




Vanilla Galleries
Leo Powell
Open Studios
Fran Odim - Loughlin
Michael Stubbs
MCAD Exchange
Mateus Domingos
Bas Marijnen
Parliament of Feathers
Charles Danby
Hannah Bishop
Grey Area

Issue #1

Autumn 2011

STUDIO

PIGEON



Pigeon's first issue '*Studio*' is devoted to the relationship of artists to their places of work; mapping what an artist can and cannot be without their studio. The frustration of a removed physical studio space within the educational environment has led Pigeon to reach for a broader understanding of the very term studio.

In the late 1960s artists questioned and overturned the traditional modes of production, circulation and reception of artworks causing the notion of the studio to gradually diminish. The diffusion of the artistic workplace across globalised networks has led to the pervasive acknowledgment of the 'post-studio' era.

In the case of the post-studio Pigeon considers the lengths to which the term does justice to the current nature of the space and place of art production. There is an ongoing debate within art education about the necessity and significance of providing art students with a studio. In an era where students work ever more systematically, does an architectural or institutional workspace remain valid?

Pigeon questions the connection between the artist and the physical space of their activity. Pigeon ask us to pay the studio a visit, to consider the innumerable spaces where artists are at work, creating along the way a studio of image, text, paper and glue.

STUDIO

PIGEON

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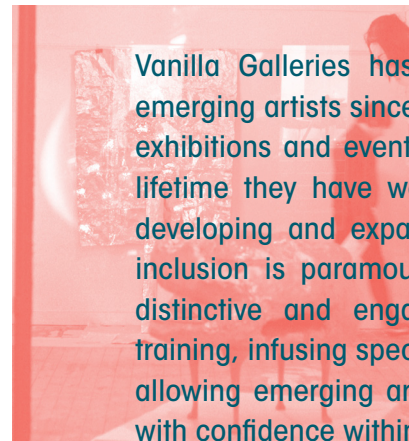
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VANILLA GALLERIES



Vanilla Galleries has been showcasing the work and ideas of emerging artists since its formation in 2008, aiming to host unique exhibitions and events for creative people. In their relatively short lifetime they have worked within the area of the East Midlands, developing and expanding with the belief that collaboration and inclusion is paramount to success. Vanilla Galleries coordinates distinctive and engaging creative workshops and professional training, infusing specialist creative skills into various organisations, allowing emerging artists to gain a platform in which to progress with confidence within their practice.

After witnessing the birth of Vanilla Galleries three years ago, Pigeon Magazine were pleased to meet founder Dave Briggs and fellow artists Greg Evans, Nick O'Reardon and Tom Sansome - a few members from the core of artists that drive the collective - in order to view their most recent exhibition and discuss what it is exactly that makes Vanilla Galleries loyal to their birthplace of Loughborough.

Define Vanilla Galleries.

Dave: Vanilla Galleries is a constantly evolving group containing some of the most innovative emerging artists and creative thinkers in the area of the Midlands in which we are based. As well as providing sanctuary for these predominately right-brain thinkers with a passion for visual expression, we initially came together in order to inspire others towards creative thinking and the enjoyment of collaborating on arts based projects. I could say we host exhibitions, creative-events and the occasional workshop-but that wouldn't be the half of it.

Nick: The collective started out as a stepping stone from University to professional practice, focussed mainly as an alternative to London and to create a sense of energy about the arts centred in Loughborough. Loughborough University has an extremely successful history in terms of it's school but nothing in the surrounding area to further promote this creativity. Since then, we have made steps towards expanding to Leicester and Nottingham, and is becoming a Midlands based venture. Our involvement with countless other collectives in the last six months

with other students and recent graduates has allowed us to broaden our network.

Greg: *Banality and Big Questions* is an exhibition set up by a friend of ours, held by the art collective the *1%ers* which is a group made up from different collectives from all over the Midlands which considered Vanilla Galleries representatives within this mix. Work is being done with DeMontford University students and tutors and the enthusiasm is brilliant.

When was the idea to found Vanilla Galleries born?

N: During our third year on our Fine Art degree at Loughborough, Dave wanted to expand on the already existing promotion of artists that the University was offering and circulated the year asking who would be interested in joining this venture. I created a website that accounted for everyone involved and sent off Press packs to raise awareness. At the time exhibiting was not our primary focus, instead the promoting of recent graduates in the area. Our focus has shifted over time to including a strong emphasis on exhibitions.

Tom: We have learnt and grown



" I watched a documentary on Alexander McQueen the other day that was depressing, but very inspiring."

over the last year especially. As soon as we revamped the Vanilla Galleries site we had a wider recognition and attracted a fair amount of attention.

G: And the exhibitions have become more realised over time, more successful. The shows are themed and exhibitors are selected more critically

What initially encouraged you to found Vanilla Galleries?

D: Naivety. I thought that if I could associate myself with every artist I knew at the time I would have more chance of being successful and an easier time find a sort-of career. All I wanted to do was put up a website to showcase and cross-promote how good our work was. When the possibility of exhibitions and the chance to become a professional comes along, who would say no? I have always had multiple inspirations to push me into founding something of this nature. Factory records, the curators Elmgreen and Dragset, the boys from *It's Nice That* and my Girlfriend's mum's training business. I watched a documentary on Alexander McQueen the other day that was depressing, but very inspiring.

Do you believe that the collective differs enough from other art collectives around the country, to make it unique and seemingly more successful?

D: The biggest differences are location, perspective and passion. Not being from the city where most of the art energy is focused upon, we have never had to compete with other collectives. We develop in our own unique habitat providing the perspective that we don't have to do things the same as other collectives, and an honesty from our shows that you will be hard pushed to find anywhere else. If visitors don't like the work, it doesn't matter. We've got the passion to carry on and we don't plan on stopping.

Have roles changed since the founding of Vanilla Galleries and how has your individual practices developed in turn?

T: Dave is essentially the ring leader. There are officially around ten people on the Vanilla Galleries committee. We work as a collective and we are encouraging to individual projects that can be supported and promoted through the catalyst of Vanilla Galleries. We encourage members of the collective to go off and do their own thing and then come back to

Vanilla Galleries and be taken under it's wing.

D: We are all from a variety of different backgrounds, raised in different parts of the country and interested in different practices. We do everything from live public performances to oil paintings of sea-life (I'm not joking). The commonality of what we do is the way we do it. Always bold and in your face but still plain-speaking and sincere. I studied Fine Art at Loughborough and specialised in painting. I then developed a hatred for painting and moved into digital media. Now in terms of medium I do whatever is appropriate.

I have found it hard to be personally ambitious. I don't think our society promotes the idea of successful individuals anymore, so much as networks and collective opinions. Of course I would love to continue to develop what I personally do on a larger scale so to impact,

involve and affect more people, but I want to do it as part of something bigger than myself.

G: We have had three exhibitions in the space of the last two months, pushing us all to be proactive within our own practices. I have always held a strong interest in satirical illustrations, yet my work has become more humour based recently. I have been doing a handful of art workshops at local schools.

N: To be honest, the more I get involved with Vanilla Galleries, the less prominent my practice becomes. The last exhibition I was involved with separate to Vanilla Galleries was at the *Surface Gallery* in Nottingham, and now my focus is on the fanzine *ZEENE* that me and Greg put together. We have just finished the fourth issue in a year, and this developed from producing handmade fanzines during my time at



University. The idea developed with Greg into something a little more involved.

T: The immediacy of fanzines is the catch that has pushed countless students into creating them, you can literally just roll them out one after another.

Considering your group is an assortment of artists whom we assume work in different ways, what are the challenges and advantages of working alongside one another?

D: The biggest challenge is the coordination. Emerging artists are the brightest and most passionate ones in my opinion, but we might sometimes lack in the professional savvy of someone like Jeff Koons. It takes patients and persistence to bring together a group with such unconfirmed ways of thinking and methods of practice, but it defiantly pays off in the long run.

Do you actively seek artists out to become part of the collective?

T: As long as you are on top of communication, and are an enthused member or contributor towards the running of the exhibitions and

events, you will be involved. I helped out on a pilot exhibition called *Spitklapp*, which they then took to Leicester, and then Dave approached me and asked if I wanted to be more permanently involved and that was it.

G: If anyone shows an interest and involves themselves, they eventually become part of the collective. We used to promote individual artists on our site, but this turned out to be unsuccessful in truly getting people actively and regularly involved. It is difficult as many students will move away from the Loughborough area once they graduate and it can be a struggle to hold onto people. Vanilla Galleries fundamentally works in this area though; our ties with the University are extremely strong and the tutors there are continuously supportive.

Brighton is completely saturated with creative ventures, collectives and projects. How does the Midlands distinct lack of creative saturation as a whole, affect the ethos behind Vanilla Galleries?

D: As I said before, living outside of London adds to our unique character. We don't rely on art sales to survive, so we don't depend upon the industry. It

allows us freedom. The biggest issue has been trying to get the interest from the local public. In London, lots of people visit art exhibitions for recreation and to become part of a community. The other 80% of the population are unfamiliar with the idea of even visiting an exhibition (maybe because they can't determine the functionality of it). We've put up shows in City centres before only to watch people pass by the windows nervously, as though scared that you might ask them to donate. It takes persistence to break that kind of attitude, however it's massively rewarding when it happens.

What were the limitations you came across when initially setting up Vanilla Galleries?

D: The only real limitation we have had is money. We have always worked to a shoe-string budget, which has worked because of a general willingness to help from people as well as local councils and other organisations. For example, we have always needed space to exhibit; once we approach a few people about projects, we usually find someone who wants to support the cause. In the past we have ended up with discounted rent on shop space, or a

gallery space for a couple of weeks just from talking to people. When you are starting out it's not easy to know whether you are doing the right thing. It's important to make mistakes in order to learn, and I'd rather be making big mistakes trying to do great things, than little mistakes on something mediocre.

What would you consider to be the importance of a studio space in order to firstly create your own work, and secondly work alongside others or communicating with others in order to work up to Vanilla Galleries events and exhibitions?

D: In the year 2011, traditional and solo studio spaces are not imperative unless you've got yourself a specific and set practice. I understand that some artists need the floor-space when they are making artwork, but as long as you have the means to create and test an idea, you are going to be alright. I have had studio spaces before but have not had the funds to keep paying the rent. Now I mostly use borrowed garage space or wherever I can. It's more important to me that I have enough of my peers around me to talk to and bounce off; having a network of like-minded people close by is the important aspect. Art to me

is about conversation. I make artwork to start off a discussion and I can't do this alone in a warehouse.

G: Vanilla Galleries makes use of the spaces we obtain for the creation of artwork as well as exhibition. We try to make sure we have them booked for an extra week so that we can do the practical side of this.

D: I also use the exhibition space in the run up to the show as much as I can. Once me and another artist slept over in the actual gallery space order to get the work finished, which only added to the unique character of the event. We hold events as much as we can dependant upon members personal commitments and the complexity of the event. Sometimes we have gone months without putting on a show, and other times we have done three or four in the space of a few weeks.

How do you promote the work you are doing effectively and how do you document the events?

D: Creatives make the best marketeers. We constantly make viral videos for the internet and we also have an army of bloggers who help out. For individual events we have posters and flyers, but they are a lot less cost

effective and they usually end up in the bin. We have also linked up with the media when we can, the highlight being a mention in the House of Commons in early 2009. We were extremely lucky that one of us could design websites, not just well but brilliantly. I put the first site together and it was a mess. If it wasn't for Nick taking over and being able to communicate the style and character in his design work, we would not have done so well.

You seem to have a running theme of humour within the art and events you create, why is this?

D: We are not a typical 'commercial sales gallery', and if you know about who we are I suppose even the name 'Vanilla Galleries' is quite funny really. But the wrong sort of humour isn't good when your trying to get someone to respect your opinions. I find watercolours funny, but I don't take them seriously. I can imagine myself at the door of some future Tate-like gallery space, ushering people into the doors, "...so maybe we should have picked a different name after all - at the end of the day that's not the point, it's just a name. Now get in here and be enlightened'.

I like to think that Vanilla

Galleries tends to use humour to underline important messages. When an artist choses to use humour they can break down social boundaries. The audience is suddenly seeing themselves on equal terms with the artists and 'sharing' a joke. Humour is the catalyst for an environment where people can have stimulating conversation without the stature of the artwork getting in the way.

Now Vanilla Galleries as a collective is more established, do you think it is successful in doing what it sets out to achieve?

D: Considering we never really set out to achieve much I guess we are. That doesn't mean we are finished yet. We've still got plenty more ideas for the future.

N: We have lots of ideas in the pipeline, including video projects, duet exhibitions and such, but the nature of how they develop prevents us from knowing specifically 'what's next'. The next project is usually confirmed a couple of weeks before it happens.

What does the future hold for Vanilla Galleries? Are you open to new avenues and contributors?

D: We are always open to new opportunities and we hold the flexibility in order to adapt. I want to push the collective as a concept rather than a society. In the future everyone with the willingness to open their mind could potentially be a Vanilla Galleries collaborator of some description. The more artists and events the better.

Pigeon holds the greatest respect for the Vanilla Galleries collective, both in terms of their ambitions to promote the arts within a previously creatively unmarked environment, and perhaps more importantly the striking array of characters that have come together in order to create work and provide fresh excitement and absolute raw passion for what they do. In order to support Vanilla Galleries, or simply to catch up on their latest events, visit their website www.vanillagalleries.com.

ART SCHOOL: TEACHING AND THE STUDIO

Leo Powell

In an era when students work ever more systematically on their laptops, questions arise as to what the architectural and institutional investment in viable workspaces for all students remains valid, let alone crucial to preparing students for professional practices. Leo Powell critically engages and discusses his opinions on the current status and importance of the studio.

When talking about the studio in art education and the nature of teaching, it's probably worth defining the terms, so that we are all reading from the same page. So what is teaching? What is a studio? When we use these terms, I think they conjure up quite traditional images – perhaps an authoritative teacher with knowledge, and a small grubby studio with a lone artist. I think there are probably more contemporary descriptions for both of these categories, so hopefully that's what we can come up with now. This article is an opinion piece based off of my observations of the studio and teaching in art education, with a hope that if this resonates with certain people, then maybe we're on the right track here.

First of all: teaching is changing. When we say 'teaching', I don't think we mean the passing on of knowledge, 'rote memory style' from a learned authority figure, even if that notion is still evoked and sometimes provoked for people. Art school has its own particular teaching traditions and attitudes, and it has alongside such traditions a very different curricular structure: it doesn't pass on knowledge or skills any more, it creates an artistic community with an art-historical context and reflective dialogue.

With that kind of ethos, I would take a leap and classify teaching (in art education) as essentially pertinent or non pertinent learning carried out through knowledge/media absorption or through Socratic dialogues anywhere with anyone. The fact that a tutor/lecturer is hired to help stimulate more pertinent dialogue and set interesting structures and reading for a community to engage in does not mean that the same tutor needs to always be present, or that the teaching always needs to occur in the classroom¹.

Which is where I would try to define the classroom, or to give it its art school moniker, the studio. For artists who work outside of art education, to speak of their studio might mean a number of things. It could mean an office, a desk, a computer, a garret, a warehouse, a supermarket aisle, an

1. I would classify "Pertinent" as something which either pertains to art, ones art practice, or related learning. "Non- pertinent" would be anything and everything else. Socratic dialogues are generally defined as a normal dialogue, except in the "form of inquiry and debate between individuals with opposing viewpoints based on asking and answering questions to stimulate critical thinking and to illuminate ideas"

easel in a garage, a community set of rooms in a block of flats, a church, a conversation... almost any space or context could be a "studio" – the place where a work is made or produced. However I'm fairly sure that, outside of an art school, almost no artist would consider their studio as a place for "teaching". Maybe for exploration and learning, but probably not for teaching. The notion of the studio as traditionally a place for production is really the linchpin. The uses of the studio have gone beyond production, with no studio type more clearly demonstrating this than the educational studio.

In art school the functions of teaching and learning, and the functions of making and producing are required by the singular space of the studio. The studio here often finds itself confused as to what it should be able to do – does a person make objects in it? Do they learn in it? Are they taught in it? Do they relax in it? Do they need to be in it? How does it affect them when they are not near it? The question of what a studio needs to be, therefore, becomes highly personal – each artist/art student has their own needs and their own particular practice which uses the notion of the studio in a variety of different ways. Despite this individuality, the studio also functions as a community space, a space where your personal needs are put into the context of other peoples. I would take a stab and suggest that, combined with the traditional notion of the lone artist figure that students inexplicably still think of, the highly particular and personal nature of ones practice leads to a confusion when placed in a context which is inherently communal. Sadly, what is often ignored by art education– institutions is that every student and every course has their own individual needs, and that only a individual qualitative approach to studio–space analysis will yield any useful results. A quantitative approach which focuses on a cost-benefit analysis based on "bums on seats" evaluations doesn't take into account the sheer variety of practices and personalities that pass through an art school. It just isn't cost effective to admit that lots of flexible (studio) space is needed to be effective. Someone might have a practice in which they always find themselves working in the local park – so do we therefore take away the studio for others? Maybe not, and this is where the communal aspect really comes into perspective. If nothing else, the studio can act

a hub for a community, a space which dedicates peoples attentions on a specific topic or reflexive discussion.

There seems to be two really key notions to keep in mind when thinkings about the use of the studio: firstly, context is everything, and it changes the meaning of what is said, understood, worked on – a change of context fundamentally alters the thing in question, whether that is an art object, a conversation, or learning². For example, a conversation over the phone is not the same as a conversation held face to face, even if the content of the conversation is exactly the same³. Secondly, in art education, learning about the physical spaces you work and display work in is tantamount to learning about the context of your work and practice: being critical and aware of these things are important for learning about and understanding art. So there is a direct link here between the importance of the studio space, the nature of art practices, and learning.

With all of this in mind, what might it be to teach in a studio? Perhaps it is more a question of “how does ones conception of their art practice relate to an artistic community based on dialogue?” What will those dialogues, and/or what will that space do to ones practice? How does one use such spaces personally, and how do we all relate to the institutional structures of ‘teachers’ and ‘students’ in a contemporary sense?

2. The Artist Placement Group’s motto “Context is half of the work” is really spot on here.
3. There is an excellent essay by Gunther Kress which deals with similar concepts, specifically the notion that context changes the nature of literacy - “What is Literacy? Resources of the mode of writing” Literacy in the New Media Age, (London: Routledge, 2003)



The airy, bright atmosphere of OPEN studio, located in London’s DeBeauvoir area is a dream workspace for most creatives. Set up in 2010 by five founding members, Holly Wales, Hugh Frost, Robert Evans, David Callow and Loren Filis, the space houses thirteen members, along with screen printing and risograph facilities. What is particularly interesting about OPEN is that it is not a collective - these artists work primarily as separate entities– but instead a physical space where a sense of community and discussion is created. We asked Holly Wales more about how the studio works.

How much interaction is there between the members of OPEN? You all work individually, so how much feedback and critique is there between you?

We have talked about this a lot because I guess at the beginning we imagined there would be certain things which maybe didn't happen but were replaced with others; we end up exchanging a lot more practical ideas than feedback and critique – paper suppliers, types of printing, good quality inks, letterpress contacts etc – and learning that way. As a lot of what we are doing tends to be for commercial clients, maybe feedback between ourselves is not always so useful or relevant.

I get the impression that the success of OPEN focuses on the physical space – what specific elements do you think are important in creating the best working environment for your shared professions?

It's definitely about the space, the studio could not work without it. Light is a major factor, and good, useable furniture and working layout. I spent a long time designing the space within our limited budget. We were using 8x4 MDF sheets which I worked out needed to be at least

20mm thick so as not to bow in the middle between the trestles, and then it was a case of working out how most efficiently to divide those sheets up to give people the biggest working space. Each section was designed as an L-shape purely with an illustrator's practice in mind – one space for a computer, one space for drawing. It's important that everyone has some vertical surface as well to pin work and divide one up from another, but nothing big or imposing which would divide us up too much, as that spoils the collaborative vibe, and people stop contributing to the space in general.

Why wasn't working alone in smaller spaces enough? What are the main benefits of this shared space?

It is not so much that it wasn't enough. Different studios were good for different things, and definitely at the start of my career it was important for me to be surrounded by other practitioners of all sorts of levels and disciplines – photographers, set designers and fashion designers, some of whom had been working on their own for several years – and it was inspiring and educational to be around them. But I think at some point it becomes important

to surround yourself with the tools and facilities (shared picture library, screenprinting, riso, tea and support!) and we did this by gathering together a lot of people who were in the same boat.

In terms of the location in Dalston, what are the benefits of being where you are?

I have lived in Dalston since 2004. I love it to bits and it has always made a lot of sense to me to work near where I live; my work is completely tied up in everything I do so I am never working any sort of nine to five schedule. Some days it's just somewhere I pop into between other things, other days it is more of a twenty four hour shift.

Most of the guys here are in similar situations, and I guess that is the benefit for us – maybe we wouldn't have found it so easy finding such like minded souls elsewhere. Maybe. But this is just the beginning!

Upon visiting OPEN it became clear that many of the practitioners were looking for an environment similar to the 'art school' feel that they had experienced at university. They spoke in particular about discussion, not necessarily focusing heavily on critique of each others work, but more providing encouragement and to sharing knowledge specific to their practice. With such a variety and wealth of people housed at OPEN, such as *Patternity*, *Landfill Editions* and *illustrators* such as Sarah King, Ciara Phelon and Adam Hayes, they are able to make the most of each other's knowledge and talent. The OPEN philosophy is to provide support, criticism, dialogue, fairness, opportunity, a sense of belonging and fresh ambition to both their creative work and independent businesses.





FRAN
ODIM -
LOUGHLIN





Moments of Separation

Ultimately I consider myself to be a hermetic creature. I find myself yearning for a small corner that acts as a place of refuge from the engulfing waves of collective conviviality.

It is not that I shy away from human interaction, as without it I fear I would get lost at sea in an ocean of my own thoughts. Yet I savour moments of isolated calm.

A space, room, corner, chair hidden behind curtains, walls, distance.

Commit yourself to your own asylum. Witness everything begin to solidify. Your consciousness begins to shrink in on itself. The clamour dissolves into ephemeral whispers that seem to reverberate around the limitless confines of your mind. Solitude allows you to lift yourself from the quagmire; shaking off remnants that are embedded and clumped in the crevasses of your skin, and take a long deep sigh.

Do not mask the wonders of your own cerebral depths with a constant desire to be enveloped by the comforting warmth of social reciprocation.

Treasure your moments of separation.

THE ROLE OF THE ARTIST' STUDIO

Michael Stubbs

With an education within the arts spanning over two decades, the artist Michael Stubbs completed his BA in Fine Art at Bath Academy in 1987, his MA in Fine Art at Goldsmiths in 1990, and his PhD in Fine Art in 2003. With the effects of the recent recession and the severity of challenges faced by our generation, Pigeon invited Stubbs to discuss his experiences of graduating during the 1990s recession, making work through this one and to explain his own understanding of the studio in relation to his practice of painting.

I'm a biased artist in that as a painter I need a studio space of a certain size. I'm not the sort of painter who worries about natural light or residing in a 'broken-down' attic, no such romantic nonsense for me. I just need a space with good artificial lighting and where I can make a mess and experiment with my chosen medium in the context that the world of contemporary art calls painting. On the one hand I would argue that all artists need a studio space but on the other, it has become increasingly obvious that many artists today do not require the 'artisan' space of tradition. Advanced artists since the 1960's have challenged and criticized the need for studios through ideas-based work (often called conceptual art) and this shift of emphasis has continued until the present day under various names such as 'relational aesthetics'.

Given these ideas-based genres, artists often make a choice (or choices) at certain moments in their career as to whether a not a studio space is necessary for their working practice especially whilst they are still in art education. With the current funding cuts in Fine Art in Universities across the UK, where undergraduate students are not given studios or spaces of any description, can be both a blessing and a curse. A blessing because it frees young artists from the overwhelmingly common idea of the artisans space as the purveyor of 'correct' artistic practice, but a curse in that with no personal space on offer (even if it is a desk space in the corner of a room), concentrated thinking and a place to identify this with is denied. Of course ideas-based thinkers will argue that personal, physical space within an assumed (artistic) architectural setting is not where artists need to be right now given that certain critical practices that I've mentioned before have no need of this situation. And I agree with this. But within education I still remain to be convinced that having no personal, physical space from which to operate and prepare work could be of benefit. After all, is a space in a school not a forum where students and tutors can share and discuss ideas? My experience as a student and as an occasional tutor is based upon a shared experience in a given time and space during focused and timetabled schedules. OK, students would obviously meet once or twice a week for shared seminar experiences in any given University as part of their course much like the well-established part-time MA programme at Goldsmiths

which requires students to have their own studios. Equally, ideas can be shared over the internet or by email. But for undergraduate students expected to have their own separate studios or workshop spaces outside the University at the beginning of their careers seems to me to put a big strain on both their shared development and their financial resources.

Because I have little experience of working in art schools that do not offer regular spaces (apart from Goldsmiths part-time MA), I'm sure I'm at a disadvantage with my argument that studio space is part of the development of a students learning. But to expect a student who wants to make paintings to be in the same situation as a student who is primarily ideas-based does seem to privilege the latter. The art school I work at offers studio space to all full-time students regardless of their style of practice. I guess those University courses that don't offer work space could argue that they are offering a different, more progressive, non-studio based curriculum that is in keeping with the times and that students are aware of this in advance of applying. But this non-studio based argument seems to exclude some practices in the name of progress such as painting and therefore unwittingly reverts back to an older art school model of media specific distinctions like the firm, departmental separation of painting, sculpture and media etc. into separate taught units. In the name of progress all (so called) artisanal mediums are removed to be replaced with 'new' mediums and this seems to mirror the very outdated, 1940's Clement Greenberg model that each art or medium should strive to separate itself in isolation to achieve a narrower area of its own competence – the medium as the carrier of meaning in its own right.

In the end though I guess it's only fair for me to relate the need for a personal space to my own experiences which counter Greenberg's insular view by sharing my experiences of the studio as having a value and place that contributes to art making in the wider (art) world. The role of the studio for me as a container in which to reflect upon my practice and in which to plan how and where my work will be placed (in commercial, independent, museum or public galleries and spaces for example) is paramount. I have needed a studio since leaving college and in the early days it was not easy

with very little money. In recent years I've rented from established artist's studios such as *Space* or *ACME* (where you have to join waiting lists). But beforehand, throughout the 90's, I sought space in independent studio set-ups out of commercial and locational necessity.

I became part of an artist-led group who set up a studio building at 96A Curtain Road in 1992. We called it *Curtain Road Arts*. Many artists then (and still are) living in the East-End of London because of cheaper house rents and mortgages. In 1992 affordable studio space was rare unless you were accommodated by *ACME* or *Space* or were prepared to take on a commercial lease which often had hidden costs. As a haphazard group of emerging young artists whose only connection had been through Goldsmiths in some shape or form, Shoreditch on the edge of the financial area of London and at the beginning of the East End seemed like the only viable option for cheap rents. Shoreditch also was not too far from the commercial hub of galleries in Soho and the West but was un-colonised and was very bleak and full of derelict warehouse buildings. There were only a few residential dwellings, a couple of shops and two pubs. At the time there were no other artists in the area as far as I or my group of colleagues knew except Gary Hume who had a studio in the far North/West corner of Hoxton Square. The idea for setting up *Curtain Road Arts* was so that as a group we could afford individual studio spaces that weren't at a commercial rent or have to wait for months or years to occupy a vacant *ACME* space. We leased a very cheap, dis-used warehouse building that was in a bad state of repair and set about fixing the leaking roof, non-operational toilets, building stud and plasterboard walls and painting the interior and exterior etc. We even managed to register as a small charity complete with interested trustees. By being a charity we waived full business rates which would have doubled our rents and only paid a fraction of the business rates on top of our minimal rents. As part of the charity deal and alongside providing affordable studio spaces for artists, we were expected to host contemporary art exhibitions. As a group we stayed together until 1999 when the lease ran out and the building was sold by the owners because Shoreditch's house and business rents were set to rise astronomically.

Originally 10 artists were involved:

Dermot O'Brien	Glenn Brown
Nick Fudge	Anya Gallaccio
Stephen Hughes	Alex Landrum
Marielle Neudecker	Emma Smith
Michael Stubbs	Gillian Wearing.

Nick Fudge left the group very early on in 1993 to be replaced by Andrea Fisher. Around 1994-95 we re-arranged a couple of the spaces to include two or three more artists after Andrea's unfortunate passing away. A few artists came and went but those that stayed included Angela Bulloch, Xenia Deiroff, Dan Hays and Cornelia Parker.

The exhibitions, mostly in Alex Landrum's ground floor space or Dermott O'Brien's first floor studio (in lieu of rent), were mainly solo and double solo shows which included artists from within and outside the studios: David Batchelor, Dan Hays and Phil King, Alex Landrum and Michael Stubbs. For a brief time around 1994-95 Alex Landrum rented his studio to the *Agency Gallery* who also put on a number of exhibitions there. *Curtain Road Arts* also put on group shows, one of which travelled to NYC and another to *Spacex Gallery* in Exeter. They included (amongst others):

-1999 **Elastic Abstract**

Curtain Road Arts - London, UK; Spacex Gallery - Exeter, UK. (catalogue)
Curators: Alex Landrum, Michael Stubbs
(*Mark Cannon, Michelle Fierro, Pascal Hervey, Phil King, Alex Landrum, DJ Simpson, Michael Stubbs*)

-1996 **Art 96**

Curtain Road Arts, London Art Fair
Design Centre - London, UK. (catalogue)
(*Dermot O'Brien, Glenn Brown, Angela Bulloch, Andrea Fisher, Anya Gallaccio, Dan Hays, Stephen Hughes, Alex Landrum, Marielle Neudecker, Cornelia Parker, Emma Smith, Michael Stubbs*)

-1993 **Mandy Loves Declan 100%**

Mark Boote Gallery - New York, USA. (catalogue)

Co-Curators: Glenn Brown, Stephen Hughes, Alex Landrum, Michael Stubbs (*Glenn Brown, Adam Chodzko, Keith Coventry, Anya Gallaccio, Stephen Glynn, Siobhan Hapaska, Stephen Hughes, Alex Landrum, Michael Stubbs, Mark Wallinger, Gillian Wearing*).

* A video project by each artist was produced by Angie Daniell and it accompanied the exhibition. It was also included in the 'Launch' Exhibition.

-1993 **Launch**

Curtain Road Arts - London, UK

(*Dermot O'Brien, Glenn Brown, Andrea Fisher, Anya Gallaccio, Dan Hays, Stephen Hughes, Alex Landrum, Marielle Neudecker, Emma Smith, Michael Stubbs*).

Since 1999 I've rented established studio spaces from *Space* or *ACME* mainly because setting up your own studio presents so many problems and requires a lot of hard work, collaboration, commitment and argument, but I wouldn't have missed the experience for the world. When I was starting out as an artist *Curtain Road Arts* provided me with an affordable space on a low income. It also gave me the opportunity to continue and echo art school discussions and share art experiences with other artists in a similar position. It also provided me with the time and space to experiment and make mistakes. As a consequence it helped develop the confidence and resilience needed to continue my career.

The benefit of a studio or work space for any artist whether they are a student, just starting out, or an experienced professional and regardless of their style or genre, is to provide a framework in a 'safe environment'; to be allowed to take risks with their work and to occasionally 'fall flat on their face' without fear of public reprisal. A studio (or workspace) also provides the opportunity to learn and communicate from these experiences through work. This should also be a pre-requisite for art education in my opinion.



TRANSATLANTIC SPACE

Universities are reputedly the hallowed halls of intellectual development, the schools of maturation where the great leaders and thinkers of the future are nurtured. However the fundamental differences between the education system in the United Kingdom and that of the USA, make for a different work ethic with positives on both sides. Due to obligation of students to study outside their specialism, the US prescribes a broader, but less in depth focus. Here in the UK, breadth is shunned in favour of a more narrowly focussed line of study. On American campuses, work is constantly requested from students on a daily basis, as opposed to the British approach of extra intensive work that comes in patches.

In August 2010, Brighton Illustration students Liv Taylor and Rosie Ashley-Lahiff, took part in an exchange programme in which they lived and worked at MCAD, Minneapolis for three months. With its extensive facilities and twenty-four hour access, MCAD provides all the physical aspects of an Illustration Degree that one could ever imagine. Brighton University's focus for Visual Communication degrees has clear differences shown within it's broad range of contexts, applications and media whilst encouraging a unique and individual voice, from designers, illustrators, photographers, animators, film makers and art directors.

After their experience in an entirely different education system, Pigeon met the girls to discuss the opposing institutions along with MCAD students Sara Fowler and Michael Perez currently on exchange here in Brighton.

Liv: The most appropriate place to start would be right at the beginning, when we had an initial meeting with Jay Coogen, the new Principal of MCAD. He asked us what we felt differed between MCAD and Brighton, the main difference that we could identify was the studio space and how it acted as an environment where people work collectively, and whether in fact they do at all.

Rosie: In this sense, I felt that we missed out at MCAD by not having this type of collective studio and not producing work together with creative people around us, and therefore not witnessing the start, the middle and the end.

Liv: At Brighton, we are given a large studio space, which initially encouraged us to work together. Now we know we can work collaboratively and create discourse about our work together, we recognise that the studio space is not always necessary. I felt at MCAD in the studios it was extremely separated, you have your own cubicle of space and in some ways that is good in terms of productivity, but it proved to be isolating. Even though you were in room with thirty or forty people you still feel the need to be silent, headphones in and heads down getting on with individual work

Sara: We actually brought this up with the new President of MCAD in a series of workshops he held to gain feedback. This was something that really got raised, changing the studio space. Right now there are several areas of studio, we are in the area where Photography, Graphic Design and Illustration are together in a series of cubicles. There is a table area where students can gather around, but as you said it remains isolated despite this.

Liv: I strongly believe that this is to do with the absolute difference in the education systems. In MCAD work was timetabled in a classroom setting,



and then the studio was a separate almost homework kind of space, whereas at Brighton the studio is very much integral to the education and we are encouraged to come together, talk together and critique together as part of this. Studio practice is not taught but encouraged as part of the teaching, whereas at MCAD it is very much about what you are learning, and with the thought in mind that individuals approach their practice differently. The element of working together is not enforced or engrained into their students like it seems to be at Brighton and therefore because it is not focused on and students are less likely to take initiative. The debate and the critical aspect of the studio exists in MCAD but in a set, regimented format.

Do you believe that the lack of the facilities at Brighton inhibit your practice?

R: In our case we only have a photocopier in the studio. It depends on the course, on graphics I can do anything as long as I have my Mac and I can take that anywhere. In that sense the studio can be wherever I choose it to be.

S: I think it is a positive element of Brighton in that their students are not becoming dependent on having everything provided for them within a studio. Once graduated, we will not have those facilities at hand so it is a necessary skill to be able to search out those things.

Do you believe that the differences within the educational system are the critical factor in this interaction?

L: Of course, when you start university on a foundation level, you form relationships with people before you pick your specialism and in that way there is breadth in who you can interact with. It would be difficult here though to have any more variety of cross course contact as the teaching is done in the studio and it is a limited space, whereas at MCAD the classroom for teaching and the studio were fundamentally separate. If we had the funding to have both a mixed studio learning space for critique and discussion, in addition to private studios then of course it would be beneficial.

R: In Brighton it is a lot more entrepreneurial, where we actively choose to come together outside the studio environment. The recognition that as a student you have to get think beyond the institution for yourselves without having the luxury of everything factored into our education, like it was at MCAD in lessons. I think there is a lot more collaboration here because of that focus on self-initiated work.

For Sara and Michael, as MCAD students coming into the education here in Brighton, have you found it hard to adjust to doing more self-initiated work and collaborations?

S: One of the reasons I came was because I knew that the course and the education structure would be different, and through the experience I could teach myself how to develop

“...the studio can be wherever I choose it to be.”

my practice further but it has been difficult to adjust.

L: One element of the debate to whether a studio is necessary is the critical importance of having the difference between work and home. Having this intense environment studio at the University.

Through exploring the idea of the ‘studio’ we have noted that many believe in two distinct definitions of studio. One is the physical space, and perhaps more importantly the other is the dialogue that is allowed to occur in a set space.

R: As an artist you want regular informal feedback on your work, and at MCAD we did not get that opportunity. At Brighton the studio is integral as the space in which dialogue occurs. When collaborating, it is about us coming together and discussing the work in a group and that is my definition and what I require from a studio.

L: From working on my own and then working alongside others, subjects occur that are not necessarily critique of work or directional, but they are debates. From finding out what others are interested in, three collaborations have come of it for me. This collaboration is the aspect that keeps you excited about your own work, and motivated to do more as opposed to being entirely pigeon holed and blinkered into just your own work.

S: The element of MCAD that does offer students something along this thread of importance, is that the studios are mixed with different majors which creates dialogue between the practices. It is important to not just be aware of what is happening in your direct field, but also to what occurs throughout the university.

L: This is an extremely valid point, and something that British education does not generally offer. At MCAD I had the opportunity to study the practice of photography and lithography, disciplines that were outside of my major, which were inherently valuable.

M: It is about mixing with others with alternative approaches to their practice, who have their own way of thinking. However I have not

benefited critically from this element of MCAD. Personally, I have contacts with students in a variety of majors, but we are yet to talk critically about our work together, exploring that interesting crossover. At Brighton the Illustration and Graphic Design students are mixed in the studio and the crossover happens without forcing it. In that sense Brighton does allow for cross course interaction.

Do you cross over with different year groups at MCAD?

S: All the classes are not year specific and depends on when you start certain modules and advance through them, so you could be in a class with first and third year students. There is a separate ‘advanced’ studio for the final years, a larger studio which is something we fought against when talking to the

President of the Faculty. It is locked so you can only have access if you have a key card, which many believe is elitist, separated and not helpful and I now hold the belief that a studio should be an open space.

L: At MCAD there is twenty-four hour access. It was available to us at all times and it is when you are not given that advantage that you then go out of the institution, find the alternatives and creatively think outside of the university structure – that is the defining factor. If students had the choice of MCAD or Brighton, they would pick to go to the school with the most facilities and MCAD can provide this without a shadow of a doubt, yet this cannot always be entirely beneficial in a long term sense of skills for post-graduates.

“It is about mixing with others with alternative approaches to their practice”

M: From being in Brighton, I feel like I am learning the nature of my own work ethic outside of the MCAD institution. Whilst here I attempt work in a more natural approach and to my own time management, as opposed to working under MCAD’s regimented structure. Figuring out how that process works is a valuable skill.

In this sense, you seem to all agree that the experience of education at MCAD leads students to be far more institutionalised than here in Brighton.

R: I loved that aspect of having structure, but I know its not realistic in the working world.

S: It is interesting to consider our experience working within Brighton University, because after coming here I feel that I can now return to MCAD and question the briefs and regimented structure. Before this exchange I had never considered the need to do this.

I have learnt that being creatively independent is extremely important to our practice as artists and designers, at the end of the day we are shaping the next generation of the creative industry!

Coming from two extremely different institutions, yet both evidently reputable, it is fascinating to explore and uncover where the fundamental differences in education lie. The exchange programme allows the students to experience a new approach to their creative practice and adapt their methodologies and ethos to strike a remarkably balanced way of thinking. It is clear to Pigeon that these four students, along with those who potentially follow in their footsteps in future exchanges, will benefit from the experience enormously and we look forward to seeing the work and collaborations that derive from this opportunity.

ART ISN'T DEAD TEACHING IT IS

Mateus Domingos

Mateus Domingos is a fine artist, filmmaker and self-proclaimed serial dabbler. Interested in the experience or affect of art - with a keen awareness of the systems that facilitate and control the production, display and consumption of art - Mateus writes here of his experience within 'Art School' in its current incarnation, hoping to provoke a critical awareness of the teaching, the studio and the system.

To preface; I am writing this text, preliminarily, at a coffee shop. I came to the city primarily to encounter this moment of solitude in the masses, aside a straight black coffee. Life is performance. Here, I slip into the performance of that guy sat typing in a coffee shop, what a schmuck/dude. This performance, is however, dramatically more productive than the performance I succumb to in the university studios.

Painting statements on laminate boards. “You know, people say painting is dead. You’ve heard that right. Well, that’s all rubbish. Conceptual practice, though. Now that is dead.” Tutors harking on about their days as part of the YBAs wax lyrical on modernist tropes, whilst a lecture programme designed by feminist-cum-radical academicians attempts to impart knowledge of a history, which seems tailor made to provoke a critical, politicised practice. All of this is obviously separate from the issue of commodities, and the reality of the systems in which art is produced. The result is a disjointed dialogue about ideas and theories and an overflow of images.

Through painting I’m thinking of Smithson, rendering the systems visible, examined. I want to strengthen the dialogue that we have as students, between students. All the ‘teaching’ seems to have worn most people out. The studio and smoking area is a place of small talk and the night before, a far cry from the happening cafés of the surrealists. The system is corrupt and broken. It produces practice, but not a positive practice. The whole value in the studio is that it provides the basis for a community and a platform for discussion. In a recent tutorial I defended the Feminist domination at the school of the arts, in terms of staff research and the perspectives from which we are taught. In the most rousing form I could manage, I said, ‘but this is good. It allows us, the students, to know our enemy! It allows us to position ourselves clearly, to argue or agree with the ideologies and histories we are being fed.’ I’m not sure I convinced a soul.

If the art school is to continue in its current incarnation, at £9000 a year, much needs to improve. It would be fine to teach the production of commodities, if they didn’t try and force romantic notions of the artist or politicised practice at the same time. There should be consistency. I’m

talking about provoking a critical awareness of the system. I’m not entirely keen on the slightly militant tone I’m using and hope you don’t write this off as more hippy shit.

More and more talk turns to escape routes. Possible trajectories that this degree will grant us. People want to teach, take other degrees, in psychology, philosophy, economics... actually learn about the issues they’ve been awoken to in their practice. (And surely this is a good thing. This has precedence, i.e. Daniel Hirschorn) People want to sell, and that’s good too. Others want to change the world through artist interventions and that too is commendable. After the history we’ve been taught, to want anything, to be able to identify any route of positive action is a miracle. With the growing realisation in the potential of the studios and the power of the students, there are an increasing amount of performances (conversely these are the moments when the performance stops and we become real) and student-led seminars. Real moments when we learn about what art is. There is a perennial bloom of student exhibition groups that are overwhelmingly good as they force so many questions about the content of the work and how it should interact with the public, whether it should be for sale and how the works work together. Through these moments we become aware of the reality of the work outside the institution and also the value of the institution. The art school system can begin to be assessed. Art school effectively pits similarly aspirational students (young and old) against the more/once established artists- cum-lecturers who claim to hold certain knowledge. There are, also, the really great tutors who do exist, who inspire and teach through positive wisdom, as opposed to negative monologues that provide that framework to fight against.

The practice today thrives in the in-between spaces, online threads of communication, walking to catch a train for some seminar, in the café outside the studio. Tom Sansome* turned the exhibition space of our studios in to a front room; sofas, tea, carpet and art. It felt real. The institution may fail to keep up with practice, unable to assess it by their old constraints, but that doesn’t really matter. It only matters that the practice continues and as art students we talk to each other about the work, the future, histories and

context, and that these studio islands form networks and gain perspective from the dislocation of the studio. Positive change is happening, and it's through publications such as this one.

An anecdote: In a lecture recently, the tutor asked the assembled second years, *'What is art?'* A feeble silence followed and we moved on swiftly, all aware that the contradiction of our existence had reared its ugly head once more.

ART SCHOOL SUMMER

Another coffee, another seamless performance. An adaptation. This time the setting is the café of a creative industries building that homes a dozen graphic design firms, a handful of photographers, web designers and even a couple of architects. Anyway, I lied, it's an OJ as I already took coffee in a restaurant where the only other 8am customer was a wild-eyed old man with a long beard and smart red sweater, drinking old english tea. Maybe this isn't really relevant.

I read my feedback for another semester. The work I'd submitted was focussed around a novella. I was forced to recognise a confusion in the geography of the studio. *'You can't read a book in a gallery.'* Admittedly I am here afforded the luxury to speak without entering in to an actual discussion, much like the feedback, but so take all this to be mildly exaggerated. My problem here is that there never seemed any point in focusing art school

problem here is that there never seemed any point in focusing art school practice on 'gallery' work, when the work was always destined to be judged by the tutors and peers, where I left it in the studio. This it seems is one of the central conceits of the art school. They allow a freedom to explore practice without being bound by project briefs or titles, yet they are in the end judging the work in terms of it's imagined potential realisation within a gallery space. This then dismisses work that has been actualized in other contexts, such as the studio itself. Performances and community art projects will come to be judged in terms of their documentation within a gallery.

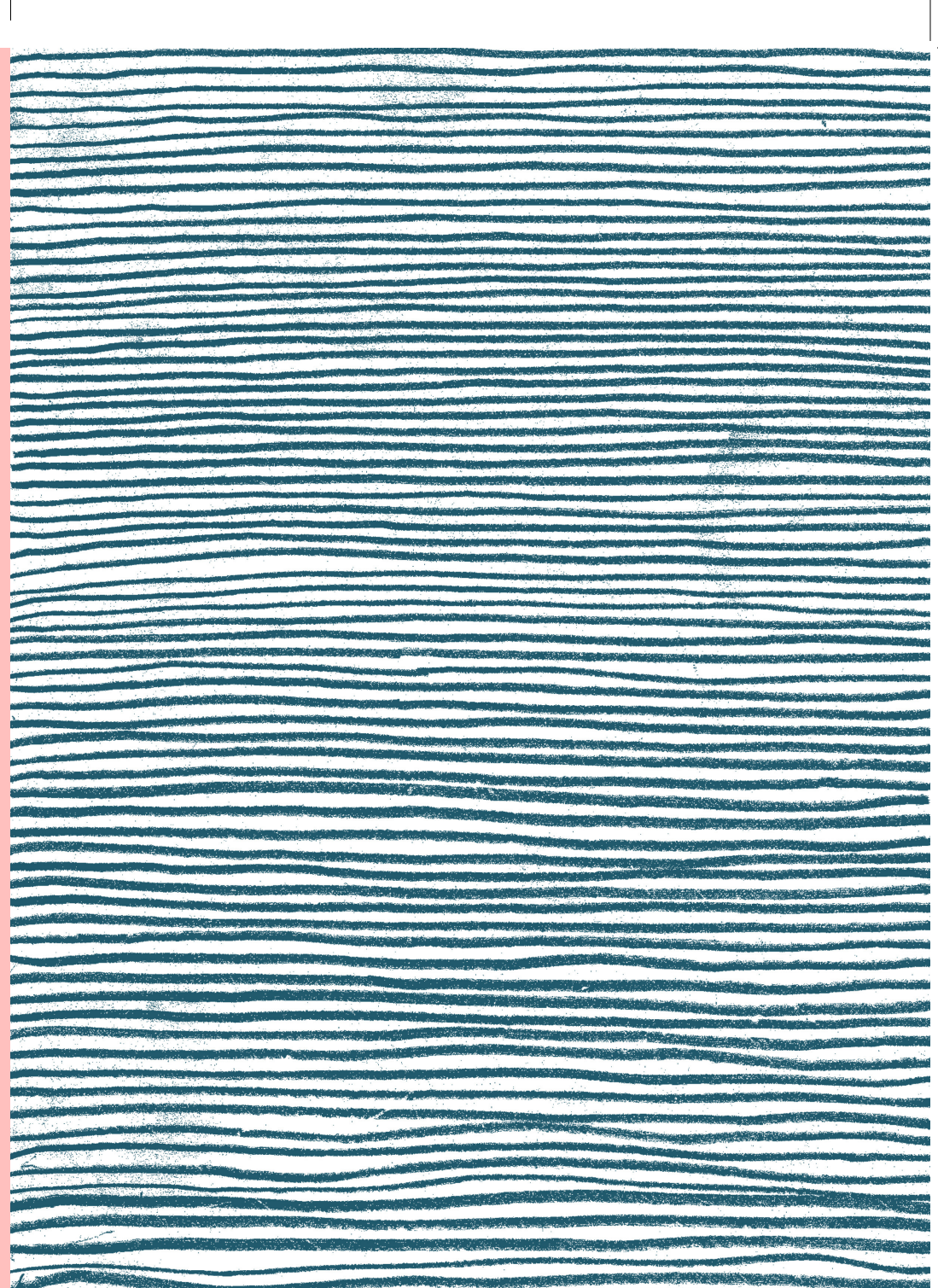
Art School offers participants the oft-perceived luxury of a four month summer. Art School summers are the students time of migration into other networks, other worlds. They can be periods of stark realisation of an other. Outside of the institution, because it's doors are locked shut. It forces a negotiation of studio. Following feedback, I take long walks in which I mutter monologues of what I might say in my first group tutorial. About how I am reacting by working exactly as I was before but censoring out, with a marker pen, the elements that aren't for the hypothetical gallery, and how I'm not going to speak of this censorship outside of this initial group tutorial. I'm inventing a performance for within this institutional context now more completely than before. A practice that is always to appear hypothetical within the studio but through dialogues and uncensored visibility in other locations, it is realised. I guess I'm just scared of the end. I'm trying to eject early. The making-work-real by removal from the institution. I think what I'm talking about can be explained in terms of twhat I believe I once heard was the native american's conception of space: If I cannot find my way home. It is not me that is lost, but home. An artist's contextis always going to be that immediate physical location which is around them and their work.

I decided to explore Etsy. Throw myself into a context outside of the Art School. This itself seemed like some fatal betrayal of art school dogma. I was greeted open arms by a community full of love and happiness. People rarely sold anything but everyone was talking about the work, sharing it and enjoying the process. There's a kind of purity to the place that would

probably be considered naive at Art School, and maybe this is why I created the *No-Sales Club* which is a ridiculous group only for people who haven't sold. Many people have joined and everyone's sharing advice and tips, but none of us has sold, so what do we know. It is doomed. I sense my poisonous presence is probably being noticed though and received a plea to open the group to people with sales, who could provide qualified advice. I want to believe in this, in happiness, but art school awaits and in order to succeed there it's hard not to be just a little cynical.

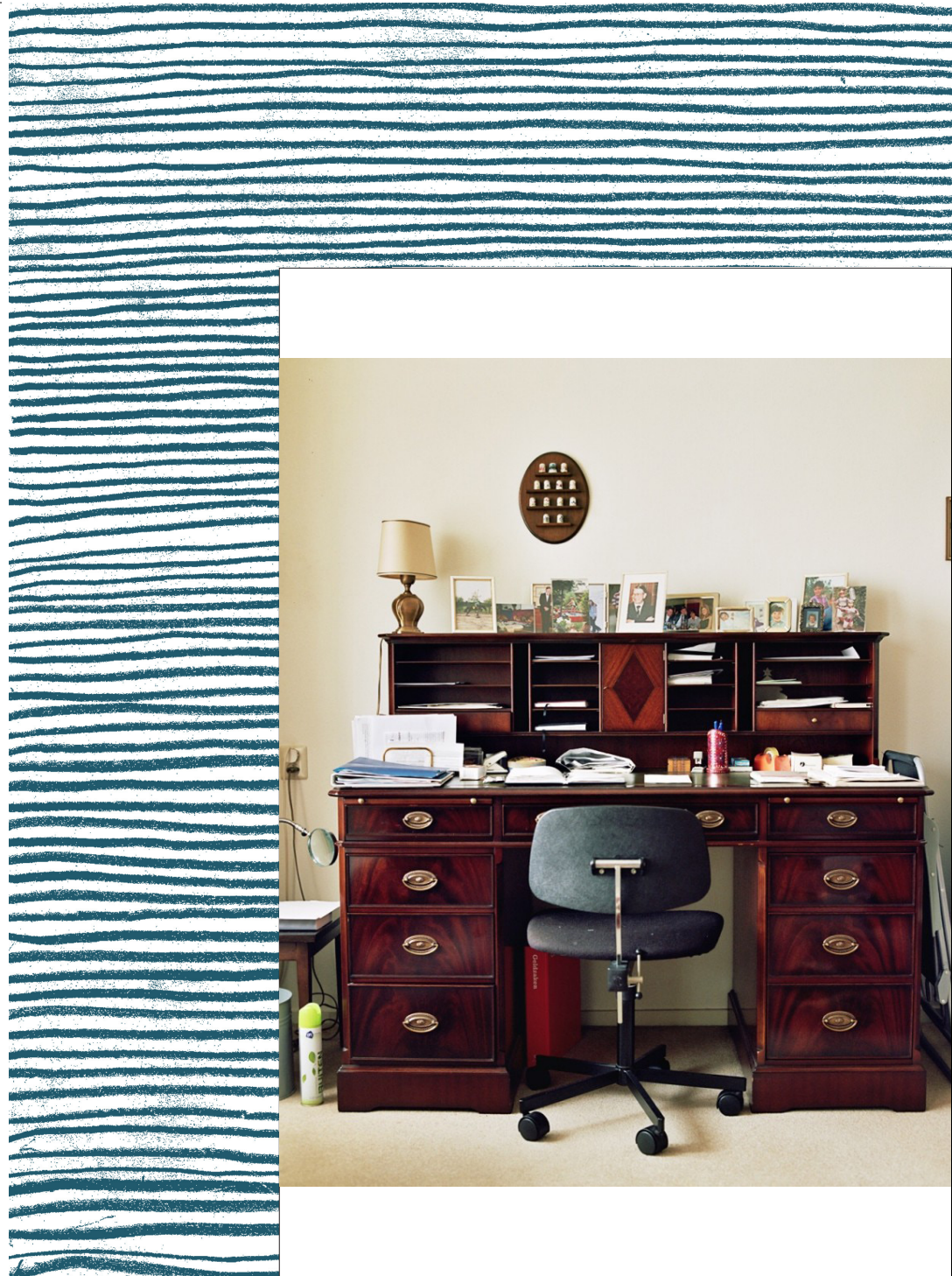
In *Beautiful Losers* (1966) Leonard Cohen writes, "*Come on a new journey with me, a journey only strangers can take, and we can remember it when we are ourselves again, and therefore never be merely ourselves again.*" And is this just how Art School works, ever necessary to engage in this performance, of the hypothetical gallery? When I return for the new semester I'll take my adventures on Etsy and talk about them with distance. Reality, and the reality of other art worlds, outside of the Art School, interrupt the hypothetical gallery. It's like pulling an actor's wig off. Like the coffee shop performance, that is useful because it creates a public space in which one can work, even if looking like a schmuck, it is productive. And maybe the bias towards a hypothetical gallery makes Art School studio practice a more productive rehearsal for the outside art world.

* artist website - indexhibit.tomsansome.com
cinemateus.com





BAS
MARIJNEN



Draagbare Werkruimte (Portable Studio)

Bas Marijnen reflects on the idea of a photographer's environment being made an integral and working part of the shot, and in this sense adapting to a 'portable studio'.

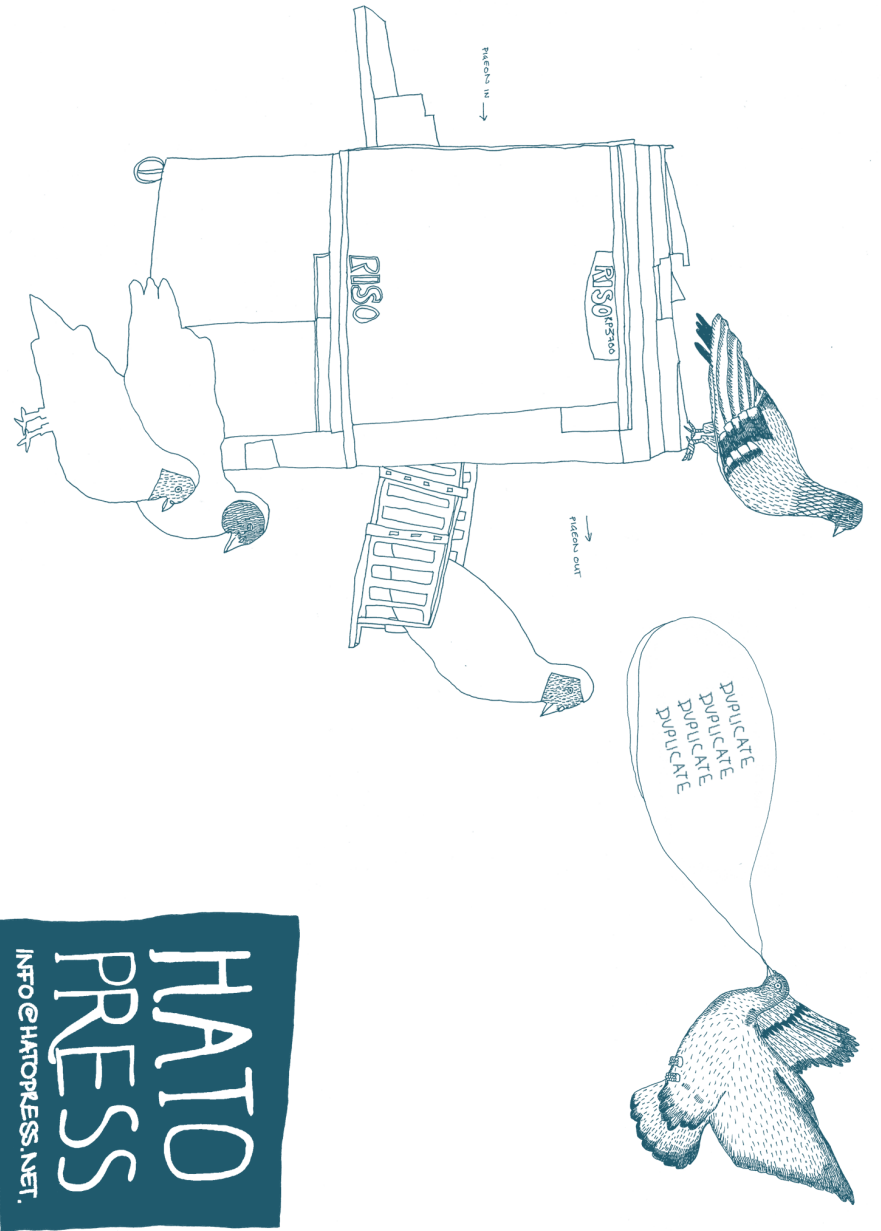
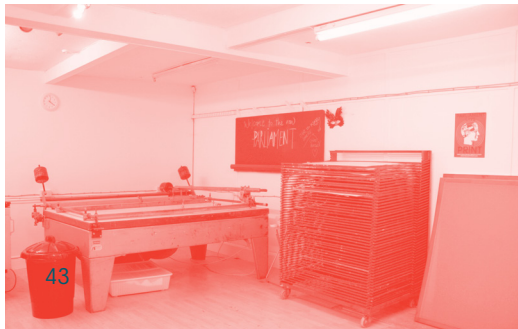


PARLIAMENT OF FEATHERS

Parliament of Feathers, screen-printing studio founded by three creatively driven individuals, offers a welcoming and friendly environment where anyone and everyone are openly invited. Residing in Portslade, the creative trio of Emma Tillbury-Barrow, Jake Tillbury and Chloe Hardwick are eager to share their fantastic studio and printing skills welcoming any one with an interest in screen-printing.

Parliament Prints provide friendly tutorials and screen-printing facilities to people at all levels, from the novice to the experienced. Open every hour of the day, one can hire equipment on an hourly basis, making use of two printing tables, a four-colour t-shirt carousel and countless more facilities in order to engage in the process of printing and involve oneself in their creative environment.

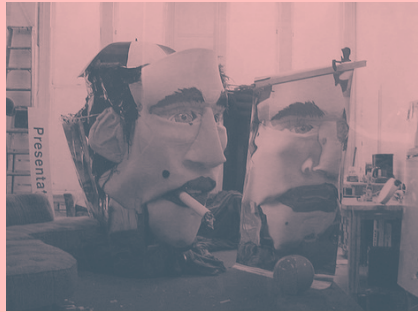
The studio is open twenty four hours, seven days a week and welcomes any level of experience. If you are interested in using the facilities their studio space offers, taking a course in screen printing or simply going along to meet the team then visit their website at www.parliamentoffeathers.com for further information. Pigeon took a trip to their budding studio and met the dedicated team that forms Parliament of Feathers, for the full interview visit our website at pigeononline.co.uk.



TRANSMISSIONS

Charles Danby

Over the course of Pigeon's short lifetime and the development of our first issue, we have been lucky enough to hold the valuable support of artist, writer and curator, Charles Danby. His current exhibition, *Epilogues: It Started With A Car Crash* staged at the IMT Gallery, is a timely response to today's climate of cultural and institutional instability - in line with our own ethos - providing an opportunity for Pigeon to both collaborate with the event, and be educated further. Looking at the nature of education both inside and against existing institutions, the primary focus off the exhibition becomes the work of the New York collective, the *Bruce High Quality Foundation*, whom founded their independent (and critically, free) university in 2009. Charles Danby unravels below the characteristics of the *BHQF's* studio and allows us to connect with the space which appears fundamental for the collective.

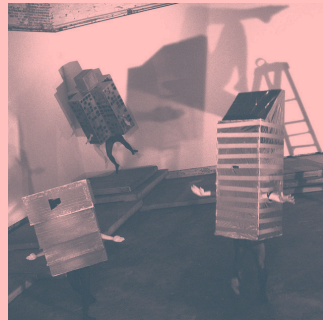


The Bruce High Quality Foundation, the head of Bruce High Quality at 225 W Broadway NY

Studio – live transmission. The head of the eponymous sculptor Bruce High Quality floated for three days in a mirrored cube disappearing into the midstream of the Hudson River. From the banks to the depths the levels of consciousness rose and fell, sometimes with the swell, sometimes against it.

The studio is a place of habitation, of exercise, of exorcism, of public affair, of walls and roof, of possibilities larger than itself, of ideas smaller than the cracks in the ceiling. It is a museum and a loading bay. It is everything and returns to where it started, from foundation.

On the corner a building faces in two directions and joins to two streets. The views from its windows on each street vary, connected but not matching. The building's internal workings are sightlines of promises and broken promises, not matched but connected, linked and abrasive to the institutions as to the white-walled junkyards and syndicates of endeavour and creative affairs.



The Bruce High Quality Foundation, the cast of Cats on Broadway (2007) at Bed-Stuy NY

The studio is the public affair of the street, it is the *Guggenheim*, it is the craving of zombies, and it is town hall and community drop-in. It is the Broadway theatre, the picket line, and all the things Hollywood, the

deployment centre of the Ghostbusters re-drawn through the cultural aspiration of its offspring.

The public space of the city is the attitude and playground of the studio. Education is the attitude and playground of the studio. The studio is a University, it is a library, and within a library it is an archive, a mirror and a black box. Fashioned, broadcast, an object, an image and a sound.



The Bruce High Quality Foundation, (left) the cast of Cats on Broadway (2007) at Bed-Stuy NY (below) from Rite of Spring (2009)

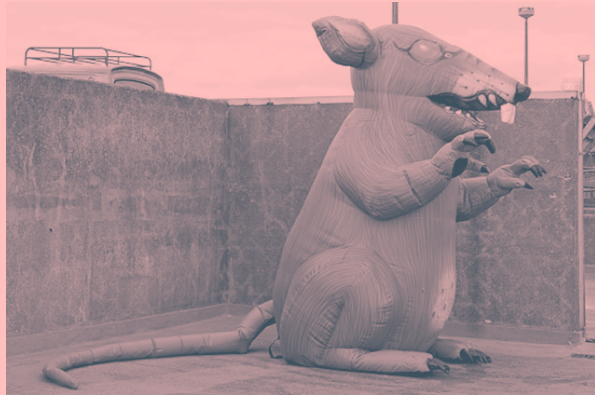


The studio belongs to the bachelors, to photographs from books and slideshows from art school. The studio is an art school and it is all the things that were not taught. The studio belongs to the preoccupations of a group of individuals. It belongs to the fabrics and fabrications that reach consensus and inertia at a particular moment of a particular day. The studio belongs to the outside, to the grass and the park, to the cast vignettes on the shores of the river, to all-star reality, to parking lots, to piazzas, to stages and to staging.

The rats that inflate with zealous flagship are everywhere in the studio. They breach the mythologies of towers and ivory, occasionally themselves in lighter form caught both in the hazy glare of studio and museum corners, going about their business, performing afterhours, projected later and

elsewhere, cheap labour, or else as inexpensive appendage hard-wired into the not quite so latest desktop technologies. There is no rent or strike just cats and Broadway.

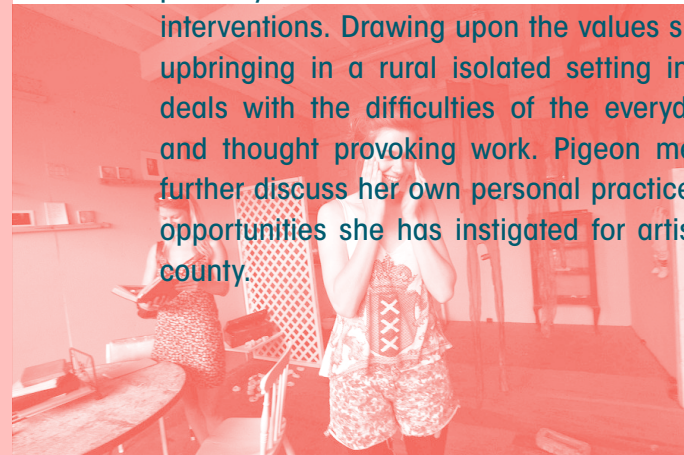
The arts that inflate with zealous flagship are everywhere in the studio. The studio is a responsibility and a shared territory of activity. It is a book, and books, and the booking of an air ticket. It is division and it is joy. It is a portable table and a portfolio produced and sweated over by someone whose name is not Bruce. The studio is the mindset of a collective and a manifesto of words. It is a cabinet of heads and a limousine. It looks upon itself and asks what happens when the cigarette stops burning.



The Bruce High Quality Foundation, installation view of *Stay With Me Baby (2011)* at Bold Tendencies 5, London



If Hannah Bishop is anything, she is honest. The artist studying in her final year of *Critical Fine Art Practice* previously stated that her work negated the physical studio space, existing privately between herself and the site in which she places her interventions. Drawing upon the values she gained through her upbringing in a rural isolated setting in West Somerset, she deals with the difficulties of the everyday, creating beautiful and thought provoking work. Pigeon met up with Hannah to further discuss her own personal practice and the exciting new opportunities she has instigated for artists living in her home county.



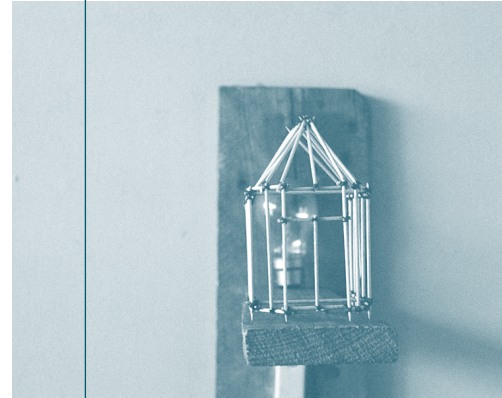
Being subtle and reflective, your work encourages the viewer to step out of themselves for a quiet moment to appreciate that which has been exhausted, leaving the audience reconsidering their priorities and values in a society of overproduction and haste. How do you go about making work that is a seemingly incredibly private experience?

I do not see my art as separate to my day to day existence, and that is why I work within my bedroom, or the farm I grew up on and the outside environment. My work has a preoccupation with personal experiences, as well as drawing in historical and theoretical issues, giving the work a wider context and interest to the viewer. Since the everyday occurrences that I experience are generally outside of the context of a studio, I have real difficulty being enclosed within an institutional setting, and I think that is one of the reasons why I consciously take myself out of the studio. I have had to come back into the institution this in order to explore and examine the problems I have with it, but I feel that there are so many beautiful things to be involved with outside of the studio walls that do it for me a lot more than the conventional white cube does in a

physical sense. Something I have had a lot of trouble with, before studying *Critical Fine Art Practice* and since, is the perceived hierarchical value that art and artists have in the industry, fine arts over the applied arts. My background has influenced this coming from a rural environment and I think that my father working long days on the farm in a physical, manual labour is no better or worse than what we do as artists.

Your upbringing evidently has a fundamental influence on your practice. What kind of places have you worked in?

I have done a lot of work within my farm at home and that is important to my practice because I do not want my work to be obviously art, in the sense that I want it to be questioned as to whether it is even art if someone came across it. Along with fellow artists Rebecca Stern and Miffy Lane-Depp, I held an exhibition within the *Open Market* in Brighton called *Off The Latch*, coming from a shared belief that it is important that we do not define work by being in the studio, feeling an element of pressure to produce. The exhibition was an open invitation to experience art in an unexpected place, to sit and



other creative people, which I have come to realise that is what I see the importance as within the studio. We had two weeks in which we invited artists to come into the *Open Market* and make work, discuss work without it being formal. Although, it was difficult to get people involved and enthusiastic as Brighton is saturated with art events and that can work against you sometimes.

On that note, we know you are organising and curating an event in Somerset called *Homecoming*, an area that is the opposite to Brighton in terms of its lack of artistic ventures. Could you tell us about that?

The concept behind *Homecoming* came out of the fact that I will be moving back to Somerset for financial reasons when I graduate! I genuinely believed when I first set up the project that there was no art movement there and I invited artists I knew to be involved, and gradually have attracted the attention of a lot of creative people previously unknown to me that live there. Somerset County Council have just cut 100% of their budget for the arts organisations, and people are completely enthusiastic to remain productive without the funding, and involve themselves in new ventures.

think and ask questions. I worked for a small Brighton-based collective over the summer called *compARTment*, which was not as critical and the environment therefore was entirely different. It was more fluid, a free way of working and making work because you wanted to and that was enough.

You seem to favour an informal approach to making work, and perhaps in keeping with that of *compARTment*. What was your role within the collective?

I became heavily involved in the organisation and the collective, and I created the two week studio project as we had a lot of artists coming to us because they missed having a studio space post-graduation. They missed the dialogue between them and



What is your focus for the event?

The event is called *Homecoming*, primarily because a large proportion of the artist's involved are heading back home after their education has come to an end. I wanted to keep the encompassing theme as open as possible, so those involved can have the freedom to work, I want people to just go that bit further and use the space effectively.

We are holding the event within a theatre, transforming all of back stage and it is truly fantastic. We want to really emphasise where the creative talent is coming from in Somerset and that it needs to be nurtured, that if the government cut our funds, we will respond positively and with force. We are going to invite people from the council to prove to them that there is a community within the arts and that it is important. Also to create or further those networks, is especially important in Somerset where there is no city, no university.

Have you seen the positive effects of this statement you are trying to enforce yet?

Somerset Arts Week is an organisation that works in Somerset and they are enthused about what is happening

and have agreed to come to the event, and provided a £500 bursary to fund a professional development opportunity, going towards events or writing courses to really benefit me. I am additionally involved in an exhibition in September as part of this. It is strange, I started *Homecoming* up, thinking there was nothing creative being done in Somerset and since I have started I have been inundated with creative people wanting to know about it, or get involved. I suppose that as Somerset is not saturated with creativity, what I am pursuing is getting noticed. The support is incredible, and it makes the challenge of interjecting the arts into an otherwise creatively cut off environment completely worthwhile.

Homecoming is a multi-disciplinary event to celebrate the creative endeavours of graduates from West Somerset and illuminate the importance of the arts in the county. Examining the relationship between contemporary and rural, the evening will showcase art, design, fashion, dance, performance and film made by over fifteen graduates originally from the area. In exploring where this talent is nurtured, and the potential for imaginative arts projects in *The Regal Theatre*, the event will utilise every space within the theatre. From the dressing rooms to the bar, the stairwells to the balcony, the evening will transform the entire building into a journey through

live installations of the inspired work created by young people from West Somerset.

Since Pigeon last met with Hannah to discuss her ventures over the course of her final year, the events that followed the above interview have been nothing short of successful. The outstanding completion of her final year of *Critical Fine Art Practice*, resulting in a well-deserved 1st and a stunning final degree show, and the highly commended staging of the *Homecoming* exhibition in Somerset, are sure to be only the first two feathers in her cap as she sets out to continue her work within the arts. After monitoring her first steps since graduation, we are delighted to communicate her successes and what the near future holds in store for her practice.

The success of the July show in *The Regal Theatre* is evident, and measurable through a strong variety of means. The support offered to the event by *Louise Crossman Architects* allowed for *Homecoming* to gain both funding and a crucial network of support. The local based business had previously worked on the theatre, helping to renovate it's physical appearance and disability access, and through the exhibition had a second opportunity to become involved and immersed within Somerset arts. Not only did the company provide financial support, but also contributed works to the exhibition.

Homecoming further allowed for the public to become once again aware of the situation within the arts, especially within their local communities of Somerset. After the entire budget for the arts in Somerset was eradicated earlier this year, the event aided *The Regal Theatre's* exposure, highlighting the importance and the effect the arts can

have on bringing the community together. The success of *Homecoming* has also allowed the theatre to be recognized as a central point of interest in the county, and has since attracted the attention of *The Reveal Roadshow*, an emerging partnership dedicated to raising the profile of the visual, digital and applied arts in Somerset. Reveal is funded through the *Arts Council Thrive Programme* and collaborates with artists and organisations across the county in an attempt to further the sector. After the influence of *Homecoming*, and the awareness raised through the event, the roadshow comes to *The Regal Theatre* for the first time, this year.

Most importantly, the event allowed for a network of local artists and designers to once again become established within an area so deprived of financial support, and to become assured that there is indeed a place for the arts within Somerset. The dialogue created that surrounds the project and the positivity generated from *Homecoming* is clear, and sets the example that despite the funding cuts within this country, the creative endeavors of individuals are continuing in great force.

Pigeon thanks **Flora Maclean** for her photography of Hannah Bishop and the collaborative exhibition *Off The Latch* created and curated by Hannah Bishop, Miffy Lane-Depp and Rebecca Stern. You can see more of Flora's striking photography at floramaclean.blogspot.com and to see Hannah's work, past and future exhibitions check out hannahbishop.com



GRAYSCALE

Since being established in a dilapidated basement just over five years ago, Grey Area Gallery has become one of Brighton's most significant and experimental art spaces. An independent artist-run gallery in the centre of Brighton, opened in March 2006, the gallery has held countless shows and numerous performance pieces, film screenings, artist's talks and discussions. During the process of setting up for their most recent show *Voodoo Chanel*, Pigeon met with curator and co-founder, Daniel Pryde-Jarman to discuss the journey that Grey Area has taken over the course of its existence, the balance it strikes between studio and exhibition space, and to wish the gallery a Happy Fifth Birthday.

You have stated that Grey Area has become a platform for experimental contemporary art events in an idiosyncratic non-sterile project space. If you believe that Grey Area is different to other art venues offered in Brighton, how would you define this difference?

Do I think that Grey Area is different? I think that it is very particular – it is particularly itself. I think it has a different logic, different approach and different methodology to the other galleries in the city, but then there is also a significant distinction between publicly funded and privately funded galleries in the city. We have a mutual respect for what the *Permanent Gallery* does in terms of ethos, but we are also very different organisations. The immediacy of our approach and the resultant aesthetic is quite distinctive, as well as our enthusiasm for DIY methods. We share a not-for-profit ethos with many other practitioners and spaces – independent galleries that have come out of a similar kind of need for artists to just get hold of a space and to start making exhibitions themselves, for ideological reasons as well as practical.

Difference initially is really important, over a period of time the initial antagonism with other galleries

that exist in the city allowed Grey Area to create an identity for itself. I'd say Grey Area has uniqueness to it. However, I think it's also interesting and exciting to consider the idea that you can share an approach with other establishments, and to look outside of those that exist in Brighton.

Can you identify establishments that you have a sense of respect for?

There are galleries that I really respect including *Royal Standard* and *Eastside Projects* in Liverpool, *Grand Union* in Birmingham and *Woodmill* in South London [that has unfortunately folded since the time of interview] and obviously *Transmission* in Glasgow. Galleries that are run by people that are trying to do things, sometimes with a Cooperative approach, sometimes with raw application, but all with a desire and conviction to get their hands on tools and do the things necessary to activate it. The reason I came to Brighton was to do something like Grey Area, I just didn't know that's what it was that I wanted to do when I arrived. There is fertility here that many artists can identify with.

Is it surprising to you that there isn't more of this movement to identify art spaces going on in Brighton?

It is surprising and also disappointing, but I am not going to wail about it with a ball and chain. Grey Area would like to encourage other spaces to have a similar outlook and output, and we would not see this as competition, but rather an exciting situation providing a healthy catalyst to push each other further. Perhaps similar to what is currently happening in Nottingham, recent graduates have put together galleries and art spaces that are now in both alignment and healthy competition with one other. From what I can see there has been a palpable desire for movement there recently- they energise each other.

What experiences have you had with gallery spaces previous to founding Grey Area?

I studied at Portsmouth initially, moved to Brighton to complete my MA, and am currently doing a PhD at Coventry. I worked collaboratively when I was on my degree because I wanted to seize the means to exhibit work and disseminate ideas. Being an artist who was full(ish) of ideas, and then having to wait for

an eternity for a gallery to respond back to me or slowly move through their waiting list, quickly wore thin for me. I wanted to be involved with the entire process myself. I also didn't want to pay for this privilege, and by that I mean I didn't want to rent wall space from a gallerist. By working within the premises of disused spaces I worked toward creating my own opportunities. I began by opening a gallery on a windowsill, followed by one on a magnolia wall, one in a fire escape, and one in a lift.

I later convinced the landlord of a bar to give me the keys to his large upstairs storage space and quickly adopted a collaborative way of working with other students to avoid only showing my own work in there. That is really when I started curating. That place had a good sleazy feel to it, and it gave us some great experiences. In the space, there were large gaps in the old floorboards, and whenever I would leave people would start smoking up there, an activity I would usually attempt to prohibit. On one occasion during a salsa dancing class that was held downstairs, one of the invigilators was smoking, and the cigarette butt was dropped through the gap between the floorboards and landed on a dancer's head, reacting with their hairspray. This moment

was key to why that place was closed down.

Where did the idea of Grey Area initially being a studio-cum-gallery space derive from, and how did you decide on the appropriate space for this endeavour?

The idea behind founding Grey Area was always to create a studio-cum-gallery space, as opposed to simply an exhibition venue. It was more of a project space in that sense. It was somewhere I could chip away at my projects, then increasingly it became somewhere other artists were interested in working and showing too because it was always to hand. When initially looking for premises for the space I did look at empty shops but generally speaking the way people are molded to behave in shops did not appeal to me. Instead I fell for the idea of being in located in a basement, where you can be off the radar under street view but still central. You can descend into it, rather than ascend towards it like many galleries and museums which promote the idea that your ascent up the stairs when entering is simultaneously an ascent to a higher level of cultural and aspirational achievement. I liked the idea of dirtily descending into a

grungy basement, which I wouldn't beautify for purpose, or deck out with new panel walls in an attempt to give it a white cube facelift. In this sense I suppose Grey Area became defined by what I did not want it to be.

Does this evident move away from a white cube space suggest that you wish for a more accessible art venue?

The power structures embedded within the fabric of white cube galleries need to be continually challenged and reappraised. The Grey Area is free and open to all during exhibitions, but the content of these shows is not democratically designed for public pleasure. I couldn't really give a fuck if anybody turns up, you can't worry about visitor numbers. Just worry about whether the show is good, that it is there and it is open.

Now that Grey Area has become successfully established, would you look to moving its location?

We have produced several off-site projects that we believe to have been successful, which stands as a testament to the idea that Grey Area is more than just some walls, floor and a ceiling. So in that sense it could become ripatetic and move

to another city. There is however, something distinctive about the space that we currently inhabit, as it really forces artists' hands with a certain duty to respond to the physicality of the space due to its particular character. You cannot simply ship work into the space and whack it up on the walls. Our working process tries to eliminate the usual 'red tape' boundaries as much as possible. Quite a few high profile artists have worked with us because of our immediacy and emphasis on criticality.

Considering Grey Area can be seen as a studio come gallery space, have you worked with artists that have a particular focus on the studio?

Bob & Roberta Smith's solo show at Grey Area entitled *A Floating Studio* in 2007 featured a raft-cum-studio which we shipped down to Brighton and launched in the channel for him to create work 'at sea'. This was intended as a homage (of sorts) to JMW Turner and the heroic myth of him lashing himself to the mast of a ship in order to experience for himself a storm at sea, an act of empirical research in preparation for a new painting of a stormy seascape. What started as quite a serene scene with the artist bobbing on a wooden

platform and making drawings and reading poems through a megaphone, quickly descended into panic when the thing capsized. When the work and artist were eventually fished out the studio, sketchbooks and other detritus were shown in the gallery along with a film of the performance.

How important do you consider the studio space to be for an artist and their curatorial development, and how do you think the current education system caters for this potential need?

Many art schools are discharging students that frequently don't have an experience-based understanding of what it is to work collaboratively or relationally to a given space or situation. I think a lot of Fine Art courses would benefit from a more substantial professional practice component that includes curatorial projects. Not at the expense of their studio-based processes, but in a way that embeds these into both the practice and theory elements of the course, which should also be less segmented. The issue of purging students' studio space as a cost-cutting exercise is an ominous concern. A lack of resistance to this critical situation will result in the misinformed assumption that the

studios were not really required or desired anyway.

After directly experiencing this loss of studio, and with an awareness of the government funding cuts affecting existing studio spaces in the country, Pigeon holds a close affinity to the issue of the studio. In some sense, this publication has provided a platform for creating our own immaterial practice and space, and the need for a physical studio has diminished. Our support and respect however, for those around us who are setting up studio spaces, workshops, collectives and facilities remains strong – without these innovators and instigators Pigeon would be unable to explore and promote their journeys in order to inspire ourselves and others.

Pigeon holds an admiration for Daniel Pryde-Jarman, his endeavours and successes with Grey Area and his initiatives. In order to learn more about the gallery, past and future exhibitions and events, visit www.greyareagallery.org

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studio *now*
1. *the workspace or atelier of an artist*