

Straw poll: Painting is fluid but is it porous? Liz Rideal

*... the inventor of painting, according to the poets, was Narcissus...
What is painting but the act of embracing by means of art the surface
of the pool?*¹ Alberti, De Pictura, 1435

Thoughts towards writing this paper address my concerns about a society that appears increasingly to be predicated on issues surrounding accountability. I was conscious too, of wanting to investigate perceptions of what has now become acceptable vocabulary, that of the newspeak of 'art practice' and 'art research'.

The discussion divides into four unequal parts.

I introduce attitudes towards art and making art as expressed in quotations taken from artists' writings.

An historical overview of the discipline of Painting within the Slade School of Fine Art, and where we stand now, as we paint 'on our island' embedded within University College London's Faculty of Arts and Humanities.

I report the results of a discreet research project: a straw poll of colleagues in undergraduate painting, stating their thoughts about the teaching of painting. Finally, conclusions drawn from the jigsaw of information.

[For the conference, this paper will be delivered against a projected backdrop featuring a selection of roughly chronological images relating to the history and people connected to the Slade over the past 150 years.]

The texts written by artists have been selected to reveal the position of art as an un-exact science that requires exacting discipline, dedication and an open mind in order to create art works. Art that can communicate ideas, emotions and instincts in a way that reflects an aesthetic balance of intellect and creativity.

Despite theories addressing how and why we make art, it seems clear that many artists work on some kind of auto-pilot.

Anne Truitt expresses it thus;

...And if I didn't know then what I was making, I don't know what I am mak-

¹ Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting*. Penguin Classics, 1991.P.61

ing now. This realisation had always lurked in the back of my mind but last night it stepped into the foreground. Irrelevant really: I shall simply keep on making work even if I am unlikely to live long enough to "see" it.²

Francis Bacon put it like this;

I know that in my own work the best things just happen – images that I hadn't anticipated. We don't know what the unconscious is, but every so often something wells up in us. It sounds pompous nowadays to talk about the unconscious, so maybe it's better to say 'chance'. I believe in a deeply ordered chaos and in the rules of chance.³

And Julian Trevelyan takes the discussion further;

Painting is not an orderly and logical process, like carpentry, it is a collaboration with the God of Chance which should end always by transcending the artist's expectations. This surely, is one of the meanings of Picasso's ambiguous phrase: 'Je ne cherche pas, je trouve.' ...'After a bit, if I am lucky, the picture will begin to paint itself. It will seem inevitable that this colour should go there, and that the sky should have that surprising bit of orange in it. Afterwards when the picture is finished I discover, of course, that the orange had to be there to pick up the orange on a chimney-pot in the foreground and relate it to an orange spot somewhere else; the canvas, in fact has become a vast colour-box in which each spot of colour finds its predetermined place'.⁴

So how do we teach how to be on the look out for chance? Traditionally there have been rules and regulations, here Alberti sets the scene;

I would have the painter first of all be a good man, well versed in the liberal arts... the student of painting will take from Nature, ..with both eye and mind... and every effort should be made to perceive, understand and express beauty.⁵

He also writes about practical advice on how to look at things and the impor-

² Anne Truitt, *Prospect*, Penguin 1997.pp.193.

³ Francis Bacon quoted in Michael Kimmelman. *Portraits. Talking with artists at The Met, The Modern, The Louvre and Elsewhere*. The Modern Library, Random House, Inc.NY.1999.p.43.

⁴ *Indigo Days: the art and memoirs of Julian Trevelyan*. Macgibbon & Kee, 1957. p.189.

⁵ p.87-92 Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting*.ibid.

tance of practise, introducing a notion of a hierarchy within the artistic disciplines. He regards sculpture as beneath painting.

Richardson in the eighteenth century says this;

*A Painter must not only be a Poet, an Historian, a Mathematician, etc, he must be a Mechanick, his Hand, and Eye, must be as Expert as his Head is Clear, and Lively, and well stored with Science.*⁶

Imagination, originality and skill are concepts that also require a degree of intelligence and education to grapple with intellectually, but these assets occur naturally, and it behoves us to nurture these aptitudes and by encouraging them, allow them to flower.

Ruskin connects between the internal psychology of the artist and their “output”.

*Every good piece of art...involves essentially the evidence of human skill, and the formation of an actually beautiful thing by it... Do not be surprised, ... if I give you at first strange things, and rude to draw. As soon as you try them you will find they are difficult enough, yet with care, possible...and as soon as you understand them you will be on your way to understand yourselves also.*⁷

Ruskin's friend, protégé and later enemy, Whistler, in his *Ten O'Clock lecture* of 1885, expands on the emotive aspects involved in art production and the relationship between artistic disciplines, saying that an artist should *seek and find the beautiful in all conditions and in all times...nature contains the elements, in colour and form, of all pictures, as the keyboard contains the notes of all music. But the artist is born to pick, and choose, and group with science, these elements, that the result may be beautiful - as the musician gathers his notes and forms his chords, until he bring forth from chaos glorious harmony.*⁸

This train of thought was much influenced by Charles Baudelaire's “The Painter of Modern Life” (1863) and it was at this time, when the Impression-

⁶ Jonathan Richardson, *An Essay on the Theory of Painting*, 1725, Scholar Press, 1971. A. Bettersworth in Pater-noster-Row, 1725p.24-5

⁷ Ruskin, *Lectures on Art*, Clarendon Press, Oxford MDCCC.LXXX P.94. Section 99. Colour, section 188 p.189

⁸ 'Mr. Whistler's "Ten O'Clock"' reprinted in Whistler, 1967, p.143

ists were shaking the foundations of what people understood art to be, that Felix Slade, in 1868, endowed Chairs in Fine Art at Oxford, Cambridge and London, with studentships only at London.



Felix Slade, (1790-1868) collector; by Margaret Carpenter, 1851 Black, white and red chalk on brown paper, British Museum, 1874,0314.1AN301233001

The UCL Founding Committee approach to art education was radical, the creation of the art school in 1871 was the direct result of Slade's bequest, and Paris-trained Sir Edward Poynter (1836-1919) was the first professor, establishing the Slade tradition of figure drawing. Felix Slade had envisaged an innovative school where fine art would be studied as part of a liberal arts university. Located within the framework of the university, the Slade was, and is perfectly positioned to enable positive interchanges with other disciplines of study.

The Slade building was completed (the present Studio 10) in 1871, and according to Frank Rutter the teaching was initially much the same as that of the Royal Academy Schools. It was the arrival in 1876, of distinguished French artist and renowned printmaker, Alphonse Legros, as Slade Professor (until 1892) that things changed. Legros only spoke French, was an associate of Courbet and friend of Whistler, and taught portraiture through demonstration. Rutter states that Legros, *may be said to have changed the character of English painting...he was a lineal descendant of Ingres. To a generation absorbed in problems of colour, lighting, and atmosphere, this broad-minded exponent of the French classical school came as a prophet in his insistence on impeccable drawing as the sure foundation of all good painting. (That he) ...brought English art again into closer touch with the main European tradition and contributed largely to the noticeable revival of draftsmanship in England at the close of the nineteenth century.*⁹

Rutter describes what we have come to appreciate as a classic Slade School approach to art, that is, a conflation of the traditional, such as Ingres, with the new; such as the Impressionists via Whistler.

The North Wing, as reproduced in *The Illustrated London News*, was built in 1880, providing space for a major expansion of the School. Fred Brown be-



came Slade Professor (1892-1917) followed by Henry Tonks as Slade Professor (1918-1930). Sculpture was directed by Sir George Frampton, known for his memorial to *Edith Cavell* near Trafalgar Square and *Peter Pan* in Kensington Gardens. Illustrious art history teachers over the years include, Roger Fry, Rudolph Wittkower, Sir Ernst Gombrich. In 1965 a separate art history department was set up in UCL by John White¹⁰ but the subject is still taught 'in house' and more contemporary lecturers include Professor Michael Newman, Professor Norman Bryson, Joy Sleeman and Mark Godfrey.

Randolph Schwabe was Slade Professor (1930-1948)¹¹ when the Slade was evacuated to the Ruskin School, Oxford during World War II, 1939-48. Sir William Coldstream, was Slade Professor (1949-1975) and Chairman of the National Advisory Council on Art Education (1958-71), becoming famous for 'his' Coldstream Report, 1960. This report has recently been described by Dr.Kate Aspinal, as representing, *a shift between two educational pictures: a notion of the scientific, disciplined drawing of Aphonse Legros, Henry Tonks and Frederick Brown, and its eclipse by a notion of design gar-*

¹⁰ <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/art-history/news-events/anniversary-50>

¹¹ Students included Kenneth Armitage, Roger Hilton, Patrick Heron and Mary Fedden.

nered from Paul Klee and László Moholy-Nagy's Bauhaus ideals.¹² The report was concerned with transforming the type of award given for fine art studies which eventually became the B.A.¹³ Under his regime, the Dip A.D. continued to be awarded until 1975.



Coldstream by Harry Diamond, August 1975, Collection National Portrait Gallery.

From the beginning women had been welcome¹⁴, and they were permitted to study and draw from the life model (separated from the men), which was revolutionary at that time, such groundbreaking open mindedness still epitomises the continuing ethos, attitude and political stance of the school.

Drawing from casts that embodied the Grecian ideal human form was standard practice until the 1950s, however the cast room was still in existence and used sporadically by students until the 1970s¹⁵. Drawing from the human form was a paramount requisite from the outset, successive Slade Professors making this their teaching touchstone. Figuration still remains important and furthermore, if a student wants to work from the life model, a ring-fenced legacy exists solely for this purpose, this money bequeathed specifi-

¹² Dr.Kate Aspinal, The Pasmore Report? Reflections on the1960 'Coldstream Report' and its legacy. p.5 Extended version of paper presented at the Art School Educated closing conference Tate Britain, London 11-12 September 2014

¹³ Coldstream employed Lucian Freud, Keith Vaughan, Frank Auerbach, Michael Andrews, Robyn Denny and Anthony Gross.

¹⁴ UCL was the first higher education institution in England to accept students of any race or religious or political belief. It was also possibly the first to accept women on equal terms with men.

¹⁵ Conversation with Ron Bowen 19 July 2015.

cally to maintain the principle and practice of life painting and drawing. However, the dedicated room with a model holding a specific pose during a six-week period (complete with plumb lines and markings on furniture, walls and model) is no longer part of the programme.

Tess Jaray R.A. became the first Slade female tutor, having been a student between 1957-1960.

*...The studios were divided up according to interests. The 'Slade painters'... followers of William Coldstream...worked in the Life Room. You painted what was in front of you... If you were really really serious and committed, there was a small room where the model posed for six weeks. ...There was, in my first year, still space dedicated to the Still Life and those who wanted to work from casts. There were also, downstairs, rooms where the life classes were separated by gender, and even the model's breaks were staggered, in case – God forbid – male and female might meet each other...The most spectacular studio was ...run by Frank Auerbach, in the tradition of Bomberg, where the air was dense with the charcoal they all used in their drawings in an attempt to understand and represent the solidity of space that Bomberg was dedicated to.*¹⁶

Stage painting had been introduced in 1929, under Vladimir Polunin (who had worked with Diaghilev and the Ballet Russes). Peter Snow, Head of Theatre Design (1967-1992), designed the British premiere of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, directed by Peter Hall at the Arts Theatre in 1955. His memorable set featured the blasted tree and upturned dustbins, with actors in pinstriped trousers, dinner jackets and battered bowler hats.

When facilities for photography and film expanded, a Postgraduate Diploma in Film Studies specialising in documentary (1960-78), was introduced under Thorold Dickinson. Reg Butler, was Director of Sculpture Studies in 1966 as the Higher Diploma in Fine Art was introduced and when the Bartlett School of Architecture vacated the Pearson Building, the Slade

¹⁶ Tess Jaray. *The Blue Cupboard*, Royal Academy Publications, p.57, 2014

moved into their studio space in 1975.¹⁷ Malcolm Hughes ran the Post Graduate Studies from 1973, introducing Fine Art Computing and Video.

Sir Lawrence Gowing, Slade Professor (1975-1985) oversaw the upgrading of the Slade Diploma to BA (Hon's), he had studied at the Euston Road School under its founder, William Coldstream. Gowing was a protégé of veteran Bloomsbury art critic Clive Bell, a prolific writer, exhibition curator and all round energetic committee man. Slade Professor Patrick George (1985-1988), also a student and friend of Coldstream, introduced the Slade Summer School and continued with the - by now traditional to the Slade - measuring technique used in the life room. The demise of the dedicated life room (known as the 'F Studio') occurred in the mid 1990s and was compounded by the death of Euan Uglow who had taken up the Euston Road mantle from Professor William Coldstream.

Under Bernard Cohen's Slade Professorship (1988-2000), the school vacated the Pearson building studios and in 1989 Postgraduate Painting moved to the ex-Courtauld Institute Galleries, in Woburn Square. During the 1990s further post graduate qualifications were introduced, the MA, MPhil/PhD, MFA, GDFA.¹⁸ John Aiken as Slade Professor (2000-2012) oversaw the upgrading of workshops, new spaces for art history, media and sculpture studio spaces. Accommodation for all was created on the Gower Street site and a dedicated research project space established at Woburn Square. In 2009 the three-year BFA in Fine Art was introduced.¹⁹ In 2012, Susan Collins became the first female Slade Professor.

This description is taken from the official painting curriculum:

We approach the practice of contemporary art and the history and theories that inform it in an experimental, research-oriented and imaginative way. The taught programme is studio based run by practicing artists equally in-

¹⁷Students from this period include Christopher Le Brun, now President of the R.A., Tony Bevan R.A. Sir Antony Gormley R.A., John Stezaker, Hannah Collins. Staff included Rita Donagh, John Hoyland, Ron Bowen, Stuart Brisley, Yolanda Sonnabend and Euan Uglow.

¹⁸Staff featured Cathy de Monchaux, Ian McKeever, Liz Arnold, and Jock McFadyen.

¹⁹ During the 2000s Bruce Mclean, Phyllida Barlow, Enrico David, Kaye Donachie, Eva Rothschild, Mark Godfrey, Lis Rhodes and John Hilliard were teaching

*involved in research and teaching, and students develop their own work with tutorial and technical assistance according to their individual needs.*²⁰

In 2015, 260 students registered for taught programmes, spread equally between the undergraduate BA and BFA in Fine Art and the Graduate MA and MFA in Fine Art with a dozen MPhil/PhD students. Our location within central London's art world, enables easy access to an unparalleled range of learning resources, we have been placed top of The Guardian league tables for the third year running:

(www.theguardian.com/education/ng-interactive/2015/may/25/university-league-tables-2016#S400) confirming the Slade as one of the country's leading university departments for Fine Art.

Generations of now famous artists trained at the Slade, and listing names is an astonishingly various role call, from Gwen and Augustus John, William, William Orpen, Stanley Spencer, Dora Carrington, Wyndham Lewis, Ben Nicholson, Eileen Gray, Richard Hamilton and Eduardo Paolozzi, Paula Rego, Euan Uglow, Craigie Aitchison and Derek Jarman. Recent Turner Prize winning alumni include, Rachel Whiteread, Antony Gormley, Douglas Gordon and Martin Creed.

This final section offers a variety of points of view garnered from my colleagues in Undergraduate Painting. For the academic year 2014/5, the work of seven staff, **Professor Andrew Stahl, HoD, Kate Bright, Neil Jeffries, Phoebe Unwin, Peter Davies, Liz Rideal and Paul Richards**, was configured as 2@3 days, 2@2 days and 3@1 day per week during term time. My colleagues responded to the same questionnaire, this is a selection of their responses.

Treated as artists from the beginning, students are not set projects but encouraged to initiate their own work. BA students are required to study another subject for a half course unit. In our non-modular school, students must negotiate and find their own voice, we are a 'gigantic argument' about the possibilities for making contemporary art. AS.

²⁰ <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/slade/about>

We don't encourage the feeling in the student that there is a right and a wrong way to make paintings. Hearing the debate and the way in which tutors have to argue their position in a disagreement helps encourage freedom in the studio. Obviously painting takes time, it needs to be made 'in public' and left to dry or to be considered for a while as other paintings are painted, perhaps in relation to past works. Therefore the faithful presence in the studio is that of the painter, manifesting a constant relationship between the maker and the object. And that 'attendance' breeds a great studio culture, students are supportive and are quickly able to develop a working language. KB

Size and physical geography of the building creates a sense of community where you feel you know everyone at least by sight which is beneficial to everyone. PD

With this catholic range of artist teachers, any student can find a mentor and any type of work can be embraced. So the character of the place is one where anything and everything is encouraged and permitted. That we have three areas of study does not preclude students transferring from one to another, nor does it mean that they cannot work in other media whilst staying within a designated area. Thus painters frequently make film and sculpture and vice-versa. LR

Coming from the aggressive, cutthroat Greenbergian atmosphere of St. Martin's was shock. It felt like landing in the belly of a benevolent dinosaur... Jeffrey Camp, Paula Rego, Lawrence Gowing, Patrick George. All of them very aware, but coated in history of art and the place itself... Now the teaching is more responsible in terms of duty to the student experience, but the continuing existence of areas means there is a lingering commitment and focus on painting and the arguments and competition happens around that fulcrum. I suppose the legacy does already feature as a brand, and people are oddly loyal to the place despite dysfunctional aspects. NJ

Changes over the last 10 years?

Much more tightly timetabled. More emphasis on student welfare and learning experience. PU

When I started teaching there were more of the types of tutors that I experienced at college. Some "unreconstructed male" types. Whilst some of them had a certain 'spirit' there was a lot of negativity that came with their atti-

tude. It's much better now. I believe in a plurality of often opposing opinions amongst staff. PD

There used to be a lot more staff, arguing their position, socialising, wandering between UG and PG. Now it is less fun as everyone is multi-tasking and there is less room for imaginative indulgence. NJ

The biggest change in the last 10 years is that the department is now 90 per cent female students. PR

Do you think that painting can be taught? How?

Painting can be taught but I don't think that it should be. How-to guides all serve to narrow the field of investigation and encourage a culture in which the student is passive and receives knowledge. Fine in theory but painting is a physical act and so personal an endeavour because of this. Euan Uglow and the tyranny of the life room is a good example – the studio system in Germany also allows too much control to lie with the Professor, detrimental to the autonomous Slade model. KB

Aspects of painting can be taught but this is not limited to its craft - it is an all encompassing activity of critical thinking/response, self-initiation, communication with peers, understanding of history, process, marrying ideas with forms, invention and experimentation. All those aspects can be explored in an art school, with the aim of imparting skills and creative independence to students - so painting is taught in a sense but, for me, it is not about the instruction of a technique and singular dialogue between a tutor and student. PU

No, you have to work it out for yourself. You can be guided and cajoled but primarily you have to feel your way towards it by trial and error. And you only do that if you have a passionate desire to do so. Students shouldn't be told what to do anyway. PD

Painting can be taught, but it needs to be done in many ways, looking at pictures, connecting it with cultural and societal touchstones, making a mess, reacting to instruction, positively and negatively. NJ

No, but you can teach, awareness, certain skills, concentration and confidence. PR

Is it important to protect such courses? Why?

Yes, in order to maintain a place where blue-sky working can happen and creativity can have its own respected place in the world, without being an-

alysed and accounted for in ways that break it up and undermine it. LR

It is important to protect the course, as it is a safe place to try and extend the self in a generous and nurturing environment that can tolerate mistakes, expression, obsession, and visual beauty. And connect to our mutual histories. NJ.

Yes, painting is a language, which is a unique expression of the imagination. A painting is experienced in one complete moment, in its totality. PR

Does the painter have a place in today's society?

Of course, why not? AS

Yes. KB

I think the artist does, although society perhaps doesn't recognise it. But I'm not sure the artist should desire a place in today's society- obviously that depends what you consider today's society to be? I would think many artists would aspire to be outside society. PD

Many and different places, from the R.A. to the local amateur group. LR

Like the writer, poet, musician, filmmaker, sculptor, the painter has a place in today's world. It just takes a bit longer to read the relevance of paintings. NJ

I don't care. PR

Do you know why you paint?

Of course, painting has a special fascination for me as it is so un-sensational – just mud on a surface yet it can celebrate being alive. AS

Always absorbing - a challenge – to myself in the studio.

It's about looking and expressing how you are assessing what you are looking at that is difficult too. KB

Yes- the combination between the (often slow) development of thought, form and colour in making and its quite instant communication. It is an activity that I continue to find interesting, challenging and rewarding. PU

No. PD

Its an urge, a way of solving visual problems, an enjoyable time concentrating on the way matter exists and can be pushed around to suggest the illusion of something else. LR

When I paint it is the only time I am alive, the rest of the time I am dead. PR

Do you have any thoughts about how your chosen artists might have contributed to society?

Picasso – Pollock – Warhol – changed the course of art forever and therefore society. AS

Painters I admire – Albert Oehlen, edgy honest and open.

Manet – modern ground breaking. KB

Picasso and Hockney and Van Gogh whose creative risk taking captured aspects of how life can feel, and the joy of looking at things, achieved through invented figuration and the direct stuff of paint. This is a contribution to society – like an insightful novel, song or film, an artwork, offers a way for people to reflect upon an individual's experience and thinking, and connect with how those images and ideas may differ from or match with their own experiences and their own time. PU

Laura Owens, Joe Bradley, Michael Krebber.

I think they reflect back, and with great sophistication, a deep and idiosyncratic understanding, with at times wit, passion and sometimes cynicism of the sophistication of our contemporary society through their relationships to what painting might be. PD

Van Dyck, the Caroline Court image overturn. Fantin Latour, consistently traditional, superfluous, exquisite work. Degas, reorganising the image. LR

Do you object to painting being called 'research' or 'practice'?

The cat's already out of the bag - it's too late. Anyway it is only semantics. AS

It can be a problem if a painting is just illustrating an idea, wanting to achieve a neat validation of itself – for me that means the work itself is not strong enough to operate visually in a complex way, which I think it ought to do (even in the case of very conceptual work, those ideas should be 'embedded'). These words can lead to an unhelpful approach (such as a disconnection between the visual, the material and idea). But if someone finds those words useful in making and describing their painting and they are making interesting work then I think that's ok – language and terms change - the main thing I want to focus on is the painting. PU

I very much object to art making being called 'Research', it's not, I hate the way that is prioritised within Fine Art education now, and where that is leading. I also object to the drive towards practice run PhDs, they have zero credibility in the art world (you can find an exception to every rule of course). I think it will be terrible if art schools end up staffed by people with

all these qualifications who don't make credible work. I think 'practice' is a cringe/old fashioned word but I use it all the time, as I haven't found a suitable alternative. PD

Yes, this is a reflection of the climate of accountability. LR

Yes, clichés lose meaning with repetition. PR

What would you call research?

The general use of this term in academic situations now includes (when it suits) making art. When it doesn't suit 'research' does not include making art. AS

In some ways this word is so over used and flexible it has become meaningless. In painting terms it can simply mean finding something out, looking at other work and working through possibilities in the studio. The problem with the word 'research' is that there can be a sense that it is somehow making those activities more 'serious' or 'intellectual', as if there is an embarrassment about the combination of skills needed to make a painting. PU

Someone who is a Biochemist developing a new sun cream, or a school pupil doing some reading for a geography project. I look in to things and read up on things and spend ages trying to find things to help me make my work but I don't consider it research. PD

Each painting involves research, what can be achieved by experimenting within the painting. PR

Library stuff, following threads of an historical or practical nature – how does a pigment react? Things around other artists...LR.

The production of this paper with accompanying images represents my original idea of what is termed research. Paul Huxley expanded my perspective and eloquently reinterpreted what I might normally dismiss as jargon.

It's not wrong to see the practice of art as research. Painting can go under the umbrella of research. Enquiring into the unknown and making it tangible. I think that's what research must be: something that wasn't known about or understood, however small or fragmentary it might be, that adds to the culture of knowledge and experience. That technically, to get a research degree you have to write about it, is understandable, there is a need for a further record. You could cite someone like Van Gogh who wrote to his brother every day about his ideas and the methodology of his painting... that's an

*ideal Phd paper, a perfect piece of research...yet people portray Van Gogh as a mad idiot, but he was obviously not.*²¹

As language is a living medium responding to our changing world, why not embrace that rather than get waylaid by semantics?

One cannot establish a specific style of teaching 'Slade branded' art today, but there emerges a correlation between the attitude towards the creation of that art, and how that attitude is reflected in the relationships between those that teach it. There is no doubt that in art schools, certain generations gel automatically capturing a zeitgeist. That zeitgeist naturally reflects the institution as a whole and this can reverberate over time. The traditionally accepted view of the Slade is of an environment that allows and encourages innovation alongside a relaxed approach towards how and what, is made and whether these outcomes can be considered as 'art'. The complexity exists in trying to tease out what we define as the traditional elements of art teaching apparent both today and in the past. Here it is useful to view historical painted and photographic evidence. That Fred Brown (Slade professor 1918-30) was an original member of the New English Art Club, an organisation set up in 1885, to contest the artistic supremacy of the Royal Academy, illustrates his oppositional stance towards the traditional, Frederick Leighton being President of the Royal Academy at the time. NEAC were pro French and in-



cluded Singer Sargent, a painter now regarded as old school.

In the William Orpen painting 'SELECTING JURY . / N.E.A.C. 1909.'; a whole swathe of Slade alumni are portrayed with their names inscribed above their heads: 'MACCOLL / RICH / BROWN / McEVOY / ORPEN / SICKERT / STEER / JOHN / TONKS / ROTHENSTEIN'.

²¹ Liz Rideal interview with Paul Huxley, recorded 23 June 2015

They had all left the school at the time of this group portrait, but their collective position is a powerful statement of contemporary and youthful attitude encased in a quasi pointillist cartoon style painting. The passage of time both cements and creates reputations, these once bold innovators became pillars of the establishment, for example Rothenstein became Principal of the Royal College of Art and his son, Director of the Tate from 1938-64.

Slade trained artists and their teachers have consequently also been very much part what is considered as bastions of the establishment. Over time attitudes change, and what was once seen as traditional can redefine itself as new wave, and vice versa, as can be seen with the current Royal Academy member line-up. One might say that the Slade is historically *simultaneously* traditional and avant grade. The initial set up was unusual, as was the choice of Legros for its second professor, reflecting the desire for an international perspective and his 'foreign' credentials also proscribing a particular stylistic pathway connected to the latest fashion in painting (Impressionism). Having an artist known for teaching a specific style is no longer the practice at the Slade as the poll confirms, no style is promulgated but the roster of artists teaching naturally attracts certain student applicants. That the school has maintained its physical presence in the main UCL quad also solidifies an aspect of the traditional, in fact we have now 'dug ourselves in', as the sculpture studios were expanded underground beneath the grass covered quad. The perceived traditional penchant for figuration as exemplified by the Camden Town/Euston Road School could skew the way that we interpret specific Slade artistic attitudes. We might consider figuration as restrictive but this subject area was certainly transformed into something entirely new when Mona Hatoum created her endoscopic journey films, *Corps étranger*, (1994) and *Deep Throat* (1996), navigating the interior landscape of her own body. This former Slade student revitalised the subject of the body, literally working from within yet together with the tradition of figuration. There is a nod to Leonardo's dissections and also to the study option that was available to our art students, that of drawing dead bodies alongside UCL medical students in shared anatomy classes.

To conclude, the staff points of view suggest that painting is not porous and in danger of liquefaction but that the teaching of painting, artists views on it and the ethos of this discipline has actually changed little over time. The

straw poll responses confirm opinions to be mutable and often in conflict with each other, in fact, one cannot assume any collective stance from the views, excepting a desire to maintain an autonomous perspective. One could suggest that the older staff members have a nostalgic take on the past but equally, younger members are vociferously against the newly invented moniker 'art research'.

Government funded institutions have no alternative but to toe the party line obeying certain changes, curriculum demands and examination structures as introduced for example through the Coldstream Report. Art schools will morph in response to diktats, as they have done before with the Diploma in Art and Design and the BA and BFA. Dr. Alex Massouras argues that it was the growth in public spending that influenced the academicizing and professionalizing of the art student, that this heralded a cultural shift redefining the art student. *Where before they had been students of technique, the developments (...) helped art students to assume a new identity as artists in their own right.*²² The arguments that are set out in Aspinal's paper²³ also rage on, as do the methods of assessing the 'degree shows' that result from our art teaching and the ways that we encourage the development of the individual autonomous artists.

British art students are now going abroad for their studies, and we welcome more and more foreign students who can pay fees here. In addition to this, there is a demand for private art schools that are making a come back, *Turps Banana*, *The Princes Trust* and *The Art Academy* to name but three. Whatever the political and academic scenario, artists will continue to paint and their work will sink or swim depending on the tides of the art market as reflected in the economics of the state and world politics.

Liz Rideal, 2015

²² Massouras, Alexander (2013) Patronage, professionalism and youth: the emerging artist and London's Art institutions 1949-1988. PhD thesis, Birkbeck, University of London.p.30

²³Dr.Kate Aspinal, *ibid.*

From left:
Hubert Wellington(?)
Unknown woman
Centre: Michael Andrews
Right: Stanley Spencer
Far right: Victor Willing
1953, Slade Archive Photo.

