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Has the Art College Entry Portfolio Outlived its Usefulness as a Method of Selecting Students in an Age of Relational, Collective and Collaborative Art Practice?

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to invite focused discussion and critical debate about the instruments currently used to select students for art colleges in Europe and North America. At this time of significant expansion and diversification in practices of art making, we must ask if current selection instruments still work. What evidence is there to support their continued use? Are they good indicators of success in art college? Who do they advantage, and whose interests do they serve? In what ways do they contribute to, or legitimate class reproduction and class advantage in the cultural sphere? In taking up these questions, this article addresses four topics of particular relevance to the selection and admission debate: reliability, validity, predictability and equality. It reports findings from two national longitudinal research studies that examined the predictive validity of selection instruments in relation to performance in art college in Ireland. While these findings are specific to the Irish higher education context, they have relevance beyond this context given that the selection instruments used by Irish art colleges are the same as those used by the majority of art colleges across Europe and North America.

Introduction

In his recent anthology, *Art School: Propositions for the 21st Century*, Steven Henry Madoff (2009) reminded his readers that because “an artwork is anything now,” the project of educating and “preparing young artists to live in a landscape of infinitely elastic production will demand some new requirements” (p. x). While Madoff does not elaborate further, his observation serves as an invitation to rethink current structural, organizational, curricular, and pedagogical aspects of art education at tertiary level. The rethinking of current art education practices and provision has, to some extent, already begun. In recent edited collections (see for example Brad Buckley’s and John Conomos’ (2009) *Rethinking the Contemporary Art School: The Artist, the PhD and the Academy*, and Steven Henry Madoff’s (2009) *Art School: Propositions for the 21st Century*), several scholars have begun to debate the future of art education in a global world. Raising questions about where art education will take place in the coming years; what art colleges will look like; how they will function; and, why they ought to exist, these scholars advance important ideas that suggest new art education practices and new art schools models, underpinned by different philosophical principles and guided by different organizational structures. Yet, larger questions about access to, and participation in tertiary art education have not been taken up in this growing scholarly arena. By this I mean questions about who gets to art college in the first place, and by what means are neither being raised, nor contemplated. While concerns have been raised about the cost and affordability of an education in art, missing from this recent debate is any consideration of how art students, future artists, are selected for art college places.

In this article, my intention is to activate debate and discussion about this topic. Specifically, I will focus on the question of how applicants get selected for art college, and pay particular attention to the selection instruments and procedures that are currently used to select art students. The article addresses four topics of particular relevance to the selection and admission debate: reliability, validity, predictability and equality. It reports findings from two national longitudinal research studies (conducted 10 years apart) that examined the predictive validity of selection instruments in relation to performance in art college in Ireland. To examine the relationship between students’ measured potential at entry and subsequent success in art college is a way to test the reliability and validity of current selection instruments. While the findings presented in this article are specific to the Irish higher education context, they have relevance beyond this context given that the selection instruments used by Irish art colleges are the same as those used by the majority of art colleges across Europe and North America. In other words, the findings presented here, while particular, have universal implications. At this point, it is important to note that while in this article data from Irish art colleges are used to examine the predictive validity and reliability of the instruments currently used to select art students, the critique that is offered relates to the

selection instruments currently used by colleges of art across Europe and North America. The article should not be read as a critique of art colleges in Ireland, but rather, a critique of selection procedures.

We know that admission to art college in Europe and North America is highly competitive and selective. Every year individuals compete for a limited number of art college places. Those with the highest chances of success in college are typically selected. To identify those applicants from among the larger pool of applicants, colleges of art have devised various selection instruments to measure student potential and ability. The instrument that is most commonly used is the entrance portfolio. Normally the entrance portfolio is a collection of objects (drawings, photographs, paintings, 3D works, animation, film, video, sketchbooks, journals, notebooks, etc.) that function as evidence of creative thinking capacities, competencies, and potential. Because, as Tom Kellaghan (1995) reminds us, “important decisions relating to the life chances of so many people can rest on a selection procedure” (p. ix), we need to ask the following questions of these selection instruments, especially the entrance portfolio given that it is considered to be the most reliable and accurate measure of suitability, readiness for, and as a predictor of success at art college by selection committees. Do current selection instruments still work? What evidence is there to support their continued use? Are they good indicators of success in art college? Who do they advantage, and whose interests do they serve? In what ways do they contribute to, or legitimate class reproduction and class advantage in the cultural sphere?

These questions are particularly relevant to ask at this time, for several reasons. As Ernesto Pujol (2009) reminds us, the students who now enter art colleges are very different from those who entered when the entrance portfolio was first used as a selection instrument: Pujol (2009) elaborates, claiming that American middle-class students now enter art school with eight digital and technological tools unimagined two decades earlier – “(1) cable, satellite, and Web accessible televisions; (2) laptop computers; (3) cell phones, and particularly smart phones; (4) DVDs and game players, portable and stationary; (5) MP3 devices and iPods; (6) credit cards and ATM cards; (7) digital cameras, integrated and standalones; and (8) scanners” (p. 3). While Pujol’s observation derives from the American context, it is also relevant to the European context, and indeed other contexts.

Moreover, in the artworld, much has changed since the entrance portfolio was first introduced as an instrument for selecting art students – future artists. While it is not an easy task to sum up the changes that have occurred, and I will return to, and elaborate on these changes later in this article, we can say with some confidence that there has been a noticeable shift away from object-based art production to relations-based and situation-based art production. An increasing number of artists no longer produce individual aesthetic objects; rather,

underpinned by the principles of collaboration, participation, and interaction, their art practice is concerned with the activation and production of new relations between individuals, groups, and communities, or the reconfiguration of existing ones. For example, the Buenos Aires born New York artist, Rirkrit Tiravanija cooked and served Thai curry to visitors to his exhibition at the 303 Gallery in New York and in a later exhibition, he built a fully functional wooden reconstruction of his New York apartment, opened it to the public twenty-four hours a day, and invited them to participate in this space as they would in their own homes. In his 'Letter Writing Project', Lee Mingwei invited viewers to communicate with absent friends, family or loved ones by writing a letter in one of three letter-writing booths he installed in the gallery. Another example is the Irish artist Seamus McGuinness' installation named *21 Grams*. Comprising 92 fragments of white men's shirts (mainly collars) that hung at shoulder height, each one weighting 21 grams – the weight of the human soul – the installation serves to remember the 92 young men's lives lost to suicide in Ireland in 2003 and in doing so creates a space to initiated discussion and debate about the high rates of male suicide in Ireland. Nancy Spector (2008) describes this development as “a shift from a focus on the individual aesthetic object to more ephemeral, situation-based work” (p. 15). Relations-based and situation-based art production, also known as Relational Aesthetics (Bourriaud, 2002), Dialogical Practice (Kester, 2005), Conversational Art (Bhabha, 1989) and “dialogue-based public art” (Finkelpearl, 2000) is one of the most noticeable and documented shifts in art practice since the 1990s. While it is by no means the only one, Irit Rogoff (2010) maintains that “the notion of conversation” has been “the most significant shift within the art world over the past decade” (p. 43). Interestingly, colleges of art across Europe and North America continue to use selection instruments that seek evidence of an ability to create traditional art forms, and to work in, and with traditional art media. It could be argued, that these requirements provide little opportunity for measuring the types of artistic dispositions, habits of mind and work practices that characterize art practices and art forms of our time.

Ernesto Pujol (2009) suggests, “Art schools should be the conscience of the art world” (p. 9). If this indeed should be the case, and I believe it should be, then it is time to critically engage with the opportunities that contemporary forms of art practice offer for rethinking traditional methods of selection. Pierre Bourdieu (1993) maintains that when a new model of art practice makes its presence felt in the field, a transformation of the field is inevitable. Its coming into being, he argues, “modifies and displaces the universe of possible options; the previously dominant productions may, for example, be pushed into the status either of outmoded [*déclassé*] or of classic works” (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 32). While this shift from object-based to relations-based and situation-based production has ushered in noticeable changes in education and critical and curatorial practices, art college selection processes have remained relatively unchanged. There is no doubt that this practice of relying on the participation of the public to make the work, which is formed in and by the process of social interaction and exchange,

presents a whole new set of challenges to art college admission and selection committees in their evaluation processes. While art colleges now accept digital portfolios, thereby in keeping with the technological advances of our time, not much has changed regarding the required content of the portfolio. Why this has remained the case warrants some attention and discussion.

**“ . . . The collective sensibility on which contemporary artistic practices
are beginning to rely”**

I wish to think further about the significant shift that has occurred in art practice in recent years by considering what Nicolas Bourriaud identified in his book *Postproduction* (2005), as “the collective sensibility on which contemporary artistic practices are beginning to rely” (p. 7). I believe it is important to do this at this point because some of the central arguments in this article derive from, are situated in, and respond to these significant shifts in art production practices. The following two questions shaped my initial thinking that gave rise to this article and the research reported herein: To what extent are current selection instruments equipped to recognize, assess, and appraise the types of artistic dispositions, habits of mind and work practices that characterize art practice and art forms of our time? Has the art college entry portfolio outlived its usefulness as a method of selecting art students in an age of relational, collective and collaborative art practice? Regardless of these questions, the “collective sensibility” that Bourriaud identifies and writes about cannot be ignored by those who select the next generation of artists. In his four books, *Relational Aesthetics* (2002), *Postproduction* (2005), *The Radicant* (2009), and *The Altermodern* (2009), Bourriaud attempts to render visible this “collective sensibility.” Mapping art practice of the 1990s and 2000s, Bourriaud tells his readers that his project, which involves a “close observation of a group of artists who happened to become leaders of their generation,” is an attempt to “present an analysis of today’s art in relation to social changes, whether technological, economic, or sociological” (Bourriaud 2005, p. 8). It seeks “to establish a typology of contemporary practices” (Bourriaud 2005, p. 8). Bourriaud discovers, and advances the argument that “the role of artworks [today] is no longer to form imaginary and utopian realities, but to actually be ways of living and models of action with the existing real” (Bourriaud, 2002, p. 13). He presents several examples of how this occurs in situations under conditions that artists establish and curators support. The artist today, he argues, “sets his sights more and more clearly on the relations that his work will create among his public, and on the invention of models of sociability” (Bourriaud 2002, p. 28).

This commitment to invent or activate new “models of sociability” is viewed as a significant departure from previous art practices. For example, writing about many of the artists that Bourriaud observed, studied, and wrote about, Nancy Spector (2008) argues that this work “is

less about social interaction than a deliberate activation of the social” (p. 18). Bourriaud locates this shift in art practice -- “the deliberate activation of the social” -- in art’s commitment to move into the relational realm in an effort to resist forces of globalization, and the standardization of culture that ensues. In short, the “collective sensibility” that Bourriaud writes about is one that values, derives from, and generates acts of collaboration, participation, interaction, and exchange that in turn creates conditions for dialogue which promotes understanding and offers new ways of being together. Given that the production of relational works is not confined to the production of a physical art object, it is important to ask the following questions: What challenges does this “collective sensibility” present to art college admission officers, selection committees, and selection and admission procedures? How ought they respond to such changes?

To provide an example of this “collective sensibility,” I turn to the art practice of an Irish artist and relatively recent graduate of National College on Art and Design (NCAD), Dublin, Ireland. The artist is Sarah Browne. Specifically, I consider a live art performance, described as a sculptural intervention and titled *Free Irish Scones* that Browne initiated in the main medieval square of Krakow, Poland. At the time of the Krakow sculptural intervention, Browne was an undergraduate Fine Arts student at the NCAD and was on an exchange program in the city of Krakow. Since that time, Browne has initiated several other relational and participative interventions and performances that have generated and facilitated dialogical exchanges in and between different communities. Her art practice is described as “an investigation of macro social structures through discussion with micro-audiences”¹. In 2009, Browne was one of two artists who represented Ireland at the 53rd Venice Biennale.

Free Irish Scones

In an effort to create opportunities to connect and interact with strangers as a stranger in a foreign city, Browne baked several hundred scones from an Irish recipe and wheeled a green-painted cart, containing the scones, into Rynek Glowny -- the main medieval square in the city of Krakow. For days previously, in that same city square, she had watched vendors sell *otwarzanki*, (Polish pretzels unique to the city of Krakow) to tourists and city dwellers from their yellow-colored movable stalls. From her green cart, made from a discarded bed-frame, Browne offered scones free to passers-by. Engaging in a practice of giving in return for a non-monetary exchange with another, Browne’s performance required the participation of a “non-art” public for the work to function as intended. The intersubjective space produced through this encounter with the other was the focus and medium of this work. To function in the manner intended, the sculptural intervention was also contingent upon the local practice of selling and buying bread (pretzels in this instance) in this public place, as it was on other individual and collective cultural practices such as giving, receiving, exchanging, encountering, making free, trusting, etc. Notwithstanding the determinants of its functionality,

the presence of Browne's sculptural intervention in the square created and activated a new form of sociability amongst the existing possibilities for social interaction. Occupying and present among daily routines, transactions, and occurrences, Browne's sculptural intervention contrasted with those that structure daily practices in this place, as it generated opportunities for different forms of social interaction and inter-human relations. Browne's sculptural intervention produced a public. To function as intended, however, the work was not reliant on traditional art making processes, traditional art making materials, or traditional ways of engaging the object of art. In this work, Browne did not produce an art object in the strictest sense, rather, she produced a set of relations based on human interactions and exchanges in a social and cultural context that were dependent on culturally learnt practices. These relations generated other relations. As is evident in this description of the work, dialogical exchanges were an integral part of the work itself; the work got formed in conversation.

As the Krakow sculptural intervention demonstrates, Browne's work creates conditions for the activation of the social and social interaction and inter-human exchange that alters common practices of communication imposed by social, material, and cultural factors. It dwells on what Kester (2004) calls "collaborative, rather than a specular, relationship with the viewer" (p. 11). Obviously Browne's practice, like so many young contemporary Irish artists (all relatively recent graduates of Irish art colleges) is reconfiguring and renegotiating what it means to make art, to engage in artistic processes individually and collaboratively across contexts and in time in exciting new ways. Yet, colleges of art, which are often the seedbed for such innovative practice, continue to use selection instruments that seek (a) evidence of ability to work in, and with traditional art forms and media, and that (b) provide little opportunity for measuring the types of artistic dispositions, habits of mind and work practices that characterize new art practices and art forms prevalent in our time.

Perhaps there is good reason for this, but without appropriate research we will not know if in fact traditional methods of selection are the most effective way of making decisions about the readiness of applicants to join tertiary art and design programs. It is important that scholars begin to investigate why art college selection committees believe that the production of actual objects, be they drawings, paintings, sculptures, weavings, photographs, sketchbooks or visual notebooks, are of greater use to them when they are faced with the task of making an evaluation of an applicant's readiness or suitability to study art or design at tertiary level. Why are these traditional art forms and art practices more relevant and useful than socially engaged and collaborative art practices and forms, such as those described above? Perhaps there are some real tensions between what selection committees are tasked to do and how they position themselves theoretically and artistically. But, without conducting research into such issues, we will never know. Given that in today's artworld, art practice is less about the mastery and refinement of technical skill but more about the cultivation of intellectual and critical

research, and participative skills, perhaps now is the time to rethink the usefulness of traditional selection instruments that rank applicants on their ability to produce tangible forms. For example, questions such as the following ought to inform this rethinking process: Is it in the best interests of potential applicants to work with others to produce collaborative art projects as Browne and others artists of our time do? To what extent do current admission procedures value the work of applicants who have participated or led socially and politically engaged art projects in which traditional notions of authorship are called into question, or thought about differently? In what ways might an acknowledgement of these interactive, participative and relational art practices challenge the notion of the knowing viewer (who is an assessor and evaluator in this case, hence the description, knowing viewer)? Obviously, in these relational and participative practices, the viewer has turned participator in order to activate and complete the work, or to respond to the situations that the work produces or invites? All that being said, is there evidence to suggest that traditional methods of selection do what they intend to do, and therefore ought to continue as the primary selection tool used by art college selection committees?

Selecting Students for Art College

For admission and selection purposes, applicants to colleges of art and design across Europe and North America are normally required to submit a collection of objects (a entry portfolio) that function as evidence of creative thinking capacities, competencies, and potential. For example, The Slade School of Fine Art in London stipulates that the “portfolio should comprise a selection of current and recent work which may include drawings, photographs, paintings on paper or board (but not stretched canvases), sketchbooks and notebooks. Larger paintings or 3D works should be shown as photographic prints. Videos or films should be in QuickTime on DVD.”² The School of the Art Institute of Chicago states, “The portfolio is a collection of your best work created within the past two years, and should reflect your interests, skills, and willingness to explore, experiment, and express yourself. We are most interested in how you communicate ideas and demonstrate your use of processes and materials.”³ Portfolios for admission to the Emily Carr University of Art and Design in Vancouver Canada should, according to university guidelines “include a range of some of the following: Drawings, prints or paintings; Animation, film, video, audio recordings, ideas for scripts and storyboards; Photographs, collage and other mixed media work; Sculpture and ceramics; Designs for zines, websites, communication and industrial design; Performance art; Images from sketchbooks, journals and notebooks”⁴.

As is the case in other European countries, in Ireland, art and design students are selected for art college primarily on the basis of their entry portfolio.⁵ Entry portfolios are submitted to individual colleges for review. Portfolios are evaluated, numerical marks are allocated, and applicants are ranked accordingly. Normally, students also need to meet a minimum academic

entry requirement, which varies across colleges. While both forms of ability are considered in the selection process, an applicant's artistic ability (as evidenced in his or her portfolio) is given greater weighting and consideration than his or her measured academic ability. In short, an applicant who receives a low score for his or her entry portfolio is highly unlikely to be offered a place regardless of how high his or her measured academic ability. As a selection instrument, the entry portfolio has been used for several decades by Irish art colleges, and for the most part its content requirements has remained unchanged. Structured around ideologies of meritocratic individualism, the entry portfolio requires applicants to undertake a series of highly prescriptive inquiry-based object generating activities that concentrate exclusively on vision and material exploration. These activities promote individual modes of visual inquiry rather than collective participatory ones. Certain visual forms, visual regimes, and visual practices are sought out, promote and rewarded as the portfolio preparation guidelines issued by the colleges suggest⁶. Certain forms and practices of visuality are valued over others. Particular ways of seeing and producing visual representations are encouraged. These portfolio guidelines ultimately establish the criteria for evaluation of entry portfolios.

Pierre Bourdieu (1993) suggests that the particularity and specificity of these visual regimes and practices of visualization operate to allow certain visual representations "to be located, through the classification of the stylistic indications which [they contain], among the possibilities of representation constituting the universe of art and not among the possibilities of representation constituting the universe of everyday objects or the universe of signs" (p. 221-2). These portfolio guidelines suggest that being sufficiently knowledgeable about practices of visualization and sufficiently skilled in producing work that, as Bourdieu says, can be located "among the possibilities of representation constituting the universe of art and not among the possibilities of representation constituting the universe of everyday objects or the universe of signs" leads to an increased chance of securing a college place. In short, as currently articulated, it is difficult to see how the entrance portfolio allows for a process of self-definition, outside of the expectations of others, in this case art college personnel.

To develop individuals who are sufficiently knowledgeable in, and about the types of visual practices and visual regimes sought and valued by colleges of art, the Further Education and Post-Leaving Certificate Education Sector in Ireland has created one-year intensive portfolio preparation programs. These programs have grown exponentially during the past decade. Many of these programs are privately run and command quite large tuition fees. Their ability to prepare applicants to secure art college places has led to their success, and to their significant growth; two decades ago only a handful of such programs existed. Supported in subtle ways by some of the colleges of art such as the Crawford College of Art and Design – for example, in its portfolio guidelines it states, "Although a large number of students do enter the College direct from school, the experience of a good, well structured Portfolio Preparation

Program can make a crucial difference in the ability of candidates to handle the transition to third-level successfully” – and available to those with sufficient economic capital and time to devote an entire year to the preparation of an entry portfolio in hope of securing an art college place in the future, these one year intensive portfolio preparation programs clearly undermine equality of access, participation, and performance in the higher art education sector in Ireland. Economic advantage in this case produces educational advantage. That the National College of Art and Design, Dublin, had to introduce a directive in 2006 whereby no more than 50 per cent of all available places would be allocated to students who had completed one of these one-year portfolio preparation programs is some indication of the pervasiveness and popularity of these programs, and indeed their success in preparing students for entry to college. The existence of such programs, and indeed their success, not only limits the opportunities of school leavers to gain a place in art college, but it especially limits the opportunities of those from low income families who do not have the economic capital to follow such a route. Given that access to, and participation in art college in Ireland is highly stratified by class (with the Higher Professional, Lower Professional, Employers and Managers and Salaried Employees socio-economic groups disproportionately over-represented by two-and-a-half to three times their representation in the national age-cohort) (O’Donoghue, 2002), one could legitimately argue that the portfolio requirement operates to maintain and support established class patterns of access and participation, and to compromise efforts to eliminate class inequalities in art education. This raises a larger question, which cannot be addressed in this article, but is important to raise nonetheless: What are the implications for the cultural field when a particular sector of the population are not accessing, participating in, or contributing to art education at the same rate as other sectors of the population?

Data

Data for this article come from two longitudinal studies of undergraduate art students in Ireland (O’Donoghue, 2000; 2009). Both longitudinal studies traced the performance of Irish art college entrants from their time of entry to their time of departure. Subjects for the first study were those who enrolled in tertiary art and design programs in the four primary art and design colleges in 1992. The majority of this entry cohort graduated in 1995 and 1996 depending on their program of study – diploma level students graduated a year before degree level students. For the second study, subjects were drawn from the 2002 tertiary art and design entry cohort. The majority of subjects from this study graduated in 2006. Comparing findings that focus specifically on the usefulness of current selection instruments from two separate studies that are a decade apart provides an important and unique set of insights into the predictability of the entry portfolio and other selection instruments over time. Empirical research that focuses on tertiary art and design students in Ireland, or elsewhere, is scarce. Rarely has attention been focused on prospective artists (or designers), although as Getzels

and Csikszentmihalyi (1976) observed many years ago in their seminal study of art students at the Art Institute of Chicago, "To know who chooses a career in art is a first step toward understanding artistic creativity" (p. 3).

Research Subjects and Variables

In this article, I focus on two entry cohorts to one college of art and design in Ireland. For the purpose of this article, the entry cohorts comprised all those who had matriculated with a Leaving Certificate (that is, the school-leaving state examination in Ireland) and a portfolio score in the autumn of 1992 and 2002. First-time entrants with A-level or other school leaving examination results are excluded. Those who dropped out of college during their first year without completing the full academic year, and those who failed First Year are not included. They are excluded because their first year marks were not available at the time of data collection. This gives a total survey size of 188 individuals. The predictive validity of the entry portfolio and other selection instruments (performance in the school leaving state examination -- the Leaving Certificate Examination) is examined in relation to performance at the end of first year in college. End of year marks comprise marks assigned for studio-based practical work (maximum 80 marks) and for written work in the history of art and design and complementary studies (maximum 20 marks). Together these marks comprise the aggregate end of year mark, which will be referred to hereafter simply as first year mark. For analytical purposes, first year mark is the dependent variable whereas portfolio score and measure of academic ability (performance in the Leaving Certificate Examination) are independent variables. In this research, portfolio score is considered a measure of artistic ability and aptitude at the point of entry. Portfolio score is the score awarded to each applicant's portfolio by college selection committees. Obviously, only the scores of those who had been successful in securing a college place are considered here. As mentioned earlier, measured academic ability at entry is actual performance in the school leaving examination – the Leaving Certificate Examination. It is expressed in a numerical points score (calculated in accordance with the procedures set out in the Common Points System, introduced in 1992 to convert letter grades to a points system for all tertiary applicants). Under this system a fixed number of points is assigned to each grade obtained in the Leaving Certificate and a single points score is arrived at by adding the six best scores/highest grades. However, in calculating the points scores of the 1992 and 2002 art entrant group it was considered more appropriate to treat grade variations within each letter grade as a single grade and allocate points accordingly. For example, grades A1 and A2 were treated as an A grade and 100 points were allocated to each type of A grade achieved; 85 points were awarded to a B grade whether it was a B1, B2 or B3, and so forth.

Underpinning most theories of artistic development is the belief that artistic learning is a cumulative process. Given this, I am interested in examining the relationship between extent

of prior art knowledge (measured on the basis of performance in the subject Art in the Leaving Certificate Examination, hereafter referred to as Art Score) and performance in art college. I focus on the extent of prior knowledge rather than whether or not an entrant had prior knowledge because all entrants had prior knowledge when it was measured in accordance with this criterion. Entrants aged twenty-one or older at entry are classified as mature entrants. All other entrants are classified as traditional entrants. Age at entry is calculated as age in years on October 1st on the year of entry – 1992 and 2002 respectively.

As the literature in the field of prediction studies demonstrates, performance in college is mediated by such factors as gender, age at entry, social class, interest in college, willingness to study and time available for study, including the quality of that time (Hartley & Lapping, 1992; Hoskins et al., 1997; Johnson, 1996; Johnes, 1990; Lynch et al., 1999; Mohr et al., 1998; Moorgat, 1997; Ozga et al., 1998; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1983; Pascarella et al., 1986; Richardson, 1995; Tinto, 1993). Therefore, I am interested in determining the extent to which performance in art college differed significantly between men and women, regular and mature entrants, and direct and indirect entrants. Direct entrants are those that enrolled directly from second level schools, while non-direct entrants are those who spent a year in a further education portfolio preparation program before coming to art college.

Method of Analyses

Analysis of both data sets was undertaken using descriptive and inferential statistics. Distributions of first year marks achieved by men and women, mature and traditional entrants, and direct and non-direct entrants were undertaken to plot the distribution of first year marks according to the variables gender, age, and entry status. T-tests were undertaken to determine if in fact first year marks differed according to the above independent variables: gender, age and entry status. The measured association between first year mark (the dependent variable) and portfolio score, Leaving Certificate points score and Leaving Certificate art score (the independent variables) is reported here in the form of correlation coefficients. When the independent variable is continuous, Pearson correlation coefficients are used to assess this relationship, whereas for categorical variables such as gender or age group, t-tests are employed to determine if first year marks significantly differ for men and women, traditional and mature entrants, and direct and non-direct entrants. As noted above, correlation coefficients are useful in measuring the strength and the direction of the relationship between two variables (the predictor variable and the outcome variable in this case). However, to determine the predictive validity of each predictor variable while holding all others constant, a multiple regression analysis is necessary. The individual contribution that each of these qualitative and quantitative input variables makes to explaining academic achievement in first year at art college is therefore examined through the use of hierarchical multiple regression analysis.

First, I present some descriptive data which outline the distribution of first year marks for the entire entry cohort for both years of entry, followed by the distribution of marks of male and female entrants, mature and traditional entrants, and direct and non-direct entrants. After this, I present the findings of the correlation analysis. These findings demonstrate the relationship between the dependent variable (First Year Marks) and the independent variables (Portfolio Score, Leaving Certificate Examination Performance, and Leaving Certificate Art Performance). Finally, I present findings from the hierarchical multiple regression analysis. These findings identify the individual contribution that the independent variables make to explaining variance in the dependent variable.

Findings & Descriptive Analyses

The distribution of first year marks for both cohorts is similar. Marks of the 1992 cohort range from 45 to 75 marks, the mean being 58.8 (with a Standard Deviation 6.32), while marks of the 2002 cohort range from 42 to 81 marks, the mean or average mark being 61.04 (with a Standard Deviation of 7.94). For both cohorts, the bulk of the marks fall between 55 and 66 marks. Clearly, the pattern of mark allocation has not changed significantly over this ten-year period. While there was no significant difference between the marks awarded to male students and those awarded to female students from both cohorts ($t=-.088$, $df=85$, $p>.05$ and $t=1.43$, $df=99$, $p>.05$), on average, male students were awarded higher first year marks. This was especially the case for the 2002 cohort. In both cohorts, male students tended to have slightly higher portfolio scores at entry than women but the difference is not significant. Male students entering in 2002 had, on average, higher LCE art grades than women but, again, the difference was not statistically significant ($t = 1.347$, $df = 86$, $p>.05$).

Interestingly, mature entrants from the 1992 performed significantly better in First Year than traditional entrants ($t=-2.525$, $df=85$, $p=.013$). The former group had a significantly higher mean First Year mark score than the latter cohort (65.5 marks compared to 58.4 marks). This pattern was not repeated ten years later: mature entrants and traditional entrants scored similar marks in first year and thus there was no significant difference between their overall mean scores ($t = .174$ $df=15$, $p>.05$). Being a direct or non-direct entrant did not impact on first year marks. Both groups – direct and indirect – in both entry cohorts achieved similar marks in First Year. No significant difference in mean scores was observed ($t = -.049$, $df = 97$ $p>.05$ (2002 cohort) and $t=.038$, $df=85$, $p>.05$ (1992 cohort)).

Correlation Analyses

Table 1 demonstrates the association between first year mark (the dependent variable) and portfolio score, school leaving examination performance score, and Leaving Certificate art score (the independent variables). Before the correlations were computed, scatterplots were

first drawn-up. These scatterplots were then scanned for rogue values or outliers. Where an outlier was found it was identified and removed from the data set. The Pearson Correlation Coefficients suggests that first year marks are positively related to portfolio score. That is, first years marks increase with portfolio score. However, for the 1992 and the 2002 entry cohorts the relationship between first year mark and portfolio score, while statistically significant, is not very strong; $r = .25$ and $r = .29$, respectively. In correlation analysis, $r = 1$ means a perfect positive correlation between the two variables examined, while $r = -1$ signifies a perfect negative correlation. When $r = 0$, it means that there is no relationship (positive or negative) between the two variables. A large correlation, somewhere close to $+1$ would indicate high predictability, and this is not the case here.

Table 1. *The Association between First Year Mark and Portfolio Scores, Leaving Certificate Points Scores, Leaving Certificate Art Score and Leaving Certificate Maths Score*

		<i>First Year Mark</i>		<i>Portfolio Score</i>		<i>LCE Points Score</i>	
		<i>1992</i>	<i>2002</i>	<i>1992</i>	<i>2002</i>	<i>1992</i>	<i>2002</i>
<i>Portfolio Score</i>	<i>Pearson Correlation</i>	<i>.247*</i>	<i>.291**</i>				
	<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>	<i>.022</i>	<i>.003</i>				
	<i>Number</i>	<i>86</i>	<i>101</i>				
<i>LCE Points Score</i>	<i>Pearson Correlation</i>	<i>.193</i>	<i>.275**</i>	<i>.353**</i>	<i>-.100</i>		
	<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>	<i>.078</i>	<i>.008</i>	<i>.001</i>	<i>.345</i>		
	<i>Number</i>	<i>84</i>	<i>91</i>	<i>84</i>	<i>91</i>		
<i>LCE Art Score</i>	<i>Pearson Correlation</i>	<i>.301**</i>	<i>.139</i>	<i>.207</i>	<i>.003</i>	<i>.418</i>	<i>.705**</i>
	<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>	<i>.005</i>	<i>.197</i>	<i>.057</i>	<i>.977</i>	<i>.000</i>	<i>.000</i>
	<i>Number</i>	<i>85</i>	<i>88</i>	<i>85</i>	<i>88</i>	<i>85</i>	<i>88</i>

**** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).**

Interestingly the impact of Leaving Certificate points score on first year mark increases over time. For the 1992 entry cohort, the relationship between performance in the Leaving Certificate Examination and performance in first year at art college is not strong ($r = .19$). Neither is it statistically significant. However, for the 2002 cohort, first year marks increase

with Leaving Certificate Points Score, ($r=.275$). This finding is statistically significant. Extent of prior knowledge has a differing relationship with first year marks over time. While performance in Leaving Certificate Art is significantly related to first year marks, and more strongly related to first year marks than portfolio score for the 1992 cohort, the same is not the case for the 2002 cohort. As Table 1 shows, for the 2002 entry cohort, performance in Leaving Certificate art is neither significantly, nor strongly related to first year mark.

In summary, the coefficients presented in Table 1 suggest that first year marks significantly increase with portfolio score for both entry cohorts. The relation between the other independent variables and first year mark differs over time. While overall academic performance in the Leaving Certificate Examination is positively and significantly related to the first year marks of the 2002 entry cohort, this is not the case for the 1992 entry cohort. Similarly, the relationship between measured prior knowledge and first year marks differ considerably for both groups. However, these are preliminary analyses that measure the association between two variables without considering the impact of other variables, and therefore should not be taken as conclusive.

As noted earlier, hierarchical multiple regression analysis allows for the identification of variables that explain variance in the dependent variable as well as the identification of the contribution that independent variables make to explaining variance in the dependent variable, while holding all other variables constant. In hierarchical multiple regression, the predictor variables are entered in a sequential or hierarchical manner in accordance with some pre-existing rationale, or on some theoretical grounds (Tabachnick and Fidell 1989; Aron, Aron and Coups 2008). As each variable is added to the regression model its predictive validity is assessed. Increases in the squared multiple correlation (R^2), as each of the variables is added to the equation, indicate the contribution the each independent variables makes to explaining the criterion (in this case first year mark). Two regression models will be constructed: one for the 1992 entry cohort and one for the 2002 entry cohort. Given its importance in the selection process, portfolio score will be entered in the final step of the regression model. This will provide an opportunity to assess its predictive validity, after controlling for other important input and likely contributory variables (such as gender, age at entry, entry status, performance in Leaving Certificate and in Leaving Certificate art). The first variable entered into each regression model is the one that includes demographic data (gender and age at entry). In step two, the variable measuring the status of students at entry (i.e. direct or non-direct) is added. It is postulated that the status of entrants at entry is indicative of artistic ability: Given the highly competitive nature of art college admission, it is believed that those who have to complete a portfolio preparation program before gaining a place in art college are generally artistically less able than those who can secure a tertiary place without having taken such a program (i.e. direct entrants). The third variable to be entered into the regression model is Leaving

Certificate art grade converted into a single points score in accordance with the Common Points system mentioned earlier). This variable measured the extent of students' prior knowledge. Given that national and international research indicates that prior knowledge is positively associated with first year tertiary performance, it is expected that Leaving Certificate art grade will have a direct influence on first year performance.

Table 2. Final Regression of First Year Marks on the Independent Variables Model for the 1992 Entry Cohort

	<i>Analysis of Variance</i>				
<i>Source of Variation</i>	<i>Sum of Squares</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Mean Square</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
<i>Regression</i>	62883.98	6	10480.66	3.188	0.007
<i>Residual</i>	259748.41	79	3287.96		
<i>Total</i>	322632.38	85			

	<i>Coefficients</i>				
<i>Independent Variables</i>	<i>Unstandardised Coefficients</i>		<i>Standardised Coefficients</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
	<i>B</i>	<i>Std. Error</i>	<i>Beta</i>		
<i>(Constant)</i>	464.84	67.157		6.922	.000
<i>Age at Entry</i>	-4.229	14.864	-.029	-0.285	.777
<i>Gender</i>	-75.307	28.520	-0.288	-2.640	.010
<i>Status of Entrant</i>	-7.552	13.240	-0.061	-0.57	.570
<i>Leaving Certificate Art Score</i>	1.526	.675	0.256	2.261	.027
<i>Leaving Certificate Points Score</i>	.1.634	.097	0.002	0.017	.987
<i>Portfolio Score</i>	1.546	.958	0.168	1.614	.110

Since, overall Leaving Certificate performance also features in the selection process, although not to the same degree as portfolio score, it will be entered in the second last step of both regression models. As noted above, it is expected, that when all other input variables are

controlled for, portfolio score will make a significant contribution to the explanation of variance in first year marks. It is expected that the higher the portfolio score the higher the first year mark will be. Therefore, the fifth and final variable to be entered into both regression equations is portfolio score. Before the relevant categorical variables could be entered into the regression equation, they had to be re-coded. Since these qualitative variables (gender, age, and status of entrant) were dichotomous they were dummy coded (Cohen and Cohen 1975).

Table 3. Final Regression of First Year Marks on the Independent Variables Model for the 2002 Entry Cohort

	<i>Analysis of Variance</i>				
<i>Source of Variation</i>	<i>Sum of Squares</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Mean Square</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
<i>Regression</i>	1016.410	6	169.402	3.317	.006
<i>Residual</i>	4085.848	80	51.073		
<i>Total</i>	5102.257	86			

	<i>Coefficients</i>				
<i>Independent Variables</i>	<i>Unstandardised Coefficients</i>		<i>Standardised Coefficients</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
	<i>B</i>	<i>Std. Error</i>	<i>Beta</i>		
<i>(Constant)</i>	36.643	10.347		3.541	.001
<i>Age at Entry</i>	-.007	2.893	.000	-.002	.125
<i>Gender</i>	3.069	1.980	.162	1.550	.998
<i>Status of Entrant</i>	.952	1.738	.061	.548	.585
<i>Leaving Certificate Art Score</i>	-.135	.104	-.199	-1.301	.197
<i>Leaving Certificate Points Score</i>	.030	.009	.470	3.180	.002
<i>Portfolio Score</i>	.036	.013	.279	2.723	.008

The coefficients for the final step of the regression models are presented in Tables 2 and 3. Before the coefficients were examined, the distribution of the residuals was examined for normality, and residuals were plotted both against predicted values and the dependent variable. These analyses indicated that the assumptions of the multiple regression model were not violated. While these independent variables account for a similar percentage of variance in first year marks over time (16.5% for 1992 and 15.5% for 2002), the predictive validity of portfolio score, Leaving Certificate points score, and Leaving Certificate Art score differ considerably for both entry cohorts. For the 1992 cohort, when all independent variables were held constant, neither portfolio score, nor Leaving Certificate points score made a noticeable or significant contribution to the explanation of variance in first year performance, while performance in Leaving Certificate Art did. For the 2002 entry cohort, portfolio score and Leaving Certificate points score together accounted for 15.5% of variance in first year marks, while performance in Leaving Certificate Art made no contribution, significant or otherwise, to the explanation of variance in first year art college performance. For the 2002 cohort, being male, female, a traditional or mature entrant, or a direct or indirect entrant had no significant impact on first year marks, when measures of artistic and academic ability were held constant. Similarly for 1992 cohort, being male or female, or a direct or indirect entrant had no impact on first year performance. However, being a mature entrant rather than a traditional entrant did have an impact. Mature entrants were awarded significantly higher marks than traditional entrants, even when their portfolio score, Leaving Certificate points score, Leaving Certificate art score, gender and entry status were exactly the same. Similarly, 1992 entrants who had higher Leaving Certificate art scores at entry did better than entrants with lower scores, when all above variables are held constant. Put simply, when gender, age, entry status, Leaving Certificate points score and portfolio score are equal, those enrolling with a high grade in Leaving Certificate art (art score) gain higher first year marks than those admitted with lower art scores (or grades). In short, first year marks increase significantly with Leaving Certificate art score

So what can we learn from this comparison? Firstly, we can tell that while the portfolio has become a more reliable predictor of performance in art college over time, its predictive validity remains low. For the 2002 entry cohort it accounted for only 7.5% of the variance in first year marks. Performance in the Leaving Certificate has also come to serve as a predictor of performance in first year in art college, albeit not a very strong predictor. Performance in Leaving Certificate art played a far stronger predictive role in the past. So too did age at entry. The impact of other variables such as motivation, personality, study patterns, along with social and institutional factors on first year performance were not considered in this article. However, it could be argued, though, that their effect was in fact measured indirectly, since

the measures of ability, achievement and aptitude that were included in the regression models are not in themselves pure measures of innate ability but tend to reflect, in addition to artistic or academic ability, desirable personal study habits and attitudes.

Given the importance attributed to the entry portfolio in the art college application and entry process, it is worthwhile reflecting on the above results as they pertain to the entry portfolio. Seen as an opportunity to present a purposeful selection of artworks that demonstrate individual abilities, interests, and readiness to join a program, the entry portfolio has been presented as an alternative form of assessment that provides a structure for documenting, reflecting upon, and showcasing achievements and accomplishments over time. However, this notion of the entry portfolio conceals the fact that it is a mechanism that operates to maintain the status quo, to legitimate class reproduction in and through culture, and, to use Kathleen Lynch's and Marie Moran's (2006) words, to silence "class dissent by fostering illusions of opportunity" (p. 222). In theory, anybody can put together a portfolio of artwork and submit it for consideration. The logic goes that those with "observational," "inventive," and "creative thinking skills" who willingly produce a collection of "appropriate" work will be meritorious (Young, 1958). Those who fail to gain a place in art college, this logic suggests, are not as deserving of it. However, we know that the visual regimes and practices of visualization most valued by art colleges, and which define their culture in large part, are very particular and specific in nature; they are neither known nor accessible to all members of society to the same extent. Rather, they are accessible to those who through their family environment or schooling are sufficiently knowledgeable and have the means to appropriate and master them in subtle and complex ways. Such individuals are in turn legitimized by their ability to appropriate and master those visual regimes and practices of visualization valued by art colleges (Bourdieu, 1993). As Janet Wolff (1990) reminds us, "The historical development of the arts in our society has left us with a heritage which is pervaded by the inequalities of class, gender, race, and ethnicity" (p. 204). As demonstrated earlier, to become sufficiently knowledgeable in, and about the visual regimes and practices of visualization most valued by art colleges is oftentimes based on access to economic capital and resources.

Besides the inequitable conditions of access and participation that the portfolio generates and legitimates, perhaps it is not the role of the portfolio to reflect and create opportunities for measuring those qualities of art and art practice promoted, supported and valued in the artworld. There appears to be the belief amongst college personnel at least, that the work contained within the portfolio provides sufficient and reliable information to determine if, and to what extent the applicant has the dispositions, skills, and habits of mind that will ensure successful performance in art college. At a time when there are more applicants than college places, if the portfolio does what college personnel say it does, then there is good reason to support it as a selection instrument⁷. However, as this article demonstrates, it is neither a very

strong, nor reliable predictor of success in college. It is a cause of some concern that for most part the predictive validity of the entry portfolio has not been examined or debated to date. Yet, it continues to be used as the primary selection instrument in art colleges across Europe and North America.

Conclusion

In 2009, The National College of Art and Design, Dublin, replaced the long-standing portfolio application requirement with a portfolio submission brief for all undergraduate applicants, apart from applicants to the Industrial Design program. Distributed by the College in advance of the submission date, it is different in many respects from the traditional portfolio. All applicants are given a common set of themes from which to work and a series of prescribed activities to be completed within a specified timeframe. Also, the criteria for evaluation are shared with potential applicants. Does this new format go far enough in terms of providing opportunities for measuring the types of artistic dispositions, habits of minds and work practices that characterize much of contemporary art practice? Since the mid 1990s Irish artists, like their international counterparts, have become increasingly involved in artistic collaborations with other artists and with the larger public. Guided by Bourriaud's (2002) idea that "artistic practice is always a relationship with the other, at the same time as it represents a relationship with the world" (p. 85), artists have become increasingly concerned with notions of site, audience and issues of temporality. They have explored these concepts in and through their practice. In doing so, they have moved away from the notion of the singular aesthetic object. Their roles, too, have shifted and changed: As Alison Pilkington (2007) observes, "the evolution of the contemporary artist's role to encompass overseeing large projects, multi-tasking, producing filmed and written documentation is a departure from the singular role that artists traditionally held as producer of objects in fixed location" (p. 9). Similarly, Bourriaud (2002) reminds us, and as demonstrated by Browne's work presented in this article, "artistic practice is now focused upon the sphere of inter-human relations" (p. 28) and artworks are presented as social interstices. Engaging in 'socially engaged art practice' (Kester, 2004) and creating conditions for new forms of sociability to occur are defining features of much contemporary Irish art practice. Art colleges continue to demand from applicants the production of objects in fixed time and location. In saying that, the efforts of the NCAD go much further than the other colleges of art in Ireland who continue to require a traditional portfolio. Given what is currently posted on the website of the School of Creative Arts of the Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology (IADT) which claims to be speaking also for the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT) regarding portfolio requirements, it is unlikely that there will be a change in the near future in the entry requirements of both institutions. Stating "some institutions now limit you to the completion of a 'special project' as the only content for your portfolio. At DIT and IADT, we do not ask for a 'special project' because we recognize that every applicant is different, and as such the portfolio should show

your individual abilities, interests, and readiness to join one of our innovative programmes.” I believe that we need to trouble this notion of “readiness to join.” What precisely does it mean? And, why, once an applicant gains a place and begins his or her program of study is he or she forced to unlearn everything that they learned about art during high school? In short, the reliance upon this selection instruments without review of its usefulness in predicting success is a cause for concern.

As competition for art college places grows, it is essential that art college selection committees and faculty members engage in a meaningful and evidence-based discussion and debate about ways of selecting their students – future artists. It is a cause for some concern that the current system of selection has not been the subject of a historical or sociological analysis to date. The current system, which this article suggests is not a very strong or reliable predictor of performance in first year, has far reaching consequences. As argued at the beginning of this article, as a selection instrument, the portfolio, as currently imagined and implemented, serves to exclude those who do not possess sufficient economic, social, or cultural capital and in the process both legitimates class reproduction and class advantage in the cultural sphere. In addition it stresses the visual over any other of the senses. The types of preparation that artists need ought to guide how, and through what means they are selected for art college. There is no doubt that art colleges do matter for the careers of artists. Art colleges serve as powerful social and cultural players in the field of artistic production, and they determine in large part those who are to be considered a legitimate player in the field of cultural production.

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Notes

1. This quote originates from Sarah Browne's artist webpage. Retrieved 8 August 2010 from <http://www.sarahbrowne.info/>
2. Slade School of Fine Art Prospectus 2010/11. Retrieved 12 September 2010 from <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/slade/slade09/topMenu/sladeProspectus.pdf>
3. The School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Retrieved 12 September 2010 from http://www.saic.edu/admissions/ug_admiss/apply/index.html#process/SLC_635
4. Emily Carr University of Art and Design. Retrieved 12 September 2010 from <http://www.ecuad.ca/admissions/undergrad/portfolio>
5. Colleges of art and design, as Jacob Getzels and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1976) observed many years ago, "have institutionalized the division in art through specialised training" (p. 49). In Ireland, while art and design students follow a common core of studio and academic courses during their first year in college, they specialize in a fine art or design discipline⁵ during their second and subsequent years; the four largest colleges of art and design offer programs in both fine art and design The National College of Art and Design offers the greatest range of art and design degrees in Ireland (at undergraduate and graduate level). Here, students may follow a program in one of four fields/faculties: Art and Design Education, Design, Fine Art, and Visual Culture. In the Faculty of Design, programs are offered in Craft Design (comprising Ceramic Design, Glass Design and Metal/Jewellery Design, three separate programs in their own right), Fashion Design, Industrial Design, Textile Design (three separate programs are also offered within this area of specialisation: printed, woven and embroidered textiles) and Visual Communication. Programs in Media, Painting, Printmaking, and Sculpture are offered within the Fine Art field. The Faculty of Education provides for the education of second level art, craft, and design teachers through the four-year concurrent teacher education program. It also offers a one-year postgraduate Higher Diploma in Art and Design Education; like the art and design education graduates, graduates from this program are qualified to teach at second level. While the Faculty of Visual Culture provide courses in the history of art and design and complementary studies (Film, Media, Cultural Studies, Sociology, Aesthetics, Gender Studies, and Business Studies) which are an integral part of the above programs in the fields of design, education, and fine art, in addition the Faculty also offers a Joint Program in the History of Art or the History of Art and Design combined with either a Fine Art or Design discipline. Joint Programs are divided on an equal basis between theoretical and

practical studies. At the studio-based (or practical) end, Joint Program students work side by side with 'regular students' in their chosen disciplines. They undertake the same projects, have the same tutors and are expected to meet the same deadlines as "regular students." In relation to the theoretical side of study, Joint Program students, in addition to having to attend the regular classes in history of art and design taken by the other students in their chosen discipline, are also required to attend on a weekly basis a series of lectures and seminars organized specifically for the group. At the Limerick School of Art and Design, which is now part of the Limerick Institute of Technology, Fine Art programs include Painting, Printmaking and Sculpture. In Design, programs are available in Fashion Design, Product Design (which is essentially Ceramic Design) and Visual Communication. Crawford College of Art and Design in Cork, which is now incorporated into the Cork Institute of Technology, offers four fine art programs and one design program. Students entering fine art may choose from the traditional Painting, Printmaking or Sculpture options or otherwise may follow a photography mixed media based program known as Photo 2D. Ceramic Design is the only design program offered within the college. The range of programs offered within the Dun Laoghaire College of Art and Design, which has since become a school within the Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology, differs somewhat from those offered in the above three colleges. In addition to the fine art disciplines Painting, Printmaking and Sculpture a program in "Digital Media" is also offered within the fine art department. In Design, courses in Animation, Film and Video, and Visual Communication are available. Furthermore, certificate programmes are offered by the College in commercial photography, radio broadcasting, model-making and special effects, make-up for film, television and theatre, and video and television production.

6. Consider the following examples: One of the portfolio based activities issued by one of the three colleges considered in this research study required applicants to select a set of objects relating to four identified themes. Using that set of objects, applicants were required to place each object in an unfamiliar environment and make observational studies of each object in that context. Another exercise invited applicants to dismantle two objects of any kind and to make observational drawings of the dismantled pieces arranged in new ways. Applicants were encouraged to use a range of materials and to combine and mix those materials that seldom appear together. Opportunities to imagine new configurations were encouraged. The following questions were offered to prompt applicants to produce work: "What is the result in visual terms of a tool interacting with an item of clothing? If we call a Ladder a tool and a Coat an item of clothing, then could the coat have slots cut in it like a ladder?" In another set of suggested exercises, applicants were asked to invent, demonstrate, or illustrate ways to do two of the following: a) Raise a flag, b) Keep a door shut, c) Place five objects of great personal importance into five contrasting locations and

record the results, d) Build a shelter, e) Design some decorative items that animals or birds could wear, f) Make a map that records a journey: across a room, along a street, along a leg of a table etc., g) Record through colour everything you eat during the day, and h) Explain the opposite of a fish. In these activities, emphasis is placed on producing still images that can be viewed easily. While applicants were invited to include moving images, they were reminded that a maximum of two minutes would be allocated for viewing such work. Similarly, the portfolio guidelines issued by another college in this research suggested that admission officers and selection committees were interested in applicants' skills of close observation. For example, potential applicants were instructed, "If you are doing a drawing on the page in which you are attempting to examine the structure of a plant, show how the stalks bend this way and that; how the leaves are attached to the stalks; how the petals fit together around the seed head etc. Instead of making one drawing of the whole plant, it would be much more interesting to make each of the investigations mentioned above, the subject of a separate drawing – but all on the same page." Applicants to the third college of art and design included in this study were advised "not [to] pack the portfolio with paintings or drawings copied from originals or from photographs. Even if it looks very slick," the guidelines suggest, "it only demonstrates a mechanical copying facility." There was a time in the history of art when copying directly from original works of art was considered an essential element of an artists training because it was believed that copying from original works required a certain understanding of, and experience and proficiency with materials, processes, and form. While this college (similar to all other art colleges) required applicants to demonstrate evidence of an ability to work with a range of different media with skill, imagination, and proficiency and to demonstrate "critical observational skills," to do so by copying an original work is not considered "a valid practice."

7. The portfolio guidelines issued by the Crawford College of Art and Design, Cork, would have us believe that, "All of the work presented will give an interviewer an idea of a students approach to work, their level of skill and experience and their ability to research and develop an idea visually." And, similarly, the NCAD is of the opinion that the work produced because of and within the limitations and possibilities of the portfolio submission brief "is intended to be a good indicator as to how they might be expected to perform at third level, where similar structures prevail."

About the Author

Dr. Donal O'Donoghue is an Associate Professor in the Faculty of Education at the University of British Columbia (UBC), Vancouver, Canada, where he serves as Chair of Art Education. His research interests are in art education, arts-based visual research methodologies, curriculum theory, and masculinities. He has published widely in these areas, and received the 2010 Manuel Barkan Memorial Award from the National Art Education Association (United States) for his scholarly writing. He is the Editor of *Canadian Review of Art Education*. His current SSHRC-funded research investigates place-cultures and place-making practices in private boys' schools.

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