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**FINDING ONE'S FEET:
A STUDY OF ARTIST FUNDING**

The title of "artist" has never been associated with a conventional career path. Far from the hum-drum security of contracted jobs – whose concrete objectives fit within predetermined hours, and are rewarded with a predetermined salary – art represents the indefinite and the unknown. Where artists are without secure gallery representation, the possibility of exhibiting their works remains uncertain; when they do exhibit, sales are not guaranteed.

This sense of being outside the conventional rat race has always had a certain romantic appeal: many esteemed artists having been represented romantically as starving mavericks, sacrificing their immediate needs in pursuit of a broader creative "vision". Steven Naifeh and Gregory White Smith, authors of the Van Gogh biography *The Life*, describe an artist who "took to mortifying himself like a medieval saint, scarcely eating and sleeping rough" – whilst nevertheless maintaining a seemingly inexhaustible appetite for "expensive materials".

Outside-In

Oliver Beer

Ikon Gallery, Birmingham

Courtesy of the artist and the
Ikon Gallery



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Yet, whilst it seems hard – even bathetic – to reconcile the pursuit of a unique artistic philosophy with paying taxes, renting a studio, and maintaining a budget, the latter are vital components of the trade. Contemporary artists such as Damien Hirst – whose two-day auction at Sotheby's in 2008 famously realised £111m – are an exception, not a rule: structures which enable artists to retain a degree of financial stability and to develop their career are therefore hugely important.

We considered some of the systems which aim to act as an incubator for artists in search of financial support, questioning the extent to which art might be considered a career, and whether the cliché of the “starving artist” endures.

For the majority of contemporary artists, educational establishments act as an initial, incubatory structure, providing artists with the technical training, and – in the case of some institutions – the studios and materials essential to the development of their practice.

For some artists, educational institutions have provided connections or exposure to modes of thought which later proved profitable – even if their original intention was the pursuit of an idea, not money. In the example of artists in the group of YBAs, Central Saint Martins served as a meeting place and ground for experimentation. A common denominator in the group's careers, the school eventually became synonymous with a certain approach to artistic production – its presence on a CV legitimising an artist's exclusive YBA status.

Though the names of prestigious educational institutions might later translate into value, their initial impact upon the financial status of an artist's career is overwhelmingly negative. Schools such as New York's Cooper Union – which, until this year, had offered a full-tuition scholarship to every student since its inception (it now offers half-tuition scholarship) – are increasingly rare. For students applying to the most esteemed educational establishments, fees are invariably high, presenting a not-inconsiderable factor in the early development of an artist's career.

In the United Kingdom, recent changes in funding structures have made the issue particularly prominent, with fees across the country unexpectedly tripling in 2010, from £3,000 to £9,000. In the US, fees for arts students sit significantly higher: for those accepted to study at the Yale University School of Fine Art, annual fees – including books, tuition fees, materials, living expenses, and materials – are \$55,000. For this, the school promises to “routinely expose” students to “many aesthetic positions through encounters with faculty members and visitors”.

The promise of this pedagogical (or networking) element is, however, presented alongside a statement which acknowledges the importance of independent study and natural talent. According to the Yale site: “Students must bring creative force and imagination to their own development, for these qualities cannot be taught – they can only be stimulated and appreciated.” Whilst this statement contains the reassuring assertion that artistic ability is not dependent on external factors, some might – rather cynically – see it as an attestation of an art school's limitations. And though the notion that original thought might be purchased is naïve, fees which run to several thousand dollars mean the question is nevertheless far from unreasonable.

In stark contrast to these high-investment education programmes, free or funded residencies pay artists to produce work, often promising to contribute to an artist's development by offering feedback or arranging interactions with academics, philosophers, or other artists. Opportunities exist internationally, though amongst the most recognised and comprehensive schemes is the Berlin Artists-in-Residence programme, the Berliner Künstlerprogramm, run by DAAD.

Open to visual artists regardless of nationality (as well as writers, musicians, performers, and film makers), the programme offers 20 grants each year, funding a one-year stay in Berlin, German language courses, and travel expenses. Whilst international in scope, the programme's focus on funded support for visual artists is intimately tied to the history of the city in which it is based, with the DAAD website stating:

“The year 1989 and the Fall of the Wall are viewed by the Berliner Künstlerprogramm as a commission to reinforce the freedom of art and the word. At the same time, the program therefore opposes the economic takeover of cultural values by liberating artistic creativity from the dictates of the market.”

Yet, though market-opposed, the Berliner Künstlerprogramm would not exist were it not for financial support. Founded in 1925, DAAD has grown to become the largest funding organisation in the world, its central aim being to “support the international exchange of students and scholars”. Its budget is derived primarily from the German Federal Foreign Office, though – perhaps due to its international

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focus – the programme has also been able to gain funding from the EU and from the foreign governments of certain partner organisations. Now in its 40th year, the programme boasts an alumni of almost 1,000.

Funded projects don't always offer artists this freedom. Whilst art schools and residency schemes endeavour to provide platforms for an artist's individual development, commissions provide funding whilst dictating the form of the work produced. Here, art is not a philosophical pursuit, but a practical service with a pre-determined function.

Somewhat eccentrically connoting the practice of artists during Baroque and Renaissance periods – when commissioned portraiture flourished as a viable form of income for artists – recent projects in the UK have seen artists paid to depict buildings or renowned figures. In 2011, the luxury London hotel Claridge's asked David Downton to be its first ever artist-in-residence, with general manager Thomas Kochs commenting: "Some of our particularly distinguished guests are regularly captured by photographers and paparazzi. We wanted them to feel that this was a more special one-off occasion, being drawn by a skillful and talented artist." This reactionary statement against the proliferation of images in contemporary media was not without its constraints: Downton was ordered to target a "secret" list of particularly eminent hotel guests when producing his work, providing the hotel with images which were not only special and one-off, but which cut out the undesirables.

This record of the upper-echelons of British society perhaps reaches its zenith in a project run by Prince Charles, who continues the long tradition of employing a "Royal Tour Artist". Pointedly described as "an engaged patron of the arts" – and even more pointedly noting that the project is self-funded – the Prince commissions (generally traditional) artists to "create a record of a tour that goes beyond the limitations of photography".

Other structures combine a notion of the artist as service provider with the commitment to artistic liberty ordinarily characteristic of academic institutions and government-funded residencies. In 2008, fashion house Hermès established the Fondation Hermès, an organisation dedicated to the promotion of traditional craftsmanship, providing visual artists with four-year residencies. Those participating in the Fondation's programme are given a "blank slate", but must produce any work they conceive with "Hermès manufacturers" – who, the programme's website notes, are "renowned for their quality product". Despite the potentially commercial connotation of this statement, former participants have gone on to be the subject of exhibitions in major national institutions: later this year, Oliver Beer – who recently joined Galerie Thaddeus Ropac – is to feature in shows at Paris's Centre Pompidou and New York's MoMA PS1.

Frac Nord-Pas de Calais

© Cabinet d'architectes Laca-
ton & Vassal, 2010



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Structures such as these, however, are not universal: for young artists unable to afford a paying arts education, or who have neither a residency nor gallery representation, public funding remains a vital factor in their ongoing capacity to produce work. In France, the FRAC system – Fonds Régional d'Art Contemporain, which celebrated its 30th anniversary last year – provides state-funded support for artists, purchasing works by those at the beginning of their careers which then form part of a touring, national collection.

Though the FRAC system is not without its critics – the former Minister for Education Luc Ferry described it as an institution which supports artists “without art and without talent” – others praise it as a platform which places an important focus on contemporary art at, most importantly, both a regional and national level. Bernard de Montferrand, president of the FRAC Aquitaine, states that the system “accomplishes a public service in supporting creation, the democratisation and decentralisation of cultures”.

In the UK, the Arts Council is the FRAC's closest equivalent, supporting arts projects both regionally and nationally. The recent financial crisis, however, means that the extent of its reach is becoming increasingly compromised: in 2014, a cut of 1.17% is planned – a figure which, though negligible, follows a steady trickle of reductions to its budget.

The effect of the recession on culture across Europe is increasingly being cited as a cause for concern following recent difficulties in Spain and Greece: between 2009 and 2012, the latter cut its arts funding by 35%. In 2012 Spain's Fundación Caja Madrid closed the 48 cultural centres it maintained around the country, a drastic move indicative of a broader diminution in artist platforms across the country.

Yet whilst residencies or awards, or foundations, might offer temporary bursts of income for selected participants, very few structures exist which offer practicing artists a stable source of income with a long-term view. The Artist Pension Trust (APT) is an exception, offering both “long-term financial security and international exposure” to an admittedly select group of artists who are accepted to participate in the scheme. According to Serge Tiroche, a shareholder of the company who served as Chairman of the Board in 2009-10, the organisation remains “the only globally available structure that I am aware of”. According to Tiroche, financial security is not something which all artists can achieve: “Some artists work well with a strong gallery who looks after their needs and helps them plan ahead for their own financial security.” The former chairman adds: “Many artists choose to join the Artist Pension Trust, which I find is a brilliant idea and a wonderfully practical solution for artists who make the cut.” For those who are accepted, Tiroche states, “APT structures a savings scheme for the artists and diversifies the individual risk to a much broader pool, thus ensuring some future cash-flow for all contributing artists.” Far from offering the fleeting rewards of gallery sales, APT attempts to structure a funding platform for artists which places a focus on sustainability. Tiroche confirms: “It is a great alternative to pension schemes for salaried employees.”

Whilst APT may be remarkable for being the exception, the absence of other platforms which similarly seek to establish financial security for artists is disconcerting – and, for many, renders a career in the industry without additional work unfeasible. Tiroche shares this concern, rounding off our conversation on artist funding by saying: “I believe it is primarily the artist's responsibility to look after their own interests, but it is also very important to provide funding to the arts by both government and private initiatives, especially for artists in the early days of their career.”

It is a responsibility which might also lie with educational establishments, where an entrepreneurial or business-focused understanding of art may establish the industry as one which is synonymous not with anguished struggle, but economic – even if this doesn't correspond with a romantic notion of the artist as outsider. Tiroche adds: “I also think art degrees should include some basic management, economics and finance courses. But until that happens, incubator projects (such as the one I created in Israel: ST-ART) are important postgraduate stepping stones providing the guidance and training necessary to understand what it takes to choose art making as one's profession. Residency projects, institutional grants and government funding are critical for young artists.”

For those who choose to dedicate a life to artistic production, a secure career trajectory remains elusive. A little compensation is perhaps to be offered in the knowledge that, while not always financially rewarding, art is a field which nevertheless offers scientifically-proven levels of satisfaction. Writing in *The Wall Street Journal*, Bruno S. Frey, a research director at the University of Zurich who has done “happiness research for some time”, found that “artists generally are happier than the rest of the population”. ■



Serge Tiroche