Fine Art as a Life Practice: Lessons from PGR teaching under COVID-19

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Abstract

During the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic, Higher Education fine art arts educators were compelled to re-think their studio teaching methods. As a PGR instructor new to teaching, I took this as an opportunity to enter into a curious and creative inquiry with my first-year students into the pandemic situation itself, through a project titled: 'Engaging, Encountering, and Distancing: Masks, Masking, Masquerading'. This article draws on my reflexive research conducted throughout my first term teaching in the School of Fine Art, Art History and Cultural and Media Studies, at the University of Leeds. My students were supported to think of themselves as context-specific artist researchers, gaining experience of social and visual research, to engage in haptic experiments with materials, to investigate their immediate habitat, and to make new work mediated by the online environment. The project encouraged students to attend to the affective, making conscious modes of relating and having presence online, searching for new ways to create a sense of being with and relating to each other. As a consequence of teaching online, I came to question what is specific about the pedagogical premise and methods of fine art teaching, with an emphasis on 'the studio' as a making and relational space, and the importance placed on embodiment in the student/lecturer relationship and learning experience of 1-2-1 tutor/student tutorials, and studio group crits. Whilst fine art lecturers are relieved to be back in the physical studio, teaching under COVID-19 has enabled us to appreciate the specificities of a fine art pedagogy and its social importance, and to value a fine art education as a life practice.

Introduction

Teams, Zoom, Skype, Blackboard Collaborate - back in August 2020, I was an innocent. By September, these online conference platforms were our studio. I had entered the summer feeling confident about the next academic year. I had six first-year fine art workshops planned for ten students, that would be delivered three times with three different groups. Working in one of the school's art studios, my students and I would explore the themes of togetherness and collaboration. Then, the announcement came. First from the Government, swiftly followed by the University. Within a week I was working to 'the rule of six' with restricted face-to-face teaching.

In this article I reflect on my experience teaching as a PGR tutor on the BA Hons First Year Fine art programme adapting to meet COVID-19 restrictions by establishing teaching as an online co-learning research project. I introduce the context of studio-based teaching as it has come to be a core, though informal pedagogy of fine art education. Under ever shifting pandemic restrictions, all face-to-face art teaching ceased within four weeks of the 2020 academic year. I go on to describe how I made a shift to online teaching, outlining my design for the three-week *Engagement: Making Art Now* programme. Full of fear for the unknown of online teaching and knowing that my students were also anxious (though simultaneously more digitally aware than myself), I applied for fast track University ethics clearance and designed this foundational first year programme as a research project for us all. Drawing on an autoethnographic/Constructivist Grounded Theory method (CGT) framework, I invited students to engage in a cycle of reflexive creative activities with me, some of which I describe below, to address the unique context of making art and being an emerging artist under COVID-19 measures. Throughout each three-week teaching cycle, I observed my feelings navigating the pandemic and my fearful state teaching online, authoring a reflective journal after each session. I also invited the students to keep a weekly reflective log, which at the end of our cycle together they submitted to me as non-assessed work.

Towards the end of the nine-week programme, I invited all of the students to join me in a focus group. The questions were derived from my field note observations taken during each of our workshops, as well as my own and the students' weekly reflective logs. I transcribed the audio recording of our three-hour session and subjected this to a CGT method of interactive coding in which patterns of themes are iteratively identified (see details below).

Writing here, I incorporate my own and my students' experiences and perspectives on the day-to-day situation during the pandemic. I highlight the importance of embodiment and materiality to the teaching of fine art, and suggest that focusing on attunement and relationality (between tutors, students, and artworks) could aid students as they return to the post-pandemic studio. Being physically together offers advantages like peer learning, developing critical thinking, intersubjective social interaction, and knowledge acquisition through hands-on creation. Furthermore, I suggest that the pandemic has enabled tutors to recognise and now advocate for the unique strengths and properties of a fine art education that equips students to enter the post-university world. Students graduate with enhanced capabilities including adeptly handling uncertainty, demonstrating innovation and resourcefulness, applying critical thinking, and sensitively adapting to their surroundings, which prepares them to navigate the contemporary world.

Where is the Pedagogy in Fine Art Education?

The UK has a variety of art and design curricula. Despite there being a national representative body, the Council for Higher Education in Art and Design (CHEAD), the differences in teaching context, including *who* is teaching, *what* is being taught, *how* teaching is delivered, and *where* teaching takes place is largely undetermined. This lack of conformity has underpinned post-war fine art education

and is widely regarded as both the privilege of receiving a fine art education and of providing it. Variations in pedagogical method as well as art medium specificity (i.e., painting, sculpture, photography, film, performance, etc.) is what attracts students. This disposition has been fiercely defended by fine art educators who commonly work against attempts to rationalise HE art education (Harrison, 2014).

Up until the 1960s, art colleges were principally staffed by professional male artists, teaching part-time to support their own artistic practice (Green, 1989). It is not uncommon for the orientation, conceptual focus, taught mediums, material accessibility, and values of an art school to be influenced by the personal interests of Heads of Schools and staff. Schools of Fine art and individual departments within schools were commonly led by charismatic male figures who determined the ethos of the college overall, its course intake and its structure (Robinson, 2021).

The *Coldstream Report* of 1960 and 1970 brought about the most significant changes to date in Higher Education art and design. It represented a shift between an educational system based on disciplined studies of techniques and crafts, often determined by an individual artist's professional interests, to one based on conceptual thinking, historical and contextual awareness, analytical skills and design, and included a clearer definition of core medium for Art and Design disciplines (Kill, 2005). Initially introduced to provide degree equivalence, the report intended to elevate and lend academic credibility to a curriculum rooted in studio practice by introducing the compulsory study of History of Art and Design and Complementary Studies, now better known as Critical and Contextual Studies (CCS) (Smith, 2015).

For art educationalist, Rebekka Kill, the report's legacy was "simultaneously valuable and catastrophic" for art education in that it both "validated and assimilated avant-garde practices in art colleges" – namely, the idea of the studio and studio practices as distinct from wider cultural context and practices (Kill, 2005: 1). For Kill, the report instituted a bias in favour of particular understandings of what constitutes academic discipline, which has come to determine the theory-led notion of critical thinking and writing.

The value of CCS in the teaching of creative subjects is today debated in all fields of art and design education. Over the last twenty years, the idea of art as lacking the academic rigour of other humanities subjects (that fuelled the *Coldstream Report* in the first place) has come under significant fire. In summary, the modes that were once considered the preserve and contribution of CCS, namely research rigour, with an emphasis on cultural and historical context are, it is argued, at the core of practicing art and design in any case. It is not that practicing art is *not* academically rigorous, so much as the values of what constitutes this 'rigour' are biased towards written based 'academic' disciplines. There is now a renewed enthusiasm in the broader field of art and design education and what is termed 'studio-based teaching', to promote art and design practices as forms of research in their own right, with or without written-based exegesis as part of the reflexive practice (Marshall, 2010).

However, despite these pedagogical assertions, what is nevertheless striking is the absence in Higher Education of an articulation of fine art pedagogy. Whilst the male 'master' tutor may now be a thing of the past, there is still remarkably little articulation of art teaching *as* pedagogical, in contrast to it being determined by unspoken ideas of studio-based teaching led by artist tutors.

What constitutes the studio in this hidden form of pedagogy? Is it a bounded, physical site of production (the fetishized artist's studio)? Does the studio point to, and stand in for, a way of doing and being? Is it a form of identity for student artists? The "tornadic impact" (Sabol, 2022: 132) of COVID-19, I propose, has impacted on studio practice-based teaching in ways that has prompted all of us in art education to re-consider what 'being in the studio' has meant and might mean in the

future. Many fine art educators are now considering whether the studio is not an expanded space of production, temporality, context and identity formation, a place of community, belonging and place-making.

COVID-19 Measures and University Policy

I commenced teaching under the UK Government's COVID 'rule of six'. The rule applied across all indoor and outdoor settings and enabled the police to disperse gatherings of over six people and issue fines accordingly. From September 2020, the University of Leeds implemented a blended teaching strategy. Disciplines arguing for the centrality of practice-based work (notably STEM and medical subjects and art and design) kept facilities open with limited access whilst lecture-based courses moved entirely online. In the Fine Art department, the artist studios, technical workshops, and AV suites became socially distance compliant. This significantly limited the number of students across the entire three-year degree programme able to access facilities at any given time. De-densification meant students were permitted to come into the fine art department one out of every three weeks for a limited range of workshops, studio based teaching, and personal studio time. From the outset, first year tutors decided if they would teach face-to-face or due to personal circumstances work entirely online.

Between September and the beginning of November, cities and regions across England were increasingly subjected to varied localised COVID-19 tiering measures in response to the fluctuating yet growing infection rates. This resulted in a great variety of social restriction measures governing citizen mobility and public and institutional access. Universities across the country were variously affected, resulting in staggered opening and access policies. By the end of October, the city of Leeds was required to adhere to what at that time was the highest of pandemic tiers. On 2nd November, the city entered Tier 3. Three days later, a second national lock down was imposed, and all universities closed their doors to face-to-face teaching. Fine art education at the University of Leeds would move wholly online.

Pre-COVID-19, the University of Leeds had initiated a digital investment strategy in which digital tools were to be integrated into the teaching/learning 'experience' and incorporated into classroom-based teaching principally to provide learners with enhanced opportunities to "engage, collaborate and learn in creative ways" (University of Leeds, 2022) on and off site, through platforms such as Padlet, Blackboard Collaborate as well as digital classroom spaces. Until the pandemic, however, Fine art teaching staff had remained largely uninfluenced by, and arguably resistant, to teaching digitally. Staff and students' use of digital platforms was principally for making artwork or for administrative and assessment purposes only. Teaching was effectively conducted as a face-to-face process, encompassing technical workshops, one-on-one tutorials, professional artist talks, and studio-based group critiques. Moreover, art students expected that their art would be produced in a physical workspace (studio, workshop, or AV suite), and it would be distributed as a temporal, spatial and physical object or process (i.e. displayed in a physical space), in contrast to online distribution. Under COVID-19 measures all this would rapidly change.

Fine Art Adaptations

For the first four weeks of the autumn semester, and with no formal preparation from the University, fine art tutors were required to adapt their pre-pandemic studio-based teaching programmes to accommodate social distancing. By November, they were teaching wholly online. Neither the University nor any arts teaching professional body stepped in to support this stressful

transition, unlike the support offered to many school-based art teachers in the USA and Australia (Coleman & MacDonald, 2020). As a sessional PGR tutor, I was working in a fluctuating and uncertain pandemic environment. I received neither technical training, software access, pedagogical support, nor the hardware for teaching online. All staff meetings ground to a halt as staff effectively retreated in isolated survival mode (Sabol, 2022). Effectively, I was on my own in a 'sink or swim' situation. I chose to try to swim.

COVID-19, Students and Adaptive Behaviours

At Leeds, first year students live in mixed degree programme halls of residence. From September 2020 through to the end of term in June 2021, student flats were re-designed as 'bubbles' of six. From the outset, socialisation with other first-year fine art students was entirely limited to those who met during formal face-to-face teaching in COVID compliant groups of six students. From November 5th, however, in line with national government policy, all students were confined to their place of residence full-time – for living, learning *and* making art. For our fine art students, meeting with fellow young artists could only be achieved via formal online teaching channels (i.e. Teams based seminars), supplemented by student initiated social media contact, including a Facebook messenger 'support network', and a Snapchat channel to keep in touch and "at first to moan about the situation and the university's lack of support" (quote from student interview). Progressively, these online groups became a vital emotional as well as creative support network. Following the Christmas vacation (when pandemic social restrictions were relaxed), another surge in COVID-19 resulted in renewed university restrictions. Some students returned to halls, whilst others stayed back at their parental homes. In both situations, the second semester commenced as a fully online fine art programme.

Fine art education is founded on a deep level of collegiate support that is facilitated via the collective studio environment, in which emerging artists make work under the curious and supportive observation of their peers. This is the unique 'studio culture' of fine art, which often persists into professional life for artists working in community-based studios. Ostensibly, from the start of the year, this form of praxis, which manifests as a social, physical and community space, had been compromised (Marshall, 2010). By contrast, and in effect, for the more confident and adaptable fine art students, their 'bubble' residential flats evolved into hybrid spaces. Within these spaces, bedrooms, kitchens, and even bathrooms were repurposed as studio areas, galleries, and sites for installation and performance.

At 4 am one morning, one student I taught - a determined young Greek student, living away from home for the first time - erected a complex textile-based installation and photographed it with makeshift lighting in her shared kitchen. Another student transformed her small shower cubicle into a reflective installation using baking foil, accompanied by sonic elements created by the dripping taps. Students involved fellow non-fine art residents as both participants in and audiences for their art productions—ranging from performers willing to be painted blue, to others dressing up and being photographed in makeshift bedroom photo studios. For those staying at their family homes, replicating a studio-like space might have been feasible, involving adaptations of bedrooms or family dining rooms, among other options. However, this was not always achievable, leading many to ultimately return to Leeds despite stricter social distancing measures.

While student ingenuity and adaptability over the year was astonishing, many also found producing art in small studio bedrooms a trying experience:

"It's like everything is done from my bed…I sleep on it, watch films, communicate with friends via social media, eat on it sometimes and make art from it. There's no demarcation between work, socialisation and sleep. And I wonder if this isn't the reason I feel so artistically directionless at times and can't sleep".

Today, whilst students are at liberty to move around and be in their physical art studios, levels of studio attendance remain low. Could this be a result of the pandemic's disruption, along with the prevalence and dependence on online platforms in which social communication, entertainment, news, college work, and even art making occur in digital spaces?

The Shifting Sands of Pedagogical Practice

Over ten weeks from late September to early December, I taught eighteen first-year fine art students in a module titled '*Engagements: Making Art Now*'. Students were divided into groups of six and worked with a tutor over a three-week cycle in response to a project brief. During this period, I deployed blended learning with one face-to-face class to launch the project brief once every three weeks in the studio, followed by two weeks delivering online classes using the Microsoft Teams platform. Repeating the same cycle of classes three times over the first semester afforded a unique circumstance for a qualitative research project addressing the teacher and student experience of a fine art education during the time of COVID-19.

Previously, the 'Now' part of the module invited students to consider their practice as a present activity, rather than rooted in art historical and traditional ways of thinking and making. I regarded the pandemic, however, as an opportunity to engage with a unique 'Now'. I rethought the concept of 'Now' by situating ourselves in an unprecedented situation as artist/co-researchers, collaboratively producing new knowledge regarding art making in the socially distanced time of COVID-19.

The project I innovated was titled '*Masking, Masquerading, and Identity'.* It took the circumstances of mandated social distancing and mask wearing and invited students to creatively engage in a shared inquiry that:

- researched practices of social distancing
- considered the socio-cultural use of masks across world cultures and history
- examined mask making and wearing as an artistic subject matter and artist process
- devised rapid creative responses

In other words, students were encouraged to think of themselves as context specific artist-researchers, gaining experience of social and visual research. It allowed the students to produce haptic experiments with materials to investigate their immediate habitat and to make new work. Moreover, the students sought to understand and place themselves in the epicentre of uncertainty and precarity, addressing what were often real personal insecurities and fears, transposing them into 'artistic material' to be worked *with*, to work *on* and to be worked *by*. One student said:

"I certainly don't think I would have made the stuff I make at all, it's more conceptual…exploring ideas of art taking over, because obviously we don't have a studio space, so things are just kind of accumulating…'cause we don't have anywhere to store it. So, this is like becoming a big part (the idea) of living with art".

Other students responded to the lack of space:

> "…the kind of lack of space has pushed me to incorporate things I will be able to share digitally. I've made a massive shift to digital ways of working which for me, like, I would never have expected".

As a PGR teacher, the pandemic, and its effects on the teaching of fine art, provided a unique and time-limited opportunity to re-consider the teacher/student relationship. With each three-week project cycle, I introduced the idea of student and tutor as co-researchers engaging with new technological platforms as a *shared* learning experience. I flipped the role of the tutor as an expert to that of a student, as I freely admitted that in many cases the students knew more about online sharing platforms like Zoom and Microsoft Teams than I did.

I also emphasised that collaborative researching had the very real effect of dissipating the fear of not knowing and 'getting this all wrong' and being 'frightened' of both the pandemic situation *and* the technology, as experienced by students and teachers alike. How to creatively manage our fears was, I proposed, not an individual problem but one that could be shared. I also invited the students to reflexively enquire what was going on in this moment of moving from studio-based teaching/learning/making to online teaching with the online dissemination of their art making. Some students, however, did not want to engage with the pandemic overtly as subject matter:

> "I see making my art as an opportunity to forget what's happening".

And some were eager to get on and make the art they desired in any event:

> "I know I want to paint abstracts, and this is what I am going to do".

Pedagogical adaptation

For our first meeting face-to-face, students read from sociologist Richard Sennett's *The Fall of Public Man* (1977) for a group discussion. During this session, we recognised the relevance of Sennett's 1970s writing on changing patterns of public social behaviour within a pandemic context. We followed our discussion with a rapid design brief. Students had twenty-five minutes to fashion a 'paper bag mask' in response to my question: '*What do you want to say, that you can only say by wearing a mask?'.* This resulted in extraordinary creative works: intricate animal heads, clown faces, complex patterns, and macabre disguises. We ended our session with a consideration of the socio-cultural and artistic history of mask wearing and masks as an artistic subject matter and object – a gallop through Ancient Greek theatre, 18th-century Venetian life and art, to feminist and queer art practices.

Figure 1. *What do you want to say, that you can only say by wearing a mask?* This exercise launched our workshop cycle in which students had 25 minutes to make a mask using a new paper bag. *Photo: Anna Douglas, 2020*

Figure 2. *What do you want to say, that you can only say by wearing a mask?* The project encouraged deep connection with how each student was feeling in the moment, and provided the space in which to share this with others. *Photo: Anna Douglas, 2020*

Week two was delivered online via Microsoft Teams. Students presented their responses to another rapid brief, this time to devise an 'emergency mask' from domestic objects and materials to hand in their flat. Remarkably ingenious designs resulted: masks cut out of individual bra cups, dried tea bags sewn together, and masks made out of kitchen rubber gloves. These were photographed in makeshift photographic studios in student bedrooms, bathrooms, and corridors. These were shared online via basic screen sharing in Teams.

Figure 3. Students were asked to make an emergency mask, transforming objects and or materials immediately to hand in their student accommodation, demonstrating innovation, resourcefulness and determination. *Photo: Molly Newham, 2020*

Figure 4. Emergency masks made from household objects were illustrated through 'staged photography', so that students developed an awareness of this contemporary photographic genre. *Photo: Molly Huxley, 2020*

Building on the first week's lecture, students additionally undertook personal research which they presented as an online illustrated talk. Remarkable research was done, with one student presenting on the invention of pandemic masks during the early 20th century Mantunian plague – a topic previously unfamiliar to me. Using PowerPoint online had unexpected consequences. Students reported that preparing a sequenced narrative of ideas and images, and the methodological process of designing and building presentations, allowed them to "give more thought to organising their ideas". I continue to adopt PowerPoint as a pedagogical tool in the post-COVID classroom whenever feasible.

In addition to undertaking cultural research and making artwork, students were invited to keep an autoethnographic reflective journal over the three weeks, noting how they were responding to and feeling about making art in lockdown. This was mirrored by my own field notes taken in each of my classes, as well as day-to-day journaling in which I noted my own use, adaptation, learning and fears around IT to deliver teaching: everything from hardware failures to software learnings. Having received ethics clearance from the University, at the end of the term, I conducted one-to-one tutorials and a group feedback workshop with my students. This allowed me to research further how they had responded to their life and work environments, their personal and shared strategies for coping and adjusting, their encounters with information technology, and also to inquire about their overall well-being. I later subjected the transcripts of this meeting to Constructivist Grounded

Theory method coding to further support my understanding of the students' experiences. CGT method of analysis asks what is going on in the speech of others, and seeks to arrive at, through iterative coding, a series of "sensitizing concepts" (Charmaz, 2012: 16-17). Re-occurring patterns of ideas highlighted students' sense of precarity and not knowing, contrasted with their resilience, determination and imagination. A felt sense of loss of togetherness was only partially salved by group chats on social media.

Tutoring experience

Like my students, I underwent a steep IT learning curve that was at times stressful, and I simultaneously worked hard to contain my own pandemic fears. As a result of our shared experience of navigating the uncertain and unknown, a bond emerged between myself and my students, and my classes became a mutual twice weekly 'life-line'. There was, however, a significant difference between us. Students had legitimate expectations that their tutors, and the University, would help them navigate this precarious journey. With the pandemic, "a new phenomena of teacher-student accessibility" via 24/7 online platforms emerged, compounding the stress I felt (Sabol, 2020: 131). How much time was I able to provide, given my constant need for adaptation and IT skilling-up, or be willing to give (taking into consideration out of work demands and stresses) to support my students, who in many cases told me they felt "abandoned", "cheated" and "financially exploited"? I often felt internally conflicted as the lines between pastoral care, personal tutoring, and teaching was blurred.

Opportunities for learning together were not equal. Students were hampered by a number of factors, including ineffective IT equipment suitable for spending hours online in group crits or for undertaking the generation of distributable digital files (PowerPoint), or producing digital artworks, or even effectively documenting non-digital artworks and artefacts to share online. Whilst the online strategy of the University assumed student access to high-end laptops, many valiantly struggled with iPhones and iPads, often pushing these devices to their limits. I had myself to invest in a new laptop to be able to operate a range of software suitable for conference sharing and viewing students' work.

There was also an assumption that students and tutors had access to the internet. Even those living in halls found Wi-Fi signals buckling under the volume of access. Cold spots resulted in groups of students of different disciplines having to work from shared kitchens. Those who returned to family homes established themselves in shared dining rooms and kitchens. This experience was not unique. Across the country, workers were experiencing the impact of sharing spaces with others. Once I became aware that students might be 'broadcasting' from spaces shared with others, I had to check-in whether they felt secure to share their work and thoughts in spaces potentially overlooked by parents, siblings and flatmates.

Being online, however, outside of the physical space of 'the studio' brought into focus skill gaps in digital technologies that students took upon themselves to fill, substituting YouTube videos for university technician support. Whilst some students voiced their dissatisfaction in paying fees only to further "fork out on online tutoring", this situation also permitted opportunities for students to take charge of their learning, making it distinctly more bespoke. Today, students are not attending workshops as we might expect. Is this the consequence of the success of YouTube DIY videos?

My own IT limitations, coupled with my scepticism of the disembodying tendencies of social media and the extensive use of digital devices, meant I kept my classes relatively low-tech, preferring to be attentive to the telepresence of our interaction with each other. Rather than getting wrapped up in

a host of Microsoft-led online platforms - many of which the University promotes (including Top Hat, Pebble Pad, etc.) - I hoped to nurture an online space as a "performance of empathy" (Turkle, 2017: 18) that cultivated students' "inquiry-orientated mind-sets'" and "instinctive approaches to practice" (Coleman and MacDonald, 2020).

We developed an attunement practice of checking in with each other at the start of every session, considering our camera angles, our framing, who was around us, and we similarly 'checked out' at the end of each session. We practiced attunement and gratitude, and I continue with such reflexive practices today in the physical studio.

Many students found social media exchanges lacking in emotional nuance and connection:

> "I am sick of other students sniping and moaning. What I want are people out there who are really listening not just 'sounding off".

The pandemic context provided an unanticipated moment to consider my own creative practice as a fine art tutor and to question my purpose during a crisis. Art educators have been characterised as creative, 'flexible and responsive to changing elements in the education landscape'. As 'problem solvers' we have worked through the challenges that COVID-19 created (and continues to arise) and we have embraced constructive lessons (Sabol, 2022). As a tutor, my interests in artistic practices of collaboration, site responsive art (Kwon, 2002), theories and practices of embodiment, affect, and reflexivity, audience reception, and sensory methods of ethnography (Pink, 2005) contributed to my revisioning of a studio-based programme, firstly as a hybrid strategy and then online. I approached my teaching as an experimental project in which I could learn about the teaching of art through the practices of others who, in turn, were responding to a unique context. Via this approach, I encouraged students to similarly 'lean' into this practice to "guide their transformations of embodied and participatory practices" (Coleman and Selkrig, 2020: 1). This move was certainly enabled by being a PGR tutor. With limited responsibilities to the University or my school, and little authority, I was considerably independent, and this made possible innovative transformations in my teaching. But, in equal measure, at times I also felt isolated, 'unheld' and anxious about my performance, just like my students.

Future transformations

As a PGR tutor I felt empowered to 're-think and re-imagine' how ways of being online could facilitate 'transformative learning experiences' that might exceed the precarious circumstances of the moment (Coleman and MacDonald, 2020). I have integrated some of these COVID-19 adaptations into my post-COVID teaching programmes. Today, I begin each student group or individual session with a practice of attunement. In group crits, I work on a variety of slow observation and listening exercises, and I support students to develop language to express critical evaluation of each other's art in contrast to the snippy one-liners or pithy 'likes' of social media (see the student quote above).

There are digital experiences I now feel nostalgic for: the immediate (though not fool-proof) transcripts of our TEAMS-based group crits, and the spontaneous sharing of videos, references, and illustrations of artists' work that brought a dynamism to our sessions. However, it is the less obvious realisations of attributes that were cultivated in my students that are now informing how I move forward into full-time teaching. I believe that precarity, uncertainty, ambiguity, resilience, agility, versatility, practicality, empathy and creativity are at the core of a fine art education irrespective of whether a student has the ambition to become an exhibiting artist. Where once the studio once

featured as a physical place, I now regard it as a praxis that permits creativity and reflexivity. This might require a dedicated physical art-making space, or it might be understood temporally as a demarcated moment in which creativity and inquiry can flourish (Sullivan, 2005). Overall, the pandemic convinced me that a fine art education is well situated to respond to the precarity of our present moment, in which we need more than at any other time, ethically minded, creative young people able to view the world through various lenses and contexts and to take up their responsibilities as global citizens in world (Beard, 2022).

Acknowledgements

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