

SCHEDULE

St George's Theatre, Great Yarmouth, NR30 2PG

10.15 - 11.00 - **Registration** and welcome
refreshments

SPEAKERS

11.00 - 11.30 - *Ryan Gander*

11.30 - 12.00 - *Matthew Cornford and John Beck*
(The Art School Project and the Culture Shed)

12.00 - 12.30 - *Anna Colin*

12.30 - 13.00 - *Jonathan P Watts*
(EASTinternational)

13.00 - 13.30 - Discussion around the question
What is Art School? chaired by Robin Deacon
(SPILL Festival)

1.30 - 2.30 - **LUNCH**

CASE STUDIES #1

14.30 - 14.40 - *Magic Acorns* - Charlotte Arculus

14.40 - 14.50 - *RCA Working-Class Collective* -
Jacob Talkowski

14.50 - 15.00 - *Stephen Spender Trust* -
Charlotte Ryland

15.00 - 15.10 - *Black Blossoms* - Bolanle Tajudeen

15.10 - 15.30 - Discussion around the question
What is Radical? chaired by Rosie Cooper
(Wysing Arts Centre)

15.30 - 15.50 - **BREAK**

CASE STUDIES #2

15.50 - 16.00 - *The Other MA* - Emma Edmondson

16.00 - 16.10 - *Open School East* - Polly Brannan

16.10 - 16.20 - *Conditions* - Matthew Noel-Tod

16.20 - 16.30 - *School of the Damned* - Zoe Green

16.30 - 16.50 - Discussion around the question
What is Alternative? chaired by Simon Willmoth
(Norwich University of the Arts)

16.50 - 17.00 - **Closing remarks**

17.00 - 19.00 - **Thank you reception and
continuing of conversations** at St George's
Theatre Cafe.

Contribute to the live Flinga
board! Scan the QR code to
start.



Ryan Gander has established an international reputation through artworks that materialise in many different forms, ranging from sculpture, apparel and writing to architecture, painting, typefaces, publications and performance. As well as curating exhibitions, he is a committed educator, having taught at international art institutions and universities, and has written and presented television programmes on and about contemporary art and culture for the BBC. Through associative thought processes that connect the everyday and the esoteric, the overlooked and the commonplace, Gander’s work involves a questioning of language and knowledge, as well as a reinvention of both the modes of appearance and the creation of an artwork. His work can be reminiscent of a puzzle, or a network with multiple connections and the fragments of an embedded story. It is ultimately a huge set of hidden clues to be deciphered, encouraging viewers to make their own associations and invent their own narrative in order to unravel the complexities staged by the artist. The artist has been a Professor of Visual Art at the Universities of Huddersfield and Suffolk and holds an honorary Doctor of the Arts at the Manchester Metropolitan University and the University of Suffolk. In 2017 he was awarded an OBE for services to contemporary arts. In 2019 he was awarded the Hodder Fellowship at Princeton University. In 2022, he was made RA for the category of Sculpture.

John Beck and **Matthew Cornford** have been exploring the history and significance of UK art schools for over ten years. The Art School Project is producing a photographic record of every art school building, or the site upon which it stood, with the aim of developing an understanding of the role of the art school, and art education, in towns and cities across the country since the middle of the nineteenth century. John Beck is a writer and Professor in the School of Humanities at the University of Westminster and Matthew Cornford is an artist and Professor of Fine Art at the University of Brighton. They both attended Great Yarmouth College of Art and Design.

Anna Colin is an independent curator, educator, researcher, and gardener based in East Kent. Anna is practically and theoretically engaged with critical pedagogy, social practice, alternative modes of instituting, and critical and participatory landscaping. Anna was a co-founder and director of Open School East, an independent art school and community space in London then Margate (2013-20). She worked as

associate curator at Lafayette Anticipations in Paris (2014-20), associate director at Bétonsalon – Centre for art and research, Paris (2011-12), and curator at Gasworks, London (2007-10). Anna works as a lecturer on the MFA Curating at Goldsmiths, University of London. She recently co-curated the 2nd edition of the Art & Industry Triennale in Dunkerque (2023) on the relationship between energy and the arts in the last five decades. She holds a PhD in cultural geography from the University of Nottingham and is training in horticulture and permaculture design.

Born in Great Yarmouth in 1986, **Jonathan P Watts** is a PhD candidate at Norwich University of the Arts where he is researching EASTinternational, an open-submission exhibition selected by invited guests that occurred annually in NUA from 1991 to 2009. Organised by curator Lynda Morris, it formed a vital part of the Norwich Gallery programme, where Morris was director from 1981–2007. EASTinternational was envisioned as a networked model to be replicated in art schools throughout the UK. EAST would be an essential component of a sustainable, decentred regional art economy networked beyond the imperial city of London. Jonathan’s research explores artist-centred exhibition-making practices, legacies of decentralisation, and transnational solidarities. Jonathan is a research tutor in Contemporary Art Practice at the Royal College of Art, London. He has a PGCert in Creative Education. He is co-organiser of Josey gallery, Norwich. Jonathan has published widely on contemporary art.

Robin Deacon is a British artist, writer, educator and curator. His artwork and research explore questions of technology, memory and fiction, with an ongoing shift in his role from biographer and academic to storyteller and unreliable narrator. He has received a variety of awards and fellowships from organisations such as the Delfina Foundation, Arts Council England, The British Council in the UK, and The Foundation for Contemporary Arts and Franklin Furnace Inc in the USA. He is also a MacDowell Fellow. After a decade in the USA as a Professor and Chair of Performance at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Robin returned to the UK in 2021 to become the Artistic Director and CEO of SPILL Festival, an international biennial of art and culture based in Ipswich, Suffolk. He is Chair of the Board of Trustees for the Live Art Development Agency, London.

Charlotte Arculus is an artist-animateur, electro-acoustic musician and maker of visual theater and immersive, emergent

environments. She has been a freelance, socially engaged arts practitioner for 4 decades and is a founder member of Magic Acorns. Her doctoral research works with posthuman, materialist philosophy to speculatively think-with young children’s ways of knowing and understanding the world. She examines uncertainty-as-method-as-ethical pedagogical practice and brings improvisation to the heart of what it means to be present. The title of her talk is : What very young children might tell us about time, art and philosophy if only grown-ups could ask better questions and start listening – with all their senses – to the replies.

Magic Acorns is an arts organisation striving to co-create exquisite and nuanced cross-arts work with our very youngest children. We have been rooted in the communities of Great Yarmouth for two and a half decades and from this place our creative pedagogies, our research and our philosophical work has grown an international reputation. Magic Acorns is rooted in inclusion, open-endedness and uncertainty offering spaces where children and families are cared for and nurtured through the arts. We are led by children’s more-than-adult ways of knowing and through our connections with families we strive to listen and think with all our senses so that truly experimental work can be created.

Jacob Talkowski (b. Great Yarmouth 1997) is a sculptor based in London. He studied at the Royal College of Art (2022) and had his debut solo show “404 NM/H Into The Horizon” with OUT-POST Gallery in Norwich (UK), he was shortlisted for the UK New Artist of the Year award, for his takeaway container series. His practice addresses coastality by tackling classism, youth culture, forgotten places, and various masculinities. The work talks to measures of value and skill, is honest, and sometimes quietly sad in that it declares if you cannot go back, you must travel onwards.

The Working Class Collective (WCC) is a society for support and solidarity for anyone wanting to discuss their experiences of being working-class or to better understand issues faced by working-class people in the RCA and wider society. In 2020, the WCC was conceived by Christoph Jones and Jennifer McMillan to uplift and provide solidarity for working-class students at the Royal College of Art, a venture vanquishing the myth that the art world is an upper-class monolith. In the last 3 years, the collective has produced two triumphant summer shows, and continues to grow vastly beyond our expectations with each student that joins. This highlight show-

cases the radical, perceptive, sensitive, urgent, nuanced and necessary work RCA graduates are making about class. Work that needs to be shouted about and often isn’t, and so, we are shouting about its gargantuan importance. Shout with us, and observe the vastness and brilliance of the artwork produced by our working-class graduates.

Charlotte Ryland is Director of the Stephen Spender Trust (SST) and founding Director of the Queen’s College Translation Exchange (Oxford). Both organisations are dedicated to bringing culture and creativity into language-learning in schools, and to raising the profile of multilingualism nationally. She runs the Anthea Bell Prize for Young Translators, the Stephen Spender Prize for poetry in translation, and a range of programmes that encourage people of all ages to engage creatively with diverse international culture. Charlotte is convinced that it is possible to change the national discourse around languages, by breaking down language hierarchies and ensuring that all language skills are recognised and celebrated.

The Stephen Spender Trust’s vision is of a cohesive, outward-looking society. We believe that the key to this cultural shift is in multilingual opportunities for all, with their life-changing power to raise aspiration, inspire empathy, and build bridges between communities. Language learning, and the intercultural awareness that comes with it, are in major decline across the UK. We work collaboratively with school and community partners to inspire young people and adults to engage creatively with multilingual culture, thereby increasing their confidence, wellbeing and communication skills. Our youth programmes turn multilingual classrooms into a creative asset, raising the aspiration of young learners from all linguistic and social backgrounds, and opening doors to future employment opportunities. In 2023 SST was awarded the Threlford Cup for inspiring the learning of languages.

Bolanle Tajudeen, a prominent figure in the UK art scene, founded Black Blossoms in 2015, an expansive curatorial platform and art school dedicated to documenting and showcasing the art histories and creative practices of artists from historically marginalised backgrounds. As an alternative art school, Black Blossoms offers short courses covering diverse topics such as Art and Revolutionary China, Black British Art, and Curating Black Art. Specialising in public art, curatorial research, and artist selection, Bolanle is a staunch advocate for underrepresented artists, earning recognition on the Art Power List 2023

by the Evening Standard Magazine. She collaborates with various organisations, curating mural and public art projects with institutions like Kensington, Chelsea Art Week, Hammersmith, and Fulham Council. Recently appointed Public Art Commissioner for the Bristol Legacy Project in partnership with Bristol City Council, Bolanle manages and curates a permanent artwork commemorating the Transatlantic Trafficking of Enslaved Africans. Beyond her work with Black Blossoms, Bolanle chairs Block 336, an artist-run project space, and is poised to launch Bolanle Contemporary in 2024, collaborating closely with artists addressing the complexities of our world.

Black Blossoms is a dynamic and innovative art organisation functioning as an expanded curatorial platform and online art school. Committed to a comprehensive and engaging exploration of contemporary art, our curatorial platform specialises in showcasing underrepresented artists from diverse backgrounds. We prioritise promoting visibility and representation for artists from historically marginalised communities through exhibitions, publications, and events that encourage critical reflection on social and cultural issues shaping contemporary art. Beyond curatorial activities, Black Blossoms offers courses and masterclasses led by experienced artists and curators, catering to individuals of all artistic abilities. These programs delve into the cultural contexts influencing contemporary art, incorporating cultural studies for a nuanced understanding of this ever-evolving landscape. Championing inclusivity, diversity, and cultural studies, Black Blossoms provides a space for artists, cultural producers, and art enthusiasts to navigate contemporary art’s rich and ever-changing terrain, unlocking the power of creativity for individuals and society.

Rosie Cooper has been Director of Wysing Arts Centre since 2021. She has led the organisation to a new chapter of national and international residencies, collaborations, commissions and an ambitious youth-led learning programme. Prior to that, she was Head of Exhibitions at the De La Warr Pavilion, Bexhill-on-Sea, and before that she was Head of Programmes at Liverpool Biennial (2012-16). She is Chair of Home Live Art, and Trustee of IntoArt. She is a judge of the Turner Prize in 2024.

Emma Edmondson lives and works in Southend on Sea. Studying and graduating during the 2008 financial crash alternative economies and utopian community are at the center of her research and practice. She uses sculpture, print, sound, text and is interested in

the power of people coming together through creative projects to change systems and rules. Recently she has been processing raw clay dug from the ground and exploring local land rights to create sculptures that sit on the ground they were made from. Through this she wants to start conversations about agency, land ownership and our connections as humans to the land we live on. In 2016 Edmondson founded TOMA (The Other MA), a postgraduate level art programme outside of the traditional institutional model. Designed to fit the everyday lives of 21st century artists, the programme is shaped by its participants, and was created in response to the hierarchies surrounding access to higher education. She teaches art in community spaces, schools, colleges, arts organisations and universities to support her practice, often on precarious contracts. Emma sees TOMA and her teaching work as part of her creative practice. Emma also runs Dog Ear with Lu Williams, producing dog toy sculptures and texts for humans and hounds.

The Other MA (TOMA) is an 18-month artist-run learning programme based in Southend-on-Sea supporting artists who have faced barriers accessing art education and the ‘art world’. TOMA was set up in 2016 to offer affordable, accessible and responsive art education to artists and we are the only postgraduate level art programme in Essex after all others were stopped by their host universities. We are unaccredited in the traditional sense, but provide a programme of learning that benefits artists in the same way. TOMA was born out of and has been shaped by austerity and the decades long businessification and dismantling of creative education. This, alongside the rise of tuition fees, means it is difficult for artists to flourish unless they become part of the financialised art world. We believe in collaboration over competition and the power of people coming together to create change. These are the politics that bought TOMA into existence.

Polly Brannan is a Curator, Artist and Educator based in the UK. Since early 2021 Polly has been the Artistic Director at Open School East, a free and alternative art school based in Margate, Kent, UK. Polly was previously Education Curator at Liverpool Biennial 2012-18 and Education Curator at Serpentine Galleries 2011 - 13. She is Founder, Co-Director and artist with the network Avant Gardening and was a member of arts/architecture collective public works 2005-2011. She has curated, delivered and produced large-scale commissions with artists Mohamed Bourouissa, Koo Jeong A, Ryan

Gander and Monster Chetwynd, amongst many others. Previous engagements include Triangle Network Fellowship, Ethiopia; Istanbul Biennale 2017, Turkey and Kochi-Muziris Biennale, India 2018.

Established in 2013 and located in Margate, **Open School East** is a free, independent art school and community space that focuses on collective learning through the arts. We support cultural practitioners at an early stage of their career to develop and sustain their practice and are committed to supporting artists from lower socio-economic and diverse backgrounds to ensure we are widening access to the arts ecology of the UK. Open School East is an organisation that strives to create real change and impact on society by developing models of working that sees artists, communities, young people and children coming together on their own terms, creating art and cultural offers in their own neighborhoods and creating a profile internationally for the quality and ambition of this work.

Matthew Noel-Tod is an artist, filmmaker and educator. As an artist his work has been exhibited internationally, including at Tate Britain, PS1 MOMA, ICA, Rotterdam International Film Festival, London Film Festival and LUX. Between 2010 and 2023 he was Senior Lecturer in Moving Image at University of Brighton and in 2018 he started Conditions Studio Programme, Croydon, a low-cost studio programme for artists.

Conditions is a low-cost studio programme for artists. It gives studio space and structured critical conversations to develop each artist’s work, as well as encouraging interdisciplinary collaboration and collective work on exhibitions and events. Conditions offers participating artists a programme of talks, support and workshops from a wide range of Associates comprising artists, writers, musicians, performers, curators and educators. It aims to provide an alternative model to the increasing cost of both studio space and education for artists in London. Conditions is artist-run, co-founded in 2018 by artist and educator Matthew Noel-Tod and artist and musician David Panos. The aim is to build a long-term, sustainable, and independent environment for artists. It is led by Matthew Noel-Tod. Since 2022 Conditions has run part of its programme in partnership with the ICA, London.

Zoé Green is a self-taught interdisciplinary artist and writer from Birmingham who works across oil and gouache painting, illustration, photography, film and sculpture. She studied English Literature at the University of Leeds

and joined School of the Damned in July 2022. Zoé explores the interplay between community, sustainable futures and human identities. Being part of School of the Damned has led Zoé to delve further into alternative arts education, and how it can be used to bring more diverse groups of people into the art world.

School of the Damned is a free, self-organised alternative to an accredited arts master’s programme. It was set up 10 years ago as a protest against the increasing fees, elitism and inaccessibility of higher arts education. The school has been passed onto a new cohort every year or two, and starts again from scratch each time. Therefore, each cohort is unique in its functionality. In the current cohort, we have approximately 50 active members across the UK. We work nomadically, with regular meetings, workshops, talks and exhibitions which take place online and in-person. School of the Damned functions on a non-hierarchical structure, meaning that members interchange between the roles of facilitator and learner. Overall, School of the Damned aims to make arts education more collaborative and accessible to a wider range of people through experimenting with different approaches to educational practices.

Simon Willmoth has many years’ experience as an academic and director of research in art schools and universities in England, Scotland and the USA. Simon is an art historian, writer and curator, who has led a number of research projects, was Chair of the EASTinternational Steering Committee and external member of Tate Gallery’s Doctoral Training Board. His research and publications have informed exhibitions, including at The Whitechapel Gallery, Staatsgalerie (Stuttgart), Palazzo Reale (Milan), LaM (Lille), Babylon Gallery (Ely), Peterborough Museum & Art Gallery. His current research includes work on arts and health projects and lived experience of the changing landscapes of Norfolk. He is a founding partner of the Norfolk and Waveney Arts and Health Collaborative. Simon is a Research Professor at Norwich University of the Arts, where, as Director of Research Management, he leads a number of research projects and leads the University’s Research Degrees programme.

CENTREFOLD IMAGES:

Mark Edwards
Art School
1998

I didn't know Great Yarmouth when I found myself teaching photography at the local college. Within a month of being there myself, and some other colleagues, were given a tour of an old disused art school. It was extraordinary in a number of ways. It had the sense of a place not abandoned but of just having been temporality left. There was no art on the walls, only the signs of its making. Indexical traces layer upon layer; masking tape, the negative spaces of drawings and paintings, writing on the wall, paint on the floor, towels draped carefully over the radiators and endless, random small holes left by drawing pins. I almost expected people to come back in after a long lunch hour.

I went to an old college school like this after leaving school. Feeling somewhat isolated in Norfolk it felt familiar. I knew I wanted to photograph it, or rather, make pictures there. I was drawn to corners and the restrained colours of floors and walls. Fond acquaintances in an unfamiliar place.

'Untitled No. I', 1998
'Untitled No. II', 1998
'Untitled No. III', 1998
'Untitled No. IV', 1998

CONTRA
CURRICULAR

original
projects

Welcome

For nearly seven years, originalprojects; has been actively engaged in Great Yarmouth, initiating our exploration back in 2016 with a day trip to investigate the town alongside our peers. This marked the commencement of our testing of various working methods, aiming to establish relevance, purpose and harmony with and for this place. Coincidentally, on Saturday 25th June 2016, the very day we began these explorations, the Brexit referendum results were announced, revealing local statistics of 71.5% for Leave and 28.5% for Remain (35,844 votes in total).

Since then, our work has focused on addressing gaps and creating opportunities in the cultural life of Great Yarmouth, the provision of support for artists working in the place. This has led to the creation of exhibitions, workshops, the YARMONICS festival (in collaboration with Eastern Ear), podcasts, a 1:12 scale public artwork for Merrivale Model Village (now sited in the real world, too), and other projects through New Geographies and New Histories. We collaborate with local community and support groups, and we utilise empty shop units on a meanwhile basis (currently a former Debenhams is our base for various activities). Our initial goal was never to operate a dedicated space for arts experiences here, but rather to evolve something greater from a sandpit of possibility. A space has, however, provided a means to create a reliable and identifiable 'centre' from which things can root and grow.

Great Yarmouth was recently designated a 'Levelling Up Place for Culture' by the DCMS and a 'Priority Place' by Arts Council England. In response to this, as well as to the ACE NPO round's invitation encouraging established metropolitan organisations to relocate to such areas, we organised Razing the Agenda in May 2023. This was an interactive discussion - we invited activists, artists and cultural community organisations to contribute to shaping new thinking and a renewed vocabulary around arts, culture and the current socio-political environment. The aim was to identify our shared priorities, especially focused on 'lived experiences' in a place designated for investment intervention (time, human resources, money) by centralised forces.

In reflecting on the event, we explored the concepts of 'cultural capital' and 'potential', considering activities that might proactively contribute to a society defined by community strengths, rather than by spreadsheets. While we are concerned with building a critical mass and developing a relevant visual arts infrastructure, we remain ever-mindful of the void left by the absence of an art school in our community. Thus, CONTRAcurricular has been organised to expand our thinking and connections, addressing the impact of this loss of access to a rigorous art education on the area. The initiative brings artists, organisers, researchers and activists to Great Yarmouth, introducing new perspectives to a place seemingly entrenched in its own challenges. It is, we think, the start of a new direction...

**Julia Devonshire and Kaavous Clayton
originalprojects;**

My Old School

Robin Deacon



The University of Wales Institute Cardiff, Howard Gardens, Cardiff, circa 2014

This was where I received my arts education between 1993 and 1996. These images were doing the rounds on social media sometime around 2014, and at this time, I would often start my public speaking engagements by showing them, referring to the demolition of these buildings as a metaphor for arts education being 'in ruins'. Since then, out of the rubble has emerged a new building consisting of hotel-like accommodation for Cardiff Metropolitan University students; clean, sleek and well appointed, this new usage is as far from my own rough, dirty, chaotic art school experience as it is possible to imagine.

At the time I studied there, the Howard Gardens campus of the University of Wales Institute Cardiff was home to a genuinely unique visual art programme, creating a generation of British artists who did much to shape the direction of experimental performance in the UK in subsequent years. Dartington College of Arts in Devon had a similar status during this period. As a very particular convergence of artists, educators, learners, buildings and facilities, neither of these institutions exist anymore.

Why should they?, you might ask. Times change.

But other things have changed too, including the fact that my local education authority paid the entirety of my tuition fees when I began my degree in 1993. By the time I left the UK to work abroad in 2011, the tuition fee cap had just increased from £3,000 to £9,000. The final arc of this journey through arts education found me working for a decade in a private American art school (The School of the Art Institute of Chicago) where yearly tuition cost a student just over \$50,000 a year. I soon realised that conversations with my American students about my experience of education relative to theirs were informed by a certain kind of guilt on my part.

When I first came to SPILL in 2021, I hadn't realised that the Think Tank, our beautiful headquarters and venue, was housed in a building that once functioned as an art school; even though it is plainly stated as a plaque on the front of the building. Sometimes you just have to look up.

Occasionally a guest to an event, or a passer by just popping their head around the door, will tell us that they used

ARTS EDUCATION FOR A WORLD TRANSFORMED



The Think Tank, High Street, Ipswich, 2023
(Photos: Robin Deacon)

to do life drawing classes in what is now one of our meeting rooms. Gazing up at the vaulted ceilings with a wistful smile, they will regale us with their memories of the old Ipswich School of Art, an institution with alumni that include Maggi Hambling and Brian Eno. Luckily, as a listed building, it will not have the same fate as my alma mater, so these moments of reverie will still be possible in the future.

Why am I in such a reflective mood regarding the history (and future) of art schools and education? Perhaps because every other day it would seem there is a new article claiming there to be a devaluing of arts and creativity in school, or highlighting a shift away from the arts and humanities within university education. Of course, such observations are nothing new. I can't remember a time when there haven't been portrayals of creative arts courses as being, financially speaking, 'not worth it'. Add the current high cost of living and a seemingly never ending spiral of inflation and these issues have an increased urgency.

I have been wondering what role SPILL might have in responding to these concerns. How can an experience of arts education be uncoupled from a lifetime of unreasonable debt? How can we question the idea of arts education as an indulgence or extravagance? What might we offer those who are creative, but do not believe a career in creativity is an economically viable path?

Over the last couple of months, my research has taken me to organisations like The Other MA (TOMA) in Southend, The Margate School and Open School East (also in Margate), to learn how others might be addressing these kinds of questions. In each instance, I saw a series of fascinating models for independent programmes of education that function outside of (and sometimes, in critique of) traditional forms

and structures of institutional learning. In conversation with the directors of these programmes and some of their students, it was clear that all had completely different financial models and cultures of learning. But what was shared is a sense that something is awry in the way mainstream graduate and post-graduate educational provision in the UK is funded.

Rightly or wrongly, I had always worked on the premise that artists were generated by educational institutions, whether in BA programmes like Cardiff where I studied, or postgraduate/MFA level at the School of the Art Institute in Chicago where I taught. As a lecturer or professor in both universities and art colleges, I was sometimes guilty of not giving a great deal of thought about what students experience before they reach higher education. In a recent Instagram post, British artist Bob and Roberta Smith claimed that in 2023, 40% fewer children took GCSE art than in 2010. If correct, this raises some interesting questions regarding what might be going on 'downriver'.

Way back in the 1980s (having received utterly mediocre grades for all of my A-level exams), I remember telling my mother I was worried that I had made a horrible mistake having chosen to only take academic subjects, and really didn't know what to do next.

History: D
English: E
Geography: U (Ungraded)

In response, my mum went on to do some research on my behalf (probably at the library; these were pre internet times), and came back with the suggestion that I could do a thing called an 'art foundation' course and this would be a way to get into art school. I followed her advice, gained entry to the BTEC Foundation Studies course at my local college, and at last, everything made sense again.



The Margate School (Formerly Woolworths),
31 - 33 High Street, Margate, 2023
(Photo: Robin Deacon)

CONTRACURRICULAR

The question I have been asking myself of late is this: if I was now in my late teens or early twenties, would I still consider going to art school? What if my parents hadn't encouraged me to follow a creative path? If there were other kinds of provision that were not so associated with debt and unstable career options, would I avail myself of them?

Counterfactuals of this kind can present us with infinite scenarios. But if I step outside of myself and apply these questions in the context of SPILL Festival (and in particular, the work we do at the Think Tank), a bigger picture starts to emerge. Some of the most memorable experiences I have had at SPILL in the last couple of years relate to the work we have done with artists that has opened up creative experiences for children. Most recently, Nottingham artist Bruce Asbestos spent a few days with us leading a series of workshops with Year 5 and 6 children who were charged with creating miniature monsters from clay. Bruce will fabricate some of the characters they created in larger form, to be shown in our October festival alongside his own enormous inflatable sculptures.

Bruce's instructions to the children were simple and open ended, but he made an interesting clarification at the start. He said that if the task was to make an animal, the children would likely produce a predictable series of dogs or cats. But if the task is to make a monster, then the imagination can run riot. As Bruce pointed out, a monster can have twenty five legs or six eyes. It can be pink, green, blue, or a mixture of all these colours.

Of course, Bruce's workshops with these children are not 'art school', at least not in the sense that I have been writing about here. But what is the line to be drawn from these kinds of childhood experiences of making and

the possibility of creativity still having a central significance in one's adult life? As I wrote this question, I was suddenly reminded of an observation from the late, great British artist Brian Catling. In a 2021 BBC documentary about his life and work, he shared a childhood recollection of making something with clay, mud and sticks at school. As he remembers it, it was a model of a caveman's house, and his realisation was the following:

'There was something about getting dirty. You have to let the hands think. You don't work it out with a pencil, you don't work it out in your head; you put your hands in the material and see what happens. I don't think that's taught anymore. I don't think that's even discussed.'

It is important to remember that such creative revelations can also be found in the most unlikely of places. Might there be something to be said for activities and processes that happen outside the walls of educational institutions? All those solitary hours I spent as a child playing with Lego were no doubt creative - building objects, stories and worlds with my own hands. 'Thinking with my hands' indeed. In retrospect, I even think the time I spent doing menial warehouse jobs in my teens and early twenties was not unconnected to the kinds of repetitive actions over long durations that my educators in Cardiff would later claim to be 'performance art'. Paradoxically, I sometimes wonder if not taking A-level art (of not learning how to draw) was what ultimately made me an artist.

Thanks to Leon Clowes, Polly Brannan (Open School East), Emma Edmondson (TOMA), Andrea Cunningham (METAL, Southend) and Maz Stuart (The Margate School) for their generosity and time, and thanks to Bruce Asbestos for his brilliant workshops.



Bob and Roberta Smith, Instagram post, 14 May 2023



Bruce Asbestos, Ok Cherub, The Bluecoat, Liverpool, 2022 (Photo: Roy Battersby)



Clay 'monsters' made by year 5 and 6 pupils, St Matthews School, Ipswich (Photos: Robin Deacon)

PK Goes EAST

Paul Kuzemczak

Working on the **transports** for EAST could be a great adventure. We would set off on the road in a van from Norwich, driving to collect works in person from artist's spaces all over the UK as well as abroad, including France, Germany, Belgium and Switzerland. I got to see so many different studios and went to places I never would have been otherwise. For years afterwards I would go on trips to visit artists we met through EAST and from stopping off in all these different countries. I also got very good at driving on the other side of the road, parking big trucks in tiny spaces and carrying massive bits of art up and down tiny staircases!

As an artist it was a big deal to be selected for EAST. I showed four paintings and as a direct outcome of the show I was offered residencies in Lithuania and Estonia, leading to a later one in Switzerland. Working as an assistant during the selection process was pretty amazing as I got to see the selectors interacting and discussing their decisions. I had also seen so many really great works and artists not making it through, so I knew it really meant something to be chosen. Some people were shocked that I had been selected because they associated me with the production side of things, but I went through the whole process fair and square! My work changed quite a lot after that though. Until then I had only really been making paintings. Maybe seeing all the other work at EAST opened my eyes up to the different forms an art practice can take.

I am in the unusual position of having **worked on every iteration of EASTinternational**. I was Assistant to Lynda Morris at Norwich Gallery at the time that EAST was established so it was an important part of our programme and we looked forward to it every year. My various roles in EAST included designing all the catalogues and printed ephemera, working as a technician for the installs and transporting artworks to Norwich from studios all over Europe. In 1994 I was also selected as an exhibiting artist, so I got to experience it from that side too.

All of this happened over such a long period of time and I have so many different memories from it all, it's hard to put into a single piece of writing how much it influenced my work and what its legacies might be. It's all so interconnected. It was a big influence in my life!

It was an insight into how other artists think.

The **shared experience** of each EAST bonded everyone together: the artists and everyone that worked on it. I met so many people though it and many of those connections lasted well beyond the event, even now sometimes showing themselves in surprising ways. It was an in-person project that created an international creative community, with Norwich as the focal point of it all. It helped to make Norwich feel like an exciting place to live and work in the arts.

A lot of **professional opportunities** opened up to me through my work on EAST. People got to know me through the process and I gained a reputation for my involvement.

We worked with so many different types of artworks over the years and I really honed my **technical and fabrication skills** through EAST. I ended up working at the Sainsbury Centre as a full time technician when my time at the art school ended.

It was a particularly interesting period in terms of the development of digital technology. The early iterations of EAST, predating the wide use of the internet, were organised by phone and post – artists applied by sending us slides of their work, with stamped addressed envelopes for their return. As time went on, I ended up designing the first website for EAST, which felt like a big change. This led directly to me also building the first ever websites for Norwich Art School and for Norfolk and Norwich Festival.

For two years, in addition to the main EAST programme, there was a project called Riverside where the same selectors also chose five artists to make site specific works along the river between the art school and the station. After the exhibition I helped rebuild the *Timber Building* by Tom Wolford in a new location and through this I ended up working with Tom on a project for Anthony Gormley in Sweden.

Paul Kuzemczak 09.12.2023

Art School as Liberation Rehearsal

Amahra Spence

Reimagining 'schooling' as a creative practice has long been embedded in the learning infrastructure of our Black liberation movements over time.

In the 1960s, across the tide of racial injustice, segregation, classism and anti-Blackness, Black communities across the world sought to create alternative schools that resisted the structural violence of the status quo. Instead, they created spaces that connected to self-determination and affirmations of culture, alongside the unlearning, surviving and healing from the pervasive, life-ending nature of white supremacy.

From the Supplementary Schools convened by West Indian families necessitated by inherent racism and disability discrimination within the mainstream British education system, to the Freedom Schools of Mississippi, coordinated by the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) "expanding the idea...that Black people could shape and control at least some of the things that affected their lives", to the Black Panther Party's Liberation Schools whose curriculum sought to "guide young people in their search for revolutionary truths and principles", there's a rich history of organising that points to school as a site of radical reimagination.

Noticeably, these schools were founded, not attempting to preach "right answers" solutionism, as is the traditional liberal approach to schooling, nor creating a school-to-workforce pipeline, nor attempting to assert one way of being or knowing, as in the colonial paradigm. Affirming the experiences, visions, abundance and possibilities of Black life, in particular the lives of young people was central to growing a politicised analysis of the world around them.

This is the lineage that MAIA's work has grown from, understanding the everyday as a site of radical invitation, strategic reimagination and systems transformation led by those most impacted. MAIA's vision is a world towards liberation, in which artists

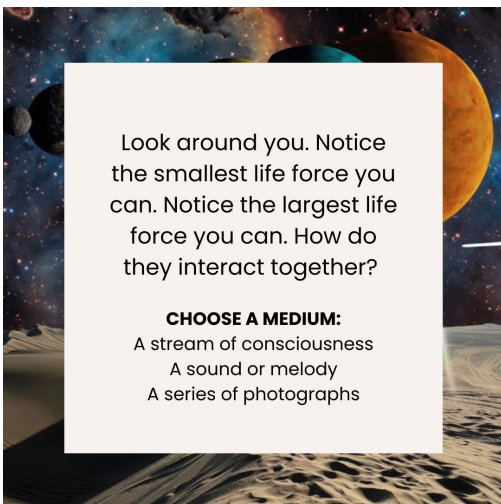
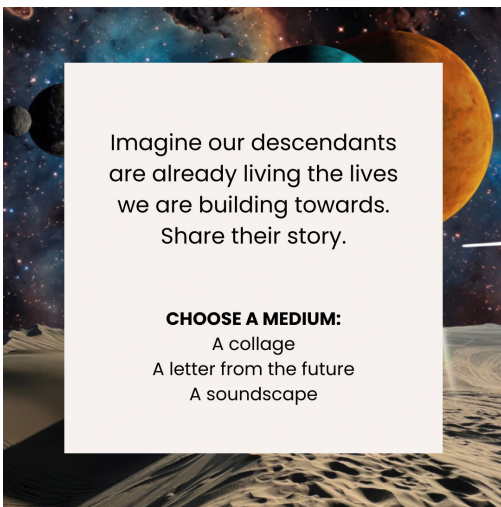
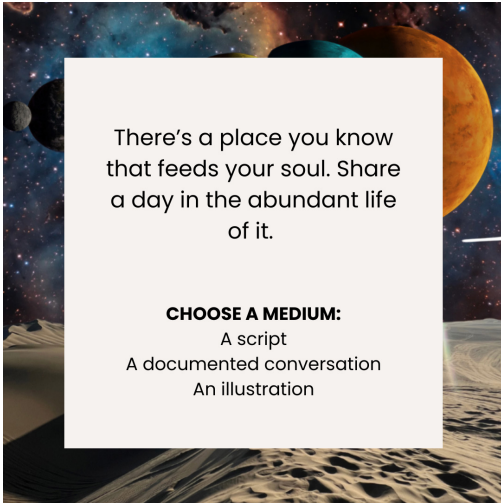
are resourced and mobilised to reimagine its possibilities. We engage culture as an imagination and organising strategy, working to build infrastructure that grows the personal, structural and sustained capacities in support of Black life and its interdependencies.

In 2020, we acquired a townhouse in our home city of Birmingham and created a site of imagination called YARD, as a prototype of the kind of radical hospitality we were seeking in our civic infrastructures. As the COVID-19 pandemic placed a spotlight on compounding crises concentrated at neighbourhood scale, 'Free YARD' became a core programme, simultaneously addressing crisis experienced by those slipping through the various gaps of available state support, while preserving the necessary and strategic dream space of our community.

Starting from various points of need amidst multi-systemic violence, without centring a deficit logic, Free YARD is MAIA's way of sharing and exchanging in the abundance of resources the YARD community houses; a way of offering porous invitations into mobilising for liberation practice; a way of being in continuous rehearsal of the worlds we're growing.

For MAIA's Art School, one of the spaces within our Free YARD rhythm, we welcome fellow travellers, dreamers, thinkers, designers, artists and builders into a residency. Art School is a porous invitation to our community to immerse in learning, play, connection, celebration and exploration, engaging with culture as a strategy for liberation. Together, we pose a journey of creative practice that supports the imagination, resourcing and building needed for sustained place-based movement infrastructure. We surface the systems that are working to debase our communities and explore tools and practices that enable life-affirming infrastructure, through culture-making, embodied knowledge, lived experience and other ontologies.

ARTS EDUCATION FOR A WORLD TRANSFORMED



How it works

2 WEEKS – 10 DAYS (TUES – SAT)

10 ARTISTS A DAY

3 ARTISTS IN RESIDENCE

2 EXPERTS

10AM – 4PM

3 ROUNDS A DAY

2 – 4 ART DISCIPLINES

A BRIEF

A COLLECTION OF RESPONSES

A STORY / EVALUATION

A COMMUNITY

+ A JOYFUL APPROACH

All images: Amahra Spence

If the World Was a Song

Rose Higham-Stainton

She takes the mic and turns her head towards the television screen, which is propped high on the wall, and away from us—an attentive mass of rowdy patrons with pints of beer, vodka, shots. Her bleached and static hair falls to her waist with the luminescence of an angel or candy floss, elucidated by the glaring lights of the Theatre Tavern, which is brimming with all the joyful benevolence and mascara stains of a night out in Great Yarmouth. And because she is facing the screen, which is directed towards the centre of the pub, she begins to sing before we have even seen her face. And there she remains—nameless, ageless, faceless—for the duration of the song.

And when she sings, which she does, it is with a soft bassiness—

There was a time when love was blind
And the world was a song
And the song was exciting

Over time, the sound—her sound, because it is hers in that moment—evolves into the sort of guttural longing worthy of Les Miserables’s “I Dreamed a Dream”. Perhaps it is the little bottles of pub wine talking, but I begin to think that the world is a song—or songs—sung by people called Shelley, or Elle n Sam, Kevin. And that if the world is Great Yarmouth and the song is Les Mis, we might learn something from them about having fun and about decentralisation.

In *Radical Friends: Decentralised Autonomous Organisations and the Arts*, Ruth Catlow and Penny Rafferty talk about ungoverned bodies, friendship as social infrastructure and a new order based on ‘play, reciprocity and affection.’ They see friendship as the original model for decentralisation—‘if we are all friends, we would not need the scaffolding of government.’

When I search ‘karaoke’ in Great Yarmouth, Google Maps drops a constellation of pins onto the screen as if each one were coursing with the bawdy brightness of the town’s seafront—the saline white, neon pink and electric blue stilettoes that grace its amusement arcades called things like Caesar’s Palace and Gold Rush. Karaoke does grace the seafront in Yarmouth, but, as the map and my local guide shows me, it also graces the pubs on King’s Street, and those that surround the market place, back-street neighbourhood pubs and high street boozers—places called Uptown Bar, Theatre Tavern, Blue Oyster; the types of places you might also find in Grimsby, Hartlepool, Blackpool, at a stretch, Las Vegas. The

other thing that those towns have, or had, in common with Great Yarmouth (perhaps not Las Vegas) was an art school. In the mid 19th century, Parliament began to make social reforms, which led to municipalisation and the devolution of services and assets to local councils and in turn, the evolution of municipal art schools. By the mid twentieth century, there were hundreds of art schools or institutes in England, six in Stoke-on-Trent alone.

Like so many others, Great Yarmouth College of Art and Design closed in the mid nineties under Tory leadership, but I am reminded of it, and the regional dissemination of arts education, when I do karaoke. Because to do karaoke in Great Yarmouth is to enter a kind of informal network of pubs and entertainment venues that are free to enter, like art schools were and should be. The compere—or karaoke master—holds various degrees of authority over proceedings and moves gracefully between a network of establishments, encumbered and exhausted—a wandering one man band with a low grade PA system. Which is to say, there is no gleaming head office for karaoke—it is ungoverned, or at least decentralised; by circumventing a single governing body—venue, compere or singer—there is a kind of democratisation of space and the stage that occurs. And when I say the stage, I merely mean the floor; because karaoke is on our level. The karaoke master—and they do appear to be masters rather than mistresses—sets up their station and by way of their mere presence, dictates the stage or the ‘front’ so that everyone turns their chairs or bodies to face that direction, however awkward the

ARTS EDUCATION FOR A WORLD TRANSFORMED

angle and regardless of who's in the way.

Once the stage is set, we enter into a constellational rather than star system—one in which the audience members become performers and vice versa. Karaoke's goal is not one of finessed showmanship, or artistic glory, but of plucking up the courage and taking part so that beyond place-making, it also offers a set of pedagogic principles—or lack of principles—based on reciprocity. In an article titled 'Karaoke Theory', the anti-disciplinary artist, researcher, writer and broadcaster, Sumugan Sivanesan, says 'by participating in karaoke, people identify with these songs and thus build a temporary sense of community and belonging.'

A public house is a public house when it necessitates community and, it turns out, karaoke. On a Saturday night, karaoke-goers frequent local establishments in a kind of rotational pull. You might see the same person twice, or three times; by the end of the night you might cheer or pat each other on the back; there might be duets, potentially even heartbreak.

Sivanesan—whose interests span migrant histories, minority politics, activist media—talks about how karaoke forces 'a humility that reminds us of a shared precariousness'. We feel this precariousness in Great Yarmouth not least in the way that like Hartlepool, Blackpool and other defunct art school coastal towns, it is predicated on seasonal work and seasonal fun. But between wrestling show season and the local hippodrome spectacular, when the fairground rides are shuttered and the entertainment pier quiet, there is always karaoke. Rafferty and Catlow write that 'sustained intimacy, fellowship and camaraderie, especially across disparities of material and social advantage help us to become sensitised to innumerable challenges and possibilities that might otherwise

be invisible to us.' I have seen all walks of life do karaoke in Great Yarmouth, but that is not to say that karaoke in Great Yarmouth, like the arts anywhere, is free from politics.

My glowing hypothesis of karaoke as a decentralised practice, or education, falls short—or down—on witnessing Billy Starr—the purported offspring of the late (and cancelled) Freddy Starr and Yarmouth Karaoke's self-styled karaoke king. Billy is reported to never wear the same pair of shoes twice—shoes that come in shades of strawberry & cream Cornetto, Slush Puppy blue, Solero orange—and as is so often the way, encapsulates both the problem and the solution with karaoke as a decentralised practice. Seeking a Thatcher era monopoly over municipal proceedings, he tours the pubs, inebriated, brashly dressed and suspicious of people he doesn't know intimately. In *Radical Friends*, Catlow and Rafferty quote from activist and writer Adrienne Maree Brown—'our friendships and relationships are systems. Our communities are systems. Let us practise upwards.' Which is to say, Billy may be our itinerant host but he is not our master; this is a bottom up system.

When I return to myself, and the din of Theatre Tavern and the woman with the angel hair, I also return to this line by Sivanesan about Karaoke Theory—

I seek to understand what happens when you put the song into you; allow the words to shape your body, the melody pass through you as you sway to its rhythm. When one becomes a vessel for the song, does it possess you?'

For a time, the song possesses the woman with the angel hair but then it moves on—or out—and touches someone else. The song becomes the dispossessed and malleable essence of karaoke; we don't learn it verbatim, we learn from it or with it.



Theatre Tavern, Great Yarmouth (Photo: Rose Higham-Stainton)

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Sumugan Sivanesan, 'Karaoke Theory', <https://fugitive-radio.net/2021/06/23/karaoke-theory/>

Ruth Catlow and Penny Rafferty, *Radical Friends – Decentralised Autonomous Organisations and the Arts*

Great Yarmouth College of Art and Design

I.E.A.C. Cont'd.

Suggested Time Table of Classes for the FIRST YEAR
of Full Time Study.

8.

	9.30 - 12.30.	2.30 - 5.0.	7.0 - 9.0.
MON. Architecture.		Design for Craft.	Design for Craft.
TUES. Drawing from Life.	Drawing from Life.	Drawing from Life.	Design for Craft.
WED. General Knowledge. (2 hours). Plant Drawing. (1 hour).	Modelling.	Modelling.	
THUR. Costume Drawing.		Drawing and Painting from Memory and Knowledge.	
FRID. Painting from Still Life.		Anatomy (1½ hours) Perspective (1 hour)	
SAT. Study Period. (10 a.m. - 12 noon).			

Total Number of Hours to be Given to Each Subject.

9. The total number of hours allocated to each subject in the first year will be as follows :-

	Per Week.	Per Term. (13 weeks)	Per Year. (39 weeks)
Drawing from Life.	5½	71½	214½
Modelling.	4½	58½	175½
Drawing and Painting from Memory and Knowledge.	2½	32½	97½
Painting from Still Life.	3	39	117
Creative Design for a Craft.	6½	84½	253½
General Knowledge (including Lettering)	2	26	78
Architecture.	3	39	117
Costume Drawing.	3	39	117
Anatomy.	4½	58½	175½
Perspective.	1	13	39
Plant Drawing.	1	13	39

The total number of hours for all subjects will therefore be :-

	Per Week.	Per Term. (13 weeks)	Per Year. (39 weeks)
	33½	435½	1306½

"AFTER SCHOOL," FEBRUARY, 1967

Page 1

further education **SPECIAL** EMMA WOOD finds out . . .

THE TRUTH ABOUT ART COLLEGES

"JUST a bunch of students with long hair and dirty jeans."

It's surprising how much prejudice is still aroused by the words "Art School".

Yet there are more state-run art schools in Great Britain than anywhere else in the world.

What are these art schools doing? Are they in fact merely producing social parasites and artistic dreamers incapable of holding down a real job after living for several years at the country's expense?

Or are they training young people to make a valid contribution to the society in which they live?

I went to the College of Art and Design at Great Yarmouth to find out the answers to these questions.

Slap-dash

Nowhere was there any indication of a slap-dash attitude, of filling in time before the real business of working.

In fact the College Principal, Mr. William Corrie told me that out of the 120 full-time and 1,600 part-time students he could only think of one he would wish elsewhere!

At Great Yarmouth there is no suggestion of an 'art for art's sake' approach, for this college is one of many throughout the country concentrating on vocational training, providing courses closely linked to industry and the business world.

The basis of all courses at Yarmouth is the Foundation Course which students enter at levels 1, 2 or 3, according to age.

This course includes liberal studies, so that the student may become fluent in expression, and a good basic grounding in art and its related subjects.

On completion of this course the student may stay at Yarmouth to specialise in

No 'art for art's sake' at Great Yarmouth

Graphics, Textiles, Dress, or Interior Design, or may choose to apply to one of the 40 other colleges in the country offering the Diploma in Art and Design (Dip.A.D.).

The claim of the Dip.A.D. is that it gives a student chance to study Art to Degree level. Each college decides on the substance of its own courses, sets its own exams; but an external assessor is called in for the final marking.

What, in fact, does the Dip.A.D. offer to the student?

For many, as with a degree, it is merely the stepping stone to a teaching career, leading to a further year's study for the Art Teachers Diploma (A.T.D.).

In some cases a young designer or illustrator may benefit by having followed the Dip.A.D. course.

'Uplifting'

In many with no particular talent for fine art it may create a stumbling block, for painting may be spiritually uplifting. It does not pay the rent!

At Yarmouth feet are more firmly on the ground, though students are encouraged to do whatever they want at whatever level.

I spoke to Lorna Fellas, now 17, who came to the College from Secondary Modern at the age of 15.

Now Lorna has three 'A' levels and one 'O', and has decided to carry on with

Fine Art as she feels that a general appreciation of line and colour will stand her in good stead for any job.

Next I met 16-year-old Jeremy Fearnaley in the Life Class, now in his first year at college but intending to stay at Yarmouth to study Graphics.

He will use the printing facilities provided at the College to learn the skills which will fit him for a job in the graphics department of an advertising agency or maybe a publishing company.

At the end of his course he will, if successful, be awarded the L.S.I.A. — the Licentiatehip of the Society of Industrial Artists.

Ex-industry

In the Design and Display section of Yarmouth College I met lecturer Brian Brookes, who came here from industry and feels very strongly about the opportunities for students following vocational courses.

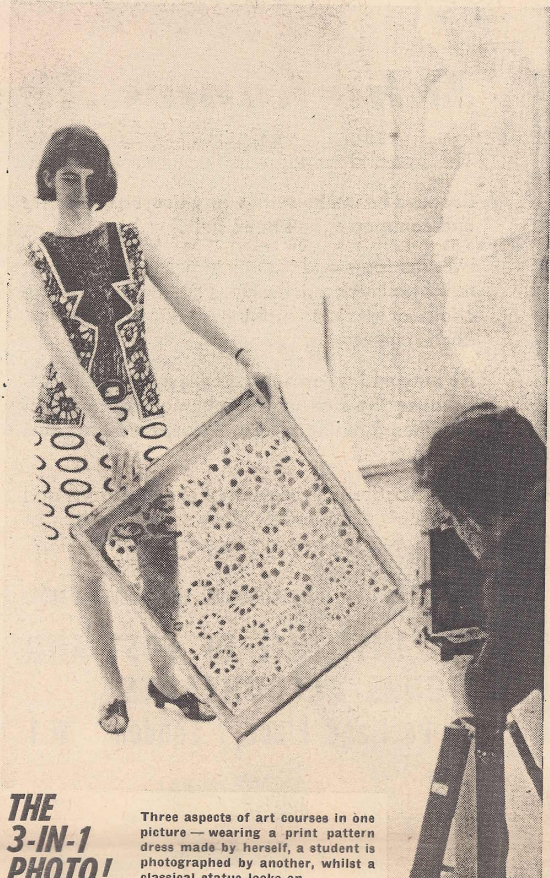
Most of his students gain the B.D.S.N.D. (British Display Society's National Diploma), recognised throughout the distributive trades as the most important qualification for a post in display or design work.

An interesting and unique course of study at Great Yarmouth, reinforcing the 'training for life' idea, is in Fashion Buying and Management.

It is sponsored by the Eastern Group of Debenhams Ltd, giving young people an opportunity to enter the retail trade after a sound training in all its aspects. (See page 7).

The course consists of one year full-time study with block release for 'on the job' training in the store, and two years practical training in the store, with part-time attendance at the college.

Similarly there is a one-year sponsored course in Display and a three year one in Applied Design.



THE 3-IN-1 PHOTO!

Three aspects of art courses in one picture — wearing a print pattern dress made by herself, a student is photographed by another, whilst a classical statue looks on . . .

A complete guide to 'Dip.A.D.' courses

ALL the colleges listed below provide courses — approved by the National Council — leading to the Diploma in Art and Design (Dip.A.D.).

There is a variety of subjects to choose from (though not all colleges cater for all subjects). These include painting, sculpture, silversmithing, industrial design, furniture, ceramics, interior design, crafts, theatre, textiles, fashion and embroidery.

Only the name of the college is given, except where this does not indicate the town or area in which it is located. BATH Academy of Arts, Corsham, Wilts; College of Art and Design, BIRMINGHAM 4; BRIGHTON College of Art.

BOROUGH College of Art; MAIDSTONE College of Art; MANCHESTER College of Art and Design. College of Art and Industrial Design, NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE, NEWPORT College of Art (Shropshire); NOTTINGHAM College of Art and Design.

Prospectus

CAMBERWELL School of Arts and Crafts, London, S.E.5; CANTERBURY College of Art; CARDIFF College of Art; CHELSEA School of Art, London, S.W.3. City of COVENTRY College of Art; EXETER College of Art; Gloucestershire College of Art; CHELTENHAM; Goldsmiths' College School of Art, LONDON, S.E.14.

PORTSMOUTH College of Art and Design; Ravensbourne College of Art and Design, BROMLEY, Kent; St. Martin's School of Art, LONDON, W.C.2. SHEFFIELD College of Art; STOKE-ON-TRENT College of Art; SUNDERLAND College of Art; West of England College of Art, BRISTOL.

Technology

HIGH WYCOMBE College of Technology and Art; HORNSEY College of Art, London, N.8; HULL Regional College of Art; KINGSTON College of Art.

WIMBLEDON School of Art, London, S.W.19; WINCHESTER Art School; WOLVERHAMPTON College of Art.

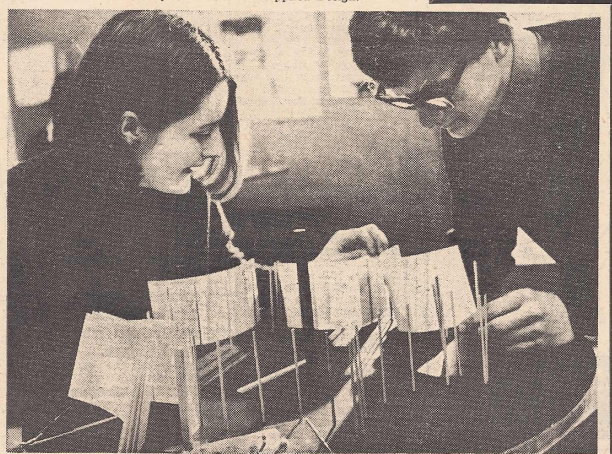
Write to the colleges which interest you for a prospectus for details of their particular Dip.A.D. courses.

The courses normally take three years to complete and entry is in September.

Grants are usually available in the normal way from your local education authority.

FIRST STEP TO NEW SHAPES

First year students at Great Yarmouth learn to use materials in an 'imaginative' way. This is an important part of basic training in design, giving the artist confidence to plan daring shapes, experiment with bold textures and choose striking colours.



ask for / everything

Lotte L.S.



IMPA, la fabrica de cooperativas

The imagination is not only holy, it is precise
it is not only fierce, it is practical
men die everyday for the lack of it,
it is vast & elegant

intellectus means “light of the mind”
it is not discourse it is not even language
the inner sun

the polis is constellated around the sun
the fire is central

Diane di Prima, *Revolutionary Letter #75 (Rant)*, 1971

When workers in Argentina were faced with the shuttering of their factories at the turn of the 21st century, they occupied them. In the years following the collapse of the Argentine economy, worker-controlled factories spread across the country, continuing to manufacture (toothpaste tubes, epoxy tubes, cake pans), organise, and keep jobs and wages afloat. As poet and labour organiser Mark Nowak writes in *Social Poetics*, workers at IMPA, a metal factory in Buenos Aires, not only retook the factory, but created spaces inside for a cultural centre, theatre workshops and productions, printmaking classes, a people’s lending library, an adult middle and high school education program, and a University of the Workers.

It’s almost impossible to imagine something similar happening in the teetering cul-de-sacs of England, the

poultry factories hidden in plain view, the commute, leaky roofs arched like a row of furrowed eyebrows, the cold, frozen meals, one-way traffic, hazy reflections in the misted mirrors of club toilets; the increasing weight of delivery rucksacks. To a large extent, this is due to England’s precise relationship to class, and to culture: to art-making, expression, self-education. In many places around the world, culture isn’t a ‘right’—it’s a real living force; one to be made and participated in daily, rather than specialised intellectualism (both sneering and sneered at). There is a dangerous liberalism (too often disguised as militancy) in trying to claim that people don’t need forms of art like we need food, housing, work, warmth - as if we can only aspire to what we need and not beyond it. The strung-out, deafening descent into almost a decade-and-a-half of austerity has left our pockets, our time, empti-

er—but also our imagination. This was crystallised when in 2021, the then education secretary Gavin Williamson announced that there would be a 50% funding cut to arts subjects in higher education. This was something Ronald Reagan already spelled out back in 1967, when he said that the State “shouldn’t be in the business of subsidising curiosity”. Half a century later, what remains is a society where the only defence for not cutting down trees full of starlings is that they may benefit the local economy.¹

It’s worth remembering that governments haven’t always been opposed to art-making. It serves a self-proclaimed ‘democracy’ to possess what it would present as a healthy, multifarious and oppositional population making art. But ‘radical’ can be its own industry, particularly within a country that strategically attempts to absorb as much as it denies. As Juliana Spahr writes in Du Bois’s Telegram: Literary Resistance and State Containment, the renowned Iowa Writers’ Workshop—influential not just in the authors it produced, but in the explosion of creative writing programmes across the US since the 1930s—was funded by the CIA. Good literature, students learned, contains, “sensations, not doctrines; experiences, not dogmas; memories, not philosophies.” The aim, according to Eric Bennett in Workshops of Empire, was to discourage systematic and collective social critiques, in favour of a focus on the personal, the concrete, and the individual. What is ambitious work? Art has always been a medium for self-expression, for the I within the We; an outlook the Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish described in relation to his own practice as: “I don’t represent anything except myself. But that self is full of collective memory.” But over two decades later, halfway across the world, in a populace with a totally different relationship to history, to freedom, to desire, to struggles for better conditions and the role of culture in it, to we; where the whole of life can be distilled into a self-care routine that will ultimately liberate you, what does self-expression mean?

So, knowing this, how can we build our own am-

ateur, sustainable structures for art-making, for expressing, sharing? And on a local level, what can be done in desire of an ambitious—and so by definition, liberatory—arts education? In service of the relationship between creative expression and freedom? Or at least the fleeting feeling of it, within a society in which capital flows and commodifies everything from what we eat, how we dress, who and how we love, to how we can (and can’t) use our time. Where the hands could be put to use, in meaningful and spiritually fulfilling ways; no longer desperately grasping in the dark.

Yet in places like Great Yarmouth, where there is high unemployment, homelessness, precarious immigration, flats in which people die from easy-to-avoid fires and a lack of carbon monoxide detectors; where Universal Credit was trialled and the number of people accessing foodbanks multiplied—the argument that “art is necessary too” often goes hand-in-hand with gentrification, displacement and assimilation, under the guise of ‘cultural development’. Or how arts programmes set up with the intention of orienting themselves towards working class residents too often end up being engaged with by (the much statistically smaller) middle class residents, who suddenly have access to a free arts education that elsewhere they would be required to pay or compete for. This requires a change both in material conditions (and in how it affects our relationship to time), and the underlying culture and collective/individualised imagination: the rotting foundations of England, a body wandering without a song in its head. And most of all, it would necessitate nothing short of an anthropological revolution: a totally different way of relating to one another. The poet Diane di Prima, who wrote in 1971, “THE ONLY WAR THAT MATTERS IS THE WAR AGAINST / THE IMAGINATION” is the same Diane di Prima who wrote: “if what you want is jobs / for everyone... / if what you want is housing, industry / a car for everyone, garage, refrigerator, TV, more plumbing... / you are selling / yourself short, remember / you can have what you ask for, ask for / everything.” And this we can only do together, from the bottom up.

¹ ‘Starling mess trees are a ‘benefit’ to Great Yarmouth’s economy’, Great Yarmouth Mercury, March 2022

Notes

Notes

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TOWN CENTRE
PARTNERSHIP**

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