Abstract

“It wasn’t what I thought I was making”: Managing uncertainty in a speculative space

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This paper explores some of the problems associated with teaching studio practice within an undergraduate Fine Art course. Will the increasing pressure placed on our graduates to seamlessly transition from student to professional artist come at the cost of an in depth understanding of the material processes involved in their practice? Has the increasingly outcome driven nature of contemporary Fine Art education obscured the necessity of learning to manage uncertainty in the studio, favouring the informed understanding of audience and exhibition practice? Do these factors act against the students’ experience of action and reflection, rather than the realization of concept as form?

The use of the term art practice suggests a process where ideas are tested through actions embodied in materials or mediated through the use of technologies. We are constantly being encouraged to look at the completed and exhibited artwork as exemplar. Does this foster a mimetic process of production rather than one of speculative enquiry where the representation too often stands in the place of practice? How do we as educators teach the ‘medium specificity’ necessary to maintain a tactical dialogue with the unfolding event that is practice?

The paper will explore how these factors impact upon our attempts to teach Fine Art practice to students in universities. It offers subtle tactical teaching solutions rather than strategic curriculum change to ensure that the ‘real curriculum has not moved under the radar’. It evidences how the writings of Barbara Bolt, Donald Winnicott and Donald Schon and more recently writings by painters Emma Talbot and Dan Hays have impacted on the development of a critical studio practice initiative on the BA (hons) Fine Art programme at Glyndwr University.

Keywords

Fine art studio practice, material thinking, fine art curriculum, speculative enquiry.

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