

NEW ART examiner

THE INDEPENDENT VOICE
OF THE VISUAL ARTS
FEBRUARY 1993
\$4.75/Can. \$6.95

FRED WILSON'S REVISIONIST RECONSTRUCTION
"SPEAKEASY" BY **RICHARD LOVING**
HI-LOW HUMOR AT THE WEXNER CENTER
"ON VIEW" SURVEYS **SEATTLE**

60° CONE OF VISION

60° CONE OF VISION

LIMITED PERSPECTIVES

studio curricula and the legacy of
Greenbergian formalism

by Howard Risatti

PARALLEL

PARALLEL

SP



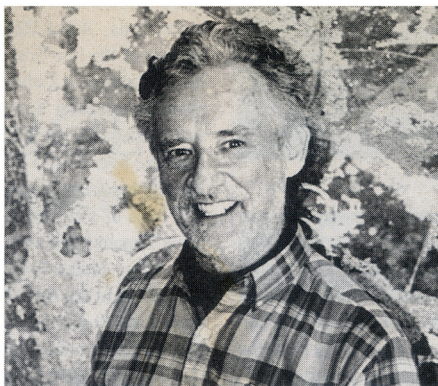
SPEAKEASY

by RICHARD LOVING

Each month the New Art Examiner invites a well-known, or not-so-well-known, art world personality to write a "Speakeasy" essay on a topic of his or her choice. The ideas and opinions expressed are those of the writer alone. Richard Loving is a painter and the co-chair of the Department of Painting and Drawing at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, where he has taught since 1968. He is represented by Roy Boyd Gallery in Chicago, where he will have a one-person exhibition in March.

Now that the hyperinflation of the art world has ended and perspectives such as political and cultural activism and an atmosphere of heightened economic needs are claiming attention, it may be useful to look again at the purpose and potential of the art school and review the pressures and stresses that are currently acting upon it. In the course of this commentary many questions will be asked regarding the present state of the art school and our expectations for it. The questions are raised now after a substantial period of expansion in order to examine new directions and changing functions, and to look at the pressures that are being brought to bear on these institutions. Specific answers are not sought or presented here, but rather a variety of observations, cautions, and questions that can stimulate thought as to the present purpose and future role of the art school.

In the long, recently ended period of art world growth the possibility of employment as a college level teacher, of exhibiting, and of possessing a self-supporting career in some aspect of the art world was a distinct possibility for art school graduates. The long-held stereotype of the artist as economically deprived and critically isolated had nearly come to an end during the market-driven boom atmosphere of the mid-'80s, capping a long expansion of the art and culture industry that started around 1950. Over this period art schools not only increased enrollments, but widened curriculums and facilities; meeting new needs, addressing recent art forms and technologies. Among these are installation and performance art and their offspring and hybrids, as well as the presentation of new art critical theories. Discussion, seminars, and lectures centered on "cutting edge" theories of the arts have become important and popular facets of the curriculum. The art school has now become a constituent element of our culture; a partner in the art world capable of quickly institutionalizing advanced trends.



An art school such as the School of the Art Institute of Chicago has long been expected to develop a constituency of creative skills comprising inventiveness and formal visual intelligence. In addition, it has also been expected to help the young artist confront the theories and histories surrounding the use of art, and not the least, to develop varied skills for the making of it. Until the end of the '80s a graduating student approaching completion of an M.F.A. degree

The widening functions of art, which now include activist and participatory uses, have broad implications for the art school.

could expect to pursue a career as more or less autonomous artist and teacher, find work in a museum or art gallery, work as a studio assistant, or find work in the vast arenas of the fashion and media industries. As changes in economic priorities now pass through the culture system, what are their effects on the school of art? How is this talent that is highly committed and expensively educated to be used? If enrollments shrink, how do institutions that are involved in this training react—in a period of economic stress do they redouble their efforts at recruitment, attempting to attract students with seductive and innovative programs? How do shifts in the mission and purpose of art schools affect the teaching faculties?

The widening functions of art, which now include activist and participatory uses, have broad implications for the art school, and to suit these needs new courses and programs are added to the curriculum, perhaps weakening more traditional classes. The urge to use art for internal growth, spiritual change, and healing has long been attached to the process of making and viewing art, and is now formalized with theory and practice in innovative new studio classes, as well as departments of art therapy

and performance, and new disciplines that wish to challenge old paradigms.

Embedded in the issue of curricular change lies another difficult question: What are the essentials of an education in the visual arts? As art-school disciplines come under the amending power of social and political criticism and the effects of multiculturalism, feminism, and ecology, serious questions arise regarding the defining elements of the core curriculum. In the struggle for class time and control of the curricular process, the value of art history and whose art history is being taught are questioned. Further questions are posed as to the value of drawing, of figure drawing, of design, color theory, and a variety of elements previously thought essential to the art school-program. Are these historically valued components of the study of art still useful? Can they be altered, eliminated, or ignored without diminishing the quality of this education?

Departments of painting remain the largest of studio programs, and by virtue of their size can help support smaller departments. But in other ways painting departments and associated first-year programs assist by providing a basic introduction to the visual arts and by providing entryways to other areas of art-making. At this level, the painting process can offer an interim period for garnering energies and developing a focus. But at the same time that the history and directness of painting infuse other disciplines, the reverse is also true. Painting absorbs and attaches itself to a variety of ideas, processes, and materials. Painting, through its historical resonance and tantalizing directness, retains its firm connection to the curriculum. Its substantial popularity may fluctuate within the school system, but its core utility in the process of making art remains evident.

The expectations and desires of the art student also have a role that is not to be underestimated in the process of curricular change. As a component of this change both the explicit and implicit wishes of the student form important ingredients. These expectations, often influenced by the quirks of fashion, may not be totally rational but remain quite powerful. The tradition of art-school nonconformism and an unfocused urge for change form a significant part of the desire to work in the liberating atmosphere of the modern art school. "Difficult" art, such as that which sparked recent controversies at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago surrounding a painting of late Mayor Harold Washington and an installation featuring an American flag placed on the gallery floor, can be viewed as art that is both encouraged in the "liberating atmosphere" and compelled to push at its limits. These characteristics can also be seen as essential elements of the creative process. How do students, their attitudes, and their art affect the programs of the art school?

Economic questions arise as to the linkages between the curricular offerings of the school

and its income. Most educational institutions, unless exceptionally well-endowed financially, are responsive to fluctuations in enrollment, which have a direct effect on income as well as on the power and popularity of given departments. Non-degree or adult-education programs offering a panoply of arts instruction outside the normal curriculum fill gaps in income and space. In making such shifts in course offerings and satisfying economic priorities, what then acts as a set of guiding and restraining principles? And if the focus on the arts—either in its presently changing configuration or as traditionally conceived—makes a college degree in the arts less attractive or less valuable, what shifts or displacements

are to be made in the kind of education offered? In this changing environment the Postmodernist questioning of object-making is having its effect on studio programs. Multiculturalism, feminist theory, and eco-art are now producing noticeable shifts. If art is less than "fine," or less than "aesthetic," or more than any of these, how do the mutations of cultural fashion effect what is being taught?

As art schools face variations of the same troubling issues encountered by the art world, the value and purpose of an art education comes under a determined scrutiny. The intensified analysis and critique of culture found within the school of art propels the discussion still further. A large entity such as the School of the Art

Institute of Chicago is a blend of corporate structure and an environment for cultural liberation and expression in a complex relationship with a major museum. It offers a "cafeteria style" education supplemented by a broad social support system for students. It has begun to function as a provider of a special kind of education increasingly involved with art's meaning and use. This is overseen by a bureaucracy with skillful and aggressive recruitment practices. Schools such as this have a determined will to survive and adapt to new conditions, but close attention will need to be paid by faculties, student artists, and others as new and difficult adaptations are proposed and enter the system of visual education. ■

BA BFA MFA

sculpture plastic media
painting/drawing photography
experimental genres



BA MA PHD

art history
public art studies decorative arts
museum studies

University of Southern California

School of Fine Arts Watt Hall 104 Los Angeles CA 90089-0292 (213) 740-2787

**TIM DOUD
BRENT GEARAN
FRANK TRANKINA**

January 22-February 23, 1993

CONTEMPORARY ART WORKSHOP

542 West Grant Place, Chicago, Illinois 60614, (312)472-4004

Gallery Hours: Mon.-Fri. 12:30-5:30, Sat. 12:00-5:00

HAROLD HAYDON

Paintings and Drawings

Feb. 6 – March 20, 1993

Opening Reception Saturday, February 6, 12-4 PM

Ukrainian Institute of Modern Art
2320 West Chicago Avenue Chicago IL 60622
Hours: Tues. – Sun. 12-4 PM

LINDA KRAMER

Installation
"A Delicate Balance"

FEBRUARY 28 - MARCH 29, 1993

Opening Reception: Sunday February 28, 3 - 5 p.m.

LOYOLA UNIVERSITY FINE ARTS GALLERY
EDWARD CROWN CENTER FOR THE HUMANITIES
LOYOLA AVENUE AT THE LAKE
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS
312.508.2820

MONOPRINTS

Exhibition Feb. 10-28

Workshop: Feb. 15-21

Master Printer: *Debra Brunken*

Invited Participants

Lynn Cox, Kathleen Mendus Diugos, Amara Geffen
Robert Godfrey, Josh Green, Denise Suska Green
Adrienne Heinrich, Drea Howenstein, Kathy Koop
Eva Kwong, Kirk Mangus, Donna Nicholas, Michael Odom
Belinda Raczka, Diane Samuels, Paul Soldner
Barbara Ann Wukich

The workshop will be conducted in the Art Gallery and open to the public. This project is supported by Slippery Rock University and Westminster College.

Westminster College Art Gallery

Box 4 Westminster College New Wilmington PA 16172 412-946-7266