# MODERN PAINTERS

The International Contemporary Art Magazine
September 2007 www.artinfo.com

**CLASS DISMISSED**
John Baldessari and Michael Craig-Martin on what's gone wrong with art education

What artists are doing about it

DIY art schools

# RICHARD PRINCE
## Smiling on the Inside

USA $9.95 CAN $12.50 UK £5.99

# School Is Out

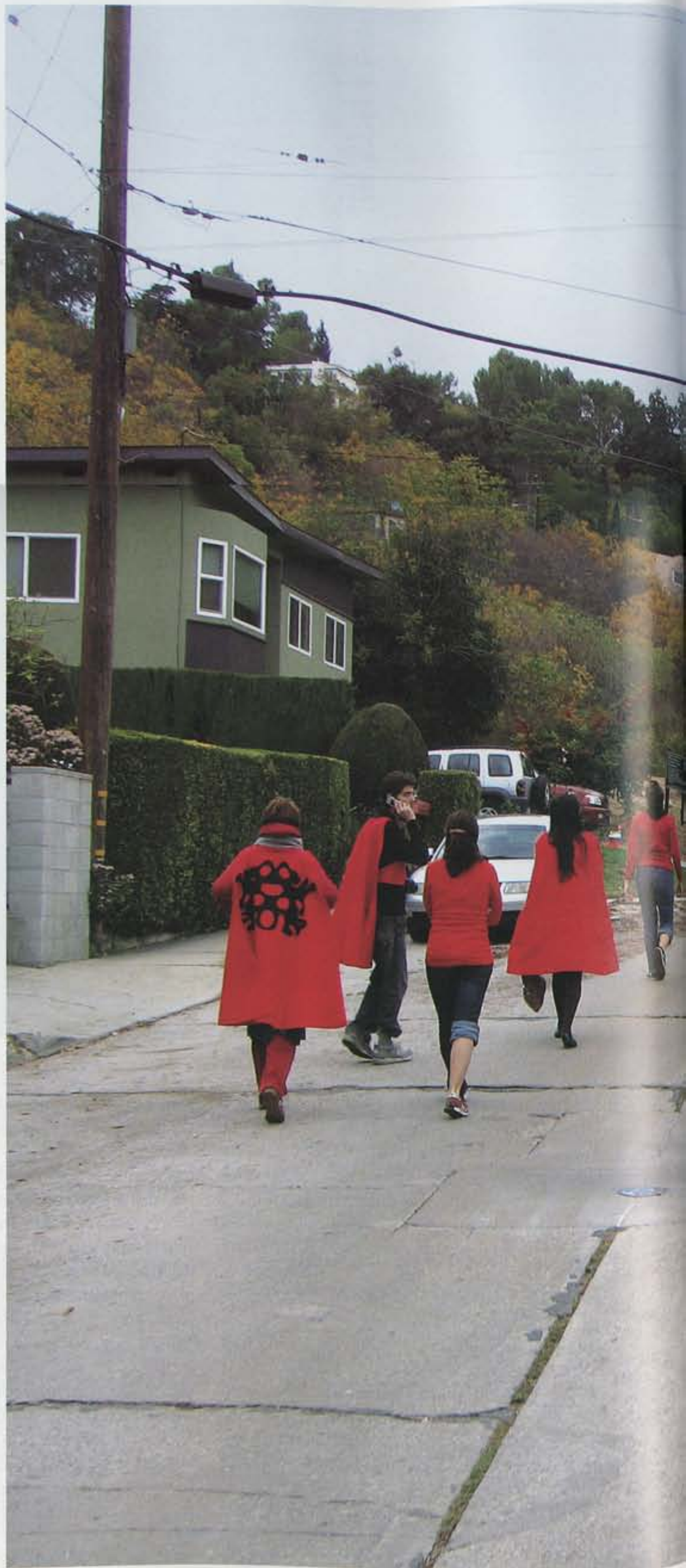
## RETHINKING ART EDUCATION TODAY

**Introduction by STEVEN HENRY MADOFF**

In recent years the role of the art school has moved to a position of prominence, pushed there by the encroachments of an aggressive marketplace and the professionalization of every aspect of the artworld, from the dominance of gallery and museum brands, to the cultural tourism of art fairs and biennials, to today's art itself now so often created precisely for the scale, spectacle, and capitalization of these events.

Under such pressures, art education has become the subject of widening debate, raising a range of issues and questions. To whom should the academy be responsible? Presumably to its students and faculty. But what about to its local community, as a social stakeholder? To the global community, on which it makes its mark as a moral authority or as a talent factory? Should the art school be a research center that enlightens conceptual practices while de-emphasizing skills, or a course of study in entrepreneurship, presentation, strategic thinking, and other matters to prepare young artists for the ruthlessness of the market? Or is art school in the 21st century simply the physical surrogate of MySpace and YouTube—the spawning ground as social network?

Of course there are numerous ways to answer these questions and many others—and a range of conferences and publications attests to this. As an outgrowth of my involvement with a series of international symposia sponsored by the Anaphiel Foundation in Miami, I recently brought together two of the most distinguished artists and art teachers alive today, John Baldessari and Michael Craig-Martin. Their conversation captures some essential lessons from their experiences over 30 years at CalArts and UCLA, and Goldsmiths College in London, respectively. And in their voices we hear the seriousness, wisdom of hindsight, and risible memories of two old pros whose improvisations and practicality still shed light on the issues facing art schools now. Lane Relyea lays out many of these with vehement clarity (and more than a few moments of *j'accuse*), describing exactly what is at stake in this continuing conversation, and what alternatives are in play to rehabilitate the noble, broken, and endlessly malleable legacy of art education. One of the more interesting questions concerns the very nature of the academy: Do we even need this centuries-old institution anymore? Claire Bishop suggests that the very concept of the art school is being eroded by new initiatives that artists and collectives are establishing—initiatives as fluid, itinerant, and potentially expansive as the artworld itself.



### Conversation between JOHN BALDESSARI and MICHAEL CRAIG-MARTIN

**MICHAEL CRAIG-MARTIN:** It seems to me the most important thing about art school is the creation of a sympathetic ambience, in which people feel comfortable and free to act according to their own instincts. You have to make a place where people feel at ease to be who they are, and bring what they have naturally in themselves to bear.

I think that's also true for the people teaching there, and the more students are put into a situation where they're at ease, the more successful the experience can be. You can't make it successful, but you can create circumstances where these things can happen.

**JOHN BALDESSARI:** I totally agree. You have to set up a situation. You can't teach art; that's my premise. When CalArts started—I don't know how it was at Goldsmiths—we just eliminated grades. We had pass/fail. You can't use grades as a punishment, to force students to attend class or do this or that. They are there of their own free will. We also had no curriculum. In other words, you chose from a menu and made up your own dishes.

One thing I worked very hard on at CalArts was to try to provide a sort of aesthetic ambience that wasn't already present in Los Angeles. So I purposely avoided inviting any LA artists to join us. The faculty were all pretty much from New York. And I started an active visitors program of mostly European artists, who would do shows or work with the students or whatever.

But basically you're acting like Cupid, trying to make relationships between the artists. I tried to set things up where something might happen—like

**SUNDOWN SCHOOLHOUSE MORNING YOGA CLASS IN THE GEODESIC DOME, LOS ANGELES, FALL 2006**
PHOTO: MARK RODRIGUEZ
COURTESY SUNDOWN SCHOOLHOUSE, LOS ANGELES

# All Systems Blow

## THE RISE OF DIY ART SCHOOLS

By LANE RELYEA

Bauhaus, Black Mountain, Beuys—these vaunted precedents punctuate the recent parade of magazine articles, books, symposia, and exhibitions dedicated to art education. Personally, I remember 1988 as the moment when schools first appeared as a conspicuous blip on the artworld's radar. That was the year students from Art Center and CalArts inaugurated the exhibition space Bliss in a rented house in Pasadena, while in London Damien Hirst and 15 of his Goldsmiths cohorts mounted the show "Freeze" in a dockland warehouse. Also that year, a decade before he published *Art Subjects: Making Artists in the American University*, Howard Singerman puzzled in an interview over why "educational institutions . . . are left out of the picture of the national art scene," even though "art around the United States is becoming more and more like art made by university graduates."

All these DIY schools are recently established, small, and take their organizational model not from staid civic institutions so much as from hectic student lifestyles: they're itinerant, makeshift, and often temporarily housed in friends' lofts and neighborhood haunts.

There are two outcomes typically expected from an art education, and education in general: on the one hand, the development of critical thinking, including the capacity for self-criticism; and on the other hand, a how-to apprenticeship that conveys the practical ins and outs of a given profession. Perhaps the modern art school has always been caught in the crossfire of trying to accomplish these two very different tasks, simultaneously demanding disenchantment and hoping for renewal.

Recently a third option has come to the fore. It approaches the intimate relationship between school and the professional artworld not as an occasion for critique (although it does adopt a righteous tone) nor as a commercial opportunity to exploit (although its manner remains pragmatic). It instead sees education as a means of reform rather than reproduction, a pocket of resistance sustained from within the status quo through idealistic conversation and warm group vibes. The basic idea involves the earnest, progressive collaboration of seminar-table back-and-forth, although it can take many forms. They range from studious (New York–based 16Beaver and Munich's ghostAkademie) to enterprising (Edinburgh's Protoacademy and Art2102 in LA) to punky (Hamburg's Akademie Isotrop, cofounded in 1996 by Situationist scholar Roberto Ohrt) to neohippie (Sundown Schoolhouse, a Southern California geodesic dome where owner Fritz Haeg hosts study of "gently radical design, literary, performing and visual arts") to casually hip (the Mountain School, whose students chat it up in the back of Jorge Pardo's Mountain Bar in LA's Chinatown). All these outfits are recently established (within the past 10 years) and small (averaging roughly 20 participants) and take their organizational model not from staid civic institutions so much as hectic student lifestyles: they're itinerant, makeshift, and often temporarily housed in friends' lofts and neighborhood haunts—or, increasingly, set up as exhibitions or residencies by established galleries, museums, or larger, "real" art schools. Indeed, even more traditional academies and university art departments are lately striking a pose of casual idealism, underplaying the commercial firepower of their celebrity faculty or their rigorous critiques in favor of how well they manage to formalize informality and package openness, invention, and effervescent sharing. "Artists and students from other schools were invited to stay in our studios," enthuses Daniel Birnbaum, since 2000 the rector of Frankfurt's Städelschule Art Academy. "We all met, cooked, ate, and talked for a week."

No longer the "hidden center of the art community," as Singerman claimed 20 years ago, schools are now the fully acknowledged hub. It's commonplace for major movers and shakers to leave top curatorial positions for art school posts or vice versa (e.g., Birnbaum, Okwui Enwezor, Charles Esche, Ute Meta Bauer, Lawrence Rinder, to name only a few), while more and more schools sprout their very own world-class kunsthallen (Frankfurt Städelschule's Portikus, UCLA's Hammer Museum, CalArts's REDCAT, CCA's Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts). When it comes to the particulars of art schools, the tendency toward opening up the curriculum and letting discussion and peer interaction predominate has been a notable feature of graduate study for some time as well. It's a point made repeatedly in all the recent studies and symposia on art education. Métier, medium, art history have all but disappeared; the curriculum now simply entails the transmitting to individual student-clients nothing less than a grasp of the whole artworld, a map or database of the entire multinational field of professional art-related practices and their various connections and affiliations. It's the kind of map that gets redrawn monthly in the lists of names and locations that have overtaken column space in the art press, and figures in the visiting-artist rosters by which most schools—even the new alternative ones—advertise themselves. "The mechanisms of contemporary art, rather than the results, could be a field of academic knowledge," art historian James Elkins has declared. "Instead of studying works and canons, we would study processes and strategies."

It's not that art schools today view object making or classroom discussions as completely irrelevant. Rather (to paraphrase Robert Morris's response when asked if Minimalism rendered the art object unimportant), such things are

now considered only less *self*-important. What encourages this imploding of art education is not quite the artist's irrepressible urge to subvert and innovate. It's more the requirement of a new communication paradigm, today's pervasive mandate to vigilantly research, discuss, categorize, editorialize, and otherwise refine and enrich raw information to yield high-grade knowledge products. Art schools have been undergoing much the same transformations as museums, where static object display has been replaced by the proliferation of information platforms. And schools are predisposed to this development: they already have what the Protoacademy's Esche calls the "infrastructure"—the diversity of media equipment and wiring needed to easily disseminate and gain access to content, and rearrangeable, multiuse spaces, as well as a general adeptness at linking art to a switchboard of audience feedback, professional tips, and scholarly exchange. Or, as Esche puts it, schools have "the means to organize talks, discussions, exhibitions, and other activities on a more or less equal level."

The historical roots of the new DIY schools, while spreading in many directions, are by and large entwined with the explosive growth of the contemporary artworld since the 1960s, when private art schools as well as studio and contemporary-art-history degrees in universities multiplied throughout the West. Foundation and government funding at the local, regional, and national levels increased accordingly, which meant more professionally savvy, ambitious young artists cropped up in diverse locales, all requiring support in some form—residencies, commissions, stipends, teaching jobs, whatever. As with many artist-run exhibition spaces in the '80s and '90s, many of the recent alternative schools have originated out of groups of friends who first met in graduate school. At the same time, the artworld, like so many industries transformed by globalized communication and exchange, has become increasingly dispersed and decentralized while achieving an ever-higher degree of functional and organizational integration and coherence. Each of the alternative schools emphasizes this—how well it responds to today's urgent need to stay in touch, gather and distribute information, network and communicate. "We cannot be in all places at all times," declare the organizers of 16Beaver. "In order to help create a more interesting future, we need to be connected."

Not long ago curators and poststudio artists reached agreement that exhibition was the ultimate source of art's production, performance, and effects. Now everyone realizes that art is actually about transmission to audiences and constituencies; thus the turn to—or anxiety to appear as—educators. "The art academy seems to me to be an extraordinary institution with potentially the greatest relevance to current art practice of any in the artworld—whether museum, kunsthalle, commercial gallery, or studio workshop," proclaims Esche, who in 1998, while on a research fellowship at the Edinburgh College of Art (ECA), initiated the Protoacademy with a collection of his postgraduate students there. As a curator in the mid-1990s in Glasgow, known for his innovative programming at Tramway and for cofounding the Modern Institute, and since 2000 as a museum director, at the Rooseum Center for Contemporary Art in Malmö, Sweden, and then at the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven, the Netherlands, the peripatetic Esche has long been interested in models of exhibition that recall less the elite art museum than the populism of community art centers. At both Malmö and the 2002 Gwangju Biennale in South Korea, which he cocurated with Hou Hanru, Esche included the Protoacademy and other alternative art schools in the exhibition programming. "The gallery or museum as simple showroom is no longer an adequate response to the work of current artists," Esche says. "All are, in different ways, shifting toward creative, productive, and discursive spaces for the 'community.'"

Some of the new DIY educational outfits are based in or closely aligned with existing institutions, like the Protoacademy's relationship with ECA, while others feed more loosely off of the local establishment. For example, Richard Jackson and Paul McCarthy were ex-teachers of UCLA grad and Mountain School cofounder Eric Wesley, and consequently agreed to lecture there for free. Some of these schools are set up as small businesses, others as nonprofits to lure grants, and a few forgo any legal identity whatsoever. In addition to receiving volunteered labor and equipment, many support themselves with donations as well as money from subletting space to artists, as does 16Beaver. A few charge tuition, like Sundown Schoolhouse ($2,400 for twelve 12-hour sessions, discounted in exchange for help around the dome). Akademie Isotrop was supposedly started by Ohrt to get more Monday-night business into the Hamburg club where he worked as a bartender. Along with hosting residencies, some schools mount exhibitions. But rather than play up these offerings, the new schools present themselves first and foremost as conversations, collaborations, and group endeavors—a bunch of people gathered around a seminar table, an all-night bar, or a hot meal. (This contrasts sharply with the bigger, more established schools, or at least with their typical portrayal. Looking back at the articles on the graduate art programs at UCLA and Art Center from the late '90s in *Spin* and *Artforum*, one sees that it was individual students' studios that were showcased.)

By foregrounding ephemeral face-to-face interactions, these newer groups could be said to extend recent artistic engagements with the quotidian, with the contingencies and practicalities of everyday life. "An art school is not concerned solely with the process of learning, but can be and often is a highly active site of cultural production," writes Anton Vidokle, a co-organizer with Mai Abu ElDahab and Florian Waldvogel of last autumn's aborted Manifesta 6. Vidokle transferred his ideas for that project into unitednationsplaza, an "exhibition as school" he opened in Berlin later that fall. "Producing tangible results that move beyond commentary requires research, groundwork and a continuous process of involvement and production." This movement affirms a more fundamental shift overall in art-school curricula—whether traditional or alternative—away from the humanities and toward the more "practical" regions of the campus, like architecture, design, new media, engineering, even business. The Mountain School, for example, offers classes on professional strategies by lawyers as well as by ex–Gagosian Gallery director Robert Shapazian (this despite the school's likening itself to 18th- and 19th-century revolutionary societies). Many of the DIY art schools, no matter how political their interests, prioritize the various organizational skills required to stage discussions over the discussions themselves. (The topic of an Art2102 event this summer—"How can we share resources, create networks, and develop opportunities for the exchange of ideas and projects internationally?"—is typical.)

Yet despite all this, these new groups, precisely because they consider themselves schools, also represent something of a retreat. Esche, for one, invokes school as a relatively autonomous preserve, a "halfway house" and "shelter for artists." Likewise, Manifesta 6 cocurator ElDahab envisioned the thwarted biennial to be a three-month-long school where "cultural production [would] maintain and defend its autonomy as a space where the freedom to experiment, to negotiate ideological positions and to fail are not only accepted, but defining." Indeed this is another distinguishing feature of these alternative schools, the over-the-top utopian rhetoric—what in the '60s would have been called "premature triumphalism." A heady brew results from the combined sense of autonomy and real-world agency; motivating many of these groups is a vision of collaboratively hammering out bridges between theory and practice, analysis and organization, under conditions that are relatively self-determined, all without state accreditation or the pat on the head of an official diploma. Problematically, though, such an uplifting goal often takes for granted assumptions about art's unique and superior capacity to positively influence society, and in that respect doesn't threaten but in fact reaffirms the ideology of traditional art institutions. Autonomy can end up being a euphemism for professional conferencing, an exchange between fellow insiders transacted using the currency of "concern," "politics," "local community," and other such buzzwords. These groups tend to overestimate the virtuousness of education per se, thus ignoring the crucial role that it plays in reproducing unequal social relations.

For example, many have correctly traced pedagogical ideas like "open" curricula to the '60s and '70s, but only to the idealistic student movements, not to the rise of a more flexible, immaterial economy and its demand for a workforce more adept at communication and adjusting to rapid turnover than at prescribed, supervised tasks. Those decades were the heyday of widespread educational reforms that shifted priorities away from product toward process, and that sought to replace an authoritarian pedagogical approach of dictating content through fragmented exercises with a more holistic view of teaching as facilitating and encouraging the student's self-expression and negotiation of open-ended and collaborative situations. As many left-leaning social scientists have argued, such classroom adaptations have run the risk of rewarding higher-income kids more comfortable with working outside or between categories—those whose parents have already predisposed them to seek out not delimited skills so much as a more general ability to master process, especially if it helps them become "self-made individuals." Students of such an education are more likely to possess the entrepreneurial moxie to match the needs of a job market in which salaried or unionized labor has been increasingly converted into temporary, subcontracted work. As a recent *New York Times* article titled "What a College Education Buys" reports, "In recent decades the biggest rewards have gone to those whose intelligence is deployable in new directions on short notice, not to those who are locked into a single marketable skill . . . it's best not to specialize too much." Indeed policy advisers and business analysts (like Daniel Pink, author of the famous "The MFA Is the New MBA" article and the book *Free Agent Nation*) have pointed to art schools as models for training inventive and mobile professionals, people adept at working across categories and under conditions of uncertainty and risk.

Among the advocates of the new schools, the more politically minded will often acknowledge the problems of embracing flexibility and mobility as challenges to the system when these are the very attributes the system itself so loudly promotes. Esche, for one, admits that while the ultimate goal is resisting current capitalist imperatives in favor of a world "imagined otherwise," his re-

Métier, medium, art history have all but disappeared; the curriculum now simply entails the transmitting to individual student-clients nothing less than a grasp of the whole artworld, a map or database of the entire multinational field of professional art-related practices and their various connections and affiliations.

formist plans mean that on a certain level the art school will come to "imitate the fluidity of capitalism." Thus the trend he foresees is "away from manual labor toward computer literacy, networking, and organizational skills." The operative word here is "networking." As with artworks today, artists themselves are increasingly valued for the number of functions and connections they enable, for the diversity and richness of the information or resources they obtain and cross-reference. As much as anything, this helps explain the current attraction that art schools hold as a model for today's artists and curators, since they systematically churn out such networks, yearly admitting and graduating collections of young creative types who don't share a common cause or ideology or even cultural obsession, but are always only loosely affiliated within a dispersed yet coherently defined professional field. It takes nothing away from the earnestness and intensity of student interactions to point out that the more highly regarded schools—whether traditional or alternative—are also the ones with the most recognizable names among their faculty, alumni, and visiting artists. Given today's hypermobile business climate, where survival depends on access to resources and opportunities, what all students seek (and this goes for higher education in general) is to leave their college with a choice selection of contacts, a dispersed social circuitry from which to gain job tips, project ideas, important social introductions, data that's as far-flung as possible while remaining professionally relevant. A bunch of interesting and well-connected people—this is what the new art schools share with that other current artworld phenomenon, the artist collective, and also why in the end Akademie Isotrop and Bernadette Corporation, for all their Situationist-inspired political posturing, are not all that different from, say, the London ICA's Cultural Entrepreneurs' Club.

With the Bologna Process well under way, by which graduate education in Europe will become more standardized along the lines of the Anglo-American model, and with skyrocketing tuition and textbook costs, not to mention the many ways in which a corrupt private banking and lending industry in the US have taken advantage of dwindling public subsidies to heap mountains more debt onto an expanding student population—given all this, the emergence of art schools that charge only a nominal fee or nothing can't help but be welcomed. By also downplaying individual studios and not awarding official credentials, perhaps these schools will foster some type of stronger bond or greater solidarity among their students, something more than just peer validation of one another's artistic and professional identity. But the results so far aren't promising. Mostly the new schools seem to extend the current system by which artists make contacts, enter support networks, join shows, generate publicity, and otherwise achieve mobility and success as full-fledged artworld operators. Indeed, the alternative schools are often used by their alumni as a selling point on their applications to the bigger, more traditional schools; Ohrt, for instance, has acknowledged that his Akademie Isotrop eventually became a "feeder program ... practically guarantee[ing] acceptance to the state-run art school." The eight-foot-square exhibition space used by Isotrop students, known as Nomadenoase (Oasis of the Nomads), was recently re-created as an autonomous object and now tours to various kunsthallen around Europe and the States. Likewise 16Beaver, Protoacademy, ghostAkademie, and other DIY schools are increasingly being treated like artworks themselves and curated into larger and more glamorous museum shows. And why not? For institutions charged with promoting society's reigning values, there's plenty here to like: earnest studentlike idolatry of art, preservation of an autonomous sphere of creativity, post-welfare state reliance on volunteerism, staged displays of seemingly spontaneous everyday democracy. By embracing the figure of the artist as a well-informed consultant who conducts nonhierarchical exchange with other sovereign and disembedded actors in an open marketplace of ideas, art schools both traditional and alternative—as well as the museums that increasingly emulate them—provide neoliberal policy with not only a fixed institutional form, but also a fully ideological one.

---

*For more information, turn to Index, p. 110.*