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COMING OUT FIGHTING

Natasha Hoare and Marc Valli look at how different artists have managed that difficult awakening, from the protected and carefully monitored environment of the art school to the harsh realities of the art world and the daunting prospect of having to build a 'career as an artist'.

Having come out of an MFA course at Slade, artist Julia Vogl describes her experience as: 'The greatest resource any college can offer is time. Time to think, time to take risks and fail, time to read, see, question and, most importantly, time to create. When you leave college, there is a wind tunnel of pressure, and that time dissolves. Suddenly you have to have a plan, you have to think on your feet, you have to jump on opportunities, you have to make things financially viable, and you can no longer tell the world you are a student – you need to be able to explain what you do.'

University is a close-knit and supportive environment where studio space is provided, deadlines and goals set, and a network fostered. There are no such clear targets or rules or marking methods in the world outside and leaving education can be a disconcerting experience. Our guide into the purgatory of these early years is Justin Hammond who, as the curator of the Catlin Art Prize, rewarding recent graduates and emerging artists, has been in the ideal position to observe the challenges and the trappings of this tricky period.

Justin Hammond

Standing out Something fresh will stand out – so much supposedly new art is just retro. I'm searching for someone with a unique angle, a new idea and the potential for thousands more. I'm not necessarily looking for the finished product: there's no fun in working with an artist with little inclination to progress.

Less is more Most degree shows aren't really curated and artists are fighting for the best spot in the shop window. Sometimes it's difficult to look – to really look – without being distracted by something totally unrelated.

How to make a curator's life easier The main thing is to avoid acting like a dickhead. It's pretty simple.

Pricing work New grads shouldn't stray too far from their degree show prices and aim for a gradual increase. Prices shouldn't fluctuate, and should never come back down. For artists represented by a number of galleries or making their work available online, it's imperative that prices remain equal throughout. It's down to the artist to manage that and facilitate communication between various galleries. Good dealers will help to build demand and manage prices, but I'd like to see more advice made available as part of the curriculum. I'm not suggesting that art schools should concentrate too heavily on that side of things, but it's terrifying just how ill-equipped some new grads are when it comes to selling their work.

Catalogue or wall text I don't advocate dumbing-down, but artspeak can be excruciating. Certain works may benefit from a written explanation or rely on a backstory, but it should be kept to a minimum. This is especially true at degree shows where visitors will spend just a few seconds (if you're lucky) with each piece of art. An impenetrable wall text won't do the artist any favours. I don't think an artist is best positioned to write about their own work: they are too immersed in the process of making, in microscopic nuances, to deliver a lucid assessment. They're always likely to miss out the

best stuff. Commission a catalogue essay. There are some good writers out there if you look hard enough.

Overnight success Each year there will be a small clutch of artists that everyone seems to focus on, invariably from the same two or three art schools, but that intensity is transient. In twelve months it's someone else's turn to be talked up. It's the search for 'the next big thing', isn't it? But I don't think anyone really believes that someone will come straight out of art school and set the world on fire. It's a long haul. Just working in London and making a living as a full-time artist is an achievement. I'm reminded of the Bob Dylan quote, 'A man is a success if he gets up in the morning and goes to bed at night and in between does what he wants to do.'

The press If you find yourself in the rare position of talking about your art to the mainstream press, just remember that they won't be remotely interested in obscure influences or references. They'll just want to know if you're destined to be the next Damien or Tracey. It's lame, but that's how it goes. Save the subtle stuff for the specialist art blogs.

Are curators snobby about where you trained as an artist? Most curators are snobby about everything, aren't they?

Do you need to do an MA to be taken seriously? Absolutely not, though the process suits certain artists and I've seen BA grads benefit from a return to the art school environment. Two of my favourite artists from the last book were BAs, both make art very instinctively. I've witnessed Tom make a quite beautiful painting without really contemplating the canvas and I'd hate to see either of them conform and lose that rawness.

The Catlin Guide 2013: New Artists in the UK is launched at the London Art Fair 2013 and will also be available from Culture Label and selected book sellers. www.artcatlin.com

Charmed Circle, 2011, ink and oil on canvas, 87 x 87 cm



Adam Dix

Adam Dix was shortlisted for the Catlin Art Prize in 2010, and has since gone on to exhibit with Haunch of Venison, Charlie Smith and Beaconsfield. His interests range from science fiction and Cold War politics to shamanic rituals and co-alescence in disturbingly contemporary images.

— *Was leaving your art degree an intimidating prospect?* No. I worked freelance as a gallery technician through my degree and just thought that I would carry on juggling time between the studio and technician work.

The gap between art degree and independent practice I was lucky to have had a successful final degree show and it gave me the confidence and finance to spend some unexpected time in the studio. This was followed by going back to technician work part time, but I was also lucky to be selected for Future Map, Catlin and a group show called 'Black Dog Yellow House'. All were good platforms. Future Map and Catlin I found essential in helping to bridge that gap between college and the professional

art world and 'Black Dog Yellow House' was my first professional gig.

Routine The routine has slightly changed now as I've been able to be solely in the studio, where as before it was a juggle between work to pay the bills and grabbing what hours I could to do the painting. Now I'm in four to five days a week, from about ten after dropping my kids off at school. The day starts in the studio with a large jug of coffee, which I steadily make my way through whilst going through emails and writing up work notes. The studio has been divided into different areas for different stages of the work, which has been rather dictated by my work process. I work on the flat and build up layers of ink and oil glazes. It's quite a me-

thodical and slow way of working and so I go from one work to another. The maximum I can work on is about three pieces per day as the studio is not that big. The day goes quickly as I don't really stop for lunch and depending if I have to collect my kids from school, I tend to finish by seven.

The return to figurative painting Figurative painting is continually evolving, so to say there has been a return would be wrong; it's just readapted. The shift in figurative painting has not been hindered by traditional criteria, but has accepted conceptual ideas whilst being aware of its past; this makes it an attractive and malleable platform. For me personally, the use of the figure is a starting point. I am not interested in the figure in the classical sense of figurative painting, merely as a prop to be included within my other ideas. The figure is naturally present by default within my work, as a motif of osmosis in its relation to the subject matter.

The past The original source for inspiration was to appropriate characteristics of lithographic printing from printed material of the 1950° Cold War period. The idea being that by emulating the nuances of print within my painting process this would refer to a 'spike' in history where there had been a huge technological advance in communication, that would subsequently imply a historical timeline to the origins of devices used today. This, coupled with the character of traditional or outmoded forms of dress, does imply an interest in the past. So, the anachronism is a visual device to evoke contrast between an attentive recipient and their response to the contemporary form of communication.

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The Blessing, 2011, ink and oil on panel, 39 x 51 cm

Talisman, 2012, American black cherry, turned aluminium, nickel inlay, paint, placed on black cast acrylic plinth, 33 x 11 cm





Do You Receive Me, 2012, link
fluorescent pigment and oil on canvas, 65 x 90 cm