

AN INTRODUCTION

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“And so I go into the studio every day, if only to read or take a nap. Main thing, I’m there. Otherwise, I know, things just don’t move along.” With this statement the U.S. artist Bruce Nauman directs attention to the studio as site of artistic production (and occasionally other activities). Art theory has recently devoted more attention to the “myth of the studio,” as evidenced by a number of conferences, publications, and exhibits. As the artist’s working environment, the studio is the point of departure for self-presentation and self-reflection; it can serve equally well as a place of refuge or as a theater for the public staging of the self. The exhibition *Bildlabor. Kunststudenten. Landau* (Picture Lab. Art Students. Landau) in the *Museum Pfalzgalerie Kaiserslautern (mpk)* focuses our gaze on an additional function of the studio: the studio as instructional site, as the site of artistic training in the context of a university education. Here the expression “picture lab” underscores the fact that the (instructional) studio is a site where, to a special extent, one experiments and undertakes trials, where ideas are advanced – or discarded. And all of this within the framework of a continuous and open process during which the individual artistic approach of each and every student is formed.

These deliberations lead to the concept of artistic research. Intended here is the idea that artists develop specific methods and strategies by means of experiments. There is nothing new about this, but it has in recent years become an evermore predominant feature of the discourses at art schools. A university institute, like that in Landau, at which studies of art and science go hand in hand, is practically predestined to take up the question of the specific research contribution made by the arts.

Having developed out of the Rheinland-Palatinate Teacher Training College (Erziehungswissenschaftliche Hochschule Rheinland-Pfalz) in 1990, Koblenz-Landau is the most recently established university in the federal state of Rheinland-Palatinate. It is unusual in structure, with its three locations on a north-south axis of 180 kilometers: teaching and research take place on the Koblenz and Landau campuses, while the Office of the President and parts of the universi-

ty administration are found in Mainz. With its 14 000 students, Koblenz-Landau is one of the medium-sized universities in Germany. Its primary mandate is the training of teachers for all school types.

This is reflected in the structure of the Institute for Art Theory and Visual Arts in Landau with its three mutually complementary instructional areas of Artistic Practice, Art Didactics, and Art Theory / Art History. Special emphasis is given to the development of didactic abilities and teaching competence. Artistic Practice involves the teaching of painting and drawing, sculptural design and printmaking techniques, photography and digital image processing. We are convinced that the ability to later teach the subject of art to children and adolescents at school presupposes long-term and multifaceted artistic practice on the part of students. For teaching art at school involves much more than just imparting the skills and techniques of artistic practice. Good art instruction fosters the creativity and imagination of the individual, not by animating him or her to imitate, but by focusing on his or her autonomous, creative production. In this way good art instruction boosts the self-confidence of children and adolescents, making in this way an important contribution to the development of their personalities. What holds for instruction at school is also true for art studies at the university: theory and aesthetic practice have to be closely interwoven – in the sense of the famous quote from Leonardo da Vinci: “He who loves practice without theory is like the sailor who boards ship without a rudder and compass and never knows where he may be cast. Practice must always rest on good theory.”

The exhibition “PictureLab. Art Students. Landau” collects the works of 20 students on paper. How should we concretely imagine how their work came into being in the instructional studio?

The point of departure for artistic activity at the beginning of art studies is daily and continuous drawing in every form. At the start, in the introductory courses, emphasis is placed on precisely seeing and reproducing. Thereafter, however, the goal is always developing one’s own stroke, filling the image area, creating composition, tensions, and relationships.

By experimenting with various pictorial techniques and materials and combining them in different ways, each student comes to his or her own way of drawing, based on individual ideas, perceptions and temperament. Here the priority of the assistance rendered is to help work out the strengths and focal points of the individual, to give one the courage to question one's own course of action, to scrap old ideas and start anew, to accept and tolerate criticism, to discover new things for oneself, to gain pleasure from one's doings by sensing progress. With emphasis on the ideas not of the instructor but of the student, diversity emerges, and the constant dialogue between the two leads to progress and convincing results.

The skills developed in drawing can then be transferred to printmaking. Here it is important that the students expose themselves to the array of technical options afforded by this medium, so that they can exploit them for their own work. Scratching, scraping, etching, cutting, layering, altering, discarding, reworking, and playing are intensive attributes of this activity. Learning patience is also an important element of this process, since the result of printmaking can only be seen at the end of a long process, when the print is completed.

Prints come about slowly and quietly. The pictorial projects develop in series; ideas come to maturation. Some experimental procedures in printmaking cannot be planned in advance in every detail; strategies have to be modified during the working process. But even in traditional techniques, it is not simply a matter of technically implementing an idea once conceived. Instead, it must be rediscussed from stage to stage, both with other students and with the instructors. Here a texture or a surface may be missing; there, forms and figures may need clarifying. Communication of students among themselves, while working together in the studio, often outside of supervised hours at night and on the weekend, and learning from one another make key contributions to the outstanding results of their labors. The action, the process of working, often remains visible to the viewer, and can be mentally re-enacted in many drawings and prints. These are the adventures of working in this way: time and again new discoveries are made that repeatedly call for new artistic decisions. Here one moves from graphite

drawings to etchings and classic woodcuts, to combinations of the two, to new materials such as cardboard as printing block and other material findings, to stories told in a series of prints, all the way to animated drawings as film.

Criticism and praise balance each other out and have to be incorporated by students into their process of development. This fosters autonomy, and creativity can emerge during the constant search for ways to raise and expand one's expressive powers. Regular exhibits are an integral part of art studies in Landau, and the prospect of being part of such an exhibition, of presenting one's work to the public, and of discussing and dealing with persons who are not acquainted with the way it came about can only serve to inspire.