

## REPORT ON TEACHING AND PROFESSIONAL FELLOWSHIP 2003-2004

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**MA FINE ART/HATS BA FINE ART CSM**

### Writing in the Context of Fine Art Education

The fellowship explored the new approaches to art writing that are surfacing in the context of Fine Art education. The starting point for the fellowship was to research the effect that the contemporary application of 'performative theory' has had on writing in Fine Art education. One of the most predominant effects of such theory has been to posit writing as a constitutive rather than neutral medium for the production of ideas – with the author's intention as a product of the text – and so one of the key questions posed by the fellowship was what happens to writing as a practice when students of Fine Art rather than students of Art History or students of Art Theory are doing the writing?

In order to explore these issues the fellowship consisted of:

- A Study Day at Tate Britain on '*Writing in the Context of Fine Art*' which was held on 15 November 2003. Participants included Yve Lomax, Jim Mooney, (Royal College of Art), John Seth (Middlesex University), Bernard Walsh (Goldsmiths' College), Joshua Sofaer (Literature Development for London) and Katy Macleod (Plymouth University). The study day looked at the new approaches to art writing that are surfacing in the context of art, and in particular art school education. Amongst the issues we discussed were
  - 1) How does the practice of writing differ from the practice of art - particularly when the making of art is so often a practice which 'risks sense'?
  - 2) If we could imagine writing as art - is the process of learning to write the same as learning to make art?
  - 3) How does writing function *like* a visual practice and can writing produce similar affective relations to the experience of art?
  - 4) Can writing be more politically affective than art and if so whether writing can still be used to describe art or whether writing is always already constitutive of our experiences of art?
- Co-ordination of two one-day Practical Workshops on '*Writing Art*' at Tate Britain which were held on 29 November and 13 December 2003. These workshops were designed to consider a range of approaches to writing in the context of Fine Art and were attended by students from the University of the Arts London (the then London Institute) and students from other art schools, nationally and internationally. The workshops were designed for artists and art students who consider writing to be a major part of their practice. During the workshops we

considered the question of what happens to writing as a practice when artists rather than theorists or art historians write? We looked at a short history of writing *with* art – particularly in relation to theories of art, writing and subjectivity and explored the possibility that writing is constitutive of subjectivity and the experience of art. The workshops consisted of practical and philosophical exercises in writing – concentrating on the idea of writing *with* art as opposed to writing *about* art.

## **Outcomes of the Fellowship in relation to University of the Arts London**

Medium Term Strategy

The Fellowship:

- Tate Britain Study Day demonstrated nationally and internationally that work at Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design/University of the Arts London leads developments within the field. Invited speakers for the Study Day at Tate Britain comprised senior figures in Art School Education and the make up of the group represented a cross section of lecturers from the major art colleges in London. This cross section ensures dissemination of work through art schools in London and elsewhere.
- Built on and extended the very successful teaching and learning strategies for writing in Fine Art which are currently employed in the BA (Hons) & MA Fine Art Courses, CSM.
- Creative and imaginative approaches to teaching and learning for writing in Fine Art have already proved beneficial to a wide range of students at CSM. The fellowship extended these progressive learning opportunities by disseminating good practice at CSM to other colleges in order to enable all students to be more creative and imaginative in their approach to writing - whilst at the same time maintaining academic rigour.
- The findings of the fellowship are currently being assessed for publication which will include contributions from other scholars in the field. The Journal "Performance Research" (produced in relation to Dartington College) has expressed interest in publishing the fellowship work and Middlesex University is currently in the process of submitting a research bid for costs towards the publication.

## **Relationship of Fellowship to my on-going professional work**

I have been teaching writing and theoretical studies in the School of Art, both on the BA and MA Fine Art courses at CSM since 1998 when I obtained my 0.5 post in Fine Art. I had been teaching as a Visiting Tutor in the School since 1993.

When I first started teaching theoretical studies to art students in 1983 writing was something which was almost universally feared and hated by art students - "We are visual people, we shouldn't have to write." Often this resistance stemmed from the perception that in order to write well the student had to conform to what they felt were rigid and unyielding academic conventions and this sort of compliance went against the grain of the average art student's sensibility. However, the changes in theory teaching and their concomitant effect on the teaching of writing have tended to free art students to be much more creative and imaginative in their approach to writing whilst at the same time maintaining a great deal of rigour and perspicacity in their work. Students still tend to

begin with the same degree of apprehension, but once they have been taught about writing as a practice in the context of Fine Art – they quickly progress to quite spectacular success.[1]

The exploration of new approaches to art writing have had a marked effect on my own pedagogical and research practice. I am currently working on a practice PhD which situates writing, itself, as the 'practice' element of the research. I am the only student currently enrolled for PhD study in the University at this present time who is using writing as the 'practice' element of their degree. During this work I have found these new approaches to writing challenging but enormously liberating and my aim therefore is to share this sense of emancipation, and the practical ways to achieve it, with as many students as possible.

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[1] For several years running the external examiner on the BA (Hons) Fine Art course has recommended that several of the student theses should be published as they make original contributions to the debate on the practice of writing and research in practice-based courses. Work from students on the MA Fine Art course has received similar distinction.