re taught to, then you’re not making art. But art schools more or less could live with that problem. In the last ten years, however, there have been additional reasons to raise the question: what should we teach to our students?

The stuff that art is made of is changing. For one thing, it is now increasingly made on a computer, floating round in cyberspace, finding an audience outside the white cube, and selling itself in business models that did not exist a decade ago.

Interdisciplinarity has become the norm; and not just interdisciplinarity that combines, say, music and images, but interdisciplinarity that blends them into something new that you don’t quite have a label for. How do you ‘teach’ your students to do that? After graduation, they are less likely to paint away in a studio than to have a business card printed and present themselves as ‘creative entrepreneurs’. But how do you teach them entrepreneurship? And should you?

Artists are now also increasingly presenting themselves as researchers. All over Europe, around 3,000 artists are pursuing a PhD in the arts. Will they produce unheard of, novel forms of art? Will they become a new academic proletariat? Or will it so turn out that, as one critic put it, “one day we will be quite accustomed to the fact that a solo exhibition in a museum of contemporary arts can’t be anything but the presentation of a doctorate in the arts”?

In short, these new roles for artists, the artist as entrepreneur and the artist as researcher, raise many questions about what higher arts education is up to. And the economic crisis, here and now, makes these questions all the more pressing.

There are currently more than half a million art students in Europe and ELIA represents more than 300,000 of them. ELIA is the European League of Institutes of the Arts, a network organisation for higher arts education in all disciplines: music, theatre, fine art, design, film, fashion, architecture, and more. Since 1990, we have been organising conferences and running projects in a network of some 300 art academies, dance and theatre schools, conservatoires, faculties of art and design and universities of the arts. When students travel freely between countries in exchange programmes and international projects, they are profiting from contacts and an infrastructure that ELIA helped bring about. And in recent years, we have
been engaging students from all over Europe in artistic projects – 300 of them made murals in each room of the Bloom! hotel in Brussels, 100 have made films for our ‘...I see you’ and ‘Languages Through Lenses’ projects and, since 2009, we organise a festival for graduating students in all disciplines, the NEU/NOW Festival.

It’s not up to us to decide what ‘the art academy of the future’ will look like. But in bringing people together, creating opportunities for students and teachers, gathering and spreading information and expertise, and co-ordinating an ‘academic network’ for research in the arts, ELIA is part of the process.

On our website www.elia-artschools.org you can find our publications, projects, and latest news; www.neunow.com shows you artistic talent that graduated in recent years, and www.sharenetwork.eu represents the state of the art in artistic research. A lot is going on. Still, in the end it is the students who, as artists of the future, will show where it will lead.

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ELIA - European League of Institutes of the Arts
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