

# Studies in Material Thinking

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*Multisensory materialities  
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*Multisensorial dynamics:  
Encountering and capturing  
the intangible heritage of the art  
school in Britain*

**AUTHORS**  
*Robert Knifton  
Fran Lloyd*

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**ABSTRACT**

*Art Schools are key sites for the formation of material culture, yet have resisted narrativisation of their own materiality. This article examines the heritage of art schools and suggests strategies for assessing the material and immaterial practices it produces. It surveys a number of counter-hegemonic practices historically within the twentieth-century art school, before considering material encounters in the art school and the spatial-temporal qualities of the art school site. The article argues for a model of temporal uncertainty and fluidity that can be experienced as Art School Time where flexible, cross-disciplinary spaces for as yet unknown*

*material and immaterial encounters enable students to develop new tactics to address societal challenges within the multi-layered and multisensorial spaces of the art school.*

**KEY WORDS**

*Art School, materiality, heritage, narrative, space, time*

## INTRODUCTION

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Art schools are key sites for the formation of material culture, yet they have proved remarkably resistant to the narrativisation of their own materiality as heritage discourse. A broad range of material and immaterial practices comprise the art school environment: teaching pedagogies, built environment, relational aesthetics, performative actions, elements of sociality, and intangible concepts such as influence and atmosphere. Together, these aspects create the individual's experience of communal art school life. Drawing on key historic accounts of the art school, plus documentation gathered during our own research into the history and heritage of Kingston School of Art, we will explore affective materiality in the art school and question what forms of heritage it constructs.

The article first surveys accounts of art school heritage, considering historic narratives around such sites. Citing core global examples from South Kensington to Bauhaus and Black Mountain, Womanhouse, Groundcourse and Locked Room, we assess dominant narratives surrounding art school identity. This is analysed via Laurajane Smith's 'authorised heritage discourse' theory to question whether counter-narrative approaches to art school heritage can be elicited that challenge dominant historical and contemporary perspectives on art schools.

Secondly, a model to capture materiality (and immateriality) experienced in art schools is delineated, questioning if a specific 'time-space' of the art school exists. The unique formulation of art schools marks them as singularly positioned within UK education. Charting shifts in the regulation of time within art schools is a lens for understanding multisensorial dynamics of art school experience;

whilst the physical spaces inhabited by art school staff and students—from workshop to studio to classroom—are another key marker of art school materiality and its heritage formation.

Finally, art school learning draws on material encounters in order to form professional practice across creative disciplines. We conclude by asking if and how heritage discourses connect with the pedagogical aims of the art school.

## AUTHORISED HERITAGE DISCOURSE AND ART SCHOOLS

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In Britain, the Great Exhibition of 1851 was a key turning point in art school development. After his success with the Crystal Palace, Henry Cole had the political wherewithal, royal patronage and argument to develop greater centralised bureaucratic control over arts education in order to improve the quality of British manufacture for export overseas. Before Cole's involvement in 1852 there were around twenty Schools of Design under the aegis of the Head School at Somerset House. By 1884 this number had expanded nearly tenfold, to around 200 different schools under state jurisdiction.

A formalised, systematised approach to art education was enforced, with a rigid and regimented style of teaching of mechanistic copying from casts at its centre. The annual directory of regulations codified practices expected of art schools—prescribing everything to the colours of walls and the arrangements of desks. The art schools of the South Kensington system acted as a form of cultural capital expanding the influence of the evolving liberal state. As Adrian Rifkin notes, they provided 'a unique link between

the newly emerging dominant classes of the reformed Parliament and their social bases in the provinces' (Rifkin 1988, p. 91). Thus, the system developed art and design as a liberal educative discipline, underpinning distinctions between art and industry that still persist to this day. Smith has identified that, 'there is rather a hegemonic discourse about heritage, which acts to constitute the way we think, talk and write about heritage' (Smith, 2006, p. 11). Smith notes how 'the authorized heritage discourse (AHD) focuses attention on aesthetically pleasing material objects, sites, places and/or landscapes' (Smith, 2006, p. 29). The authorised heritage discourse surrounding British art schools emerged from Cole's South Kensington system: encompassing notions of art and industry, formality and taste, utilitarianism and order. However, the art school site has been subject to multiple rewritings and counter-discourses over the course of the last century—as a site it does not fit easily into an authorised heritage discourse, as some of the example counter-narratives below will prove.

## *...the system developed art and design as a liberal educative discipline...*

One of the key counter-hegemonic art school sites of the twentieth century was undoubtedly the Bauhaus site at Dessau. The learning pedagogies pioneered at the Bauhaus spread from this short-lived experimental school outward via writing and teachers across Europe and North America. The Bauhaus was especially influential through linking material learning

and physical space within the art school building. The Bauhaus building in Dessau (Walter Gropius, 1925-1926) physically embodied radical pedagogy. G. James Daichendt describes it thus: 'Divided into three different wings, it represents the educational focus of the school. The workshops, studio spaces, and the north wing all have particular spaces yet connect to one another' (Daichendt, 2010, p. 104). Steven Henry Madoff expands,

*Gropius's solution to the problem of studio space for art instruction split the space into collective workshops that emphasized material experimentation (displayed behind large glass grids that precariously hung off the volume of the building) and deemphasized classrooms and ancillary public spaces, constituting the building's three-wing, asymmetrical pinwheel form. (Madoff, 2009, p. 69)*

Therefore, in the built environment created, the pedagogic emphases of the Bauhaus were highlighted—emphasising material engagement over theory, as exemplified by the central basic course established by Johannes Itten, with its focus on exploring material, texture, composition, shape and tone in a general theory of contrast. The 'Vorkurs' programme run by Itten, and later developed further by Josef Albers and Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, broke down art and design teaching to first principles of material engagement. An emphasis on the material offered art school objects (artworks, cultural production) greater fluidity than possible under the South Kensington system, for instance de-emphasising visuality in favour of more multisensorial considerations of material. The 'Vorkurs' programme encouraged students to re-

write objects—something that Smith notes is excluded from authorised heritage discourse, subsequently constricting our ability to revise cultural and social meaning. Smith contends: ‘In disempowering the present from actively rewriting the meaning of the past, the use of the past to challenge and rewrite cultural and social meaning in the present becomes more difficult’ (Smith, 2006, p. 29).

The concepts pioneered at the Bauhaus were later extremely influential across a range of art and design disciplines in the British art school. This was the case at Kingston School of Art, where a new

Figure 1: Knights Park at Night, c.1940s. Kingston School of Art Archive.



school of Architecture with a European outlook was established in 1941.

The Architecture department led by Eric Brown was ‘directed like a Bauhaus version of a puritan grammar school’ (Gowan, 1975, p. 13). In 1947, Charles

Herbert Reilly contended that the Architecture course at Kingston at this time was ‘of a rather Bauhaus kind... getting remarkable results... There was a definite break with Beaux Arts traditions and a return to fundamentals in the relation of design to construction, often illustrated by models, which was very refreshing...’ (Reilly in Crinson & Lubbock, 1994, p. 111). The influence of the Bauhaus extended beyond Architecture, influencing, for instance, the teaching of design—as tutor Don Pavey recalled:

*Basic Design derived from Bauhaus thinking. Firstly, it was based on logic and specification but ultimately its greatest achievements were likely to have been inspired by intuition... Imagine the power of expression one has when one can play with the variations of all the basic elements in design: colour, luminance, shapes, texture and so on. (Pavey, 2012)*

This interpretation of the ‘Vorkurs’ via Basic Design at Kingston reflects a much broader history across art and design from the mid-1950s, with the highly influential input of figures such as Harry Thubron, Maurice de Sausmarez, Richard Hamilton and Victor Pasmore discussed, for example, in the writings of de Sausmarez (1964) and Richard Yeomans (1988).

The history of twentieth-century art school development is one of adoption and application of working tactics learned from processes within modern and contemporary art, with two spaces—art school and artists’ studio—in dialectical relationship. The Bauhaus teaching model was inextricably tied up with studio methods of artists such as Kandinsky, Albers and others. This approach to art school

pedagogy influenced students in Europe, but also in North America, where Albers emigrated to teach at the experimental liberal arts Black Mountain College in 1933 (Katz, 2013, p. 24). Black Mountain was innovative for its incorporation of aspects of performative practice into the art school's spatial-temporal make-up. By including a broader liberal arts programme including, notably, music and dance, the college eroded rigid disciplinary hierarchies. A less regimented approach to timetabling and staff-student divides augmented this more fluid, open model.

The structural changes to British art school education in the 1960s brought significant upheaval to the system, as the NDD centralised system was supplanted by a de-centralised DipAD. Michael Craig-Martin recalls its positive impact:

*When I first arrived in Britain, the art schools were in this moment of blossoming in the 1960s, which was through the Coldstream report and all sorts of things that created the 1960s model of art school in Britain. The idea of that model was that instead of schools and professional teachers...there would be artists teaching in art schools, people who were practitioners. (Craig-Martin in Reardon, 2009, p. 112)*

By enabling part-time tutors in art to maintain professional practice, a greater equivalence grew between artists' studio practice and art school studios. Phyllida Barlow, talking on the shift in art school education from the previous generation, discusses how the view of art school espoused by figures such as Coldstream differed from the prevailing current climate:

*They didn't see them as places that manufactured finished artists who could be delivered straight into the art world...they saw them as places where there could be an ongoing process of revealing and testing out, and changing and offering huge opportunity to people. (Barlow in Reardon, 2009, p. 39)*

Pedagogical developments such as Roy Ascott's Groundcourse not only drew on Bauhaus teaching but also the studio methods of a new generation of artists to deliver such opportunities. Rainer Usselman highlights the significance of Roy Ascott's work to the evolution of art school studio teaching in the 1960s:

*Ascott's Groundcourse, a unique program of study at Ealing School of Art (1961-1964) and later at Ipswich Civic College (1964-1967), incorporated innovative methods, such as behavioural psychology, chance operations and interactive collaborations. Groups of six students functioned as integrated units of self-regulation, who had to react to environmental stimuli according to predetermined parameters. (Usselman, 2003, p. 393)*

The Groundcourse was Bauhaus melded by the white heat of technology, and was indicative of the broader range of disciplines and sources that art school education referenced, and reciprocally influenced, in the 1960s. Ascott's students included Pete Townshend at Ealing, whose stage show with The Who incorporated a guitar smashing finale—in part influenced by avant-garde concepts of destruction as creative process witnessed at Gustav Metzger's Destruction in Art Symposium in September 1966.

Ascott also taught Brian Eno at Ipswich, encouraging his sound experiments manipulating tape loops, thus bridging the seeming chasm between John Cage at Black Mountain and Pan's People on Top of the Pops. The art school thus became the crucible for a vast panoply of popular and avant-garde cultural practices that moved beyond the purely visual and into varied multisensorial areas such as installation and site-specific artwork, rock and pop music, expanded sculptural work, advertising media in film, television and print, performance art, and magazine culture.

Importantly, these new-found freedoms were not purely artistic; Alex Seago quotes Robert Hewison on the cultural and political diversity of post-war art schools:

*[They were] a haven for imaginative people otherwise neglected by the educational system... the relative freedom of art schools encouraged experiments with style. For working class students they were an escape route from the factory, for middle class students they were the entry to bohemia. (Hewison in Seago, 1995, p. 9)*

Returning to Smith's heritage model, art schools at this time created space for counter-hegemonic heritage to emerge via multifarious voices present in its material and immaterial outputs: working, middle, and upper class; young teenagers and older ex-servicemen; avant-garde and mainstream culture; male and female. As Smith contends, a key aspect of counter-hegemonic heritage values is precisely this 'multi-vocality of many heritage values and meanings' (Smith, 2006, p. 12) For Seago, art schools were at the nexus of cultural

transformation centred around visual arts and, most visibly, manifested in pop culture. Art schools became key to sustaining the counter-culture:

*From being a setting of...mechanical purpose and ideological discipline in the nineteenth century organization of artistic training, the art school of the late 1960s had become an institution more than ready to embrace the idea of and the tensions of youth and expressive cultural opportunity being intertwined. In terms of ideologies of work, leisure, and style, the art school was the natural location for the attempted realization of this claimed unity. (Seago, 1995, p. 14)*

Thus, Seago underscores the centrality of art schools to emerging new cultural forms in the 1960s. He states, 'it was art and design students who were among the first to be aware of and to articulate the social implications of postmodern culture' (Seago, 1995, p. 24).

The countercultural experiment embodied in the 1960s British art school was reflected in Kingston, where musicians such as Sandy Denny, John Renbourn and Eric Clapton augmented the bohemian atmosphere. In an interview with Timothy White in Billboard magazine, Eric Clapton reminisced about his brief sojourn at the art school:

*It was a remarkable school. You would have a five-day week. Three of those days would be almost exclusively spent working with art—either in clay or with oil, or in life drawing. The other two days would be cram-packed with maths, English and sport. I loved it; it moved me onto another level of*

*an aesthetic appreciation in terms of music, art and literature. I met a bunch of people who were much more avant-garde. (Clapton in White, 1993, p. 60)*

More avant-garde immaterial outputs observed at Kingston were experimental music performances on prepared piano influenced by composers such as John Cage. John Tilbury recalls one such concert where, 'in a performance at Kingston Art School we opened the windows and used sounds from the environment' (Tilbury, 1969, p. 151). Extending beyond the visual, such practices embraced the multisensory as part of an alternative art school culture.

Another counter-hegemonic discourse to the authorised heritage of the art school can be found in feminist critique, emerging in the 1970s. For example, the feminist art education programme established by Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro at CalArts that produced Womanhouse applied the temporal / spatial dynamics of nascent radical feminist art practice to the art school. with a focus on multisensorial embodiment. Chicago writes: 'The establishment of the Feminist Art Program at CalArts marked the first time that a major art school had specifically addressed the needs of female students by incorporating an educational program designed and run by women for women' (Chicago, 2014, p. 34). By renovating and installing their art in an old house, they constructed

*a series of rooms expressing women's feelings about the home. Women had been confined to domesticity for centuries and had quilted, stitched, baked, cooked, decorated, and invested a good part of their creative energies into enhancing their domiciles. What would*



Figure 2: Music concert in the Quadrangle at Knights Park, Kingston. 1973. Photo: Chris Thomas.

*happen, we wondered, if women took those very same activities and carried them into fantasy proportions by translating them into art? (Chicago, 2014, p. 34)*

At Womanhouse, the students worked eight-hour work days. As Chicago asserts, 'there is no substitute for the long, silent hours spent in the studio, struggling to give form to your ideas with whatever technique is best suited for the job.' (Chicago, 2014, p. 217)

The 1980s brought more changes, as Madoff states: 'From the 1980s on, the influence of conceptualism has affected art schools all over the world' (Madoff, 2009, ix). The new generation of British artists who emerged in the late 1980s and 1990s at art schools

such as Glasgow and Goldsmiths constructed their practice influenced by art school studio spaces that drew on the atelier style industrial production of the preceding professional artists—figures such as David Mach, who temporarily taught part-time at Kingston in the 1980s. Liam Gillick studied at Goldsmiths, and now teaches at Columbia University. His conception of the art school reflects the conceptual debates at British art schools in the 1980s. He highlights the significance of ‘the site of art education as the site of production’—not just of artworks, but of other things: ‘a real machine for the production of all sorts of layered things’ (Gillick in Reardon, 2009, p. 188). The production Gillick considers seems to be multi-faceted: not just art school objects or students, but a range of material and immaterial encounters that represents an expanded field that Thierry de Duve refers to as ‘attitude-practice-deconstruction’ replacing ‘creativity-method-

*‘Conceptually based,  
multidisciplinary studios are  
hybrid learning environments’*

invention’ (de Duve, 1994, pp. 23-40).

The evolution of the Polytechnics into post-1992 universities, and twin processes of globalisation and commercialisation of the art world have had noticeable effects on the art school over the last few decades. Some, such as Ernesto Pujol, see this as art school’s response to ‘multidisciplinary art research and intradisciplinary art production’ (Pujol in Madoff, 2009, p. 3). Pujol argues that the traditional

separation of art history, theory and studio work is increasingly untenable in the contemporary art school: ‘Conceptually based, multidisciplinary studios are hybrid learning environments’ (Pujol in Madoff, 2009, p. 6). This is what Juli Carson and Bruce Yonemoto typify as the legacy of ‘post-studio’ practice on contemporary art schools (Carson & Yonemoto, 2009, p. 91). Others, such as Brad Buckley and John Conomos point to the negative impact of university research models on the fluid creative practices evolved in the art school. They contend that ‘there is a surreal mismatch between what artists and art students describe as creative work and what the non-artist academics believe it to be’ (Buckley and Conomos, 2009, p. 12). For Buckley and Conomos, the traditional measures of humanities and natural and physical sciences are irrelevant ‘to the multiplying complexities and issues of post-Duchampian art forms’ (ibid.). They assert: ‘The unquestioned straitjacketing of the contemporary arts within the traditional academic, research, and pedagogic paradigms is...denying us the opportunity to enhance our creativity and our intellectual life and is, critically, negating the possibilities of producing new publics’ (Buckley & Conomos, 2009, p. 13).

Smith contends that ‘heritage is most usefully perceived as a cultural process about meaning making’ (Smith, 2006, p. 87). Across its institutional history, the art school has always been a site where identity and creativity are fought over and defined. It has at different times reflected nationalistic concerns of trade and design; been the avant-garde’s laboratory for shaping the vanguard; the hot-house of the counterculture’s assault on mainstream culture and politics; the site of feminist discourse challenging patriarchal pedagogy; and witnessed the victory of conceptualism over disciplinary boundaries. Considering the models

of heritage exposed in art school pedagogy and production, it seems that both authorised discourse and counter-hegemonic practices can be ascertained. This seems typical of its dynamic and fluid modes of production. Su Baker captures a sense of this art school dynamism when she claims:

*A good art school creates a milieu, an atmosphere, a critical context, and an occasion for these explorations and opportunities; in many cases, it creates new markets for products, events, and experiences. It should model reciprocal social relations and encourage the active imagining of possible futures. (Baker, 2009, p. 28)*

In the next section, we will consider in more detail the particular spaces constructed within the art school for this process, and the differing kinds of material and immaterial culture they produce.

### **ART SCHOOL TIME**

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In *Studio and Cube*, Brian O'Doherty introduces his concept of studio time, asserting that the art object held within its parameters are effectively held in stasis:

*Artworks lie around, parked, ignored in remote corners, stacked against the wall, reshuffled with the cavalier attitude allowed only to their creator. As one work is worked on, the others, finished and unfinished, are detained in a waiting zone, one over the other, in what you might call a collage of compressed tenses. All are in the vicinity of their authenticating source, the artist. As long as they are in his or her orbit, they are subject to*

*alteration and revision. All are thus potentially unfinished. They—and the studio itself—exist under the sign of process, which in turn defines the nature of studio time, very different from the even, white, present tense of the gallery. (O'Doherty, 2007, 18)*

O'Doherty sees the studio as defined by a 'mobile cluster of tenses' (O'Doherty, 2007, p. 18) with artworks inhabiting different temporal moments and states of being. This model of temporal uncertainty and fluidity could be adapted usefully to help us understand the spatial-temporal qualities of the art school. Material culture present within the art school has multiple authors, multiple readings, multiple possible futures as artwork, lesson, or incorporated into heritage discourse. Like O'Doherty's 'studio time', art school time is fluid and contingent—it expresses a series of tensions and actors operating within matrices of relationships. Unlike the standard institutional classroom or lecture theatre, the art studio is an unfixated and continually changing space. It changes according to annual cycles of teaching and making, culminating in the end of term, year or end of degree show, and the activities that take place on a day-to-day level both individually and collectively. Each of these cycles is made up of differing and changing multisensorial dynamics. The frenetic energy, sounds and smells of the pre-degree exhibition preparation are experiences central to the art school's annual cycle.

One possible trajectory of the temporal and spatial qualities of the art school could be to trace a move from regimented, controlled space toward more fluid and open relationships over time, and an accompanying move from the visual to the multisensory. At Kingston School of Art immediately after the Second

Figure 3: A fashion model wearing a student design on Knights Park staircase, c.1970. Kingston School of Art Archive.



World War there was undeniably a considerable degree of control and compartmentalisation, as the extract below from 1948 hints at:

*At the beginning of each week we rowed up our donkeys and easels, crouched or lounged before them as required, and surveyed the model knowingly until the first break. Then we hastened to the canteen or gasped for air out of the windows overhanging the central courtyard. After the break we took up our pencils, charcoal, Conté or what have you, and made considered lines here and there on our sheets of paper... (40 Years On, 1988)*

In his (unpublished) memoir, Gordon Miller recalls the newly built Knights Park building, where he became a student in January 1940 as:

*A rather large two storey brick building with a three storey entrance element jutting out from the main face line containing offices on the ground floor, student and staff common rooms on the first with studios at the top containing a hall area and principal staircase. The building was square—single depth studios all around four sides, accessed off wide corridors on both floors looking out over a grassed open courtyard located some fifty feet or so away from the Hogsmill River and grass bank with which it ran parallel. On that side, south, were graphic design studios and general study studios on the ground floor. Above were design, fashion and craft studios; there were painting studios on the first floor of the north side which included drawing groups (anatomy, perspective, architectural study areas) and on the ground floor sculpture, pottery and spare studios.*

*At the back was another staircase—lavatories and cloakrooms as on the first for general purposes. (Miller, 2014, p. 6)*

The sense given is of every subject having its own space, of order and discipline being significant aspects. The space described is intimate. Entering the 1939 building via its original slightly curved white portico, set against red brick, with an exterior wrought iron balcony, the encounter is first and foremost with materials. The plain glazed, heavy, dark double-wooden doors with wrought iron glazed panels above, open onto the cool white and grey terrazzo floor edged with a pale green terrazzo that runs up the wall to a fine inlay border of white and green mosaic. The beautifully finished, smooth brass handrail leading to the studios above is cool to the touch. Ascending the white and grey terrazzo steps, the geometric design of the wrought iron balustrade is light and open, while sounds of each step echo in the hallway. Simple, utilitarian and crisp, the materials embody different forms of craftsmanship, different textures, volumes, colours, and weight. Richly resonant of the function of the 1930s art school to engage with processes and materials, they also announce an aesthetic and order to the building, and carry the immaterial heritage of the feel, the sounds, and the atmosphere of the art school.

Miller's description of the working week at the art school in the 1940s details the regimented nature of the timetable:

*The week was divided up into days of differing activities—drawing, the constant theme including anatomy study and skeleton drawing from real examples on suspended steel arched hangers, plaster casts of figures etc. Still life had*

*complicated arrangements on stools, tables and chairs. Architecture included classical study—all the orders either from casts or large, double elephant line drawing copies from Bannister Fletcher. Perspective included shadow and reflection drawing. Modelling was in clay always from live animal set ups; and there was casting, graphics and lettering. (Miller, 2014, p. 8)*

The students were nearly as caged as the rabbits they sculpted from. However, this near Foucauldian discipline of time and space is always under threat of erasure from individual's re-writing their own route through the art school's classes, or by moments of chaotic creative potentiality—as occurred for instance when medical students from St Thomas's were temporarily re-housed in the art school during the war. Miller recounts the disruption:

*Our tranquil art school life was soon to be shattered by the arrival of medical school students from London who delighted in covering the common room tables with large jars of pickled body parts which they would vividly discuss while munching sandwiches. (Miller, 2014, p. 8)*

Whilst Miller's memoirs detail the new building at Knights Park; this space was soon augmented with a haphazard series of annexes spread all across Kingston. Jane Gray studied at Kingston in the late 1940s and early 1950s, specialising in stained glass. In this extract, she recalls visiting the department for the first time:

*During those first two years I never had time to visit the annexe, and wasn't quite sure what went on there. It was a bit of a walk from the*

Figure 4: The Life Drawing Room at Kingston School of Art, c. 1950s. Kingston School of Art Archive.



*main building, and looked, from the outside, like any ordinary terraced town house, overlooking Kingston bus station. Up the stone steps to the front door, then up uncarpeted stairs towards the sound of glass cutting. So this was where the Stained Glass Department was! What a revelation. It was love at first sight. Although I don't remember seeing any completed panels I do recall a strong feeling of 'this is what I would like to do'. There were students cutting glass on a bench; others working at easels set up in the window so that light could pass through the coloured glass which they had cut and now were painting; others working at another bench making up panels using strips of lead to hold pieces of glass together, and there were other activities which I couldn't appreciate at first glance. (Gray, 2011, pp. 2-3)*



Figure 5: Helen Storey, A Wedding 1981. Final Degree Show design, made from fragments of material salvaged from cutting room floor. Photo: Life on the Outskirts. Helen Storey Foundation/Kingston University.

Figure 6: David Nash, *Blue Place*, 1966 (Work in Progress), Coombe Farm Barn Annexe. Courtesy the Artist.



The revelatory experience Gray verbalises is typical of the transformation of everyday life through the kind of exceptional aesthetic encounter that is possible within art school space. Most often, these experiences are expressed in kinaesthetic terms. For example, Victoria Crowe studied at Kingston in the early 1960s; interviewed for the British Library's National Life Stories project, she recounts the spaces at Knights Park in similar, experiential terms: 'The life room was just amazing, I loved it. The smell of the art college, the turps, the oil paint, and the warmth of the life room, all this drawing...' (Crowe, 2007, 7:35).

Hester Westley has addressed the significant positioning of the life room in art school life, contending that rather than being an outmoded model, in the early 60s 'art tutors believed that a reconfigured life room deserved a place in a reformed educational system informed by received ideas of the Bauhaus' (Westley, 2015, p. 52). An analogue to Crowe's material memories of the life room are found in Helen Storey's description of the Fashion School's store cupboard,

where a haptic sense of potentiality is expressed: 'My love of fabric began when Lycra and I first met in a darkened stockroom. It was cold, slippery and heavy; metres of stuff which went wherever I wanted it to go' (Storey, 1996, p. 32).

Similarly, David Nash recounts the fluid, exploratory possibilities afforded by the art school in building up a material relationship with his chosen discipline of sculpture:

*[T]hey had an anvil and a forge, and I think, I just heated up metal and whacked it. I loved that, fire and steel and hitting it. Pretty low tech. We did a bit of welding I think, just making up forms. It was like, just have a go, have a go...learn by doing was really the emphasis rather than a more dry, academic and theoretical approach. (Nash, 1995, p. 86)*

Besides the main art school building and annexes, study trips also formed an important space for art school experience, breaking down divides between everyday life and art school creativity. At Kingston, from the 1950s to 1970s annual interdisciplinary 'town study' trips were organised. These study visits saw the art school extend outwards and interact with specific communities, setting up dialogues with the built environment in particular—as this extract from a local newspaper documents:

*Young men and girls in loose shirts, armed with tape measures and drawing boards, have invaded Bradford-on-Avon. Their object is to compile information about the town's many picturesque buildings. Altogether some 70 students of the Kingston School of Art will be in the town for the*

*next few days. They are encamped on the banks of the Avon, next to Bradford Rowing Club's premises. One of the senior students, Mr. Victor Shelford, explained that the School arranges one trip each year to a town like Bradford-on-Avon where there are problems of re-development. 'When we get back to Kingston we will get our facts and figures together and then make models of the various buildings in order to study the possibilities of re-development,' said Mr. Shelford. (Bristol Evening World, 1959, n. p.)*

An important aspect in the construction of the time-space of the art school is the tension between creative freedom and professional preparation. Daphne Brooker, Head of Fashion from 1962 to 1992, addressed this balance in a Guardian article from 1974:

*I feel strongly that students must be able to step into jobs and hold their own well. But I am also determined that we should not orientate them entirely towards industry to the exclusion of all else. This is why we alternate commercial projects with schemes in which students can do something as far out and non-commercial as they please. (Brooker in Neustatter, 1974, p. 13)*

In the view of Bruce Ferguson, the contemporary art school must focus increasingly on such demands of professionalization. He writes,

*In viewing art schools as professional environments aligned to a professionalized art world and obligated to prepare their students for financially and critically successful careers, the hippy vision of art school as a 'safe' environment or monastery,*

*where students are encouraged to fail, experiment and explore, is outdated and dangerous. (Ferguson 2011, p. 176)*

Potentially, Ferguson's vision of the art school as a professional environment risks fixing art school time to the same degree that the regimented disciplinary

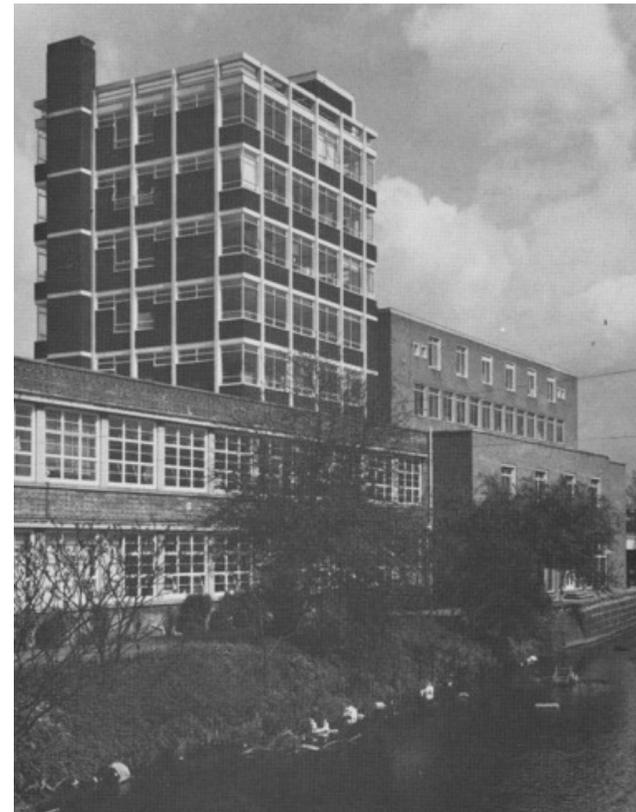


Figure 7: Knights Park campus of Kingston Polytechnic in 1972, with River Hogsmill in foreground. Photo: Chris Thomas.

system of previous generations did. In examining the temporal and spatial qualities that best imbue creative practice, those moments of open-ended encounter with materiality offer the best opportunity for students to thrive—it would be a disservice if moves to professionalization tidied up such material encounters in the art school.

In the final section, we turn to examine the material production of the art school and aim to link these material encounters with processes of learning and teaching, and art school heritage.

### **LEARNING, HERITAGE AND MATERIALITY**

What do we learn at art school? The South Kensington system emphasised ‘hand skill’—gaining artistic skills via hours of meticulous copying, the ‘talent-métier-imitation’ triad of de Duve (de Duve, 1994, p. 22). Such concerns are no longer deemed appropriate for the contemporary art school student. In the 1940s, sculpture students entering the workshops at Knights Park would first of all be taught to fashion their own tools—taking professional practice back to first principles and building a direct relationship with materials. This hands-on approach to material engagement is also a lesser priority in the digital age.

The Faculty of Art, Design and Architecture of Kingston University, the successor institution of Kingston School of Art, occupies the much extended and re-organised 1939 building. It has adopted the slogan ‘Thinking through Making’ to symbolise its joined-up approach to studio, workshop and classroom, placing material and multisensory encounters at the heart of learning experiences. This approach has many benefits, encouraging cross-disciplinary conversations,

for instance, via open access technical spaces. However, the implied teleology between material production and art school pedagogy should not be overstated. Irit Rogoff has argued that art schools should focus on ‘potentiality, actualization, access and contemporaneity’ (Rogoff, 2011, p. 132) leading to a method of teaching where ‘the possibilities of not doing, not making, not bringing into being [are] at the very centre of acts of thinking, making and doing’ (Rogoff, 2011, p. 133, original emphasis). Such a model of art school education gives credence to intangible cultures and experiences in equal measure to those tangible products that emerge from such training. The immaterial culture of the art school, its atmosphere, community and intangible heritage are equally significant as the objects displayed in degree shows. Focusing on the intangible aspects of studio culture leads to embracing precarity within our spatial and temporal treatment of the art school. This is perhaps why the trend for ‘maker spaces’ can be frustrating, as their entrepreneurial focus can close off possibilities. As O’Doherty’s studio time saw the art object affected by clusters of tenses and states of being, so the art student today within the art school building is similarly affected by precarity. This precarious nature is vital to the art school as it permits non-outcome based experimentation with immateriality, whilst also effectively preparing students for future employment precarity. The art school studio is a semi-porous and multisensorial space, and we may debate just how much of the outside world should enter into it. Contemporary artist Laura Oldfield Ford discussed an alternate model in a recent interview:

*[A]s an artist you leave college and often end up on your own in a studio in an old factory building*

*in an industrial estate and you go to work in the morning and there'll be a corridor of closed doors. It's often not really conducive to have that much isolation. You need a certain amount of withdrawal and a critical distance but to be isolated like that... it would be really good for art schools to think about integrating artist studios with art schools, thinking about that relationship between students and practising artists. (Oldfield Ford, 2016)*

At Kingston, technical workshop fellows are recruited from cohorts of recent graduates precisely to construct porosity in the studio structure between art school and professional practice. There is a need to recognise that the art school studio is a technology, and effective use of it needs to be taught, and occasionally recalibrated to the outside world.

Increasingly, art school students are creating multisensory work that problematizes its own material relation to the world, focusing on 'born digital' practices. The divide between physical and digital realms has become a valid creative area for investigation, and a space where the dominant scopic regime can be challenged. We highlighted examples from the Kingston 2014 Degree Show in an earlier article (Knifton, 2015, pp. 37-8): Melita Gandham's graphic design work harvesting data from dating app Tinder, and Emily Rose Waite's images re-photographed from Google Streetview. Today's art school requires facilities that permit student-led creativity to cross fluidly between tangible and intangible, material and immaterial practices. What is significant is not only the ability to work both in physical and digital formats, but to learn techniques for harnessing both in unison, crossing

borders as effortlessly as formerly solid disciplinary boundaries are now traversed. This may require a further re-imagining of the art school in the twenty-first century, precisely at the moment it is under severe financial and political pressure. The threat to art history within secondary education and increased scrutiny of foundation courses are symptomatic of this. Those involved with art schools are required to justify the unique use of time, space and resources within its walls as never before. However, viewing it historically as an institution, it has persistently dealt with such dramatic transformations. The multisensory modes of acting and learning prevalent in contemporary art and design education are indicative of such a transformation. These increasingly exert pressures on the physical environment and the need to create flexible spaces for as yet unknown encounters so that students can develop new tactics that address their societal challenges and the art school may continue to adapt, flourish and survive.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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**Robert Knifton /**  
University of Leeds /  
Centre for Critical Studies in Museums,  
Galleries and Heritage /  
r.h.knifton@leeds.ac.uk

Robert Knifton is University Academic Fellow in Critical Studies in Museums, Galleries and Heritage at University of Leeds. At the Visual and Material Culture Research Centre at Kingston University in 2015 he co-curated the HLF-funded project *Histories in the Making* that examined the history and heritage of Kingston School of Art. He was researcher on the AHRC Beyond Text project *Collecting and Curating Popular Music Histories* at the Institute of Popular Music, University of Liverpool. He co-curated *Centre of the Creative Universe: Liverpool and the Avant-Garde* for Tate Liverpool in 2007, as part of an AHRC Collaborative Doctoral Project with Tate and Manchester Metropolitan University.

**Fran Lloyd /**  
Kingston University London /  
Visual and Material Culture Research Centre /  
f.lloyd@kingston.ac.uk

Fran Lloyd is Professor of Art History and Director of the Visual and Material Culture Research Centre in the Faculty of Art, Design & Architecture at Kingston University. Project lead on the HLF-funded Kingston School of Art Research, she is co-author with Robert Knifton of *Kingston School of Art: 140 Years* (2015) and co-curator of accompanying exhibitions. She has published widely on modern and contemporary art in Britain, including *Kurt Schwitters: Responses to place* (2013); *The Picker House and Collection: A late 1960s home for art and design* (co-authored, 2013); *Art beyond exile: Ernst Eisenmayer* (2012) and the co-authored volume *Public sculpture of outer South and West London* (Public Sculpture of Britain Volume 13, 2011).

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