

**The rise of the leisure painter: artistic creativity within the
experience of ordinary life in postwar Britain, c. 1945-2000**

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For Theo and Iris

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List of abbreviations

ACACE	Advisory Council of Adult and Continuing Education
ACSAC	Association of Civil Service Art Clubs
BIAE	British Institute of Adult Education
BWS	Birmingham Watercolour Society
CEMA	Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts
ESA	Educational Settlements Association
ILEA	Inner London Education Authority
LCC	London County Council
LEA	Local Education Authority
NIACE	National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education
NIAE	National Institute of Adult Education
RA	Royal Academy of Art
RBSA	Royal Birmingham Society of Artists
RI	Royal Institute
RWS	Royal Watercolour Society
SEAC	Stock Exchange Art Club
SSA	Society of Staffordshire Artists
WEA	Workers Education Association

*What is this life if, full of care,
We have no time to stand and stare?*

W. H. Davies, 1911

PART ONE

Introductory

INTRODUCTION

Artistic creativity within the experience of everyday life

‘The average householder here is woefully ignorant of the wealth of artistic talent that lies hidden among his fellow countrymen.’¹

What is creativity?

‘The wave of veneration for creativity is once again swelling’, wrote historian of aesthetics Wladyslaw Tatarkiewicz in 1980.² According to the economist Richard Florida, the turn of the twenty-first century marked the dawn of a ‘creative age’, where the ‘ideas factory’ ethos of the creative industries generated invention and innovation.³ Creativity was intensely coveted. Harnessing its powers became the concern of big business and government, yet the term itself remained little understood. The subject of creativity is not underpinned by a secure body of knowledge: numerous definitions have been proposed, but there is very little agreement across or even within academic disciplines as to what exactly it should define. Firstly, there is no consensus on whether creativity is a quality possessed by a product, process or person; secondly, there is little agreement as to whether creativity is an individual affair or a social activity; lastly, there is no firm understanding of whether creativity is a rare occurrence or a common everyday experience.⁴ Confusion stems mainly from the term’s convoluted history.⁵ In Latin, *creare* had a similar

¹ Dodgson Bowman, W., ‘The G.P.O. Arts Club’ in *Amateur Artist and Collector: A Monthly Journal for All Interested in Art*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Nov., 1927), pp. 16-7.

² Tatarkiewicz, W., *A History of Six Ideas: An Essay in Aesthetics* (Warsaw: Polish Scientific Publishers, 1980), p. 260.

³ Florida, R., *The Rise of the Creative Class: And How It’s Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), xii.

⁴ Gotesky, R. and Breithaupt, E., ‘Creativity: A Metasociological Analysis’ in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 39, No. 1 (Sep., 1978), pp. 23-5. See also Mayer, R. E., ‘Fifty Years of Creativity Research’ in Sternberg, R. J. (ed), *Handbook of Creativity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 450.

⁵ Kristeller, P. O., “‘Creativity’ and ‘Tradition’” in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 44, No. 1 (Jan. - Mar., 1983), p. 105.

meaning to *facere*: to make. During the Christian period, a new expression *creatio* referred to God's act of creation from nothing or *creatio ex nihilo*. *Creatio* was the exclusive province of God and, as such, took on a different meaning from that of *facere*, which was the lowly field of *homo faber* (man the maker). Making, a mundanely mortal occupation, was subsequently sidelined from discourse.⁶ It was much later that *creatio ex nihilo* became synonymous with the talents of the artist. The ideal of the creative genius emerged with the Romantic movement and, in the nineteenth century, came to be associated with art alone.⁷ During the twentieth century the remit of creativity gradually expanded to become an attribute not only of the arts, but also of the sciences and, eventually, 'all fields of human production'.⁸ By the late-twentieth century, creativity had been imbued with economic as well as cultural value, and identified as a key component of economic growth.⁹

Sociologist Richard Sennett argues the word creativity carries 'too much Romantic baggage' to warrant using with any credibility.¹⁰ It is true that it has become a 'catchall expression' which can be interpreted in any number of different ways.¹¹ To completely dismiss the concept is, however, unwarranted: it exists and is both pervasive and persuasive. That creativity powered the economy was an idea as vague and intangible as its original incarnation as the divine power of an omniscient god, yet creativity was more than simply a factor in the drive for innovation. Creativity appealed not only to governments keen to foster economic growth, but also

⁶ Tatarkiewicz, *A History of Six Ideas*, p. 247.

⁷ Kristeller, "'Creativity' and 'Tradition'", pp. 106-7.

⁸ Tatarkiewicz, *A History of Six Ideas*, p. 254.

⁹ Villalba, E. (ed), *Measuring Creativity, Conference Proceedings for Can Creativity be Measured?* (Brussels: May, 2009); see also Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class*, xii; Seltzer, K. and Bentley, T., *The Creative Age: Knowledge and Skills for the New Economy* (London: DEMOS, 1999), p. 14; and Unsworth, K., 'Unpacking Creativity' in *The Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (Apr., 2001), pp. 289-97.

¹⁰ Sennett, R., *The Craftsman* (London: Penguin, 2008), p. 290.

¹¹ Razik, T., 'The Issue: Creativity: Nature, Nurture, and Measurement and Evaluation' in *Theory into Practice*, Vol. 5, No. 4 (Oct., 1966), p. 149.

to ordinary individuals who wished to express themselves artistically in their day-to-day lives. At an individual level, creativity became what psychologist M. A. Boden describes as a ‘socially sanctioned honorific’: creative individuals were admired, their talents coveted.¹² Despite the term’s inherent ambiguity, it held considerable allure; while few understood the phenomenon, many were keen to experience its rewards.

The dominant approach to the study of creativity has, however, led to the neglect of much of this everyday personal creativity. Psychological research into creativity is relatively recent. Yet it is this branch of investigation, dating from the 1950s, that has had the greatest influence over both academic and popular interpretations of the term.¹³ Psychological concepts and methods privilege intellectual creativity and place thought processes at the centre of exploration.¹⁴ Creativity, it is commonly argued, is primarily a mental process of coming up with something that is both novel and appropriate.¹⁵ Central terms of research involve the explanation of novelty, originality, invention and innovation. From psychometric tests of ‘divergent’ thought (the generation of ideas and inspiration) to historiometric analyses of creative epochs, and biographical methodologies such as Lewis Terman’s longitudinal study of the ‘gifted’, the emphasis across disciplines is on individuals who exhibit an ‘objective’ creativity.¹⁶ Unlike Eastern doctrines (Hindu, Taoist, Buddhist), which do not recognise the concept of creativity *ex nihilo*, the modern western understanding of creativity is a romantic one, based on ideas of individual

¹² Boden, M. A., ‘Introduction’ in Boden, M. A. (ed), *Dimensions of Creativity* (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1994), p. 2.

¹³ See Westland, G., ‘The Investigation of Creativity’ in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (Winter, 1969), pp. 127-31; and also LaChapelle, J. R., ‘Creativity Research: Its Sociological and Educational Limitations’ in *Studies in Art Education*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (1983), pp. 131-2.

¹⁴ See, for example, Koestler, A., *The Act of Creation* (New York: Macmillan, 1964).

¹⁵ Sternberg, R. J. and Lubart, T. I., ‘The Concept of Creativity: Prospects and Paradigms’ in Sternberg, R. J. (ed), *Handbook of Creativity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 3.

¹⁶ Mayer, ‘Fifty Years of Creativity Research’, pp. 454-5.

gifts and outstanding genius.¹⁷ An implicit hierarchy of creative responses, not all of which are considered equally valid, has permeated much research.¹⁸ Even subjective approaches, which assert that there is no objective standard for quality, often describe some other realm of creativity wherein exist the ‘prodigiously gifted’ – artists of the Renaissance, for example.¹⁹ Overall, a Schumpeterian interpretation, in which creativity can only ever be recognised *ex post*, has come to dominate.²⁰ Only experiences in which the end product is deemed innovative are examined, creating bias towards socially ‘successful’ ideas.²¹ This unduly limits the field of enquiry: if creativity is judged only by ‘successful’ products *ex post*, the creative process – and why people choose to engage in it – is not likely to be understood.

A Cartesian duality has become entrenched in the modern western understanding of creativity: thought took precedence over action, product over process. The physical experience of much creativity was sidelined in an age where conceptual ‘art without the work of art’ became the apotheosis of artistic creation.²² The romantic notion of art as inspiration was elevated above the craft notion of art as certified progression. The evolution of the idea that art was the result of inspiration, rather than of the application of skill and physical labour was, like that of the term creativity, long and complicated. The ancients saw more that connected the fine arts and crafts than separated them, and divided them according to whether they required mental effort alone (the liberal arts) or additional manual effort (the common or

¹⁷ Albert, R. S. and Runco, M. A., ‘A History of Research on Creativity’ in Sternberg, R. J. (ed), *Handbook of Creativity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 18; see also Lubart, T. I., ‘Creativity Across Cultures’ in Sternberg, R. J. (ed), *Handbook of Creativity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 339-50.

¹⁸ LaChapelle, ‘Creativity Research: Its Sociological and Educational Limitations’, p. 132.

¹⁹ See, for example, Csikszentmihalyi, M., ‘Society, Culture, and Person: A Systems View of Creativity’ in Sternberg, R. J. (ed), *The Nature of Creativity: Contemporary Psychological Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 337.

²⁰ Schumpeter, J. A., ‘The Creative Response in Economic History’ in *The Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (Nov., 1947), p. 150.

²¹ Unsworth, ‘Unpacking Creativity’, p. 289.

²² Tatarkiewicz, *A History of Six Ideas*, p. 48.

mechanical arts). Liberal arts were considered superior to the mechanical arts, but not all arts today considered fine were deemed liberal; sculpture and painting were considered vulgar because they used manual labour, yet they were not included on the list of mechanical arts because they lacked utility. During the middle ages, painting, sculpture and craft trades continued to be skills acquired by apprenticeship and, as such, were ranked beneath high arts. In the Renaissance there was, however, a transformation: as commerce slowed, art came to be regarded as an investment.²³ This improved the social standing of painters, sculptors, and architects who, as producers of beauty, came to be highly valued.²⁴ Giorgio Vasari, who witnessed the recategorisation of painting as a liberal art and the founding of the first academies of painting and sculpture, proclaimed that he had ‘lived to see Art arise suddenly and liberate herself from knavery and bestiality’.²⁵

Both art and craft suffered from their divorce: despite efforts to reconnect the two by the arts and crafts movement in the late-nineteenth century, and its revivalists at various points in the twentieth, the assumption that craft was devoid of imagination, and art bereft of craftsmanship persisted. The elevation of fine art above craft was repeatedly criticised, yet the approach taken by some critics further entrenched the division between the two. David Gauntlett, for example, has recently argued that art should be regarded ‘as unnecessarily pretentious and exclusive, and therefore rather silly, in comparison to the more earthy, engaged spirit of craft’.²⁶ Similarly, Susan Sontag has complained that unlike traditional cultures, where everyone is expected to

²³ Tatarkiewicz, *A History of Six Ideas*, p. 15; see also Lopez, R. S. and Miskimin, H. A. ‘The Economic Depression in the Renaissance’ in *The Economic History Review*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (1962), pp. 408-26.

²⁴ Tatarkiewicz, *A History of Six Ideas*, pp. 15-16.

²⁵ Quoted in Macdonald, S., *The History and Philosophy of Art Education* (London: University of London Press, 1970), p. 20.

²⁶ Gauntlett, D., *Making is Connecting: The Social Meaning of Creativity, from DIY and Knitting to YouTube and Web 2.0* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011), p. 23.

fulfil the role of artist to some extent, in the west art is ‘the terrain of the specialist’, requiring an elite and ‘specialised language’ to which only the few are initiated.²⁷ These notions assume there is only one art world, and that it is the high-level commodified ‘world’ ruled by the multi-million pound global art market. Craft is posited as some kind of antidote to the elitism of art, when no such division should exist. Fabrication and thought are each necessary but not sufficient conditions of creativity.²⁸ Just as craft is uninteresting without a degree of imagination and artistry, most fine art requires skill and craftsmanship.²⁹ Both involve what the craftsman David Pye calls the ‘workmanship of risk’, where the quality of the final product is constantly under threat of accident or destruction during the process of making.³⁰ Painting, for example, is associated with imagination, yet is essentially a practical form of creativity. ‘When you get right down to it,’ explained a 1975 editorial in amateur art magazine *Leisure Painter*, ‘it’s as difficult to paint a picture as it is to build a decent piece of furniture, or weave a good length of cloth, without the basic skills, enthusiasm and talent.’³¹ Just as there is no good reason to regard execution and fabrication as ‘non-creative’, there is no reason to assert that art is irrelevant to the experience of ordinary life.³²

The fractal art world

In this study, the common view that fine art is reserved for elites is challenged by unveiling the extent of artistic creativity within the experience of ordinary life in

²⁷ Susan Sontag quoted in Newick, J., ‘Study of the Context of Participation in the Arts’ in Field, D. and Newick, J. (eds), *The Study of Education and Art* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), p. 83.

²⁸ Bailin, S., ‘On Creativity as Making: A Reply to Gotz’ in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 41, No. 4 (Summer, 1983), pp. 438-9.

²⁹ Sennett, *The Craftsman*, p. 65.

³⁰ Pye, D., *The Nature and Art of Workmanship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), p. 20.

³¹ Editorial in *Leisure Painter* (July, 1975), p. 1.

³² Maitland, J., ‘Creativity’ in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 34, No. 4 (1976), p. 400.

twentieth century Britain. By ‘ordinary’, this study refers to individuals whose artistic creativity is scheduled into their leisure hours, outside of work, as opposed to the conventional image of the professional artist. Mostly hidden from view, amateurs were ‘the most numerous stratum of artists’.³³ Drawing and painting was a minority pursuit but, over the course of the twentieth century, it became a significant and growing minority. In one late-twentieth century survey conducted by the Research Services of Great Britain for the Arts Council, it was estimated that 3.7 million people (out of a total UK population of 57.4 million) engaged in drawing and painting from time to time, of which 1.8 million did so regularly – the majority in a non-professional capacity.³⁴ Amateur art was part of a general interest in creative leisure pursuits. The same 1991 survey found that, for example, 3.7 million people regularly practiced photography and, it was reported in the General Household Survey of the same year, 1.8 million engaged in amateur music and drama.³⁵ In combination, the numbers involved in the amateur arts were higher than the visitor numbers for some of England’s major art galleries and museums. Given that in the same year 1.8 million people visited the Tate Gallery (now Tate Britain) in London, the number of amateur artists cannot be dismissed as insignificant.³⁶

Despite their growing number, amateurs remained the nation’s hidden artists. An overemphasis on the passive consumption of fine art in galleries and museums obscured the popularity of drawing and painting as a leisure pursuit.³⁷ The academic

³³ Finney, H. C., ‘Mediating Claims to Artistry: Social Stratification in a Local Visual Arts Community’ in *Sociological Forum*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (Sep., 1993), p. 429.

³⁴ Hutchison, R. and Feist, A., *Amateur Arts in the UK: The PSI Survey of Amateur Arts and Crafts in the UK* (London: The Policy Studies Institute, 1991), p. 23, p. 68 and p. 134.

³⁵ *Ibid*, xiii and p. 134; see also General Household Survey, 1991.

³⁶ *Social Trends*, 27 (1995), p. 223; *Social Trends*, 33 (2001), p. 30; see also Hooper-Greenhill, E., *Museums and Their Visitors* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 60-1.

³⁷ In 2003, for example, the Office of National Statistics’ Annual Abstract replaced the participatory leisure activities category with ‘attendance at leisure and culture activities’. For a critique of the misleading nature of cultural booms, which focus on passive rather than active consumption, see Linder, S. B., *The Harried Leisure Class* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), pp. 103-6.

focus on the activities of professional artists and their audiences has reinforced the assumption, made by Gauntlett and Sontag, that artistic enjoyment is an elite privilege associated with the educated classes.³⁸ This is, in some respects, a reflection of a bias inherent in arts provision. As adult educationist David Jones argued in the late-1980s: ‘The opportunities which exist to engage with the arts are mainly opportunities to appreciate them. Opportunities to create and to participate are limited.’³⁹ Towards the end of the twentieth century two reports challenged the assumed correlation between elitism and the arts by examining amateur experience.⁴⁰ *The Arts and Adult Education* by Geoffrey Adkins (1981) and *Amateur Arts in the UK* by Robert Hutchison and Andrew Feist (1991) offered useful, albeit historically isolated, snapshots of amateur activity in the arts and crafts.⁴¹ The authors lamented the absence of the amateur from public discussion of the arts and called for greater recognition of the scale and impact of the amateur arts. The situation has not, however, vastly improved. Although adult educationists have, since the late-1950s, argued that ‘culture is ordinary’ and that the arts are not, and should not, be separate from everyday life, there remains a general lack of engagement with cultural production by ordinary people across academic disciplines.⁴² The current emphasis in humanities research on participatory arts, which focuses on the co-authorship of the audience and the professional artist, and community arts, in which professional artists are commissioned to bring artistic

³⁸ See, for example, Miles, A., ‘Culture, Participation and Identity in Contemporary Manchester’ in Savage, M. and Wolff, J. (eds), *Culture in Manchester: Institutions and Urban Change Since 1850* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), pp. 176-93; and also Blau, J. R., Blau, P. M. and Golden, R. M., ‘Social Inequality and the Arts’ in *The American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 91, No. 2 (Sep., 1985), pp. 309-31.

³⁹ Jones, D., *Adult Education and Cultural Development* (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 112.

⁴⁰ Similar surveys do not exist for previous years. The two mentioned here are quite different in approach.

⁴¹ Adkins, G., *The Arts and Adult Education* (Leicester: Advisory Council for Adult and Continuing Education, 1981); and Hutchison and Feist, *Amateur Arts in the UK*.

⁴² Raymond Williams (1958) quoted in Thompson, J., *Bread and Roses: Arts, Culture and Lifelong Learning* (Leicester: National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education, 2002), p. 109 and pp. 14-15.

experience to specific groups, does attempt to engage with the art experiences of ordinary people.⁴³ Yet because participants in these projects represent a small minority drawn into professionally-led arts provision, such research neglects the much larger number of people who choose to make art by themselves.⁴⁴ Leisure painting has been consigned to what sociologist Andrew Miles recently described as ‘ghostly’ participation.⁴⁵ Much everyday experience is, as a result, overlooked.

Including the amateur in the story of twentieth century artistic creativity reveals that rather than one monolithic (and elitist) art world there were many co-existing ‘worlds’ of artistic creativity, each dependent on their own specific audience and criteria for judgement.⁴⁶ The idea of multiple ‘art worlds’ has been proposed by sociologist Howard Becker, yet although he touches briefly on individuals who do not earn a great deal from their art, Becker’s main focus is on professional artists working at different levels.⁴⁷ In this, a study of amateur experience, a far broader range of ‘art worlds’ is revealed.

In mathematics, a fractal is a complex pattern which repeats itself, or bears a close resemblance, at different scales. The social organisation of artistic activity in twentieth century Britain had a ‘fractal’ quality: the structure of activity looked much the same regardless of the level of attainment. At all levels of activity, creativity was motivated by and experienced within similar educational ideals and institutions. Values filtered from top to bottom and at every level were expressed in a similar form. Art societies, which are examined in detail in chapters 2 and 3, provide an instructive example. Voluntary associations, which developed during the industrial

⁴³ The underlying ethos of community arts is the subject of Owen Kelly’s *Community, Art and the State* (London: Comedia, 1984).

⁴⁴ For a discussion of the differences between ‘amateur’ and ‘community’ arts see Hutchison and Feist, *Amateur Arts in the UK*, pp. 13-14.

⁴⁵ Miles, ‘Culture, Participation and Identity in Contemporary Manchester’, p. 187.

⁴⁶ Finney, ‘Mediating Claims to Artistry’, pp. 403-31.

⁴⁷ Becker, H. S., *Art Worlds* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), pp. 95-6.

era to support the interests of artists who struggled for professional status, both inspired and were inspired by the creation of training institutions. These institutions produced not only creative values and ideas, but also the people who went on to make creativity their career, equipped to impart their skills to amateurs, aspirants and students. Similarly to the hierarchical organisation of other expressive activities, such as music or sport, the fractal structure operated as a self-sorting mechanism for artistic aptitude.⁴⁸ At the highest level – the Royal Academy of Art or the national art schools, for example – the system was relatively inefficient and an excess of aspirants created a lottery element. Opportunities developed at less competitive levels for those unable to achieve the pinnacle – in, for example, a range of amateur art societies and, later, adult education. Artists sorted themselves into groups according to shared standards and values. By selecting the level in which their work was most likely to be well-received, the individual was rewarded with a sense of achievement and wellbeing.⁴⁹

Creativity existed, to some extent, at every level of activity. Multidisciplinary theories of creativity, which understand the creative act in both psychological and sociological terms, encompass a broad range of experience. Creativity is considered a ‘normal trait’, which can be expressed in any number of ways at any number of levels, rather than something which belongs only to a few gifted individuals.⁵⁰ The existence or absence of creativity is argued to be a matter of personal judgement and

⁴⁸ For more on the sports analogy, see Bishop, J. and Hoggett, P., *Organizing Around Enthusiasms: Mutual Aid in Leisure* (London: Comedia, 1986), p. 110; see also Csikszentmihalyi, M., *Creativity: Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1997), p. 111.

⁴⁹ Offer, A., ‘Introduction’ in Offer, A. (ed), *In Pursuit of the Quality of Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 14; for a discussion of ‘optimal involvement’ see Collins, M. A. and Amabile, T. M., ‘Motivation and Creativity’ in Sternberg, R. J. (ed), *Handbook of Creativity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 301.

⁵⁰ LaChapelle, ‘Creativity Research’, p. 132.

taste, which is both socially and historically contingent.⁵¹ An adjudication of the value of art is not objective, but rather the product of the social system in which it is made.⁵² In the case of art societies, for example, there is not just one group or criteria of judgement, but a proliferation of groups, which create plurality of meaning.⁵³ Creativity is therefore multivalent: the value of a work of art changes depending on the group or individual appraising its merits.⁵⁴ The attribution of creativity is 'grounded only in social agreement': that which one group applauds, another may treat with dismay or condescension.⁵⁵ This study does not follow the social constructionist argument that all works are equal and must be understood in relative terms.⁵⁶ Rather it recognises that creativity is expressed at different levels of talent and aptitude; by examining different levels of activity a fuller understanding of the phenomenon can be achieved.⁵⁷

Work, leisure and artistic creativity

The fractal nature of artistic participation indicates that creative activity was stratified along a hierarchic continuum. This counters the common assumption that there was a rigid divide between amateur and professional experience. Despite similarities between amateur and professional activity, however, the two were not equally esteemed. The etymological origin of the word amateur is the latin *amator*, meaning

⁵¹ Boas, G., 'The Mona Lisa in the History of Taste' in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (Apr., 1940), p. 224. See also Csikszentmihalyi, M., 'Implications of a Systems Perspective for the Study of Creativity' in Sternberg, R. J. (ed), *Handbook of Creativity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 326.

⁵² Csikszentmihalyi, 'Implications of a Systems Perspective for the Study of Creativity', p. 314.

⁵³ LaChapelle., 'Creativity Research', pp. 134-5.

⁵⁴ Boas, 'The Mona Lisa in the History of Taste', p. 207.

⁵⁵ Csikszentmihalyi, 'Society, Culture, and Person: A Systems View of Creativity', p. 327.

⁵⁶ For a critique of the social constructionist approach, see Hacking, I., *The Social Construction of What?* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).

⁵⁷ See, for example, Guilford, J. P., 'Can Creativity Be Developed?' in *Art Education*, Vol. 11, No. 6 (Jun., 1958), p. 6.

lover.⁵⁸ By the beginning of the twentieth century, amateurism had lost its original meaning of ardour and had come to be associated with a range of unappealing attributes, including ‘idle interest, dilettantism, feebleness, falseness, ineptitude’.⁵⁹ The association of fine art with the leisure class had devalued art made for pleasure as a ‘useless, if not neurotic, self-indulgence’.⁶⁰ For the leisure class, work was, as it had been for the ancient Greeks, considered a shameful activity associated with poverty and drudgery.⁶¹ Art was considered a worthy occupation for leisured men and women only when undertaken as an amateur.⁶² Wealthy students – particularly women, for whom drawing was considered an ideal subject for ‘finishing’ – provided work for private art masters.⁶³ These tutors, who were themselves formally trained in fine art, upheld ‘the tradition that Art was an amateur accomplishment’.⁶⁴

The trend towards professionalisation in the late-nineteenth century diminished the association of art with idleness for a fortunate few who were able to carve a career from what was, for the most part, a precarious livelihood. Being able to make a living from art became a marker of an artist’s credibility, success and also, crucially, of their creativity. Professionalisation deepened the separation of art produced for income from that created solely for personal fulfilment; the amateur was pitted against the

⁵⁸ Stebbins, R. A., ‘The Amateur: Two Sociological Definitions’ in *The Pacific Sociological Review*, Vol. 20, No. 4 (Oct., 1977), p. 590.

⁵⁹ Buehr, G., ‘Art Education and the Amateur’ in *Bulletin of the Art Institute of Chicago*, Vol. 42, No. 6 (1948), p. 87.

⁶⁰ Perry, L. R., ‘Education in the Arts’ in Field, D. and Newick, J. (eds), *The Study of Education and Art* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), p. 114.

⁶¹ For an examination of the elevation of work from drudgery in antiquity to the central feature of human existence in the Christian period, see Agamben, G., *The Man Without Content* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999).

⁶² Macdonald, *The History and Philosophy of Art Education*, p. 149.

⁶³ Efland, A., ‘School Art and Its Social Origins’ in *Studies in Art Education*, Vol. 24, No. 3 (1983), p. 156.

⁶⁴ Hanson, D., ‘The Art Masters’ in *British Journal of Educational Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (Feb., 1971), p. 48.

professional in terms of ‘little versus great skill, intrinsic versus extrinsic reward, avocational versus vocational’.⁶⁵

While the amateur’s reputation had diminished, changing working conditions in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century provided opportunities for amateurism on a larger scale than ever before. The expansion of leisure created the preconditions for ordinary people to explore their own artistic creativity outside working hours. The commonplace explanation for the rising popularity of leisure pursuits like fine art amongst ordinary working people is that the absence of skilled tasks in the workplace motivated a search for creative expression elsewhere. This argument, popularised by American sociologist Harry Braverman in the mid-1970s, had lengthy historical credentials. Labour which lacked an element of creativity or skill had long been considered a blight on human dignity. As Britain entered the industrial age, Adam Smith, who celebrated the productivity of the division of labour, warned that repetitive factory work was detrimental to the intellect, leaving the worker with ‘no occasion to exert his understanding, or to exercise his invention’.⁶⁶ The image of drudgery was a common impression of the working man’s lot, yet much industrial work was skilled. Personal accounts such as Alfred Williams’s memoir of working in the Great Western Railway’s workshop, published during the First World War, showed that skilled work remained a part of factory life.⁶⁷ Nevertheless, the increasing magnitude of dull repetitive work had, by the end of the nineteenth century, eroded the perception of work as a ‘noble’ pursuit.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Stebbins, ‘The Amateur: Two Sociological Definitions’, p. 601.

⁶⁶ Smith, A. [Campbell, R. H. and Skinner, A. S. (eds)], *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), Vol. 2, Book 5, Chapter 1, p. 782.

⁶⁷ Williams, A., *Life in a Railway Factory* (London: Duckworth, 1915). See also Schmielechen, J. A., ‘Reconsidering the Factory, Art-Labor, and the Schools of Design in Nineteenth Century Britain’ in *Design Issues*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (Spring, 1990), pp. 58-69.

⁶⁸ Thomas Carlyle argued that ‘work alone is noble’ in *Past and Present* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1870 [1843]), Book 3, Chapter 4, p. 192.

Skilled or unskilled, working hours began to fall and, following the First World War, most workers enjoyed an increasing amount of leisure. The idea that this free time could provide the creative outlet missing in work was not, however, popular with some academics. In the 1960s and 1970s, several Marxist scholars of work and leisure, including Braverman, argued that the satisfactions of leisure were merely a distraction from worker alienation.⁶⁹ Such arguments, which had been expressed earlier and more eloquently by the socialist artist and craftsman William Morris and, later, the sculptor Eric Gill, presented a simplified dynamic of exploitation and alienation no longer relevant to work patterns in the post-industrial age.⁷⁰ As the twentieth century progressed, changes in the mode of production, coupled with rising levels of education, increased the scope for creativity both within and outside the workplace.⁷¹ Many individuals may have regarded their leisure as compensation for the dissatisfactions of work, yet the relationship between work and leisure was not simple or uniform; some sought hobbies of a similar level of intensity to that of their work, while for others leisure provided a complete and refreshing change.⁷² For most, leisure offered a more expansive domain in which to pursue ‘the free exercise of his creative capacity’ than work.⁷³

⁶⁹ Braverman, H., *Labour and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1998 [1974]), p. 78 and p. 307; for a similar appraisal of work and leisure a decade earlier, see Seligman, B. B., ‘On Work, Alienation, and Leisure’ in *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (Oct., 1965), pp. 341-9.

⁷⁰ Gallie, D., ‘The Quality of Employment: Perspectives and Problems’ in Offer, A. (ed), *In Pursuit of the Quality of Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 168.

⁷¹ Offer, A., *The Challenge of Affluence: Self-Control and Well-Being in the United States and Britain Since 1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 242-4.

⁷² Clayre, A., *Work and Play: Ideas and Experience of Work and Leisure* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1974), p. 197.

⁷³ Dumazedier, J., *Toward a Society of Leisure* (New York: Free Press, 1967), p. 17.

The consumer catch

While more leisure was available in the second half of the twentieth century than ever before, this abundance of ‘free’ time was channelled by the aspirational experience of consumerism. Consumer expenditure on durable goods increased significantly in the postwar years; the number of households with televisions, phones and washing machines reached near saturation point by the 1980s.⁷⁴ As society grew more affluent, the never-ending mass-produced ‘flow of novelty’ would, some economists feared, weaken the impulse to create.⁷⁵ Consumption took time and, as Steffan Linder argued, time was a ‘scarce commodity’.⁷⁶ The time liberated by the multiplication of time-saving technologies, such as the washing machine, was re-occupied by time-use technologies, such as the television; greater capability to enjoy leisure was accompanied by diminishing spare time in which to do so. It would be fair, then, to assume that making art, which required an investment of time and patience, might become a rare pastime due to its demands on personal resources.

There is, however, insufficient evidence to support the claim that personal creativity was destroyed by time-intensive consumer goods. The ‘consumer society’ was not unique to late-twentieth century Britain.⁷⁷ From the Victorian and Edwardian eras to the 1950s and just about every decade since, each new wave of consumerism was perceived as a significant alteration not only to the fabric of society, but also to the internal world of individual consumers.⁷⁸ In the post-industrial era, for example, the television became the symbol of the modern consumer society. At the end of the

⁷⁴ Office of National Statistics data on the percentage of households with certain durable goods, 1967-2000.

⁷⁵ Scitovsky, T., *The Joyless Economy: An Enquiry into Human Satisfaction and Consumer Dissatisfaction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 227.

⁷⁶ Linder, *The Harried Leisure Class*, pp. 2-7.

⁷⁷ Lodziak, C., *The Myth of Consumerism* (London: Pluto Press, 2002), ix.

⁷⁸ See, for example, Floud, R., *The People and the British Economy, 1830-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 187; or Bowden, S., ‘The New Consumerism’ in Johnson, P. (ed), *Twentieth-Century Britain: Economic, Social and Cultural Change* (London: Longman, 1994), pp. 247-9.

day, American sociologist Ben Seligman argued, millions of workers would be able to do little more than ‘collapse into a chair and stare vacantly at the TV screen’.⁷⁹ Yet there was a disjunction between the perception and evidence of time use. British workers were not held captive in their living rooms any more in the 1980s than in the 1960s: the amount of time spent watching television by Britons in full-time employment increased by just eight minutes per day for men, and nine for women, between 1961 and 1984.⁸⁰ As consumerism marched on, time spent watching television did not increase unabated. Some writers suggest the notion of ‘time pressure’ was illusory. An increase in discretionary time (time not taken up with bodily, family, financial or household necessities) allowed a greater amount of ‘temporal autonomy’ than is commonly assumed.⁸¹ The harried feeling was, according to sociologists Oriel Sullivan and Jonathan Gershuny, not due to having less spare time but rather to time being divided between a greater number of activities undertaken simultaneously.⁸²

In postwar Britain, ordinary people were able to engage in a greater variety of hobbies and social activities during leisure than ever before. Affluence provided not only the leisure time and the financial means to pursue these interests, but also a greater number of opportunities to do so institutionally, socially and privately. Contrary to Robert Putnam’s thesis on the decline of social capital in North America, British sociologist Peter Hall argues that at the end of the twentieth century Britain

⁷⁹ Seligman, ‘On Work, Alienation, and Leisure’, p. 342. For a discussion of socialist contempt for television viewing during the 1950s, see also Black, L., ‘Sheep May Safely Gaze’: Socialists, Television and the People in Britain, 1949-64’ in Black, L. et al, *Consensus or Coercion? The State, the People and Social Cohesion in Postwar Britain* (Cheltenham: New Clarion Press, 2001), p. 37.

⁸⁰ Hall, P. A., ‘Social Capital in Britain’ in *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 29, No. 3 (July, 1999), p. 426.

⁸¹ Goodwin, R. E. et al, *Discretionary Time: A New Measure of Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 4-5, p. 37 and p. 261.

⁸² Sullivan, O. and Gershuny, J., *Cross-national Changes in Time-Use: Some Sociological (Hi)stories Re-examined* (University of Essex ISER Working Paper, 2001), pp. 16-20.

maintained levels of community involvement similar to those experienced in the late-1950s, despite watching, on average, more than two-and-a-half hours of television every day.⁸³ There is little reason to believe the situation for private leisure pursuits should be any different. Following the Second World War, the proportion of individuals seeking ways in which to express their creative drive during leisure grew significantly. This study follows one such drive: the desire to draw or paint, and follows the rising popularity of 'leisure painting' from the interwar period to the end of the twentieth century. As affluence and consumerism grew, so too did a fraction of society engaged in painting and drawing - a fraction which transcended age, gender and occupation to include a wide range of experience. For those interested in creative activity, time was set aside for art regardless of changing consumption habits. In the chapters that follow, this study will show that rather than dull the appetite to create, affluent society provided an ever increasing number of opportunities for individuals to pursue artistic creativity in their everyday lives.

The study is arranged thematically over five parts: following the introduction, artistic activity is explored socially, educationally, commercially and individually. In part one, chapter 1 provides an overview of the social, political, economic and cultural changes which led to an historic push towards the democratisation of artistic creativity: from early signs of interest in art for the people in the Victorian and interwar periods, through the expanding take-up of leisure painting in the immediate postwar years, to the commodification of the arts in the late-twentieth century. In part two, the social organisation of art making is examined. Chapter 2 looks at the structure and growth of art societies and exhibitions across Britain, from the local art club to the Royal Academy of Art. Chapter 3 traces the development and eventual

⁸³ Hall, 'Social Capital in Britain', pp. 433-4.

decline of the workplace art club: widely encouraged in the immediate postwar years, but swept away in the increasingly corporate climate of the 1980s. Part three investigates the provision of adult education art classes following the Second World War. Chapter 4 explores the pioneering work of London's inner city boroughs and the short term residential colleges in England and Wales, and how this was affected by political and economic change. In chapter 5, the impact of shifting political ideologies on local authority support for recreational art education is examined through a case study of community education provision across the county of Oxfordshire. Part four looks at commercial support for amateur artists, which increased significantly after 1945. Chapter 6 investigates the publication of magazines and books for the amateur market. These reflected an artistic appetite which reveals amateurs to be both producers and consumers of creativity. Chapter 7 considers the role of art material manufacturers. It describes how these businesses influenced and responded to the changing market for amateur products. In part five motivations and incentives are investigated. Chapter 8 presents several personal testimonies by amateurs, collated from interviews and written accounts, and explores what inspired and sustained leisure painting as a popular pursuit. Finally, chapter 9 examines how the creative drive was affected by exogenous forces. Artistic creativity manifested itself in various ways, and changed as the century wore on but, ultimately, the example of the leisure painter indicates that the desire to be creative and make art was enhanced and supported, rather than obstructed and eroded, by postwar affluence.

General approach and method

This study is not a history of debates and ideas but of creativity itself, of how it was organised and experienced by ordinary people. By bringing the amateur back into the spotlight, this investigation moves away from the usual approach, which privileges the product of creativity, towards one that instead explores the forces that drive it.⁸⁴

Any number of arts and crafts could have been chosen to examine artistic creativity in twentieth century Britain. A focus on fine art was selected because it provides an accessible and circumscribed domain in which to explore the nature of creativity within the experience of ordinary life – an otherwise sprawling and endless topic. Fine art is useful because, unlike most crafts which produce objects of utility, the motivations for taking up painting and drawing are less likely (although this is by no means a hard rule) to be clouded by reasons of frugality, functionality or environmentalism – i.e. making something to save money, serve a function or preserve resources.⁸⁵ Fine art by its nature is slow, difficult and requires a degree of skill, but it is also accessible and can be enjoyed at a very basic level. Sculpture is not included because, although classified as a fine art, it is generally less accessible than drawing and painting (due to the expense and difficulty in handling materials) and is, as a result, practiced by far fewer amateurs. In addition, focusing specifically on drawing and painting provided greater consistency. Craft is not, however, absent from this approach, which moves down from the pinnacle to include artistic activity across the whole of society; by taking a craft interpretation of artistic creativity, rather than

⁸⁴ From dabblers to beginners, amateurs to hobbyists, there exist numerous typologies of amateurism (see, for example, Stebbins, 'The Amateur', pp. 582-606). For purposes of clarity, the term amateur is used in this thesis alongside 'leisure painter' to cover a range of levels of participation undertaken by artists for whom art is not their main occupation. This is not a universally agreed definition, but a straightforward one proposed by *Leisure Painter* magazine ((Sep., 1976), p. 5).

⁸⁵ I discuss why fine art did have material utility for many amateurs in chapter 8.

one based on theories of inspiration or genius, a far broader range of experience is encompassed.

The overall approach to the study is narrative, depicting a broad social history of amateur art production in twentieth century Britain. It draws on the social, political and economic history of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as well as the history of aesthetics and art, but it is not a history of art, or an exercise in art criticism. The task at hand is not to decide what is ‘good’ or ‘bad’ art, but to find out how much art was made by amateurs, and why. Research has been influenced by multidisciplinary strands, from sociology and anthropology to psychology, business and art education. It is assumed that human behaviour expresses universals which remain constant throughout time; if, as anthropologists assert, making is a ‘human universal’, then any differences in the way it is expressed over time suggest the effects of exogenous forces.⁸⁶ The impact of leisure and consumerism – the products of affluence and mass production – on the creative drive is explored: does creative activity wane as affluence increases? Or does affluence deliver greater opportunity and incentive for the indulgence of creative pursuits?

A variety of primary research evidence was examined to discover how ordinary people organised and experienced fine art for themselves. Research was carried out over a period of two years, between 2009 and 2011. Empirical evidence was collected for case studies in London, Birmingham and Oxford – a spectrum of city scales reflective of Britain as a whole. Time constraints prevented further areas being examined in sufficient depth to warrant useful comparison but, given that more than 80 per cent of the population of the United Kingdom lives in England, these cities and

⁸⁶ Brown, D. E., *Human Universals* (London: McGraw-Hill, 1991); see also Dissanayake, E., *Homo Aestheticus: Where Art Comes From and Why* (Washington: University of Washington Press, 1995).

their surrounds are taken to be sufficiently representative.⁸⁷ The evidence collected indicates both the degree to which individuals produced art during this period – in, for example, exhibitions or adult education classes – and also the extent of their consumption of its related wares: books, paint brushes, and the very idea of creativity itself.

The development of adult education art classes and the proliferation of amateur art clubs and societies in twentieth century Britain encouraged commitment in ordinary people who wanted to indulge their artistic drive in their spare time. Institutional arrangements provide a statistical picture of organised artistic activity. Society membership reflects the level of motivation to participate in art socially and, in the case of more prestigious art societies, participation also suggests a certain level of proficiency, which takes time and practice to achieve. Art society membership does not, however, necessarily equate with creative production. Similarly, the income elasticity of consumer products may, as economist Staffan Linder argued, be greater than that of the activities they are designed to service, yet the growth in the publication of magazines and books, which contained practical art advice and instruction for amateurs, and the wide range of art materials developed and manufactured specifically for the amateur market, indicates a far larger scale of amateur production than is apparent when examining participation in formal activities such as art societies alone.⁸⁸

Across each area of research, a number of archival sources were consulted: from society exhibition guides and minute books, to company accounts and trade catalogues. Primary printed sources included government reports and surveys, amateur art magazines and books, and contemporary publications and literature

⁸⁷ Hutchison and Feist, *Amateur Arts in the UK*, p. 35.

⁸⁸ Linder, *The Harried Leisure Class*, p. 103.

relating to the arts and artistic experience throughout the twentieth century. The broader social and economic backdrop was informed by secondary source materials, including statistical bulletins, social surveys, and historical accounts.

To explore personal experience and motivation, interviews were undertaken with a dozen or so individuals involved in the amateur art world (mostly society members and adult education students). Oral history recordings and interviews relating to local art societies, exhibitions, and artists, which were made during the 1980s and 1990s and held by Oxfordshire County Library records office, were also consulted. Oral history is not without issue. Any interview is a collaborative process: the rapport necessary for an interview to take place may affect the circumstance and direction of the discussion.⁸⁹ In addition, memory may be unreliable. Interviews are not, however, the basis of this study, but rather contribute subjective accents to its main findings. They form part of an ethnographic approach: I also visited societies, viewed exhibitions and attended adult education art classes. Many informal conversations were had with leisure painters 'in the field'. While such activity does not directly inform research findings, which are based on archival research and primary printed sources, it created a direct personal experience of the subject.

The existence (or lack thereof) of suitable evidence presented continuing challenges. There are, as yet, no longitudinal studies of individuals who choose to paint in their spare time. The Office of National Statistics General Household Survey reported data on practical leisure activities such as sewing and gardening, but only for a few non-consecutive years between 1977 and 1996, and there are no statistics which refer specifically to participation in fine art. Only in one trailer to the main survey,

⁸⁹ The growing field of 'memory studies' asserts that what people thought happened is as important as what actually happened, and that this should not hinder the relevance of oral history to research. See Ritchie, D. A., 'The Evolution of Oral History' in Ritchie, D. A. (ed), *The Oxford Handbook of Oral History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 13-14. See also in the same volume Quinlan, M. K., 'The Dynamics of Interviewing', pp. 26-31.

published in 2002, were statistics offered on the number of individuals painting.⁹⁰ Trends were interpolated from a variety of sources. Some evidence was not comparable. Different measures, for example, covered different parts of the UK: some the whole of the UK, some Britain, some England and Wales, and some England alone. Changes in reporting were a recurring problem. Archives are the result of what people at the time think is worth keeping.⁹¹ In the case of art societies, for example, the smallest societies passed records down informally from one chair or treasurer to the next. These archives were stored in attics and cellars and on numerous occasions had been lost or destroyed. In general, the more prominent the society, the more coherent the data retained, but this was not always the case. The Royal Academy of Art's reporting was immaculately Victorian until 1982 when, in the combined fervour of a new chief executive and the switchover to the digital age, it became sparse and inconsistent for almost two decades.

These issues were not insurmountable. Quantitative history, which supposes the existence of long series of homogenous and comparable data, may not have been a viable route to examine the evidence available but, as economist Marc Blaug says, 'the truth does not always wear the garb of equations'.⁹² Evidence was drawn from what remains extant. Informal interviews with adult education officers, material manufacturers and art shop owners provided details in areas where there are few written or archival sources. Through a combination of historical, ethnographic and statistical survey, the existence of artistic creativity within the experience of ordinary life in the second half of the twentieth century is brought to light.

⁹⁰ Fox, K. and Richards, L., *National Statistics: Sport and Leisure Results from the Sport and Leisure Module of the 2002 General Household Survey* (London: HMSO, 2004), pp. 38-40.

⁹¹ Furet, F., 'Quantitative Methods in History' in Goff. J. and Nora, P. (eds), *Constructing the Past: Essays in Historical Methodology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 13.

⁹² Blaug, M., *The Methodology of Economics: Or, How Economists Explain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 262.

CHAPTER 1

An art by the people

‘The art of a people is one of the signs of its good health.’¹

Once the preserve of leisured elites, drawing and painting for pleasure became a pastime within the reach of more people than ever before in the second half of the twentieth century. Debates during the 1930s and 1940s about the centrality of artistic creativity to human life invoked both Romantic and late-Victorian precedent, but were conceived within a particular context: one that emphasised the enjoyment of art above any economic gains that might derive from that enjoyment. Making art benefited the individual – occupying leisure time, stimulating the intellect, and raising self-esteem – which, in turn, contributed towards a civilised society. The social democratic ideals of the immediate postwar period facilitated the development of social and institutional arrangements which sustained an interest in art amongst ordinary people for the rest of the century. In the late-twentieth century shift towards market liberalism, however, this civilising zeal waned and, in its place, an individualist and consumerist ethos took root. The everyday enjoyment of art did not fade as social and economic priorities were reordered but, considered a private rather than public good, personal creativity ceased to be something considered worthy of state support. This chapter gives an historical overview: by relating arts policy, the professional art scene and the amateur art scene to the socio-economic and political shifts of the mid- to late-twentieth century, it explores the changing perception of art’s relevance to everyday life.

¹ Evans, B. I. and Glasgow, M., *The Arts in England* (London: The Falcon Press, 1949), p. 19.

Early signs: the Victorians

In the late-nineteenth century the artist and craftsman William Morris argued that creativity should be part of the everyday lives of ordinary people. Influenced by John Ruskin and Karl Marx, Morris believed working lives should be enriched with artistic activity and aesthetic experience. A ‘genuine art’, he wrote, was ‘the expression of man’s pleasure in his labour’.² In the mechanised age such pleasure was increasingly lacking. Factories and machines, Morris held, saturated the environment with mass produced consumables and emptied working lives of their creative content. Morris opposed the divisive trend towards professionalism, the alienating artlessness of the factory, and the blandness of current commercial taste – all of which removed artistic creativity from the experience of everyday life.³ Yet he did not think that human creativity should be sidelined into leisure. Morris hoped, like Marx, that work would become meaningful once again, and workers reunited with the arts and crafts.⁴

The prevailing Victorian approach to the aesthetic enlightenment of the masses was driven not by an effort to reconnect ordinary people with creative livelihoods, but by a civilising mission to bring the high arts to the lower classes. The cultivation of taste would distract working men from ‘sensual pursuits’, such as drinking or gambling.⁵ It also served another agenda: mass production required a mass market,

² Morris, W., ‘Preface’ in Ruskin, J., *The Nature of Gothic: A Chapter of the Stones of Venice* (Hammersmith: George Allen, Kelmscott Press, 1892), i-iv.

³ For a discussion of the philosophy underpinning the arts and crafts movement see Crawford, A., ‘Ideas and Objects: The Arts and Crafts Movement in Britain’ in *Design Issues*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (Spring, 1997), p. 24; see also Clayre, A., *Work and Play: Ideas and Experience of Work and Leisure* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1974), pp. 73-6.

⁴ Marx believed that after the revolution there would be ‘no painters but only people who engage in painting among other activities’. See Buchler, P., ‘Somebody’s Got to Do It’ in Cummings, D. (ed), *Art: What is it good for?* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2002), p. 24.

⁵ Harrison, J. F. C., *Learning and Living, 1790-1960: A Study in the History of the English Adult Education Movement* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961), p. 87.

and aesthetic education primed this market to make choices which would enhance the performance of commerce and industry.⁶

Progressive Victorians believed that the high arts could not only civilise but be actively enjoyed by ordinary working people. In 1845 theologian and essayist the Reverend Dr Richard Winter Hamilton, president of the Leeds mechanics institute and campaigner for the advancement of the working classes, wrote:

Wherever the arts abound, this refinement descends to the humblest ranks of life. ... The love of music, painting, sculpture, grows upon the most unsusceptible minds when the noblest specimens are familiarised to them.⁷

In the mechanics institutes, Hamilton hoped to foster the refinement of taste among ‘the classes addicted to the extremest labour’.⁸ Offering a glimpse of the potential scale of interest in the arts amongst ordinary working people (although the institutes were known to enrol far more middle class students than had been originally intended), lectures in these ‘peripheral’ subjects attracted relatively large numbers of listeners. The popularity of cultural subjects such as literature, art and music was such that they were often introduced to remedy declining enrolments.⁹ At this stage, however, education was directed towards the appreciation of the professional arts, rather than to inspire, as Morris had hoped, a ‘genuine art’ of the people.

⁶ Sproll, P. A. C., ‘Matters of Taste and Matters of Commerce: British Government Intervention in Art Education in 1835’ in *Studies in Art Education*, Vol. 35, No. 2 (Winter, 1994), pp. 107-9.

⁷ Hamilton, R. W., *The Institutions of Popular Education* (Leeds, 1845), p. 75.

⁸ *Ibid*, p. 75.

⁹ Harrison, *Learning and Living, 1790-1960*, p. 67 and p. 87; see also Edwards, H. J., *The Evening Institute: Its Place in the Educational System of England and Wales* (London: National Institute of Adult Education, 1961), pp. 28-30.

Artistic awakening: the interwar period

Following the First World War, the gulf between the arts and everyday life that had existed during the Victorian era began to narrow.¹⁰ This was made possible by the changing relationship between work and leisure. In 1918, the Ministry of Reconstruction's interim report on adult education recommended shorter working days, a reduction of overtime, the limitation of night work and better holiday pay. The committee behind the report included members of the early adult education movement, Albert Mansbridge, R. H. Tawney and Basil Yeaxlee: idealistic planners who placed the 'development of life' at the centre of postwar restructuring.¹¹ 'The paramount consideration is that of the individual as a member of society', the report stated. 'Material progress is of value only in so far as it assists towards the realisation of human possibilities.'¹² The report advocated a shift from the Victorian laissez-faire approach to economic policy and welfare, towards a position that valued the importance of each and every individual's role in the creation of a harmonious society. Culture and the arts were central to this vision: they were the bedrock of civilisation, and civilisation the beacon of hope shining out from the dark shadow of war.¹³

During the interwar period the standard of living gradually improved. As prices fell, workers enjoyed a greater proportion of spare income and, continuing a trend that had begun before the war, leisure time further expanded. An increasing number of

¹⁰ Constable, W. G., 'The growth of popular interest in Art' in *Art for the People: Report of the British Institute of Adult Education Experiment in Providing Loan Exhibitions in the Smaller Towns of England* (London: British Institute of Adult Education, 1935), p. 5.

¹¹ [Cmnd. 9107] *Interim Report of the Committee on Adult Education: Industrial and Social Conditions in Relation to Adult Education* (London: Ministry of Reconstruction, 1918), p. 28.

¹² *Ibid*, p. 27.

¹³ The report called on local authorities to provide an inspiring and cultured environment for the creation of a 'fuller social life'. *Interim Report of the Committee on Adult Education* (1918), p. 27.

ordinary people were able to seek recreation outside the home.¹⁴ The transition towards a civilised and cultured populace optimistically envisaged by the Ministry of Reconstruction in 1918 was not, however, readily forthcoming. An interest in art, either its appreciation or practice, was still a minority taste. Realism, which had been popular in the nineteenth century, was rejected by the modernist movement in the twentieth. As the value of Victorian paintings declined, so too did the dominance of the Royal Academy of Art, which had been pitted against the rebellious avant garde since the late-nineteenth century.¹⁵ Although figurative art was still a valid approach for some artists of the modernist movement – painters such as Stanley Spencer, Paul Nash, Eric Ravilious and Mark Gertler, for example – in 1920 the art critic Roger Fry wrote that ‘the artist of the new movement is moving into a sphere more and more remote from that of the ordinary man’.¹⁶ British taste remained focused on figurative and representational art and ordinary people were, according to one report in 1935, ‘uneasy and suspicious when the painter takes liberties with appearances’.¹⁷ Modernism, and its dehumanisation of art was, according to literary critic John Carey, deliberately ‘anti-popular’: it cultivated ‘irrationality and obscurity’ in a determined effort to exclude the masses from high culture.¹⁸ An interest in art and culture was assumed to be a function of social class, both by those included in and excluded from its enjoyment.¹⁹ Suspicion of art was deeply rooted; culture was a plaything of the

¹⁴ Floud, R., *The People and the British Economy, 1830-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 139.

¹⁵ Graves, R. and Hodge, A., *The Long Week-End: A Social History of Great Britain, 1918-1939* (London: Faber and Faber, 1940), pp. 192-6.

¹⁶ Fry, R., *Vision and Design* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1957 [1920]), p. 15. The sculptor Eric Gill expressed a similar sentiment in *Work and Leisure* (London: Faber and Faber, 1935), pp. 141-2.

¹⁷ *Art for the People: Report of the British Institute of Adult Education Experiment in Providing Loan Exhibitions in the Smaller Towns of England* (London: British Institute of Adult Education, 1935), p. 31.

¹⁸ Carey, J., *The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice Among the Literary Intelligentsia, 1880-1939* (London: Faber, 1992), p. 17.

¹⁹ Brazier, P., *Art History in Education: An Annotated Bibliography and History* (London: Heineman, 1985), p. 30.

wealthy elite and the impression amongst ordinary working people that art was ‘not for the likes of us’ stubbornly remained.

During the 1930s, a few enlightened members of the cultured elite attempted to allay these suspicions by championing the relevance of the high arts to everyday life. The economist and patron of the arts John Maynard Keynes hoped to democratise elite artforms for the enjoyment of all. Keynes’s approach diverged from that of his Bloomsbury friend Clive Bell, who wrote that only those with ‘material security’ could become ‘highly civilised’, and that this privileged few must be supported by a hard-working majority.²⁰ For Keynes, a civilised society required that people of all classes and all regions possess knowledge of culture and the arts, not just the few.²¹

Rising unemployment during the interwar period presented a social and economic challenge; politicians feared that worklessness would lead to idleness, and idleness to social unrest and vice.²² The content of leisure was similarly feared. In 1930, Keynes wrote of a coming ‘age of leisure and of abundance’.²³ Like many of his contemporaries, he was concerned that new leisure would be ‘a fearful problem for the ordinary person, with no special talents, to occupy himself’.²⁴ Hobbies, which often necessitated social organisation, maintained a work ethic during periods of leisure or economic inactivity and were, therefore, welcomed.²⁵ Art was one such hobby. During the interwar years, the ‘cultivation of innate artistic ability’, which

²⁰ Bell, C., ‘How to Make a Civilisation’ an extract from his *Civilisation* (1929) in Larrabee, E. and Meyersohn, R. (eds), *Mass Leisure* (Illinois: The Free Press, 1958), pp. 31-8.

²¹ Laurence, P., ‘The Intimate Spaces of Community: John Maynard Keynes and the Arts’ in *History of Political Economy*, Vol. 39, No. 5 (2007), p. 300.

²² Harris, B., ‘Unemployment and the Dole in Interwar Britain’ in Johnson, P. (ed), *Twentieth-Century Britain: Economic, Social and Cultural Change* (London: Longman, 1994), p. 213.

²³ Keynes, J. M., ‘Economic Possibilities for Our Grandchildren’, originally published in *Nation and Athenaeum*, 11 and 18 October 1930, and subsequently in *Essays in Persuasion* (London: Macmillan, 1931), p. 328; for a discussion of how the masses were perceived by the upper classes and intelligentsia see also Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses*, p. 23.

²⁴ Keynes, ‘Economic Possibilities for Our Grandchildren’, p. 328.

²⁵ Gelber, S. M., ‘A Job You Can’t Lose: Work and Hobbies in the Great Depression’ in *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (Summer, 1991), p. 742; this sentiment was expressed at the end of the Second World War in Sankey, V. and Dudley, J., *Adult Education After the War: A Report of an Enquiry Made for the British Institute of Adult Education* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1945), vii.

demanding the spare time previously afforded only by the leisure class, became an increasingly viable activity for ordinary working people.²⁶ Keynes believed the discovery of an artistic appetite would make leisure more rewarding: 'There will be no harm in making mild preparations for our destiny, in encouraging, and experimenting in, the arts.'²⁷

In an approach similar to that of Reverend Hamilton nearly a century before, much of the civilising effort during the interwar period was directed at the working class.²⁸ Some centres of education, such as the working men's colleges and London's inner city evening institutes, provided art education 'by stealth': exhibitions were shown in canteens and common rooms and artists hired to encourage people to 'try their hand'.²⁹ The question was, would ordinary people seek such cultivation for themselves without paternalistic prompting? Leisure's 'advance guard' had not set a particularly good example; the wealthy classes who were 'spying out the promised land for the rest of us' had, Keynes lamented, failed to do anything remarkable with their abundant leisure.³⁰ The amateur artists of the privileged sections of society were, however, a very small minority; by the late-1920s amateur practice had begun to change. 'Painting has ceased to be a finishing school accomplishment for the trifler,' declared *Amateur Artist and Collector* magazine, 'but a subject for serious study and

²⁶ Pangburn, W., 'The Worker's Leisure and his Individuality' in *The American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 27, No. 4 (Jan., 1922), p. 436.

²⁷ Keynes, 'Economic Possibilities for Our Grandchildren', p. 332.

²⁸ Fine art was not the only avenue for creative expression: left-wing publishers behind the Popular Front campaign encouraged working class writers in the 1930s. See Hilliard, C., 'Producers by Hand and by Brain: Working-Class Writers and Left-Wing Publishers in 1930s Britain' in *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 78, No. 1 (Mar., 2006), pp. 37-64.

²⁹ Cumberlege, G., *The Further Education of Men and Women: A Task of the 1944 Education Act* (London: Oxford University Press, 1946), p. 19.

³⁰ Keynes, 'Economic Possibilities for Our Grandchildren', p. 328.

incessant practice.’³¹ Individuals from all sections of society, in particular the expanding middle class, were beginning to take an interest in making art.

Some were suspicious of this new breed of amateur. The sculptor Eric Gill followed a long line of critics of industrialism and, like John Ruskin and William Morris before him, believed that modern work destroyed the individual’s ‘powers of initiative and creativeness’.³² In the past, Gill said, making artefacts ‘called forth the creative and contemplative faculties of men’ and satisfied a natural creative urge.³³ Industrialism, which had separated the worker from the satisfactions of production, placed the artist on a pedestal and rendered ordinary people incapable of artistic expression:

It can only be the rarest individual who will dare, or have the energy, to set up in competition with these things – to play the musical instruments himself, paint his own pictures, carve his own carvings and act in his own plays.³⁴

Industrialism had left modern life with ‘the problem of leisure’.³⁵ Yet Gill was not convinced artistic activity was the solution. While leisure satisfied the desire to scratch the human ‘itch for creation’, the products it brought forth were inherently useless, because everything useful had already been made in the factory.³⁶ Industrialism divorced work from art and, as a result, leisure could have no purpose other than ‘to satisfy the idiosyncrasy of individuals’ for whom ‘the blessing of leisure will turn into a curse of fret-work and all sorts of amateur “fancy work” – fret-

³¹ Dodgson, W., ‘Filling the Gap’ in *Amateur Artist and Collector: A Monthly Journal for All Interested in Art*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Nov., 1927), p. 3.

³² Gill, in his 1934 lectures at Bangor University, *Work and Leisure*, p. 38.

³³ *Ibid*, p. 40.

³⁴ *Ibid*, p. 51.

³⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 38-9.

³⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 38-42.

work and fretfulness'.³⁷ Gill concluded that while 'the dregs of the human appetite to make things' persisted, 'the numbers of those who still wish to make things is probably very small'.³⁸

Gill's verdict on the impact of industrialised labour on the human desire to create was not unanimous. In 1935, W. G. Constable, the director of the Courtauld Institute and Slade Professor of Fine Art at the University of Cambridge, offered a different perspective:

No doubt those who reveal an interest in art are a minority of the population, and probably they will continue to be a minority; but it is also certain they are a substantial minority and one which is rapidly growing in number. Moreover, this interest is latent rather than obtrusive. It is one that needs to be persuaded, and yet one that, given a little encouragement and opportunity for exercise, is likely to develop on a large scale.³⁹

The popularisation of high culture through Penguin paperbacks, touring exhibitions, and BBC broadcasts, aimed to introduce 'a new kind of public' to the arts.⁴⁰ In 1938, for example, Pelican Books, Penguin's educational imprint, published *Art in England*: an attempt to educate 'that large and increasing section of the public which is becoming more and more interested in the visual arts'.⁴¹ Chapters were drawn from articles previously published in *The Listener* by art experts and critics including such luminaries as Herbert Read, Clive Bell and Kenneth Clark. The book's potential readership was indicated by the first British Institute of Adult Education *Art for the People* touring exhibition in 1935. The selection of privately-loaned work, which included Stanley Spencer's *Blacksmith's Yard* and R. W. Sickert's *Crucifixion*,

³⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 45-6.

³⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 38-9.

³⁹ Constable, 'The Growth of Popular Interest in Art', p. 6.

⁴⁰ Newton, E., 'Art for Everybody' in *Britain Advances* (London: British Council pamphlet, 1943), pp. 5-7.

⁴¹ Lambert, R. S., *Art in England* (London: Pelican Books, 1938), p. 5.

attracted more than 10,000 visitors to makeshift galleries in impoverished and remote areas.⁴² Following the exhibition's success, the British Institute of Adult Education surmised that there are 'many who would be encouraged to try painting for themselves when they had seen how it was done by others'.⁴³ Contrary to Gill's pessimism, 'many' individuals, not just the 'rarest', were beginning to try their hand at fine art.

The modernist movement may have become remote from the 'ordinary man', but that did not mean ordinary people were remote from art itself.⁴⁴ Realism continued to have vernacular appeal for this small but growing number of amateur artists.⁴⁵ The popularity of amateur art developed in tandem with a gradually thawing reception towards avant-garde experimentation. The two seemed incongruous and contradictory – one harking back to the traditions of art past, and the other leading the arts into uncharted waters – yet the social climate was ripe for both. 'Art is now in the limelight', announced *Amateur Artist and Collector* magazine in 1927. 'Never, in this country, has it received so much attention as at present.'⁴⁶ Both the non-professional 'pleasure painter' and the avant garde aesthete were associated with 'art for art's sake'; on the one hand, the avant garde valued aesthetic autonomy above instrumentalism and, on the other, amateurs engaged in art making for pleasure rather than utility. Yet while the avant-garde gradually came to be accepted by mainstream British culture, amateur art remained largely unrecognised. Critics, galleries and curators ignored amateur activity because of its unfashionable tendency towards

⁴² *Art for the People* (British Institute of Adult Education), p. 2 and p. 18.

⁴³ *Ibid*, p. 39; see also Williams, W. E., 'Art for the People' in Lambert, R. S. (ed), *Art in England* (London: Pelican, 1938), pp. 113-18.

⁴⁴ Fry, *Vision and Design*, p. 15.

⁴⁵ Gombrich, E. H., *The Story of Art* (London: Phaidon, 1989 [15th edition]), p. 615.

⁴⁶ *Amateur Artist and Collector: A Monthly Journal for All Interested in Art*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (Dec., 1927), p. 34.

realism and sincerity.⁴⁷ For the gatekeepers of high culture, who valued novelty and ‘the shock of the new’, amateur work lacked sufficient originality to merit serious attention.⁴⁸ Critics like Clive Bell and Roger Fry considered the scale of audiences for professional arts noteworthy, yet their focus on passive appreciation overlooked the beginnings of a growing interest in artistic activity amongst ordinary people. The amateur ‘movement’ remained relatively small throughout the interwar period; an unexpected impetus to its development was to be provided by the Second World War.

Conflict and creativity: the Second World War

The foundations laid during the interwar period were cemented and built upon during the Second World War. After a brief ‘cultural blackout’ which descended on the arts in 1939 as galleries were closed and treasures removed to the country for safe keeping, the power of art to boost morale and create a sense of national pride was seized upon.⁴⁹ One amateur painter recalled his impression of the shift in perception of the arts during the war’s early years:

At the outbreak of war and for the first two years of it there was a deliberate and almost complete suppression of the arts. Not only were they a luxury which the nation could not afford, but were clearly evidence of a dangerous, decadent soft centre. Later as the war dragged on, a public depression – which though deep had not yet disturbed the basal determination – became increasingly a major factor: the arts were hastily recruited. Reluctantly it was realised that the arts were integral to the life we were defending, that they could provide not only a release from the daily nervous tensions but, one had to mollify the philistines, could demonstrate the unfailing Spirit of the British people.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Exceptions did occur, notably Ben Nicholson’s discovery of Cornish fisherman Alfred Wallis, whose naïve seascapes captivated and influenced a number of contemporary British artists.

⁴⁸ Hughes, R., *The Shock of the New* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1991).

⁴⁹ Newton, ‘Art for Everybody’, p. 24; see also Shaw, R., ‘The Arts Council and Aesthetic Education’ in *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (Jul., 1981), p. 85.

⁵⁰ Rees, F., ‘A Reminiscent History of the Association – Part 3’ in the *Association of Civil Service Art Clubs Newsletter* (Oct., 1977), pp. 7-10 (bound volumes courtesy of the Civil and Public Service Artists).

The Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA) was set up by Royal Charter in 1940 ‘to protect the treasures of civilisation’ and to raise public morale by providing greater contact with the arts.⁵¹ By nurturing the public’s cultural appetite, the council, under the initial direction of the Pilgrims Trust and, from 1942, its first chairman John Maynard Keynes, served to protect not only the physical artefacts of civilisation, but also the civilisation of the people.⁵² CEMA’s slogan was ‘the best for the most’.⁵³ Through one-shilling concerts of classical music in the capital, Shakespearean theatre companies touring mining villages and art exhibitions appearing in factories and canteens, the high arts were extended to ordinary working people across Britain.⁵⁴ A scene in the wartime propaganda film *Listen to Britain* (1942), for example, shows the pianist Myra Hess accompanied by the orchestra of the Royal Air Force at a lunchtime concert in the National Gallery. In the packed audience sits Queen Elizabeth (later the Queen Mother) alongside uniformed service personnel and civilians.⁵⁵ Such initiatives were popular with the general public; in 1941 the *Art for the People* exhibition attracted more than half a million visitors across England, Wales and Scotland, an increase from 300,000 the previous year, and fifty times as many visitors as attended the first exhibition in 1935.⁵⁶

The visual arts played a particularly important role in the war effort. The government appointed professional artists to depict the nation at war.⁵⁷ Everyday

⁵¹ Marwick, A., *The Arts in the West Since 1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 9.

⁵² Baldry, H. C., *The Case for the Arts* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1981), pp. 13-14. See also Baynes, P. and Marx, H., ‘Adult Education Auxiliaries and Informal Learning’ in Fieldhouse, R. (ed), *A History of Modern British Adult Education* (Leicester: National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education, 1996), p. 326.

⁵³ Baldry, *The Case for the Arts*, p. 14.

⁵⁴ Newton, ‘Art for Everybody’, p. 24.

⁵⁵ *Listen to Britain*, a film directed and edited by Humphrey Jennings and Stewart McAllister (Crown Film Unit, 1942). A number of similar films are mentioned in Feaver, W., *Pitmen Painters: The Ashington Group* (Northumberland: Carcanet Press, 1993), p. 124.

⁵⁶ Baldry, *The Case for the Arts*, p. 14; see also Foss, B., *War Paint: Art, War, State and Identity in Britain, 1939-1945* (London: Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, 2007), p. 182.

⁵⁷ See Foss, *War Paint*.

civilian life was deemed as relevant to the record as the theatre of war: Bevan boys down the pits, Londoners sheltering underground during the Blitz, women at work in the munitions factories. The chosen few were not, however, the only artists depicting day-to-day existence. Amateurs set out to record their own experiences. Some amateur work found its way into Sir Kenneth Clark's 'Recording Britain' project which, between 1939 and 1943, collated 1,549 watercolours illustrating the British landscape before and after bombing.⁵⁸ The project inspired the formation of amateur art clubs such as Birmingham's Midland Painting Group, which set out to capture Britain's changing cityscapes.⁵⁹ Some amateurs were critical of their professional counterparts and used their own art to set the record straight. Oliver Kilbourn, a miner and member of the Ashington Group, a small art club in County Durham which gained prominence in the 1930s, was not impressed by the artist Henry Moore's depiction of mining life: 'He misses part out. His pit drawings are not of real live miners because he did not understand.'⁶⁰ Kilbourn's own paintings sought to rectify this alleged misrepresentation: every sinewy muscle, low-hanging beam and rubble of coal was clearly illustrated to convey the claustrophobic confines and hard labour of a working mine. Together, Kilbourn and Moore's work created a powerful and enduring visual record of life in the collieries during the 1940s.

With the physical and social rebuilding of the country on the horizon, it became apparent that there was an opportunity to provide artistic experience for ordinary people within the postwar settlement. In 1943, a Gallup poll found that 57 per cent of respondents favoured continued government spending on the arts after the war.⁶¹ In

⁵⁸ Saunders, G. (ed), *Recording Britain* (London: V&A Publishing, 2011), p. 9.

⁵⁹ Welsby, M. S., *Origin and Early Days of the Midland Painting Group* (Birmingham: Midland Painting Group, 1996).

⁶⁰ Oliver Kilbourn quoted in Feaver, *Pitmen Painters*, p. 113. The Ashington Group is further discussed in chapter 3, p. 100.

⁶¹ Foss, *War Paint*, p. 194.

the British Council pamphlet 'Art for Everybody', published the same year, art critic Eric Newton wrote:

Certain ideals and reforms are being clearly envisaged by those who have the artistic health of this country at heart. ... More efficient galleries throughout the country, more efficient art education for the rising generation, a closer connection between artist and manufacturer, and closer contact between the artist and his public – all these things are in the minds of post-war planners, even though the full realization of them may seem difficult. But what is interesting, and what was, four years ago, quite unexpected, is the discovery that the war, far from interfering with our progress towards this better world, has actually pushed us a little nearer to it.⁶²

CEMA courted amateur painters, but did not directly provide for them. It emphasised the creation of larger and more appreciative audiences for the professional arts. The presentation of art as 'something to be received' when 'really it is something to be done' was, however, criticised.⁶³ The work of the amateur artist attracted the attention of critics like Newton who, although primarily concerned with making professional exhibitions accessible to the 'ordinary man', came to appreciate the value of amateur art:

Since the outbreak of war there has been an enormous increase in the interest taken in painting and drawing by amateur artists. Here again opportunity has played its part. The vast organization of Civil Defence has called into being a new mode of life, a mode of life in which men and women are forced to spend long stretches of time on duty, ready for an emergency, but unoccupied until that emergency arises. Firemen, wardens, stretcher-bearers, rescue parties, tied to their posts yet unoccupied, have felt the urge to create and to express their experiences (often spectacular ones) in paint. When the Civil Defence Artists held their first exhibition in a Bond Street Gallery a new source of artistic energy was tapped which has flowed freely ever since. Amateurish their art may be, but the practice of art is not just a question of producing masterpieces. It is also a question of training the imagination and observation, of providing a new outlet for experience.

⁶² Newton, 'Art for Everybody', p. 31.

⁶³ Gerard Hopkins in *The Listener* (24 June 1947) quoted in Evans and Glasgow, *The Arts in England*, p. 116.

It is encouraging to think that the war has actually fostered rather than suppressed this creative urge in England.⁶⁴

Exhibitions by fledgling amateur art groups demonstrated that artists were ‘not merely the product of art schools’, but of society as a whole.⁶⁵ They indicated a far broader interest in art than had previously been assumed. This was not an ‘art for the people’ but rather an art *by* the people.

The right to art: postwar settlement

Prior to 1940, the arts had been funded primarily through private patronage. Interest in the ‘aesthetic awareness’ of ordinary people had been expressed sporadically by government since the 1830s, yet this tended to be motivated by concerns for the development of consumer taste.⁶⁶ Such concerns were epitomised by Henry Cole’s development of South Kensington and the Victoria and Albert Museum: a blueprint for the taste of the nation.⁶⁷ Cole’s project was intended to be rolled out throughout the country but, due to the differing attitudes of local authorities to expenditure on the arts, provision was regionally varied. Many towns and cities had a gallery or a museum, but these were often under-valued and under-resourced.⁶⁸ Aside from commissioning artists to record the war effort, a scheme which had first come into being during the First World War, state involvement in the arts was limited.⁶⁹ The

⁶⁴ Newton, ‘Art for Everybody’, pp. 25-6.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, p. 26.

⁶⁶ Sproll, ‘Matters of Taste and Matters of Commerce’, pp. 107-8.

⁶⁷ Macdonald, S., *The History and Philosophy of Art Education* (London: University of London Press, 1970), pp. 178-9.

⁶⁸ Evans and Glasgow, *The Arts in England*, p. 62; see also Baynes and Marx, ‘Adult Education Auxiliaries and Informal Learning’, p. 326.

⁶⁹ Hewison, R., *Culture and Consensus: England, Art and Politics Since 1940* (London: Methuen, 1995), xv.

attitude of most governments followed that of Prime Minister Lord Melbourne who, in 1835, declared: ‘God help the government who meddles in art.’⁷⁰

Whereas Victorian efforts to foster the nation’s artistic appetite centred on the creation of discriminating consumers, during the 1940s the emphasis shifted towards wellbeing rather than economic prosperity; the prevailing vision was of a civilised society for all citizens emerging from the devastation of war. This vision was associated with the social democratic programme introduced by the Atlee government in 1945, which included a national health service free at the point of entry, an expanding education system, the provision of decent social housing, the introduction of national insurance, public ownership of the means of production through extensive nationalisation, and fiscal redistribution through a mixed economy. The importance of the arts and culture to social welfare had been emphasised during the interwar period. This was not limited to Keynes or the adult educationists behind the 1918 report for the Ministry of Reconstruction (see p. 35). In 1901, social reformer Seebohm Rowntree created the concept of a poverty line, defining the conventional level of urban subsistence at the time. In 1936, Rowntree revised this line to a level below which a civilised life could not be led. According to historian Ross McKibbin, Rowntree’s new poverty line marked the growing recognition ‘that there was now more to life than just food and rent’.⁷¹ Although economist William Beveridge’s 1942 report *Social Insurance and Allied Services*, which formed the backbone of the postwar Labour government’s welfare policy, recommended the provision of benefits at a flat subsistence rate, it was not long before this level was ‘breached’ in order to provide for an increasingly affluent populace, for whom the ability to participate in

⁷⁰ Quoted in Gray, C., *The Politics of the Arts in Britain* (London: MacMillan, 2000), p. 32.

⁷¹ McKibbin, R., *Parties and People: England 1914-1951* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 196.

civilised society had become part and parcel of the rising standard of living.⁷² Many on the Labour left had little interest in culture and were suspicious of affluence but, in the postwar years, ‘Labour revisionists were as animated by culture and leisure as wage and work’.⁷³ The arts and culture were a component of civilisation and, therefore, a natural part of a planned social democracy. The Arts Council, a state funded central agency which formally began Treasury-financed operations in 1946, became emblematic of a new approach whereby ‘matters of the mind and the spirit’ were no longer a privilege but rather a democratic right.⁷⁴

Throughout the late-1940s, policy makers called for the democratisation of the arts, both their appreciation and practice. Committees were formed and reports published on the state of the arts and public access to them, from the Dartington Hall report on *The Visual Arts*, published by Oxford’s Political and Economic Planning committee in 1946, to the *Arts in England* report in 1949, which was co-written by the newly-inaugurated Arts Council’s secretary-general and vice-chair.⁷⁵ A Trades Union Congress (TUC) report published shortly after the war expressed concern that millions of people would be too exhausted by the monotony of modern work to enjoy creative activities during their leisure time.⁷⁶ Such fears were, however, already being allayed: in its 1945 report *Adult Education After the War*, the British Institute of Adult

⁷² Lowe, R., ‘Modernizing Britain’s Welfare State: The Influence of Affluence, 1957-1964’ in Black, L. and Pemberton, H., *An Affluent Society? Britain’s Post-War ‘Golden Age’ Revisited* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), pp. 37-8.

⁷³ Black, L., ‘The Impression of Affluence: Political Culture in the 1950s and 1960s’ in Black, L. and Pemberton, H., *An Affluent Society? Britain’s Post-War ‘Golden Age’ Revisited* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), p. 94; see also Black, L., ‘Sheep May Safely Gaze’: Socialists, Television and the People in Britain, 1949-64’ in Black, L. et al, *Consensus or Coercion? The State, the People and Social Cohesion in Postwar Britain* (Cheltenham: New Clarion Press, 2001), p. 29.

⁷⁴ Morgan, K. O., *Britain Since 1945: The People’s Peace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 31.

⁷⁵ Cumberlege, G., *The Visual Arts: A Report Sponsored by the Dartington Hall Trustees* (London: Oxford University Press on behalf of the Arts Enquiry by Political and Economic Planning (PEP), 1946); see also Evans and Glasgow, *The Arts in England*.

⁷⁶ TUC’s 1946 report, quoted *Working Party Report on the Arts* (London: Trades Union Congress, 1976), p. 1.

Education noted a marked increase in demand since 1918 for courses in music, drama, literature and art.⁷⁷

Developments in public provision during the interwar and war years created the ‘new shape’ of the arts across the country.⁷⁸ In place of the pre-existing laissez faire approach, the state, in the midst of an historic and costly process of rebuilding and nationalisation, took on a significant level of responsibility for the arts.⁷⁹ In 1949 the *Arts in England* report concluded that a ‘new renaissance’ in the enjoyment of art was underway, which extended beyond the ‘privileged and the elect’ to the ‘common man’.⁸⁰ Like its predecessor CEMA, the Arts Council devoted its resources to professional rather than amateur arts.⁸¹ Arts Council chairs and directors were keen on what they called the democratisation of art, but this meant they focused on viewers and listeners, rather than makers and doers. Appreciation of the arts is not, however, the only story to be told: the conditions were ripe for the democratisation of not only art appreciation but also artistic creativity. The Arts Council may have limited its concern to the professional, but its existence validated artistic activity for anyone keen to pursue it. Whereas interwar efforts to inspire an artistic urge had mostly been top-down affairs – artists working with the unemployed in deprived inner city adult education institutes or touring impoverished rural areas – now far more significant was the growing number of ordinary people seeking out practical art experience for themselves.

⁷⁷ Sankey and Dudley, *Adult Education After The War*, p. 9.

⁷⁸ Evans and Glasgow, *The Arts in England*, pp. 13-15.

⁷⁹ Gray, *The Politics of the Arts in Britain*, pp. 35-7. The aspiration to provide artistic experience for everyone was enshrined in the 1948 United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. See Article 27, Section 1 in the *United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, 1948-2008: Sixtieth Anniversary Special Edition* (United Nations Department of Public Information, 2007), p. 10.

⁸⁰ Evans and Glasgow, *The Arts in England*, p. 21.

⁸¹ Gray, *The Politics of the Arts in Britain*, pp. 35-41.

Art and affluence: the golden age

Following the war, the British economy achieved rapid growth, low inflation and full employment.⁸² Working hours fell further in the immediate postwar years, increasing leisure still more. By the early-1950s, Britain had arrived at the end of austerity and, in a 'golden age' which lasted into the early-1970s, a 'society of popular affluence' was born.⁸³ As investment and consumption recovered from a short-term contractionary policy during the Suez crisis, Harold MacMillan announced that 'most of our people have never had it so good', a statement which became the Conservative Party's winning election slogan in 1959. It was a period of optimism and confidence. Living standards improved as wage rates outstripped the cost of life's basic necessities. The availability of mass produced consumer durables increased, as did home ownership – from less than 30 per cent in 1950 to more than 50 per cent by 1973.⁸⁴ The rise in personal affluence was accompanied by changing social attitudes; as occupational and class divisions began to shift, the highly-stratified society of the 1950s began to break down.

A political consensus during this period extended to arts policy. The Labour government was not alone in its support for the arts; *The Conservative Future* (1946), reasoned that 'to guide and elevate the pleasure of the people, to enrich their lives as well as to increase their livelihood, is surely not outside the duties of an enlightened state'.⁸⁵ Leisure and the arts were a minor election issue in 1959, in which both the Conservatives and Labour promised to improve provision. In a 52-page pamphlet, Labour posited that the arts were central to human experience, quoting J. B.

⁸² Schenk, C., 'Austerity and Boom' in Johnson, P. (ed), *Twentieth Century Britain: Economic, Social and Cultural Change* (London: Longman, 1994), p. 302.

⁸³ Hobsbawm, E., *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914-1991* (London: Abacus, 1995), pp. 259-62.

⁸⁴ Howlett, P., 'The "Golden Age", 1955-73' in Johnson, P. (ed), *Twentieth-Century Britain: Economic, Social and Cultural Change* (London: Longman, 1994), p. 321.

⁸⁵ *The Conservative Future* (1946) quoted in Baldry, *The Case for the Arts*, p. 19.

Priestley's 1947 speech to the Fabian Society, in which the writer claimed that 'art is not really like the icing on the cake, it is far more like the yeast in the dough'.⁸⁶ The Conservatives, meanwhile, published a 23-page document entitled *The Challenge of Leisure*, which proposed higher state funding for the Arts Council.⁸⁷

This consensus fostered a 'cultural revolution' during the 1960s, led by the Arts Council and state-funded art schools and, from 1964, overseen by the first Minister for the Arts, Jennie Lee.⁸⁸ Arts Council spending 'mushroomed', creating a large professional arts sector in receipt of state subsidy.⁸⁹ Mass media, rather than the fine arts, came to dominate the upper echelons of artistic production in this affluent society. The crossover between elite and popular art was crystallised in pop art, as photomechanical reproduction, pioneered by the avant garde, became commonplace.⁹⁰ At one end of the spectrum, photography grew more affordable for ordinary people, who used the medium for family snaps as a hobby. At the other end, creativity became a valuable trait, and 'creatives' – from artists to advertising men – 'culture's heroes'.⁹¹

As reproduction became simpler, faster and cheaper, the environment grew saturated with visual arts through advertising, television, publishing and product design.⁹² Historian Eric Hobsbawm argues that traditional art forms declined in this society of mass consumption due to 'rapid changes in the incentives to express them,

⁸⁶ Baldry, *The Case for the Arts*, p. 20; see also Priestley, J. B., *The Arts under Socialism: Being a Lecture Given to the Fabian Society with a Postscript on What the Government Should Do for the Arts Here and Now* (London: Turnstile Press, 1947), p. 7.

⁸⁷ Baldry, *The Case for the Arts*, p. 20.

⁸⁸ Marwick, *The Arts in the West Since 1945*, p. 101; see also Black, L., 'Making Britain a Gayler and More Cultivated Country': Wilson, Lee and the Creative Industries in the 1960s' in *Contemporary British History*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (2006), pp 323-4.

⁸⁹ Gray, *The Politics of the Arts in Britain*, p. 49.

⁹⁰ Marwick, *The Arts in the West Since 1945*, p. 102.

⁹¹ Albert, R. S. and Runco, M. A., 'A History of Research on Creativity' in Sternberg, R. J. (ed), *Handbook of Creativity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 28.

⁹² Gray, *The Politics of the Arts in Britain*, p. 37.

or in the outlets for expressing them'.⁹³ The high arts were, he claimed, preserved only by their status.⁹⁴ Yet the extent of this preservation was far broader than Hobsbawm assumed. According to one writer in *Leisure Painter* magazine, the amateur became the champion of traditional representational art:

This then is the leisure painter's most vital role, of which in most cases he remains blissfully innocent and to which an accolade is overdue. In his respect for the craft skills he helps to maintain that vast network of informed public support for the tradition of representational and tonal painting that can be traced back to the great days of the Renaissance.⁹⁵

This is a romantic generalisation; many amateurs paid little attention to traditional art and, similarly, many professionals remained committed to realism. Nevertheless, the imitation of reality retained appeal for a large number of leisure painters.⁹⁶ It was not, as Hobsbawm pessimistically surmised, that the fine arts were dying out, but rather that their social functions had changed.⁹⁷

There was an upsurge in amateur activity after the war.⁹⁸ The introduction of the arts to the rank and file produced a sufficient number of leisure painters to generate a social and commercial infrastructure which would support amateur activities for the rest of the century; a spectrum of 'incentives' and 'outlets', from privately organised art clubs and societies and state-funded adult education, to the publication of art magazines and the manufacture of affordable art materials, developed to serve an amateur interest in the tradition of representational fine art. With greater leisure and

⁹³ Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes*, p. 512.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 512-3.

⁹⁵ Chittock, D., 'The Leisure Painter's Vital Role' in *Leisure Painter* (July, 1977), p. 32.

⁹⁶ Murray, J. J., 'Art, Creativity, and the Quality of Education' in *Daedalus*, Vol. 112, No. 3 (Summer, 1983), pp. 132.

⁹⁷ Walker, J. A., *Art in the Age of Mass Media* (London: Pluto, 1983), p. 9.

⁹⁸ A similar situation in the US during the 1950s was observed by Daniel Bell in *Work and Its Discontents: The Cult of Efficiency in America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1956), p. 38. For a discussion of the growth in leisure painting in the US in the immediate postwar, see Buehr, G., 'Art Education and the Amateur' in *Bulletin of the Art Institute of Chicago*, Vol. 42, No. 6 (1948), pp. 87-90.

personal affluence, individuals had sufficient spare time and income to pursue a variety of creative interests. As one ‘Sunday painter’ wrote in 1962:

Amateur art is one of the ‘do-it-yourself’ pastimes which have grown almost beyond recognition since the war. Every year there are exhibitions of paintings by bus drivers and atomic scientists, by housewives, porters and bank clerks. Art schools and other classes are crowded. Manufacturers of materials are producing more for the amateur than for the professional and on bookstalls and in bookshops there are books with such titles as *Anyone Can Paint Pictures* or *Painting for Beginners*. Sketching holidays are advertised by Tourist agencies. There is even danger that professional artists become more interested in teaching the amateur than in painting their own pictures.⁹⁹

Adult education art classes provided by Local Education Authorities were unable to keep pace with prospective enrolments, and the number of amateur art societies and painting and sketching clubs grew rapidly.¹⁰⁰ Large exhibitions, from the annual exhibition of holiday paintings at the Royal Institute’s Mall Galleries to the National Amateur Art Exhibition and *The People’s National Housewives’ Painting Competition*, displayed the work of thousands of amateur artists to the general public.¹⁰¹ New magazines and books were published and a host of low-cost and gimmicky art materials produced for the amateur market.¹⁰²

The popularity of amateur art was such that even central government took an interest in the relationship between leisure painting and the prevailing ‘cultural efflorescence’.¹⁰³ The 1964-5 white paper *A Policy for the Arts* sought to rectify the

⁹⁹ Seymour, W. A., ‘The Sunday Painter’ in *Association of Civil Service Art Clubs Newsletter*, No. 34 (Sep., 1962), p. 2 (bound volumes courtesy of the Civil and Public Service Artists).

¹⁰⁰ A member of the Ministry of Supply Art Club referring to a paper entitled ‘The Painter and His Public – 1754-1954’ read to the Royal Society of Artists by the portrait and landscape painter Bernard Adams in Cadman, R. L., ‘We Amateur Artists’ in the *Association of Civil Service Art Clubs Newsletter*, No. 7 (1954), p. 5 (bound volumes courtesy of the Civil and Public Service Artists).

¹⁰¹ These exhibitions were advertised and reported in art magazines for amateurs such as *The Artist* and *Leisure Painter*. See, for example, Mackinlay, C., ‘Never Had a Lesson: Naïve Charm in Perspective’ in *Leisure Painter* (Winter, 1968), pp. 34-7.

¹⁰² Commercial support for amateur artists is discussed in chapters 6 and 7.

¹⁰³ Marwick, *The Arts in the West Since 1945*, p. 9.

‘relatively modest scale’ of government aid to the arts.¹⁰⁴ Its primary focus was the professional artist, yet it recognised the importance of amateur activity, insisting that, in a civilised community, enjoyment of the arts ‘should not be regarded as something remote from everyday life’.¹⁰⁵ As the postwar planners of adult education had realised two decades earlier, the arts, which provided professional occupation for the few, were ‘in the main important’ because they provided a leisure-time pursuit ‘for the many’.¹⁰⁶

Echoing the sentiments of Keynes, *A Policy for the Arts* contended that it was the duty of an enlightened government to respond to the needs of citizens who, ‘in an age of increasing automation’, would ‘need the stimulus and refreshment that the arts can bring’.¹⁰⁷ Building on existing arguments in favour of creative art education in schools, the classroom was recognised as a key location for the development of a civilised society.¹⁰⁸ Through early art education, younger generations would gain self-confidence in their own artistic self-expression and develop an interest in that of others:

If children at an early age become accustomed to the idea of the arts as a part of everyday life, they are more likely in maturity first to accept and then to demand them. ... As activities become more widespread, more and more people will be inclined as they grow up to practice and appreciate the arts. The professionals of the future will require more and better facilities for their training, the amateurs will swell the growing ranks of those who attend the already remarkable variety of part-time classes or occasional

¹⁰⁴ [Cmnd. 2601] *A Policy for the Arts: The First Steps* (London: HMSO, 1964-5), p. 16.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*, p. 6.

¹⁰⁶ Cumberlege, *The Further Education of Men and Women*, p. 9; and also *Further Education: The Scope and Content of its Opportunities Under the Education Act, 1944* (London: Ministry of Education Pamphlet No. 8, 1947), p. 34. Both reports built on suggestions made in the 1918 interim report discussed on p. 37.

¹⁰⁷ [Cmnd. 2601] *A Policy for the Arts*, p. 19.

¹⁰⁸ Ideas popularised by Herbert Read in *Education through Art* (London: Faber and Faber, 1943). See Macdonald, *The History and Philosophy of Art Education*, pp. 320-52. This is discussed in more detail in chapter 4, see p. 137.

lectures, and the arts as a whole will reach wider and better informed audiences.¹⁰⁹

The white paper's aim was to provide the living artist with a 'larger and more appreciative public'.¹¹⁰ In this respect, it did not diverge significantly from the civilising mission of the Victorian era: a particular vision of 'good art' was to be instilled in the public mind.¹¹¹ The difference was the recognition that amateur production also served the vision of a civilised society, and that supporting amateurs through the provision of state-subsidised adult education was an important and necessary part of supporting the arts.

It is not easy to identify the exact socio-economic location of these leisure painters. Leisure painting is generally regarded as a middle class pursuit, and its growth attributed to the expansion of that class.¹¹² Yet fine art appealed to people from all walks of life, from miners and factory hands to civil servants and bank managers.¹¹³ The relative proportion of men and women involved is not easily estimated. Though a popular pastime for leisured middle and upper class women during the Victorian and Edwardian eras, the social organisation of leisure painting in societies and adult education in the early-twentieth century appears to have been, initially, a predominantly male activity. A combination of growing educational opportunity and increased female participation in the workforce during the postwar years, however, resulted in the engagement of a larger number of women in social leisure pursuits such as amateur art societies.¹¹⁴ Surveys carried out during the 1990s suggest the pursuit of drawing and painting (socially and in isolation) was roughly

¹⁰⁹ [Cmnd. 2601] *A Policy for the Arts*, p. 14.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.18.

¹¹¹ Gray, *The Politics of the Arts in Britain*, p. 48.

¹¹² Hall, P. A., 'Social Capital in Britain' in *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 29, No. 3 (July 1999), p. 439.

¹¹³ The variety of occupations represented is discussed in chapter 3.

¹¹⁴ Hall, 'Social Capital in Britain', p. 437.

equal between the sexes.¹¹⁵ Participation across ethnic groups is more difficult to trace. Studies of ethnic minority arts have appeared, yet there is little information on the ethnic backgrounds of participants in either fine art societies or adult education art classes.¹¹⁶

Cuts and commodification: the 1970s and beyond

The postwar economic boom ended in the early-1970s. The arts, which had enjoyed consistent stimulus, began to suffer after 1975, as government subsidy to the Arts Council was pared back.¹¹⁷ Regional arts were badly hit. In 1976, the Redcliffe-Maud report *Support for the Arts in England and Wales*, commissioned by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, concluded that local government had ‘found a new readiness’ to see the arts in leisure as an ‘essential part of local life’ – evident in the hundreds of new local arts centres and arts festivals which had recently come into being – yet added regretfully that economic issues had created an ‘overriding obstacle to progress’.¹¹⁸

In 1979, Britain entered a new era of cultural management under Margaret Thatcher’s prime ministership. Thatcher believed, like Lord Melbourne, that the arts withered under state control. She called for ‘business acumen and efficiency to bear on the administration of cultural institutions’ and encouraged private sector

¹¹⁵ See, for example, Hutchison, R. and Feist, A., *Amateur Arts in the UK: The PSI Survey of Amateur Arts and Crafts in the UK* (London: The Policy Studies Institute, 1991), p. 23; Sargent, N., *The Learning Divide: A Study of Participation in Adult Learning in the United Kingdom* (Leicester: National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education, 1997), p. 84; and also Fox, K. and Richards, L., *National Statistics: Sport and Leisure Results from the Sport and Leisure Module of the 2002 General Household Survey* (London: HMSO, 2004), pp. 38-40.

¹¹⁶ Notably Khan, N., *The Arts Britain Ignores: The Arts of Ethnic Minorities in Britain* (London: Commission for Racial Equality, 1976); and also Jermyn, H. and Desai, P., *Arts – What’s in a Word? Ethnic Minorities and the Arts* (London: Arts Council of England, 2000).

¹¹⁷ Gray, *The Politics of the Arts in Britain*, pp. 51-2; and also Baldry, *The Case for the Arts*, p. 25.

¹¹⁸ The Redcliffe-Maud report [Cmnd. 4040] quoted in Margetts, M., ‘Patronage for Art’s Sake’ in Gainsborough, J. (ed), *Arts Review Yearbook 1977* (London: Richard Gainsborough Periodicals, 1977), pp. 44-8; see also *Working Party Report on the Arts* (London: Trades Union Congress, 1976), pp. 19-20 and p. 39.

involvement.¹¹⁹ The key idea was commodification: the arts ceased to be valued for being useful, giving pleasure or provoking thought, and were instead justifiable only in terms of their financial return.¹²⁰ Thatcher built on socio-political changes that had been evident since the 1970s, as the social–democratic consensus began to unravel and values drifted from collectivism towards individualism.¹²¹ As the collectivist ethos of postwar Britain was gradually eroded, the politics of the arts changed.¹²² In a shift indicative of a more general transition towards a consumerist society, the arts were increasingly perceived as a consumer good: they were a pleasure for which people should be prepared to pay, and not the responsibility of the state.

The value of art became an either/or equation: art was an intangible ‘luxury to be sacrificed’ when more pressing tangible needs demanded public finances.¹²³ Yet the commodification of the arts was not initiated because the state could no longer afford them. In the second half of the twentieth century, rapid economic growth carried British society into sustained affluence: per capita GDP increased (in real terms) fourfold over the course of the twentieth century, with growth between 1948 and 1998 at almost twice the rate of that between 1900 and 1948.¹²⁴ Despite a recession following the 1988-9 boom, by the mid-1990s real income per head was twice as high as it had been in the 1940s.¹²⁵ Commodification was an expression not

¹¹⁹ Margaret Thatcher (1993) quoted in Gray, *The Politics of the Arts in Britain*, p. 144.

¹²⁰ Gray, *The Politics of the Arts in Britain*, pp. 5-7.

¹²¹ Riddell, P., *The Thatcher Era and Its Legacy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), p. 9, p. 13, p. 209 and p. 223.

¹²² Gray, *The Politics of the Arts in Britain*, p. 8.

¹²³ Coles, P., *Manchester Hospitals’ Arts Project* (London: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 1981), p. 9.

¹²⁴ Hicks, J. and Grahame, A., *A Century of Change: Trends in UK Statistics Since 1900* (London: House of Commons Library, 1999), p. 23.

¹²⁵ Offer, A., ‘Introduction’ in Offer, A. (ed), *In Pursuit of the Quality of Life* (Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 1; see also Hannah, L., ‘Crisis and Turnaround? 1973-1993’ in Johnson, P. (ed), *Twentieth-Century Britain: Economic, Social and Cultural Change* (London: Longman, 1994), p. 346.

of necessity, but of an ideological shift; the state had come to resemble J. K. Galbraith's 'rich man who deludes himself into behaving like a mendicant'.¹²⁶

Much amateur art activity was either voluntary, private, or commercially supported and, to a greater extent, excluded from the regime of cuts. Amateur art societies had, for example, never been dependent on state patronage and were generally independent of government funding cycles of spend and save.¹²⁷ The removal of the small amount of money that did, from time-to-time, trickle down indirectly from central funds, did not, on the whole, threaten their continued existence. Some amateur art activities were, however, deeply affected. State support for the amateur did not extend far beyond the adult education system, yet this was a vital channel for the artistic activity of ordinary people. As chapters 4 and 5 argue, local authority art classes were central to the postwar rise of the leisure painter. Cuts to adult education services, which began in earnest during the 1970s, became ideologically entrenched in the 1980s.¹²⁸ The cost of services, previously met by the state, were to be met by the student, now the 'consumer'.¹²⁹ Access was restricted either to those who could pay or those eligible for subsidy and, as a result, the potential of the arts to reach the majority of ordinary people gradually diminished.

The new democratisers

The importance of the arts for ordinary people was not completely ignored during this period. Priorities in the allocation of public resources shifted in the 1970s and 1980s.

¹²⁶ Galbraith, J. K., *The Affluent Society* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1958), p. 4.

¹²⁷ Hutchison and Feist, *Amateur Arts in the UK*, xiii and p. 142.

¹²⁸ Fieldhouse, R., 'An Overview of British Adult Education in the Twentieth Century' in Fieldhouse, R. (ed), *A History of Modern British Adult Education* (Leicester: National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education, 1996), p. 68; see also Tuckett, A., 'Counting the Cost: Managerialism, the Market and the Education of Adults in the 1980s and Beyond' in Westwood, S. and Thomas, J. E., *The Politics of Adult Education* (Leicester: National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education, 1991), pp. 21-43.

¹²⁹ Thompson, J., *Bread and Roses: Arts, Culture and Lifelong Learning* (Leicester: National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education, 2002), p. 115.

As financial support was siphoned away from the arts in one domain, it trickled into another. A growing body of evidence demonstrating the value of the arts for health and social care initiated the introduction of practical arts activities led by professional artists within hospitals and in the wider community.¹³⁰ Awareness of the relationship between the arts and wellbeing led eventually to community arts activities being made available on National Health Service prescription for the treatment of depression.¹³¹ While drastic cuts hit the professional and, through reduced adult education services, the amateur arts from the mid- to late-1970s onwards, community arts projects became increasingly common.¹³²

The community arts movement began in the ‘radical outpouring’ of the late-1960s.¹³³ Following the Arts Council’s *Report for the Community Arts Working Party* (1974), projects led by professional artists began to receive state funding, distributed initially by the Arts Council of Great Britain, and subsequently the newly-established Regional Arts Associations.¹³⁴ Community arts projects provided a relatively inexpensive method of helping the disadvantaged – the sick, the poor, the elderly – whilst at the same time supporting professional artists.¹³⁵ Community arts and amateur arts both involved ordinary people making art (those for whom community arts were provided were also, essentially, amateurs), but self-directed amateurs ‘suffered a lesser status’ because the Regional Arts Associations, who distributed grants to local arts projects, assumed they were predominantly middle class and

¹³⁰ Brown, L., ‘Is Art Therapy? Art for Mental Health at the Millennium’ (Manchester Metropolitan University Ph.D thesis, 2006), p. 6.

¹³¹ For a discussion of the pilot scheme for Arts on Prescription, which was granted £20,000 by Stockport’s Joint Health Executive in 1996 to offer referrals to community arts projects for individuals with mental health problems, see ‘Part 3, Section H: Stockport Arts and Health’ in Watkins, S., *Health 2000: Three Years to Go* (Ninth Annual Public Health Report for Stockport, 1997), pp. 436-58.

¹³² Coles, *Manchester Hospitals’ Arts Project*, p. 40.

¹³³ Kelly, O., *Community, Art and the State: Storming the Citadels* (London: Comedia, 1984), p. 10.

¹³⁴ *Ibid*, p. 15.

¹³⁵ For an example of this approach see *Culture and Creativity: The Next Ten Years* (DCMS Green Paper, 2001).

therefore not in need of state assistance.¹³⁶ While the therapeutic benefits of art were provided for those in need, amateur art was perceived as a purely individual and private affair.

Community arts were, in part, a reaction against the pre-existing civilising mission to bring the high arts to the people. Owen Kelly, who became the spokesperson for the first generation of community artists in the 1980s, complained that the ‘universal criterion for civilisation’ was little more than a mid-nineteenth century prioritisation of the governing classes’ predilection for the fine arts:

Even those who are, in political terms, ‘radical’ are often content to limit their demands to an increase in popular access to ‘the arts’, as though an increased dosage of someone else’s pleasures could ever be a substitute for pleasures of your own and the pleasures of the groups to which you belong.¹³⁷

The democratisation of culture was not, Kelly contended, enough, as the culture being democratised was that created and enjoyed by the few. The relentless ‘trumpeting’ of access to professional arts had, he argued, resulted in ‘the undervaluing of human creativity in general’.¹³⁸ Community arts projects sought to decentralise ‘the means of cultural production’ by providing projects primarily for disadvantaged groups who might ordinarily have little awareness of or access to the arts.¹³⁹ They aimed for a ‘cultural democracy’, which would not discriminate between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ art and could not be centrally controlled according to a particular set of values and interests dictated by elites.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁶ Assistant Director of North West Arts Cliodhna Mulhern (1990), quoted in Hutchison and Feist, *Amateur Arts in the UK*, p. 89.

¹³⁷ Kelly, O., ‘In Search of Cultural Democracy’ originally published in *Arts Express* (Oct., 1985) and reproduced online at The Southampton Media Workshop <http://mpmw.org.uk/insearch-of-cultural-democracy/> (accessed 2 August 2013).

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ Kelly, *Community, Art and the State*, p. 21.

Sir Roy Shaw, general secretary of the Arts Council between 1975 and 1983, was an advocate of adult education and outreach programmes which delivered the traditional high arts to ordinary people. In 1981 Shaw criticised the belief, shared by a growing number of community artists like Kelly, that bringing elite art forms to the people was an imposition which served only to preserve the ‘bourgeois cultural hegemony’.¹⁴¹ Shaw believed, like Keynes, that given the opportunity, ordinary working people would enjoy high culture.¹⁴² Yet his concern about the community artists’ ‘do-it-yourself approach’ betrayed a common assumption that there was either the high (and bourgeois) arts, or the low (and popular) arts, and that these were two separate and incompatible categories – a division which obscures the real level of engagement in artistic creativity in twentieth century Britain.¹⁴³

While each valuable in their own terms, both Kelly’s ‘cultural democracy’ and Shaw’s ‘art for all’ overlooked the existence of everyday amateur art activity: the former centred on the cultural production of marginalised groups (although Kelly hoped community arts would eventually be made available to all members of society), and the latter focused on the widespread enjoyment of professionally-produced artforms. Criticism of the elitist nature of art, either in terms of production of the arts or access to them, laboured under a basic misapprehension because the most prevalent ‘art of the people’ did not suit prevailing tastes and definitions. Ordinary everyday creativity was certainly undervalued, but it existed to a far greater extent than either community arts activists or Keynesian democratisers recognised. The most popular form of artistic production was that produced by amateurs: traditional, representational, and consistently ignored.

¹⁴¹ Shaw, ‘The Arts Council and Aesthetic Education’, p. 90.

¹⁴² Kelly did not disagree with the idea that ordinary people could enjoy the arts, but rather the contention that the high arts were the only art forms worth knowing. See Kelly, *Community, Art and the State*, p. 98-9.

¹⁴³ Shaw, ‘The Arts Council and Aesthetic Education’, p. 90.

In the late-Victorian era, William Morris called for a ‘genuine art’ to be created for the people by the people. The prevailing approach was, however, a civilising mission which attempted to introduce ordinary people to the professional arts. Throughout the twentieth century, the public dialogue on the arts remained fixated on professional artists and their audiences. The discourse surrounding aesthetic experience was, for the most part, concerned with passive consumption rather than active production. In the 1990s, the importance of art to national wellbeing was once again recognised by the newly-elected Labour government.¹⁴⁴ In a speech to the Royal Academy of Art in 1997, the first Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport Chris Smith said the arts ‘must be available to the many, not just the few’.¹⁴⁵ Smith insisted, promisingly, that ‘the opportunity to create and to enjoy must be fostered for all’.¹⁴⁶ Yet a circumscribed conception of art was maintained: despite the fact that, in 2002, nine per cent of General Household Survey respondents – an estimated 5.3 million people – regularly engaged in drawing and painting, the political emphasis remained on the popular appreciation of works by professional artists.¹⁴⁷

For a short period, in the decades leading up to and following the Second World War, a window opened onto amateur experience which inspired a legion of leisure painters. Created in leisure rather than labour, their art was not the ‘genuine art’ that William Morris had envisaged, but it was an art *by* the people. So prevalent was this art, that the 1949 *Arts in England* report concluded that ‘amateur achievement in this country is so far-reaching and important, both socially and artistically, that it requires

¹⁴⁴ Brown, ‘Is Art Therapy?’, p. 28.

¹⁴⁵ Chris Smith (22 May 1997) quoted in Thompson, *Bread and Roses*, p. 4.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p. 4.

¹⁴⁷ Fox and Richards, *Results from the Sport and Leisure Module of the 2002 General Household Survey*, pp. 38-40.

a separate study'.¹⁴⁸ Such a study did not properly materialise until 1991, in a survey of amateur arts and crafts across Britain, by which point the optimism of the immediate postwar years had ebbed away.¹⁴⁹ The civilising mission continued, but it was now concerned, on the one hand, with reaching the greatest number through subsidised access to the professional arts and, on the other, with helping the disadvantaged through community arts.¹⁵⁰ In the shift from social democracy, which nurtured a belief in the civilising power of the arts for the whole of society, towards market liberalism, which viewed art as a commodity, the independent production of art by amateurs, which for a brief moment in history had been regarded as a civilising force in its own right, was once again sidelined.

¹⁴⁸ Evans and Glasgow, *The Arts in England*, p. 18.

¹⁴⁹ The report was Hutchison and Feist's *Amateur Arts in the UK*.

¹⁵⁰ And also 'participatory arts' (see introduction, p. 17).

PART TWO

Societies

CHAPTER 2

The social life of the artist

‘Daily duties and routine we undergo and accept as normal ring far from the creative side of us. He is a happy person who is able to enjoy the satisfaction of bringing into existence the pleasure of art and we, like many other societies, share that talent.’¹

Art making is usually a lone pursuit, yet the gathering together of artists into groups to share mutual interests and protection has taken place since the eighteenth century. During the twentieth century, the number of art societies in Britain increased significantly, the result of the growing popularity of leisure painting in the interwar and postwar era. Societies provided the amateur with opportunities to be part of a community through which they could find camaraderie and achieve status. Through an examination of art societies and exhibiting in the second half of the twentieth century, this chapter explores how extrinsic social rewards motivated leisure painters to share their creative exploits with others. Artistic creativity was not only a personal but also a social activity. In the postwar era of joining-in, amateur art societies flourished. As British society became increasingly individualist from the late-1960s onwards, the formation of new amateur art societies began to level off. Their popularity did not, however, wane: the number of art societies in existence remained constant until the end of the twentieth century, indicating an enduring interest in the socially organised pursuit of art.

The Royal Academy of Art in London is considered to be ‘the most famous, oldest and most respectable’ of all associations of artists.² Established in 1768, it

¹ Easel Club Annual Report, 1972 (Birmingham Archives and Heritage, MS 3151/B/2).

² Evans, B. I. and Glasgow, M., *The Arts in England* (London: The Falcon Press, 1949), p. 104.

accepted only fine artists ‘of high reputation’.³ Membership, initially capped at forty, was ‘an honour to be competed for’.⁴ Candidates submitted to a rigorous selection procedure: firstly they must be named in the nominations book, secondly find six academicians to back their nomination, and finally gain the vote of more than half of the general assembly.⁵ In the nineteenth century a range of professional associations across a variety of subjects and media, from portraitists to marine artists, pastellists to watercolourists, miniaturists to muralists, came into being. The Royal Academy (RA) took pride in its role as the archetype for these professional and semi-professional art societies:

The existence, in the Metropolis, of other societies connected with art must be regarded as, on many accounts, beneficial. They promote the great principle of emulation, which it is one object of the Royal Academy to foster.⁶

Principally through the organisation of selective exhibitions, these societies acquired prestigious reputations, which then served to confer respectability and status on their members. Letters following an artist’s name – RA, RI, RWS – provided a stamp of approval for those who had risen to a significant level in the artistic hierarchy.⁷

Towards the end of the nineteenth century younger societies, like the New English Art Club (NEAC), were founded in reaction to what was perceived to be the ‘dead men’s shoes’ policy of the increasingly conservative and ageing Royal Academy.⁸ This was symptomatic of a general movement against academies across

³ Royal Academy’s Instrument of Foundation, quoted in Popp, G. and Valentine, H., *Royal Academy of Arts: Directory of Membership* (London: Royal Academy of Arts Library, 1996), v.

⁴ Evans and Glasgow, *The Arts in England*, p. 104; see also Macdonald, S., *The History and Philosophy of Art Education* (London: University of London Press, 1970), p. 28.

⁵ Howard, K., ‘Society Rules: How Letters Benefit the Artist’ in Ward, O. (ed), *The Artist’s Yearbook 2006* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2005), p. 364.

⁶ Annual Report of the Royal Academy to the General Assembly of Academicians (1860), p. 18 (Royal Academy of Art Library).

⁷ Which stand for Royal Academy, Royal Institute and Royal Watercolour Society.

⁸ Howard, ‘Society Rules: How Letters Benefit the Artist’, p. 364.

Europe. In an article praising the vitality of the NEAC in 1907, the *Burlington Magazine* dismissed the RA as an ‘oligarchy of old men’.⁹ The New English opted for a democratically elected committee and selected an independent jury to run exhibitions, yet the mould was essentially the same: a selective society of limited number whose chief objective was to provide professional support and an annual exhibition at which members could show their work.¹⁰ The Academy’s ‘principle of emulation’ appeared to work: all future associations of artists, professional or amateur, were arranged along similar lines – all ‘estimable for being its imitators’.¹¹

During the twentieth century, art societies became the institutions through which much artistic creativity, amateur and professional, was mediated. While the Royal Academy aspired to attract ‘the best artists’, a broad spectrum of provincial art societies were founded, predominantly from the late nineteenth century onwards, which accommodated artists at varying levels of interest and aptitude.¹² As the 1911 entry for art societies in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* reported:

One of the remarkable features in the history of art in Great Britain has been the rapid increase of the artistic rank and file. ... Coincident with this astonishing development there has been a corresponding addition of new art societies.¹³

Art magazines and guidebooks published for an amateur audience gave advice on how to transform local interest into a fully functioning society (these magazines are discussed in greater detail in chapter 6). *Amateur Artist*, for example, laid down a thorough plan of how a society should be organised, from the election of a

⁹ Editorial, ‘The Case for Modern Painting IV: The Royal Academy and the New English Art Club’ in *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*, Vol. 11, No. 52 (July, 1907), p. 205.

¹⁰ Newton, E., ‘The “New English” Celebrates Its Jubilee’ in Lambert, R. S. (ed), *Art in England* (London: Pelican, 1938), pp. 54-8.

¹¹ Ripplingille, E. V. (ed), *The Artist and Amateur’s Magazine: A Work Devoted to the Interests of Arts and Design and the Cultivation of Taste* (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1843), p. 2.

¹² Royal Academy Annual Report for 1860, p. 32.

¹³ ‘Art Societies’ in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica: A Dictionary of Arts, Sciences, Literature and General Information* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911), pp. 701-3.

management committee to selecting the insignia for society stationery.¹⁴ *The Artist's Yearbook*, meanwhile, printed a variety of hints for the formation of an amateur society, from gathering a minimum of twenty members willing to pay a subscription fee and finding an 'airy and well lighted' room for meetings, to constructing a 'model's throne' for life drawing classes.¹⁵

Amateur societies, like their professional counterparts, were founded on a constitution. 'Specimen club rules' were, from time to time, printed in magazines like *Leisure Painter* and annuals such as *The Artists' Guide*.¹⁶ They stipulated the election and running of the management committee, eligibility for membership, and various protocols for meetings and exhibitions.¹⁷ These 'specimens' bore a close resemblance to those found in the minute books of local art clubs, suggesting that advice was both sought after and heeded. As a result, amateur societies exhibited remarkably similar structures to not only one another, but also to the pinnacle institutions they attempted to emulate. Similarly to their more professional and high-ranking counterparts, amateur clubs comprised members and a management committee (elected from within the membership at an annual general meeting), which organised exhibitions and events.¹⁸ In this respect, the social organisation of artistic creativity in Britain from the nineteenth century onwards had a fractal quality: rather like a football league, the structure of the activity looked much the same at every level – from the local art club

¹⁴ Laurie, M. E., 'Technique: Running an Art Club' in Gainsborough, J. (ed), *Amateur Artist*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (July, 1966), pp. 38-9.

¹⁵ 'Hints on Forming an Amateur Society' in Sawkins, H. (ed), *The Artist's Yearbook* (London: The Artist Publishing Company, 1939), p. 162.

¹⁶ A similar list was included in appendix II of Evans and Glasgow, *The Arts in England*, pp. 132-5.

¹⁷ 'Specimen Club Rules' in Parkinson, F. (ed), *The Artist's Guide and Review: Sixth Edition* (London: The Artist Publishing Company, 1958), p. 171.

¹⁸ Simpson, R., 'The Role and Potential of Amateur Arts Groups in Building an Empowered, Participative, Fulfilled and Healthy Civil Society' a paper given at the conference *Taking Part: Arts, Culture and Civil Society* (London: October, 2010).

to the Royal Academy of Art. As one amateur art society mused hopefully: ‘We are getting more like the Royal Academy every day.’¹⁹

While the structure of these societies was similar, their substantive content could differ significantly, as could the degree of seriousness with which members approached activities. In the more serious societies which, like the Royal Academy, were highly selective, amateurs and professionals often joined forces: presidents would sometimes be professional or semi-professional, lending prestige rather than their time to the society, and secretaries or treasurers would usually be amateurs ‘with some time to spare’ for their ‘onerous’ organisational duties.²⁰ In a system reminiscent of that of the Royal Academy, candidates were elected to membership by vote after submitting a set number of works, usually four to six pieces, to a selection committee. In less selective societies, candidates simply applied and, if there was sufficient room for new members, were gladly accepted. Some groups, which were for ‘dabblers’ rather than for ‘serious amateurs’, operated more like an adult education class: no membership as such, just a regular weekly space to get together and make art.²¹

An important function of amateur societies was educative and, particularly where access to adult education was limited, societies provided an opportunity for organised art making that did not necessitate becoming a student (adult art education is examined in chapters 4 and 5).²² Tuition for members – inviting local artists or art historians to give demonstrations or talks to members on society premises or in community education centres – was commonplace and was tailored to the particular

¹⁹ Birmingham Watercolour Society, minutes for the Annual General Meeting, 1939 (private collection made available by the society).

²⁰ ‘Focus on Art Clubs’ in *Leisure Painter* (Jan., 1978), pp. 5-7.

²¹ Interview with Pat Coward, founder of the Millpool Art Club, Solihull, 2009; for a discussion of the differences between ‘serious amateurs’ and ‘dabblers’ see Stebbins, R. A., ‘The Amateur: Two Sociological Definitions’ in *The Pacific Sociological Review*, Vol. 20, No. 4 (1977), pp. 582-606.

²² Interview with Gordon Williams, former president of the Wolverhampton Art Society, 2009.

level of the group. At all levels of participation, the prime event on the society calendar was the annual exhibition (discussed towards the end of this chapter), with other popular activities including painting sessions, evenings of mutual criticism, lectures and excursions. These events featured as prominently in society calendars towards the end of the twentieth century as they did in the Victorian period.

The popularity of art clubs and societies amongst the amateur rank and file increased rapidly in the interwar and immediate postwar years. Local government support, made possible by the Physical Training and Recreation Act of 1937, was given to clubs with ‘athletic, social or educational objects’ in the form of subsidised premises to hold meetings, classes and events.²³ In 1947, a Ministry of Education pamphlet stated that due to a range of wartime efforts to bring the arts to ordinary people, for example those led by the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts discussed in chapter 1 (p. 43), ‘appetites have been created that will continue to grow if the food is made available’.²⁴ The following year a clause in the Local Government Bill provided this sustenance, enlarging the support made available by the 1937 Act.²⁵ The Act was introduced during a period of growing concern about the changing relationship between work and leisure, and the bill which supplemented its powers in 1948 was part of the Labour government’s vision of a civilised society (see chapter 1, pp. 47-53). Further assistance was offered to art societies by the Carnegie Trust, which contributed to the cost of artist-instructors, life models, and the hire of premises for life drawing classes.²⁶ Subsidised premises in which to meet, practice

²³ Evans and Glasgow, *The Arts in England*, p. 65.

²⁴ *Further Education: The Scope and Content of its Opportunities Under the Education Act, 1944* (London: Ministry of Education, 1947), p. 35.

²⁵ Duncan, N. S., *The Arts in the South: A Preliminary Survey and Report* (Winchester: Southern Arts Association, 1970), p. 13; see also Evans and Glasgow, *The Arts in England*, pp. 66-9.

²⁶ Parkinson, F. (ed), *The Artist’s Guide and Review: Sixth Edition* (London: The Artist Publishing Company, 1958), p. 172.

and exhibit aided the development of amateur art societies which were, on the whole, financially self-sufficient through subscriptions from members.²⁷

The 1950s and 1960s were particularly fertile decades for art society formation – part of a generally thriving era of joining in.²⁸ In the mid-1950s, an art critic for the *Glasgow Herald* remarked:

One of the most heartening characteristics of painting in present times is that a growing number of amateurs – in the real sense of the word – are no longer content to stand as spectators in the field of art, but must themselves in occupational and regional groups, be up and doing with brush and palette.²⁹

Societies were not only to be found in densely populated urban areas; many were established in rural areas, which lacked the centres for professional arts and the provision of adult education prevalent in larger towns and cities (see fig. 2.1, below).³⁰ As one society member reflected in 1954:

The arts were now being practised by the public to such an extent that artistic societies, clubs and circles extended from one end of the country to the other. There was scarcely a town or village that had not its art club and there was no body of importance without its art society – the medical profession had theirs, and so, too, had Army Officers, the Post Office, Parson Painters, every bank, every insurance company and most of the Ministries attached to Her Majesty's Government.³¹

As the number of art clubs increased, individual groups developed bonds with fellow groups in neighbouring villages, towns and cities, forming large loose-knit

²⁷ Hutchison, R. and Feist, A., *Amateur Arts in the UK: the PSI Survey of Amateur Arts and Crafts in the UK* (London: The Policy Studies Institute, 1991), xiv.

²⁸ Hall, P. A., 'Social Capital in Britain' in *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 29, No. 3 (July, 1999), p. 423.

²⁹ Press cutting: 'Parson Painters' Refreshing Show from our London Art Critic' in *Glasgow Herald* (21 Nov., 1955) (Lambeth Palace Library Archives, MS2885).

³⁰ Hutchison and Feist, *Amateur Arts in the UK*, pp. 37-8.

³¹ A member of the Ministry of Supply Art Club referring to a paper entitled 'The Painter and His Public – 1754-1954' read to the Royal Society of Artists by the portrait and landscape painter Bernard Adams in Cadman, R. L., 'We Amateur Artists' in the *Association of Civil Service Art Clubs Newsletter*, No. 7 (1954), p. 5 (bound volumes courtesy of the Civil and Public Service Artists).

associations, such as the Federation of Northern Art Societies or the Federation of Midland Art Societies. These self-supporting umbrella groups operated as a 'parent body', through which societies cooperated to organise large art shows and events.³² They also offered courses to members of affiliated clubs at discounted rates.³³ The size of the amateur federations allowed them to negotiate assistance from local authorities, the Carnegie Trust, and even the Arts Council, which was usually reluctant to directly assist the amateur arts.³⁴ In addition, equipment and resources were contributed to exhibitions and summer schools by the manufacturers of artists' materials, such as Winsor and Newton and George Rowney and Co. (which became Daler-Rowney in the 1980s).³⁵ The federations, like art societies, mirrored the structure of their professional counterparts. The Federation of British Artists, for example, had since 1959 operated as an administrative umbrella for twenty autonomous professional societies of high standing, including the New English Art Club, the Royal Institute of Painters in Watercolours, and the Society of Women Artists.³⁶ A number of amateur federations founded in the 1960s and 1970s took their cue from such prominent examples.

³² Bishop, J. and Hoggett, P., *Organizing Around Enthusiasms: Mutual Aid in Leisure* (London: Comedia, 1986), p. 27.

³³ Painting holiday pullout supplement in *Leisure Painter* (Mar., 1976), p. 6.

³⁴ Parkinson, F. (ed), *The Artist's Guide and Review: Sixth Edition* (London: The Artist Publishing Company, 1958), p. 172.

³⁵ 'Editorial' in *Leisure Painter* (Mar., 1976), p. 1.

³⁶ Young, J., 'Federation of British Artists' in Gainsborough, J. (ed), *Arts Review Yearbook and Directory* (London: Richard Gainsborough Periodicals, 1973), p. 215.

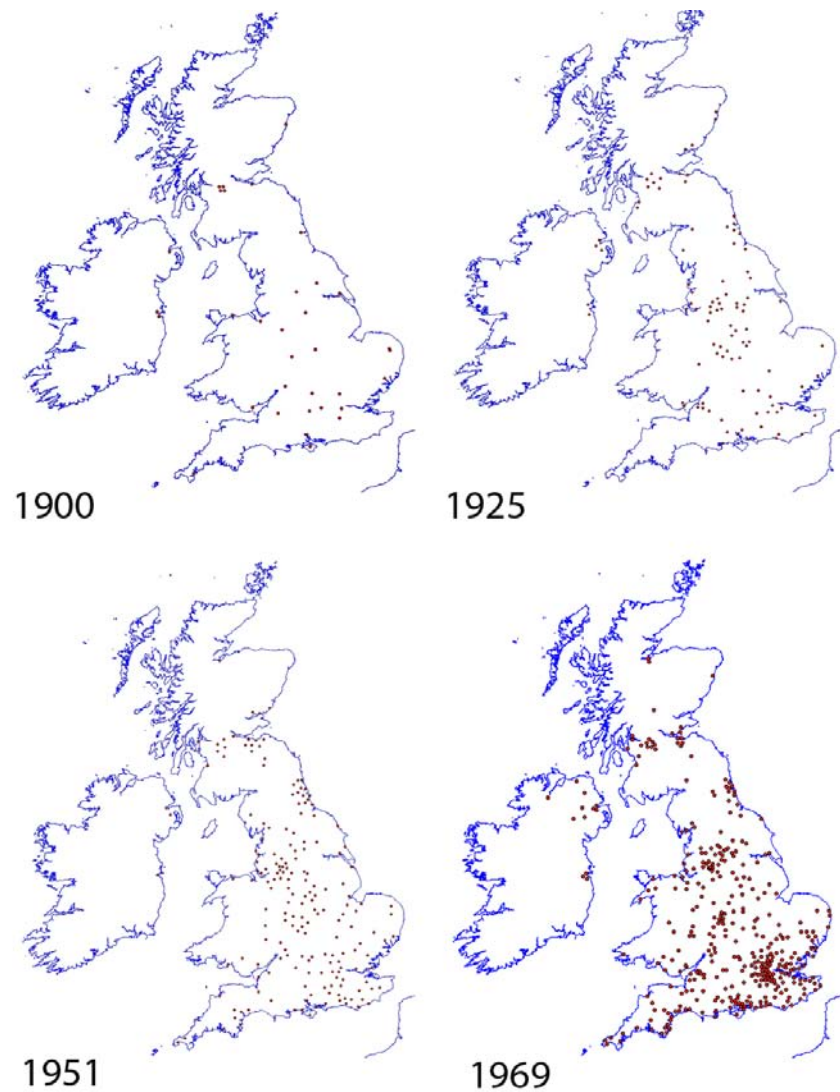


Fig. 2.1: The spread of art societies across Britain, 1900-69

Sources: GIS mapping from statistics collected from Geo. Rowney & Co.'s *Artists' Almanac*, 1900-51 (British Library, p.p.2495.bb) and *The Artists' Yearbook and Guide*, 1951-69 (The Artist Publishing Company, 1937-69)

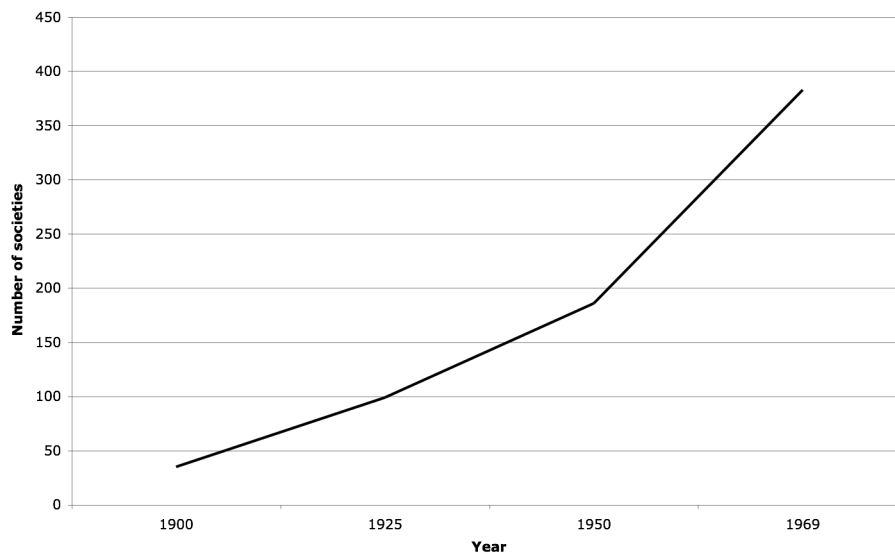


Fig 2.2: Art societies in Britain, 1900-69

Sources: Geo. Rowney & Co.'s *Artists' Almanac*, 1900-51; *Artists' Yearbook and Guide*, 1937-69

The number of art societies across Britain quadrupled from less than 50 in 1900 to nearly 200 in 1951, and doubled again to 400 between 1951 and 1969. Overall, numbers are likely to have been even greater than those indicated in fig. 2.2 (above), as listings compiled by both *Geo. Rowney & Co.'s Artists' Almanac* and *The Artists' Yearbook* depended on societies coming forward to be recorded. *Leisure Painter* magazine, for example, estimated there to be more than 1,000 art clubs in the late-1960s. Consistent statistics are not available for the 1970s onwards, yet it appears that art societies had reached an upper limit by the last third of the twentieth century, with most towns having at least one, if not several, active art societies and clubs.³⁷ There was not a great deal of further growth between the late-1960s and the early-1990s: *Leisure Painter* magazine made a similar estimate of around 1,000 art clubs in the late-1970s and in 1991 a Policy Studies Institute survey identified 1,077 art clubs

³⁷ *Leisure Painter* kept a list of all art clubs in the UK as part of its Readership Services Department, but unfortunately this was a mailing list and was regularly updated without retaining previous records. See 'Editorial' in *Leisure Painter* (Mar., 1978), p. 3.

across the UK, the majority of which were founded in the 1960s.³⁸ This situation was not unique to societies of artists; the National Council for Voluntary Organisations estimates that associational memberships in general grew by 44 per cent between 1959 and 1990 with, again, most of this growth taking place during the 1960s.³⁹

Due to population growth, the stability in numbers between the late-1960s and the early-1990s could be interpreted as an overall decline in interest, part of the phenomenon of diminishing social capital identified in the US during the same period by sociologist Robert Putnam.⁴⁰ As British society drifted towards individualism, the appeal of art societies dwindled, and members sought artistic experience privately elsewhere.⁴¹ Declining social capital is not, however, the only explanation. Sociologist Peter Hall argues that associational activity in Britain during the postwar years broadly kept pace with population growth.⁴² The stasis in the overall number of art societies recorded obscures the fact that the amateur art world was always in ‘a constant state of flux’, with many societies coming into and going out of existence throughout the period.⁴³ The membership rolls of individual societies fluctuated regularly: with a society within reach of everyone who needed one, it was rarely necessary for a new society to come into being – societies could simply absorb new members when demand grew, and shrink back when it subsided. Given that at least as many societies came into being as fell out of activity in the last quarter of the twentieth century, it appears that, although not soaring, overall interest remained reasonably buoyant.

³⁸ ‘Comment’ in *Leisure Painter* (Jan., 1978), p. 3; see also Hutchison and Feist, *Amateur Arts in the UK*, pp. 255-6.

³⁹ Hall, ‘Social Capital in Britain’, pp. 423-4.

⁴⁰ Putnam, R., *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Touchstone, 2000).

⁴¹ Offer, A., *The Challenge of Affluence: Self-Control and Well-Being in the United States and Britain Since 1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 365.

⁴² Hall, ‘Social Capital in Britain’, pp. 417-22.

⁴³ Hutchison and Feist, *Amateur Arts in the UK*, p. 142.

Community and belonging

While there have always been ‘lone wolves’ in the art world who prefer not to join forces with other artists (the figurative painter Lucian Freud, who resolutely refused to join the Royal Academy throughout his long career, is a prominent example), the popularity and growth of art societies and clubs suggests the social organisation of artistic creativity held considerable allure.⁴⁴ Societies provided a ‘sense of belonging’ for those engaged in the ‘lonely business’ of art making.⁴⁵ They facilitated the artistically inclined in both their quest for community, through the creation of social networks, which provided friendship and support to otherwise isolated individuals, and in their quest for status, conferred through membership, exhibitions, and organisational responsibilities.

‘No one will deny the profound interrelation of the artist and the community’, the art critic Herbert Read asserted in 1931. ‘The artist depends on the community – takes his tone, his tempo, his intensity from the society of which he is a member.’⁴⁶ Through society life, artists became involved in a community bound together by mutual interest.⁴⁷ Conviviality was indispensable, as one amateur artist remarked of their art club:

Our meetings are always a pleasure at which to be present and if we come along without something to place on the easel, listening to the criticisms and enjoying one another’s company is in itself good reason for the visit.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Hutchinson, S., *The History of the Royal Academy, 1768-1986* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1986), p. 183.

⁴⁵ Howard, ‘*Society Rules: How Letters Benefit the Artist*’, p. 365.

⁴⁶ Quoted in Newick, J., ‘Study of the Context of Participation in the Arts’ in Field, D. and Newick, J. (eds), *The Study of Education and Art* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), p. 88.

⁴⁷ Easel Club Annual Report, 1964 (Birmingham Archives and Heritage, MS 3151/B/2).

⁴⁸ Easel Club Annual Report, 1954 (Birmingham Archives and Heritage, MS 3151/B/2).

Personal creativity thrived on social interaction.⁴⁹ It was, however, necessary for individuals to find a society suited to their abilities and level of commitment. In any given geographic area there were usually a number of societies catering for different levels of skill and interest. The numerous art societies of the city of Birmingham and its surrounds provide a good example. These societies grew out of a strong connection between art and industry in ‘the city of a thousand trades’ during the nineteenth century.⁵⁰ The origins of the Royal Birmingham Society of Artists (RBSA), for example, were entwined with those of the Birmingham School of Art and Design – both grew out of the Birmingham Society of Arts, which was founded in 1821.⁵¹ In its heyday, leading members of the Royal Academy acted as president, including Lord Leighton, Sir John Millais, and Edward Burne-Jones – underpinning the RBSA’s reputation as Birmingham’s oldest and most prestigious art society.

In the late-nineteenth century a wave of new local associations of artists, amateur and professional, were founded in the city, of which the Easel Club, the Art Circle and the Clarendon Fellowship were the most prominent, regularly exhibiting in the RBSA galleries. Like the Royal Academy and the other pinnacle societies in London, these were highly selective societies of limited number. Amateur artists belonged ‘to all shades of society’, but these groups, which tended to draw their members from the middle and upper classes, were not particularly inclusive.⁵² The Easel Club insisted its membership included ‘artists from all walks of life’, yet with not one but two bank managers involved in 1948, and a membership roll listing

⁴⁹ Gotesky, R. and Breithaupt, E., ‘Creativity: A Metasociological Analysis’ in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 39, No. 1 (Sep., 1978), p. 37.

⁵⁰ James, P., *Made in Birmingham: The 1886 Exhibition of Local Manufactures and Natural History* (Birmingham: Library and Archive Services, 2009).

⁵¹ Thomas, G., *Royal Birmingham Society of Artists: A Brief History* (Birmingham: Royal Birmingham Society of Artists Pamphlet, 2001); see also Macdonald, *The History and Philosophy of Art Education*, pp. 105-7.

⁵² Dodgson Bowman, W., ‘Filling the Gap’ in *Amateur Artist and Collector: A Monthly Journal for All Interested in Art*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Nov., 1927), p. 2.

architects, patent agents, commercial artists and teachers in 1986, it represented a particularly middle class coterie.⁵³ Similarly, in its early years the Birmingham Watercolour Society, founded in 1907, drew members from the city's most expensive suburbs. 'People were not short of a bob or two', says former president Bob Swingler. 'Very few were living in areas of Birmingham that were for real working people. They were people with money.'⁵⁴

In the postwar years a number of more inclusive societies were founded. Finding a rung a little lower in the artistic hierarchy, groups like the Midland Painting Group, a 'friendly, amateur group' founded in 1943 by locals who wished to record the changing city for posterity, found a footing (see chapter 1, p. 44).⁵⁵ Yet still, membership tended towards the middle classes of lower artistic aptitude, rather than being representative of all social classes. Given that the size of the middle class expanded significantly in the second half of the twentieth century, this is not surprising; Peter Hall argues that it was the middle classes who sustained levels of social capital through associational memberships in Britain during this period.⁵⁶ These less-selective societies did, however, tend to be more socially inclusive than their more prestigious counterparts, and also attracted a larger number of women members.⁵⁷

By the end of the twentieth century, members of most of the Birmingham

⁵³ Easel Club Annual Report, 1986 (Birmingham Archives and Heritage, MS 3151/B/2).

⁵⁴ Interview with Bob Swingler, former president of the Birmingham Watercolour Society, Hanbury Hall, 3 August 2011.

⁵⁵ Promotional leaflet for the Midland Painting Group, 2008; see also Welsby, M. S, *Origin and Early Days of the Midland Painting Group* (Birmingham: Midland Painting Group, 1996). The group's founding members were inspired by 'Recording Britain', a wartime exhibition of work recording rapidly changing areas of the country. See Saunders, G. (ed), *Recording Britain* (London: V&A Publishing, 2011); and also Newton, E., 'Art for Everybody' in *Britain Advances* (London: British Council pamphlet, 1943), p. 20.

⁵⁶ Hall, 'Social Capital in Britain', p. 439; for a similar verdict see Tomlinson, A., *Leisure and the Role of Clubs and Voluntary Groups* (London: SSRC/Sports Council, 1979), p. 10.

⁵⁷ For a discussion of women's participation in leisure activities in Britain following the war see Hall, 'Social Capital in Britain', p. 437; and also Lowndes, V., 'Women and Social Capital: A Comment on Hall's 'Social Capital in Britain'' in *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 30 (2000), pp. 533-40.

societies were drawn from a broader range of class backgrounds. Similarly, the balance between the sexes became more even as the century progressed. Until the First World War the Birmingham Watercolour Society was, for example, an exclusively male society which admitted women only to an annual 'ladies night'.⁵⁸ Apart from the Easel Club, which to this day remains an all-male society limited to no more than 25 members, by the end of the century women were both admitted to and, in some Birmingham societies, made up the majority of active members.⁵⁹ Overall, the balance had shifted towards equality, reflecting a more general societal phenomenon of growing female involvement in community activities – the result of an expansion in universal and higher education and the increased participation of women in the labour force.⁶⁰

Whilst becoming more socially varied in terms of class and gender, many amateur societies found that the proportion of elderly and retired members within their ranks increased.⁶¹ An apparently ageing membership was perceived as a particular problem by societies that began life with more professional aspirations in the earlier part of the twentieth century. The Society of Staffordshire Artists, for example, was founded in 1933 by a group of professional and semi-professional artists working in the local potteries and art schools. It set out as an exclusive exhibiting association, but the closure of the potteries, and the subsequent disappearance of local professional artists and artisans, led to an increasingly amateur profile; it gradually changed to comprise mostly retirees, and as much emphasis was

⁵⁸ Interview with Bob Swingler.

⁵⁹ Towards the end of the twentieth century, 30 per cent of those in attendance at Birmingham Watercolour Society meetings were women members, whereas 90 per cent of those attending Art Circle meetings were women (statistics from the Birmingham Watercolour Society and Art Circle).

⁶⁰ According to Peter Hall, female involvement in community activities increased by 127 per cent between 1959 and 1990, as opposed to seven per cent for men. Hall, 'Social Capital in Britain', p. 437.

⁶¹ Hutchison and Feist, *Amateur Arts in the UK*, p. 257.

placed on social events as on exhibitions.⁶² Similarly, the Midland Painting Group found that, by the 1990s, its members were ‘getting on a bit’. The problem, confided the group’s treasurer, was that younger prospective members were put off when they realised that ‘everyone in it is old’. The group’s organisers, elderly themselves, began ‘targeting recent retirees’ in an attempt to keep going.⁶³

An ageing cohort could significantly alter the character of a group, but it did not necessarily signal the group’s demise. At first glance, the examples of the Society of Staffordshire Artists and the Midland Painting Group appear symptomatic of a more general decline in social capital, whereby societies gradually aged and faded away with an original cohort of enthusiastic members (this cohort phenomenon is discussed in chapter 3, see p. 106). On closer inspection, it is evident that most art societies had a natural life cycle: people joined later in life and so societies appeared to be ageing when in fact there was simply a regular turnover of people of a certain age.⁶⁴ Increasingly affluent and early retirement exacerbated this cycle. As Bob Swingler explains: ‘People have more leisure, people who are retired, and they have more income than they have ever had, they needed something to do.’⁶⁵ The phenomenon of voluntary involvement in associations increasing with age was compounded by changing life expectancy: where just five per cent of the population was above pensionable age in 1901, by 1951 the proportion had doubled to 10.9 per cent, and in 1987 pensioners comprised 15 per cent of the population.⁶⁶ This ageing population, combined with rising levels of education and the growing participation of women in

⁶² Various records of the Society of Staffordshire Artists, 1938-2009 (private collection made available by the society).

⁶³ Interview with Brenda Hall, treasurer of the Midland Painting Group, June and July 2009. See also Welsby, *Origin and Early Days of the Midland Painting Group*.

⁶⁴ Hall, ‘Social Capital in Britain’, p. 430.

⁶⁵ Interview with Bob Swingler.

⁶⁶ Young, M. and Schuller, T., *Life After Work: The Arrival of the Ageless Society* (London: HarperCollins, 1991), p. 10.

the workforce, contributed to an expanding level of interest in the arts in general in the late-twentieth century – an expansion which further enhanced the appeal of art societies.⁶⁷

An ageing membership concerned society committees because continuation depended on healthy subscriptions. Each society had a unique character, which helped define the status of its members in relation to other groups in terms of both substantive and social activities.⁶⁸ The Society of Staffordshire Artists, for example, was predominantly an exhibiting society, the Easel Club was known for its lively evenings of mutual art criticism, and Millpool Art Club conducted active painting sessions during its fortnightly meetings. Maintaining membership numbers caused considerable anxiety for groups keen to preserve their unique communities. In the 1980s, for example, the Birmingham Watercolour Society stressed the ‘necessity for new members’ to ‘liven things up a bit’.⁶⁹ In 2000, the society hoped that attracting ‘talented members’ would ‘bring some youthful vitality and enthusiasm to the society’.⁷⁰ As the current president exclaimed in 2011: ‘It’s always been like this!’⁷¹ For many societies, much of this anxiety was unnecessary; while the character of a society might alter, in the long run membership numbers did not suffer. The minute books of societies at all levels of activity relate cycles of membership numbers which subsequently returned to equilibrium.⁷²

⁶⁷ Hillman-Chartrand, H., ‘The Arts: Consumption Skills in the Post-Modern Economy’ in *Journal of Art and Design Education*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (1987), pp. 35-40.

⁶⁸ Bishop and Hoggett, *Organizing Around Enthusiasms*, p. 42.

⁶⁹ Birmingham Watercolour Society, minutes for the Annual General Meeting, 1982 (private collection made available by the society).

⁷⁰ Birmingham Watercolour Society, minutes for the Annual General Meeting, 2000 (private collection made available by the society).

⁷¹ Interview with Shirley Bonas, president of the Birmingham Watercolour Society, Hanbury Hall, 3 August 2011.

⁷² Interview with Pat Coward.

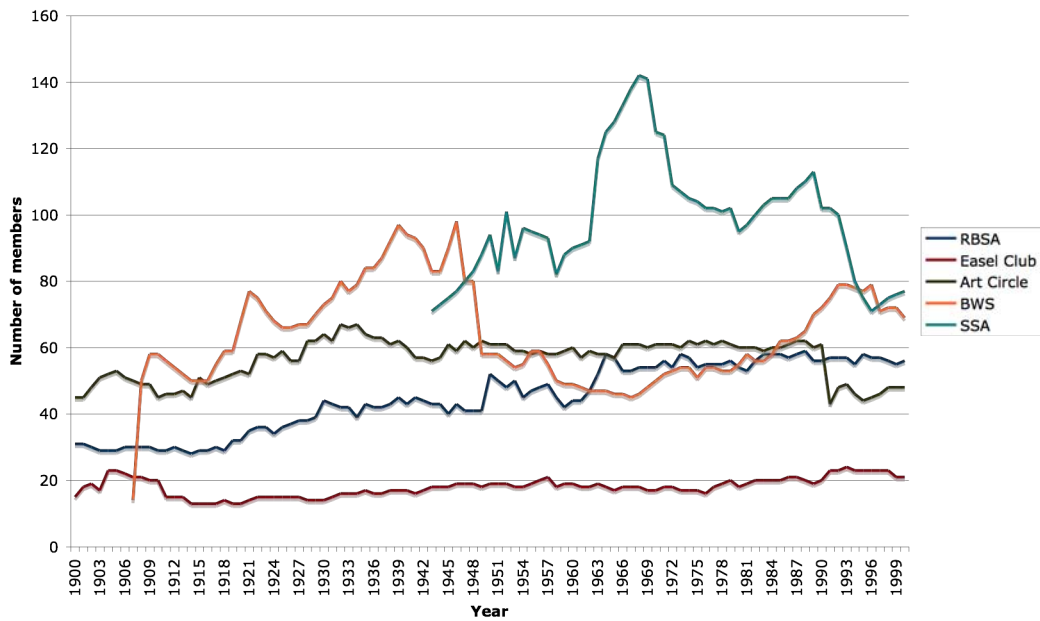


Fig. 2.3: Membership of five Birmingham societies, 1900-2000

Source: Birmingham City Library Archives and the private archives of the Society of Staffordshire Artists and the Easel Club

Note 1: The sudden drop in membership of the Birmingham Watercolour Society in the 1940s was due to the discontinuation of the 'associates' category of membership.

Fig. 2.3 (above), which shows the membership of five prominent art societies in the Birmingham area, demonstrates that, despite some peaks and troughs, membership remained relatively constant throughout the twentieth century. The ebbs and flows reflected a general pattern of gently-undulating (and occasionally fluctuating) participation in the amateur arts world, rather than an overall decline in interest.⁷³

'Power, prestige and respect'

Alongside the satisfactions offered by being part of a community, societies also facilitated the quest for status. There were often tensions between the social and personal rewards of society life. In most organised exhibiting societies, there were members whose main reason for membership was to seek accolades. Such individuals were accused of reaping the rewards of membership without contributing to the

⁷³ Hutchison and Feist, *Amateur Arts in the UK*, p. 142.

society. A member of the Society of Staffordshire Artists complained in 1990:

The Society has around 110 members, yet less than 40 of these can be termed as active in so far as they contribute to the Society's exhibitions. ... Several of these non-contributors are quite proud to use their Society membership on their CV when it suits their purpose ... Is it fair on our small volunteer work force to do so much knowing it bears no fruit whatsoever?⁷⁴

Lack of participation was felt to compromise the ethos of mutual aid central to the running of these self-organised groups.⁷⁵ As sociologist Alan Tomlinson argues: 'Clubs die when they are comprised purely of consumers and no-one is willing to produce.'⁷⁶ Committees strove to engage members, and were sometimes moved to expel non-contributors. This was a longstanding problem; within its first year of existence the Birmingham Watercolour Society ruled in 1908 that 'those members of the committee registering the lowest attendance during the year shall not be eligible for re-election'.⁷⁷ Many societies, however, had difficulty enforcing conditions of participation. Some members, for example, contributed to exhibitions, but were criticised for being concerned *only* with exhibiting. As the current president of the Birmingham Watercolour Society Shirley Bonas explains:

They think they are the best. Some people never vote in new candidates because they think it devalues the society. They just want the status of being a member. They want to sell work and put letters after their name. Because if you are a member of the Watercolour Society, you can have the letters BWS after your name just as you can BSA [British Society of Artists].⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Society of Staffordshire Artists, letter from publicity secretary Thomas Mountford, 5 November 1990 (private collection made available by the society).

⁷⁵ Bishop and Hoggett, *Organizing Around Enthusiasms*, p. 41.

⁷⁶ Tomlinson, *Leisure and the Role of Clubs and Voluntary Groups*, p. 36.

⁷⁷ Birmingham Watercolour Society, minutes for the Annual General Meeting, 1908 (private collection made available by the society).

⁷⁸ Interview with Shirley Bonas.

Dealing with members who were driven purely by showing and selling work appears to have become a more acute problem – or at least one that caused a greater number of complaints – from the 1980s onwards. This reflects a general change in the character of associational life: while the overall levels of associational activity may not have declined, studies of social capital in societies and clubs report less face-to-face interaction and a growing emphasis on the individual needs of members above those of the society as a whole.⁷⁹ Economic historian Avner Offer describes this as the late-twentieth century ‘drift towards self-regarding individualism’, whereby the ‘quest for self-fulfilment’ overrode a pre-existing sense of social obligation and mutuality.⁸⁰ In 1996 the Easel Club attempted to grapple with this problem by instituting a new rule: members who did not attend meetings for a year would be not be eligible to exhibit at the annual exhibition.⁸¹ This was a fitting punishment for ‘trophy hunter’ members interested only in personal rewards and accolades.⁸²

The personal quest for status was not, however, wholly incompatible with society life. In addition to conferring status on individuals, group events and exhibitions also provided managerial and organisational opportunities and responsibilities.⁸³ Some members were keen to participate and achieved status through, for example, being elected as president or secretary. Involvement cemented their usefulness as individuals with the society’s progress and, in the process, ensured their acceptance by the group.⁸⁴ Overlapping memberships of more than one society were common, with some members taking on responsibilities at several clubs.⁸⁵ This

⁷⁹ Hall, ‘Social Capital in Britain’, pp. 449-50.

⁸⁰ Offer, *The Challenge of Affluence*, p. 365.

⁸¹ Easel Club minutes, 1996 (Birmingham Archives and Heritage, MS 3151/B/2).

⁸² Bishop and Hoggett, *Organizing Around Enthusiasms*, p. 54.

⁸³ Tomlinson, *Leisure and the Role of Clubs and Voluntary Groups*, p. 38.

⁸⁴ Scitovsky, T., *The Joyless Economy: An Enquiry into Human Satisfaction and Consumer Dissatisfaction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 120.

⁸⁵ Hutchison and Feist, *Amateur Arts in the UK*, p. 179.

was welcome so long as there was ‘no Mussolini’ who wanted to ‘rule the roost’.⁸⁶ The activities of these busy society members reflect economist Albert Hirschman’s contention that twentieth century harriedness stemmed not only from excessive consumption, but also from a time-consuming search for ‘power, prestige, and respect’.⁸⁷

Putting on a show

The quality of the final product hangs in the balance throughout the process of making, and the risk undertaken by the artist manifests itself in each step towards the finished article.⁸⁸ At all levels of creative activity, whatever the objective merits of the resultant product, the possibility of failure is real and daunting. Yet risk is not only a private concern experienced in the studio or the workshop: it is amplified by the social life of the artist. Both the quest for community and the quest for status involved the risk of failure. The possibility of success in the social sphere spurred the individual on. Individuals increased their chance of success by finding the right level of ‘fit’ by joining the society which best accorded with their level of ability. The reward of finding a good fit was a sense of self-efficacy which, in turn, raised self-esteem. The initial risk faced by the leisure painter was gaining entry to a society and establishing themselves within its community. Once a member, however, the element of risk remained, finding its most potent manifestation in the annual exhibition.

The intersection of the personal and the social was evident in exhibitions, a combination of the individual’s private endeavour and the public representation of the

⁸⁶ Birmingham Watercolour Society, minutes for the Annual General Meeting, 1936 (private collection made available by the society).

⁸⁷ Hirschman, A. O., ‘An Alternative Explanation of Contemporary Harriedness’ in *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, Vol. 87, No. 4 (Nov., 1973), p. 635; see also Seligman, B. B., ‘On Work, Alienation, and Leisure’ in *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (Oct., 1965), p. 355.

⁸⁸ Pye, D., *The Nature and Art of Workmanship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968).

group. Most art societies exhibited at least annually. Exhibitions were often their *raison d'être*, part of the initial design of such an association. Many societies, particularly those with professional aspirations, held more than one exhibition per year. The success of a society exhibition was measured in different ways. For some members it was the number of paintings sold, for others the overall quality of the work in comparison to past efforts. A society's goal was usually to break even, rather than to make money.⁸⁹ Like society membership, exhibitions had a fractal quality: although generally organised in the same way – the exhibitor's work was hung in a public space alongside that of other artists – at a lower level, all works were accepted, with a restriction on the number of works per artist only if space was limited; in the more selective groups a selection committee, and sometimes also a separate hanging committee, decided what was to be exhibited and what must be returned to the artist. Thus even when an individual appeared to have found the right level at which to participate, they still risked being excluded from their society's exhibitions.

Those who risked submitting their work ran the gauntlet in societies that 'spared no-one in their endeavour to cut out all pictures which they deemed not quite good enough'.⁹⁰ The outcome could be painful for artists whose work was not judged to be of an appropriate standard. At the Society of Staffordshire Artist's 1965 autumn exhibition, for example, of the 312 paintings submitted only 122 were exhibited.⁹¹ One disgruntled member wrote to the committee: 'How disappointing it is if you are voted in as a member and then year after year none of your work is included in

⁸⁹ Art Circle Annual Report, 1964 (Birmingham Archives and Heritage, MS 3201).

⁹⁰ Birmingham Watercolour Society, minutes for the Annual General Meeting, 1938 (private collection made available by the society).

⁹¹ Society of Staffordshire Artists, minutes for the Annual General Meeting, 3 April 1965 (private collection made available by the society).

exhibitions.’⁹² For the successful exhibitor, the element of risk remained even in the exhibition hall: a bad newspaper review was enough to remind even the most determined amateur of the pitfalls of public scrutiny. While some critics singled out individuals for praise or criticism, others commented on entire groups, who might have found what Herbert Read described as their shared ‘tone’ and ‘tempo’, but not necessarily the approval of the external gaze.⁹³

Despite its unpredictability, the external gaze was actively sought by some amateurs. An increasing number of venues for exhibiting art at a competitive level were established in the twentieth century. Most of the professional London societies – the members of the Federation of British Artists who exhibited at the prestigious Mall Galleries, for example – mounted annual shows which welcomed entries from non-members.⁹⁴ A small number of local society members managed to ascend to exhibiting on the national stage in these exhibitions. Societies took pride in successful members, who raised the profile of the entire group by association. As the minutes for the Birmingham Watercolour Society’s 1954 annual general meeting record:

Our sincere congratulations were extended to Mr L. Ward on his election to the Royal Institute. We were indeed proud that one of our members should rise to such high standards. Mr Carter also gave his art to the Royal Academy, as did Mr Ward. For the rest of us, however, we too proceeded happily throughout the year not attaining greatness but getting pleasure from our efforts.⁹⁵

The Summer Exhibition at the Royal Academy of Art was the pinnacle venue at which to have one’s work exhibited, and appealed to a range of visual artists. The exhibition was laid down in the Royal Academy’s founding statute as an annual

⁹² Society of Staffordshire Artists, Miss Pell quoted in minutes for the Annual General Meeting, January 1961 (private collection made available by the society).

⁹³ Quoted in Newick, ‘Study of the Context of Participation in the Arts’, p. 88.

⁹⁴ ‘Editorial’ in *Leisure Painter* (Oct., 1978), p. 5.

⁹⁵ Birmingham Watercolour Society, minutes for the Annual General Meeting, 1954 (private collection made available by the society).

public exhibition of painting, drawing, sculpture and design ‘open to all artists of distinguished merit’.⁹⁶ It offered exhibitors the longest public exposure of any of the London art shows – in some years continuing for longer than three months.⁹⁷ By the end of the nineteenth century the Royal Academy had come to be regarded as the rather stuffy home of academic and conservative art. Yet the popularity of the Summer Exhibition, from then on pigeonholed as a venue of traditional and figurative art, continued throughout the twentieth century. Repeatedly criticised for eschewing the avant garde, the Summer Exhibition nevertheless attracted a faithful following of artists keen to have the prestige of the institution conferred upon their work.⁹⁸

The Royal Academy itself was created in an effort to professionalise artists, yet the Summer Exhibition had always welcomed the work of amateurs. The RA claimed to make no distinction between amateurs and professionals. ‘Art is certainly a discipline, and maybe a livelihood’, said the Academy’s secretary in 1991. ‘But it seems to me that the quality of the work overrides any qualification or distinction between artists.’⁹⁹ Amateur societies often made efforts to inspire their members to submit work: ‘When you feel that you have done some really good work,’ advised one art club newsletter in 1952, ‘send it into the Royal Academy ... You may get in.’¹⁰⁰ Magazines for amateur artists gave regular advice on how to go about submitting for entry and served to boost the morale of tentative potential exhibitors:

It has been confessed that the pictures submitted in such great numbers to the Royal Academy were in the main quite uninspiring.

⁹⁶ Written in 1768 and reprinted in the appendix of the Royal Academy’s Annual Report for 1860, p. 80.

⁹⁷ ‘An Outsider’s Royal Academy’ in *Leisure Painter* (Aug., 1977), pp. 16-17.

⁹⁸ A situation anticipated by the Royal Academy in its Annual Report for 1860, p. 16.

⁹⁹ Secretary of the Royal Academy (1991) quoted in Hutchison and Feist, *Amateur Arts in the UK*, p. 68.

¹⁰⁰ Everatt Gray, W., ‘Being an Artist’ in *Association of Civil Service Art Clubs Newsletter*, No. 1 (July, 1952), p. 7 (bound volumes courtesy of the Civil and Public Service Artists).

This should give the ambitious student an impetus, for there is undoubtedly much room at the top for artists of real distinction.¹⁰¹

The allure of the Royal Academy was such that artists' materials manufacturers used it to promote their wares. In 1977, for example, Winsor and Newton invoked 'the dream of almost every amateur artist to get his work into the big Summer Exhibition at Burlington House' with a double page advertisement in *Leisure Painter*.¹⁰²

Selection for the Summer Exhibition was an involved and complex process. Every single work submitted would be paraded before the selection committee, which comprised a small number of academicians. If the committee voted unanimously in favour – a rarity – an 'A' for 'accepted' was chalked on the back of the work, which meant it would be included in the final show. One or no votes would lead to rejection and the mark 'X'. The remaining works, which numbered from around 3,000 to 5,000, were classed as 'D' for 'doubtful'. Of these, more than half would be 'crowded out' of the final exhibition on hanging day.¹⁰³ The scale of this operation is indicated in fig. 2.4 (below). On the whole, somewhere between 10,000 and 12,000 works were sent into the Royal Academy every year (with peaks of up to 15,000 at the end of both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries). Between 1,000 and 2,000 works, from between 800 and 1,000 exhibitors, were usually included in the final hang.¹⁰⁴ 'It is not unlike a gigantic jigsaw puzzle', observed the Academy's librarian Sidney

¹⁰¹ 'Art Notes of Interest' in *The Artist*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (June, 1931), p. 166; see also 'Instructions for Applying to the Summer Exhibition' in *Leisure Painter* (July, 1973), p. 2.

¹⁰² 'It's times like these that Winton oils show up in their true colours', Winsor and Newton advertisement in *Leisure Painter* (Sep., 1977), p. 17. The relationship between materials manufacturers and amateur artists is discussed in chapter 7.

¹⁰³ This method of selection and 'crowding out' was emulated by many of the more selective amateur societies. See 'Selection Committees (How They Work)' in Mills, J. (ed), *The Artist's Guide: Seventh Edition* (London: The Artist Publishing Company, 1963), p. 122.

¹⁰⁴ Hutchinson, *The History of the Royal Academy*, p. 134.

Hutchinson in 1986, ‘with the added hazards of there being endless permutations and far too many pieces.’¹⁰⁵

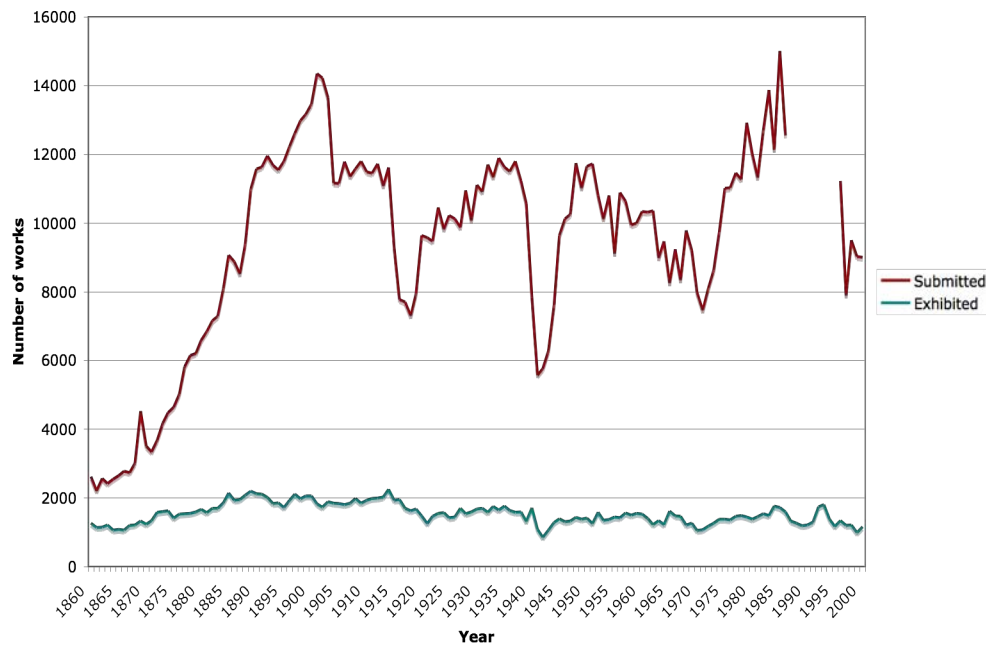


Fig. 2.4: Number of works submitted to and exhibited at the Royal Academy of Arts Summer Exhibition, 1860-2000

Source: Royal Academy Library, Annual Reports and Summer Exhibition catalogues, 1860-2000

Despite criticisms that the Academy was ‘far too tolerant of the mediocre artist’ and that, due to the overcrowding of pictures, the exhibition usually resembled ‘a mad cemetery’, the selection procedure led to disappointment for most applicants.¹⁰⁶ From an early stage the Royal Academy recognised the pain of rejection:

There can be no doubt that the competition is greater than in any other instance; and that, therefore, although the cases of disappointment are the same in kind elsewhere, they are perhaps nowhere so great in degree.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 228.

¹⁰⁶ Wraight, R., ‘The Royal Academy’ in *Canvas*, Vol. 3, No. 8 (Dec., 1968), pp. 8-10; Gainsborough, J. (ed), *Amateur Artist*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (June, 1966), p. 40.

¹⁰⁷ Royal Academy Annual Report for 1860, pp. 17-8.

Rejection was experienced not only by hopeful amateurs but also by established academicians: Stanley Spencer, Walter Sickert and Wyndham Lewis were among the well-known artist academicians to have had their work marked with an 'X'. Spencer resigned in protest, although he was reinstated shortly after.¹⁰⁸ Failure to be selected was for many amateurs, however, worth the risk. 'Even to be rejected by that august body is worthwhile,' one leisure painter consoled, 'it makes you go all out the next year.'¹⁰⁹

'Dipping a toe in'

Further down the scale of exhibiting activity was the local arts festival, which developed in the last quarter of the twentieth century. In contrast with the Summer Exhibition, arguably the most prestigious location to exhibit, local arts festivals provided many more individuals with opportunities to show their work. Oxfordshire Artweeks (originally called Artweek) is an annual arts festival where anyone able to pay the entrance fee and find a venue, be it somewhere public or in their home, is free to exhibit. Run by artists, and sponsored by several local and national bodies (from local councils and Oxford colleges to the Arts Council), the network of open studios and exhibitions provides an opportunity for the public to meet and talk to artists, often in their studios.¹¹⁰ Although the value of an arts festival for bringing 'cultural opportunities to the residents' and 'visitors to the town' was recognised by government in the mid-1960s,¹¹¹ Oxfordshire Artweeks was the first of its kind to bring together all visual artists, professional and amateur, in 1983. The growth in

¹⁰⁸ Hutchinson, *The History of the Royal Academy*, pp. 158-63.

¹⁰⁹ Everatt Gray, W., 'Being an Artist' in *Association of Civil Service Art Clubs Newsletter*, No. 1 (July, 1952), p. 7 (bound volumes courtesy of the Civil and Public Service Artists).

¹¹⁰ Message of support from Tim Renton MP in the programme for *Artweek: Oxford Visual Arts Festival*, 18 May - 2 June 1991, p. 1 (Sackler Library, 902.8 Oxf).

¹¹¹ [Cmnd. 2601] *A Policy for the Arts: The First Steps* (London: HMSO, 1964-5), p. 11.

open house visual arts festivals has since been considerable, and today there are dozens of similar festivals across the UK.¹¹²

Whereas societies are often self-selecting to a certain level of skill or talent, at Artweeks different levels of expertise participate in the same giant event. The festival is ‘open to all comers’ and promotional literature makes no distinction between professionals or amateurs.¹¹³ For some participants, the festival provides an opportunity for self-promotion. For many, however, it is simply regarded as an opportunity to dip ‘a foot in the water’.¹¹⁴ The only risk, given that there is no vetting of exhibitors, is putting oneself forward for public scrutiny.

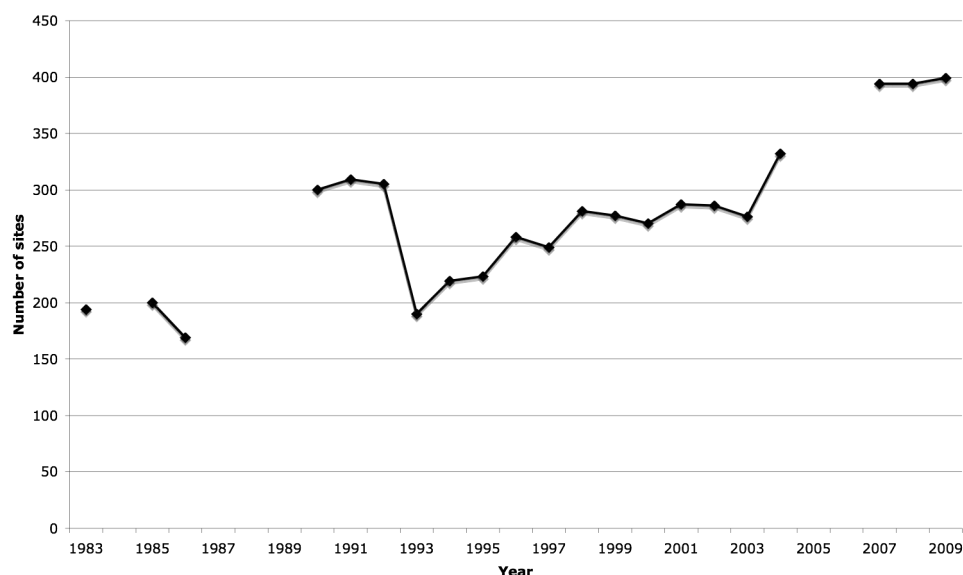


Fig. 2.5: Number of exhibitor sites in Oxford Artweeks festival, 1983-2009
Source: Oxford Artweeks programmes, 1983-2009, Sackler Library and Oxford Artweeks’ private collection

Fig. 2.5 (above) shows the growing number of exhibition sites at Oxfordshire Artweeks since 1983. Participation has steadily increased, particularly from the early-1990s to the present. In 1984, there were 197 individual exhibitors, by 1991, there

¹¹² Interview with Esther Browning, Director of Artweeks, Oxford, 16 February 2011.

¹¹³ Patrick, K., ‘Introduction’ in programme for Artweek, 1986 (Oxfordshire Records Office, Oxford Area Arts Council Archive, 1974-87, Location SZ 706 Part 1 Box 1).

¹¹⁴ Interview with Esther Browning.

were 300 separate exhibition sites involving more than 500 artists and craftspeople, and by 2003 there were nearly 400 sites catering for more than 1,000 participants.¹¹⁵ The festival has a significant retention of exhibitors, with up to 85 per cent of artists returning every year.¹¹⁶ Although Artweeks is open to everyone, regardless of talent or aptitude, the expense of entering (in 1984 it was £1 to enter, whereas today it is more than £100) has, for some, become a barrier.¹¹⁷

The popularity of Artweeks amongst exhibitors grew during a period in which local societies found affordable exhibition space was becoming increasingly scarce. Following the loss of support from the Carnegie Trust, and after local government cuts in the 1970s and 1980s (which led many local authorities and councils to increase the rents on the meeting rooms and venues traditionally hired by art societies) many societies struggled to find suitable venues. With more Artweeks exhibitions in people's homes than in galleries, it is clear that there were not enough public venues to cater for the number of artists who wished to take part. Artweeks' flexibility made it possible for large numbers of artists to get involved, safe in the knowledge that they would feature in the festival programme and receive plenty of publicity.

The inclusivity of Artweeks sometimes caused tension. Some of the 'top-end' artists, who made up about one quarter of exhibitors, felt the festival was 'diluted by the mix of levels' participating in the event. They appeared in the festival programme alongside the many amateurs, schools and community groups for whom the festival provided a validating 'rubber stamp'.¹¹⁸ In response, attempts were made to refer to the status of exhibitors by placing the initials of art societies and guilds by the names

¹¹⁵ Programmes for *Artweek[s]*: *Oxford Visual Arts Festival*.

¹¹⁶ Interview with Esther Browning.

¹¹⁷ Interview with Julia Johnson Fry, assistant accountant at St Edmund Hall, Oxford, 1 March 2011.

¹¹⁸ Interview with Esther Browning.

of member artists in the programme to signal a 'mark of quality'.¹¹⁹ For the festival's thousands of visitors, however, the mixture of professional and amateur artists was its major appeal. Visitor numbers increased rapidly, from 40,000 visits in 1985 to more than 100,000 in 1992.¹²⁰ Artweeks's mixed bag offered something to appeal to the tastes and finances of every visitor, providing them with an opportunity to buy the work of unknown artists at affordable prices.

'Little collectors'

Art as a commodity was a postwar phenomenon, which boomed extravagantly in the last quarter of the twentieth century. From the early-1950s, art buyers bought speculatively for investment, rather than purely for pleasure.¹²¹ Similarly to art societies and exhibitions, the art market developed a fractal quality. At one end of the spectrum, wealthy investors directed resources towards rare and celebrated works of art. At the other, a new breed of art consumer developed: a growing educated middle class who wanted a token of artistic creativity at an accessible price.¹²² In the wake of traditional patronage a diverse group of collectors 'all with different tastes and varying budgets' emerged:

The young newly married buy some colourful prints for their flat. The middle-aged wage slave has a legacy and spends some of it on a good nineteenth century landscape. Individually they make no dent on the habits of the millionaire collectors, but there are so many of these 'little' collectors that they represent the majority of the market.¹²³

¹¹⁹ Interview with Esther Browning.

¹²⁰ Programme for *Artweek: Oxford Visual Arts Festival*, 1993, p. 1 (Sackler Library, 902.8 Oxf).

¹²¹ Hobsbawm, E., *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914-1991* (London: Abacus, 1995), p. 508.

¹²² Blau, J. R., Blau, P. M. and Golden, R. M., 'Social Inequality and the Arts' in *The American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 91, No. 2 (Sep., 1985), p. 313.

¹²³ Gordon, A., 'The Art Scene and Market Trends' in Gainsborough, J. (ed), *Arts Review Yearbook and Directory* (London: Richard Gainsborough Periodicals, 1973), p. 178.

During the economic shock and uncertainty of the 1970s, the art market was ‘buzzing with an activity never seen in previous periods’.¹²⁴ A trickle-down effect led to an era of increasing prices and burgeoning sales at all levels of market activity. Sales at the Summer Exhibition, which increased shortly after the war and remained relatively stable throughout the 1950s and 1960s, grew rapidly (see fig. 2.6, below).

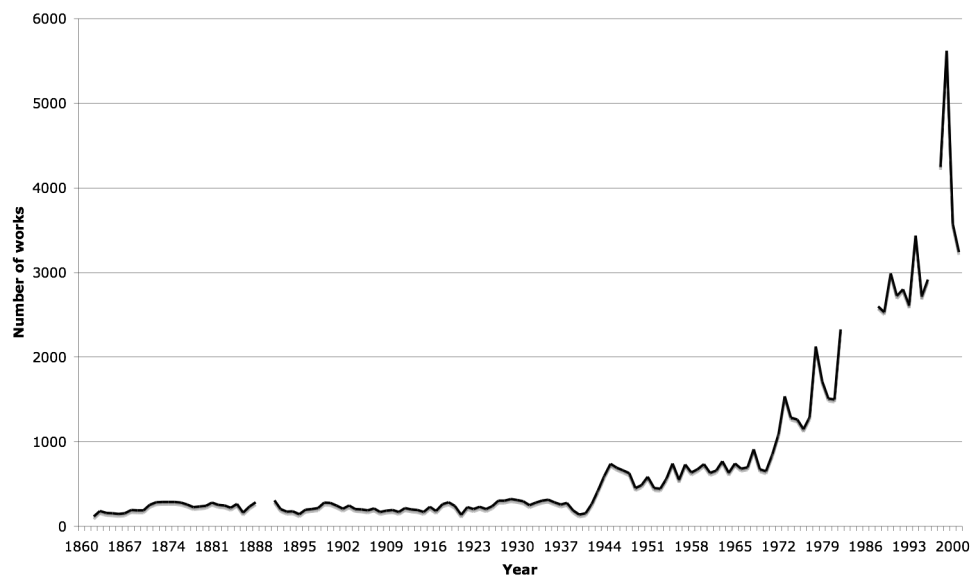


Fig. 2.6: Number of works sold at the Summer Exhibition, 1860-2000
Source: Royal Academy Library, Annual Reports, 1860-2000

As high-end art began to fetch enormous amounts of money in the late-twentieth century global art boom, sales at the Summer Exhibition soared. After running at a deficit for decades, the exhibition was sponsored for the first time in 1983. By 1985 attendance was the best it had been for 25 years. In a move that mirrored other large galleries and auction houses at the time, President Hugh Casson introduced a 15 per cent commission in 1977, which was raised in 1984 to 25 per cent. This did not dampen sales: on the first day of the 1984 private view, a record breaking 1,166 works were sold for £262,049.¹²⁵

¹²⁴ *Ibid*, p. 178.

¹²⁵ Hutchinson, *The History of the Royal Academy*, pp. 220-33.

While the number of sales increased dramatically, the amount of money fetched by these works was far smaller, in real terms, than in the first half of the century (see fig. 2.7, below). Even revenue during the ‘speculative art boom’, which collapsed in the early-1990s, appears modest compared to that of the 1900s.¹²⁶ At the turn of the twentieth century the Summer Exhibition survived on a limited number of high-rolling purchases; at the turn of the twenty-first century, it had become the hunting ground for ordinary buyers with modest budgets.

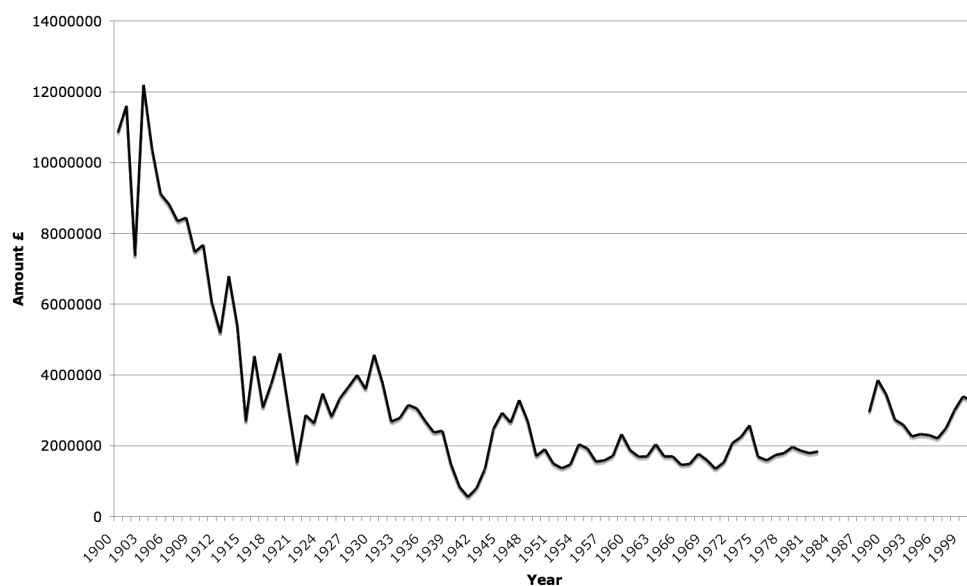


Fig. 2.7: Work sold at the Summer Exhibition in £, 1900-2000
(real amount at 2008 prices)
Source: Royal Academy Library, Annual Reports, 1900-2000

Only a very small proportion of art was genuine investment material; returns were highly variable and often negative. Most of the ‘new class of picture buyer’ purchased art primarily for pleasure.¹²⁷ Since before the Second World War, the public taste for art had trailed behind the avant garde (see chapter 1, p. 36).¹²⁸ As the president of the Royal Society of Marine Artists observed in 1969: ‘Many people

¹²⁶ Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes*, p. 508.

¹²⁷ Newton, ‘Art for Everybody’, p. 12.

¹²⁸ Graves, R. and Hodge, A., *The Long Week-End: A Social History of Great Britain, 1918-1939* (London: Faber and Faber, 1940), p. 192.

think they ought to change, to follow fashion, but fundamentally I don't think people have changed that much. They still appreciate traditional paintings.'¹²⁹ That the art exhibited at the Summer Exhibition tended towards more conservative tastes and was continually criticised for being out of step with contemporary art was not, therefore, a hindrance to its commercial success.¹³⁰

The work of many amateur artists who excelled at traditional and figurative art found a ready market for their work in these 'ordinary' collectors of modest means. Having risked submission to an exhibition, selling a piece of work was a key milestone:

Sales are the yardstick by which we measure our ability. This may not be the most satisfactory way and is often decried, but it surely is an arrogant person who cares little for the opinion of others ... there is need for the final seal of approbation – the sale. ... The 'lift' that an artist gets from someone purchasing his painting is worth its weight in gold for the excitement and encouragement it gives.¹³¹

A sale raised the artists' self-esteem and delivered a sense of self-efficacy. Because the number of works sold at the Summer Exhibition increased (see fig. 2.6, above) at the same time as the number of works selected for exhibit decreased (see fig. 2.4, p. 90), the successful applicant's chances of selling work were greatly improved.¹³² Now that the Summer Exhibition, like Oxfordshire Artweeks, thrived on a large number of small sales, more amateurs than ever before could enjoy the emotional and financial rewards of making a sale. As one 'self-styled serious amateur' told *Leisure Painter*:

¹²⁹ Young, J., 'Claude Muncaster' in *Canvas*, No. 6 (Oct., 1969), p. 10.

¹³⁰ During the 1940s, it was claimed that the exhibition carried little weight 'with the discriminating buyer'. See Cumberlege, G., *The Visual Arts: A Report Sponsored by the Dartington Hall Trustees* (London: Oxford University Press on behalf of the Arts Enquiry by Political and Economic Planning (PEP), 1946), p. 12.

¹³¹ Vera E. Stanley of Crosby, Liverpool, writes to 'Readers' Letters' in *Leisure Painter* (Nov., 1974); see also 'Exhibitions: How to Submit' in Briers, I. A. and Parkinson, F. (eds), *The Artist's Guide: Eighth Edition* (London: Artist Publishing Company, 1969), p. 44.

¹³² 'Nobody Wants Mediocre paintings' in *The Artist*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (Nov., 1931), p. 110.

‘It breaks my heart to lose a picture and boosts my ego that anyone should want to buy it.’¹³³

Artists of all levels and calibres involved themselves at both the Summer Exhibition and Oxfordshire Artweeks; at one meeting with a highly specific selection process, and at the other with no selection based on artistic merit whatsoever. The ability of each event to engage exhibitors, audiences, and buyers at different levels of activity and interest illustrates the fractal nature of the art world as a whole. The growing popularity of the two events with exhibitors and visitors alike demonstrates the enduring appeal of art to both creators and consumers and the sustained levels of socially organised artistic creativity throughout an era of growing affluence and individualism.

From the pinnacle Royal Academy Summer Exhibition and the exclusive Royal Birmingham Society of Artists to the inclusive Oxfordshire Artweeks and Midland Painting Group, values and rules filtered down from the ‘top strata’ and, as a result, all associations of artists operated in much the same way. Whatever the substantive content of the art itself, the social organisation of artistic creativity was remarkably similar. At all levels of endeavour, the creative drive was satisfied not only by making art, but by finding an appropriate social outlet for the activity: personal creativity was an inherently social, rather than purely individual, activity.

¹³³ ‘Art Group in Action’ in *Leisure Painter* (Autumn, 1968), p. 20.

CHAPTER 3

Art after hours

*'In their daily avocation they were fellow workers; in their hours of recreation fellow students.'*¹

During the period in which art societies spread across the regions, associations of amateur artists were also formed in workplaces: from miners and bus drivers to bankers and vicars, the work art club catered for the creative needs of men and women from a diverse range of occupational backgrounds. Most work art clubs were founded in the interwar and postwar years, and blossomed for several decades. Yet in contrast to the relative stability of the Birmingham art societies described in chapter 2, the core of which survived into the twenty-first century, only a small fraction of work art clubs remained active by the 1990s. Those continuing to operate did so as a shadow of their former selves. Work art clubs flourished within public and private companies and organisations where a benevolent employer, believing such activities were of value for both employees and the workplace, provided assistance and encouragement. In the last quarter of the twentieth century the culture of the workplace changed. This was, in part, the result of broader societal changes, which created a more family-centred and individualist workforce: as fewer and fewer new members joined, the clubs aged and, eventually, ceased activity. A cohort phenomenon had, however, existed throughout the postwar period: clubs and societies constantly worried about maintaining their number. In the late-1970s and 1980s, management practices shifted towards an increasingly corporate ethos; the withdrawal of company support intensified the transience of membership cohorts and, ultimately, left little scope for many in-house clubs to continue.

¹ Dodgson Bowman, W., 'The G.P.O. Arts Club' in *Amateur Artist and Collector*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Nov., 1927), pp. 16-7.

Mutual benefits

In the 1930s, a small group of miners and former miners from Northumberland became the unexpected darlings of the art world when they formed an after-hours painting club. The Ashington Group, as they became known, started by accident: in 1934 the men requested a class in art appreciation from their local branch of the Workers' Educational Association (WEA).² Practical art tuition was not usually provided by the WEA, but when the men expressed dissatisfaction with a slideshow of celebrated works of art at their first meeting, art tutor Robert Lyon was forced to redevise the class.³ Art appreciation was quickly abandoned and, in its place, Lyon encouraged the men to take up painting themselves, and to bring their work to a weekly evening of friendly mutual criticism.⁴ The group flourished, discovering amongst themselves a previously unknown interest in art and art making. Within a couple of years, the Ashington Group had attracted widespread media attention, appearing in short films and radio programmes, and receiving numerous column inches in a range of newspapers and magazines.

The Ashington Group is often described as exceptional, yet the formation of art societies within groups of working men and women was not particularly unusual during the interwar years. Influenced by a climate of growing concern for the content of mass leisure and, at the same time, for the social welfare of the worker (see chapter 1, pp. 37-8), a number of large employers began to encourage the development of various societies and clubs within their ranks. The great depression, and the spectre of unemployment, heightened an awareness of the social ills that followed from too

² Lyon, R., 'An Experiment in Art Appreciation' in Lambert, R. S. (ed), *Art in England* (London: Pelican, 1938), p. 118.

³ Feaver, W., *Pitmen Painters: The Ashington Group, 1934-1984* (Northumberland: Carcanet Press, 1993), p. 154.

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 46.

many people having too much time on their hands.⁵ Leisure was a resource to be used wisely and productively, and the cultivation of artistic creativity was an appropriate route towards this goal. ‘What will people do with the rest of their time?’ asked the warden of the Spennymoor Settlement, set up during the 1930s to bring educational and social relief to the local mining community, ‘I suggest the only intelligent thing to do is create.’⁶ Art clubs were founded as part of a fairly standard repertoire of hobby groups, from sports teams to brass bands, which developed participation in a community beyond simply that of a shared workplace. From bankers and bishops to mechanics and bus drivers, the memberships of these small communities of occupationally-linked amateurs were socially and regionally diverse: men and women from all walks of life, and from across Britain in the case of some national organisations and professions, participating in the visual arts through their workplace. Work art clubs challenged the common preconception that the arts, and art societies, were the preserve of elites.⁷

Members valued their work club membership for its levelling effect amongst employees of different grades and ranks, and also because they took pride in its achievements: with the support of the employer, company art groups secured prestigious exhibiting venues which attracted large public audiences and often an interested press. There was great admiration for these worker-artists, and a generally sympathetic view expressed by journalists who, when writing their reviews, took account of the artists’ ‘scanty leisure’ and ‘high pressure’ working lives.⁸ Staff morale

⁵ Gelber, S. M., ‘A Job You Can't Lose: Work and Hobbies in the Great Depression’ in *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (Summer, 1991), p. 742.

⁶ McManners, R. and Wales, G., *Shafts of Light: Mining Art in the Great Northern Coalfield* (County Durham: Gemini Productions, 2002), p. 55.

⁷ An assumption pioneering adult educationists railed against. See Alfred, D., ‘Albert Mansbridge’ in Jarvis, P. (ed), *Twentieth Century Thinkers in Adult Education* (London: Routledge, 1987), p. 25.

⁸ ‘The Exhibition of the Midland Bank Art Club by our Art Critic’ in *Amateur Artist and Collector*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (Dec., 1927), pp. 37-8.

was raised by reports which appreciated the ‘calibre of the amateur artists who, with full-time jobs of considerable complexity, have run a national art club with success’.⁹ In addition, art clubs acted as a commitment device for amateurs with busy work schedules. ‘To belong to an organised club provides a stimulus’, explained one work art club member, ‘to trust to the mere prompting of inclination is not always enough.’¹⁰ That the employer facilitated and subsidised this process was an added bonus; it was rational for the worker to take advantage of opportunities that required a lower investment in terms of time (travelling to and from society meetings) and money (to cover the cost of hiring venues and social activities).

Not all viewed the development of clubs within the workplace positively. The appeal of art was, as one leisure painter put it, that ‘it engrosses you. It takes your mind and thoughts completely off the daily round and worries of your working life’.¹¹ Some left-wing critics believed that, as a result, clubs distracted workers from more important social and political concerns. In 1938, Percy Horton, a professional artist writing for the *Left Review*, argued:

The upholders of the present social system have not been slow to recognise the value of encouraging workers to draw and paint at evening ‘institutes’ and the arrangement by big industrial concerns of exhibitions and competitions for art produced by their employees. ... The Sunday painter is encouraged to be a harmless little man absorbed in what Cezanne once called ‘sa petite sensation’ and oblivious to the social questions agitating his fellow men.¹²

Indeed, employers did not simply suffer the existence of work clubs: they actively encouraged their development. Company directors like the Midland Bank’s Lewis H.

⁹ ‘Post Office Art Club’ in *Canvas*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (May, 1968), p. 39.

¹⁰ *The Midland Venture: The Magazine of the Midland Bank Staff Association*, Vol. 7, No. 79 (Sep., 1926), p. 321 (HSBC Archives, records of the Midland Bank Art Club).

¹¹ Press cutting: ‘Parson Painters’ in *Walker’s Monthly* (Nov., 1933), p. 3 (Lambeth Palace Library Archives, MS2885).

¹² ‘The Native and the Sophisticated’ in the *Left Review* (Apr., 1938), quoted in Feaver, *Pitmen Painters*, p. 122.

Walters regarded his bank's resident society as a means to resolve potential conflict between work and play, by providing workers with a creative outlet sometimes missing from their occupation:

I think it is the duty of everyone, especially to themselves, to cultivate their artistic senses and develop the talents which they are lucky enough to have. We who spend the best part of our lives in the City do not have much time or opportunity to do so, but for those who possess these talents, it makes life more worth living ... although the Bank may make calls upon your time and energy the great vitality of your art can flourish.¹³

Clubs were regarded as credible leisure activities by employers because they involved a certain degree of social organisation, which developed work values and skills.¹⁴ Through the development of small communities within the workforce, art clubs introduced a sense of camaraderie among workers.¹⁵ This enhanced the social capital of the workplace, increasing worker satisfaction and, in the process, their overall productivity. As the British Institute of Adult Education argued in 1945: 'The right employment of leisure increases the will as well as the ability to work.'¹⁶

That a loss of creativity in work was behind the formation of these clubs remained a popular thesis in the postindustrial era.¹⁷ Yet the idea that workers were duped into compliance by the provision of on-site leisure activities is not persuasive. Members of Walters' workforce at the Midland Bank were only too aware of both the contrasts and complements between their working lives and their leisure:

¹³ Club Chair and director of the bank Lewis H. Walters' opening speech for the sixth annual exhibition in *The Midland Venture: The Magazine of the Midland Bank Staff Association*, Vol. 7, No. 144 (Feb., 1932), p. 666 (HSBC Archives, records of the Midland Bank Art Club).

¹⁴ Gelber, 'A Job You Can't Lose', p. 742.

¹⁵ Hilda Gypps in *Leisure Painter* (Oct., 1984).

¹⁶ Sankey, V. and Dudley, J., *Adult Education After the War: A Report of an Enquiry Made for the British Institute of Adult Education* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1945), vii.

¹⁷ American sociologists Ben Seligman and Harry Braverman popularised the idea that a loss of creativity in work led to the search for self-expression elsewhere. See Seligman, B. B., 'On Work, Alienation, and Leisure' in *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (Oct., 1965), p. 346; Braverman, H., *Labour and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the 20th Century* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974 [1974]), pp. 294-5.

I think we may reasonably compare the organisation of the Bank with a piece of intricate machinery, and that we each of us are the wheels, or cogs, or springs that are helping to keep that machinery at work. The members of this Club are to be congratulated that when they are weary of being a cog, or wheel, they can revert to the beauties of nature.¹⁸

Art clubs weren't simply 'devices' dreamt up by the 'corporate archon' to keep workers happy.¹⁹ Rather than alienated workers mollified by the provision of leisure activities in the workplace, these employees understood their position in the 'machinery' of banking life and valued the opportunity to relate to one another as something other than a 'cog' or a 'wheel'.

Shifting support

In the postwar years art became an increasingly popular leisure pastime and the voluntary association of amateurs in art societies commonplace (see fig. 2.1, p. 73). Work art clubs went from strength to strength. They thrived principally because of employer benevolence: management committees lent premises, subsidised activities and, in some cases, provided administrative support. There was, for example, 'an upsurge' in the amount of art produced by miners across Britain's coalfields shortly after the Second World War.²⁰ Possibly inspired by the Ashington Group's public profile, their efforts were encouraged by the newly instituted National Coal Board, which commissioned artworks, published reproductions in its monthly magazine and, in 1947, mounted the national touring exhibition 'Art by the Miner'.²¹

¹⁸ Opening of the sixth annual exhibition by Mr Frederick Hyde in *The Midland Venture: The Magazine of the Midland Bank Staff Association*, Vol. 11, No. 132 (Feb., 1931), p. 623 (HSBC Archives, records of the Midland Bank Art Club).

¹⁹ Seligman, 'On Work, Alienation, and Leisure', p. 349.

²⁰ McManners and Wales, *Shafts of Light*, p. 224.

²¹ *Ibid*, p. 224; see also Feaver, *Pitmen Painters*, p. 131.

Not all societies were so fortunate. Those founded without the support of a benevolent employer struggled to survive. The Society of Parson Painters, a group of amateurs united by a mutual interest in fine art, was founded in 1923 to bring together the artistic talents of Britain's clergy. The society aimed for a high standard. In this regard, it was similar to the more selective Birmingham societies, except for the fact its 60 to 70 members were drawn from across Britain, rather than a specific locale.²² The society's function was social as well as artistic: its value lay in the sense of community it lent to men otherwise isolated in their individual parishes: 'A society of all ranks and from all parts of the country ... sharing a common interest with men who paint under difficulties similar to their own.'²³

For provincial reverends on modest stipends, sending work to the annual exhibition in London was prohibitively expensive and, in 1959, the society ceased activity. It is true that, as the society's final minutes reasoned, the 'status of amateur art had changed'.²⁴ There were far more art societies in existence in the late-1950s than during the early-1920s when the clergymen first came together to exhibit. Yet it was not simply that, as the Parson Painters claimed, other art societies had taken its place; in an era of growing enthusiasm for leisure painting, there was room for both work art clubs and local art societies. In most work clubs, members were encouraged to join their local art society, take adult education classes and pursue further training in art. Multiple memberships did not lead to conflict, but rather the development of a deepening interest and a greater commitment to the work club itself. With insufficient support from a benevolent employer or organisation, however, the parsons were left

²² Press cutting: Foxell, M., 'The Society of Parson Painters' in *The Studio* (1932), pp. 236-8 (Lambeth Palace Library Archives, MS2885).

²³ Press cutting: *Walker's Monthly*, 1937 (Lambeth Palace Library Archives, MS2885).

²⁴ Minutes of the Annual General Meeting, 20 July 1959 (Lambeth Palace Library Archives, MS2885).

with little choice but to disband. By the end of the twentieth century, the majority of workplace art clubs would experience a similar fate.

By the 1980s most work art clubs had fallen by the wayside. This was part of a complex transition, resulting from changes in both demand and supply. A general shift in the pattern of private life emerged in the late-1960s. The appeal of work clubs gradually diminished as British society became more home-centred, family-oriented and individualist.²⁵ The spread of car ownership increased mobility, which enabled a search for creative outlets outside of the workplace and nearer the home, and reduced the time-saving benefits of joining with fellow workers after hours. Change was not immediate. In some clubs the effect revealed itself in a cohort phenomenon: a close-knit group retained membership, even after retirement, but attracting new members proved difficult and, when long-standing members began to naturally fall away, the club followed suit. This was a common lifecycle. After a boom in the immediate post-war era, clubs were often run by the same members for several decades – many of whom were, by the 1990s, beginning to die out.²⁶ Of the 120 members of the Bank of England Art Society in 2001, for example, 89 were pensioners, five had resigned, and only the remaining few were ‘active staff’.²⁷ At the time of writing, the society, founded in the interwar period, was in the process of being wound-up.

The decline of work art clubs was not, however, the result of exogenous forces alone. Demand may, to some extent, have trailed off, leaving employers less inclined to continue providing resources for dwindling numbers of interested employees, yet fundamental changes were, at the same time, taking place within the workplace.

²⁵ See, for example, Young, M. D. and Willmott, P., *The Symmetrical Family: A Study of Work and Leisure in the London Region* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973).

²⁶ Simpson, R., ‘The Role and Potential of Amateur Arts Groups in Building an Empowered, Participative, Fulfilled and Healthy Civil Society’ a paper given at the conference *Taking Part: Arts, Culture and Civil Society* (London: October, 2010).

²⁷ Data from spreadsheet charting society membership (courtesy of Bob Sleeman, Bank of England Art Society).

Whilst there was, and is, a range of management styles amongst employers, the closure of many clubs from the 1980s onwards reflected a normative change across companies and organisations. In many instances, the once benevolent employer shifted towards a more target-oriented and profit-maximising corporate style. Declining participation was the result of a cultural change whereby the community of the workplace, which had been nurtured by both public and private employers in the mid-twentieth century, was gradually eroded. The 'job for life' that had been a near-certainty in the immediate postwar grew increasingly unusual towards the end of the century. With individuals leaving and joining at irregular and comparatively short intervals, there was less stability in cohorts, and the longevity of work art clubs was compromised. As the stories which follow indicate, if the former members of work art clubs were now painting alone, it was not necessarily through their own volition.

Skeletal remains: the changing culture of the workplace

The Association of Civil Service Art Clubs (ACSAC) was a casualty of the changing culture of the workplace. The association was formed in 1930 to 'encourage the practice and appreciation' of the fine arts and crafts amongst the various departmental art clubs within the Civil Service. Originally there were five art clubs. The dispersal of government departments shortly before the Second World War halted development, but the association was resurrected in 1947 and by 1951 there were 13, and by 1955 more than two dozen clubs affiliated to the association, representing more than 2,000 members.²⁸ From office clerks to medical illustrators, and from

²⁸ Frank Rees in the *Association of Civil Service Art Clubs Newsletter*, No. 97 (Aug., 1978), pp. 3-7; and also *Association of Civil Service Art Clubs Newsletter*, No. 4 (Apr., 1953), p. 1 (both in bound volumes courtesy of the Civil and Public Service Artists).

museum curators to postmen, the ACSAC provided a focus for men and women from an eclectic range of occupations.²⁹

Art clubs were founded in most of the ministries and departments, from Health to Supply, Aviation to Education, Housing to Pensions and National Insurance to Power. Some departments had an art club in each of their major locations. Provincial art clubs for civil servants in Bristol, Manchester, Blackpool and Newcastle were formed in order to avoid the problems faced by several societies (including the Parson Painters), who based most of their events around headquarters in London. This flourishing network of clubs communicated through the pages of the ACSAC newsletter, first issued in July 1952, which provided encouragement and information for members wherever they were located. The ACSAC organised week-long and weekend summer schools, a touring exhibition mounted by the Civil Service Catering Organisation in staff restaurants across the regions, and a large annual exhibition which attracted ‘a serious public’ and, on occasion, art dealers.³⁰ For an added subscription, there was also the Whitehall Studio Club, founded in 1954, which provided premises for members and affiliated clubs to use for sketching and meeting during lunchtimes and evenings.³¹ These activities were in addition to the numerous demonstrations, classes, lectures and excursions organised by the individual clubs. It was a period of growth and optimism.

Similarly to the Birmingham societies discussed in chapter 2 (see pp. 77-8), the association had always expressed concern over the maintenance of membership. Despite the period being considered a golden age for the formation of voluntary

²⁹ *Amateur Artist and Collector*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (Jan., 1928), p. 92.

³⁰ *Association of Civil Service Art Clubs Newsletter*, No. 1 (July, 1952), p. 3; and also *Association of Civil Service Art Clubs Newsletter* (Oct., 1973), p. 65 (both in bound volumes courtesy of the Civil and Public Service Artists).

³¹ ‘Whitehall Studio Club’ in *Association of Civil Service Art Clubs Newsletter*, No. 21 (Oct., 1957), p. 2 (bound volumes courtesy of the Civil and Public Service Artists).

associations, the 1960s were not entirely smooth sailing. In 1962, the editor of the ACSAC newsletter asked why, given the ‘widespread’ popularity of art at the time, so few members exhibited at the annual exhibition. He concluded that ‘the plain fact is that as our people retire and drift away from clubs not enough members replace them’.³² There was particular concern for the lack of interest from the under-30s.³³ Yet again, this was not in itself unusual; participation in associational life in general tended to increase with age, peaking with individuals in their forties and fifties.³⁴

It had always been difficult to motivate members to contribute time and effort beyond the more enjoyable activities of art making and socialising. Sometimes clubs fell by the wayside: in 1964, the Norcross Art Club in Blackpool was forced to close due to lack of support. The association’s honorary general secretary subsequently felt the need to warn members that without vigilance and enthusiasm their club might suffer a similar fate. ‘If they wish to continue to enjoy club activities they must be prepared to take a share in the running of them’, he advised.³⁵ Yet, despite the continual starting-up and winding-down of the various art clubs, it was felt that ‘the general position is still one of growing interest in art activities in the Civil Service’.³⁶ The difference between the Birmingham societies discussed in chapter 2 and the ACSAC was that, by the 1980s, this ‘general position’ was no longer sufficient to keep the clubs afloat.

In the last quarter of the century demand, which had always waxed and waned to some extent, declined sharply. It was not simply that members lost interest; during

³² *Association of Civil Service Art Clubs Newsletter*, No. 33 (Feb., 1962), p. 2 (bound volumes courtesy of the Civil and Public Service Artists).

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Hall, P. A., ‘Social Capital in Britain’ in *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 29, No. 3 (July 1999), p. 430.

³⁵ Seymour, W. A., ‘Honorary General Secretary’s Report for 1963-4’ in *Association of Civil Service Art Clubs Newsletter*, No. 39 (Sep., 1964), p. 4 (bound volumes courtesy of the Civil and Public Service Artists).

³⁶ *Ibid.*

the 1970s, changes in the structure of the Civil Service began to adversely affect participation. In 1972, when just 11 members turned up to the association's annual general meeting, the newsletter's editor complained that the constant merging of departments had led to 'apathy' and warned against the 'eventual breakdown' of the Association.³⁷ Of the 29 clubs recorded in the ACSAC newsletter in 1974, several were reported as no longer functioning the following year. The cohort phenomenon, which had been evident to some extent in the postwar years, became increasingly problematic. One member complained that only 80 out of 1,000 registered members had submitted work to the annual exhibition. Participation in the organisation of events was even lower, with around 40 members, 'the regular loyal old gang for many years past', lending a hand.³⁸ While a few clubs came into being during this period of growing instability (the Lacon House Art Group and Colchester Telephone Art Group were, for example, both founded in 1977) their foundation was so unusual it led the newsletter's editor to remark upon the 'cheering news'.³⁹ These clubs were to be especially short lived.

Working conditions became increasingly fraught with insecurity during the 1980s as the Civil Service underwent 'rationalisation': departments closed and merged, regional offices were shut down, and pay frozen.⁴⁰ Frederick England, an artist tutor on the association's painting holidays, recalls a sharp shift in attitude towards the clubs. In the postwar years the Civil Service took the arts seriously. A number of club members were arts trained and of a professional standard. After the

³⁷ Minutes of the Annual General Meeting in *Association of Civil Service Art Clubs Newsletter* (June, 1972), p. 29 (bound volumes courtesy of the Civil and Public Service Artists).

³⁸ John Anthony writing in *Association of Civil Service Art Clubs Newsletter*, No. 98 (Oct., 1978), p. 6 (bound volumes courtesy of the Civil and Public Service Artists).

³⁹ *Association of Civil Service Art Clubs Newsletter* (Summer, 1977) (bound volumes courtesy of the Civil and Public Service Artists).

⁴⁰ Kandiah, M. and Lowe, R. (eds), *The Civil Service Reforms of the 1980s* (Centre for Contemporary British History, Oral History Programme, 2007).

founding of the NHS, for example, medical artists became civil servants, some of whom joined the ACSAC. The high level of artistic knowledge and expertise was such that the association's reputation went beyond the service, with professional artists turning up at the Civil Servants' annual week-long painting holidays 'to see what they were up to'.⁴¹ In the 1980s, however, everything changed. 'Imagine a meadow, and then imagine a great big plough running through it,' England says, 'that's what happened to the Civil Service clubs.'⁴² It was not simply that resources were withdrawn. The network of clubs was, England argues, purposefully dismantled:

It was getting too cosy so the government broke it up. They sent young people all over the country so the clubs couldn't function as they once had. It used to be that employees grouped together and got life models within the various departments, but this was no longer possible.⁴³

Whatever the motive, reorganisation had a detrimental effect on membership, which fell from 1,000 in 1978 (itself a 50 per cent decline from the 1950s) to 531 members affiliated through just eight clubs, and 140 individual members in 1983.⁴⁴ Gradually, the Civil Service lost the depth of artistic skill and interest it had cultivated in the postwar years. Submissions to exhibitions and, subsequently, sales, set upon a downhill trajectory. The exhibition committee complained that because so few members submitted work, they were unable to be selective and, as a result, the overall standard of the annual show fell into decline.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Interview with Frederick England, art tutor for the Civil and Public Service Artists (formerly known as the Association of Civil Service Art Clubs), London, 2 August 2011.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Association of Civil Service Art Clubs Newsletter*, No. 115 (Winter, 1983-4), pp. 3-4 and p. 18 (bound volumes courtesy of the Civil and Public Service Artists).

⁴⁵ *Association of Civil Service Art Clubs Newsletter*, No. 114 (Autumn, 1983), p. 13 (bound volumes courtesy of the Civil and Public Service Artists).

Civil Service clubs had always been at the mercy of government reorganisations and reshuffles. In the early-1950s, for example, when the Ministry of Health was divided into two departments, the art club duly split into two. This fractured one of the earliest Civil Service art clubs, described in the 1920s as ‘a remarkably active organisation’ filled with ‘keen and enthusiastic students of the graphic arts’ who published their own newsletter filled with the ‘spirit of missionary zeal’.⁴⁶ In the postwar years there was a sense that the art club was a necessary, and even natural, part of Civil Service life, and the split simply meant there were now two active and growing clubs instead of one.⁴⁷ By the 1990s, however, the continuing existence of a departmental art club demonstrated remarkable determination. With only a handful of clubs still affiliated to the ACSAC, membership declined. Efforts to swell the ranks were made in 1995 by opening up membership to spouses, and again in 2002 by including the service’s Retirement Fellowship (at which point the association was renamed the Civil and Public Service Artists). The primary function of the association, which had been ‘to promote the formation of Art Clubs throughout the Civil Service’, was now replaced with a membership run on an individual basis.⁴⁸ One retired member, who had been with the association since 1965, said with disappointment:

When the Retirement Fellowship joined we realised that people were just there to organise the buffet – it had nothing to do with art. It felt like we were taken over. But I’m not criticising them. We were getting smaller, we needed boosting up.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ ‘The Exhibition of the Ministry of Health Art Club by Our Art Critic’ in *Amateur Artist and Collector*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (Dec., 1927), pp. 46-8.

⁴⁷ Association of Civil Service Art Clubs programme for the 1951 exhibition (British Postal Museum and Archives, Post 65/296).

⁴⁸ *Association of Civil Service Art Clubs Newsletter*, No. 1 (July, 1952), p. 1 (bound volumes courtesy of the Civil and Public Service Artists).

⁴⁹ Interview with Helen Monostori, Civil and Public Service Artists, London, 29 July 2011.

By the end of the twentieth century the ACSAC art clubs found themselves on an unstable, if not non-existent, footing. From an ambitious association with a high calibre exhibition and a horde of eager members, it had become a skeleton of its former self, populated predominantly by retirees. By 2010, the once-vibrant newsletter had been reduced to an email bulletin with a couple of pages on membership and arrangements for the Christmas dinner.⁵⁰ The annual exhibition, in its heyday displaying up to one thousand pictures, showcased less than one hundred in 2011. Much like the Society of Staffordshire Artists (see chapter 2, p. 79), the association kept going only by drastically changing its demographic. The responsibility for providing leisure activities for the workforce shifted from employer to individual worker and, as a result, an ageing and individualistic enterprise gradually replaced one in which the communality of the workplace had been prized.

Market forces: the premium for space

While the ACSAC continued into the twenty-first century, albeit in skeletal form, logistical problems caused by company belt-tightening and the demise of employer benevolence made the continuation of many work art clubs impossible. Since its origins in the 1930s, London Transport sponsored a range of staff activities, from sports teams to dog shows, which were sympathetic to company shift patterns and popular with employees.⁵¹ A number of informal associated clubs were also organised by the workers themselves. The company supported these clubs: as well as part-funding them through the surplus from sales of lost property, it donated resources and expertise to ensure their smooth running – the reprographics department for printing posters or leaflets, for example, or rooms for classes and meetings.

⁵⁰ *Civil and Public Service Artists Newsletter*, No. 207 (Winter, 2010) (courtesy of the Civil and Public Service Artists).

⁵¹ Interview with Glynis Thompson, former London Transport employee, 10 July 2011.

London Transport became ‘a font of things to do’ in the postwar years, as more and more societies came into existence.⁵² The London Transport Art Group, founded in 1947, was one of a number of clubs – from the Rifle Club to the District Line Winemakers and from the Gramophone Club to the Angling Society – catering for the varied interests of the company’s growing workforce.⁵³ Like most art societies, the group organised sketching expeditions, visits to galleries and museums, and an annual public exhibition.⁵⁴ Members met for discussions, lectures, criticisms and weekly life drawing classes held by an instructor provided and subsidised by London County Council at 55 Broadway, the company’s headquarters. Members of the art group were drawn from all departments: from the trolleybuses to the executive, from welfare to the architect’s office, and from the typing staff to the various engineering works in Acton, Chiswick, and Charlton.⁵⁵ The largest number of members came from the railways, the works and central buses, which drew most employees from the working class. The art group, like most work clubs, created ‘conditions of equality’ which were lacking in day-to-day work.⁵⁶ Working class bus drivers rubbed shoulders with members of the executive at club meetings and events. One former member, who worked a ‘dirty, mucky job’ on the railways, recalls that the offices of senior staff were made available to members of the art club to practice painting: ‘We used these people’s offices, which was a terribly chancy business – you know what it is with paint and brushes.’⁵⁷ Eventually, after one too many paint splatters on the executive furniture, a more suitable location was found in the disused clock tower at 55

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ ‘Round the Clubs’ in *London Transport News* (26 June, 1981) (London Transport Museum Archive, Acton).

⁵⁴ Catalogue for the third annual exhibition of London Transport Art Club in 1949 (London Transport Museum Archive, Acton, LDLTM 1998/720).

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Seligman, ‘On Work, Alienation, and Leisure’, p. 355.

⁵⁷ Interview with Sydney Savory, former member of London Transport Art Club, 13 July 2011.

Broadway, a space where London Transport's artists could 'really let fly'.⁵⁸

The group was encouraged by the company's general newsletter, rather than one written specifically by and for members. Regular reports were published on the art group's exhibitions and its members' achievements. 'Star' artists like retired bus driver Ted Hunt, who had been painting for 40 years, were celebrated.⁵⁹ Royal Academy exhibitors E. F. Northway, an engineer in Acton, and Albert Harding, a sports ground controller in the welfare department, were congratulated.⁶⁰ Beginners were welcome, but some members had studied art previously. Polish ex-serviceman Stanislaw Frenkiel, a porter at Archway Station, had studied for two years at the Academy of Art in Krakow before the war.⁶¹ The group encouraged members to develop their interest outside of the company. Ladbroke Grove canteen cook Samuel Penn began studying at London's St Martin's School of Art after just two years with the club.⁶²

Standards were high: of the 140 paintings submitted to the thirteenth annual exhibition in 1960, just over 100 were selected to be hung by an 'expert' panel of external judges.⁶³ The involvement of professional artists in amateur activities, from judging exhibitions to teaching art classes and giving talks, was commonplace. Well known artists and critics such as C. W. Nevinson, John Nash and Eric Newton, worked with the Midland Bank Art Club, Parson Painters and the ACSAC, amongst

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ 'Golden Art' in *London Transport News*, No. 171 (16 May, 1980), p. 5 (London Transport Museum Archive, Acton).

⁶⁰ *London Transport Magazine*, No. 4 (July, 1947), pp. 12-13; *London Transport Magazine*, Vol. 2, No. 9 (Dec., 1948), p. 10; and *London Transport Magazine*, Vol. 6, No. 10 (Jan., 1953), p. 2 (all London Transport Museum Library, Covent Garden).

⁶¹ 'Our People' in *London Transport Magazine*, Vol. 4, No. 8 & No. 9 (Nov. - Dec., 1950), p. 13 (London Transport Museum Library, Covent Garden).

⁶² *London Transport Magazine*, Vol. 2, No. 9 (1948), p. 10 (London Transport Museum Library, Covent Garden).

⁶³ 'Art Group Exhibition' in *London Transport Magazine*, Vol. 13, No. 10 (Jan., 1960), p. 7 (London Transport Museum Library, Covent Garden).

others, in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s.⁶⁴ London Transport Art Club's highly-selective process resulted in successful exhibitions where more than half of the works on show were sold – a significant proportion for an amateur club.⁶⁵ Adding another dimension to company support, works from the annual exhibition were regularly purchased by the executive; in 1948, for example, a painting by first time exhibitor Edward Sebley, a Metropolitan Line platelayer, was bought by the company and hung in the managers' dining room.⁶⁶

It is not clear when the group came to an end, although its existence is last mentioned in *London Transport News* in the early-1980s. The society had aged; in the 1940s and 1950s there were only a couple of retired members, with the vast majority being active workers. By 1966, 14 of the 44 exhibiting members that year were retirees.⁶⁷ The trend towards an increasingly elderly and retired membership continued throughout the next decade, indicating, again, that the club's longevity was adversely affected by a cohort phenomenon. Yet interviews with former members suggest that the club did not simply die out with its initial membership, but rather disbanded in the 1980s due to a lack of space in which to practice. As space came increasingly at a premium, facilities owned by large companies and organisations were sold off or put into more 'productive' use. In 1980, proposals for the reorganisation of London Transport were put forward and subsequently cleared.⁶⁸ Splitting-up the company and selling off land was a prelude to privatisation. Sports fields were sold, office space was rationalised, and meeting rooms once made

⁶⁴ See, for example, the *Association of Civil Service Art Clubs Newsletter*, No. 3 (Jan., 1953), p. 6 (bound volumes courtesy of the Civil and Public Service Artists).

⁶⁵ 'Round and About' and 'A Change of Scene' in *London Transport Magazine*, Vol. 24, No. 11 (Mar., 1971), p. 8 (London Transport Museum Library, Covent Garden).

⁶⁶ *London Transport Magazine*, Vol. 2, No. 9 (1948), p. 10 (London Transport Museum Library, Covent Garden).

⁶⁷ London Transport Art Club exhibition catalogue for 1966 (London Transport Museum Archive, Acton, LDLTm 1998/95309).

⁶⁸ *London Transport News*, No. 183 (14 Nov., 1980) (London Transport Museum Archive, Acton).

available to clubs like the art group were redeployed for more pressing business use. Retired former member Sydney Savory says that eventually the club was ‘kicked out’ of the clock tower at 55 Broadway:

Terrible place we went to. ... That put an end to it really, we lost our studio. When they couldn’t find a place they got a room in ‘lifts and escalators’. ... It was a dingy room, the light was bad. I packed it in then and I went to Hammersmith Art School to do life classes.⁶⁹

A similar situation was reported by the ACSAC in the early-1980s. The Property Services Agency, which was charged with the management and maintenance of government property, informed the association in 1983 that the Treasury would be charging an economic rent for the Whitehall Studio Art Club’s occupation of the Palace Chambers. The annual rent was expected to be in the region of £3,000. According to the minutes of the annual general meeting that year, the service did show some benevolence; the Management and Personnel Office (assimilated into the Cabinet Office in 1982) offered to make a grant to meet the rent through the Civil Service Sports Council (CSSC). Yet the gesture was scuppered by bureaucracy: because the ACSAC could not affiliate to the CSSC as an organisation, each individual member would have to pay a £6.50 subscription (around £25 at today’s prices) to the CSSC in addition to their annual ACSAC subscription. The ACSAC committee decided that the club’s tenancy would have to be terminated.⁷⁰

The withdrawal of resources left little scope for company art groups to continue. For London Transport, the rupturing of society life had a profound effect on the working lives of former members. Groups and activities that had bound staff together

⁶⁹ Interview with Sydney Savory.

⁷⁰ Minutes for the Annual General Meeting in *Association of Civil Service Art Clubs Newsletter*, No. 115 (Winter, 1983/4), p. 18 (bound volumes courtesy of the Civil and Public Service Artists). Declining attendance at the Studio Art Club had been noted in the mid-1970s. See *Association of Civil Service Art Clubs Newsletter* (June/August, 1976) (bound volumes courtesy of the Civil and Public Service Artists).

were allowed to fall apart. Without these voluntary associations, which nurtured a collective endeavour, the social capital of the workplace diminished. One retiree reminisced:

I retired in 1994. Lots of changes were happening. It was all broken up, it's very sad. It was very much like cattle men and sheep men – you had bus men, tube men and train men, and the societies brought all these different men together.⁷¹

As the culture of the organisation shifted towards a more profit-oriented ethos, the community fostered by work clubs was dispersed. The ideal of the market won out over the ideal of culture. It was not privatisation itself that precluded the existence of a work art club; from the Midland Bank Art Club to the Commercial Union Art Club, art clubs thrived in many private companies and organisations in the interwar and postwar years.⁷² Rather, the culture introduced to the workplace through the process of privatisation during the 1980s placed little value on these activities and left them to wither and fade. The art club had united members in a 'common culture'.⁷³ When the art group ceased to be active, so too did the unique community it brought together: men and women from very different walks of life, equal behind their drawing boards, painting and exhibiting side by side.

The Stock Exchange Art Society (SEAC) met a similar fate to the London Transport Art Group, except in its case a large amount of benevolence was bestowed upon its activities by a neighbouring institution. The society, which began in 1901, exhibited throughout its life at the Drapers' Hall, belonging to a prestigious livery company founded in the fourteenth century, which resided next door to the

⁷¹ Interview with Glynis Thompson.

⁷² The Cuaco Art Club, as it was known, served the Commercial Union Group, now Aviva (Aviva archives, CU2606 CU).

⁷³ Gelber, 'A Job You Can't Lose', p. 747.

exchange.⁷⁴ The exhibitions were popular, sometimes attracting more than 1,000 visitors (it is possible that many visitors were also attracted by the rare opportunity to see the hall's impressive interior). The society received notices in national newspapers like *The Times*, which reflected a certain fascination with the seemingly incongruous occupations of trading and art making:

Archie Gunn, an associate member of brokers Keith, Bayley, Rogers & Co, was busier trading yesterday than many another Stock Exchange man. His pitch, however, was not in the Exchange but in the Drapers' Hall, and he was dealing not in shares but in pottery and paintings.⁷⁵

The SEAC was indebted to the Worshipful Company of Drapers, which had historically provided its hall to the club without charge. In the 1980s, Drapers made efforts to become more commercial and introduced a fee. The fee was initially subsidised, but in 1982 it was raised to £100. The SEAC went into the red.⁷⁶ Its last exhibition in the hall took place in 1986. It is possible the society folded the following year, when the hall was unavailable due to refurbishment, because alternative affordable space could not be found elsewhere. This would suggest that, once again, the premium commanded by venues had priced yet another art society out of existence. Indeed, the struggle to find affordable places to meet and exhibit was a story common to all societies, not just work art clubs.⁷⁷ Local art societies were priced out of the venues owned by local government who, in the drive to maximise income during the 1980s, removed the subsidised rates that had been introduced in the 1930s

⁷⁴ The final exhibition at Drapers was in 1986. For want of further evidence, it appears the society subsequently ceased activities.

⁷⁵ Press cutting: 'Business Diary' in *The Times* (10 Oct., 1974) (Drapers' Archive, Folder 1: 370/1994 Stock Exchange, October 1930 to December 1978).

⁷⁶ Drapers' correspondence, 14 January 1982 (Drapers' Archive, Folder 2: 52/1993 Stock Exchange, January 1970 to 198-).

⁷⁷ Tomlinson, A., *Leisure and the Role of Clubs and Voluntary Groups* (London: SSRC/Sports Council, 1979), p. 24.

and 1940s.⁷⁸ The problem was rarely overcome. As London Transport's Sydney Savory observed of his local art club in Ealing: 'It came to a slow end because of a lack of facilities to use. One of the things of modern times – as space became costly, people didn't want to help and lend rooms for a bunch of artists.'⁷⁹

The cessation of SEAC activities in 1986 could, however, also have been related to the 'big bang': the sudden deregulation of financial markets in October of that year. No records could be found to substantiate either scenario. Yet considering the extent to which the Conservative government's reforms changed the face of the city's financial services, opening them up to greater competition, and changing the culture of the workplace in the process, it is possible – given the impact on London Transport Art Group and the ACSAC of similar cultural transitions – that the effects of this rapid change reverberated across the Stock Exchange's numerous clubs bringing many to an untimely end.

The personal touch

For some work art clubs, support came directly from the chairman or president of the organisation or company, who personally ensured the club's activities were encouraged. Without interest from such individuals, clubs became unstable. This was the case for the British Museum Art Group.⁸⁰ The group ran into the ground in the late-1970s after the separation of the British Library from the British Museum in 1973, which brought the arrival of a new director less sympathetic to the needs of a work art club.⁸¹ Sir John Pope-Hennessy was, according to the group's committee, 'a

⁷⁸ Simpson, 'The Role and Potential of Amateur Arts Groups'.

⁷⁹ Interview with Sydney Savory.

⁸⁰ The British Museum Art Group was affiliated to the ACSAC.

⁸¹ Art Group correspondence, 1969-76 (British Museum Archive, Item 3).

director the exact opposite to Sir John Wolfenden'.⁸² Under Wolfenden's directorship, the group had been encouraged to hold public exhibitions in the museum and was supplied with studio space – 'past the fountain and Coins and Medals in the Greek Vase Galleries' – for weekly art classes organised in conjunction with the local adult education college.⁸³ Wolfenden sponsored prizes at the annual exhibition and had his wife select winning entries.⁸⁴ In 1975, however, the new director forbade a public exhibition on the museum's premises. The group was forced to exhibit elsewhere. It persevered for a few more years, but eventually wound-up activities due to a continual struggle to secure support and resources from the director's office.⁸⁵

Similarly, the Midland Bank had a string of chairmen who were sympathetic to the activities of the company art club throughout the interwar and postwar years. Under the chairmanship of Lord Harlech in the 1950s, the club found that 'whenever aid or advice was sought' it was 'unstintingly given'.⁸⁶ Head office premises were used extensively, from watercolour painting sessions in the smoking room, and sketching evenings in the managers' luncheon room, to exhibitions in the boardroom.⁸⁷ Harlech was keen to encourage his workers to take an 'active interest in the practice of the arts' and provided prize money to distribute at the annual exhibition.⁸⁸ In 1952 a touring exhibition was sponsored by the bank's management

⁸² Letter from Roy Ralph, Department of Oriental Antiquities, on behalf of the British Museum Staff Art Group, to Dorothy K. Pearce, 9 April 1976 (British Museum Archive, Item 3).

⁸³ British Museum Staff Art Class Syllabus, January to March 1970 (British Museum Archive, Item 2).

⁸⁴ Wolfenden went on to head the committee which produced the 1978 report *The Future of Voluntary Organisations*. See Tomlinson, *Leisure and the Role of Clubs and Voluntary Groups*, p. 3.

⁸⁵ Correspondence between Museum Superintendent C. W. Berry and Barbara Ashby of the Rare Books Collection, 1975 (British Museum Archive, Item 3).

⁸⁶ 'Brief History' in the programme for the 10th exhibition, 1949 (HSBC Archives, records of the Midland Bank Art Club, Reference: 0192/0102, Location: 092-A06).

⁸⁷ Diamond Jubilee Season, 1956/7; and also programme for the 16th Exhibition, 1954; *The Midland Venture: The Magazine of the Midland Bank Staff Association*, Vol. 11, No. 131 (Jan., 1931), p. 622; Midland Bank Art Club, Touring Exhibition to Bournemouth, Bristol, Cardiff, Birmingham, Liverpool, Manchester, Leeds, Sheffield, Norwich and Leicester, March and April 1952, p. 2 (all HSBC Archives, records of the Midland Bank Art Club, Reference: 0192/0102, Location: 092-A06).

⁸⁸ Coronation Year exhibition programme, 1953; 15th exhibition opening Speech; and correspondence between Rt Hon Lord Harlech, Chairman of Midland Bank, and Dennis A. Frith, Honorary Secretary to

committee in an effort to keep local branch members involved.⁸⁹ Yet again, however, the club did not stand the test of time and, by the late-1980s, ‘seemed to have petered out’.⁹⁰

Benevolent directors and chairmen like Wolfenden and Harlech were crucial to the survival of the work art club. Without them, company support could not be guaranteed and, in the shifting work culture of the 1980s, many clubs were unable to continue. The cohort phenomenon that adversely affected society membership also existed in company management: in the case of the British Museum and the Midland Bank, the old cohort’s paternalistic belief in the value of high culture for the working man or woman was replaced by the new management cohort’s belief in the efficiency of the market. The new cohort did not, however, completely neglect the wellbeing of its workforce. In some companies there was a revival of interest in self-improvement. ‘Learning entitlement’ schemes, such as car manufacturer Ford’s Employee Development and Assistance Programme, provided company contributions to non-work related education for individual employees. At Ford, six per cent of employees selected arts subjects, including the visual arts, in 1989.⁹¹ These schemes were, however, focused on personal development, rather than the social experience that society life had encouraged in companies and organisations during the interwar and immediate postwar period. Reflecting a shift from the development of social bonds within the workforce to the encouragement of ‘self-help’, courses were undertaken in private and in isolation from fellow workers.⁹²

Midland Bank Art Club, November 1956 (all HSBC Archives, records of the Midland Bank Art Club, Reference: 0192/0102, Location: 092-A06).

⁸⁹ Midland Bank Art Club, Touring Exhibition, March and April 1952.

⁹⁰ Correspondence with Thelma Sutton, former member of the Midland Bank Art Club who retired from the bank in 1985, 1 November, 2011.

⁹¹ Sargant, N., *Learning and Leisure: A Study of Adult Participation in Learning and Its Policy Implications* (Leicester: National Institute of Adult Education, 1991), pp. 104-6.

⁹² Hall, ‘Social Capital in Britain’, p. 420.

Without subsidies in the form of rooms, exhibition spaces and the provision of publicity, and without the general encouragement provided through articles in newsletters, the donation of prizes and the purchase of work by management, societies like the London Transport Art Group, the Stock Exchange Art Society, the British Museum Art Group, the Midland Bank Art Club, not to mention the numerous departmental Civil Service art clubs, were unable to continue. Like the Parson Painters decades earlier, it was easier to disband and for artistically driven individuals to seek an outlet for artistic expression elsewhere – in other local art societies, in adult education art classes, or informally within the privacy of their own home – than to struggle on in an art club with ever-dwindling resources.

The survivors

A few societies survived the cultural and structural changes that affected workplaces towards the end of the twentieth century. For some, continuity was secured through financial assistance from outside the workplace. The Medical Art Society, founded in 1934, was able to continue because a generous benefactor provided funds for administrative assistance and social activities from 1977 onwards.⁹³ The Armed Forces Art Society, meanwhile, had difficulty finding affordable exhibition venues until the turn of the twenty-first century, when the defence and security group Thales became its sponsor. Today the society exhibits at the prestigious Mall Galleries in London.

The Post Office and Telecoms Art Club (founded as the General Post Office Art Club in 1906, the oldest and largest club affiliated to the ACSAC) also continues to

⁹³ Levy, M., 'Painting for Pleasure' in *The British Medical Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 5059 (21 Dec., 1957), p. 1486.

this day.⁹⁴ The club is unusual for continuing largely because of the enduring benevolence of the employer: both the Post Office and British Telecoms have been keen for the club to continue as one of the last vestiges of the connection between the two historically-linked organisations.⁹⁵ Like the societies already discussed, the Post Office, and later British Telecoms, supported the club from the outset. Similarly to the Midland Bank Art Club and the British Museum Art Group, assistance came from the very top: when the club was selecting work for its exhibition at the international postal union congress in Paris in the late-1940s (alongside the Société Artistiques des Postes et Télégraphes et Téléphones, the club's French equivalent), the Postmaster-General helped decide on the final dozen works which would represent the organisation abroad.⁹⁶ The Postmaster-General and honorary president of the club in the late-1960s, The Right Honourable Edward Short, was himself a practicing amateur artist, which members felt helped the club's standing within the Post Office as a whole.⁹⁷ Various works departments were involved; from public relations officers assisting with an exhibition in Rome in the 1950s, to the reprographics service producing posters and catalogues for exhibitions in London during the 1970s, the club had access to far more help than existed within the ranks of its membership alone.⁹⁸

In the increasingly corporate climate of the 1990s, however, even employer support could not guarantee a society's survival. Affordable exhibition space was a pressing concern for the Post and Telecoms Art Club, which wanted to uphold its tradition of exhibiting within the square mile of the City of London. This was a far pricier commercial environment than in the postwar years and, despite the Post Office

⁹⁴ 'Post Office Art Club' in *Canvas*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (May, 1968), p. 38.

⁹⁵ Interview with Ron McGill, Post and Telecoms Art Club, London, 2011.

⁹⁶ White, E. A., 'Post Office Goes Abroad' in the *Post Office Magazine* (May, 1947) (British Postal Museum and Archives, Post 65/5378).

⁹⁷ 'Post Office Art Club' in *Canvas*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (May, 1968), p. 39.

⁹⁸ Catalogue for the 91st exhibition, October 1997 (British Postal Museum and Archives, Post 62/115).

and British Telecoms offering to hire the exhibition venue on the club's behalf, the committee struggled to find a suitable place to exhibit.⁹⁹ At the turn of the twenty-first century, there was talk of winding the club down, yet the committee resolved to carry on.¹⁰⁰ Unlike the ACSAC's newsletter, the Post and Telecoms Art Club's *Arts News* continued to contain lengthy and detailed articles reporting on events as well as providing advice on painting, materials, and humorous pieces on the plight of the amateur artist. It is remarkable such effort continued to be poured into the newsletter when magazines such as *Leisure Painter* or *Artists and Illustrators* now met the need for inspiration and practical guidance (art magazines for amateur artists are discussed in detail in chapter 6). *Art News* continued to offer its readers a sense of community – a community eradicated from companies where the art club had disbanded – and this gave the club the impetus to continue.

Sustaining this community remained a central concern. As always, the maintenance of membership was a constant worry. Conscious of the need to 'ensure that our strength in numbers and quality is maintained', the Post and Telecoms Art Club made regular calls in its newsletter 'to see what can be done to attract the vital new blood'.¹⁰¹ Similarly, in the early-2000s, the Armed Forces Art Society's membership comprised 50 per cent retirees, more than 25 per cent spouses, and less than 25 per cent in active service. Despite continuing to function as a successful exhibiting society, the 'lack of young blood' raised concerns that 'the society might die'.¹⁰² The need to plump-up numbers had, however, always existed and was not simply the result of growing individualism. The difference between surviving societies like the Post and Telecoms Art Club, and defunct clubs such as the London

⁹⁹ Letter from Ron McGill of the Posts and Telecom Art Club to the chief planning officer of the City of London Corporation, 23 July 1998 (British Postal Museum and Archives, Post 62/109).

¹⁰⁰ *Art News* (Summer, 1996) (British Postal Museum and Archives, Post 65/296).

¹⁰¹ Ron McGill in *Art News* (1990), p. 3 (British Postal Museum and Archives, Post 62/104).

¹⁰² Interview with Martin Balshaw, Secretary of the Armed Forces Art Society, 15 February 2011.

Transport Art Group, was that the former still enjoyed sufficient external support to retain the main function and appeal of their art club – an annual exhibition in a public venue – whereas the latter did not. For work art clubs without assistance from the employer, decline was inevitable.

Creative communities

In all professions and places of employment there was a belief in the exceptional nature of their own particular work art club. The Ashington Group is frequently referred to as out-of-the-ordinary, demonstrating a correlation between the grit of manual labour and the artistic spirit. The Parson Painters thought that the percentage of artists in the clergy was ‘probably higher than that of any other body of professional men who venture to hold an exhibition of amateur drawings’.¹⁰³ The Midland Bank Art Club believed there was a unique and mysterious connection between banking and painting. ‘We have all heard that there is a close connection between music and mathematics,’ one member reflected, ‘and I can only suppose that the kindred art of painting is connected with banking because a banker has to be a person of sincerity and exactitude.’¹⁰⁴ The findings presented in this chapter, however, suggest that within any group of people, whatever their shared community or employment, there exists a drive towards artistic creativity – a drive facilitated and encouraged by social organisation. From the Midland Bank Art Club to London Transport Art Group and from the Armed Forces Art Society to the Post and Telecoms Art Club, work art clubs catered for a range of occupational backgrounds and social classes. They brought employees together in a community of interest,

¹⁰³ Press cutting: Humphries, J. H., ‘The Parson Painters’ in *Walker’s Magazine* (1938) (Lambeth Palace Library Archives, MS2885).

¹⁰⁴ *The Midland Venture: The Magazine of the Midland Bank Staff Association*, Vol. 13, No. 158 (Apr., 1933), p. 113 (HSBC Archives, records of the Midland Bank Art Club).

which imparted value on both workers and the workplace.

These unique communities were, however, subject to the vagaries of workplace culture. Their lifecycle mirrored the political climate: formed with the welfare state, and destroyed with Thatcherism. Work art clubs existed in both public and private companies and organisations throughout the interwar and postwar years. During this period, the clubs, and the artistic communities they fostered, were believed to provide value for the worker as well as for the workplace. By the late-1980s, such activities were deemed of little relevance to the business of working life. Endogenous changes within the workplace, which led to the stripping away of the clubs that had thrived in the mid-twentieth century, were compounded by exogenous factors. A cohort phenomenon, whereby the membership of clubs naturally aged and failed to replenish, was the result of broader social changes which diminished the appeal of the work art club. Yet although something of a chicken and egg situation, the cohort phenomenon did not threaten the continuation of the clubs until employer support was systematically withdrawn. Some art clubs survived the century but, of these, most operated as a shadow of what they once were. Still more were swept aside as the ethos of self-seeking individualism destroyed the ethos of the workplace as a community.

PART THREE

Education

CHAPTER 4

Educating the amateur

*'It may be observed that all the artists made in the kingdom are not formed at the Royal Academy; this is true, but they are created by similar means.'*¹

The 'golden age' of the 1950s and 1960s was not only a fertile period for the formation of societies, but also one of significant expansion in the provision of adult education. Following the Second World War, classes in painting and drawing, which in the nineteenth century had been a privilege of the upper levels of leisured society, became a popular strand of recreational adult education provided and subsidised by local authorities. Recreational adult education, which catered for a growing number of leisure painters, was regarded in the immediate postwar years as a civilising good worthy of public investment. Towards the end of the twentieth century, adult education courses in fine art grew increasingly popular, yet the social reach of this provision diminished: in the shift from a collectivist social democracy, to the market-liberal individualism of the 1980s and beyond, the purpose and reach of adult education changed.² British society was more affluent by the end of the century than following the war, yet the reclassification of recreational adult education as a consumer good became the rationale for cuts to local authority services. The popularity of art did not fade but, as the chief beneficiary of recreational adult education came to be regarded as the individual rather than the community, the cost of this education was transferred from the state to the student. Only those able to afford

¹ Rippingille, E. V. (ed), *The Artist and Amateur's Magazine: A Work Devoted to the Interests of The Arts and Design and the Cultivation of Taste* (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1843), p. 152.

² Fieldhouse, R., 'An Overview of British Adult Education in the Twentieth Century' in Fieldhouse, R. (ed), *A History of Modern British Adult Education* (Leicester: National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education, 1996), p. 75.

increasing fees could continue to benefit from the provision of recreational classes in fine art.³

The rudiments of art

Adult students chose to study art in their spare time for a variety of reasons. For some, weekend and evening courses were an extension of pre-existing leisure activities.⁴ Some members of art societies, for example, supplemented group activities with art classes at their local adult education centre or evening institute. For others, adult education offered a foray into a new subject, the beginning of a new passion, or even a new career. A large proportion of adult education courses in fine art provided a formal style of art tuition in traditional figurative and representational art, which focused on ‘skill-acquisition’ rather than ‘imaginative exploration’.⁵ Just as amateur art societies were modelled on professional institutions founded in the nineteenth century and earlier, so too life drawing and landscape painting classes were based on a mixture of eighteenth century academy and nineteenth century atelier tuition. This canonical style of art education originated, like the art societies discussed in chapter 2, with the Royal Academy of Art (RA) in London, which was itself modelled on the European art academies founded in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.⁶

Academic training in art was a lengthy undertaking: over a period of between five and 10 years, students progressed slowly from anatomy, to drawing from casts

³ Tuckett, A., ‘Counting the Cost: Managerialism, the Market and the Education of Adults in the 1980s and Beyond’ in Westwood, S. and Thomas, J. E., *The Politics of Adult Education* (Leicester: National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education, 1991), p. 22.

⁴ Raymond, J., ‘Creative Leisure in Short Term Residential Colleges’ in Hutchinson, E. M. (ed), *Adult Education and the Arts: Examples of Activities Promoted as Adult Education Contributing to H. M. Government’s ‘Policy for the Arts’* (London: National Institute of Adult Education, 1966), p. 9.

⁵ Adkins, G., *The Arts and Adult Education* (Leicester: Advisory Council for Adult and Continuing Education, 1981), p. 86.

⁶ Macdonald, S., *The History and Philosophy of Art Education* (London: University of London Press, 1970), p. 26; see also Efland, A., ‘School Art and Its Social Origins’ in *Studies in Art Education*, Vol. 24, No. 3 (1983), pp. 17-28.

and copies of notable works and antiques, and finally to drawing from life.⁷ By the mid-nineteenth century, the RA had gained a reputation for being stuffy and outmoded and, in an attempt to compete with foreign design imports, the British government funded a national system of art education.⁸ In their early years, the state-funded design schools followed a utilitarian style of vocational training inspired by the German dual system, which separated the fine and applied arts.⁹ In the 1870s, however, the schools, which by 1873 numbered 120, ‘swung towards fine art’.¹⁰

The establishment of the Slade School of Art at London’s University College in 1871 provided the impetus for this shift.¹¹ Slade students worked from casts, copied the work of masters and drew from life; they continued to receive, in essence, a version of the canonical art education that had thrived in the eighteenth century.¹² Yet the new teaching style was far more intuitive and accessible, steering a path between the austere classicism of the Royal Academy on the one hand, and the dry functionalism of the early design schools on the other.¹³ By the 1950s the ‘Slade System’ had become the standard followed by all British art schools and also influenced the direction of art teaching in recreational adult education (which, as this chapter will show, flourished in the postwar era).¹⁴ Slade graduates made ideal tutors in traditional figurative art, linking canonical art education with adult education, and professionals with amateurs. The Slade-style life class, with its nude model, easels and charcoal, and artist tutor, proved popular with many adult students.

⁷ Macdonald, *The History and Philosophy of Art Education* p. 29; and Efland, ‘School Art and Its Social Origins’, p. 149.

⁸ Macdonald, *The History and Philosophy of Art Education*, p. 69; see also Sproll, P. A. C., ‘Matters of Taste and Matters of Commerce: British Government Intervention in Art Education in 1835’ in *Studies in Art Education*, Vol. 35, No. 2 (Winter, 1994), p. 106.

⁹ Efland, ‘School Art and Its Social Origins’, p. 152; see also Macdonald, *The History and Philosophy of Art Education*, p. 78 and p. 226.

¹⁰ Macdonald, *The History and Philosophy of Art Education*, pp. 182-3.

¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 269.

¹² *Ibid*, pp. 273-4.

¹³ *Ibid*, pp. 269-83.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 277.

This was not the only approach to art education available within the postwar adult education service. An alternative style developed out of the progressive teaching methods beginning to circulate in primary education during the interwar period.¹⁵ Children had been taught how to draw in elementary schools since 1852, but this was according to a ‘strictly utilitarian’ government syllabus.¹⁶ During the 1930s, a new awareness of the relationship between art and psychology, together with an appreciation of the art of the ‘primitive’ and the influence of the modernist movement, led to a growing interest in the creativity of the child. Child art was, alongside the art of the ‘primitive’ and the ‘outsider’, placed within the ‘general range of aesthetic appreciation’.¹⁷ Following the pioneering work of Austrian child art educationist Franz Cizek, London County Council art inspectors Marion Richardson and R. R. Tomlinson developed new approaches for the teaching of art to children of primary age.¹⁸ These techniques were based on creativity, self-expression and play, but also emphasised the child’s innate ability to make aesthetic judgements.¹⁹ The publication of art critic Herbert Read’s *Education Through Art* in 1943 brought the connection between modernism in art and progressivism in education to a large and receptive audience, initiating a ‘revolution’ in art teaching methods in the postwar years.²⁰

The art teacher was no longer charged simply with training the nation’s future artists, but rather with providing entire generations with an instinct for their own creativity ‘so that they leave school with a desire to understand more of art and to

¹⁵ Taylor, R., *Visual Arts in Education* (London: The Falmer Press, 1992), p. 22.

¹⁶ Macdonald, *The History and Philosophy of Art Education*, p. 167; see also Hanson, D., ‘The Art Masters’ in *British Journal of Educational Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (Feb., 1971), p. 48.

¹⁷ Macdonald, *The History and Philosophy of Art Education*, p. 329; see also Taylor, *Visual Arts in Education*, p. 23.

¹⁸ Macdonald, *The History and Philosophy of Art Education*, p. 348.

¹⁹ Constable, W. G. ‘The Growth of Popular Interest in Art’ in *Art for the People: Report of the British Institute of Adult Education Experiment in Providing Loan Exhibitions in the Smaller Towns of England* (London: British Institute of Adult Education, 1935), p. 5.

²⁰ Macdonald, *The History and Philosophy of Art Education*, p. 349.

create it for themselves'.²¹ Where previously 'personal expression was not tolerated', now school art classes came to value a child's work for its self-expression rather than its demonstration of technical mastery or draughtsmanship.²² According to art historian E. H. Gombrich, the school art class conditioned the public perception of art; rather than being the province of elites, art became something attainable by all, regardless of skill or talent.²³ Former pupils who had 'tasted the satisfaction of free creativity' in the classroom went on to 'practice painting as a relaxation' in their adult lives, and this led to a 'rapid increase in the number of amateurs' in the immediate postwar.²⁴ As the first generation of children educated by progressive teaching methods came of age, steeped in the value of their own creativity during childhood, many sought to recapture the freedom of self-expression through art in their adult years.²⁵ A newly-invigorated state-subsidised adult education service awaited them with a variety of courses in fine art.

Not all adults schooled in creativity sought self-expression, however; adult education provided not only a continuation of, but also a remedy for, initial art education. Due to a misinterpretation of Cizek et al's methods, many school art teachers emphasised enjoyment above the acquisition of skill.²⁶ Although the art curriculum was rebranded 'art and design' in the late-1980s, by the turn of the twenty-first century the emphasis on 'nurturing creativity' continued to prioritise the development of creative mental capacities, leaving few school leavers with even a

²¹ Cumberlege, G., *The Visual Arts: A Report Sponsored by the Dartington Hall Trustees* (London: Oxford University Press on behalf of the Arts Enquiry by Political and Economic Planning (PEP), 1946), p. 18 and p. 151.

²² O'Riordan, T., 'Painting is pleasure' in *Leisure Painter* (Dec., 1972), p. 34; see also Abbs, P., 'Introduction' in Taylor, R., *Visual Arts in Education* (London: The Falmer Press, 1992), vii-viii.

²³ Gombrich, E. H., *The Story of Art* (London: Phaidon, 1989 [15th edition]), p. 615.

²⁴ *Ibid*, p. 615.

²⁵ Hutchinson, E., 'Action in the Arts' in Hutchinson, E. M. (ed), *Adult Education and the Arts: Examples of Activities Promoted as Adult Education Contributing to H. M. Government's 'Policy for the Arts'* (London: National Institute of Adult Education, 1966), p. 18 and p. 10.

²⁶ Field, D., 'Art and Art Education' in Field, D. and Newick, J. (eds), *The Study of Education and Art* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), p. 151.

basic ability to draw and paint.²⁷ For some students, then, postwar school art education did not inspire a search for self-expression so much as a desire to learn from scratch the skill and craft of drawing and painting. From the expressive to the canonical, adult education art classes developed to serve a plethora of creative needs and appetites.

‘Art education available to all’

The arts did not feature prominently in the early years of local authority adult education; between the creation of the Local Education Authorities (LEAs) in 1902 and the First World War, such provision was directed primarily at remedying the deficiencies of initial education and providing vocational and technical training.²⁸ It was not until the interwar years, when calls for the democratisation of the arts, both their appreciation and practice, were increasingly voiced, that the nature of art education for adults was re-examined (see chapter 1, pp. 37-9). During this period, a series of government reports recognised the personal and social value of practical recreational activities.²⁹ In 1918, the Ministry of Reconstruction identified a growing demand for non-vocational adult education amongst ordinary men and women:

It arises from the desire for knowledge, for self-expression, for the satisfaction of intellectual, aesthetic and spiritual needs, and for a fuller life. It is based upon a claim for the recognition of human personality. This desire is not confined to any class of society, but is to be found amongst people of every social grade.³⁰

²⁷ Gingell, J., *Impact: The Visual Arts and Education* (No. 13 in a series of policy discussions by the Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain, 2006), p. 3; see also Taylor, *Visual Arts in Education*, p. 6 and p. 29.

²⁸ Edwards, H. J., *The Evening Institute: Its Place in the Educational System of England and Wales* (London: National Institute of Adult Education, 1961), pp. 18-19.

²⁹ Fieldhouse, R., ‘The Local Education Authorities and Adult Education’ in Fieldhouse, R. (ed), *A History of Modern British Adult Education* (Leicester: National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education, 1996), p. 82.

³⁰ [Cmnd. 9107] *Interim Report of the Committee on Adult Education: Industrial and Social Conditions in Relation to Adult Education* (London: Ministry of Reconstruction, 1918), p. 3.

Adult education was recognised as perfectly situated ‘to do something toward democratizing art’ in both its ‘creation and dissemination’.³¹ Yet despite an increase in recreational courses during the 1930s, following calls from the Board of Education for local authorities to extend their non-vocational curricula, the provision of fine art classes remained negligible.³²

London was a notable exception. Considered a trailblazer in the field, London’s provision of adult education formed the blueprint followed by many local authorities after the Second World War.³³ Organised from 1904 by London County Council (LCC), and from 1965 until 1990 by the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA), London provided an adult education service of ‘quite remarkable educational and social breadth’.³⁴ Students in the city’s inner boroughs enjoyed the benefits of above average expenditure and below average fees.³⁵ An early recognition of the productive use of leisure was central to adult learning in London’s institutes. By 1929-30, 58 per cent of London’s adult education students studied recreational subjects, compared with just nine per cent across the rest of the country.³⁶ The LCC was aware of its unique position, claiming in 1936 that the ‘privileges regarding continued education’ available to the Londoner were ‘enjoyed by very few, if any, other areas in the country’.³⁷

London’s unrivalled provision of non-vocational adult education did not grow out of affluence and prosperity, but rather in a period of high unemployment and, in

³¹ Eduard Lindeman (1926) quoted in Brookfield, S., ‘Eduard Lindeman’ in Jarvis, P. (ed), *Twentieth Century Thinkers in Adult Education* (London: Routledge, 1987), p. 131; see also Fieldhouse, ‘The Local Education Authorities and Adult Education’, pp. 82-3.

³² *Adult Education and the Local Education Authority* (London: Board of Education Adult Education Committee, 1933), viii; Cumberlege, *The Visual Arts*, p. 29.

³³ Stephens, M. D., *Adult Education* (London: Cassell, 1990), p. 35.

³⁴ Fieldhouse, ‘The Local Education Authorities and Adult Education’, p. 83.

³⁵ Sargent, N., *Learning and Leisure: A Study of Adult Participation in Learning and Its Policy Implications* (Leicester: National Institute of Adult Education, 1991), p. 8.

³⁶ Stephens, *Adult Education*, p. 35.

³⁷ *Floodlight* (London: London County Council, 1936), p. 4.

some areas, desperate poverty. The men and women who frequented London's inner city evening institutes were, according to a 1926 H. M. Inspectors' special report, 'among a class living in some of the least favourable surroundings of urban life'.³⁸ The LCC initially concentrated on providing either technical and vocational subjects or practical and domestic 'women's' subjects.³⁹ Art had been offered as early as 1902-3, but most courses were for the development of artisans' drawing skills.⁴⁰ During the interwar years, the LCC recognised the value of creative activities for ordinary people.⁴¹ The central boroughs' adult education officers believed the arts were particularly valuable for poorly-paid unskilled manual and casual workers 'who, on the conclusion of their day's work, desire to occupy their leisure in an interesting and profitable way, not necessarily connected with their employment'.⁴² Non-vocational adult education, it was realised, was uniquely placed to provide practical art experience and the LCC began to organise and widen its provision accordingly. London's numerous schools, colleges and institutes developed particular strengths: from technical and commercial centres, which provided industrial training, and art schools to train professional artists, to the separate institutes for men and women, which would provide the majority of recreational leisure courses in art.⁴³ Practical recreational courses, taught by 'distinguished' artists and craftsmen, were provided in drawing and painting as well as a number of arts and crafts.⁴⁴ Those who wished to

³⁸ 'Education Pamphlet No. 48' quoted in Yeaxlee, B. A., *Lifelong Education: A Sketch of the Range and Significance of the Adult Education Movement* (London: Cassell, 1929), p. 114.

³⁹ Devereux, W., *Adult Education in Inner London, 1870-1980* (London: Shephard-Walwyn, 1982), pp. 105-7.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p. 34.

⁴¹ Fieldhouse, 'The Local Education Authorities and Adult Education', p. 83.

⁴² *Floodlight* (1936), p. 12.

⁴³ *Ibid*, pp. 6-18.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p. 9.

‘develop in their leisure the arts and graces of life’ were offered something to study ‘whatever their bent may be’.⁴⁵

London’s institutes were not the first educative body to offer art education to ordinary working people. In the nineteenth century the mechanics institutes, the forebears of modern adult education, provided lectures on the fine arts as well as elementary classes in various branches of drawing, from architectural and mechanical to figurative and landscape. According to historian Stuart Macdonald, however, lectures were ‘far above the artisans’ heads’ and art classes of a ‘very low standard’.⁴⁶ The introduction of local authority subsidised recreational adult education made a very different kind of art education available to ordinary men and women. London’s institutes demonstrated that practical art classes could not only establish a balance between the highbrow and the popular, but also ignite an interest in art amongst a diverse and sometimes unexpected range of people. Exhibitions of students’ work organised by the evening institutes illustrated to an interested public that fine art was not purely a middle class pursuit:

Exhibitions of work showed that many students had a spirit of craftsmanship and a natural gift for artistic expression. A warehouseman, a house decorator, three deckhands waiting for a ship and a haddock smoker were the nucleus of a class which, after a year’s instruction, gave an interesting exhibition of original drawings and paintings in a Bethnal Green Museum.⁴⁷

As the varied occupational backgrounds discussed in chapter 3 also indicated, given the opportunity, art making appealed to individuals from a broad range of socio-economic groups, not just a privileged elite.⁴⁸ The success of London’s institutes was

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p. 4.

⁴⁶ Macdonald, *The History and Philosophy of Art Education*, p. 38.

⁴⁷ Devereux, *Adult Education in Inner London*, p. 97.

⁴⁸ For a late-twentieth century breakdown of the socioeconomic groups involved in Local Education Authority arts and crafts courses see Sargant, N., *The Learning Divide: A Study of Participation in*

such that what had started as an ‘experiment’ to serve a social need for recreative courses, soon became a permanent feature of the LCC adult education service; inspired by their own achievement, the city’s adult education officers pledged ‘to make art education available to all’.⁴⁹

The philosophy underlying the work of LCC adult education service was similar to that advocated by the Educational Settlements Association (ESA).⁵⁰ These non-residential settlements were founded on a belief in ‘education as a continuous and pre-eminently spiritual process’ through which ‘the graces and virtues of life, as well as the skills of mind and hand, are cultivated’.⁵¹ In his book *Lifelong Education*, published in 1929, Basil Yeaxlee, who had been joint-secretary of the ESA in its formative years, argued that an individual’s potential could be ‘drawn out and strengthened’ through the ‘practice of the arts’ within what he described as the ‘fellowship’ of adult education.⁵² Yeaxlee’s pluralistic approach to adult education promoted the quest for self-fulfilment.⁵³ He believed that whether ‘seeking the philosophic key to the meaning of existence’ or ‘discovering some hitherto unsuspected aptitude for using his hands artistically and skilfully’, each student would be ‘attaining a new understanding of himself and enriching the values of his world’.⁵⁴

Yeaxlee, who maintained that the expressive arts, such as painting, music and drama, were no less valuable than academic subjects, was a great admirer of London’s evening institutes:

Adult Learning in the United Kingdom (Leicester: National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education, 1997), p. 82.

⁴⁹ *Floodlight* (1936), p. 9.

⁵⁰ The ESA became the Educational Centres Association (ECA) in 1946.

⁵¹ *Memorandum 2: Educational Settlements in the Post-War Years*, Educational Settlements Association, 1941-2 (courtesy of Educational Centres Association chair Bernard Godding).

⁵² Yeaxlee, *Lifelong Education*, p. 48; see also *Community Education: Being a Description of the Work of Residential and Non-Residential Colleges for Adult Education* (London: Educational Settlements Association, 1938), p. 14.

⁵³ Cross-Durrant, A., ‘Basil Yeaxlee and the Origins of Lifelong Education’ in Jarvis, P. (ed), *Twentieth Century Thinkers in Adult Education* (London: Routledge, 1987), p. 52.

⁵⁴ Yeaxlee, *Lifelong Education*, p. 45.

It is beyond question that multitudes of men and women will never learn much, if anything from books. They are not built that way. They gain far more, aesthetically and intellectually, as well as socially and morally, by the use of their hands than by any other means. It will not do to brush aside handicrafts, hobbies, and other media of education which have been shown to possess such intrinsic value by the work of Women's Institutes, for example, or the London Men's Institutes, or the East London Art Club in Whitechapel which recently astonished the world by its exhibition of two hundred pictures painted by working men artists.⁵⁵

The ethos behind both the settlements and London's adult education provision was influenced by transcendental philosophy. Transcendentalists believed human life comprised two aspects: a subjective or spiritual internal world and an objective or material external world. These worlds were mediated by the aesthetic: the practice of the arts and crafts provided a 'gateway to the Awakening'.⁵⁶ Transcendentalists were criticised by social reformers for concentrating on self-improvement rather than social action. Yet both the Settlements and the LCC were working towards a collectivist goal through the nurturing of the individual: individualism was a route to collective betterment. London's institutes, as well as other prominent examples such as the Ashington Group (discussed in chapter 3, p. 100) and the East London Art Club praised by Yeaxlee, demonstrated that 'unsuspected talent' existed in those who, without evening classes in the arts, would have little opportunity for artistic self-expression.⁵⁷ By inspiring men and women who might otherwise never have discovered an interest in art, let alone join with others in a club or class to draw or paint, the LCC and the ESA not only developed a sense of pride in individual achievement, but also forged social bonds throughout the broader community.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 152-3.

⁵⁶ Harrison, J. F. C., *Learning and Living, 1790-1960: A Study in the History of the English Adult Education Movement* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961), pp. 142-3.

⁵⁷ *Floodlight* (1936), p. 13.

‘The will to endure’

Britain’s wartime experience served to develop an awareness of the vast reserves of artistic creativity amongst ordinary people (see chapter 1, p. 42-4). During the Second World War, adult education offered recreational courses of a shorter than usual duration to provide relief from the hostilities. Courses in the arts and crafts comprised more than five per cent of all courses offered in the Educational Settlements Association’s wartime curricula and, of the courses offered in liaison with local LEAs, the most popular subject after those dealing with wartime necessity (first aid, physical training, home nursing, dressmaking and cookery) was drawing and painting.⁵⁸ Art classes, taught by skilled artists and craftsmen, were also a popular part of the armed forces’ educational programme: courses in literature and painting more than tripled from 72 in 1941-2 to 239 in 1944-5.⁵⁹ Numerous art exhibitions by members of the armed forces were arranged across the provinces, some of which displayed hundreds of drawings and paintings and attracted thousands of visitors.⁶⁰

Activities in London’s evening institutes continued ‘with only temporary interruptions’.⁶¹ During the Blitz, thousands of special classes were organised in the city’s public air-raid shelters. From December 1940, classes in everything from painting to ballroom dancing were held in the various tunnels and recesses of the London Underground.⁶² Not only did these classes boost morale, but also they stimulated an interest in artistic expression across different sections of the population:

Many of the shelterers had, previously, only a vague idea of evening classes or what they meant. They developed new interests. They

⁵⁸ *Memorandum 2: Educational Settlements in the Post-War Years*; see also *Adult Education and the Local Education Authority* (London: Board of Education Adult Education Committee, 1933), p. 73.

⁵⁹ Wilson, N. S. *Education in the Forces 1939-46: The Civilian Contribution* (London: Evans Brothers, 1948), p. 69.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

⁶¹ Savage, E. G., ‘Introduction’ in *Floodlight* (London: London County Council, 1944-5), p. 3.

⁶² Devereux, *Adult Education in Inner London*, pp. 155-6.

listened intently to lectures on current events, international affairs, music and art. Grandmothers, mothers and children were taught dressmaking and needlework – in many cases their first lessons in “make-do and mend.” Portable cinemas projected topical films. The hours until bedtime were spent in an atmosphere of industry and enthusiasm. Those men, women and children were able to forget ... the grim happenings so near at hand. It is difficult to estimate the value and importance of these activities, but it is permissible modestly to believe that they played a certain part in the maintenance of public morale and the will to endure.⁶³

Following the war, *The Arts in England*, an Arts Council report on the current and future direction of the arts, argued that as a direct result of such initiatives:

Many people were introduced for the first time to the pleasures of music and painting and the drama in familiar surroundings which formed part of their every-day lives. ... Many people came to feel that art was no remote or unreal manifestation, but an accepted part of ordinary enjoyment.⁶⁴

The experience of wartime living, and creative relief from that experience, inspired a continued and sustained interest in the arts – evident in the high level of demand for both adult art education and art societies after 1945. It became clear that there existed ‘a great deal of latent talent’ in men and women who had never before attempted creative activities.⁶⁵ The authors of *The Arts in England* report presented an ambitious vision for the future democratisation of artistic creativity:

The most encouraging conclusion that can be reached from the extended distribution of the arts in the war years is that there exists in the majority of men and women a sound and rich capacity for artistic enjoyment. Its presence in the past has not been detected for there have been few opportunities for its exercise. With opportunity, its strength will grow until it becomes part of a new national life.⁶⁶

⁶³ Savage, ‘Introduction’ in *Floodlight* (1944-5), pp. 3-4.

⁶⁴ Evans, B. I. and Glasgow, M., *The Arts in England* (London: The Falcon Press, 1949), p. 117.

⁶⁵ Wilson, *Education in the Forces, 1939-46*, p. 80.

⁶⁶ Evans and Glasgow, *The Arts in England*, p. 19.

‘Opportunity’ was created by Section 41 of the 1944 Education Act, which made it the duty of every local education authority to provide:

Leisure-time occupation, in such organised cultural training and recreative activities as are suited to their requirements, for any persons over compulsory school age who are able and willing to profit by facilities for that purpose.⁶⁷

Section 42 of the 1944 Act requested every local authority prepare and submit a scheme for further education to the government for approval.⁶⁸ The vagueness of the act led to a great deal of variation in provision from authority to authority, yet it was implemented in most areas with vigour and enthusiasm. To help the LEAs draw up their schemes, the Ministry of Education published a pamphlet, which expanded on the idea of ‘learning for leisure’ as being to promote ‘individual happiness’ and a ‘civilized community’.⁶⁹ Leisure, the pamphlet asserted, was ‘a possession to be wisely used in the development of resources within oneself and to be shared with other people’.⁷⁰ Drawing on the example set by the LCC and the ESA, self-actualisation was, although not explicitly referred to as such, central to the founding ethos of local authority recreational adult education. This was not purely individualist, but rather part of a collectivist approach: through productive leisure, it was hoped, individuals would find self-fulfilment, and fulfilled individuals would, in turn, make for a better society.⁷¹

Providing creative opportunities for ‘the many’ through adult education laid a foundation for the expression of art within everyday life throughout the rest of the

⁶⁷ Dent, H. C., *The Education Act, 1944: Provisions, Possibilities, and Some Problems* (London: University of London Press, 1947 [3rd edition]), p. 46.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, p. 46.

⁶⁹ *Further Education: The Scope and Content of Its Opportunities Under the Education Act, 1944* (London: Ministry of Education, 1947), p. 32.

⁷⁰ *Further Education: The Scope and Content* (1947), p. 34; see also Sankey, V. and Dudley, J., *Adult Education After the War: A Report of an Enquiry Made for the British Institute of Adult Education* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1945), vii.

⁷¹ *Further Education: The Scope and Content* (1947), pp. 32-4.

century. Following the Second World War, and within a climate of growing security and optimism, adult education developed to cater for an increasingly affluent and leisured populace.⁷² By far the largest provision of courses for adults was made by the Local Education Authorities.⁷³ Between 1947 and 1950, the number of LEA evening institutes in England and Wales doubled and enrolments increased from around 825,000 to somewhere in the region of 1.25 million.⁷⁴ LEA provision was designed to complement that of the Workers Educational Association (WEA) and the university extra mural departments, whose funding regulations encouraged the academic study of the arts rather than engaging in the practical activities themselves (the Ashington Group, discussed in chapter 3, being a notable exception).⁷⁵ LEA-funded adult education provided an alternative: creative subjects in which students actively practiced their chosen subject during lesson time.⁷⁶ By 1952, 66.4 per cent of all adult education students in England and Wales took practical subjects (as opposed to academic or theoretical subjects) compared with 32.3 per cent in 1929.⁷⁷

In the early-1960s, J. F. C. Harrison, a historian of adult education, wondered if the welfare state might fill what William Morris once described as ‘the terrible gap between riches and poverty’ and thus give ‘popular art’ the ‘chance of a healthy life’.⁷⁸ Harrison argued that this was unlikely, given that increasing prosperity ‘did not stimulate a genuine popular art nor much more sustained interest in cultural activities’ but rather fostered only a ‘commercial mass-art’.⁷⁹ Yet the popular art was

⁷² Harrison, *Learning and Living*, pp. 329-31.

⁷³ *Ibid*, p. 314.

⁷⁴ Fieldhouse, ‘The Local Education Authorities and Adult Education’, p. 89.

⁷⁵ Stock, A., *Adult Education in the United Kingdom* (Leicester: National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education, 1982), p. 30. These regulations were relaxed in later years.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, p. 30.

⁷⁷ *Evening Institutes* (London: Ministry of Education Pamphlet No. 28, 1955), p. 48.

⁷⁸ William Morris quoted in Harrison, *Learning and Living*, p. 334.

⁷⁹ Harrison, *Learning and Living*, p. 334.

right under his nose: in adult education itself. As the Ministry of Reconstruction's adult education committee argued in 1956:

A true popular culture grows naturally and cannot be created by educational means, but we have certainly seen a very wide and popular dissemination of 'culture' in the common sense. The practical arts and crafts are now well looked after by local authorities.⁸⁰

Within an enormous expansion of non-vocational provision, the proportion of courses in fine art on offer was to grow significantly.

Popularity and growth

The provision of art courses at the short term residential colleges of England and Wales provides a striking example of this rapid growth. Following the Second World War, a number of short term residential colleges, funded mainly by the LEAs, were founded.⁸¹ These colleges were championed by educationist Sir Richard Livingstone who, inspired by the Danish Folk High School movement, argued that every LEA should have its own 'house of education'.⁸² Unlike the early residential colleges, which provided educational opportunity for the socially disadvantaged, there was no driving social purpose behind the foundation of the short term residential colleges.⁸³ They were intended to be 'inspirational rather than instructional'.⁸⁴ The emphasis was placed on personal development and self-fulfilment through the provision of courses in a broad range of arts, crafts, languages, and cultural subjects. Colleges were often

⁸⁰ *Design for Democracy: An Abridgment of a Report of the Adult Education Committee of the British Ministry of Reconstruction, Commonly Called the 1919 Report* (London: M. Parrish, 1956), p. 45.

⁸¹ Adkins, *The Arts and Adult Education*, p. 16.

⁸² Harris-Worthington, P., *Back to the Future: A Study of Short-Term Adult Residential Education* (Gwent: Hill Residential College, 1987), p. 12.

⁸³ Drews, W. and Fieldhouse, R., 'Residential Colleges and Non-Residential Settlements and Centres' in Fieldhouse, R. (ed), *A History of Modern British Adult Education* (Leicester: National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education, 1996), pp. 256-7.

⁸⁴ Harris-Worthington, *Back to the Future*, p. 13.

housed in historic buildings, many of which had been used by the military during the war.⁸⁵ These buildings, handed over to the authorities at the war's end, offered surroundings which were felt to add to the 'richness and depth' of creative courses.⁸⁶

The colleges took in groups of adults for three- or four-day courses, mostly at weekends.⁸⁷ This format proved popular with students, allowing a deeper exploration of the subject than the 'how to – in 10 lessons' usually encountered in the weekly meetings offered by adult education evening institutes.⁸⁸ Courses were popular with both tutors and students: well-known tutors were enticed by negotiable fees, and students benefited from being taught by established professionals.⁸⁹ The intake of students grew rapidly: from just over 20,000 in 1950-1, to more than 50,000 in 1960. By 1969 provision had peaked at more than 100,000 students (the same number was recorded in the 1990s).⁹⁰ Courses were advertised in the twice-yearly *Calendar of Residential Short Courses*, published every summer and winter from 1949 by the National Institute of Adult Education.⁹¹ As fig. 4.1 (below) illustrates, fine art courses in drawing and painting grew significantly in number between the 1950s and 1990s, increasing their percentage share of all courses offered by the short term residential colleges throughout the period.

⁸⁵ Miller, R., 'Painting in Stately Homes' in *Leisure Painter* (Summer, 1970), p. 38.

⁸⁶ Raymond, 'Creative Leisure in Short Term Residential Colleges', pp. 5-6.

⁸⁷ Harrison, *Learning and Living*, pp. 317-8.

⁸⁸ Adkins, *The Arts and Adult Education*, p. 92.

⁸⁹ *Ibid*, p. 93; see also Miller, 'Painting in Stately Homes', p. 38.

⁹⁰ Drews and Fieldhouse, 'Residential Colleges and Non-Residential Settlements and Centres', pp. 256-8.

⁹¹ Formerly the British Institute of Adult Education (BIAE) and later to become the National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education (NIACE).

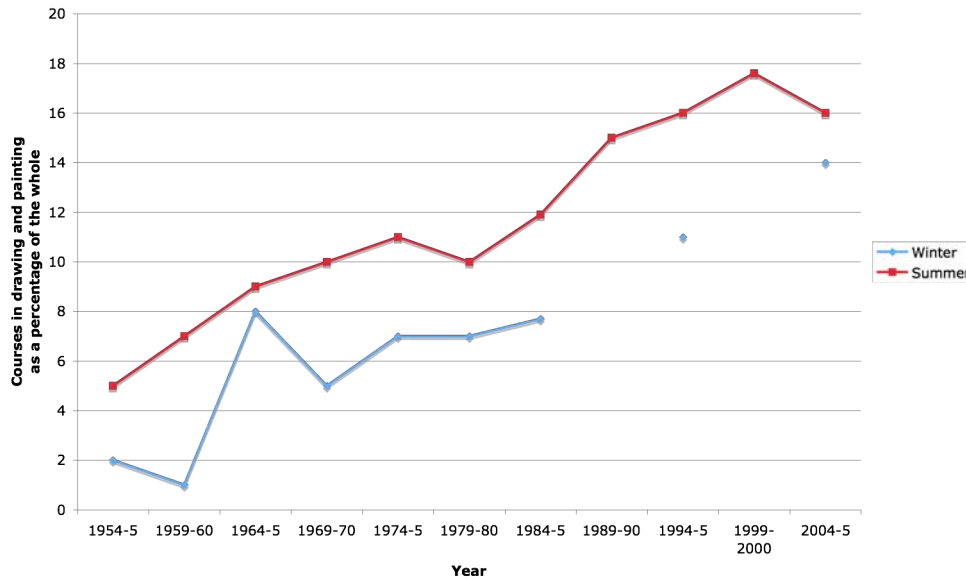


Fig. 4.1: Fine art courses as a percentage of all short term residential college courses, 1954-2005

Source: NIAE/NIACE Calendar of Residential Short Courses, 1954-2005

The popularity of art courses at the short term residential colleges was an indication of the connection between a growing number of actively engaged amateur artists, and increasing personal affluence and leisure. More fine art courses were offered in the Summer than in the Winter; in Summer 1955, for example, there were more than twice as many courses in drawing and painting as in the winter of 1954-5. This was because art courses at the short term residential colleges functioned as reasonably-priced artists' holidays. Going on holiday with strangers on commercial courses advertised in magazines like *The Artist* became increasingly popular from the 1950s onwards.⁹² Initially these holidays were in the UK, at places like The Earnley Concourse, a non-profit making venture with the motto 'education is your vacation'.⁹³ As travel abroad became more accessible in the late-1950s, courses took place across

⁹² Baynes, P. and Marx, H., 'Adult Education Auxiliaries and Informal Learning' in Fieldhouse, R. (ed), *A History of Modern British Adult Education* (Leicester: National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education, 1996), p. 316.

⁹³ Review of educational courses at 'The Earnley Concourse' in *Leisure Painter* (Sep., 1975), p. 3.

Europe.⁹⁴ By the 1970s, art classes of up to 60 adult students were taking place aboard P&O cruise ships.⁹⁵

In addition to the impartation of skills and knowledge, artists' holidays aimed to provide 'happiness and enjoyment' to amateurs through the creation of a socially rewarding environment.⁹⁶ Galleon Holidays, which started life as the Workers' Travel Association in 1947, was largely responsible for the growth of the artists' holiday industry in the UK. The focus was as much on social as artistic development. As one Galleon Holiday attendee reported in 1972: 'In no time at all it becomes ... a grand social gathering and by the end of the week we have acquired a host of new friends.'⁹⁷ At the competitively-priced short term residential colleges, students could also 'work in congenial company' for anything from a few days to a few weeks.⁹⁸ Meeting others was central to the experience:

The painter, like anyone else, needs a change of scene – a different landscape to stimulate his creativity, a few weeks' break from his usual activities at the local art club or evening classes. ... A painting holiday is surely a rare treat ... with the added bonus of professional instruction. And, nearly as important, to benefit from the chance of meeting other student painters from all over the country and to realise that they, too, have suffered the same diffidence before joining the group.⁹⁹

Whether a holiday course or a weekly class at the local evening institute, adult education provided a social activity which, for many amateur artists, made their sometimes lonely pursuit worthwhile. Classes introduced fellow amateurs to one another and allowed students to share in the process of art making:

⁹⁴ Baynes and Marx, 'Adult Education Auxiliaries and Informal Learning', p. 316.

⁹⁵ Squires, W., 'Painting for Pleasure with P&O' in *Leisure Painter* (Sep., 1972), p. 41.

⁹⁶ Profile of Edward Swann, founder of Galleon Holidays in *Leisure Painter* (Mar., 1972), p. 12.

⁹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 12.

⁹⁸ Miller, 'Painting in Stately Homes', p. 37.

⁹⁹ Painting holiday pullout supplement in *Leisure Painter* (Mar., 1976), p. 1.

Art and especially painting is popular because of the freedom it allows for expression in all mediums at all levels, including friendly association among group members, opportunity for stimulation by comparison and the widening of ideas among the differing personalities.¹⁰⁰

Adult education was not simply an individualistic alternative to the art societies discussed in chapters 2 and 3; social contact was crucial to the success of many classes, providing amateur artists with an easily accessible environment in which to create and enhance social capital.¹⁰¹

As the ‘golden age’ progressed, artists’ holidays increased in popularity to such an extent that choosing where to go could be overwhelming. ‘This year’, an article in *Leisure Painter* magazine reported, ‘there is such a wide choice of holidays that our problem will be to decide which splendid fortnight to pick.’¹⁰² Private companies advertised exciting trips – a ‘sketching holiday’ in Yugoslavia in conjunction with *The Artist* magazine, for example – in the pages of the *Calendar of Residential Short Courses*.¹⁰³ In response to this direct competition, the short term residential colleges endeavoured to set their own offerings apart. Across all subjects, tutors tried to entice prospective students by advertising courses under seductive titles.¹⁰⁴ Whereas in the 1950s drawing and painting courses were straightforwardly named ‘sketching and figure drawing’ or ‘painting for pleasure’, by the 1960s course titles became more imaginative, often including the name of the tutor – many of whom were well-known

¹⁰⁰ ‘Not Many Masterpieces but Wonderful Enjoyment’ in *Leisure Painter* (Mar., 1971), pp. 16-21.

¹⁰¹ Newman, M., *The Poor Cousin: A Study of Adult Education* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1979), p. 149; see also Rogers, J., *Adults Learning* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1971), p. 21.

¹⁰² Editorial in *Leisure Painter* (Spring, 1970), p. 3.

¹⁰³ *Calendar of Residential Short Courses* (Leicester: National Institute of Adult Education, 1960), p. 22; adverts for companies like Galleon were placed in all the amateur artists’ magazines, for example *Amateur Artist*, Vol. 1, No. 10 (Feb., 1967), pp. 18-21.

¹⁰⁴ Harrison, *Learning and Living*, p. 318.

artists.¹⁰⁵ Several courses in landscape painting advertised in 1960, for example, featured the names of prominent artists such as Gilbert Spencer, John Addyman and John Nash.¹⁰⁶ This capitalised on the allure of the artist as teacher and on the growing trend for students to follow tutors rather than course type.¹⁰⁷

Competition fuelled demand, adult educationists believed, because ‘latent demand’ could be stimulated through the provision of ‘overt and effective supply’.¹⁰⁸ Art courses at the short term residential colleges increased from two per cent of all courses in 1954-5 to 8.3 per cent in the Winter of 1964-5, and from five per cent in 1955 to nine per cent in the Summer of 1965 (see fig. 4.1, above). By the 1960s, courses in drawing and painting accounted for one third of all arts courses at the short term residential colleges which, in turn, made up more than one third of the entire programme. Fine art courses – ‘clearly the most popular for short courses’ – had an edge.¹⁰⁹ Demand began to outstrip supply. The appetite for art courses was so great, and bookings made so far in advance, that the *Calendar* may actually underestimate the real number of courses that took place, since many were so heavily subscribed there was no need for them to be advertised (often, due to the level of interest, where one course was advertised, more than one would run).¹¹⁰ Courses at the short term residential colleges continued to increase throughout the 1970s. In 1974-5, 236 courses in drawing and painting were advertised.¹¹¹ By 1979-80, the number had increased by 63 per cent to 385.¹¹²

¹⁰⁵ See, for example, *Calendar of Residential Short Courses* (Leicester: National Institute of Adult Education, 1955), p. 9.

¹⁰⁶ *Calendar of Residential Short Courses* (Leicester: National Institute of Adult Education, 1960), pp. 24-6 and p. 45.

¹⁰⁷ Interview with former Oxfordshire adult education officer Rosemary Napper, Oxford, 2011.

¹⁰⁸ Sargant, *Learning and Leisure*, p. 98.

¹⁰⁹ Raymond, ‘Creative Leisure in Short Term Residential Colleges’, p. 6.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 5-6.

¹¹¹ *Calendar of Residential Short Courses* (Leicester: National Institute of Adult Education, 1975).

¹¹² *Calendar of Residential Short Courses* (Leicester: National Institute of Adult Education, 1979-80), p. 4.

Having already embarked on such provision before the war, the number of courses provided in fine art in London's adult institutes also grew significantly in the postwar decades. The number of drawing and painting courses listed in *Floodlight*, a guide to part-time courses in London's twelve inner boroughs and the City of London, more than trebled from 95 to 307 between 1960 and 1980 (see fig. 4.2, below).

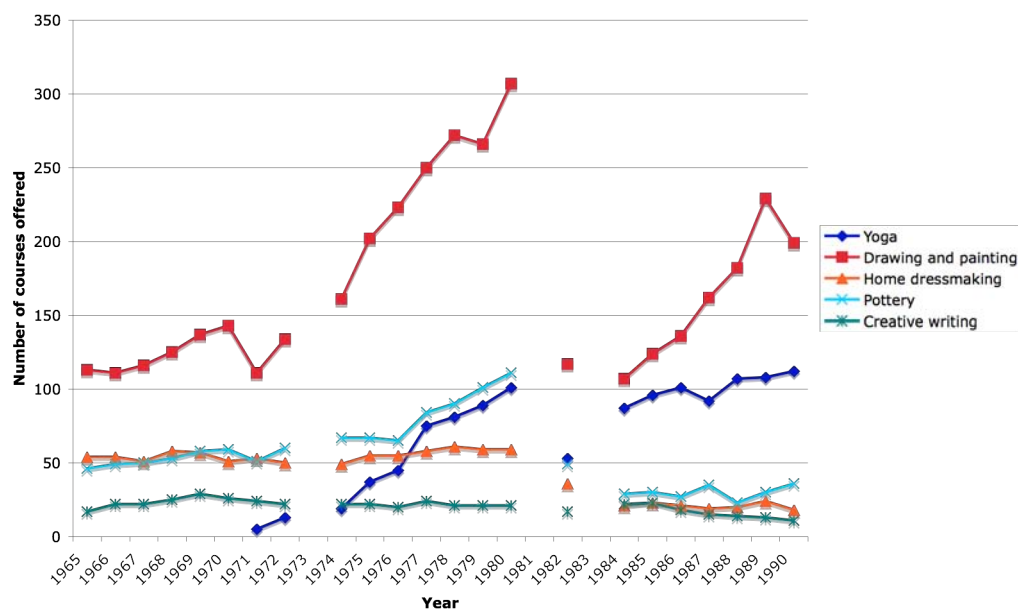


Fig. 4.2: ILEA adult education courses, 1965-90

Source: *Floodlight*, 1965-90

Notes: Reporting altered continually throughout the period so this graph can only provide a rough indicator of change. The difference between drawing and painting and other courses is however significant enough to warrant attention.¹¹³

Similarly to the short term residential colleges, more drawing and painting classes were offered than for any other art or craft class; as fig. 4.2 (above) illustrates, practical classes in fine art were more popular than those in pottery, dressmaking or creative writing. They were also more popular than yoga, included here because its

¹¹³ Apart from a brief suspension during the war until 1944-5, *Floodlight* provided consistent information on courses available in the inner London boroughs from 1936 until 1990. Initially, subject areas were listed, and readers referred to the relevant institutions for more information. From 1960, *Floodlight* listed every single course available at the inner borough's evening institutes. Due to changes in reporting and categorisation of arts subjects throughout the period, only courses in drawing and painting were counted to ensure consistency. From 1990, *Floodlight*'s remit enlarged to incorporate greater London, not just the central boroughs. To avoid the expanding catchment area skewing analysis, only data up to 1990 is shown.

rise in popularity since the 1970s gives a good indication of the extent to which art classes attracted students. The flatlining popularity of traditional crafts such as home dressmaking was possibly the result of greater personal affluence and the availability of cheap manufactured goods, which allowed more people to pay others to make things for them, or to buy items ready-made.¹¹⁴ Yet courses in fine art had always been more popular than other creative courses: the first survey of adult education provision across England in 1936 found that, out of all the creative courses available at the time, the most popular were in watercolour and oil painting, closely followed by linocut and sketching.¹¹⁵ Due to the need for specialist materials, craft courses tended to be more expensive than courses in drawing or painting; the cost of taking a course such as pottery or woodwork was, for example, often considerably more than the headline fee (for a discussion of the ever-decreasing cost of fine art materials see chapter 7, pp. 213-19).¹¹⁶ Creative writing did not necessitate a large outlay for materials, yet its low popularity may be due to the fact that, as Basil Yeaxlee argued, literary pursuits did not appeal to the ‘multitudes’ (see p. 139).¹¹⁷

Throughout the postwar years, in services across Britain, adult education was subsidised in order to attract as wide a clientele as possible. London in particular boasted low fees, building on its early work attracting students from less affluent socio-economic backgrounds.¹¹⁸ While this encouraged a wide range of students to participate in adult education, the increase in the number of courses offered was in large part a response to the greater level of involvement by women in the postwar

¹¹⁴ Sargant, *Learning and Leisure*, p. 38.

¹¹⁵ Williams, W. E. and Heath, A. E., *Learn and Live: The Consumer's View of Adult Education* (Methuen and Co., 1936), p. 138.

¹¹⁶ Knott, C. A., *'I Can't Wait For Wednesday': The Crafts in Adult Education* (London: Crafts Council, 1987), p. 37.

¹¹⁷ Yeaxlee, *Lifelong Education*, p. 152; the art critic Eric Newton expressed a similar sentiment during the Second World War, see Newton, E., ‘Art for Everybody’ in *Britain Advances* (London: British Council pamphlet, 1943), p. 25.

¹¹⁸ ‘Art Classes of the Inner London Education Authority, Session 1967-8’ in *Amateur Artist*, Vol. 2, No. 5 (Sep., 1967), pp. 35-9.

years. In the early years of provision, men and women were taught separately in their respective institutes, with the latter being provided courses mostly in practical and domestic ‘women’s subjects’. Gradually, however, men and women began to join the same classes and activities, a development accelerated by the war.¹¹⁹ By the 1950s, the boundaries were increasingly blurred and, by the 1990s, the balance between the sexes in the take up of fine art courses was remarkably equal. One survey from 1997 found that seven per cent of both male and female LEA adult learners in the UK participated in painting classes.¹²⁰ This reflects a far more balanced mixture of male and female students than in adult education in general, where three quarters of students were women.¹²¹ The increased presence of women in adult education echoes their growing membership of the art societies discussed in chapters 2 and 3, as greater involvement in the workforce, combined with improved educational opportunities, encouraged female participation in a variety of community activities.¹²²

A changing climate

By the 1980s the vision of adult education as a social good worthy of public investment had begun to fragment.¹²³ Following a series of economic shocks during the 1970s, financial cutbacks became an annual occurrence (see chapter 1, pp. 56-8). Reductions in Local Education Authority expenditure were severe, and adult

¹¹⁹ *Further Education: The Scope and Content* (1947), p. 51.

¹²⁰ Sargant, *Learning Divide*, p. 84. Surveys differ, however: one 1982 Advisory Council of Adult and Continuing Education (ACACE) survey found that four times as many women took courses in painting or sculpture than men, although the survey notes that a similar number of men and women would have liked to have taken courses in the arts and crafts when they were younger. See *Adults: Their Educational Experience and Needs* (Leicester: ACACE, 1982), p. 54.

¹²¹ This has been a longstanding situation: see Rogers, J. and Groombridge, B., *Right to Learn: The Case for Adult Equality* (London: Arrow Books, 1976), p. 133; and Sargant, *Learning and Leisure*, p. 12.

¹²² Hall, P. A., ‘Social Capital in Britain’ in *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 29, No. 3 (July 1999), p. 437.

¹²³ Fieldhouse, R., ‘Historical and Political Context’ in Fieldhouse, R. (ed), *A History of Modern British Adult Education* (Leicester: National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education, 1996), p. 7.

education services plunged into austerity, as Britain entered a period of social, political and economic turbulence.¹²⁴ This was not the first time the non-vocational side of the adult education service had been threatened with cuts. In 1953, the Ministry of Education announced a 10 per cent cut in grant to liberal arts subjects. The news was greeted by a storm of protest and the Ashby Report, commissioned by the Ministry to pacify criticism, called instead for the proposed cuts to be abandoned.¹²⁵ In the 1970s, however, cuts were presented as a necessity and legitimised by a climate of stringent spending restrictions across the public sector.

The cuts, which were initially justified as being in response to fiscal crisis in the 1970s, had by the 1980s become ideologically entrenched. Reductions in LEA expenditure on adult education grew increasingly severe as the value and purpose of adult education was systematically reconceptualised; cuts to services stemmed from the belief that the chief beneficiary of recreational classes – the individual – should pay for their own enjoyment. Subsidies were directed towards vocational adult education and the cost of recreational courses placed increasingly on the student.¹²⁶

In most areas, recreational services began to shrink: fees increased, course lengths were shortened and, in some cases, provision suspended altogether.¹²⁷ Vestiges of the collectivist spirit of the postwar settlement remained. In 1973 the Russell Report on adult education in England and Wales argued that:

¹²⁴ Hobsbawm, E., *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914-1991* (London: Abacus, 1995), p. 403.

¹²⁵ Ashby, E., 'Foreword' in Ashby, E., Briggs, A. and Stephens, M. D. (eds), *The Ashby Report: The Organisation and Finance of Adult Education in England and Wales* (Nottingham: University of Nottingham Department of Adult Education, 1954), pp. 1-2.

¹²⁶ Largely a by-product of the 1992 Higher and Further Education Act, which rendered only courses focused on qualifications eligible for funding. See Fieldhouse, 'The Local Education Authorities and Adult Education', pp. 103-5; Martin, I., 'Community Education: The Dialectics of Development' in Fieldhouse, R. (ed), *A History of Modern British Adult Education* (Leicester: National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education, 1996), p. 139; and also Adkins, *The Arts and Adult Education*, p. 18.

¹²⁷ Tuckett, 'Counting the Cost', p. 21.

The value of adult education is not solely to be measured by direct increases in earning power or productive capacity or by any other materialistic yardstick, but by the quality of life it inspires in the individual and generates for the community at large.¹²⁸

Yet in the new climate of targets and productivity, the argument for community enrichment through individual betterment lost ground, and rigid funding criteria made it increasingly difficult for adult education officers to legitimise subsidies for non-vocational courses.

London fared better than most authorities during the 1980s, and was able to protect and even increase its budget throughout the decade.¹²⁹ In 1987-8, fees were nearly half that of the rest of the English counties – at 39 pence as opposed to an average of 77 pence per hour per head.¹³⁰ Yet by the early-1990s the city's adult education service, which by this point provided for nearly 14 per cent of all local authority adult education in England and Wales, had begun to feel the strain.¹³¹ After the ILEA was abolished by central government in 1990, London was exposed to the 'catastrophic' cuts that were taking place in adult education services across the country.¹³² As responsibility for provision was fragmented between the capital's various inner boroughs, the central strategic planning, which had ensured sufficient funding across services, was lost. An increasing amount of pressure was placed on successor authorities to cut spending; the inner boroughs' adult education services experienced year-upon-year budget reductions.¹³³

¹²⁸ Russell Report, *Adult Education: A Plan for Development* (London: HMSO, 1973), xi.

¹²⁹ Tuckett, 'Counting the Cost', p. 25; see also Devereux, *Adult Education in Inner London*, pp. 285-93.

¹³⁰ Hutchison, R. and Feist, A., *Amateur Arts in the UK: The PSI Survey of Amateur Arts and Crafts in the UK* (London: The Policy Studies Institute, 1991), p. 101.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

¹³² Tuckett, 'Counting the Cost', p. 38.

¹³³ Fletcher, N., 'Introduction' to *Floodlight* (London: Inner London Education Authority (ILEA), 1988-9), p. 2; and also Fletcher, N., 'Introduction' to *Floodlight* (London: ILEA, 1989-90), p. 2.

While adult education enrolments in aggregate fell, the take up of classes in fine art in both London and the short term residential colleges continued to rise. The number of art courses offered in London's inner boroughs increased during a period in which enrolments in other non-vocational arts and crafts subjects showed a comparative decline (see fig. 4.2, p. 150). Similarly, in the *Calendar* for the short term residential colleges, painting and drawing continued to have the largest number of listings throughout the 1980s; summer art courses had by 1990 more than quadrupled to 395 from 87 in 1970. In 1980 the newly elected Thatcher government predicted as much: in a report which planned to cut public spending on adult education by one third, it was stated that 'if most of this saving is achieved through increased fees, enrolments should not substantially fall below the current level'.¹³⁴

The provision of adult education had always operated on a simple model of supply and demand. Popular courses ran year after year, and additional courses were organised if requested by enough students (normally somewhere between 10 and 20 students were required for a course to run). If a course ceased to attract a sufficient number of students, however, it would be discontinued. Where once supply and demand had been a guiding principle, now it became the central feature of provision as adult education centres, institutes and colleges grew increasingly market-oriented.¹³⁵ As *Leisure Painter* magazine advised readers concerned about the future availability of their local art classes: 'The most likely and most noticeable effect of the economies is that classes that do not get their required minimum numbers, or do not keep up to them, will be much more rigidly closed down.'¹³⁶

¹³⁴ Public Expenditure White Paper [Cmnd. 7841] quoted in Adkins, *The Arts and Adult Education*, p. 17.

¹³⁵ Drews and Fieldhouse, 'Residential Colleges and Non-Residential Settlements and Centres', p. 259.

¹³⁶ 'Your Problems' in *Leisure Painter* (Sep., 1977), p. 28.

The removal of subsidies forced adult education providers to go ‘up-market’ in order to support themselves, vying with commercial providers whose fees were now uncomfortably close.¹³⁷ The popularity of courses in fine art guaranteed institutes and colleges a reliable baseline of income on which they could depend. As a result, an immense and ever-expanding range of art courses continued to be made available to leisure painters, from the basic ‘painting for beginners’ and ‘painting for everyone’, to the fashionable ‘Chinese brush painting’, the therapeutic ‘help yourself painting week’ and the spiritual ‘prayer and painting’.¹³⁸ The merits of such courses were presented in much the same way as they had been in the 1950s: emphasising the personal and social rewards of painting for pleasure. In London’s *Floodlight*, courses with ‘no direct relevance to work or exams’ continued to be offered ‘for sheer mental or physical enjoyment’.¹³⁹ The short term residential colleges, which remained part of the non-vocational adult education service provided by many LEAs, promised ‘the chance to pass a few free days pleurably and purposefully’ by ‘following an old hobby or new interest in congenial surroundings and among fellow enthusiasts’.¹⁴⁰

The growth in recreational art courses during this period of escalating fees would not have come as a great surprise to long-serving adult educationists. In 1950, when fees increased for the first time since 1934, enrolments at London’s evening institutes fell by 17 per cent. In response, the programme of courses was widened to cater for an increasingly affluent, leisured and middle class populace; the number of courses in creative subjects grew and, by 1959-60, enrolments had fully recovered.¹⁴¹

¹³⁷ Harris-Worthington, *Back to the Future*, p. 25; Baynes and Marx, ‘Adult Education Auxiliaries and Informal Learning’, p. 316; see also Newman, *The Poor Cousin*, p. 16; and Tuckett, ‘Counting the Cost’, p. 29.

¹³⁸ Courses advertised in *Floodlight* and the *Calendar of Residential Short Courses* towards the end of the twentieth century.

¹³⁹ ‘Introduction’ in *Floodlight* (London: Floodlight Publishing, 1999-2000), p. 3.

¹⁴⁰ *Calendar of Residential Short Courses* (Leicester: National Institute of Adult Education, 1974-5), p. 4.

¹⁴¹ Devereux, *Adult Education in Inner London*, pp. 183-7.

In the last few decades of the twentieth century, however, this occasional tendency to balance the books became entrenched: recreational adult education now depended solely on self-financing individuals.¹⁴² The overall picture was one of remarkable stability, and even growth, in the provision of fine art courses, but this obscured an underlying problem: as fees escalated, the clientele changed. As leisure courses grew increasingly self-financing, they became available only to those who could afford to pay the market rate, excluding many adults who might otherwise have benefited from them.¹⁴³

Recategorising adult education

‘One may wonder if, despite all the efforts of the Arts Council and the BBC, there would be anything like the present degree of public interest in the arts but for the permeating influences of adult education,’ wrote adult educationist Enid Hutchinson in 1966.¹⁴⁴ In the latter half of the twentieth century, amateur artistic experience was extended to the masses through local authority classes in fine art. The importance of recreational adult education was recognised with enthusiasm in the postwar years, when Britain was undertaking a costly programme of rebuilding following the war. Why, when the nation was ostensibly a far more affluent place three decades on, did the perception of recreational adult education change?

Cuts in publicly-funded adult education services in both London and the short term residential colleges followed a period of significant expansion in provision as adult education, once an investment good, was reconceptualised as a consumer

¹⁴² Harris-Worthington, *Back to the Future*, p. 25.

¹⁴³ Adkins, *The Arts and Adult Education*, p. 33; and also Fieldhouse, R., ‘British Adult Education: Past, Present and Future’ in Fieldhouse, R. (ed), *A History of Modern British Adult Education* (Leicester: National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education, 1996), p. 392.

¹⁴⁴ Hutchinson, ‘Action in the Arts’, p. 20.

good.¹⁴⁵ The collectivist tradition which motivated early adult education was, in the Thatcher years, replaced with an ‘individualist ideology’ whereby the ‘pursuit of essentially individual goals’ could be ‘theoretically justified as self-actualisation’.¹⁴⁶ Yet individualism was not the antithesis of either adult education or a just society; it was present in the founding ethos of ‘learning for leisure’, and self-actualisation (although not named as such) was a central tenet in the philosophy shared by the Educational Settlements Association and London County Council’s pioneering adult education officers. The key difference was that, in the postwar years, individual self-fulfilment was regarded as beneficial to society whereas, in the Thatcher era, the individual’s gain was considered to be their own private business. Adult education set out to nurture the individual but, as the century drew to a close, individualism became an end in itself: a system based on transcendentalism adapted for market liberalism.

Adult education offered intrinsic benefits for learners and, in so doing, benefited society in general. Intangible and nebulous, these benefits were difficult to quantify. As cuts deepened, adult educationists continued to fight the contraction of their services with language similar to that of the postwar planners. ‘The arts and adult education are not frills,’ argued the chairman of the Advisory Council for Adult and Continuing Education in 1981, ‘but basic to the business of living.’¹⁴⁷ In 1991, a long-overdue survey of the amateur arts in the UK stated the centrality of adult education to the arts:

Adult education classes have been a route taken by hundreds of thousands of people to practise and develop their artistic skills. In an affluent society like Britain, there should be no question that those who wish to engage in arts and crafts, either as beginners or as more

¹⁴⁵ Tuckett, ‘Counting the Cost’, p. 22.

¹⁴⁶ Fieldhouse, ‘An Overview of British Adult Education in the Twentieth Century’, p. 75; see also Hall, ‘Social Capital in Britain’, p. 458; and Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes*, p. 334.

¹⁴⁷ Hoggart, R. and Shaw, R., ‘Foreword’ in Adkins, G., *The Arts and Adult Education* (Leicester: Advisory Council for Adult and Continuing Education, 1981), iii.

experienced practitioners, and who wish to develop their skills and knowledge, should have the opportunity to do so.¹⁴⁸

By this point, however, it was already too late: the vision of individual fulfilment through social improvement had been replaced with a model of consumer choice determined by financial capability. In the shift from social democracy to market liberalism, the popularity of adult education art courses did not wane, but the task of engaging the breadth of clientele envisaged in the 1940s became increasingly difficult to realise. As funding for recreational courses was withdrawn, only those who could afford to pay, or those willing to prioritise recreational adult education above other needs were, by the end of the twentieth century, able to benefit from an adult education in art.

¹⁴⁸ Hutchison and Feist, *Amateur Arts in the UK*, p. 141.

CHAPTER 5

Educating the community

*'It does not make sense to educate a whole generation to enjoy reading, acting, listening to music, painting, playing an instrument and so on for the while they are at school, and then neglect to provide exciting opportunities and activities for them later.'*¹

Instituted with the postwar settlement, community education was a central feature of local authority adult education. Guided by an egalitarian vision of developing the individual's interests in relation to his or her local community, community education centres nurtured the growth of both adult art education and local art clubs. In the 1980s, the vision of community learning fragmented. The shift from social democracy to market liberalism led to widely differing outcomes in the provision of recreational art classes – outcomes which depended, largely, on the socio-economic makeup of each adult education centre's local community. While affluent areas continued to enjoy non-vocational courses like fine art, poorer communities struggled to maintain similar provision.² This chapter examines Oxfordshire's adult education service. Initially, demand for art courses in the county's more affluent areas was sufficient to maintain the impression of overall growth. By the late-1990s, however, cuts to Oxfordshire's community education budget were so severe the total number of recreational courses in fine art began to decline. In the transition from collectivism to individualism, what had originally been intended as a service for all became a privilege for the few.

Prior to the Second World War, art education in Oxfordshire was limited. The City of Oxford School of Arts and Crafts ran evening classes to train those working,

¹ Duncan, N. S., *The Arts in the South: A Preliminary Survey and Report* (Winchester: Southern Arts Association, 1970), p. 34.

² Variation existed regionally and locally: see Sargant, N., *Learning and Leisure: A Study of Adult Participation in Learning and Its Policy Implications* (Leicester: National Institute of Adult Education, 1991), p. 12.

or intending to work, in industry or the teaching profession, but offered no recreational opportunities for adults.³ Local Education Authority (LEA) adult education, meanwhile, focused on vocational courses provided by technical colleges and evening institutes.⁴ The technical colleges, which had grown out of the mechanics institutes, provided the only non-vocational courses for adults in the interwar years.⁵ The ‘recreative department’ at Oxford’s Central Evening Institute for Girls and Women (the women’s branch of the City Technical School), for example, provided female students with courses in the arts and humanities – from literature and social history to dancing and the domestic arts. One of the 19 courses on offer at the institute in the late-1920s was in drawing and painting.⁶

The 1944 Education Act created ‘a revolution’ in Oxfordshire’s provision.⁷ A scheme for county-wide further education was prepared: adult and community education centres were to be located in smaller towns and city districts, functioning, for the most part, as evening institutes, and technical and further education colleges would be built in the larger towns. All were to offer non-vocational courses to adults.⁸ It was a few years before the scheme’s aspirations were fully realised. The city of Oxford, for example, was slow to adopt non-vocational and recreational leisure courses. Courses in artistic or cultural subjects were considered by some of the city’s traditional adult educationists to lack ‘the more direct sense of social purpose’ which had informed the work of university extension and the Workers’ Educational

³ Brookes, J. H., *Headmaster’s Report for Oxford School of Arts and Crafts, 1928-29* (Oxfordshire Records Office, Oxfo 370 pamphlet).

⁴ *Opportunities: A Handbook on Further Education in Oxfordshire* (Oxfordshire County Council Education Committee, 1947-48), p. 7 (Oxfordshire Records Office, Oxfo 370 pamphlet).

⁵ Harrison, J. F. C., *Learning and Living, 1790-1960: A Study in the History of the English Adult Education Movement* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961), p. 213.

⁶ Oxford Central Evening Institute for Girls and Women prospectuses, City of Oxford Education Committee, 1928-29 and 1929-30 (Oxfordshire Records Office, Oxfo 374 pamphlet).

⁷ *Opportunities: A Handbook on Further Education in Oxfordshire* (1947-48), p. 7.

⁸ Pickstock, F. V., ‘Adult and Further Education in Oxford’ in Rowley, T. (ed), *The Oxford Region* (Oxford: Oxford University Department for External Studies, 1980), p. 230.

Association.⁹ Across the county there was an emphasis on remedial education in the late-1940s: preparing adult students for basic qualifications that had been forgone during the war. As illustrated in fig. 5.1 (below) English, mathematics, and woodwork were the most popular subjects among adult students at the evening institutes during this period.

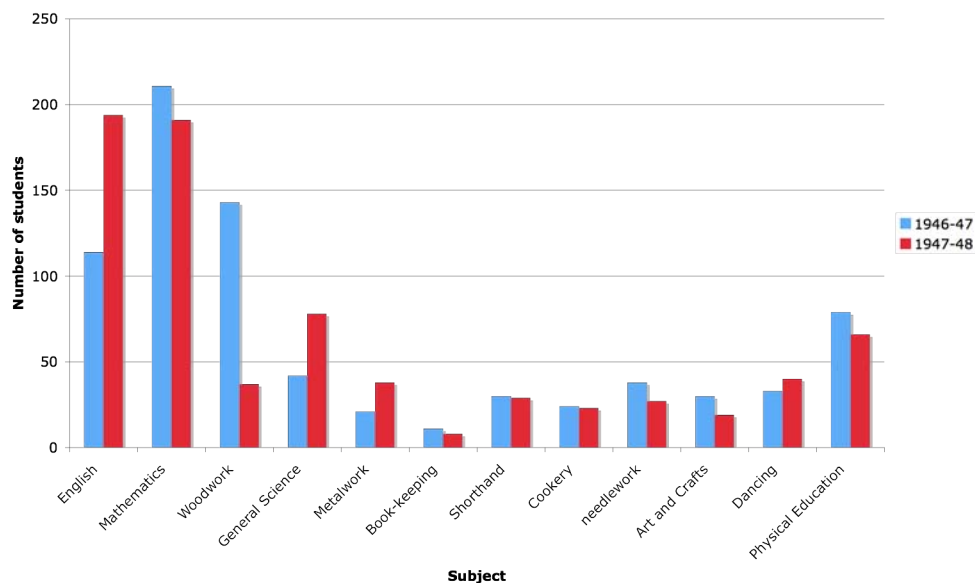


Fig. 5.1: Student enrolments at Oxfordshire's evening institutes, by subject, 1946-48
Source: 'Table III: List of enrolments for each subject for the sessions 1946-47 and 1947-48' in a supplement to Oxfordshire's Scheme of Further Education (1949), p. 14 (Oxfordshire Records Office, Oxfo 378)

Initially, the arts and crafts accounted for a relatively small number of enrolments. Art was, however, high on the agenda; in 1947, Oxfordshire's adult education providers set themselves the 'object of pioneering this field in the county and developing among young people and adults an appreciation of good painting and a desire to express themselves creatively through Art'.¹⁰ The number of non-vocational courses provided at technical institutes duly increased. Courses were offered to those who wished to pursue the arts and crafts in a professional capacity, as

⁹ *Ibid*, p. 229; see also *A Survey of Adult Education Provided by Responsible Bodies in the County of Oxfordshire and the County Borough of Oxford* (London: Ministry of Education, 1951).

¹⁰ *Opportunities: A Handbook on Further Education in Oxfordshire* (1947-8), p. 18.

well as those who sought to occupy their leisure time with creative activity.¹¹ Henley Technical Institute, for example, held courses ‘appealing to the housewife and the handy-man’ during the day, and in the evening provided classes ‘for the worker seeking relaxation through creative leisure’.¹² The further education colleges, built as a priority following the war to provide vocational education to school leavers, also took on some responsibility for adult education. In the original architectural plans for the Oxford College of Further Education, adult education was allocated various rooms and facilities for the pursuit of leisure time studies in, amongst other subjects, the arts and crafts.¹³

The majority of non-vocational adult education provision in the county was focused in the smaller community education centres, following a drive towards their formation by the Ministry of Education at the end of the Second World War.¹⁴ Out of all the county’s adult education services, these centres received the largest contribution from the LEA. This was given in the form of premises, an organising secretary, and grant-aid to cover administrative costs and up to 50 per cent of the educational programme. The remaining 50 per cent was covered by students’ fees, which were similar to those at the technical colleges.¹⁵ In 1958, local communities were empowered by central government to take over the organisation of their local community education centres from the County Education Office, giving them greater

¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 11.

¹² *Ibid*, pp. 13-14.

¹³ *Scheme of Further Education and Plan for County Colleges for Submission to the Ministry of Education Under the Provisions of Section 42 (1) and Section 43 (2) of the Education Act, 1944* (Oxfordshire Education Committee, Oxfordshire County Council, 1949), p. 32 (Oxfordshire Records Office, Oxfo 378).

¹⁴ *Further Education: The Scope and Content of Its Opportunities Under the Education Act, 1944* (London: Ministry of Education, 1947), p. 55; see also Baynes, P. and Marx, H., ‘Adult Education Auxiliaries and Informal Learning’ in Fieldhouse, R. (ed), *A History of Modern British Adult Education* (Leicester: National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education, 1996), p. 311.

¹⁵ *Survey of Adult Non-Vocational Education in Oxfordshire Conducted During the Academic Year 1966-67* (London: Department of Education and Science, 1967), pp. 2-3.

autonomy and direct control over the courses provided.¹⁶ By the mid-1960s, Oxfordshire's community centres were steadily growing. In 1967 there were 16 centres across the county, mostly run by local management committees on secondary school premises.¹⁷ In a style reminiscent of the Educational Settlements Association (see chapter 4, pp. 138-9), Oxfordshire's community education officers aimed to provide 'opportunities for individuals to develop their intellectual and artistic potential' through the 'enjoyment of recreational and leisure pursuits'.¹⁸

In the 1960s, Oxfordshire's scheme for adult and further education was considered to be 'a very good example of what can be achieved' by an LEA.¹⁹ As fig. 5.2 (below) illustrates, by the late-1960s the arts were by far the most popular subject area. More courses were offered in painting and pottery than for any other arts subject.²⁰ Given that the minimum enrolment per course would have been somewhere between 10 and 20 students, the 40-plus courses offered in the arts and crafts in 1966-7 constituted a vast increase in the number of arts enrolments from the late-1940s, when they did not exceed 50 (see fig. 5.1, p. 162).

¹⁶ In the mid-1970s these powers were increased by Oxfordshire County Council. See Brighthouse, T. R. P., 'Appendix B' in *Serving the Community: Local Democracy and Continuing Education* (Oxfordshire County Council, 1974), p. 21 (part of a set of papers loaned by Mike Bardsley, head of Oxfordshire Adult Learning).

¹⁷ Hanson, J., *A Working Party Report on Non-Academic Education 14-16* (Oxfordshire Education Committee, 1967), p. 91 (part of a set of papers loaned by Mike Bardsley, head of Oxfordshire Adult Learning); see also *Survey of Adult Non-Vocational Education in Oxfordshire* (1967), p. 2.

¹⁸ Paper agreed by the Education Committee (Oxfordshire County Council, 1974), pp. 1-2 (part of a set of papers loaned by Mike Bardsley, head of Oxfordshire Adult Learning).

¹⁹ *Survey of Adult Non-Vocational Education in Oxfordshire* (1967), p. 20.

²⁰ *Ibid*, p. 7.

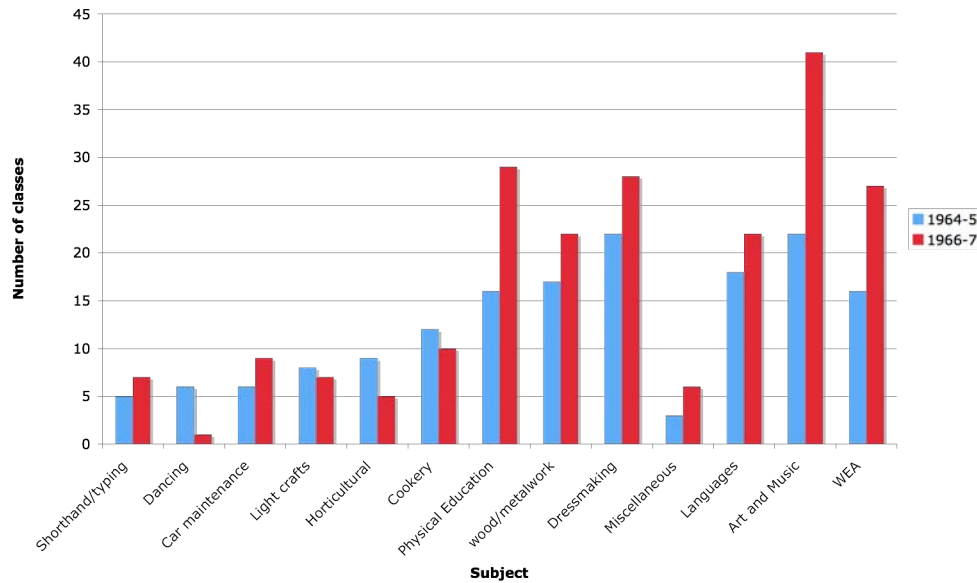


Fig. 5.2: Number of classes provided by Oxfordshire community adult education centres, by subject, 1964-67

Source: Survey of Adult Non-Vocational, 1967, p. 2 (Oxfordshire Records Office, P374/374/(1966))

Community education centres operated as social hubs for the local area.²¹ Many amateur art societies were affiliated to their local centres. They subscribed a small amount per member per year, in return for which they gained access to the centre's facilities for group workshops, events and exhibitions.²² Given that many of the arts and craft rooms in the secondary schools which served as community education centres had been refurbished with new facilities, this held particular appeal to societies which did not have their own permanent premises.²³ Community centres provided a mutually beneficial environment for art classes and art societies. A 1967 report on leisure pursuits in Oxfordshire adult education found that the presence of societies and clubs provided 'a valuable influx of members who are enthusiastic in their own fields and add to the range and vitality of the centre'.²⁴ Individual society

²¹ Depending on the year, and the adult educator, 'community education centre' was sometimes used interchangeably with 'adult education centre' and 'evening institute'.

²² *Ibid*, p. 5.

²³ Pickstock, 'Adult and Further Education', p. 230; see also Adkins, G., *The Arts and Adult Education* (Leicester: Advisory Council of Adult and Continuing Education, 1981), p. 25.

²⁴ *Survey of Adult Non-Vocational Education in Oxfordshire* (1967), p. 6.

members took classes at the centres to complement their membership, and some societies were provided with group tuition through their local centre. At the same time, the report observed, the art class could make ‘the foundation and growth of a society possible’.²⁵ An estimated eight per cent of arts and crafts students in adult education belonged to a local society or guild.²⁶ In some cases, students arranged themselves into affiliated art clubs, paying a favourite tutor on an ‘honorary basis’.²⁷ Cumnor Art Group, for example, began life as a group of students in an evening adult education class on the premises of the Matthew Arnold School:

We had been going for three years and one year we decided that we would start a group of our own. Our teacher was leaving and we thought this was a good time to make a break or we’d be doing it until we were 90 ... and so we started this group up. It was just members of the evening class. It’s very, very informal, it’s just a little group of friends who paint together ... every Wednesday evening.²⁸

In the summer months, when courses which usually ran from September until April ceased, some classes formed art clubs to fill the gap, taking sketching excursions together, sometimes with the course tutor in tow.²⁹ This was actively encouraged by adult education officers, who recognised the value of students keeping up their interests during the holiday periods.³⁰ As well as encouraging commitment and continuation outside term time, engaging with an art club increased the appetite for adult education art classes.

²⁵ *Ibid*, p. 6.

²⁶ Knott, C. A., ‘*I Can’t Wait for Wednesday*’: *The Crafts in Adult Education* (London: Crafts Council, 1987), p. 54.

²⁷ Bishop, J. and Hoggett, P., *Organizing Around Enthusiasms: Mutual Aid in Leisure* (London: Comedia, 1986), p. 93.

²⁸ Lorna Dolley, leader of Cumnor Art Group in the broadcast *Hello Cumnor: John Simpson Talks to Some Inhabitants of Cumnor*, 14 February 1971 (Oxfordshire Records Office, OXOHA: MT 16).

²⁹ Interview with Julia Johnson Fry, assistant accountant at St Edmund Hall and former adult education art student, Oxford, 1 March 2011.

³⁰ ‘Not Many Masterpieces But Wonderful Enjoyment’ in *Leisure Painter* (Mar., 1971), pp. 16-21; see also Bicester Adult Education Centre Programme, 1983-4, p. 4 (Oxfordshire Records Office, box of ephemera relating to adult education).

The development of community education was thus intimately connected with the growth of both adult art education and amateur art societies. It linked individual and social endeavour and, as such, encapsulated the central ethos of adult education in the postwar settlement. As the Ministry of Reconstruction stated in 1956: 'The goal of all education must be citizenship – that is, the rights and duties of each individual, as a member of the community; and the whole process must be the development of the individual in his relation to the community.'³¹

'Can't draw for toffee'

There were several private competitors to LEA courses in Oxfordshire and, in the late-1970s and early-1980s, newly formed arts associations and arts centres also provided an increasing number of adult education classes in the arts and crafts.³² Yet the scale of such provision was miniscule in comparison to that provided by the LEA. One fifth of courses held at the Old Fire Station Arts Centre, run by Oxford Area Arts Council from 1974 until the centre's closure in 1987, were in fine art.³³ This amounted to five or six courses per year, accommodating around 50 students.³⁴ Although the Old Fire Station claimed its courses were unique, they were essentially the same as those offered by the LEA, which boasted far greater resources and long-running expertise in providing art education to amateurs, not to mention lower fees.³⁵

³¹ Letter from the Chair Arthur L. Smith to the Prime Minister Lloyd George in *Design for Democracy: An Abridgment of a Report of the Adult Education Committee of the British Ministry of Reconstruction, Commonly Called the 1919 Report* (London: M. Parrish, 1956), p. 54.

³² Pickstock, F. V., 'The Arts and Adult Education' in *Old Fire Station Newsletter* (Summer, 1981), p. 20 (Oxfordshire Records Office, Oxford Area Arts Council Archive 1974-87: Location SZ 706 Part 1 Box 1).

³³ Oxford Area Arts Council programmes (Oxfordshire Records Office, Oxford Area Arts Council Archive 1974-87: Location SZ 706 Part Box 2 folder 9).

³⁴ 'Made at the Old Fire Station' in *Old Fire Station Newsletter* (May, 1985) (Oxfordshire Records Office, Location SZ 706 Part Box 2 folder 6: Oxford Area Arts Council Archive 1974-87).

³⁵ Pickstock, 'The Arts and Adult Education', p. 20; see also Adkins, *The Arts and Adult Education*, p. 23.

Oxfordshire's adult education service offered a broad variety of art classes.³⁶ The formal canonical style of art education outlined in chapter 4 (see pp. 130-1) was provided extensively. Courses at Oxford's College of Further Education, for example, promised to develop an 'understanding of anatomy' by learning from the 'old masters'.³⁷ A degree of skill or flair was often expected for this type of course; at Chiltern Edge Community Education Centre it was felt that 'some natural talent is desirable' in order to learn about 'materials, composition, perspective, anatomy, still life and landscape painting'.³⁸ Courses to help the 'amateur painter' in the 'search for relaxation and self-expression' were also popular, often because natural talent was not deemed necessary to enjoy them.³⁹ Charlbury Adult Education Centre advertised 'art for fun', a course 'specifically designed to encourage creativity and promote enjoyment' rather than to develop specific skills.⁴⁰ In all courses, the promise of uncovering 'hidden potential', even in those who felt they were so inept they were best suited to a course entitled 'can't draw for toffee', was promoted.⁴¹ As the blurb for a 'creative' course at Chiltern Edge Community Education Centre put it:

This course is designed for all, including those who think they cannot draw or paint. Its aim is to encourage visual awareness through personal discovery and to develop powers of invention. Everyone has such abilities even though they have lain dormant for years.⁴²

³⁶ Collections held by Oxford Central Library's Heritage Centre were patchy and inconsistent. The collection was mostly ephemera collected after the heritage project was set up in the late-1960s, and even then not all pamphlets and booklets had been kept. A great deal of ephemera was locked away in the basements of the County Council. Access to this store was restricted, but a small selection of material was selected by archivists on request.

³⁷ Oxford College of Further Education programme, 'Kickstart your Career' in *Autumn Starts Part Time Courses*, 2001, p. 4 (Oxfordshire Records Office, box of ephemera relating to adult education).

³⁸ Chiltern Edge Community Education Centre programme, 1982-3 (Oxfordshire Records Office, box of ephemera relating to adult education).

³⁹ *Gateway to Leisure* (City of Oxford Education Committee, 1969-70), pp. 19-22.

⁴⁰ Charlbury Community Education Centre programme, 1994-5, p. 4 (Oxfordshire Records Office, box of ephemera relating to adult education).

⁴¹ Course listings in *Liaise Project: Index of Adult Education Courses and the Advisory Network in Oxfordshire* (Oxford, 1996-7), pp. 87-95 (Oxfordshire Records Office, Oxfo 374 Stack).

⁴² Chiltern Edge Community Education Centre programme, 1982-3 (Oxfordshire Records Office, box of ephemera relating to adult education).

Many different levels of interest and aptitude were catered for within the service. As the number of students taking up art courses reached a critical mass in the 1960s and 1970s, adult educators were able to divide subjects into various levels to suit different competencies, providing routes of certified progression to most students. Head of Oxfordshire Adult Learning Mike Bardsley explains:

Rather than just putting on four classes in art, we'd say, let's do a beginners class, a life drawing class. Progression is about being better at what we are doing. As the market matures, you begin to differentiate your products. With an immature market, you get an inchoate offer, but as the market settles down, the market segments, and people begin to make sense of it. You can break down the curriculum in order to trace progression routes. It also becomes a way of extending the experience of the learner in the system. Because art was one of the strongest offerings, painting was one of the areas where you'll see that tendency most clearly.⁴³

There were courses for absolute beginners, beginners, improvers, and courses deemed intermediate, intensive, untutored and advanced. Courses in 'drawing and painting for the risk taker' were offered alongside 'drawing and painting for the terrified'.⁴⁴ Courses like 'I wish I could paint' were aimed at individuals who wanted to learn from scratch, while courses such as 'discover your creativity' were for those who simply wanted to enjoy the self-expressive properties of art making without being concerned with rules or improvement.⁴⁵

The varied possibilities for future study maintained the popularity of adult education art courses throughout the twentieth century. Courses were graded and arranged as part of an integrated programme in order to develop creativity if the learner so desired. This structure of learning exemplified the fractal nature of artistic

⁴³ Interview with Mike Bardsley, head of Oxfordshire Adult Learning, Oxford, 26 September 2011.

⁴⁴ Courses offered at Missenden Abbey in *Calendar of Residential Short Courses* (Leicester: National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education, 1995), p. 127.

⁴⁵ Art courses advertised in various community education centre programmes (Oxfordshire Records Office, box of ephemera relating to adult education).

creativity within adult education: regardless of the level of expertise catered for, courses were organised in much the same way. Individual learners could traverse and climb the fractal scale according to their appetite and aptitude. As the Oxford College of Further Education explained in the early-1980s:

Students can be prepared for examinations ... but may attend simply to improve their skills and broaden their horizons. So that this may be done in the most effective way possible, classes are offered at several different levels; thus a beginner can join a class which will concentrate on the basic skills and fundamentals which must be acquired before more complex work can be tackled satisfactorily.⁴⁶

The scaling of different levels of activity was not limited to the vocationally-oriented colleges of further education; a course in the 1983-4 brochure for Littlemore, Rose Hill and Sandford Community Education called 'art' also hinted at the fluid boundaries between different levels of artistic activity, with the suggestion that a beginners' 'leisure course' in drawing and painting might eventually 'lead to O-level'.⁴⁷

The blurring of boundaries between strictly recreative art classes, and those leading to more vocational outcomes, was common in adult education. Adult educationists argued against distinguishing between vocational and non-vocational provision, because a course which could lead to qualifications or employment for one student might be followed by another simply for self-improvement or personal enjoyment.⁴⁸ The emphasis on vocational ends which developed towards the end of the twentieth century was, according to many adult educators, misguided: recreational

⁴⁶ Oxford Further Education College programme, 1983-4, p. 72 (Oxfordshire Records Office, box of ephemera relating to adult education).

⁴⁷ Peers programme, 1983-4 (Oxfordshire Records Office, box of ephemera relating to adult education).

⁴⁸ *The Strategic Plan for Further Education in Oxfordshire, 1991-94* (Oxfordshire County Council), p. 35 (Set of papers loaned by Mike Bardsley, head of Oxfordshire Adult Learning,); see also Sargent, *Learning and Leisure*, pp. 20-2.

reasons for study were often ‘overlaid with other motives’ which, in the end, could turn out to be vocational.⁴⁹ Adult education courses provided a friendly and unthreatening ‘point of entry’ into the arts and crafts, a point from which some students would ‘move progressively towards a deeper commitment’.⁵⁰

Growth

Opportunities to develop an interest in art within the adult education service expanded across Oxfordshire in the late-1960s. *Gateway to Leisure*, a small annual programme of courses published by the City of Oxford Education Committee between 1967 and 1974, was an early attempt to advertise the city’s adult education provision.⁵¹ The programme listed classes available at community centres in Oxford’s main residential areas. Courses were held mostly in the evenings on the premises of local schools, with some taking place during the day in community education centres across the city.⁵²

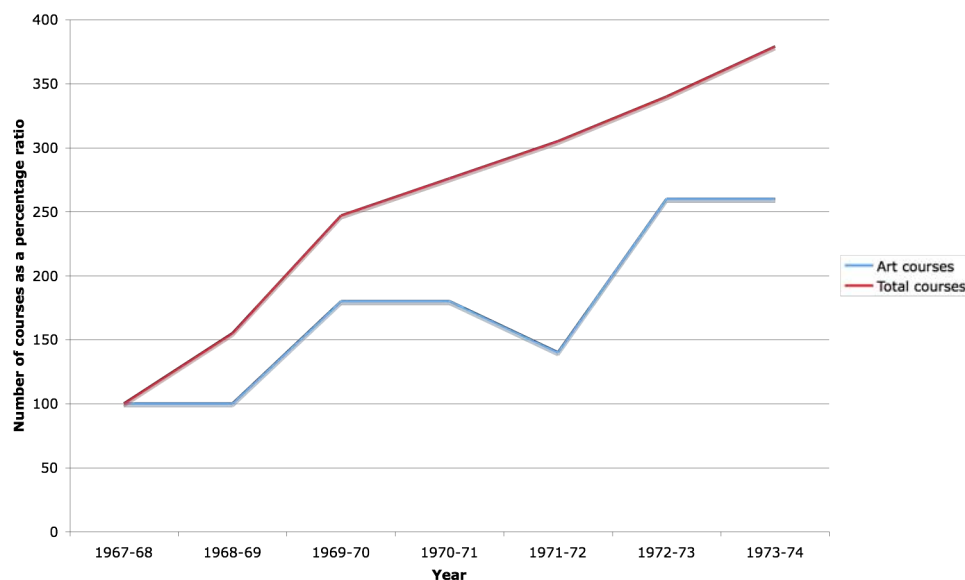


Fig. 5.3: Adult education art courses in Oxford, 1967-74

Source: Oxfordshire Records Office, Oxfo 374 pamphlet (*Gateway to Leisure*, 1967-8 to 1973-4)

⁴⁹ Rogers, J., *Adults Learning* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1971), p. 12.

⁵⁰ Adkins, *The Arts and Adult Education*, p. 100.

⁵¹ *Gateway* appears to have begun publication in 1967, but this may simply be when the Oxfordshire Heritage Library began to collect ephemera in the late-1960s. *Gateway* ceased publication in 1974.

⁵² *Gateway to Leisure* (City of Oxford Education Committee, 1968-9), pp. 3-5.

As fig. 5.3 (above) shows, the number of courses in fine art offered across Oxford's community centres more than doubled between 1967 and 1974.⁵³ At the micro-level, however, growth varied. The provision of community education was dictated to a large extent by local demand and reflected the socio-economic profile of the groups residing nearby.⁵⁴ Whereas more affluent areas in the north of the city offered courses in confectionary, pottery, art appreciation and French conversation, areas to the east, such as Cowley, Rose Hill and Blackbird Leys, located in large housing estates on or just outside the city ring road, offered woodwork, weight training and car maintenance.⁵⁵

In the early years of *Gateway*, just three centres to the north and west of the city provided courses in fine art. In 1967-8, the only arts and crafts-related course at the east Oxford centre at Rose Hill was dressmaking – other courses included basketball, weightlifting and 'ladies keep fit'.⁵⁶ From the outset, art classes had proved more popular in the wealthier areas.⁵⁷ In 1949, the Oxfordshire scheme for further education acknowledged that 'the Summertown Evening Institute [in north Oxford] is different in character to those at East Oxford and Headington, being more essentially recreative'.⁵⁸ Yet as the work art clubs in chapter 3 and London's evening institutes in chapter 4 demonstrated, art did not appeal solely to the better-off. Adult education officers stimulated demand for recreative art courses in poorer communities by gradually increasing supply and, like the institutes in London's inner city boroughs

⁵³ *Gateway* was not an exhaustive list of all art courses available in Oxford; courses were also offered by the College of Technology in Headington, the College of Further Education in Cowley, the many voluntary organisations and community associations and, increasingly, by private course providers. See Garne, J., 'Introduction' in *Gateway to Leisure* (City of Oxford Education Committee, 1973-4), p. 1.

⁵⁴ Roberts, N. A., *The Marginal Necessity? A Study of Adult Education in the Community* (Oxford: Cowley MSC Final Report for Cowley and District Community Education Committee, 1985), p. 29.

⁵⁵ *Gateway to Leisure*, various years.

⁵⁶ *Gateway to Leisure* (City of Oxford Education Committee, 1967-8), p. 15.

⁵⁷ Although, according to Roberts (*The Marginal Necessity?*, p. 26), roughly one third of students attending courses did not live in the education centre's immediate district.

⁵⁸ Supplement to *Scheme of Further Education* (1949), p. 14 (Oxfordshire Records Office, Oxfo 378 pamphlet).

during the interwar period, were met by a positive response (see chapter 4, p. 137). By 1969-70, the provision of courses in drawing and painting across the city had more than doubled, with offerings at all the centres, north and east.

Disparity

In 1978, 3.1 per cent of Cowley and District Community Education Committee's classes in the less affluent east Oxford were in fine art, rising to 4.3 per cent in 1980-1 and 5.5 per cent in 1983-4. This appears to be a reasonable rate of growth, yet in fact the total number of courses fell by nearly half, increasing fine art's percentage of the whole when the number of fine art courses remained the same. A similar pattern was found for provision in the lower-income areas of Littlemore, Rose Hill and Sandford (collectively called 'Peers' after the local secondary school where a number of classes were held).⁵⁹ A reduction in the number of courses was the direct result of local government cuts. While average national expenditure on adult education in 1983 was 0.6 per cent of LEA budgets, Oxfordshire spending was 0.4 per cent. In contrast to the glowing reports of the 1960s, a county report on adult and continuing education in 1983 described provision as 'inadequate', the result of six years of 'constantly reducing' support from Oxfordshire County Council.⁶⁰ As one Cowley and District Community Education officer complained in 1983: 'The cuts in finance have meant that Community Education is being run on a "shoe-string" and costs to students are rising.'⁶¹

In affluent north Oxford, a completely different picture unfolded. The

⁵⁹ Littlemore, Rosehill, and Sandford community education programme, 1982-3 (Oxfordshire Records Office, box of ephemera relating to adult education).

⁶⁰ 'Appendix B' in *Continuing Education: From Policies to Practice* (Oxfordshire Advisory Council for Adult and Continuing Education, 1983), pp. 2-4 (Oxfordshire Records Office, Oxfo 370).

⁶¹ Cowley and District community education programme, 1983-4 (Oxfordshire Records Office, box of ephemera relating to adult education).

popularity of ‘learning for leisure’ continued apace despite the cuts. Over the period 1978-84, fine art courses provided by North West Oxford Community Education Committee grew from five to nine courses per year, accounting for five per cent of the centre’s total programme. East and north Oxford experienced cuts differently because adult education in Oxfordshire was ‘irregularly supported in the community at large’.⁶² Centres were dependent on their local community. The decentralisation of the planning and organisation of community education, which in the service’s early years had seemed a positive development, led to widely differing outcomes depending on where in the city a centre was located.⁶³ This difference was amplified by the reduction in subsidies from local government.

In 1986, a review of arts provision in Oxford criticised the city’s inadequate investment in the arts, identifying ‘the sphere of education’ as the sole location of ‘sophisticated arts policy thinking within the County Council’.⁶⁴ Yet while on the surface art remained a popular subject, in reality only certain sections of the city’s population were able to explore their artistic creativity within the remit of their local adult education service. With a greater proportion of income for adult education centres being raised by student fees rather than local government subsidy, services catering for poorer areas struggled to maintain their provision of courses such as fine art, while the number of art courses provided at centres in more affluent areas continued to grow. The sophistication evident in these thriving centres belied the fact

⁶² Roberts, *The Marginal Necessity?*, p. 93.

⁶³ Brighouse, T. R. P., ‘Appendix B’ in *Serving the Community: Local Democracy and Continuing Education* (Oxford County Council, 1974), p. 21; see also Paper agreed by the Education Committee, (Oxfordshire County Council, 1974), p. 3 (papers loaned by Mike Bardsley, head of Oxfordshire Adult Learning).

⁶⁴ Harvest, F. and Merkel, K., *Review of Arts Provision in Oxford – The Report Consultation Draft* (Southern Arts, Oxford City Council and Oxfordshire County Council, 1986), p. 18 (Oxfordshire Records Office, Oxfo 700).

that, by the 1990s, the range of students attracted to the service as a whole had narrowed considerably.

Decline

Similarly to London and the short term residential colleges (discussed in chapter 4), the total number of drawing and painting classes across Oxfordshire increased in the 1980s and 1990s.⁶⁵ Art classes appealed not only to students but also to adult education providers, who faced the difficult task of keeping their centres running as cuts began to bite. Because adult education operated on a simple model of supply and demand (as discussed in chapter 4, p. 155, if enough students expressed an interest and showed up to class, a course would run), adult education officers were obliged to monitor fluctuations in attendance and adjust provision accordingly.⁶⁶ They worked ‘hand in hand with the market’; if there was demand for a particular class, then more of the same would be provided.⁶⁷ In areas that could still afford them, art classes were regarded as a ‘crowd puller’: a popular subject that helped balance the books.⁶⁸ Courses were, as a result, directed squarely at those who could pay: ‘Twelve is the usual number of people required before we can run a course,’ one community education centre explained in its course programme, ‘but we can arrange to run a class with fewer people if they are willing to pay a higher fee or have fewer hours for their money.’⁶⁹

⁶⁵ Between 1982 and 2002 the County Council produced an annual publication, similar in format to London’s *Floodlight*, which listed all adult education courses in the county. The *Liaise Index*, as it became known, brought together all Oxfordshire providers to offer comprehensive listings of adult education courses to the public. See *Liaise Project: Index of Adult Education Courses and the Advisory Network in Oxfordshire* (Oxford, 1982-2001).

⁶⁶ Newman, M., *The Poor Cousin: A Study of Adult Education* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1979), p. 14.

⁶⁷ Interview with Mike Bardsley.

⁶⁸ Newman, *The Poor Cousin*, p. 15.

⁶⁹ Didcot Community Education Centre programme, 1994-5, p. 2 (Oxfordshire Records Office, box of ephemera relating to adult education).

At centres across Oxfordshire, art pulled in the crowds. Of the 71 courses offered at Bicester Community Adult Education Centre in 1984, for example, 24 were ‘in the red’, and the largest surplus achieved by (in order) typing courses, English O-level, painting and drawing, and pottery.⁷⁰ Profit per head for the course ‘painting and drawing 1’ was nearly four times the average, and the number of students enrolled on the course nearly twice the average enrolment figure. The only courses to attract more students were ‘cake decorating’, ‘English O’level’, and the exercise class ‘stretch and trim’. Profits were lower for a second painting and drawing course because, due to the large number of students enrolled, the class was split into two, and two tutors employed. While other creative subjects, including cooking, dressmaking, woodwork, upholstery and crochet, made a loss, fine art held considerable allure: only two painting and drawing courses were advertised in Bicester’s advertising pamphlet, but three courses ran.⁷¹ Between 1967-8 and 1994-5 the number of art classes at Bicester adult education centre quadrupled.⁷² In an area where students could afford rising fees, fine art remained attractive to students and providers alike.

Initially, the popularity of art at community centres in more affluent areas created an overall impression of robust growth, despite the fact an increasing number of areas were struggling to maintain provision. Continual growth in the number of art courses provided across Oxfordshire was not, however, sustained in the final years of the twentieth century. The total number of adult education courses listed across the county, which had remained at around 5,000 every year since the mid-1980s, fell to

⁷⁰ Breakdown of student numbers, Bicester Adult Education Centre, 1984-5 (Oxfordshire Records Office, box of ephemera relating to adult education).

⁷¹ This was not unique to Bicester; a survey of amateur arts in the UK in 1991 found that LEA painting classes in general enjoyed higher enrolment levels than other creative classes. See Hutchison and Feist, *Amateur Arts in the UK*, p. 169.

⁷² Breakdown of student numbers, Bicester Adult Education Centre, 1984-5.

4,900 in 1996-7, and to 3,500 in 1997-8.⁷³ As fig. 5.4 (below) illustrates, art was no exception; in the last few years of the twentieth century, the popularity of art courses in more affluent areas was no longer sufficient to maintain buoyancy across the service.

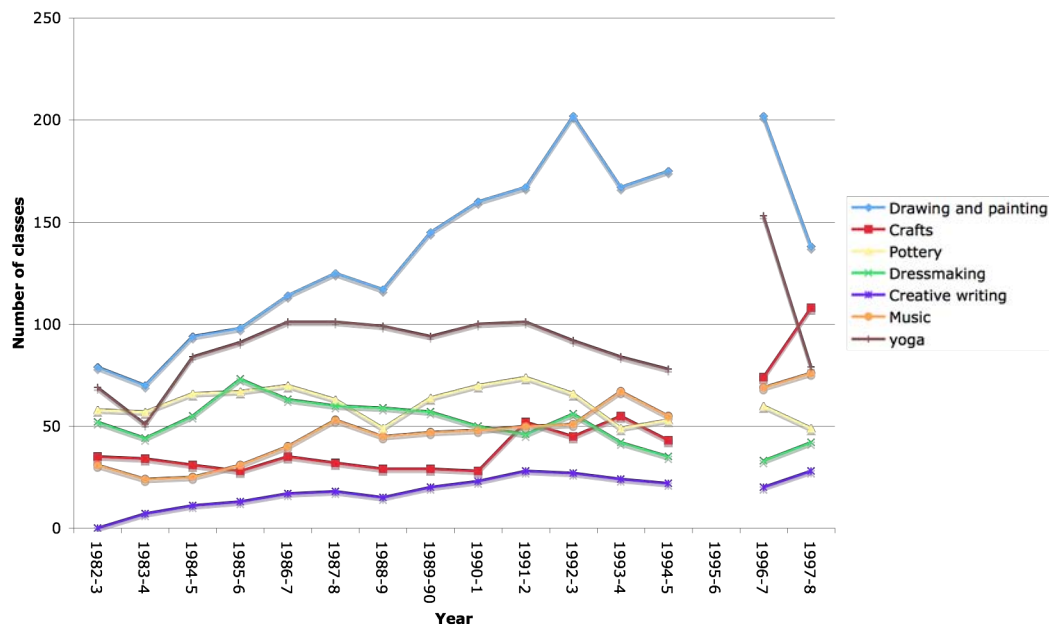


Fig. 5.4: Adult education art courses in Oxfordshire, 1982-98

Source: Liaise Index, 1982-3 to 1997-8 (Oxfordshire Records Office, Oxfo 374 Stack)

Decline was not unique to Oxfordshire; while London is difficult to measure because of the change in reporting following the abolition of the Inner London Education Authority in 1990 (see fig. 4.2, chapter 4, p. 150), a similar situation was evident in adult education provision for the city of Birmingham, where the art societies discussed in chapter 2 flourished.

⁷³ *Liaise Project: Index of Adult Education Courses and the Advisory Network in Oxfordshire* (Oxford, 1996-98).

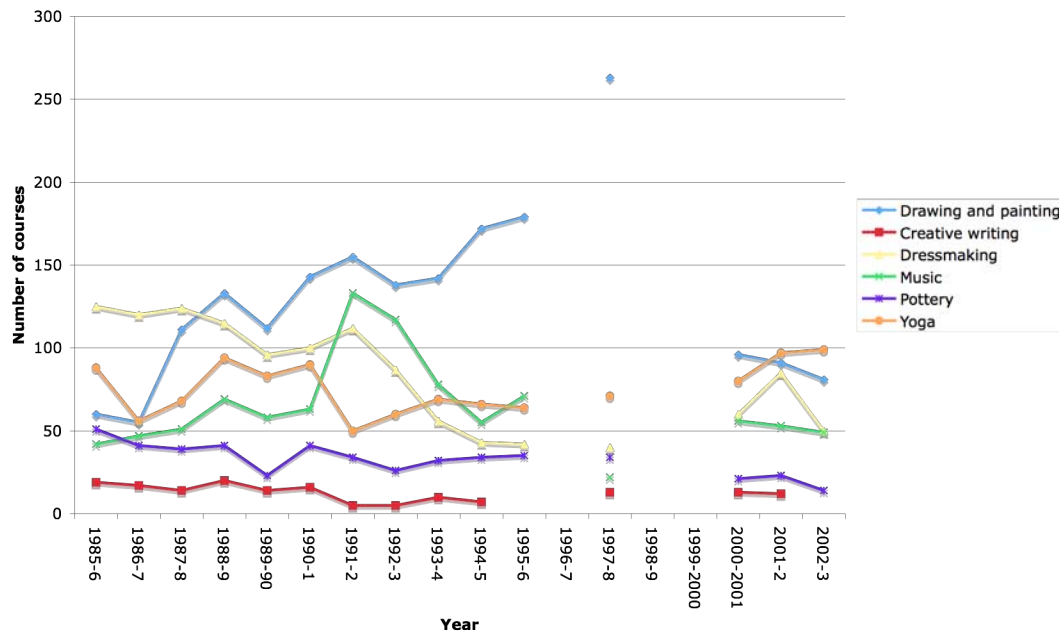


Fig. 5.5: Adult education courses in Birmingham, 1985-2003

Source: *Leisure and Learning Directory of Courses for Adults*, 1985-6 to 2002-3 (Birmingham Records Office, BF48.76 Box 1)

Note: Birmingham provided a comprehensive list of all courses in *Leisure and Learning* a publication similar to *Liaise* and *Floodlight*.

As can be seen in fig. 5.5 (above), drawing and painting courses in Birmingham followed a somewhat bumpy path, but put clear water between other arts and crafts courses in the early-1990s, only to fall from a peak in the late-1990s to a trough in 2002-3. According to one former adult education art tutor in the Birmingham area, the 1990s were ‘the good years’, after which the service was repeatedly ‘hammered’.⁷⁴ Birmingham classes in drawing and painting decreased by 40 per cent at the end of the century, from more than 250 courses in 1997-8 to less than 100 after 2000. ‘The only way to get money from the government now is to offer courses to full-time students’, the former art tutor lamented, highlighting the increasingly vocational emphasis in adult education.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Interview with Shirley Bonas of Birmingham Watercolour Society, Hanbury Hall, 3 August 2011.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* The vocational emphasis of late-twentieth century adult education is discussed in Fieldhouse, R., ‘The Local Education Authorities and Adult Education’ in Fieldhouse, R. (ed), *A History of Modern British Adult Education* (Leicester: National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education, 1996), pp. 103-5; Martin, I., ‘Community Education: The Dialectics of Development’ in Fieldhouse, R. (ed), *A*

Changing provision in Oxfordshire and Birmingham was representative of trends in non-vocational adult education across England and Wales. In 1953, there were 700,000 students in local authority adult education and, by 1974, nearly 1.6 million.⁷⁶ By the end of the twentieth century, however, that figure had fallen to just 1.1 million. Enrolments in ‘general courses’ that did not lead to a formal qualification, such as drawing and painting, decreased by 20 per cent between 1995 and 2002.⁷⁷ Declining enrolments in the late-1990s indicate that the Thatcher government’s claim that courses would continue to run as fees were increased (see chapter 4, p. 155) was not borne out and that, eventually, something had to give.⁷⁸

In the ideological shift from collectivism to individualism, the cost of adult education was placed on the individual user, rather than supported by the state (see chapter 4, p. 157).⁷⁹ At first, it seemed that the overall level of provision would not suffer as a result. Eventually, however, fees reached an unsustainable level, disturbing the balance between supply and demand. Despite attracting a fairly average student demographic by national standards, Oxfordshire’s budget allocation was criticised for being especially low in the late-1990s.⁸⁰ After budgetary reductions nearly every year between 1992 and 1999, approximately two thirds of the cost of the county’s adult

History of Modern British Adult Education (Leicester: National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education, 1996), p. 139; and also Adkins, *The Arts and Adult Education*, p. 18.

⁷⁶ Pickstock, ‘Adult and Further Education’, p. 227.

⁷⁷ ‘Enrolments on Adult Education Courses: By Age, Type of Course and Gender’ in *Social Trends*, 30 (1998); and ‘Enrolments on Adult Education Courses: By Age, Attendance Mode and Sex’ in *Social Trends*, 34 (2002).

⁷⁸ Public Expenditure White Paper [Cmnd. 7841] quoted in Adkins, *The Arts and Adult Education*, p. 17.

⁷⁹ See Hall, P. A., ‘Social Capital in Britain’ in *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 29, No. 3 (July, 1999), p. 458; see also Fieldhouse, R., ‘An Overview of British Adult Education in the Twentieth Century’ in Fieldhouse, R. (ed), *A History of Modern British Adult Education* (Leicester: National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education, 1996), p. 75; and Hobsbawm, E., *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914-1991* (London: Abacus, 1995), p. 334.

⁸⁰ In 1999, 5.9 per cent of the county population used the service, of which 75 per cent were women and 16 per cent were over the age of 60. See Banbury, M., *Adult Learning in Oxfordshire: Ofsted Report* (London: Office for Standards in Education, 1999), p. 6; for similar statistics 15 years earlier see Roberts, *The Marginal Necessity?*, p. 24.

education service came from fees.⁸¹ The composite effect of repeated annual cuts made those towards the end of the century more final and damaging, affecting even ‘crowd pullers’ like fine art.⁸² As cuts ‘pared back and back’, many courses were discontinued as fewer and fewer students were willing, or able, to pay.⁸³

Art classes did not disappear from Oxfordshire’s adult education service altogether. In 1985, adult educationist N. A. Roberts wrote: ‘One does not have to be a clairvoyant or a cynic to anticipate a future picture in which ... at a local level only the ‘economically viable’ evening class provision is maintained for those who can afford to pay.’⁸⁴ Fast forward 25 years, and nearly half of the 385 ‘creative courses’ in the glossy 2009-10 county-wide programme *Oxfordshire Adult Learning* were in fine art.⁸⁵ Cherwell Valley College, an amalgamation of three of Oxfordshire’s former technical colleges, divided its *Learning for Leisure* programme into two sections: creative arts and languages – the two most popular strands of leisure learning.⁸⁶ Continual cost-cutting had resulted in the market for non-vocational courses being taken to its logical conclusion: offering courses only in subject areas in which there was high demand, and for which a sufficient number of students were prepared to pay the full market price.

Cuts continued into the new millennium. Cherwell Valley College announced in 2010 that it was ‘no longer in a financial position to carry the costs of the part-time adult learning-for-leisure programme’.⁸⁷ Fees were raised by, on average, 55 per cent in a single year – part of more than a decade of fee escalation. In 1996-7, a ‘rough

⁸¹ Banbury, *Adult Learning in Oxfordshire*, p. 6.

⁸² Newman, *The Poor Cousin*, p.15.

⁸³ Interview with Mike Bardsley.

⁸⁴ Roberts, *The Marginal Necessity?*, p. 1.

⁸⁵ Oxfordshire Adult Learning programme, 2009-10, p. 1 (Oxfordshire Records Office, box of ephemera relating to adult education).

⁸⁶ Cherwell Valley College programme, Autumn/Winter 2010-11 (Oxfordshire Records Office, box of ephemera relating to adult education).

⁸⁷ Cherwell Valley College programme, Autumn/Winter 2010-11.

guide' to the cost of courses in Oxfordshire was estimated at between £20 and £25 per term, with concessions for those on low incomes or benefits; by 2010-11, a course in drawing and painting at Cherwell Valley College was £187.50 plus £10 for materials – accounting for inflation, an increase of at least 650 per cent.⁸⁸ During the same period, real wages (at 2010 prices) increased from £20,169 to £22,970, a growth of just 14 per cent. Nevertheless, the rhetoric of talent and discovery continued: 'Once you have discovered your creative side,' Cherwell Valley College suggested enticingly, 'you may find no end to your talents.'⁸⁹ For those willing and able, the quest for self-fulfilment through the social exploration of artistic creativity remained something worth paying for. The possibility of enjoying personal creativity within the fellowship of one's local community had, however, radically diminished.⁹⁰

In 1943, the art critic Herbert Read conceived of a new art education 'not to produce more and better works of art but better people and communities'.⁹¹ In the immediate postwar years, art education was regarded as a social good: something 'needed by the whole community'.⁹² Community education served this ideal, providing a place for amateur artists to convene in either the art class or art club. In the first three decades of the postwar period the number of art courses grew rapidly within the development of community education. By educating individuals through their local communities, fine art became available to everyone in the county of Oxfordshire. By the end of the century, however, art courses were accessible only to those who could afford to pay the escalating fees. From an early emphasis on

⁸⁸ 'Introduction' in *Liaise Project: Index of Adult Education Courses and the Advisory Network in Oxfordshire* (Oxford, 1996-7); Cherwell Valley College programme, Autumn/Winter 2010-11.

⁸⁹ Cherwell Valley College programme, Autumn/Winter 2010-11.

⁹⁰ Yeaxlee, B. A., *Lifelong Education: A Sketch of the Range and Significance of the Adult Education Movement* (London: Cassell, 1929), p. 48.

⁹¹ Herbert Read, 'Education Through Art' (1943), quoted in Cumberlege, G., *The Visual Arts: A Report Sponsored by the Dartington Hall Trustees* (London: Oxford University Press on behalf of the Arts Enquiry by Political and Economic Planning (PEP), 1946), p. 27.

⁹² Cumberlege, *The Visual Arts*, p. 27.

egalitarian improvement, community education moved towards a consumerist model. As the community element of Oxfordshire's adult education scheme was pared back, so too, eventually, was the ambitious dream of creative self-fulfilment for everybody.

PART FOUR

Consumption

CHAPTER 6

Self-help

*‘An artist can never be made by this method but one
can learn the essentials of the craft.’¹*

Amateur art activity in the twentieth century was pyramidal in form: the tip comprised participation in formal activities, such as art societies and adult education, while the base comprised the vast – and hidden – majority of individuals making art in isolation.² Thus far, this thesis has concentrated on the social aspect of amateur art, when artistic creativity is, for the most part, a solitary pursuit. Public participation provides a useful barometer of change, but inevitably fails to capture the far greater activity which took place informally at the base. One late-twentieth century survey estimated that eight per cent of the UK population, with a fairly equal balance between the sexes, regularly engaged in drawing and painting as either a hobby or a profession.³ Given that drawing is an ‘easily accessible’ activity, requiring little more than a pencil and a scrap of paper, this figure is likely to be an underestimate.⁴ The real amount of leisure painting taking place in Britain is unclear. While the number of people self-reporting as amateur artists increased during the postwar ‘golden age’, the actual amount of time devoted to making art is difficult to pin down. The modern amateur was a creature of divided loyalties; the ‘Sunday painter’ a ‘poor soul’ forced

¹ Ottewill, J., ‘I Wanted to Paint’ in *Leisure Painter* (Mar., 1972), pp. 34-8.

² Hutchison, R. and Feist, A., *Amateur Arts in the UK: The PSI Survey of Amateur Arts and Crafts in the UK* (London: The Policy Studies Institute, 1991), pp. 17-18; for a discussion of informal learning at the end of the twentieth century see also Sargant, N., *Learning and Leisure: A Study of Adult Participation in Learning and Its Policy Implications* (Leicester: National Institute of Adult Education, 1991), p. 25; and also Sargant, N. (ed), *The Learning Divide: A Study of Participation in Adult Learning in the United Kingdom* (Leicester: National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education, 1997), p. 88.

³ Hutchison and Feist, *Amateur Arts in the UK*, p. 23; and similar figures (showing a one per cent increase) a decade later can be found in Fox, K. and Richards, L., *National Statistics: Sport and Leisure Results from the Sport and Leisure Module of the 2002 General Household Survey* (London: HMSO, 2004), pp. 38-40.

⁴ Sargant, *The Learning Divide*, p. 88.

to squeeze their love of art into a working week.⁵ Economist Stefan Linder argues that while the harried leisure painter might identify as an artist, ever-decreasing amounts of time were spent making art due to the multiple demands of work, leisure and consumption:

At a certain income level, a person may take up painting and is then reported as an amateur painter. As income continues to rise, new activities are added and less time – but still some time – may be devoted to painting. He remains on the lists, however, as an amateur painter. In this way the numbers rise without there necessarily being any rise in total time.⁶

Statistics relating to the consumption of art materials are, Linder warns, misleading because ‘the income elasticity of goods is greater than that of the activities’.⁷ Growing sales of instructional art books or paint do not necessarily translate into more people picking up the brush and palette. The exact amount of time spent painting is, however, less relevant to this story than the drive towards artistic creativity itself. The purchase of books and materials indicated the allure of creativity within the experience of ordinary life. From dabbler to professional, artists at various levels of expertise constituted a market receptive to commercial products and services related to the making of art. While market activity cannot reveal the overall amount of time allocated to the pursuit of artistic creativity, it can show how the appetite for creativity changed over time. Consumerism broadly facilitated the pursuit of artistic creativity for a vast number of leisure painters in the second half of the twentieth century, as commercial interests developed to cater for the growing amateur artist community. This chapter and the next examine how commercial interests intersected with those of amateur artists: firstly, through the publication and consumption of how-to art

⁵ ‘Whitehall Studio Club’ in *Association of Civil Service Art Clubs Newsletter*, No. 9 (July, 1954), p. 2 (bound volumes courtesy of the Civil and Public Service Artists).

⁶ Linder, S. B., *The Harried Leisure Class* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), pp. 106-7.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

magazines and books, and secondly through the manufacture and consumption of art materials. The development and tailoring of these products to the needs of the leisure painter gives an indication of the scale and direction of artistic production. It reveals the artistically inclined to be both producers *and* consumers of creativity: amateur artists consumed not only the products they used to be creative, but also the ideal of creativity itself.

In the postwar years, avenues for informal solitary learning developed alongside the expansion of formal adult education. Amateur artists who wanted to learn about painting and drawing without joining a society or attending an adult education art class opted for what adult educationist Basil Yeaxlee called 'self-education'.⁸ Individuals educated themselves in art through a variety of media, from books and television to magazines and correspondence courses. Whereas the emphasis in nineteenth century self-education had been on self-improvement rather than leisure, amateur artists in the twentieth century were afforded opportunity for both.⁹ Early instructional books in art for the layperson presented dry scientific diagrams, outlines and engravings from ornaments, flowers, or landscapes for copying. These authoritative texts, which were approved by the Council of the School of Design, sold well but were considered unimaginative and boring.¹⁰ The twentieth century saw the introduction of a more entertaining and sophisticated incarnation of these instructional publications: the 'how-to' book. How-to books provided for a market uncertain of its skills and talents, offering a guided arena in which to pursue art in private. They were part of an increase in the availability of modestly-priced educational books across a

⁸ Yeaxlee, B. A., *Lifelong Education: A Sketch of the Range and Significance of the Adult Education Movement* (London: Cassell, 1929), p. 121.

⁹ Harrison, J. F. C., *Learning and Living, 1790-1960: A Study in the History of the English Adult Education Movement* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961), p. 38; see also Sargant, *Learning and Leisure*, p. 66.

¹⁰ Macdonald, S., *The History and Philosophy of Art Education* (London: University of London Press, 1970), p. 122.

range of subjects.¹¹ For many leisure painters, these publications offered an invaluable source of information and advice for technical improvement.

As the number of leisure painters grew, publishers recognised an expanding and potentially lucrative market. Following the Second World War, the publication of how-to books proliferated. Alongside several small publishing houses such as the Oak Tree Press (*The Joy of Drawing*) or the Blandford Press (*What Shall We Draw?*), larger houses put into production entire ranges for amateur artists.¹² Some titles, such as the Herga Series of Painting Books, ran into triple digits.¹³ Ranges were sold to art shops through the trade catalogues of material manufacturers. The Walter T. Foster range, which first appeared in the Winsor and Newton catalogue in 1968, was written for commercial artists, students, amateurs and hobbyists.¹⁴ Titles such as *Drawing Simplified*, *Portraits and How to Do Them* and *Designs for You to Trace and Copy* were so popular that the titles featured in the catalogue increased from 124 in 1974 to nearly 200 by 1986. Most how-to series contained books which provided prescriptive step-by-step lessons on how to recreate a particular subject. Studio's extensive *How to Draw* series offered instructional guides to drawing everything from tanks and planes to trees and hands, with technical illustration, composition, and perspective along the way. Winsor and Newton's own *Art Manuals*, which featured titles such as *How to Use Water Colours* and *Simple Rules for Painting in Oils*, provided more general introductions to art 'written specially for the student and amateur by well-known artists'.¹⁵ Some publications, however, provided more detailed tuition in the

¹¹ Baynes, P. and Marx, H., 'Adult Education Auxiliaries and Informal Learning' in Fieldhouse, R. (ed), *A History of Modern British Adult Education* (Leicester: National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education, 1996), p. 332.

¹² Pitman, for example – see *Amateur Artist*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (May, 1966), p. 42.

¹³ Winsor and Newton trade catalogue, 1948 (Winsor and Newton archives, Wealdstone).

¹⁴ Winsor and Newton trade catalogue, 1968, p. 187 (Winsor and Newton archives, Wealdstone).

¹⁵ Winsor and Newton trade catalogue, 1955, p. 172; see also Winsor and Newton trade catalogue, 1948, p. 64 (both Winsor and Newton archives, Wealdstone).

rudiments of drawing; some according to the canonical standard of academy art training, and others according to the more expressive tenets of free creativity (see chapter 4, pp. 132-3). Texts promising technical prowess to those willing to follow detailed instruction were also popular. These tended to be ‘one off’ titles rather than part of a series. Kimon Nicolaides’ *The Natural Way to Draw* (1941) took a classical approach to art training, recreating lessons from the atelier to be followed by the individual at home.¹⁶ Betty Edwards’ *Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain* (1979), meanwhile, was based on the scientific and psychological theory of brain activity. Through simple exercises, which challenged the basic skills of visual perception, Edwards claimed her methods could rewire the way an individual could see without the need for arduous technical progression. Once the artist could ‘see’, representative and figurative art – the amateur’s mainstay – would, with practice, be within reach.¹⁷

Books were also published to support instructional television series on the arts and crafts.¹⁸ How-to programming began in earnest during the 1950s. *Painter’s Progress* (1954) presented by RCA-trained Mervyn Levy, aimed to encourage ‘pleasure painting’ amongst beginners, amateurs and children. The programme attracted an audience of five million and, in response to one of its competitions, nearly 50,000 entries were sent to its studios at Alexandra Palace.¹⁹ Encouraged by the 1964 government white paper *A Policy for the Arts*, which argued that ‘radio and television have much to contribute to the encouragement of artistic activity and appreciation’, arts programming increased significantly.²⁰ Following cultural blockbusters such as Kenneth Clarke’s *Civilisation* (1969) and Jacob Bronowski’s

¹⁶ Nicolaides, K., *The Natural Way to Draw* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1941).

¹⁷ Edwards, B., *Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain* (London: HarperCollins, 1979).

¹⁸ Rogers, J. and Groombridge, B., *Right To Learn: The Case for Adult Equality* (London: Arrow Books, 1976), pp. 101-2.

¹⁹ Walker, J. A., *Arts TV: A History of Arts Television in Britain* (London: John Libbey & Company, 1993), p. 24.

²⁰ [Cmnd. 2601] *A Policy for the Arts: The First Steps* (London: HMSO, 1964-5), p. 16.

Ascent of Man (1973), some adult educationists claimed television to be the ‘principal adult education force in Britain’, with the potential to reach a far larger number of learners than any other media.²¹ Television was a fitting educational tool for aspiring artists, employing demonstration techniques used by adult education tutors to teach audiences in their own homes. In 1968, a 10-part series on drawing called *Eyeline* aired weekly on BBC2. The producers claimed that drawing could be ‘mastered with practice’ and encouraged viewers to copy exercises directly from the television screen.²² Such programming challenged the prevailing perception that television was the ‘prime residual activity’, demanding little concentration or skill.²³ *Eyeline* illustrated that rather than holding the nation captive in the living room, television could actually stimulate artistic activity and even ‘mass creativity’.²⁴ Watching television was, in terms of time use, an opaque activity. Some amateurs reported painting with ‘half an eye on the telly’ to help them get into their work – a mild distraction from the initial stress of negotiating an intimidatingly blank sheet of paper.²⁵ By the 1980s, arts programmes commissioned for enjoyment, not simply educative value, had found their way into peak time slots, broadcasting to large audiences.²⁶ In the 1990s, Alwyn Crawshaw’s relaxing watercolour tutorials in *A Brush with Art* and the competitive paint-off *Watercolour Challenge* continued to

²¹ Groombridge, B., ‘Broadcasting’ in Fieldhouse, R. (ed), *A History of Modern British Adult Education* (Leicester: National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education, 1996), p. 354; see also Rogers and Groombridge, *Right To Learn*, pp. 99-102; and also Withnall, A., Osborn, M. and Charnley, A., *Review of Existing Research in Adult and Continuing Education, Volume X: The Economics and Organisation of Adult and Continuing Education* (Leicester: National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education, 1982), pp. 47-8.

²² *Amateur Artist*, Vol. 12, No. 12 (Apr., 1968), p. 39.

²³ Scitovsky, T., *The Joyless Economy: An Enquiry into Human Satisfaction and Consumer Dissatisfaction* (New York: Oxford University press, 1976), p. 164; for a more recent interpretation see Offer, A., *The Challenge of Affluence: Self-Control and Well-Being in the United States and Britain Since 1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 181.

²⁴ Walker, *Arts TV*, p. 24.

²⁵ Interview with Julia Johnson Fry, former assistant accountant at St Edmund Hall, Oxford, 1 March, 2011.

²⁶ Adkins, G., *The Arts and Adult Education* (Leicester: Advisory Council for Adult and Continuing Education, 1981), p. 88.

entertain viewers with a creative bent.²⁷ Not all viewers participated in on-screen activities, but television offered an opportunity to engage with artistic creativity for more people than ever before. Crucially, it created demand for learning elsewhere; for amateurs who wanted to learn informally, television programmes and their partner publications provided a segue into other literature on the subject.

Not all art instruction for amateurs was of a practical nature. Some titles adopted the familiar ‘self-help’ format. Self-help as a tool for cultural improvement had a long heritage. Much of the literature of the mid-nineteenth century Smilesean ‘self-help craze’ focused on ‘how to get on’.²⁸ This was not simply about self-improvement in monetary terms; cultural enlightenment was regarded as central to personal development. Literature and the fine arts were regarded as ‘civilising factors in life’ and the working man was encouraged to improve himself socially and spiritually through them.²⁹ The ideal of self-help maintained its resonance in the twentieth century. The emphasis, however, shifted from dull rote instruction and self-improvement to free creative expression and self-exploration. Postwar self-help literature for the aspiring artist drew on psychological theory. The growing interest in personal creativity in the 1930s and 1940s owed much to the new theories of child education which were beginning to circulate (see chapter 4, p. 132). Herbert Read’s *Education Through Art* (1943) brought an awareness of psychological theory, and its connection to artistic creation, to artists and teachers for the first time.³⁰ An intimate and enduring relationship between art and psychology was suggested: art was not only a skill to be mastered, but also it possessed therapeutic properties.³¹ The amateur

²⁷ Walker, *Arts TV*, p. 25.

²⁸ Harrison, *Learning and Living*, pp. 203-10.

²⁹ *Ibid*, p. 87.

³⁰ Macdonald, *The History and Philosophy of Art Education*, p. 372.

³¹ Art as therapy was a concept seized upon by the newly developing field of art therapy shortly after the Second World War.

artist was in need not simply of practical classes or instructional manuals, but of ‘a sort of clinic ... and his teacher, heaven guide him, must be a practitioner, a mother and a clairvoyant’.³² Although popular with wealthy elites since the late-Victorian era, the heyday of psychoanalysis followed the Second World War, when it became available to ordinary people. In his history of psychiatry, Edward Shorter argues that ‘psychoanalysis was to therapy as expressionism was to art: both represented exquisite versions of the search for insight’.³³ Through the act of creation, individuals developed a new sense of self. ‘When we begin this adventure of making and doing, we begin to remake ourselves at the same time, discovering whole new worlds’, wrote the editor of *Amateur Artist* magazine in 1966.³⁴ As Ashington Group member Harry Wilson explains: ‘When I have done a piece of painting I feel that something has happened not only to the panel or canvas, but to myself. For a time I have enjoyed a sense of mastery – of having made something real.’³⁵ Art was packaged and administered as self-therapy: you could make yourself feel better. ‘Getting over’ barriers and ‘unleashing’ suppressed inner aptitudes were popular ideas in the field, as was reaching for the creativity of the ‘inner child’. Some texts, which sought to enlighten the reader and eradicate their psychological issues and creative blocks, became ‘must reads’ for the artistically inclined. David Bayles and Ted Orland’s *Art and Fear* (1993), for example, promoted self-therapy through popular psychology, capitalising on the allure of creativity and its restorative powers. Consuming this literature, it was inferred, would unveil not only the individual’s innate artistic ability but also their ‘real’ self, and lead to a better life.

³² Buehr, G., ‘Art Education and the Amateur’ in *Bulletin of the Art Institute of Chicago*, Vol. 42, No. 6 (1948), p. 88.

³³ Shorter, E., *A History of Psychiatry: From the Era of the Asylum to the Age of Prozac* (New York: Chichester, 1997), p. 153.

³⁴ *Amateur Artist*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (May, 1966), p. 3.

³⁵ Harry Wilson, 1938, in Feaver, W., *Pitmen Painters: The Ashington Group, 1934-1984* (Northumberland: Carcanet Press, 1993), p. 28.

Books were popular amongst amateurs. Yet some were sceptical about their effectiveness in teaching the practicalities of drawing and painting:

Over the years ... I have studied every art book I could lay my hands on and from them I learned what little I do know about drawing, composition, balance and even perspective, but if no one points out my mistakes, how do I know if I'm on the right track or floundering in a quagmire?³⁶

The absence of interaction with a tutor who could respond and offer constructive criticism was a significant drawback. 'The more manuals one reads', wrote one critic, 'the more one realises that they can only be adjuncts to the personal contact between teacher and student.'³⁷ Feedback was important to many amateurs. Receiving advice from a teacher helped the learning process and validated effort. While television reached the largest audience, it was magazines catering specifically for leisure painters that provided the most direct and dynamic form of guidance after personal student-teacher contact. Whereas television and books were essentially a closed avenue for learning, magazines offered a feedback loop, providing readers with a community through which to exchange ideas, advice and information. Magazine publishing for amateur artists found a relatively secure market in the last third of the twentieth century, but amateur art magazines and periodicals had been produced since the late-eighteenth century, with the *Artist's Repository and Drawing Magazine* being first published in 1784. By the mid-nineteenth century more periodicals and pamphlets catering for the leisured artist were brought to market. The *Artist and Amateur's Magazine*, launched in 1843, was an early attempt to arm the amateur with

³⁶ Letter from M. Sutherland, Bonar Bridge in *Leisure Painter* (Aug., 1975), p. 26.

³⁷ 'Book Reviews' in *Leisure Painter* (Dec., 1973), p. 44.

professional tips and knowledge of the ‘mysteries of art’.³⁸ It didn’t last the year; demand for such a publication was not to reach its height for more than a century, when a very different – and numerous – kind of amateur artist would be in ascendance.

In the second half of the nineteenth century the British letterpress industry developed rapidly. A combination of reduced taxes on weekly periodicals, the introduction of the steam-driven rotary press, and rising rates of literacy created the perfect conditions for a range of magazines catering for a variety of interests.³⁹ By the late-nineteenth century, demand had developed to such an extent that *Art Amateur* magazine was able to run from 1879 until 1903. This London-published American monthly did well to survive even for a short time in a market dominated by low-priced weekly periodicals. *Art Amateur* included a range of how-to articles: from painting in watercolours to drawing cats and kittens. It offered the reader advice, book reviews, a letters page, and provided space for companies to advertise their books, materials and courses. It was the prototype of the modern amateur art magazine. Yet nearly 30 years passed before a successor took its place.⁴⁰

During the interwar period, when a range of niche interests were brought to market by British publishers, amateur art magazines began to find a foothold.⁴¹ The monthly journal *Amateur Artist and Collector*, first published in 1927, ran for just two years. Yet in that short time it established the format amateur art magazines would take for nearly a century to come. The 34-page publication featured articles on art clubs, including the Society of Parson Painters and the Midland Bank Arts Club, as

³⁸ Ripplingille, E. V. (ed), *The Artist and Amateur’s Magazine: A Work Devoted to the Interests of the Arts and Design and the Cultivation of Taste* (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1843), p. 6.

³⁹ Cox, H. and Mowatt, S., ‘Vogue in Britain: Authenticity and the Creation of Competitive Advantage in the UK Magazine Industry’ in *Business History*, Vol. 54, No. 1 (Feb., 2012), p. 69.

⁴⁰ See, for example, *The Art Amateur: Devoted to Art in the Household*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (July, 1891).

⁴¹ Cox and Mowatt, ‘Vogue in Britain’, p. 71.

well as essays on ‘the status of the amateur’ and instructional articles written by ‘art teachers and painters of eminence’.⁴² The magazine’s mission was to cater for the ‘neglected and ignored’ amateur artist. Whereas amateur associations and clubs had previously ‘to depend on the hospitality of newspapers’ to announce and advertise their events, now they had their own journal, and ‘outside assistance’ would be no longer necessary.⁴³ The sense of community, of being ‘insiders’, was vital to the running of the magazine. It aimed to bring amateur artists ‘into closer touch’, to be a ‘friend to whom all may turn for counsel’, and ‘a medium for the exchange of views between readers’.⁴⁴ Despite its communal aspirations, the magazine ceased publication after just two years. This was not, however, unusual: the magazine industry in general had a high turnover of titles throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Within three years a newcomer had taken its place.

First published in 1931, *The Artist* magazine set out with the ‘object of assisting in the practical education and training of art students’.⁴⁵ While students were the stated readership, in practice the monthly magazine also appealed to a growing number of leisure painters. This was the first art magazine to retain a foothold in the amateur market. *The Artist* printed advice and practical instruction by ‘front rank’ professional artists with ‘years of experience’. Readers were promised a sympathetic education in art: ‘Students will be told what to aim for, and taken step-by-step along the path by artists ... who have been “through the mill” themselves, who have striven increasingly until success was won.’⁴⁶ From its first issue in 1931 until the 1960s, when several similar publications came onto newsagent shelves, the magazine could

⁴² *Amateur Artist and Collector: A Monthly Journal for All Interested in Art*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Nov., 1927), p. 1.

⁴³ Dodgson Bowman, W., ‘Filling the Gap’ in *Amateur Artist and Collector: A Monthly Journal for All Interested in Art*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Nov., 1927), p. 2.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ ‘Editorial’ in *The Artist*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Mar., 1931), p. 5.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

boast that it was ‘the only purely instructional art magazine in the world’.⁴⁷ In the second half of the twentieth century the number of special interest magazines grew rapidly. In 1958 there were at least 250 periodicals catering for the hobbies market.⁴⁸ As earlier chapters have illustrated, the mid-1960s was a period of cultural effervescence, during which art clubs, adult education, and the arts in general enjoyed a thriving popularity. As one advertisement for amateur publications proclaimed in 1966:

Every year, every day, more and more people discover the pleasures and problems of doing and making, as well as admiring and enjoying, in the infinitely various world of the arts and crafts. The desire and the leisure to paint ... were never so widespread as now among people of every sort.⁴⁹

Several magazines catering for amateurs entered the market, tapping into this potential readership. *Amateur Artist* began publication in May 1966, with advice and tips from experts on the arts and crafts. It was not a successful venture, unable to compete with its main competitor, *The Artist*. In May 1968, in an effort to eschew the stigma attached to amateurism and attract a broader range of readers, the magazine changed its name to *Canvas* ‘the magazine for all artists’.⁵⁰ But to no avail. *Amateur Artist* did not win out in the market place. It was *Leisure Painter*, launched the following year, that enjoyed enduring success. *Leisure Painter* was launched as a quarterly magazine for amateur painters in 1967. It started life as an A5 pocket book published by Reeves, the art materials manufacturer. By April 1973 the popularity of *Leisure Painter*, which had been taken over by the Artist Publishing Company, was

⁴⁷ Parkinson, F., (ed), *The Artist’s Guide and Review: Sixth Edition* (London: Artist Publishing Company, 1958).

⁴⁸ Tomlinson, A., *Leisure and the Role of Clubs and Voluntary Groups* (London: SSRC/Sports Council, 1979), p. 23.

⁴⁹ ‘For the Amateur Painter’ an advertisement for The Artist Publishing Company in *Amateur Artist*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (May, 1966), p. 3.

⁵⁰ *Canvas*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (May 1968).

such that the magazine went monthly and, by the end of 1978 switched to a more conventional A4 format.

Unlike *The Artist* (also produced by the Artist Publishing Company), *Leisure Painter* was aimed directly at ‘people who paint for pleasure in their spare time’.⁵¹ In its first edition, it argued: ‘You don’t have to have great talent to get pleasure from painting, but the more you paint the more know-how you are likely to want.’⁵² Imparting knowledge was an important aspect of these magazines, which made a significant contribution to adult education by providing opportunity for informal learning.⁵³ ‘Expert’ tutors provided lessons on the rudiments of art to ‘set beginners on the right track’.⁵⁴ The range of subjects covered was so broad that, within a few years, the pre-existing annual and biannual artists’ yearbooks and guides, which had provided comprehensive information on the art world for amateurs and students, were crowded out of the market and ceased publication.

Guides for artists had been in print in one form or another since the late-nineteenth century. *Geo. Rowney & Co.’s Artists’ Almanac*, published by the art materials manufacturer George Rowney and Co., listed all British art societies – amateur and professional – and art galleries, annually from 1879 until 1951. *The Artist’s Yearbook and Guide* ran from 1937 until 1969, and provided information and guidance on everything from how to form an amateur society or how much to charge as a freelance, to issues of copyright, insurance and marketing.⁵⁵ As the 1963 *Artist’s Guide* argued, amateur artists sought a great deal of information and advice on their chosen pursuit:

⁵¹ ‘Putting You in the Picture’ in *Leisure Painter* (Spring, 1967), p. 3.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Baynes and Marx, ‘Adult Education Auxiliaries and Informal Learning’, p. 315.

⁵⁴ ‘Putting You in the Picture’ in *Leisure Painter* (Spring, 1967), p. 3.

⁵⁵ See, for example, Sawkins, H. (ed), *The Artist’s Yearbook: First Edition* (London: The Artist Publishing Company, 1937), pp. 93-5; and also Briers, I. A. and Parkinson, F. (eds), *The Artist’s Guide: Eighth Edition* (London: The Artist Publishing Company, 1969).

There is no subject, past-time [sic] or hobby that is so wide as art ... The artist, whether he or she is a full-time professional or a part-time enjoyer, has to know a very large number of subjects: what brushes to use; where to get etching plates; is there a society in my home-town; what is a good book on the history of art; who could restore my picture; how do I sell my work; which art school is the most suitable. These are but a few of the many problems which often have to be decided.⁵⁶

In a small and increasingly crowded market place, the extensive advice and support offered in *Leisure Painter* rendered larger one-off guides to amateur art making redundant.⁵⁷

For a small investment – the cost of the magazine’s cover price and the spare time to read it – the amateur could reap the rewards of tailor-made content. This held particular appeal to amateurs who wanted advice without the pressure of having to show work in public or the cost of attending a formal art class. As the artist and tutor Ernest Savage, whose tutorials regularly featured in amateur art magazines in the 1970s, explained:

Most leisure painters at some stage become anxious to improve their skills and consider taking some form of tuition. Often they attend art classes organised by local Education Authorities, or decide to spend their vacation with travel and other organisations that run holiday painting courses around Britain and abroad. Some have private tuition from neighbouring artists, or enjoy painting sessions with their local art society. ... There are many who are doubtful about their ability to paint, and are shy of joining the ‘Experts’ in these activities, these generally rely on getting inspiration from books and magazines.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ ‘Foreword’ in Mills, J. (ed) *The Artist’s Guide: Seventh Edition* (London: The Artist Publishing Company, 1963), p. 1.

⁵⁷ In 2005 the format was rolled out again by Thames and Hudson as *The Artists’ Yearbook*. Although a profitable level of demand had been identified, the format was discontinued after its 2010-11 edition because sales, estimated at between 5,000 and 7,000 per year, had not reached a ‘viable’ level. In an email in 2011, the editor blamed the internet for the *Yearbook*’s short lifespan.

⁵⁸ Savage, E., ‘Learning to Paint by Post’ in *Leisure Painter* (Feb., 1975), p. 25.

Leisure Painter, in particular, provided readers with an unthreatening initiation into the subject of art, and gently developed their confidence and self-esteem. As well as the usual content – a crossword, a letter page and various competitions – how-to articles such as ‘You find drawing difficult?’ and ‘Hints for sketching out of doors’ enticed the nervous amateur to engage with creative activity. Regular features such as ‘Never had a lesson’, ‘Why I paint’ and ‘Late starter’, focussed on the amateur experience, providing comfort, encouragement and, above all, a sense of camaraderie for novices. These articles were printed alongside profiles of famous contemporary artists, such as L. S. Lowry, and biographies of late masters, such as Degas or Constable, suggesting no discontinuity between amateur or professional, weekend dabbler or ‘genius’ maestro. In *Leisure Painter*, the canon of art was an open and welcoming feast: from venerated master Rembrandt to post-impressionist Georges Seurat, and from full-time art teacher Leslie Ann Gorton to retired leisure painter Phyllis Pearsall – all were considered equally deserving of attention. Like many consumer magazines launched during this period, features were often recycled: a great deal of content had not changed in style vastly since the late-nineteenth century.⁵⁹ The repetitive nature was part of its charm. Amateur art magazines provided a warm and unthreatening medium for exploring artistic creativity: the endless permutations of the same lessons provided a sense of mastery for regular readers, and a note of familiarity to those who dipped in and out from time to time. Nobody was going to be left behind or struggle to catch up.

Magazines did far more than simply support the isolated amateur. They encouraged readers to participate in public activities as a complement to their private endeavours. As well as promoting exhibitions like the National Amateur Exhibition

⁵⁹ Cox and Mowatt, ‘Vogue in Britain’, p. 69.

and the National Housewives' Art Exhibition, amateur art magazines intersected with the interests of art clubs. As discussed in chapters 2 and 3, most art clubs created their own journals or newsletters, which provided their close-knit communities with advice and useful information. Frustrated newsletter editors often struggled to get fellow members to contribute copy, and many noticeably shrank in size when the arrival of commercial publications like *Leisure Painter* relieved them of their duties. The magazines featured societies and clubs in every issue, and compiled lists of professional artists willing to give demonstrations to members.⁶⁰ Group discounts on subscriptions were offered to encourage this relationship.⁶¹ Magazines were useful to societies, providing information on issues pertinent to their organisation, such as copyright, insurance or marketing – particularly once the aforementioned guides had been discontinued.⁶²

Not only did magazines assist in raising the proficiency of artists unable or unwilling to attend classes or participate in society life, but also they provided a sense of community for their readers. While the vast majority of amateurs sought education and advice for solitary activity, some found the magazines offered a relaxed and informal social environment. Specialist magazines provided a hub for communication between lone amateurs. As one *Leisure Painter* reader wrote in a letter to the magazine:

The feeling of warmth, closeness and above all friendship conveyed through *Leisure Painter* is something that I cannot easily describe with words. The lack of stiffness and the feeling that everyone, from the artists who write the articles to the readers, belongs is something

⁶⁰ See, for example *Leisure Painter* (Apr., 1976), p. 1.

⁶¹ Subsidies for subscriptions to *Leisure Painter* and *The Artist* were advertised during the 1960s and 1970s in the *Association of Civil Service Art Clubs Newsletter*.

⁶² In a Society of Staffordshire Artists minute book, for example, there was enclosed a photocopy of an article from *Artists and Illustrators* magazine (Mar., 1996): 'Questions of Copyright: When Does Artistic Homage Become Theft?'

that I have not come across before in a magazine that caters for a particular interest.⁶³

Leisure Painter's editorial team fostered this sense of community. Readers were encouraged to treat the magazine as a forum: 'To exchange experiences; to ask questions; to air their views.'⁶⁴ The magazine was responsive to requests for features and services. In August 1975, for example, a Miss Sutherland from Bonar Bridge wrote to the letters page requesting the magazine provide constructive criticism for amateurs who did not attend an art group or evening class.⁶⁵ By October of the same year, *Leisure Painter* had introduced a free 'advisory service' for readers to send in 'technical queries' to a team of 'editorial consultants'.⁶⁶ The magazine already ran a criticism service, where readers could send in three paintings and receive 'constructive criticism' from a panel of experts. Sometimes submitted work was featured in the magazine alongside its professional critique. Such services, which attempted to recreate the critiques popular with art societies, played a part in raising self-awareness and self-esteem. These initiatives were not tokenistic gestures of goodwill. Interaction was actively encouraged with the incentive of a free subscription to *Leisure Painter* for the best work submitted.⁶⁷

Such initiatives were not particularly innovative, and had appeared in earlier magazines; in the late-1920s the *Amateur Artist and Collector* asked readers to submit their technical problems to the editor for help.⁶⁸ Advisory schemes were inspired by correspondence school tuition, which had been a popular method of learning since the

⁶³ 'Readers' Letters' in *Leisure Painter* (June, 1978), p. 16.

⁶⁴ *Leisure Painter* (Spring, 1967), p. 1.

⁶⁵ Letter from M. Sutherland, Bonar Bridge in *Leisure Painter* (Aug., 1975), p. 26.

⁶⁶ 'Editorial' in *Leisure Painter* (Oct., 1975), p. 1.

⁶⁷ *Leisure Painter* (Feb., 1976), p. 1.

⁶⁸ *Amateur Artist and Collector: A Monthly Journal for All Interested in Art*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (Dec., 1927), p. 64.

nineteenth century penny post.⁶⁹ Following the Second World War, an ever-expanding variety of arts subjects were offered by correspondence colleges, attracting amateurs from many different walks of life.⁷⁰ Courses came with a booklet of illustrated lessons. The student would send in their work, and an art tutor return it with a critique, usually written on transparent paper overlays.⁷¹ Correspondence courses, like magazines, appealed to those who could not attend formal classes – the housebound or shift workers, for example – and also to those who sought to avoid the pressure of public show associated with societies and adult education classes. If there was no nearby art school, or transport was too expensive, or tuition fees too high, there was no need to be deterred; by living at home, and studying in their spare time, students were able to work to support their studies.⁷² Correspondence courses were the next best thing to the private art master, employed by the upper classes in the nineteenth century, but beyond the means of most leisure painters in the twentieth. Through correspondence, a traditional form of art tuition could be fitted around working life. The format, which was eagerly adopted by magazines, may not have been particularly original, but it was popular, and helped cement the interests of the magazine with those of its readership.

The Artists Publishing Company, which published both *The Artist* and *Leisure Painter*, integrated itself into the world of the amateur artist through a number of initiatives. It published a range of books on art and ran book clubs offering ‘special

⁶⁹ Rogers and Groombridge, *Right To Learn*, p. 93.

⁷⁰ Stephens, M. D., *Adult Education* (London: Cassell, 1990), p. 45; see also Savage, E., ‘Learning to Paint by Post’ in *Leisure Painter* (Feb., 1975), p. 27.

⁷¹ As technology improved, cassette tutorial systems were used to add a personal touch. See advertisement for Pitman’s ‘Voice Link’ tutorial system in *Leisure Painter* (Feb., 1975), p. 24; for earlier examples of technological development see advertisements in Sawkins, H. (ed), *The Artist’s Yearbook: First Edition* (London: The Artist Publishing Company, 1937), p. 26. The correspondence concept was developed more fully in the 1980s by the Open College of Arts, a long-distance learning college which, similarly to the Open University, offered the option to gain credits towards degrees in fine art.

⁷² Jardine, D. L., ‘2: Correspondence School Instruction as a Foundation for Careers in Commercial Art’ in *Art Education*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (Jan., 1968), p. 18.

members discounts'.⁷³ The mail order *Artist Series* included titles such as *On Painting a Portrait* and *Introduction to Watercolours*, written by well-known artist-tutors such as Jack Merriott and Hesketh Hubbard.⁷⁴ The company sponsored the National Amateur Art Exhibition in London, which attracted 'thousands of quite good painters and sculptors' annually.⁷⁵ It also promoted sketching holidays in the UK and on the continent and, as discussed above, ran a queries service for readers, answering questions on the technicalities of art making.⁷⁶ By weaving its business into the fabric of amateur life, the Artists Publishing Company made itself indispensable from both private and social forms of amateur artistic creativity.

Magazine publishers capitalised on the individual's search for self-actualisation through art, tapping into the creative drive and providing a platform for other commercial interests to intersect with those of amateurs. The magazines' business models demanded a keen understanding of their readerships in order to be able to effectively market advertising space to interested companies. Amateur art magazines were not unusual for developing a close relationship with readers; similar techniques were used throughout the magazine industry. Relationships were forged by editorial with its readership on the one hand, and its advertisers on the other, in large glossies and small special interest magazines alike. The connection between editorial and advertising had been pioneered to great effect by Condé Nast, who used *Vogue* magazine to attract lucrative advertising revenue to appeal to the luxury market.⁷⁷ Just as *Vogue*'s editors worked with businesses in the fashion industry, so too amateur art magazines courted – and were courted by – art materials manufacturers, artists'

⁷³ *Leisure Painter* (May, 1978), p. 3.

⁷⁴ Advertisement featured in Parkinson, F. (ed), *The Artist's Guide and Review: Sixth Edition* (London: The Artist Publishing Company, 1958), xxiii-xxv.

⁷⁵ Sandilands, G. S., 'Survey of the Year's Art' in Parkinson, F. (ed), *The Artist's Guide and Review: Sixth Edition* (London: The Artist Publishing Company, 1958), p. 32.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ Cox and Mowatt, 'Vogue in Britain', pp. 72-4.

holiday enterprises, publishers and other interested companies. Appealing to readers was a vital part of attracting and retaining advertisers upon whose rates the magazines' livelihoods depended.⁷⁸ As one candid *Leisure Painter* editorial acknowledged:

We know that in lending aid and authority to our ideas and opinions, the largest materials suppliers in the UK are finding our pages invaluable in announcing their products and services to our readers. We all need one another in our ceaseless search for proficiency – whether we are learning to paint, publishing an art magazine, producing artists' materials, or offering a variety of services to the artist. We are all fortunate that in this extremely pleasant field of endeavour, all those concerned in so many ways are sincerely trying to help the others.⁷⁹

A host of businesses advertised in these magazines, all carefully targeting readers' interests. Self-help books were promoted regularly in book reviews and advertorials. How-to publisher Hodder and Stoughton, for whom art titles were a popular strand of their low-cost *Teach Yourself* series, catered for the same readership as *The Artist* and *Leisure Painter*.⁸⁰ Appealing to the amateur's desire for creative activity at minimal expense, one advertisement for a *Teach Yourself* guide advised:

Don't say 'But I can't draw' – you won't need to, the painting has been started for you by the teacher, a famous artist who has also written the 16 page full-colour book of instructions you will get with the Course. Make your leisure moments happy, creative and completely satisfying for so little cost!⁸¹

Art material manufacturers such as Winsor and Newton and George Rowney and Co. (later Daler-Rowney) also advertised heavily in the magazines, often using expensive double-page spreads or back covers to promote their products. Their advertorial

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, p. 80.

⁷⁹ 'Editorial' in *Leisure Painter* (Dec., 1978), p. 3.

⁸⁰ Rogers and Groombridge, *Right To Learn*, p. 97.

⁸¹ *Leisure Painter* (Oct., 1976), p. 3.

strategies will be explored more fully in the next chapter, which examines the involvement of art material manufacturers in the amateur art world.

After twenty years of dominating the market for amateur artist magazines, *Leisure Painter* and *The Artist* were joined by a new competitor. ‘There are more artists and illustrators in the UK now than at any time previously’, proclaimed the first ever editorial in *Artists and Illustrators* magazine in 1986. The magazine carved a niche for itself by appealing to the more aspirational amateur artist: the leisure painter who would rather not be referred to as such. The magazine for ‘professionals and aspiring amateurs’ pledged to provide ‘inspiration’ alongside technical and commercial know-how.⁸² *Artists and Illustrators* combined aspects of *Leisure Painter* and *The Artist*: from interviews with leading contemporary artists and art organisations to step-by-step instructional articles, as well as product guides and information on artists’ events and holidays. The magazine set itself apart from its veteran competitors as ‘the UK’s only full colour practical art magazine’, yet its how-to articles were similar to those featured in *Leisure Painter*. The confidence of *Artists and Illustrators*’ publishers in the growth of the amateur art market was rewarded by a sustained readership. By the end of the twentieth century, *The Artist*, *Leisure Painter*, and *Artists and Illustrators* had each achieved a relatively secure market share.

The circulation of these magazines expanded to meet a growing number of consumers interested in pursuing art in their spare time. This growth took place at the same time as the expansion of both art societies and adult education. Yet the breadth and reach of art magazine publishing continued to enlarge when, as described in

⁸² Russel-Cobb, F., ‘Foreword’ in *The Artists’ and Illustrator’s Magazine* (Oct., 1986), p. 3.

chapters 4 and 5, adult education was pared back.⁸³ The most significant growth in amateur art magazine circulation took place from the 1980s onwards, when workplace art clubs and adult education struggled to continue. Between 1985 and 2010 the circulation of *Leisure Painter* increased by 157 per cent, while *The Artist's* circulation also more than doubled.⁸⁴ These magazines gained popularity during a period of transition towards a more heavily consumerist and individualist society.⁸⁵ Private forms of self-learning became ever more important as state-subsidised forms, such as adult education, were being dismantled. As one *Leisure Painter* reader observed in 1977:

Inflation has hit all of us – not only with our rent and rates, quarterly bills and sometimes unemployment; but also through study courses and leisure activities. We are all discovering that local grants are being cut, or disappearing, so that classes in painting, the crafts flower arranging, or whatever, are being trimmed or disappearing completely. This is truly food for thought – have we not – all of us – taken for granted over the last 20 years the largesse of facilities that we could so easily and sometimes casually take advantage of? There are few of us who have not joined in an evening class once a week for a few pounds a year; using reasonably well ordered classrooms administered by well-trained tutors. ... Perhaps we will all now appreciate the facilities offered by our local art groups, who offer painting space and tuition at such a low cost for members. And, of course, more than ever we should take advantage of instruction from such publications as *Leisure Painter*. Where else can one find such a variety of help and information for only 40p a month?⁸⁶

As self-funded bodies, art clubs were not generally at the whim of adult education cuts by local government and, as commercial interests, neither were magazines. The societies examined in chapters 2 and 3 may not have sustained their postwar growth

⁸³ Tuckett, A., 'Counting the Cost: Managerialism, the Market and the Education of Adults in the 1980s and Beyond' in Westwood, S. and Thomas, J. E. (eds), *The Politics of Adult Education* (Leicester: National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education, 1991), p. 21.

⁸⁴ Correspondence with Dr Sally Bulgin, editor of *The Artist* and *Leisure Painter*, 2011.

⁸⁵ Circulation differs from sales (companies often printed extra copies to entice advertisers, so the accuracy of these figures is uncertain) but in 1991, the circulation of *The Artist* was 17,000 and *Leisure Painter*, 23,000. See Hutchison and Feist, *Amateur Arts in the UK*, p. 255.

⁸⁶ *Leisure Painter* (Dec., 1977), p. 30.

in the late twentieth century, but this did not mean fewer people were taking up painting and drawing as a recreational activity. In 1981 a survey on the *The Arts and Adult Education* argued:

One consequence of the present financial pressures on the public provision of adult education is the diversion of demand towards self-help arrangements ... For many, adult education courses are the only doorway to the arts and crafts, and in some places these doors are now being closed.⁸⁷

While avenues for formal learning became accessible only to the more affluent in society, anyone keen to learn could do so through a range of publications readily available at mass market prices or, if not purchased, then borrowed from the local library.⁸⁸ The appeal of art had not diminished: in 2002, nine per cent of General Household Survey respondents ‘painted or did drawing, printmaking or sculpture’ in the four weeks before interview.⁸⁹ For the vast majority of amateurs, books and magazines provided an alternative ‘doorway’ to the arts.

The commonplace assertion that, in the second half of the twentieth century, a consumer-based society replaced a producer-based society should not be taken for granted: production and consumption operated together rather than as two distinct realms.⁹⁰ Consumerism was a crucial part of the amateur artist’s existence in the twentieth century – not, as is often asserted, a hindrance to it. Amateur artists both produced *and* consumed artistic creativity. Consumerism, in the form of magazine and book purchasing, enabled many leisure painters to engage in artistic creativity and to learn at their own pace and convenience. Yet consumption was not simply defined

⁸⁷ Adkins, *The Arts and Adult Education*, p. 10.

⁸⁸ This phenomenon was not unique to art; in 1991, 25 per cent of adult learners learnt at home from a book – see Sargent, *Learning and Leisure*, p. 94.

⁸⁹ Fox and Richards, *National Statistics: Sport and Leisure Results from the Sport and Leisure Module of the 2002 General Household Survey*, pp. 38-40.

⁹⁰ Ransome, P., *Work, Consumption and Culture: Affluence and Social Change in the Twenty-first Century* (London: Sage, 2005), p. 3.

by the sales and profit margins of commercial interests; amateur artists were consumers in another, more fundamental sense. They consumed the *idea* of creativity. Making fine art and craft, which ‘exudes unashamed materiality’, was a means of consumption, not an escape from it.⁹¹ ‘Chop your own wood and it will warm you twice’, the saying goes: amateurs consumed the experience of making art and then consumed the art itself by hanging it on the wall or giving it away as a gift.⁹²

The western obsession with ‘unleashing’ creativity was part of a culture of rampant consumption. Creativity was sold like a wonder pill by self-help books. They promised to deliver creative insight and were devoured in large number. Creativity had a powerful allure. Its promise encouraged consumption both inside and outside of the market. It is beyond the remit of this study to establish how many amateurs attained their objectives, but that it was considered worth pursuing is evident in the buoyant markets for self-help and how-to literature in the latter half of the twentieth century. Through consumption of these products the drive towards artistic creativity could be fulfilled within the experience of everyday life without ever leaving the front door.

⁹¹ Hackney, F., ‘Use Your Hands for Happiness: Home Craft and Make-do-and-Mend in British Women’s Magazines in the 1920s and 1930s’ in *Journal of Design History*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (2006), p. 35. See also Turney, J., ‘Here’s One I Made Earlier: Making and Living with Home Craft in Contemporary Britain’ in *Journal of Design History*, Vol. 17, No. 3 (2004), pp. 267-82.

⁹² Quotation in Bowkett, S., *100 Ideas for Teaching Creativity* (London: Continuum Books, 2007), p. 141.

CHAPTER 7

Making a mark

‘Acrylics entered my painting life. I took to them instantly, using them transparent or opaque, even impasto, and finding them a great comfort. Somehow, the very fact that they were new gave me courage. We were both novices together.’¹

Affluence democratised artistic creativity. The leisured amateur of the nineteenth century was joined in the twentieth by the rank and file. Neither gentleman amateurs nor ladies cultivating accomplishments, these were ordinary men and women with enough spare cash to pursue interests outside their ‘workaday obligations’.² These individuals sought company in art societies, instruction in adult education, and advice from magazines and books on how to paint, where to study, what societies to join, and which materials to buy. The postwar consumer society facilitated the take-up of amateur artistic creativity. A combination of mass leisure and disposable income created a large market for the manufacturers of products servicing a broad range of leisure interests. Materials were necessary for the artist to make his or her mark; as opportunities for self-expression through artistic creativity developed, so too did the market for consumables designed to cater for the needs of a growing number of leisure painters. Developments in this market provide a useful guide with which to evaluate artistic creativity within the experience of ordinary life. By the end of the twentieth century, the amateur market formed the bulk of revenue for the UK’s leading art material manufacturers. A host of inexpensive and sometimes gimmicky products reflected the market for which they were created: an increasingly product-hungry population of leisure painters in pursuit of their own creativity.

¹ Stanton, C., ‘I Wanted to Paint’ in *Leisure Painter* (Apr., 1975), pp. 8-9.

² Dumazedier, J., *Towards a Society of Leisure* (New York: Free Press, 1967), p. 17.

Artists' colourmen, as art materials manufacturers were known in the late-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, catered for both artists and the wealthier classes for whom art was either an idle diversion or an accomplishment, but rarely a livelihood. Winsor and Newton and George Rowney and Co. (which later became Daler-Rowney and, for purposes of consistency, will be referred to as Rowney in this chapter) had been forerunners in the market for quality artists' materials since the late-eighteenth century.³ They made their names catering for the palettes of distinguished artists. The archives of Winsor and Newton, for example, contain correspondence with famous painters, requesting the formulation of new colours and advising on improvements to packaging.⁴ During the nineteenth century, both companies focused on capturing the centre ground in the artists' materials market. Innovation was central to their success. Products were improved to please professional artists who ground and mixed their own pigments, and a small number of wealthy amateurs who required modest samples of pre-mixed paint. Since principal customers were artists desirous of greater luminosity, permanence, and range of colour, major developments centred around improving and perfecting existing products; price, although of importance, was not the primary driving factor behind early formulations. Amateurs and professionals alike benefited from the resultant product developments, from the creation of moist watercolours in 1830 and the collapsible paint tube in 1841, to the introduction of new pigments.⁵ The market for these materials was limited and they remained relatively expensive. They were not accessible to the working class who, even if aware of the pleasures of art, toiled for

³ Rowney merged with Daler in the 1983 to become Daler-Rowney and, after several takeovers, Winsor and Newton is today owned by the art materials giant Colart, which also houses the Lefranc and Bourgeois, Reeves, and Liquitex brands.

⁴ Letters from John Everett Millais and John Ruskin are, for example, held in the Winsor and Newton archives (Wealdstone, Box MD8 [N.B. Colart has since relocated Winsor and Newton operations to France]).

⁵ Winsor and Newton trade catalogue, 1900 (Winsor and Newton archives, Wealdstone).

hours too long and pay packets too small to spend a significant proportion of either on the pursuit of fine art. Those from less well-off backgrounds were not excluded from art making, but their efforts, made with improvised materials, were more ephemeral: boards for canvases, crude concoctions and stains for paint. Some nineteenth century miners, for example, drew on the whitewashed walls of the colliery huts with coal.⁶ This was to change significantly over the course of the twentieth century, when the artists watchful of price rather than quality would come to rule the direction of the colourmen's chemists. The arms race of product development took on a new intensity as these businesses recognised a growing market happy to sacrifice a little quality for something more affordable.

Prior to the twentieth century, artists' materials manufacturers had concentrated on the production of painting and drawing materials. Following the advent of the camera, which brought about the decline of both the painted portrait and the private drawing master, a slump in demand for existing products necessitated a change of direction. The colourmen broadened their portfolios to include a range of amateur craft materials during the late-Victorian and Edwardian period. Alongside the usual artists' materials, a 1900 Winsor and Newton catalogue featured 15 pages of Madame E. Vouga's 'fine art studies'. These decorative illustrations of birds, flowers, country scenes and castles, were designed to be copied onto screens, door panels and china.⁷ Such products were aimed at hobbyists rather than serious amateur artists, who at this stage would have still had to pay for artists' quality mixes. In a separate section of the same catalogue a small number of 'student quality' products, including sketch books and easels, were also featured.⁸ Student ranges were at first tentative. Diversification

⁶ Harvey, J., *Miner-Artists: The Art of the Welsh Coal Workers* (Aberystwyth: National Library of Wales, 2000).

⁷ Winsor and Newton trade catalogue, 1900, p. 220 (Winsor and Newton archives, Wealdstone).

⁸ Winsor and Newton trade catalogue, 1900, p. 123 (Winsor and Newton archives, Wealdstone).

was, however, crucial to the survival of the colourmen when, like many manufacturers, their fortunes were dented by a series of catastrophic global events in the first half of the twentieth century. The disruption of overseas trade to Germany during the First World War, closely followed by the devastating 1923 earthquake in Japan, which depressed trade to the far east, shattered confidence. Winsor and Newton's profits showed improvement throughout the rest of the 1920s but, as fig. 7.1 (below) illustrates, the recovery was floored in the early-1930s by the 'unprecedented trading conditions' of the Great Depression.⁹

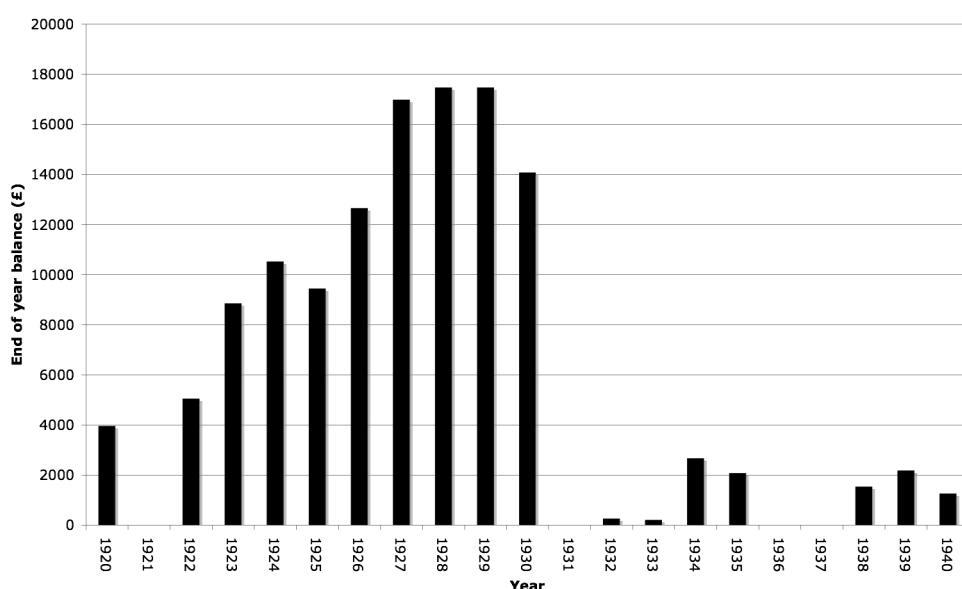


Fig. 7.1: Winsor and Newton end of year trading balance, 1920-40
Source: Winsor and Newton annual reports (Winsor and Newton archives, Wealdstone, Box MD2)

To counter declining sales, Winsor and Newton made a determined move into student quality materials, launching the Scholastic range in 1933.¹⁰ By the end of that year, the board optimistically reported an 'improvement in trading' (despite recording an overall loss) and the company was kept afloat. Gradually, the artists' materials

⁹ Winsor and Newton annual report, 1932 (Winsor and Newton archives, Wealdstone, Box MD2).

¹⁰ Winsor and Newton, 'History of Colour Making' (Courtesy of Winsor and Newton's Marketing Department, 2010).

market was divided into three distinct segments: fine art, student and hobby.¹¹ By 1940 export trade had begun to improve and, despite wartime shortages of raw materials, the company returned 'record sales' in 1941.¹²

A period of austerity followed the war, during which time production continued to be limited to 'essentials', and paint and picture frames were in short supply.¹³ War time make do and mend was necessary for amateurs and professionals alike. 'Materials being scarce at this time, I made do with anything I could paint on', one leisure painter recounts.¹⁴ Henry Stockley, a London Transport bus driver, used 'old pieces of linoleum, wallpaper and even old pillowslips' to make his art.¹⁵ As restrictions were removed, products were gradually reintroduced to the market. They were met with enthusiasm. In 1950, *Geo. Rowney & Co.'s Artists' Almanac* claimed that 'four times as many artists are using Rowney goods as they did pre-war'.¹⁶ The majority were amateurs, new not only to Rowney's wares, but to art making in general. Whereas previously many would have experimented with homemade materials, now amateurs could tentatively explore drawing and painting with shop-bought products, without facing a prohibitively expensive investment.¹⁷ Making one's own materials was, however, considered by some to be a rewarding and thrifty pastime. The inventive ethos of the war years percolated into art making for those artists conditioned by an era of expensive materials in limited supply. One recurrent query in amateur art magazines and society newsletters related to the fabrication of

¹¹ A division which still exists today. See, for example, *European Council of the Paint, Printing Ink and Artists' Colour Industry Annual Report* (Brussels: CEPE, 2006), p. 6.

¹² Winsor and Newton annual report, 1941 (Winsor and Newton archives, Wealdstone, Box MD2).

¹³ George Rowney and Co. Catalogue, 1948 (Daler-Rowney archives, Bracknell), p. 3; see also Hutchinson, S., *The History of the Royal Academy, 1768-1986* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1986), p. 166.

¹⁴ Vickers, W. A., 'I Wanted to Paint' in *Leisure Painter* (July, 1973), pp. 36-43.

¹⁵ 'Our People' in *London Transport Magazine*, No. 2, Vol. 2 (May, 1948), p. 14 (London Transport Museum Library, Covent Garden).

¹⁶ *Geo. Rowney & Co.'s Artists' Almanac* (1950), p. 2.

¹⁷ Buehr, G., 'Art Education and the Amateur' in *Bulletin of the Art Institute of Chicago*, Vol. 42, No. 6 (1948), p. 90.

homemade boards. An article about the Medics Art Society in the *British Medical Journal* in 1957 recommended the use of ‘some pieces of stout cardboard or plywood with two coats of common glue-size’.¹⁸ Expensive materials were not necessary to make art. As one art tutor argued: ‘What does it matter how you do it or what you use? A shaving brush, toothbrush, a nailbrush, your thumb; the lot. What does it matter as long as the keenness of feeling comes out?’¹⁹ Yet cautionary tales of misadventure reminded the beginner that artistic creativity could be easily extinguished through the use of inappropriate materials and tools. One beginner reportedly used olive oil as a medium instead of linseed. When her painting failed to dry, she baked it in the oven until it was ‘nicely browned and charred around the edges’.²⁰ Most amateurs preferred to play it safe and preserve precious painting time by using pre-made colours and surfaces. They belonged to a rapidly expanding legion of leisure painters enjoying a ‘golden age’ of record employment, increasing wages and expanding leisure time. Yet still, price was a deciding factor for the majority; the manufacturers responded with products designed to cater for a variety of different interests, aptitudes and, most importantly, budgets.

Responding to the amateur’s budgetary constraints was not a new challenge for material manufacturers; John Ruskin, like many a modern-day cost-conscious amateur, wrote to Winsor and Newton in the late-nineteenth century to suggest some worthwhile economy might be made if he bought in large quantities: ‘If you tell me what pigments you can furnish in bulk, without heavy cost,’ he wrote, ‘I will choose the set I should like.’²¹ In the postwar years, bulk-buying for economy was no longer necessary, as manufacturers set about finding ways to make small pre-selected ranges

¹⁸ Levy, M., ‘Painting for Pleasure’ in *The British Medical Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 5059 (21 Dec., 1957), p. 1485.

¹⁹ ‘Not Many Masterpieces But Wonderful Enjoyment’ in *Leisure Painter* (Mar., 1971), pp. 16-21.

²⁰ Buehr, ‘Art Education and the Amateur’, p. 90.

²¹ Letter from John Ruskin, 11 Jan 1888 (Winsor and Newton archives, Wealdstone, Box MD8).

of paint attractive to amateurs with limited means. Initially, amateurs were served by ranges developed for students. Rowney's range boasted five varieties of student paint in 1948, doubling to 10 in 1959, and rising to 14 by 1981.²² The student ranges were a success, but it soon became evident that the potential of the amateur market was not being fully utilised. In the postwar years, the companies rebranded their competitively-priced oils and watercolours for amateur artists without explicitly merchandising them as either amateur or student products. Winsor and Newton had already created Winton oils in 1936, and added Cotman watercolours to its amateurs' range in 1967. Rowney introduced its Georgian range of watercolours and oils in 1953. In an effort to raise the profile and legitimacy of less expensive products of a lower specification, the similarity of their origin and manufacture to those at the top of the range was emphasised. Student and amateur products were no longer advertised separately at the back of trade catalogues, but proudly positioned side by side with their professional counterparts. In consumer publications, two tubes of Cadmium Red were used to advertise Rowney oil paint in 1973: one 'Artists' quality and the other Rowney Georgian. 'It's great when you can afford it', read the caption beneath the artists' colour and, beneath the Georgian, 'it's very good when you can't'.²³

Pricing was crucial to capturing the amateur market. The manufacturers aimed to promote products which were 'not only the right quality for the artists' palette – but at the right price for the artists' pocket!'.²⁴ The differential in price between professional materials and those intended for amateurs was significant: a No. 12 nylon brush by Winsor and Newton cost 50 pence in 1972, for example, whereas the same size brush in sable would set the artist back more than ten times as much, at £5.25 a

²² Statistics collected from Rowney trade catalogues in Bracknell.

²³ Gainsborough, J., *Arts Review Yearbook and Directory* (London: Gainsborough Periodicals, 1975), p. 170.

²⁴ *Leisure Painter* (Sep., 1978), pp. 18-9.

piece.²⁵ Firms appealed to amateurs by introducing ranges of paint with a consistent price point: unlike professional artists' ranges, each tube of paint, no matter the pigment, would cost the same amount. To achieve price consistency, less-expensive materials and manufacturing processes were employed. As one Winsor and Newton advertisement boasted: 'We produce two ranges of most things. One range is really exceptional. The other range is exceptionally good. And as a result nobody ever works with bad materials.'²⁶ Each tier – professional, student or amateur – required different formulations, created in the Research and Development laboratory. The grade of colour was dependent on a pigment's natural strength, how finely that pigment was ground and its light fastness. Artists' quality pigment was finely milled to a thick, buttery consistency, which lent greater permanence and luminosity. Student or amateur quality, meanwhile, contained substitute pigments from non-traditional materials to give a similar colour hue. Pigments could cost anything from 67 pence to £92.60 per kilo (at 2010 prices). Relatively inexpensive pigments, like ultramarine, could be used in all ranges, but in many cases, as quality declined, the level of pigment reduced and the amount of 'extender' increased.²⁷

New products were continually brought to market during the immediate postwar years, from poster colour and student-level gouache in the 1950s to large tins of Rowney School of Art oil paint and cheap PVA colour in the 1960s. The extent of product development can be gauged from trade catalogues: Rowney's increased from 57 pages in 1948 to 124 in 1953, with a product index which leapt from 170 products in 1948 to 305 in the late-1980s (similarly, the Winsor and Newton product index

²⁵ Winsor and Newton catalogue, 1972, p. 38 (Winsor and Newton archives, Wealdstone).

²⁶ Gainsborough, J., *Arts Review Yearbook and Directory* (London: Gainsborough Periodicals, 1975).

²⁷ Interview with Tom Stagles, head scientist in the research and development department at Daler-Rowney, Bracknell, 10 December 2010; and also Daler-Rowney marketing department's 'Quality Presentation', 2010.

increased by 56 per cent between 1948 and 1968).²⁸ The range of products available catered for all levels of interest and aptitude – from dabblers who wished to copy or paint by numbers, to amateurs who sought to learn the craft of art, to professional artists who made a living from their work. In this respect, the market for artists' materials had, like art societies and art education, a fractal quality: regardless of the level of specification, the products looked much the same. As was the case in many arenas where the interests of amateurs and professionals co-existed, materials catering for the professional strata influenced materials created for and used by amateurs.²⁹ Ranges at the lower end of the market benefited from the research and expertise invested in products of a higher specification. Where innovations for artists took place, student and amateur products tended to follow.

Product innovations and developments stemmed from the manufacturers' attempts to increase their share of the leisure painter market, rather than demand from the market itself.³⁰ Products which did not have a particularly long shelf life were intended to stimulate demand. While some amateurs enjoyed using professional materials, the majority were looking for something that required a lower investment of both time and income. These amateurs, hungry for new ways to engage in art, provided a market receptive to a host of gimmicky products. By the mid-1950s, the number of craft materials for hobbyists on the market had grown considerably since the days of Madame E. Vouga. Faddish products, many of which faded after a year or two, appealed to the impulse purchaser and were introduced one after another. Some were popular and survived, undergoing a minor reinvention every few years to capture more toe-dippers. The most popular format was the copying kit: a

²⁸ Statistics collected from Rowney and Winsor and Newton trade catalogues in Bracknell and Wealdstone.

²⁹ Bishop, J. and Hoggett, P., *Organizing Around Enthusiasms: Mutual Aid in Leisure* (London: Comedia, 1986), p. 81.

³⁰ *Ibid*, p. 50.

reformulation of the nineteenth century design books which presented simple outlines for tracing. Kits were popular with leisure painters, and manufacturers regularly launched different combinations, bringing them to the attention of target consumers through advertisements in amateur art magazines. One *Leisure Painter* magazine editorial described an ‘eruption of the painting by numbers craze in the post war world’.³¹ This ‘craze’ had countless incarnations, all of which involved copying the work of professional artists. ‘Starter kits’ or ‘outfits’ typically contained an outline and colour guide printed onto either canvas or board, an instruction leaflet or set of lessons, and a small selection of paint, some turpentine and a painting medium.³² Winsor and Newton’s Oilographs, introduced in the mid-1950s, were a particularly successful venture. Oilographs presented the amateur with a ready-made drawing and composition designed by a professional artist, whose name appeared on the box as a certification of artistic quality. By removing the necessity of skill, Oilographs were intended ‘to help would-be artists who lack the ability to draw’. The promotional literature promised Oilography to be ‘oil painting with all the fundamental difficulties removed’.³³ One leisure painter recounts using such a kit:

It was a dear little artist’s box my wife gave me. It contained two or three brushes, six or eight little tubes of oil paints ... and a piece of hardboard. Also there was a little picture to copy about twice the size of a cigarette card depicting a farmyard scene complete with thatched barn and haystack, an old cart with hayfork and two or three chickens scratching about. There was a fence before a field with trees in the middle distance, and to crown all, a hill climbing into the distant sky. I faithfully copied this on to the little board with the tiny brushes. I put in the hayfork and other junk leaning against the barn, the cart, the chickens and, as I thought, a really masterly touch of my own — a tiny old man ... trudging through the field towards the hill. It was dreadful, but a start!³⁴

³¹ ‘Getting going’ in *Leisure Painter* (Nov., 1975), p. 26.

³² Rowney’s *Teach Yourself* guides, for example.

³³ Winsor and Newton trade catalogue, 1955, p. 175 (Winsor and Newton archives, Wealdstone).

³⁴ Ottewill, J., ‘I Wanted to Paint’ in *Leisure Painter* (Mar., 1972), pp. 34-8.

Similar starter kits were launched throughout the period; some highly prescriptive, allowing little flair from the individual, some less so, but all embodying the basic canonical principle of learning through emulation. Despite the seemingly rigid content, the manufacturers were at pains to emphasise their products' creative possibilities. They stressed that 'full rein is given for self-expression in colouring, shading and blending' and that there was 'plenty of scope' for 'individuality'.³⁵ Creativity might have been on a tight leash, but whether this was a comfort or a frustration depended on the individual. This particular amateur enjoyed his little flourish or 'masterly touch' sufficiently to remember his first painting kit fondly. For some, the kits were merely idle diversions, for others they marked the first tentative step towards creative activity, a gateway to greater involvement in art. As an article in *Leisure Painter* explained in the mid-1970s:

Many people pooh-poohed the idea of mature people filling in the arbitrarily decided shapes with ready mixed colours. But there were many who did not and saw in the idea the beginning of an approach to painting for the adult and particularly the adult who was inhibited by his lack of ability in drawing. It would surprise most people to know the number of amateur painters who came to painting through such an approach.³⁶

Eventually, it was argued, the novice amateur would grow out of using kits and move on to greater independence. After developing his practice beyond the narrow confines of the 'outfit', one leisure painter realised 'that a few selected colours and good brushes put in any old sort of a case was just as good - even better'.³⁷ There were, however, sufficient newcomers (alongside the unadventurous) to keep the manufacturers in business. By 1968 the Winsor and Newton trade catalogue contained three pages of Oilographs, 13 pages of craft and modelling, and five pages of how-to books for

³⁵ Winsor and Newton trade catalogue, 1955, p. 175 (Winsor and Newton archives, Wealdstone).

³⁶ *Leisure Painter* (Sep., 1976), p. 24.

³⁷ Vickers, W. A. 'I Wanted to Paint' in *Leisure Painter* (July, 1973), pp. 36-43.

amateurs. From Scraperboards in the 1980s to Winton Outlines in the 1990s, the ‘novice painter’ was exceptionally well catered for.³⁸

The enduring appeal of beginners’ products continued unabated throughout the rest of the century, with more ranges than ever before listed in the manufacturers’ trade catalogues in the 1990s. The Simply Painting range, for example, included books, painting sets and videos introduced by ‘famous Irish television artist Frank Clarke’. It was advertised with the slogan ‘anyone can paint’.³⁹ Manufacturers marketed new products to go with existing items. Within each major innovation, came several sub-inventions. Rowney’s Cryla ‘staywet palette’, a vacuum moulded tray, was advertised individually in magazines like *Leisure Painter* to accompany its already successful (and pricey) range of artists’ acrylics.⁴⁰ As one experienced amateur observed, numerous products were created for the affluent leisure painter:

So many people have retired on reasonable pensions – they have a surplus cash – and the art market has risen to the occasion by producing all sorts of things you don’t really need ... For example paintbrushes for painting trees – thinking ‘if I buy this I will paint great trees’. If I had my time again I’d buy a dozen good quality artists watercolour paints, half a dozen sable brushes ... All these other things are just gimmicks.⁴¹

The development of this throwaway market provided a consistent stream of revenue. This, in combination with the lower-tier amateur ranges of classic drawing and painting materials, inspired generations of leisure painters to take up the brush and ‘have a go’.⁴²

³⁸ Winsor and Newton trade catalogue, 1986, p. 92; Winsor and Newton trade catalogue, 1993, p. 17 (Winsor and Newton archives, Wealdstone).

³⁹ Winsor and Newton trade catalogue, 1997, p. 41 (Winsor and Newton archives, Wealdstone).

⁴⁰ *Leisure Painter* (Sep., 1978).

⁴¹ Interview with Bob Swingle, former president of Birmingham Watercolour Society, Hanbury Hall, 3 August 2011.

⁴² Interview with Esther Browning, director of Oxfordshire Artweeks, Oxford, 16 February 2001.

The shifting market

The most significant innovation in the materials market during the second half of the twentieth century was acrylic paint. Although synthetic resins had been used as the base for painting mediums in the US since the late-1940s, Europe's first acrylic, Cryla, was introduced to market by Rowney in 1963.⁴³ By the early-1970s, several ranges of acrylic paint were available, yet it was not until the late-1980s that an amateur range was brought to market.⁴⁴ In 1982, Rowney's chemists were given the brief to formulate a new budget acrylic. A receptive market had been identified which, it was hoped, would be stimulated by a targeted supply. Development began straight away but, due to a company takeover the following year, the product didn't initially launch as planned. The marketing department was concerned that a high-specificity low-price product would 'cannibalise' the company's professional sales. When Talens, a Dutch competitor, upgraded its own low-specification acrylic product, Rowney was forced to act. System 3, a middle-quality acrylic paint, was finally developed in 1986 and launched the following year. Winsor and Newton followed with Galleria acrylic three years later. Student or amateur grade acrylic was so successful that Rowney's less-durable PVA 'Ready Colours' were promptly discontinued, as were Winsor and Newton's 'Vinyl Colours', formerly the company's main budget paint.⁴⁵

⁴³ Interview with Tom Stagles.

⁴⁴ Gainsborough, J. (ed), *Arts Review Yearbook and Directory* (London: Richard Gainsborough Periodicals, 1973), p. 167.

⁴⁵ Interview with Tom Stagles; Winsor and Newton trade catalogue, 1990, p. 46 (Winsor and Newton archives, Wealdstone).

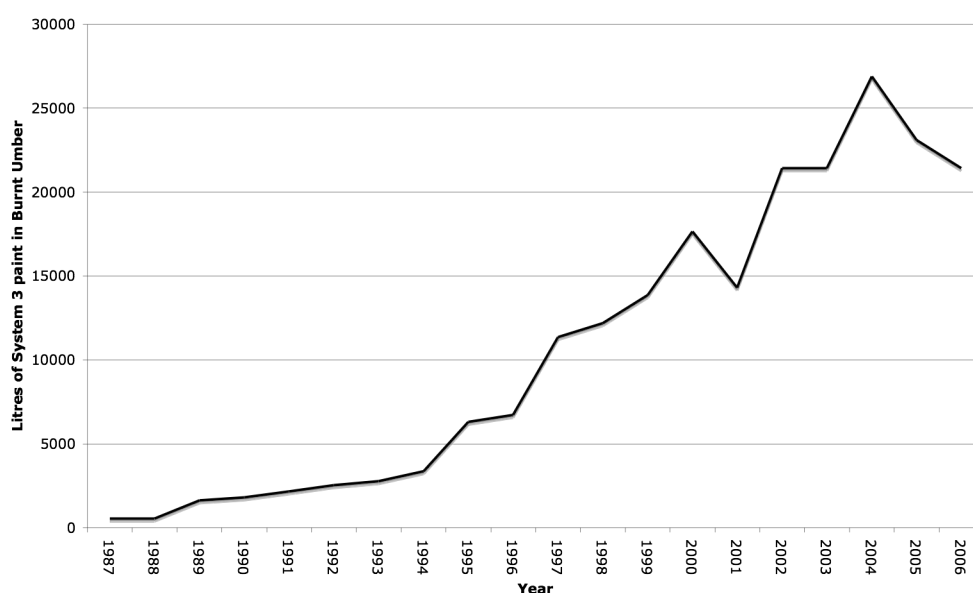


Fig. 7.2: Litres of System 3 Burnt Umber paint produced by Rowney, 1987-2006
 Source: Production run cards from Daler-Rowney's laboratory, courtesy of Tom Stagles

As fig. 7.2 (above) illustrates, initial quantities of System 3 were relatively small, but the amount produced increased dramatically in response to strong market demand. Head chemist Tom Stagles worked in research and development at Rowney during the launch. He recalls:

We set up for 90 litre batches – any less would not be worth it. The first production final was 180 litres. Then 360 litres. Then we were asked – can we get more? So we upped the batch to 420 litres – all within the first year of production. For three years we effectively had the market to ourselves.⁴⁶

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, there was a ‘dramatic increase’ in the popularity of acrylic paint. The ‘versatile and straightforward’ medium was used by professional artists, teachers, students, and was ‘extremely popular’ with amateurs and hobbyists.⁴⁷ System 3 was the biggest selling brand for Rowney by the end of the century: more than 15,000 litres of Burnt Umber, one of the line’s most popular colours, were

⁴⁶ Interview with Tom Stagles.

⁴⁷ Winsor and Newton trade catalogue, 1990, p. 39 (Winsor and Newton archives, Wealdstone).

produced every week. Not all of this paint was sold in the UK. By the 1990s more than half the output from Rowney's factory in Bracknell, and nearly 50 per cent of Winsor and Newton products, were sold overseas.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, a stable proportion of output remained for the home market throughout; even 7,500 litres of System 3 Burnt Umber would be a considerable advance on the 420 litres produced per week in the first year of production.

Innovation remained as important at the end of the twentieth century as it was at the beginning. In trade catalogues from the 1990s, Rowney reminded its customers that it was 'always in the vanguard of research and innovation', mentioning Daler's Dalon brush as the 'first real alternative to natural sable', Daler Board as the first and only 'acceptable alternative to canvas for oil' and Georgian Oils being 'the UK's best-selling oil colours for decades'.⁴⁹ The quality of amateur grade products had risen to such an extent that professional artists were also likely to use them. As a result, artists' quality products grew increasingly expensive by comparison – not simply because of the cost of raw pigment and lengthy manufacturing processes, but because declining professional sales made small batches ever more expensive to produce.⁵⁰ Whereas once lower-specification products had benefited from the research and expertise invested in artists' materials, now development was channelled primarily into amateur and student ranges. Products at the lower end of the product spectrum contributed to a large proportion of sales, but they were not without cost: due to their relative inexpensiveness, sales were not translated into revenue. As fig. 7.3 (below) shows, during the period in which sales of System 3 increased exponentially, Rowney's financial health failed to show a similar pattern of growth. As Rowney's

⁴⁸ Daler-Rowney trade catalogues from the 1990s (Daler-Rowney archives, Bracknell); ColArt Fine Art and Graphics Sales and Marketing Plan, 2001, p. 2 (Winsor and Newton archives, Wealdstone, Box MD2).

⁴⁹ Daler-Rowney trade catalogues from the 1990s (Daler-Rowney archives, Bracknell).

⁵⁰ Interview with Tom Stagles.

marketing department had forewarned in the 1980s, low-cost products had ‘cannibalised’ sales higher up the market chain.

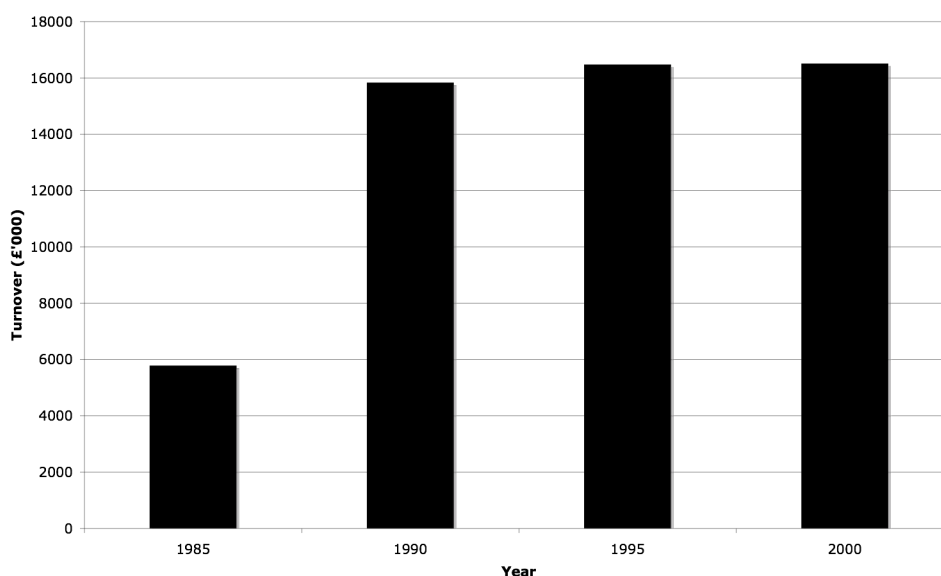


Fig. 7.3: Annual turnover for Rowney, 1985-2000 in real terms at 1985 prices

Source: Annual Reports filed with Companies House

Notes: For purposes of continuity reports were collected from the date the company was registered as Daler-Rowney. Prior to that it was two separate companies, which makes comparison problematic.

In the early 2000s, the market began to shift due to a large influx of low-cost products from East Asia. Economy imports catered for a growing number of consumers concerned more with price than specification. The ‘China effect’ cheapened entry points, making it easier for people take up art as a hobby, and denting the sales of British material manufacturers in the process.⁵¹ International competition changed the market for lower-specification products significantly. Production volumes of System 3 at Rowney rose until 2004 (see fig. 7.2, p. 221). Acrylic paints like System 3 and Galleria had been stocked by educational institutions, providing the manufacturers with a healthy baseline in revenue. As similar products became available from overseas at competitive prices, bulk sales dried up. Considering that overall sales across British artists’ materials manufacturing

⁵¹ Interview with Nicholas Walt, owner of L. Cornelissen & Son, London, 8 June 2011.

had been falling since the late-1990s (see fig. 7.4 and fig. 7.5, below), System 3 did well to remain a market leader until 2004.



Fig. 7.4: UK manufacturer sales of artists' brushes, 1971-2008

Source: ONS Prodcom

Note: The break is due to a change in reporting.



Fig. 7.5: UK manufacturer sales of sets of artists' paint, 1972-2009

Source: ONS Prodcom

Note: The break is due to a change in reporting.

To maintain a presence in the 'lower cost market', Rowney was forced to cut the product price of System 3, leaving little room for further development in any

direction other than reducing the cost of production. To remain competitive, the art material manufacturers were forced to change once again. At the turn of the century, new tiers were introduced to their business models. Student quality paint was an early, and invariably superior, precursor to what the manufacturers' marketing departments coined the 'commodity market'.⁵² Initially, Rowney bought and distributed low-grade commodity products directly from China. It turned out to be an expensive operation: not only did they have to buy container loads in large quantities and pay for outside warehousing, but also the quality of the product was erratic, with underfilled bottles swelling with gas due to a failure to include the necessary preservative.⁵³ The issue of quality control became so costly it turned out to be cheaper to manufacture in Britain despite significantly higher labour costs. The low-grade commodity tier was where most product development began to take place.⁵⁴ The specification of amateur and student grade products like System 3 stopped rising: the cannibals were being cannibalised.

Traditionally, art materials were sold in art shops, but as the market for 'educational' and, later, 'commodity' art materials developed, the retail outlets for these products began to change. The large manufacturers, who had depended on institutions bulk buying student grade formulations, forged relationships with shops that could guarantee a dependable baseline through sales of amateur lines, such as Galleria or System 3, as well as basic commodity products. Chain stores, like newsagent W. H. Smith and discount outlet The Range, offered manufacturers fewer

⁵² This was not entirely unprecedented: in the 1960s the company introduced a range of low-specification 'Budget Oil Colour' – see Rowney trade catalogues from the period (Daler-Rowney archives, Bracknell).

⁵³ Interview with Tom Stagles. British manufacturers had already shipped some of their own production overseas to cut costs during the 1980s; Winsor and Newton's canvas and boards, for example, were outsourced to factories in China and India with success.

⁵⁴ Interview with Tom Stagles.

buying points for a steady return.⁵⁵ The ‘enduring pleasure’ of browsing in traditional art shops remained at the higher end of the market, but now the consumer could also pick up a tube of Burnt Sienna with their supermarket shop.⁵⁶ As cheaper lines became available, smaller specialist art shops struggled to compete. Commodity products formed the base line of income, educational, student and amateur ranges the middle ground, and professional artists’ quality materials a very small proportion of total sales. As the owner of Cornelissen and Son, a traditional art shop in central London, observed: ‘The market is drifting down the pyramid to the cheaper end, which tends to be where Daler-Rowney and Winsor and Newton have emigrated.’⁵⁷

Courting the amateur

Throughout the second half of the twentieth century, the manufacturing sector responded to the demands of leisure painters and, at the same time, influenced that demand. This was largely because the sector integrated itself into the amateur artist ‘subculture’.⁵⁸ The manufacturers developed a deeply embedded marketing strategy, presenting themselves as an integral part of the amateur art world, crucial to magazines, art societies, adult education, and individual leisure painters. Manufacturers had been involved in society life since the 1870s, when Rowney first published the *Artists’ Almanac* as a vehicle to advertise its wares and to ‘remind the Profession’ of its existence.⁵⁹ The *Almanac* listed all societies in the UK, giving amateur groups a stamp of approval and signalling their existence within the artistic

⁵⁵ Similarly, in the 1970s, Boots (the chemist) sold artists’ materials in more than 100 of its stores. An advertisement for the company’s ‘art departments’ appeared in the opening pages of Mills, J. (ed), *The Artist’s Guide: Seventh Edition* (London: Artist Publishing Company, 1963), xxvii.

⁵⁶ Ron McGill describes a visit to L. Cornelissen & Son in *Post Office Art Club Art News* (1990), p. 7 (British Postal Museum and Archives, Post 62/104 1990).

⁵⁷ Interview with Nicholas Walt.

⁵⁸ Bishop and Hoggett, *Organizing Around Enthusiasms*, p. 51.

⁵⁹ *Geo. Rowney & Co.’s Artists’ Almanac* (1925), p. 2. Manufacturers also produced in-house ‘how to’ books to promote their materials to likely consumers. For an early selection see Winsor and Newton’s 1955 trade catalogue, pp. 172-4 (Winsor and Newton archives, Wealdstone).

community. From assisting clubs in the bulk purchase of materials, books and magazines, to arranging free artist demonstrations and sponsoring prizes at society exhibitions, various schemes were introduced to assist society life, often in conjunction with amateur art magazines.⁶⁰ *Leisure Painter*, for example, organised competitions for lone artists, such as the ‘Leisure Painter of the Year Competition’, the ‘I Like to Paint Landscape Competition’, and the ‘Artists in Watercolour Bi-Annual Competition’, which were jointly sponsored by material manufacturers and other commercial ventures.⁶¹

The companies immersed themselves in amateur life. Art materials were advertised wherever amateur artists presented themselves. Adverts by Rowney, Winsor and Newton and other companies such as Reeves and Liquitex (today under the umbrella of the same company, Colart), appeared in the exhibition catalogues of prominent art groups such as the Post and Telecoms Art Club and the Association of Civil Service Art Clubs, as well as in adult education programmes such as London’s *Floodlight*.⁶² Manufacturers also received informal advertising in society newsletters, where members wrote about their favourite materials. Most significant, however, was their presence in the amateur art magazines discussed in chapter 6.

Magazines provided a key venue for material manufacturers to place advertisements, and they did so regularly, using an advertorial format which mimicked the style and content of the magazine’s own editorial. Advertisements appealing to the amateur artistic appetite had appeared in the earliest amateur artist magazines. The *Amateur Artist and Collector* (published 1927-9) featured

⁶⁰ For examples of these schemes see: ‘Focus on Art Clubs’ in *Leisure Painter* (Jan., 1978), pp. 5-7; *Leisure Painter* (Apr., 1976), p. 1; 37th Annual Exhibition of the Post Office Art Club of Great Britain, November 1954 (British Postal Museum and Archives, Post 65/296); and *Royal Mail Leisure Magazine*, No. 40 (Sep., 1997) (British Postal Museum and Archives, Post 62/112).

⁶¹ *Leisure Painter* (June, 1978), p. 5; and *Leisure Painter* (Spring, 1967), p. 7.

⁶² For example, advertisements appeared in the 1948 Post Office Art Club of Great Britain membership and yearbook (British Postal Museum and Archives, Post 65/296).

advertisements for correspondence courses in art, instructional how-to manuals, and art materials.⁶³ Eighteen pages of advertisements prefaced the 1937 edition of *The Artist's Yearbook*, which provided a home to businesses appealing to the artistically inclined; publishers, galleries, printers, agents, shops, framers, magazines and art schools all advertised in its pages regularly. Materials manufacturers often bought the largest spaces, using double page spreads and back pages to promote their wares. Marketing strategies were entwined with editorial. Art materials were, on occasion, created in response to magazine content; following a feature on pastel painting by the artist Ernest Savage in *Leisure Painter*, for example, Rowney produced a new box of 36 pastels called 'The Selection of Ernest Savage'. The set was subsequently advertised in the same magazine.⁶⁴ Materials were also advertised indirectly through magazine news and letters pages. The 'Art News' section of *Leisure Painter* reviewed most new products on the market, often describing them much as might the manufacturers' own advertisements.⁶⁵ One Art News story reviewed the ITV programme *Paint Along with Nancy Kominsky*, which ran into several series during the 1970s.⁶⁶ To tie in with the news story, Rowney advertised its Nancy Kominsky 'painting outfit', which included 'all the items necessary to follow the artists into the third series', on the back page of *Leisure Painter*: a picture of the American author and TV personality painting with the slogan 'Nancy chooses Georgian'.⁶⁷ Again, supply was intended to stimulate demand: art materials were seductive and adverts affected readers' choices. As one beginner admitted: 'It was the extensive advertising in *Radio Times* and other publications by George Rowney just before last Christmas

⁶³ *Amateur Artist and Collector: A Monthly Journal for All Interested in Art*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (Dec., 1927), p. 42.

⁶⁴ 'News and Comment' in *Leisure Painter* (Oct., 1975), p. 19.

⁶⁵ For example, 'Art News' in *Leisure Painter* (Aug., 1978), pp. 29-32.

⁶⁶ 'Art News' in *Leisure Painter* (Jan., 1977), p. 23; see also a similar review in the 'Art News' section of *Leisure Painter* the following year (Apr., 1978), p. 13.

⁶⁷ *Leisure Painter* (Jan., 1977), p. 24.

that started me off.’⁶⁸

Winsor and Newton and Rowney dominated the market, the brands of choice for respectable and reliable art materials. Leisure painters using their products enjoyed the link between their own artistic activity and that of esteemed artists who had chosen the same materials to create their masterpieces. An advert in *Canvas* magazine for Rowney Cryla, an artists’ grade acrylic paint, capitalised on the amateur’s aspiration to have some form of affinity with artists who operated at a higher level: beneath a picture of a canvas and palette, and a life model posing as a ballerina, was the slogan: ‘On Tuesday I was Degas.’⁶⁹ Tapping into the desire to be a ‘proper’ artist, adverts often featured celebrity painters to promote professional materials; the artist Leonard Rosoman singing the praises of Rowney’s Cryla ‘Flow Formula’, for example.⁷⁰ Encouraging amateurs to try artists’ quality materials was not a fruitless endeavour. Amateurs did not always limit themselves to cheaper ranges. There was a tribalism in affiliating with a certain make or range: product choice was a sign of artistic intent and distinction. Splashing out on artists’ quality could be an enjoyable indulgence, a rite of passage, or sometimes a justified expenditure for those who took their materials seriously. Materials held properties beyond simple functional use; they added a ritualistic element to the fabrication of art. One veteran leisure painter and member of the Post Office Art Society, who bought his first paints just after the Second World War, reminisces:

We were suffering the post-war shortages of the time and art materials were no exception but from ‘under the counter’ I obtained my first sable brush, a number 9; I still have it, and what has turned out to be a treasure ever since, a Winsor and Newton ‘Binning Munro Water-

⁶⁸ ‘Readers’ Letters’ in *Leisure Painter* (Nov., 1977), p. 24.

⁶⁹ *Canvas*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (May, 1970), pp. 2-3.

⁷⁰ ‘Cryla Changed my Life’, an advertisement in *Leisure Painter* (May, 1977).

colour box' helped by an occasional repair with a soldering iron, is still in constant use.⁷¹

In regular and long-standing use, treasured materials developed a talismanic property. Kept like lucky charms, they related not only to the process of making, but also to the finished artefact. A work painted without the Binning Munro box would, for this particular amateur, never be quite the same.

While old products possessed valuable charm, new products were seductive. The consumption of art materials indicated the drive towards artistic creativity and the desire to be artistic even if one suspected one hadn't much talent. As one amateur artist argued, buying materials could be a thrilling activity quite independent of their eventual use:

I am the person who gave up Art at school because I was so bad at it. I always loved colour. ... But I could not draw... So I gave up art... I hung around art-shops. Occasionally I even blued [blew] some scarce cash on a brush or a special kind of pencil. Their mere possession gave me comfort. That was all I ever did towards fulfilling my dream.⁷²

The purchase of art materials that might never be used reveals the allure of artistic creativity: the consumption of an ideal rather than a purchase of straightforward utility. Materials possessed a life of their own, sat neatly in their boxes, pristine within their silvery tubing, patiently awaiting first use. 'The box of attractive colours, bottles of medium, oils and varnishes looked so very impressive that I had to have it', admitted one leisure painter.⁷³ The fetishistic thrill of ownership imbued the buyer with a power unrelated to the process of art making itself. Materials and their consumption signalled an identification with the ideal of artistic creativity. The

⁷¹ Chapman, C., 'My Art' in *Art News* (Summer, 1983), p. 8 (British Postal Museum and Archives, Post 65/298).

⁷² Stanton, C., 'I Wanted to Paint' in *Leisure Painter* (Apr., 1975), pp. 8-9.

⁷³ Vickers, W. A., 'I Wanted to Paint' in *Leisure Painter* (July, 1973), pp. 36-43.

income elasticity of these goods appeared at first glance to be, as Stefan Linder argued, greater than that of the activity itself.⁷⁴ Yet this assumption misapprehends what was actually being consumed: materials were about more than painting, they were about creativity itself.

The manufacturers' dedication to capturing the amateur market was largely successful. Owing to intense product development, the make do and mend of postwar austerity was replaced by the ready availability of materials at accessible prices. By the end of the century, very few artists were forced to make their own materials, although some might do so for pleasure. Linder argued that 'the pleasure derived from time spent in developing the mind and spirit is in fact very little dependent on goods'.⁷⁵ Yet the spiritual benefits of art making were dependent on some expenditure. Art could be pursued at reasonable economy, but it didn't come for free. Drawing remained accessible at a very basic level – through the use of a pencil and sheet of paper – but now leisure painters could spend as much, or as little, as they liked and, very often, not suffer a great deal in quality as a result. If the amateur was lucky enough to sell their work, these costs could be easily covered. This may explain why drawing and painting was less faddish than other creative activities, which required a greater financial investment in tools and materials. As illustrated in chapter 4 (fig. 4.2, p. 150), adult education classes in subjects such as pottery or dressmaking underwent peaks and troughs in popularity. Materials for such pursuits were generally more expensive than for drawing and painting, and the numbers of amateurs involved not large enough to create a similar drive for product innovation in the commercial sector. In the early-1950s, one amateur argued: 'The cost of painting as a hobby compares favourably with many other free time occupations, but it is still sufficiently

⁷⁴ Linder, S. B., *The Harried Leisure Class* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), p. 103.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, p. 95.

large to limit the activities of many an amateur artist.’⁷⁶ By the end of the twentieth century, however, the expense had reduced dramatically; affluence created the conditions for leisure painting on such a scale that the cost of taking up the activity fell as incomes rose. A critical mass of amateur artists created a market for affordable products, which then allowed yet more absolute beginners to safely ‘dip a toe in’ at considerable economy.

The popularity of mass market products indicates the scale of the rise of the leisure painter in the postwar years, and reflects a market much larger than that able to afford adult education classes or spare the time to be involved in society life. Painting was an activity facilitated by the trappings of the affluent society: more time and more disposable income. Space was made for creative pursuits, despite a heightened sense of time scarcity, as leisure painters balanced their hobby with family obligations and, for those not yet retired, a working life. Consumerism shaped and informed the experience of amateur artistic creativity in twentieth century Britain. Individuals created their identity as artists not only through producing art in societies, evening classes, or at home, but also through the consumption of artists’ materials and advisory literature.

In 1970 Stefan Linder argued that ‘the gospel of economic growth’ led to a decreasing amount of time devoted to culture.⁷⁷ This was not a particularly original notion; just over a century before, John Ruskin had railed against the worship of ‘the goddess of getting on’ which, he believed, had removed creativity from the experience of ordinary life.⁷⁸ I have argued that, on the contrary, the shift towards an individualistic consumer culture in the 1980s did not hinder, but rather enhanced

⁷⁶ ‘Letter to the Editor’ in *Association of Civil Service Art Clubs Newsletter*, No. 4 (Apr., 1953), p. 3 (bound volumes courtesy of the Civil and Public Service Artists).

⁷⁷ Linder, *The Harried Leisure Class*, p. 94.

⁷⁸ Ruskin, J., ‘Traffic’ in *The Crown of Wild Olive & The Cestus of Aglaia* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1915 [1864]), pp. 54-5.

artistic creativity within the experience of ordinary life. Product innovation directed at the mass market made materials ever cheaper and more accessible to an even greater number of people. Yet despite the ready availability of cheap materials in the late-twentieth century, the scope for developing an interest beyond the privacy of one's own home had diminished for most people. While modest means might be able to accommodate the cost of cheap art materials bought from the supermarket, they did not stretch to the market price for adult education classes – the gateway to further learning and higher education in the arts. Those with sufficient drive and determination would always have a chance, however slim, of success, but for most ordinary amateurs, there was not much further to go. As a private individual pursuit, their interest could flower, but as a socially meaningful endeavour – as art, a form of communication, must surely be – the options were more limited than they had been in the immediate postwar years. The ambition to realise the civilising potential of art was dismissed as little more than a private, if relatively inexpensive, form of personal amusement. Amateurism had been relegated, once again, to the confines of a trivial pursuit.

PART FIVE

Drive

CHAPTER 8

Motivation

*'You find us having a free activity this morning, and in our activity period, each little individual chooses his or her own form of occupation ... yes, some of us paint, and some of us do plasticine work, or go to a stand table over there, we feel that each little individual has got to get to the bottom of himself and learn what he wants of life. ... I do love to see them all so happily occupied, each little one expressing his own personality.'*¹

Performed in the early-1960s, comedian Joyce Grenfell's evocative sketch gently mocked the trend towards free play and creativity in nursery and primary education, which gained popularity in the immediate postwar years. It captures the innocent creativity of childhood, but could just as easily describe the search for creative self-expression in adulthood during the same period. In the second half of the twentieth century, the popularity of drawing and painting as a leisure pursuit increased considerably. People from all walks of life joined societies, attended evening classes, and painted alone in the privacy of their own homes. This, the final part of the study, examines the nature of the creative drive in twentieth century Britain. In this chapter, interviews with amateur artists, as well as personal accounts and biographies published in books, magazines and society newsletters, are examined to identify what attracted ordinary people to drawing and painting as a leisure pursuit.¹ It is not a chronological account, but rather a summation of the most common motivations expressed by amateurs throughout the period. If these motivations remain relatively constant over time, then any changes in participation can be attributed to exogenous factors; the next chapter then explores the forces which led to the growing popularity of leisure painting following the Second World War.

¹ Recording of Joyce Grenfell in the nursery school (a sketch which she performed during the 1950s and 1960s). Played during an interview with Connie Norman on the radio programme *My Choice with Penny Faust*, BBC Radio Oxford, 1985 (Oxfordshire Records Office, Oral History Archives) and also available on the 1992 compilation of her monologues *Requests the Pleasure: The Best of Joyce Grenfell* (BBC Audiobooks, March 1989).

Igniting a passion

For some leisure painters, an early introduction to artistic creativity took place in the home. There was a common belief that creativity ‘ran in the family’.² Several described an ‘artistic streak’ inherited from a relative or predecessor – mentioning a talented aunt or grandfather to explain their own skill with the pencil or brush. Adult education art tutor and president of the Birmingham Watercolour Society Shirley Bonas was ‘good at art at school’ yet the origin of her skill lay, she believed, with a bohemian great-grandmother who painted scenery at the Theatre Royal in Birmingham.³ Talent (or simply interest) was nurtured by parents who encouraged their children to draw and paint from an early age. At the age of five, Bob Swingler, a retired revenue manager for Severn Trent Water and former president of the Birmingham Watercolour Society, was taught by his father: ‘My art training was in the war. In the [air raid] shelter my father taught me to draw in perspective. He was a factory worker – a tool-setter – but he could draw.’⁴ Swingler’s father would finish a packet of Woodbine cigarettes, turn the packet inside out, and ‘draw anything in front of him’.⁵ Julia Johnson Fry, an Oxford college accountant and keen landscape painter, also described her father as artistic, although her home education in art was a little different to that of Swingler; she was given a paint-by-numbers set when she was nine years old, and was encouraged by her father, who completed a few paint-by-numbers pieces himself (for a discussion of the postwar craze for painting kits, see chapter 7, pp. 216-19).⁶ Some amateurs grew up with parents and siblings who painted in a professional or semi-professional capacity. Civil Servant Helen Monostori was

² Interview with Julia Johnson Fry, assistant accountant at St Edmund Hall, Oxford, 1 March 2011; also Audrey Blackman on the radio programme *My Choice with Penny Faust*, BBC Radio Oxford, 1986 (Oxfordshire Records Office, Oral History Archives).

³ Interview with Shirley Bonas, Birmingham Watercolour Society, Hanbury Hall, 3 August 2011.

⁴ Interview with Bob Swingler, Birmingham Watercolour Society, Hanbury Hall, 3 August 2011.

⁵ Interview with Bob Swingler.

⁶ Interview with Julia Johnson Fry.

directly influenced by her family's artistic talents: 'My eldest brother was already an accomplished artist. But I think it came from my father who was always painting. I was always drawing, occupying myself. ... I never had to ask how to do it. It was there, I just did it.'⁷

Whether or not artistic creativity is hereditary is unclear. Genetics may play some part in creative aptitude.⁸ To take an extreme example, recent research suggests creativity could be related to a genetic mutation which can also lead to psychosis and schizophrenia.⁹ Betty Edwards, author of *Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain*, argues that, on the contrary, genetics have little to do with artistic aptitude; skill in fine art can be learnt, and is not simply the fortunate possession of the gifted.¹⁰ The question is perhaps one of nurture and nature: an introduction to art at an early age might reinforce or develop a latent skill or talent. Indeed, sociologists have identified parental encouragement as an important factor in the development of a lifelong interest in art.¹¹

Prior to the Second World War, schooling in art tended to be a dry affair, offering scarce opportunity for creative self-expression. Most children were not educated to think of art as an interesting and rewarding activity and, as a result, those without parental encouragement were less likely to develop an interest in art later in life. A very different kind of art education emerged after the Second World War. In *Education Through Art* (1943), the art critic Herbert Read popularised the innovative

⁷ Interview with Helen Monostori, a long-standing member of the Civil and Public Service Artists (formerly the Association of Civil Service Art Clubs), London, 29 July 2011.

⁸ Wiebe, G. D., 'An Exploration into the Nature of Creativity' in *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 26, No. 3 (Autumn, 1962), p. 390.

⁹ Callaway, E., 'Artistic Tendencies Linked to 'Schizophrenia Gene'' in *New Scientist* (16 July, 2009) at <http://www.newscientist.com/> (accessed 17 September 2013); creativity has also been associated with depression – see Bower, B., 'Manic Depression: Risk and Creativity' in *Science News*, Vol. 134, No. 10 (3 Sep., 1988), p. 151.

¹⁰ Edwards, B., *Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain* (London: HarpurCollins, 1979).

¹¹ Hutchison, R. and Feist, A., *Amateur Arts in the UK: The PSI Survey of Amateur Arts and Crafts in the UK* (London: The Policy Studies Institute, 1991), p. 34.

teaching methods of Austrian art educationist Franz Cizek and London County Council art inspectors Marion Richardson and R. R. Tomlinson (see chapter 4, p. 132).¹² The idea that the creativity of the child should be developed through free self-expression in the classroom gained currency, becoming the standard in art education throughout the rest of the century. For the vast majority of children, who did not come from artistic families, early forays into artistic creativity could now take place at school. With an emphasis on creative play, art was transformed into a fun and exciting practice.¹³ Once this absorbing interest had been discovered, it was rarely forgotten.¹⁴

Television, which by the late-1950s was becoming an increasingly common feature in the home, capitalised on this creative awakening with a number of art programmes designed specifically for children. *Sketch Club* (1958-62), presented by the artist Adrian Hill, taught painting and perspective at Friday teatimes.¹⁵ Young viewers were encouraged to send their work into the studio where, if they were lucky, it would be showcased in a televisual ‘picture gallery’ at the end of the programme.¹⁶ Similar series were aired for children throughout the rest of the century, from Tony Hart’s *Hartbeat* (BBC, 1984-93) to Neil Buchanan’s *Art Attack* (ITV, 1990-2007). These programmes were similar to the practical art series scheduled for adults discussed in chapter 6 (pp. 188-90), such as *Eyeline* or *A Brush with Art*. Techniques and materials were demonstrated before the camera for children to emulate at home.

¹² Macdonald, S., *The History and Philosophy of Art Education* (London: University of London Press, 1970), p. 329.

¹³ Richmond, S., ‘In Praise of Practice: A Defense of Art Making in Education’ in *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (Summer, 1998), p. 13.

¹⁴ Gombrich, E. H., *The Story of Art* (London: Phaidon, 1989 [15th edition]), p. 615.

¹⁵ Walker, J. A., *Arts TV: A History of Arts Television in Britain* (London: John Libbey & Company, 1993), p. 24.

¹⁶ Interview with Julia Johnson Fry, who as a child had her work exhibited in the programme’s gallery.

For many children, the practical exercises stimulated an interest in art making that would last into adult life.

Filtering creative aspiration

While fine art was regarded by parents as an inexpensive and harmless way for children to pass the time, embarking on a career in art was quite another matter. A common assumption was that art would not provide a sustainable livelihood. Young people from poorer backgrounds were rarely encouraged to enter artistic professions through art school. ‘A lot of talent was lost because people were poor’, reflected Joseph Nunn, who was born shortly after the First World War. Nunn was ‘good at art’, and one of his school teachers thought he should continue, but his family could not afford it: ‘I just couldn’t do it, didn’t have the means, you know.’¹⁷ Instead, he became a carpenter. Charlton Taylor, a member of the Post Office Art Club, and of a similar age to Nunn, was also advised against art as a profession: ‘The headmaster insisted that my parents should allow me to take up art as a career, but financial considerations did not allow this, and at 14 years of age I started work in a Bradford textile mill.’¹⁸ Bob Swingler was inspired by his father to draw as a child but, as he reached his late-teens in the 1950s, was discouraged from taking his interest any further: ‘My father’s background – they were poor people. So to go to art school was like flying to the moon.’¹⁹ A working life making art was, for many young aspiring artists, an unaffordable and unrealistic dream.

Suspicion of art as a career was not reserved only for the poor. Middle class parents also regarded art as an insecure occupation. Norman Chesworth, a member of

¹⁷ Interview with Joseph Nunn by Anne Burrell for Grimsbury Oral History Project, November 1994 (Oxfordshire Records Office, Oral History Archive).

¹⁸ Taylor, C., ‘Personalalia’ in the *Post Office Art Club Newsletter* (Spring, 1952), p. 10 (British Postal Museum and Archives, Post 65/298).

¹⁹ Interview with Bob Swingler.

the Customs and Excise Art Club, wanted to become a commercial artist but his father regarded art as 'too precarious a livelihood' and so, in the early-1950s, he joined the Civil Service.²⁰ A leaf through amateur art magazines from the 1960s and 1970s reveals a train of amateurs relaying similar stories. Roland Rushton, an eye-specialist, 'had two ambitions, one to become a doctor, the other to become an artist'. His father advised him to 'keep art as a hobby' and so he went to medical school.²¹ Similarly, H. Elliott-Blake, a consultant plastic surgeon, 'hankered after taking up painting as a career', but his family persuaded him 'that medicine was a saner road to follow'.²² Some were discouraged because art was not considered to be a serious or respectable profession. Shirley Bonas's parents directed her away from art school: 'My father didn't understand and said "no daughter of mine is going to art school". He thought secretary school was the right place for girls. So I went to secretary school and I became a solicitor's secretary.'²³ When Helen Bradley won a scholarship to Oldham Art School at the age of twelve, her father protested: 'We don't want an artist in *our* family.' She turned down the scholarship and, after leaving school, 'settled down' to raise a family.²⁴ Some, like Bob Swinger, were encouraged to pursue art up to a certain point but were later counselled against continuation. Speech and drama teacher Margaret Jones got as far as being offered a place at art college but was discouraged from taking it up: 'There was a lot of pressure: it's an insecure job, you'll never make a living, you can always do it in your spare time, and go on and do something respectable.'²⁵ For these budding young artists, deciding between trying to

²⁰ Norman Chesworth in the *Association of Civil Service Art Clubs Newsletter* (Apr. - May, 1976), p. 3 (bound volumes courtesy of the Civil and Public Service Artists).

²¹ Coleman, F., 'Busy People – Doctor Painter' in *Leisure Painter* (Winter, 1967), pp. 43-7.

²² 'Elliott-Blake: Unexpected Artist' in *Amateur Artist*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (Aug., 1966), p. 10.

²³ Interview with Shirley Bonas.

²⁴ Hutchin, K., 'Edwardian Childhood' in *Leisure Painter* (Autumn, 1967).

²⁵ Interview with Margaret Jones on the radio programme *My Choice with Penny Faust*, BBC Radio Oxford, 1984 (Oxfordshire Records Office, Oral History Archives).

become a professional artist or settling for a life where art would never be more than an adjunct to one's main occupation was a difficult turning point.

The popular assumption that the average art course was a career cul-de-sac was not unfounded. The aspiring artist faced a war of attrition to get to the top of his or her profession. Only a small number of those trained in art would go on to become full-time artists, and even fewer would be renowned for their work. The expansion of the university education system in the 1960s opened higher education to a greater number of students than ever before.²⁶ By the 1960s, a working class background and lack of qualifications were not a deterrent; students with fewer ordinary level and advanced level qualifications were, if sufficiently talented, able to enter art school and work towards a degree. Yet poor prospects were a perpetual problem for art school leavers. In 1969 Carel Weight, then head of the Royal Academy of Art's School of Painting, regretted that while most students embarked on their studies with the intention of becoming full-time artists, 'very few' would succeed financially.²⁷ Acknowledging the difficulty faced by young artists in forging a career, the 1964-5 white paper *A Policy for the Arts* set out the Labour government's vision of raising the profile and prospects of the living artist.²⁸ The paper proposed an increase in grant funding to the Arts Council to assist young artists but, when the mushrooming arts expenditure of the 1960s was deflated in the 1970s, the ambitious proposals were shelved (see chapter 1, pp. 55-6).

Little changed over the next four decades. Higher education in the arts grew rapidly at the end of the twentieth century, largely due to government efforts to stimulate the 'creative industries', now regarded as a powerhouse of economic

²⁶ Sanderson, M., 'Higher Education in the Post-War Years' in *Contemporary Record*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (1991), pp. 417-18.

²⁷ 'Creating a Career as an Artist' in *Canvas*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (June, 1969), p. 37.

²⁸ [Cmnd. 2601] *A Policy for the Arts: The First Steps* (London: HMSO, 1964-5), p. 18.

growth. First degrees awarded in the category of ‘creative arts and design’ increased from around 15,000 in 1994-5 to nearly 30,000 in 2003-4.²⁹ Educational opportunity expanded significantly, but so too did the number of aspirants, and so there remained relatively few practicing artists in proportion to the number educated to degree level. The oversupply of artists created fierce competition and led to a filtering system.³⁰ This system was not based purely on talent or skill; it was inefficient and had been since its development in the mid-nineteenth century. In 1843, just six years after the first state-funded school of design was founded in central London, *The Artist and Amateur’s Magazine* ruefully remarked that ‘it may fairly be questioned whether any profession will afford so many examples of men living and luxuriating upon the slenderest stock of talent, and starving upon the largest, as that of Art’.³¹ The ‘surplus of ‘fine artists’’ horrified C. R. Ashbee, an architect influenced by the arts and craft movement who, in his 1911 book *Should We Stop Teaching Art?*, wrote that there was no need for the ‘scores of mediocre schools of Art, most of them turning out bad painters’.³² He believed Britain’s art schools were dysfunctional and called for the introduction of a guild system of apprenticeship to eliminate the wastage of talent. Nearly a century later, however, luck played just as much of a role in the path to success. The slim opportunities of Joseph Nunn’s generation had not changed considerably for those born towards the end of the twentieth century; the scope for training in art had greatly increased, but art as a vocation was as remote as ever.

²⁹ Data from Leavers Report 2003-04 cohort – Table Ci: Destination of UK domiciled leavers who obtained qualifications through full-time study by level of qualification and subject area in the *Higher Education Institutions Longitudinal Survey* (Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2008); see also *The Creative Sector: Higher Education in Facts and Figures* (Universities UK, 2009), p. 3.

³⁰ Yogev, T., ‘The Social Construction of Quality: Status Dynamics in the Market for Contemporary Art’ in *Socio-Economic Review*, Vol. 8 (2010), p. 516.

³¹ Ripplingille, E. V. (ed), *The Artist and Amateur’s Magazine: A Work Devoted to the Interests of the Arts and Design and the Cultivation of Taste* (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1843), p. 221.

³² Ashbee, C. R., *Should We Stop Teaching Art?* (London: Batsford, 1911), p. 67.

In 2004-5 more than 90 per cent of university leavers in medicine, dentistry, engineering, business and administration were expected to be in employment related to their degree within a year, compared with less than five per cent of leavers from arts and design courses.³³ The majority of this successful five per cent entered careers in related fields, from advertising, architecture and fashion to film, publishing and television and radio.³⁴ Very few art graduates became full-time practicing artists. Most existed 'on the margins', balancing modest sales with grants, teaching and other non-related employment.³⁵ Trained artists entered a grey area of semi-professional, partly-amateur activity. The boundaries were fluid: while professionals taught amateurs in art societies and adult education, amateurs formed a pool from which the fortunate few might join the professional ranks.³⁶ Some trained artists abandoned any hope of a creative career and, while pursuing other livelihoods, maintained their enthusiasm for art in an amateur capacity. In this respect, amateurs were not so different from their professional counterparts: some had trained together at art school. The majority of graduates simply did not have the right mixture of 'talent, determination and luck' to pursue a lifelong career as an artist.³⁷

Reigniting the artistic flame

The vast majority of amateur artists were not trained in art to degree level. *Leisure Painter* magazine ran a regular feature which asked: 'Most people learn painting at

³³ Data from Leavers Report 2004-05 cohort – Figure 1.7: Percentage of full-time first degree leavers in work, study or assumed unemployed in the *Higher Education Institutions Longitudinal Survey* (Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2009).

³⁴ Data from Leavers Report 2003-04 cohort – Table Ci: Destination of UK domiciled leavers who obtained qualifications through full-time study by level of qualification and subject area in the *Higher Education Institutions Longitudinal Survey* (Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2008).

³⁵ Hewison, R. and Holden, J., *The Right to Art: Making Aspirations Reality* (London: Demos, 2004), p. 9; see also Hutchison and Feist, *Amateur Arts in the UK*, p. 136.

³⁶ Stebbins, R. A., 'The Amateur: Two Sociological Definitions' in *The Pacific Sociological Review*, Vol. 20, No. 4 (Oct., 1977), p. 595; see also Kaplan, M., 'The Social Role of the Amateur' in *Music Educators Journal*, Vol. 40, No. 4 (Feb. - Mar., 1954), pp. 26-7.

³⁷ 'Creating a Career as an Artist' in *Canvas*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (June, 1969), p. 37.

school. What makes someone who has not painted since that time pick up the brushes again?’³⁸ It was common for amateurs to set aside their artistic aspirations while they began work and family life. ‘War and wanderlust’ distracted Dennis Coote, an assistant editor of the Midland Bank’s house journal, from art until the 1950s when he joined his local art society and attended its weekly painting sessions.³⁹ Some did not begin again until after retirement. Helen Bradley, a musician and housewife, reignited her interest in painting at the age of 61. ‘Somewhere, deep down, there was always the desire to paint’, she recalled in 1967.⁴⁰ Some amateurs expressed regret over lost opportunities. Joseph Nunn, like Bradley, also waited until he was at the end of his working life before beginning to paint again. He was wistful for what might have been, fearing that age had withered his talents:

I wish I had taken it up. I think if I had taken it up I would have been pretty good, you know. Like I said, you hadn’t the means, you had to get what job you could. ... You lose it as you get older. If I had the imagination that I had then, I could probably paint much better than I can now.⁴¹

Helen Monostori also wished she had been able to do more when she was younger: ‘I never had the money to do what I wanted to do. ... I’m trying to make up for it. I’ve got it, I have got to use it, I have to make the most of it.’⁴² In the second half of the twentieth century, the opportunities available to these amateurs, reunited with their passion in later life, were strikingly different to those in existence before the Second World War. Through a proliferation of art societies, a growing number of work art clubs, the expansion of adult education services, and the wide availability and affordability of books, magazines and materials directed at amateur artists, leisure

³⁸ Reed, M., ‘Late Starter: Margaret Kahn’ in *Leisure Painter* (Spring, 1967), p. 34.

³⁹ Coote, D., ‘I Wanted to Paint’ in *Leisure Painter* (Mar., 1973), pp. 24-9.

⁴⁰ Hutchin, K., ‘Edwardian Childhood’ in *Leisure Painter* (Autumn, 1967).

⁴¹ Interview with Joseph Nunn.

⁴² Interview with Helen Monostori.

painters could educate themselves to as high a level as their talent and enthusiasm could take them.

While some amateurs regretted lost opportunities in youth, others discovered a previously unknown enjoyment of art relatively late in life. These newcomers found art an accessible pastime. ‘Anyone who has not yet tried painting will probably be surprised to find how satisfactory his first efforts are. ... There is no age or time barrier in art’, promised the *Association of Civil Service Art Clubs Newsletter* in 1962.⁴³ *Leisure Painter* magazine called such amateurs ‘late starters’, and printed regular interviews with them about why they had taken up painting. These articles raised the self-esteem of the interviewee, provided a sense of camaraderie amongst readers, and encouraged tentative beginners to ‘have a go’.

Many late-starters painted for relaxation and enjoyment, and had little ambition to become proficient. ‘I have absolutely no talent, but I thoroughly enjoy myself’, declared one housewife-turned-amateur artist.⁴⁴ The writer J. B. Priestley, who took up painting for the first time in his sixties, was similarly disinterested in the craft of painting. ‘I’m impatient I suppose’, he reflected, ‘there’s no use taking a lot of trouble when I don’t know what sort of trouble to take.’⁴⁵ Former Prime Minister Winston Churchill, also a late-starter, advised those taking up art in their twilight years against being over-ambitious: ‘We may content ourselves with a joy ride in a paint-box. And for this Audacity is the only ticket.’⁴⁶ Some late-starters were, however, keen to develop technical proficiency and studied the subject in adult education classes, at home in books and magazines, and socially in groups and societies. Churchill himself

⁴³ Seymour, W. A., ‘The Sunday Painter’ in *Association of Civil Service Art Clubs Newsletter*, No. 34 (Sep., 1962), p. 3 (bound volumes courtesy of the Civil and Public Service Artists).

⁴⁴ Lawrence, T., ‘Thirty Housewives Take to the Brush’ in *Leisure Painter* (Spring, 1967), pp. 42-6.

⁴⁵ Dowling, F., ‘Priestley the Painter’ in *Leisure Painter* (Summer, 1967), pp. 21-3.

⁴⁶ Winston Churchill in ‘Painting as a Pastime’, one of two articles he wrote on art-making for *The Strand* magazine in December 1921 and January 1922. Quoted in Soames, M., *Winston Churchill: His Life as a Painter, A Memoir by his Daughter* (London: Collins, 1990), p. 45.

was considered a more than competent artist; esteemed artists such as Walter Sickert admired his painterly ‘joy rides’ and, in 1948, Churchill was elected to the Royal Academy of Art as an ‘honorary academician extraordinary’, a special category to which no other artist has ever been admitted.⁴⁷

The harried amateur

People from all walks of life and occupations enjoyed leisure painting. Amateur art magazines printed the biographies of leisure painters, from cartographers to surgeons, bus drivers to housewives, actors to writers (the varied social and occupational backgrounds of art society members are discussed in chapters 2 and 3).⁴⁸ Working amateur artists juggled their hobby with the obligations of family and employment. The difficulty of putting aside one’s passion to go to work was the constant bane of the serious amateur. As one 1975 *Leisure Painter* editorial sympathised: ‘The real freeing of the spirit to create and realise one’s own imaginative potential are swamped and hidebound by earning a living in a totally opposed direction.’⁴⁹ Leisure painters often complained about having insufficient spare time to indulge the pursuit. Channel 4 News anchor Jon Snow, who had enjoyed painting as a child and took it up again as a hobby when he was in his 30s, never took classes: ‘The problem is always time, and working anti-social hours.’⁵⁰ *Leisure Painter* interviewee John Ottewill, a businessman, also lamented: ‘Painting to me is demanding but exciting. ... My only regret being the usual one for amateurs – “I get so little time”.’⁵¹

⁴⁷ Popp, G. and Valentine, H., *Royal Academy of Arts: Directory of Membership* (London: Royal Academy of Arts Library, 1996).

⁴⁸ See, for example, Mackinlay, C., ‘Phyllis Pearsall’ in *Leisure Painter* (Spring, 1970), pp. 14-17; and also Coleman, F., ‘Busy People: Doctor Painter’ in *Leisure Painter* (Winter, 1967), pp. 43-7.

⁴⁹ ‘Editorial’ in *Leisure Painter* (June, 1975), p. 5.

⁵⁰ Interview with Channel 4 News anchor Jon Snow, London, 14 July 2011.

⁵¹ Ottewill, J., ‘I Wanted to Paint’ in *Leisure Painter* (Mar., 1972), pp. 34-8.

Some were critical of the self-proclaimed 'harried' amateur. Suzanne, Duchess of St Albans, explained: 'I snatch the odd half hour: I feel quite strongly that when people say they'd like to paint but haven't the time, what they mean is they don't know how to use what time they have!'⁵² The allure of creativity was such that many amateurs reserved time for painting and drawing. Artists who continued to paint seriously throughout their working lives were exceptionally organised. As *Amateur Artist and Collector* magazine advised in 1927: 'The greatest difficulty confronting the amateur is lack of leisure for the practice of his art. But such time as he has he can always make directly profitable to him as a student, if he uses it aright.'⁵³ Some amateurs took long-term strategies to fitting art into their schedules, by planning intensive sessions during annual leave and weekends. Elliott-Blake, for example, took an annual painting holiday and divided his weekends between art and his other love, golf.⁵⁴ Others squeezed as much as possible into their daily routines. One busy housewife fitted her love of painting around the household chores:

I paint in odd moments – while the potatoes are cooking, in between household jobs, and when I've finished work in the evening. ... There's lots more in my head ... and I'll get round to painting them all one of these days, in between the spring-cleaning and the shopping and cooking.⁵⁵

Another leisure painter, who was by profession a medical doctor, integrated the various stages of watercolour painting into his daily routine. 'I think I work better when I'm pushed', he explained. 'Sometimes before going in to a clinic I put down a

⁵² Miller, R., 'Painter Duchess' in *Leisure Painter* (Spring, 1970), p. 26.

⁵³ Bowman, W. D., 'Filling the Gap' in *Amateur Artist and Collector: A Monthly Journal for All Interested in Art*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Nov., 1927), p. 2.

⁵⁴ 'Elliott-Blake: Unexpected Artist' in *Amateur Artist*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (August, 1966).

⁵⁵ Hutchin, K., 'Edwardian Childhood' in *Leisure Painter* (Autumn, 1967).

nice wet wash. Nice to know that it will be dry and ready when I've finished.'⁵⁶ Space was, however, a privilege and not everyone had access to it. Helen Monostori, for example, created art in her bedroom; having to clear away after every single session reduced the amount of time available for the art making itself. She did not have the space to leave works-in-progress somewhere where activity could be easily resumed when an 'odd half hour' presented itself.

Slowing down

Once issues of time and space had been resolved, painting offered relief from the apparent rush of modern life. In the postwar years rapid technological change created the impression that time was accelerating. 'The rate of change has increased so much that our imagination can't keep up', argued the scientist C. P. Snow in his 1959 Rede lecture.⁵⁷ As the century wore on, and communication technology advanced, the pace of life appeared to quicken. In 1986, the secretary of Birmingham's Easel Club mused: 'The time seems to have flown parallel to this computer age. I think in this rushing existence we have lost a lot of that gentle tempo that we once had.'⁵⁸ Leisure painting provided an alternative tempo. As the very first issue of *Leisure Painter* magazine reflected in its opening editorial, quoting W. H. Davies' 1911 poem *Leisure*:

This bustling age leaves scarcely a moment for reflection. But
when you are painting, time stands still; and 'what is this life if full
of care, we have no time to stand and stare?' With a brush in your
hand and an empty canvas before you, you have got to do just
that.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Coleman, F., 'Busy People – Leisure painters: Doctor painter' in *Leisure Painter* (Winter, 1967), pp. 43-7.

⁵⁷ Snow, C. P., *The Rede Lecture: The Two Cultures* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998 [1959]), pp. 42-3.

⁵⁸ Easel Club Annual Report, 1986 ((Birmingham Archives and Heritage, MS 3151/B/2).

⁵⁹ 'Editorial' in *Leisure Painter* (Spring, 1967), p. 1.

Art, by its nature a slow pursuit, provided leisure painters with an escape from the grind of daily routine. ‘You forget all your worries and troubles once you begin to paint’, said London Transport Art Group secretary George Butterfield, a craftsman at Aldenham Works. ‘You are totally immersed in what you are doing.’⁶⁰ The slowing of time appealed especially to those with hectic working lives. For example, politicians with busy public schedules, such as Churchill and his contemporary Andrew McLaren, Labour MP for Burslem, enjoyed the contrast between their work and leisure activity: the slowing pace, the escape from the day-to-day, the contrasting physicality of making and, for Churchill at least, warding off the ‘black dog’ of depression.⁶¹

Many artists reported entering a trance-like state during the act of art making, in which they were completely absorbed in their activity – an experience described by Richard Sennett as ‘the special human condition of being engaged’ and by psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi as ‘flow’.⁶² In a 1972 edition of the *Leisure Painter* series ‘I wanted to paint’, housewife Phyllis Cockburn recounted the experience of making her very first painting:

I became so absorbed that I forgot everything – where I was, where the others were, what we were going to eat for lunch, I almost forgot who I was! I didn’t much care about the picture being good or bad, (it was bad, particularly the cows), but I was thrilled with the actual occupation.⁶³

⁶⁰ Club Secretary George Butterfield quoted in ‘London Transport Art Group Annual Show’ in *London Transport Magazine*, Vol. 3, No. 10 (Jan., 1970), pp. 16-17 (London Transport Museum Library, Covent Garden).

⁶¹ Bowman, W. D., ‘London and Paris Notes’ in *Amateur Artist and Collector: A Monthly Journal for All Interested in Art*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (Dec., 1927), p. 41.

⁶² For numerous examples of professional artists reporting this phenomenon see Csikszentmihalyi, M., *Creativity: Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1997); see also Sennett, R., *The Craftsman* (London: Penguin, 2008), p. 20; and Collins, M. A. and Amabile, T. M., ‘Motivation and Creativity’ in Sternberg, R. J. (ed), *Handbook of Creativity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 301.

⁶³ Cockburn, P., ‘I Wanted to Paint’ in *Leisure Painter* (Apr., 1972), pp. 29-33.

Jon Snow described his own creative state similarly:

It is completely all-absorbing. Nothing else becomes important any more. There's something coming from inside that connects with the paper. It's brain cleansing. The moment you sit down and commit yourself to putting paint on paper, that becomes the thing for that moment. There are other experiences – swimming, tennis – which I do, but then I think of the things which are dogging my temporal life. With painting I'm not visited by it at all. It's not just an escape, it's an expression, something happens, creating.⁶⁴

The timelessness of art making was in sharp contrast to the time-constraints imposed by work. 'Art is a complete pause. It slows everything', explained Snow. 'Work can be tense ... especially the last hour [before the news is broadcast live at 7pm] – the contrast with painting is so great. Even if it ends in agony, it's very different from the tension at work.'⁶⁵ The difference was not only in tension, but also of content. Snow painted landscapes, a far cry (for the most part) from the news stories he covered as a journalist. Contrast between the subject of work and the subject of art was common: many amateurs purposefully avoided the subject matter of their daily employment. 'Deep down I just don't want to paint figures', confessed J. B. Priestley, who was, like Snow, an ardent landscapist. 'As a novelist I've been dealing with people for over forty years. I want to get away from people when I paint.'⁶⁶ Similarly, London Transport bus driver Fred Ford's pictures of 'calm precise waterside scenes and boats, yachts, windjammers and steamers' were noted by *Amateur Artist* magazine to be 'in marked contrast to his strenuous job of driving a heavy bus through London's traffic'.⁶⁷ *The Times* newspaper reviews of the Parson Painters' annual exhibitions repeatedly implored them to paint their parishes, but the men of the cloth were

⁶⁴ Interview with Jon Snow.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ Dowling, F., 'Busy People – Leisure Painters: J. B. Priestley' in *Leisure Painter* (Summer, 1967), p. 21.

⁶⁷ 'Unexpected Artist: Fred Ford, Bus Driver' in *Amateur Artist*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (June, 1966), p. 32.

adamant: ‘We Parsons want to get right away from our work in our holidays or hours of leisure. And painting helps us.’⁶⁸

Art provided a tonic for the stresses of working life and a form of self-therapy for the harried amateur. According to psychiatrist Anthony Storr, creativity requires isolation.⁶⁹ Many amateurs, like Churchill, who believed painting combated the onset of depression, found the quiet contemplative nature of artistic production restorative and healing.⁷⁰ The therapeutic properties of art making were, in the postwar years, recognised by the medical profession. One former Post Office area engineer recalled how, ‘after a prolonged bout of workaholism’, his general practitioner recommended he take up oils ‘as a serious hobby’.⁷¹ In 1981, an estimated 25 per cent of doctors advised patients to join a creative adult education class (in which art was a popular subject) as a form of therapy.⁷² This informal trend was given an official stamp of approval in 1996 when, in some parts of England, visual art was made available on National Health Service prescription for people suffering from depression and related health issues.⁷³

Creative destruction

Painting was not simply a means of escape, however. Art making might seem therapeutic, yet arriving at a satisfactory artefact was rarely plain-sailing. While

⁶⁸ ‘Parson Painters’ in *Walker’s Monthly* (Nov., 1933), p. 3 (Lambeth Palace Library Archives, MS2885).

⁶⁹ Storr, A., *Solitude* (London: HarperCollins, 1997), xv and p. 202.

⁷⁰ Churchill called his bouts of depression ‘the black dog’ after an old English saying to describe a sullen child.

⁷¹ ‘Bertram “Bertie” Moore, MBE’ in the Post Office Art Club’s *Art News* (Summer, 1987), p. 10 (British Postal Museum and Archives, Post 62/101).

⁷² Withnall, A., Osborn, M. and Charnley, A., *Review of Existing Research in Adult and Continuing Education, Volume X: The Economics and Organisation of Adult and Continuing Education* (Leicester: National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education, 1982), p. 36.

⁷³ For a report on the pilot scheme for Arts on Prescription in Stockport, see ‘Part 3, Section H: Stockport Arts in Health’ in Watkins, S., *Health 2000: Three Years to Go* (Ninth Annual Public Health Report for Stockport, 1997), pp. 436-58.

leisure painters like J. B. Priestley took up the brushes as a route to relaxation, some artists found it the very opposite. 'I loved every minute given to my painting studies but cannot say I found it carefree and relaxing', admitted one amateur.⁷⁴ 'I suffered again, and again, and again', complained another.⁷⁵ For those who undertook the pursuit of art with the serious intention of developing skills and expertise, painting demanded effort and sacrifice. As one Civil Servant leisure painter argued, art was an obsessive occupation that jostled for finite attention:

Whatever form it takes will be fatal to the sort of life you used to lead before. Anybody taking up any of the arts is giving himself a full-time job for 24 hours a day every day because it will, in its essential nature, pervade his whole being, sleeping or waking.⁷⁶

For such amateurs there was nothing leisurely about painting. The completion of a work was often accompanied by feelings of disappointment and even despair.⁷⁷ 'Only the handful never suffer from a sense of inadequacy', consoled the artist Derek Chittock in an article in *Leisure Painter*. 'Among these may be those quite immune from reasonable criticism and not without a touch of mild megalomania.'⁷⁸ The artist's fiercest critic was usually himself. According to *The Artist* magazine, patience, persistence and perseverance were necessary qualities for such individuals:

It is only mastered by infinite labour, by the sorrow of defeat, by patient, long-suffering effort. There are no short cuts. The true artist is never satisfied with his best work – he always feels he could do better, and he strives to improve on his previous best.⁷⁹

⁷⁴ Ottewill, J., 'I Wanted to Paint' in *Leisure Painter* (Mar., 1972), pp. 34-8.

⁷⁵ Butterfield, J., 'Felt Pen and Wash' in *Leisure Painter* (Dec., 1975), p. 5.

⁷⁶ Everatt Gray, W., 'Being an Artist' in *The Association of Civil Service Art Clubs Newsletter*, No. 1 (July, 1952), pp. 6-7 (bound volumes courtesy of the Civil and Public Service Artists).

⁷⁷ Gordon, R., 'Art: Mistress and Servant of Man and His Culture' in Field, D. and Newick, J. (eds), *The Study of Education and Art* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), p. 21.

⁷⁸ Chittock, D., 'The Leisure Painter's Vital Role' in *Leisure Painter* (July, 1977), p. 32.

⁷⁹ 'Then and Now' in *The Artist*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (Nov., 1931), p. 119.

Destruction was a recurrent theme for artists whose paintings did not satisfy their own rigorous standards.⁸⁰ Businessman John Ottewill humorously described his personal quest to get rid of his creations:

I had it [an unsuccessful painting] for some time until finally I became so revolted that I threw it into the fire. There were several of my early paintings around the country. One was rolled up and forced between the stones of a Cotswold wall. Another flew out into the middle of Loch Tay, where, I am thankful to say, being so heavily coated with paint it sank immediately. Various litter bins also received examples of this my 'blues' period.⁸¹

Destruction was not simply a negative inversion of the positive act of creation. Sometimes, in the act of destroying a work, a revelatory moment could bring it back to life. Swingler found this an exhilarating process:

Sometimes if it isn't going right I think, 'this is useless, I'll put it in the bath, or put the shower on it'. ... But then suddenly you'll have a moment, and you realise that you can actually do something with it. And then the last quarter of an hour makes or breaks it.⁸²

The struggle to complete a satisfactory piece of work was part of the natural problem-solving drive identified by the philosopher David Hume. Hume recognised that humans satisfied a craving for achievement by setting themselves problems and finding appropriate solutions.⁸³ This, it seems, was where the excitement and intrigue of making art lay. Jon Snow described a similar experience: 'That uncertainty as to which way it will be is part of the lure. You may be yet able to turn it from failure and recover the ecstasy. The discovery that if you go that tiny bit redder it's going to

⁸⁰ Artists such as substation control room engineer William Davies, interviewed in 'London Transport Art Group Annual Show' in *London Transport Magazine*, Vol. 3, No. 10 (Jan., 1970), pp. 16-17 (London Transport Museum Library, Covent Garden).

⁸¹ Ottewill, J., 'I Wanted to Paint' in *Leisure Painter* (Mar., 1972), pp. 34-8.

⁸² Interview with Bob Swingler.

⁸³ Hundert, E. J., 'The Achievement Motive in Hume's Political Economy' in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (1974), p. 140.

work.⁸⁴ The tantalising possibility of success, of the work satisfying the artists' own judgement, was worth the pain and uncertainty of striving for artistic achievement. It was not the 'loss of conscious awareness' or 'flow' which delivered the satisfactions of art making, but rather the state experienced afterwards.⁸⁵ The triumph of resolution, or at least the hope of triumph, made artistic achievement at all levels of activity worthwhile.⁸⁶

The social artist

Once the personal criteria for success had been satisfied, some amateurs sought out a public arena in which to measure their achievements. Success depended on ranking but, unlike graded pursuits such as learning to play the violin or joining a football league, ranking mechanisms in art were elusive and the criteria by which art was judged opaque and shifting.⁸⁷ While competitions and prizes offered momentary clarification about the value of artistic creativity, there was, in general, great uncertainty.⁸⁸ This ambiguity introduced an element of risk: the challenge for the aspirant was to find the level of activity best suited to their aptitude and aspiration.

The social organisation of artistic creativity in twentieth century Britain helped the individual, by allowing them to more effectively rank themselves. As argued throughout this study, the structure of participation in art societies, exhibitions and art education had a fractal quality: it looked much the same regardless of the standard of achievement. At every level, risk was calculated; while a small amount of risk acted

⁸⁴ Interview with Jon Snow.

⁸⁵ Perry, L. R., 'Education in the Arts' in Field, D. and Newick, J. (eds), *The Study of Education and Art* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), p. 119.

⁸⁶ Scitovsky, T., *The Joyless Economy: The Psychology of Human Satisfaction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992 [1976]), pp. 68-9.

⁸⁷ Bishop, J. and Hoggett, P., *Organizing Around Enthusiasms: Mutual Aid in Leisure* (London: Comedia, 1986), p. 110.

⁸⁸ Heinich, N., 'The Sociology of Vocational Prizes: Recognition as Esteem' in *Theory, Culture & Society*, Vol. 26, No. 5 (2009), p. 88.

as a stimulus, there was little satisfaction in facing too much uncertainty.⁸⁹ The individual weighed up the probability of success and acted accordingly. ‘I have started viewing the Summer Exhibition by computing what I think is worse than me, and what is better’, confided Jon Snow. ‘Just enough to keep me happy and to whet my appetite for a comeback.’⁹⁰ Similarly, Post Office Art Club member Ron Standen reflected: ‘I enjoy professional exhibitions for their dazzling display of talent which I could never hope to emulate, but amateur shows more so because with a little better observation, skill and luck I might one day reach the standard of my betters.’⁹¹ As the editor of *Leisure Painter* magazine advised in 1972:

We should always set our sights high, but never so high as to impede any chance of being reasonably successful. ... We should in our finished work keep reasonably within our limitations and, in the odd quiet time, practise like mad to make such limitations less and less.⁹²

Success depended not on striving for the pinnacle, but on finding the most rewarding level of engagement.⁹³ By being realistic about one’s talents and finding an appropriate level at which to participate, risk could be attenuated and outcomes improved.⁹⁴

⁸⁹ ‘Editorial’ in *Leisure Painter* (Sep., 1972), p. 1. For a similar example of moral support offered to those attempting to navigate the process of self-selection earlier in the century, see Bowman, W. D., ‘Our Readers’ Pictures’ in *Amateur Artist and Collector: A Monthly Journal for All Interested in Art*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Nov., 1927), p. 32.

⁹⁰ Snow, J., ‘Oh the Agony of the Artistic Dream that has Turned Me into Jon ‘Failure’ Snow!’ in *Daily Mail* (19 June, 2011).

⁹¹ Standen, R., ‘Review’ in the Post Office Art Club’s *Art News* (Feb., 1987), p. 7 (British Postal Museum and Archives, Post 62/101).

⁹² ‘Editorial’ in *Leisure Painter* (Sep., 1972), p. 1.

⁹³ According to psychologist M. A. Boden, creativity is measured ‘in terms of what relevant people think of it’: Boden, M. A., ‘Introduction’ in Boden, M. A. (ed), *Dimensions of Creativity* (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1994), p. 4.

⁹⁴ Offer, A., ‘Introduction’ in Offer, A. (ed), *In Pursuit of the Quality of Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 14.

Once a suitable ranking had been achieved, the social organisation of personal creativity provided for the natural desire to belong.⁹⁵ Painting was a lonely pastime which, in some cases, necessitated a social outlet. For some amateurs, the social aspect was as, if not more, important than the level of artistic attainment itself.⁹⁶ ‘Happiness depends largely on overcoming bashfulness,’ claimed self-professed ‘incompetent amateur’ Caroline Stanton, ‘for one must join others to taste it to the full.’⁹⁷ For others, the level of participation was crucial; leisure painters who found a good ‘fit’ were able to demonstrate their success and efficiency to their social circle – a process which raised self-esteem. Determined and socially active amateurs worked their way through the network of opportunities available to them until they found a satisfactory balance between risk and acceptance.

Shirley Bonas’s climb from local evening class student to adult education tutor, and from local art club member to president of a prestigious regional art society, illustrates the fractal nature of artistic participation and the blurred lines between amateur and professional practice:

It was in the 1970s. I went to evening classes with a friend, because I enjoyed sketching. I always had this bee in my bonnet that I was good at art. My parents hadn’t pushed it. I never did O- or A-level. After children, I went to evening classes at Stourbridge local authority adult education centre. I enrolled with a friend in an art class. After two to three years I joined Kidderminster Art Society – a good amateur art society. At the time, I heard they were doing part-time foundation courses at Stourbridge College. I got onto that and found that I enjoyed it and so I went full-time. I worked towards a degree. I was very interested in art history as well. So my degree course, which was at Wolverhampton University, was fine art with 30 per cent art history. This was in the early-1980s. After my degree, I did some painting classes at Age Concern in Kidderminster. My tutor at Stourbridge College said that she was thinking of leaving, and that if I wanted to apply for her job in adult

⁹⁵ Scitovsky, *The Joyless Economy*, p. 115.

⁹⁶ Tomlinson, A., *Leisure and the Role of Clubs and Voluntary Groups* (London: SSRC/Sports Council, 1979), p. 39.

⁹⁷ Stanton, C., ‘I Wanted to Paint’ in *Leisure Painter* (Apr., 1975), pp. 8-9.

education I'd stand a very good chance of getting it. So I went to tutor there. It grew from there and eventually I became a full-time tutor in adult education.⁹⁸

Bonas moved between several societies before she became president of the Birmingham Watercolour Society. She compares this to building a career: 'When you go for a job, you want to get better. So you join a better society. It is for your own CV. ... It looks good and it gives you status – kudos.'⁹⁹ At a higher level, the value of membership lay in the fact that not everyone could achieve acceptance. Yet society positions were, like positional goods, 'will-o'-the-wisps': as an individual attained a certain level, the level they wished to attain jumped further out of reach.¹⁰⁰ 'You want to be recognised by your peers so you keep stepping up. When you've done it, the spark goes out of it', Bonas reflected.¹⁰¹ Her career, traversing between amateur and professional practice, demonstrates that there was no clear distinction between the two spheres of activity; the position of an artist changed throughout their lifetime, as they interacted with various individuals and groups. There was not one single dominant art world but rather a spectrum of co-existing worlds in which amateurs and professionals experienced similar motivations and rewards.¹⁰²

Motivating personal creativity

Intrinsic motivation, where an individual is moved to pursue an activity for its own sake, rather than as a means to some other end, is considered central to the creative act. According to psychologist Carl Rogers, a pioneering investigator in the field,

⁹⁸ Interview with Shirley Bonas.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ Hirschman, A., *Shifting Involvements: Private Interest and Public Action* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), p. 60.

¹⁰¹ Interview with Shirley Bonas.

¹⁰² Hutchison and Feist, *Amateur Arts in the UK*, xiii-xv; see also Becker, H. S., *Art Worlds* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

creativity is motivated by a drive to fulfil personal potential and must therefore take place in the context of self-evaluation rather than evaluation by others.¹⁰³ One might expect, therefore, that the amateur, who was un beholden to patrons or peers and pursued ‘art for art’s sake’, would reach the pinnacle of creative engagement – as opposed to the professional artist, who entered into an extrinsically-motivated relationship with a patron or client.¹⁰⁴ The fact that amateurs are not usually associated with the top tier of artistic creativity suggests that intrinsic motivation cannot, in isolation, account for the creative drive.

Extrinsic motivation is considered by some psychologists to be damaging to creativity and little more than a necessary evil for the struggling professional.¹⁰⁵ Yet the idea that amateur art was created simply for its own sake, without the involvement of any extrinsic motivation, is misleading. Many amateurs were actively motivated by extrinsic incentives. Making a living from their art was not, for example, necessary to the survival of the amateur artist, yet amateurs did not always avoid the market. A thriving informal economy blossomed around amateur art in the second half of the twentieth century. In a *Leisure Painter* article celebrating the amateur, artist-tutor Derek Chittock calculated that sales at local exhibitions amounted to a considerable sum in aggregate, far exceeding the number of sales made at the Royal Academy’s Summer Exhibition.¹⁰⁶ Amateurs operated within what sociologist Pierre Bourdieu termed the ‘inverted economy’: remuneration was sought in order to be able to carry out the activity rather than its chief purpose.¹⁰⁷ Yet the sale of amateur art did not

¹⁰³ Collins and Amabile, ‘Motivation and Creativity’, pp. 298-300.

¹⁰⁴ The assumption that the amateur was concerned only with ‘art for art’s sake’ abounded in magazines for amateur artists. See, for example, ‘In Answer to Our Readers’ Letters’ in *Leisure Painter* (Aug., 1974), p. 29.

¹⁰⁵ Carl Rogers was an early proponent of this view. See Collins and Amabile, ‘Motivation and Creativity’, pp. 298-300.

¹⁰⁶ Chittock, D., ‘The Leisure Painter’s Vital Role’ in *Leisure Painter* (July, 1977), p. 32.

¹⁰⁷ Heinich, ‘The Sociology of Vocational Prizes’, p. 88; see also Bishop and Hoggett, *Organizing Around Enthusiasms*, p. 126.

serve merely to replenish materials and fund activities. The exchange of money gave ‘the final seal of approbation’ in an emotionally-charged transaction which boosted morale.¹⁰⁸ Sales encouraged the budding artist and validated their effort. They helped not only financially, but also psychologically, raising the amateur’s sense of self-efficacy and self-esteem (see chapter 2, p. 97).

Art societies also provided the amateur with extrinsic incentives. They helped maintain commitment; by having a regular place in which to meet, create, and share work with fellow artists, individuals could continue to improve their practice where alone they might falter.¹⁰⁹ With feelings of disappointment and frustration commonplace, artists of all levels found it ‘comforting to see that other people suffer as we do’.¹¹⁰ Societies provided constructive criticism, which some psychologists have found to be conducive to creativity in less-skilled individuals, who regard it as a means to improve standards.¹¹¹ This was certainly true of amateur groups such as the Easel Club and the Parson Painters, who relished evenings of fierce mutual criticism, and also of the amateurs who sent their work to the offices of *Leisure Painter* magazine for critique and guidance (see chapter 6, p. 200).

The vast majority of leisure painters did not engage in socially organised activities such as exhibitions, art societies or adult education classes. The number of lone leisure painters far exceeded the number involved in public activities (see chapter 6, pp. 184-6). Some may have lacked the motivation or the necessary skill to raise their abilities to a sufficient level to climb the ranks, others may have lacked the means to support their interest at a more competitive level. The majority, it is

¹⁰⁸ Vera E. Stanley of Crosby, Liverpool, writes to ‘Readers Letters’ in *Leisure Painter* (Nov., 1974).

¹⁰⁹ Offer, A., *The Challenge of Affluence: Self-Control and Well-Being in the United States and Britain Since 1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 3-4.

¹¹⁰ Lumley, J., ‘The Value of Art Groups’ in *Amateur Artist*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (July, 1967), p. 8.

¹¹¹ Collins and Amabile, ‘Motivation and Creativity’, p. 307.

generally assumed, pursued art mainly for its intrinsic benefits: art for art's sake.¹¹² Yet extrinsic incentives existed even for those who were not socially motivated. Art had a utilitarian aspect, usually overlooked due to a common assumption that pictures were inherently useless, something to be hung on the wall and ignored. For many amateurs, the 'enduring tangible products' of art making were its chief reward.¹¹³ Artists had no need to buy original art or reproductions to hang in their homes when they could produce it for themselves.¹¹⁴ A painting might be created with a specific end in mind – to commemorate a special occasion or to give to a particular person; for practical reasons – 'to go with the curtains' or to fit an awkward sized alcove; or for sentimental reasons – commemorating a loved one or a special holiday.¹¹⁵ Making could be a straightforward means to an end. The artist's painting had just as much functionality as the craftsman's chair: filling the gap on the wall and providing the maker with the satisfaction of having created something of personal value and long-lasting use.¹¹⁶

The search for self-actualisation

This chapter cannot claim to capture all the motivations which drove leisure painters throughout the second half of the twentieth century. Yet the vignettes reported here were repeated throughout the postwar period: art offered escape from the stress and

¹¹² For a discussion of the historical development of the term 'art for art's sake' see Luxford, J. M., 'Art for Art's Sake – Was It Ever Thus? A Historical Perspective' in Townley, B. and Beech, N. (eds), *Managing Creativity: Exploring the Paradox* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 87-105.

¹¹³ Stebbins, R. A., "'Amateur' and 'Hobbyist' as Concepts for the Study of Leisure Problems' in *Social Problems*, Vol. 27, No. 4 (Apr., 1980), p. 413.

¹¹⁴ A member of the Ministry of Supply Art Club referring to a paper entitled 'The Painter and His Public – 1754-1954' read to the Royal Society of Artists by the portrait and landscape painter Bernard Adams in Cadman, R. L., 'We Amateur Artists' in the *Association of Civil Service Art Clubs Newsletter*, No. 7 (1954), p. 5 (bound volumes courtesy of the Civil and Public Service Artists).

¹¹⁵ Gill, E., *Work and Leisure* (London: Faber and Faber, 1935), p. 133; see, for example, Peake, M., 'Housewife and Mother to Part-Time Teacher' in *Leisure Painter* (June, 1974), pp. 34-7; Ottewill, J., 'I Wanted to Paint' in *Leisure Painter* (Mar., 1972), pp. 34-8; and Bennett, R., 'Busy People – Leisure Painters: Leslie Caron' in *Leisure Painter* (Spring, 1967), p. 21.

¹¹⁶ For a discussion of the unique value of the handmade, see chapter 9, pp. 274-6.

insecurity of work, slowed the pace of life for the duration of the creative act, instilled a sense of self-efficacy and self-esteem, provided opportunities to meet like-minded individuals, and produced enduring and useful artefacts. If motivations were broadly consistent through the decades, what caused the growing interest in leisure painting following the Second World War? According to psychologist Abraham Maslow, creativity stood at the tip of a hierarchy of needs: the ultimate vehicle for the realisation of personal potential. Maslow argued that only once all other basic physiological ‘prepotent needs’ had been met, and conditions of security established, could the individual be motivated to progress to the ultimate human goal of self-actualisation. ‘A musician must make music, an artist must paint, a poet must write, if he is to be ultimately happy. What a man can be, he must be’, Maslow wrote.¹¹⁷ In affluent postwar Britain, many ordinary people came closer than ever before to having their ‘prepotent needs’ met and, with issues of home economy and spare time largely resolved, they embarked upon a search for creative self-fulfilment.¹¹⁸ Fine art was one of a number of creative pursuits which appealed to this growing number of individuals. Affluent society provided for the artistically-inclined with an array of educative, social and consumer opportunities which enhanced the personal experience of artistic creativity. In the next chapter, I will examine how affluence created the preconditions for the take-up of creative pursuits and facilitated the search for creative self-actualisation.

¹¹⁷ Maslow, A. H., ‘A Theory of Human Motivation’ in *Psychological Review*, Vol. 50 (1943), p. 382.

¹¹⁸ It should be noted that Maslow believed that due to psychological barriers very few, if any, individuals would be able to fully self-actualise.

ⁱ A note on interviews: partially-structured open-ended questions were outlined to keep the core of each interview the same, while allowing space for each interviewee to talk freely. Informants were asked how and when they started out painting; what education, if any, they had received and to what level; whether they exhibited, joined societies or read art literature; and finally what motivated them to pursue art in their spare time. Interviews were documented by note taking; most interviewees felt more relaxed without the presence of a recording device, and for consistency that method was adopted throughout. Selecting likely candidates was a combination of availability and a snowball method of sampling, which evolved as research proceeded. Initial interviews were arranged through contacts made while conducting archival research into art societies (many archives were held by individual members) and through adverts placed in retirement magazines for large employers, who had at one time supported a company art club (including the Midland Bank, the Post Office and London Transport). Snowballing has obvious pitfalls. By tapping into a specific network it limits the range of experience: those agreeing to interview were a self-selecting group willing to talk about their experiences. Given that amateur artists leave little trace, and that many potential interviewees were difficult to find – particularly those practicing at home, alone – this was considered to be a necessary compromise.

CHAPTER 9

Conditions for creativity

*'[Art] is always conditioned more or less by economic changes, but these are rather conditions of its existence at all than directive influences.'*¹

Making is a human universal: be it in the service of function and utility or beauty and truth, humans are hardwired to create artefacts.² The leisure painters discussed throughout this study demonstrate that the creative urge is not the possession of a gifted few; it exists in a far greater number of individuals and across a far broader cross-section of society than is generally assumed.³ Not all would share the artist Giorgio De Chirico's 'impulse even more urgent than the hungry desperation which drives a man to tearing at a piece of bread like a savage beast', yet the drive to create, the sense that art was 'just something you want to do', was common amongst amateur artists in the twentieth century.⁴ Whether vocation, passion, or occasional hobby, art satisfied the urge to make a mark and leave a 'reassuring trace of one's existence'.⁵

The biological explanation for the creative drive explains why art appealed to individuals with little interest in achieving even a basic proficiency in the pursuit (see, for example, J. B. Priestley's comments in chapter 8, p. 245).⁶ It does not, however, cast sufficient light on why amateur art activity increased to such a significant extent following the Second World War. Nor does the similarly sweeping argument that 'it makes people happy'; happiness is a common sense explanation which is, in this context, devoid of much explanatory power. While the Romantic movement's ideal of

¹ Fry, R., *Vision and Design* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1957 [1920]), p. 10.

² Brown, D. E., *Human Universals* (London: McGraw-Hill, 1991).

³ Dissanayake, E., *Homo Aestheticus: Where Art Comes From and Why* (Washington: University of Washington Press, 1995), pp. 34-5.

⁴ Giorgio de Chirico quoted in Fitzgerald, A., *An Artist's Book of Inspiration: A Collection of Thoughts on Art, Artists, and Creativity* (New York: Lindisfarne Press, 1996), p. 44; and interview with Bob Swingler, Birmingham Watercolour Society, Hanbury Hall, 3 August 2011.

⁵ Richmond, S., 'In Praise of Practice: A Defense of Art Making in Education' in *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (Summer, 1998), p. 13.

⁶ Art was one of many creative outlets available to ordinary people in the twentieth century.

the tortured creative genius may be an extreme, so too is the simplistic argument that artistic expression is sought purely for pleasure. Many things give us pleasure but, as art educationist L. A. Reid suggests, paraphrasing Bentham's famous slander on the arts: 'If pleasure is the aim, then, for some people, pushpin (or bingo) is as good as poetry.'⁷ Why one art and not another? For that matter, why fine art and not do-it-yourself, or any other leisure activity? Pleasure was undoubtedly an incentive for many amateur artists: it is likely that amateurs who chose to spend their spare time painting enjoyed the pursuit – the free play of Joyce Grenfell's nursery class transposed onto the 'painting for fun' adult education class, for example (see chapter 8, p. 235 and also chapter 5, pp. 167-71). Yet the happiness explanation risks paternalistic assumptions about what is 'good' for people, without making an effort to understand what is being prescribed.⁸ It is unlikely that any mode of activity, creative or otherwise, would induce a one-size-fits-all mood in all humans throughout history. While some reports claim that creativity promotes wellbeing, others suggest a correlation between creativity and 'mood disorders' such as depression.⁹ The relationship between mood and creativity is more likely to be a spectrum. As the examples given in chapter 8 (pp. 251-4) illustrate, creativity did not provide the artist with unadulterated pleasure; much ended in disappointment and destruction, yet still artists endeavoured to realise their creative aspirations.

The rising popularity of leisure painting in postwar Britain requires a more nuanced explanation than simply biological drives or hedonic pleasures. Art might fulfil an urge but, at a personal level, it was not a necessity; it could be readily

⁷ Reid, L. A., 'Aesthetics and Aesthetic Education' in Field, D. and Newick, J. (eds), *The Study of Education and Art* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), p. 177.

⁸ Sociologist David Gauntlett, for example, argues that everyone should engage in creative activity because it is good for them. See Gauntlett, D., *Making is Connecting: The Social Meaning of Creativity, from DIY and Knitting to YouTube and Web 2.0* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011).

⁹ See, for example, Bower, B., 'Manic Depression: Risk and Creativity' in *Science News*, Vol. 134, No. 10 (3 Sep., 1988), p. 151.

sacrificed if other more pressing needs materialised.¹⁰ Whereas in early human society the pressures competing with art making were of basic survival, in the late-twentieth century they were of consumerism and its concomitant, time famine. Since John Ruskin and William Morris, the forces of industrialisation and mass production have been blamed for the destruction of the creative powers and sensibilities of ordinary people. In the post-industrial age, the grand and escalating scale of mass consumerism became the juggernaut which threatened to annihilate everyday creativity. Yet if humans made art when their daily existence was threatened by wild predatory beasts, why would the urge to create dissipate when exposed to consumerism? According to the economist Staffan Linder, consumerism left little spare time for creative pursuits. Amateurs might be moved to buy paints and brushes, but would fail to produce art because of the myriad distractions of the modern consumer lifestyle.¹¹ The evidence presented in this study suggests, however, that for individuals with a creative disposition, no such dissipation of personal creativity occurred: ordinary people made time for artistic pursuits alongside work and family obligations. At every level of artistic attainment creative activity was facilitated by a variety of extrinsic incentives, from art societies and exhibitions to adult education classes. The existence of these incentives was conditioned by broader social, political and economic factors. Through the influence of exogenous forces, painting became a viable option for more people than ever before: the drive towards artistic creativity in postwar Britain was broadly helped, rather than hindered, by affluent consumerist society.

¹⁰ Gordon, R., 'Art: Mistress and Servant of Man and His Culture' in Field, D. and Newick, J. (eds), *The Study of Education and Art* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), p. 14.

¹¹ Linder, S. B., *The Harried Leisure Class* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), pp. 2-7.

Creative work, creative leisure

Why did the popularity of leisure painting grow during the second half of the twentieth century? One explanation for the general increase in creative activities, from do-it-yourself and crafting to creative writing and needlework, is sociologist Harry Braverman's argument that automation rendered modern work bereft of skill. This, he contended in *Labor and Monopoly Capital* (1974), would lead individuals to satisfy their creative drive elsewhere.¹² This was not a particularly original idea. It found its roots in the nineteenth century critics of industrialising Britain and influenced critics like the sculptor Eric Gill, who in 1931 wrote that the human need to make was such that 'if a man's whole day be spent as a servant of an industrial concern, in his spare time he will make something, if only a window box flower garden'.¹³

For some amateur artists, the pursuit of art did provide compensation for an unrewarding working life; one Civil Service art club member, for example, described a 'not very happy and rather dull life in the SBD [the Post Office Savings Bank Department]' being 'much brightened by the formation of the SBD Arts Club'.¹⁴ For such individuals, the existence of an interesting leisure activity outside of work was invaluable. This was not mere escapism. As the author Arnold Bennett wrote in his popular self-help book *How to Live on 24 Hours a Day*, first published in 1910 and running into numerous editions since, leisure had the potential to enrich work: 'Can you deny that when you have something definite to look forward to at eventide, something that is to employ all your energy – the thought of that something gives a

¹² Braverman, H., *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century* (New York: New Monthly Press, 1998 [1974]), pp. 294-5.

¹³ Gill, E., *Printing and Piety: An Essay on Life and Works in the England of 1931, and Particularly Typography* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1936 [1931]), preface.

¹⁴ Waller, G., 'A Leisure Time of Painting' in *Association of Civil Service Art Clubs Newsletter*, No. 40 (Mar., 1965), p. 6 (bound volumes courtesy of the Civil and Public Service Artists).

glow and a more intense vitality to the whole day?’¹⁵ This was particularly true of work art clubs, which allowed individuals to forge new social relationships based on shared interests, a process described by sociologist Joffre Dumazedier as the ‘cultivation of personality’.¹⁶ An exhibition by a staff art club could, for example, reveal hidden talents, showing fellow workers to one another in ‘an entirely different light’.¹⁷ Through building social capital within the workplace community, art clubs had the potential to improve the worker’s overall experience of their employment (work art clubs are discussed in detail in chapter 3).

Leisure painting was not, however, simply a consolation for the loss of skill in work. Amateurs populated the ranks of a range of careers, many of them creative. A number of individuals famed for their creativity, be that as writers, actors or musicians, who made fine art as an adjunct to their main – and celebrated – occupation, provide an illuminating example. These artists pursued drawing and painting with varying degrees of seriousness. The writer and novelist J. B. Priestley, for example, began to paint in the mid-1950s when he was in his 60s and, as discussed in chapter 8 (p. 245), enjoyed the pursuit for its relaxing properties.¹⁸ Actor Leslie Caron, meanwhile, painted throughout her career to while away the hours she spent waiting around on film sets.¹⁹ Some ‘celebrity’ amateurs enjoyed relative success. Musician David Bowie’s late-twentieth century prints and paintings have

¹⁵ Bennett, A., *How to Live on 24 Hours a Day* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1914 [8th edition]), p. 45.

¹⁶ Dumazedier, J., *Towards a Society of Leisure* (New York: Free Press, 1967), p. 17; see also Simpson, R., ‘The Role and Potential of Amateur Arts Groups in Building an Empowered, Participative, Fulfilled and Healthy Civil Society’ a paper given at the conference *Taking Part: Arts, Culture and Civil Society* (London: October, 2010); and also Hutchison, R. and Feist, A., *Amateur Arts in the UK: The PSI Survey of Amateur Arts and Crafts in the UK* (London: The Policy Studies Institute, 1991), p. 137.

¹⁷ Coles, P., *Manchester Hospitals’ Arts Project* (London: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 1981), pp. 28-33.

¹⁸ Dowling, F., ‘Priestley the Painter’ in *Leisure Painter* (Summer, 1967), p. 21.

¹⁹ Bennett, R., ‘Busy people – Leisure Painters: Leslie Caron’ *Leisure Painter* (Spring, 1967), p. 21.

fetched thousands of pounds at auction.²⁰ Bowie may have considered these paintings to be an integral part of his overall creative output, and not regarded fine art as an amateur pursuit, yet it was neither his main occupation nor source of income. Leisure painting may have differed to their main line of work but, for Priestley, Caron and Bowie, it was not an escape from an uncreative working life.

‘Celebrity’ amateur artists, whose work was already creatively or intellectually stimulating, were in little need for the compensatory creative outlet outlined by Braverman. Their motivations were not, however, dissimilar to those of the ordinary leisure painters discussed throughout this study. While some individuals used leisure to compensate for the frustrations of work, many had similarly demanding experiences in both leisure and employment. Art societies in the armed forces, mining communities, the clergy and the medical profession, amongst others, illustrate how both physically and mentally demanding professions, vocations and occupations were well represented amongst amateur artists (see, for example, the variety of work art clubs discussed in chapter 3). These were not alienated workers, sedated by television.²¹ Some sought something completely opposite to their work in their leisure – the Parson Painters escaping their busy parishes to paint relaxing holiday scenes, for example. Others demonstrated the extension model of work and leisure described by Alasdair Clayre in his book *Work and Play*, in which a hypothetical Mr Coles finds his work interesting and in his leisure ‘pursues something equally absorbing and equally based on craft and skill – his painting’.²² Either way, leisure was not simply a

²⁰ In 2012, for example, three self-portraits sold for £6,500. See ‘David Bowie Self-Portraits fetch £6,500 at auction’, NME.com (accessed 9 September 2013).

²¹ Seligman, B., ‘On Work, Alienation, and Leisure’ in *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (Oct., 1965), pp. 342.

²² Clayre, A., *Work and Play: Ideas and Experience of Work and Leisure* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1974), pp. 197-8.

compensatory measure, replacing something lost from the workplace: those active and rewarded by work were likely to be active and rewarded by leisure.²³

The range of occupations held by amateur artists – not just across professions and workplaces, but also within them – indicates that no simple assumption can be made about the type of worker who would require a creative outlet after hours. The pursuit of fine art could be both compensatory for the deficiencies of work and congruent with an existing work skills set.²⁴ Braverman's generalisation is, therefore, ill-suited to explain the growing popularity of leisure painting in postwar Britain. Indeed, had a lack of skill in work been the main driving force behind creative pursuits, and had the extent of this loss of skill in work been as broad as Braverman claimed, one would expect the proportion of the population involved to be much higher.²⁵ That it was not indicates that fine art remained a minority pursuit, albeit one that steadily grew in popularity over the course of the twentieth century.²⁶

Affluence and creativity

If not the displacement of skilled work, what can account for the significant increase in amateur art activity following the Second World War?²⁷ The economic correlates of art and creativity have been long debated, yet these debates have focused on eminent artists and creative epochs, rather than on the everyday amateur production of art. In the early-1960s, economic historians Robert Lopez and Harry Miskimin wrote

²³ For a discussion of Harold Wilensky's hypotheses of 'compensation' versus 'spillover' and Stanley Parker's 'three-fold typology' of leisure see Clayre, *Work and Play*, p. 197.

²⁴ This was recognised in the interwar period, see Gelber, S. M., 'A Job You Can't Lose: Work and Hobbies in the Great Depression' in *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (Summer, 1991), p. 741-66.

²⁵ Clayre critiques the belief that post-industrial work was unskilled in *Work and Play*, p. 197.

²⁶ A phenomenon predicted by W. G. Constable in 'The Growth of Popular Interest in Art' in *Art for the People: Report of the British Institute of Adult Education Experiment in Providing Loan Exhibitions in the Smaller Towns of England* (London: British Institute of Adult Education, 1935), p. 6.

²⁷ In 2002 it was estimated that nine per cent of the population drew or painted regularly. See Fox, K. and Richards, L., *National Statistics: Sport and Leisure Results from the Sport and Leisure Module of the 2002 General Household Survey* (London: HMSO, 2004), pp. 38-40.

that ‘money was put into art when economic outlets were few’.²⁸ They took as their example the Renaissance and the development of early European art markets. Although not intended as such, their argument is relevant to the postwar British experience: the global art market turned high art into a store of value during recessionary phases and a capital investment for the rich.²⁹ However, apart from the phenomenon of make do and mend during the scarcity of the Second World War, and a resurgence in frugalism and craft during the economically turbulent 1970s – which conform to popular theories of there being a correlation between recession and everyday creativity – Lopez and Miskimin’s model does not shed much light on the rising level of amateur art making in postwar Britain.

Writing just two years after Lopez and Miskimin, sociologist Vytautas Kavolis argued that affluence, rather than depression, motivated towards creativity. A greater proportion of social resources were allocated to ‘non-instrumental’ pursuits during periods of abundance.³⁰ He qualified this claim by adding that artistic efflorescences such as the Renaissance were stimulated by the disturbance of what he called a ‘relatively steady state’.³¹ In periods of equilibrium, Kavolis held, the social utility of art declined despite the availability of resources.³² Although focusing on ‘sophisticated art’, Kavolis’s argument resonates with the development of artistic creativity within the experience of ordinary life in postwar Britain. The Second World War marked an enormous disturbance of the ‘steady state’, a disturbance which stimulated a postwar boom in artistic creativity across all sections of society. Out of

²⁸ Lopez, R. S. and Miskimin, H. A., ‘The Economic Depression in the Renaissance’ in *The Economic History Review*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (1962), p. 408.

²⁹ Hobsbawm, E., *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914-1991* (London: Abacus, 1995), p. 508.

³⁰ Kavolis, V., ‘Economic Correlates of Artistic Creativity’ in *The American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 70, No. 3 (Nov., 1964), p. 334.

³¹ Kavolis, V., ‘Community Dynamics and Artistic Creativity’ in *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 31, No. 2 (Apr., 1966), p. 208.

³² *Ibid*, p. 208.

the war came the Arts Council of Great Britain (see chapter 1), a host of amateur art clubs and societies (see chapters 2 and 3), adult education art classes subsidised by local government (see chapters 4 and 5), and a rise in consumerism which, through a host of commercial enterprises, provided handsomely for the amateur's intellectual and material needs (see chapters 6 and 7).

Kavolis assumes a cyclical pattern to artistic creativity: as soon as equilibrium returns, the social utility of art begins to decline. Yet in the case of the amateur arts in postwar Britain there was a sustained and growing interest in leisure painting for the rest of the century. While the war was certainly a serious disturbance, the extended period of relative stability over the next 60 years saw no corresponding decline in amateur practice as the 'steady state' returned. Instead, affluence influenced social and political forces which, in turn, laid the foundations for the rise of the leisure painter. The socially democratic ethos of the postwar settlement was carried through a carousel of Labour and Conservative governments, creating a political consensus that was, on the whole, supportive of the arts. The near-full employment of the immediate postwar years delivered rising wages, and the reduction in the working week created greater leisure time in which to participate in social activities such as art societies and adult education art classes, or pursue interests in private with the help of books and magazines. The lengthy period examined in this study may not have been a single trajectory of consistent increase in amateur activity, but an overall trend of improvement can be seen: affluence motivated towards creativity within the experience of ordinary life.

Consumerism and the banalisation of art

With affluence, came mass consumerism. Over the course of the twentieth century, British people enjoyed an increasing amount of spare income with which to purchase an array of consumer products. Some, like the washing machine, were labour-saving, but a good deal of consumer expenditure was spent on time-intensive products, such as the television.³³ As a result, some economists assumed that consumerism would reduce the amount of spare time available for non-consumerist activities.³⁴ Yet for the minority engaged in leisure painting, consumerism did not destroy the creative drive; on the contrary, it facilitated creative production in a number of ways.

As chapters 6 and 7 illustrated, consumerism helped amateurs in their pursuit of artistic creativity. Magazine and book publishers and material manufacturers responded to the growing thirst for creative leisure activities with a range of products aimed directly at the amateur market. Magazines provided education, guidance and a sense of community, without the hassle of belonging to a society or the expense of attending art classes. Art material manufacturers courted the amateur with a wide range of affordable products. From oil paint to paint-by-numbers kits, product lines were developed to satisfy a growing number of cost-conscious consumers and encourage the quest for self-actualisation through artistic creativity.

Consumerism had another less obvious influence on the development of artistic creativity within the experience of everyday life. In *Labor and Monopoly Capital* Braverman described a world in which cheap manufactured goods ended the urge to make, turning the “home-made” into a derogation and “factory made” or “store bought” into a boast.³⁵ The source of status was ‘no longer the ability to make things

³³ Offer, A., *The Challenge of Affluence: Self-Control and Well-Being in the United States and Britain Since 1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), pp. 175-8.

³⁴ See, for example, Linder, *The Harried Leisure Class*.

³⁵ Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, p. 191.

but simply the ability to purchase them'.³⁶ Conspicuous consumption, a term coined by the sociologist Thorstein Veblen in his late-nineteenth century study of the leisure class, was not a new phenomenon.³⁷ In the twentieth century, however, using consumption to demonstrate one's social and economic standing ceased to be an activity confined to elites. Mass production, combined with the easy availability of credit, facilitated lavish expenditure. In the late-1990s, sociologist Juliet Schor reported a small but growing backlash against 'upscaling consumption' in the US, whereby middle-income families made concerted efforts to downsize their consumer spending.³⁸ Yet Schor overlooked a far more pervasive trend, present on both sides of the Atlantic, which was not so much a counter-culture as a manipulation of existing cultural norms: for disenchanted consumers, consumption itself became a route through which to reject the tyranny of consumer choice.

Affluence created a hedonic treadmill: because everyone became more affluent at the same time, no extra status was conferred by new riches.³⁹ The 'store-bought' could no longer be a boast if everybody could buy the same products. Photomechanical reproduction, for example, created mass-produced prints of famous works of art at ever-decreasing prices.⁴⁰ From the *Mona Lisa* and the *Birth of Venus* to the *Metamorphosis of Narcissus* and *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, by the mid-twentieth century more people than ever before could own reproductions of celebrated works of art. An increasing number of consumers grew dissatisfied with the lack of

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Veblen, T., *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (London: MacMillan, 1899).

³⁸ Schor, J., *The Overspent American: Why We Want What We Don't Need* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1999), pp. 18-22.

³⁹ Offer, A., 'Introduction' in Offer, A. (ed), *In Pursuit of the Quality of Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 10.

⁴⁰ This development was observed in the 1930s by W. G. Constable in 'The Growth of Popular Interest in Art', p. 5.

individuality and originality in these possessions. Economist Tibor Scitovsky explains:

The wide currency of reproductions of some paintings greatly diminishes the interest and enjoyment they hold, especially when one encounters not only an occasional good reproduction on a friend's living-room wall, but many not-so-good reproductions in magazines, book covers, and posters. ... People's desire for the uniqueness of the painting, an art object, a dress, or any other possession therefore, however snobbish it may seem, is soundly based on a desire for maximum novelty and stimulus enjoyment. The owner himself, of course, quickly uses up the novelty content of his own possessions, but uniqueness enhances the enjoyment of others as well as the satisfaction the owner gets from other people's enjoyment.⁴¹

Mass production led to the mass consumption of identical products which, in turn, elevated the value of handmade products. Handmade works of art became symbols of individuality in an environment saturated with mass produced goods.

In the 1930s, the art theorist Walter Benjamin compared the uniqueness of the work of art with a rare and precious flower: 'That which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art', he wrote. 'The sight of immediate reality has become an orchid in the land of technology.'⁴² It was an argument reminiscent of John Ruskin's in *Stones of Venice* (1851-3): that the roughly-hewn bricks of the traditional stone mason outshone the lifeless monotony of mass-produced masonry.⁴³ For Ruskin, the handmade retained a value with which the mechanically-produced could not compete. In the second half of the twentieth century, the aura of originality in the handmade artefact continued to glow, its

⁴¹ Scitovsky, T., *The Joyless Economy: The Psychology of Human Satisfaction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992 [1976]), p. 262.

⁴² Benjamin, W, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' in Arendt, H. (ed), *Walter Benjamin, Illuminations* (London: Cape, 1970), p. 221 and p. 233. In the J. A. Underwood translation, the orchid is described instead as the 'blue flower [of Romanticism]' (London: Penguin, 2008), p. 24.

⁴³ Ruskin, J., *The Nature of Gothic: A Chapter of the Stones of Venice* (Hammersmith: George Allen, Kelmscott Press, 1892 [1851-3]).

luminosity made brighter by the ever-increasing scale of mass production. Art critics who debated the relative value of different works of art dismissed the traditional emphasis of much amateur work as unoriginal (see chapter 1, pp. 41-2). Yet the fact it was produced by hand, and that no two works would ever be the same, however derivative the subject or manner of treatment, meant all handmade creations retained a special quality which could not be replicated. The ‘irregularities in execution’ which lent the object its aura did not, Scitovsky propounded, ‘necessarily have anything to do with artistic excellence’.⁴⁴ As one leisure painter proudly asserted: ‘We know, just as no two fingerprints are alike, that no one will create a painting exactly like ours. It may not be a masterpiece, but at least it will be unique.’⁴⁵

Handmade products carried a signal, which denoted individuality and created a mark of distinction which benefited not only the producer but also the consumer. As the craftsman David Pye predicted in 1968, whatever the benefits of cheap, mass produced goods in terms of price and availability, ‘people will continue to demand individuality in their possessions’.⁴⁶ As discussed in chapter 2 (p. 94), the market for art, like the social organisation of art making, had a fractal quality: it existed for a range of consumers and producers of varying tastes and aptitudes. It was not necessary that a work of art be deemed universally unique, only that it could be identified as such when situated at an appropriate level. Although separate from the dominant commodified art world, amateur art had a market of its own. This market, which comprised many small transactions, offered buyers with modest budgets an opportunity to purchase something ‘a little out of the ordinary’.⁴⁷ In so doing, amateur

⁴⁴ Scitovsky, *The Joyless Economy*, p. 250.

⁴⁵ O’Riordan, T., ‘Painting is Pleasure’ in *Leisure Painter* (Dec., 1972), p. 37.

⁴⁶ Pye, D., *The Nature and Art of Workmanship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), p. 23.

⁴⁷ ‘The Humanities’ in *Church Times* (Nov., 1930) (Lambeth Palace Library Archives, MS2885).

art provided inexpensive relief, for both producers and consumers, from the ‘banalization of art’.⁴⁸

Creativity and the art of consumption

Despite the diverse range of opportunities for consumption provided by affluent society, many consumers remained unsatisfied. Consumer dissatisfaction stemmed from boredom, and boredom was the result of a deficit in the consumption skills necessary to maximise the enjoyment of leisure.⁴⁹ The remedy, according to Scitovsky, was culture and the arts, which provided the skills ‘necessary for getting the most out of life’.⁵⁰ But first, an investment was required: the cultivation of consumption skills required time, patience and commitment. In the immediate postwar years, the British state assisted with this investment. Rising levels of initial education impacted positively on consumption skills.⁵¹ This was enhanced by the provision of recreational adult education, which taught students ‘how to benefit from leisure’.⁵² Through classes in the practice and appreciation of the arts, individuals developed an understanding of what John Maynard Keynes called ‘the art of life itself’.⁵³ Adult educators recognised the importance of consumption skills;

⁴⁸ Scitovsky, *The Joyless Economy*, p. 262.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p. 235.

⁵⁰ Scitovsky, T., ‘What’s Wrong with the Arts Is What’s Wrong with Society’ in *The American Economic Review*, Vol. 62, No. 1-2 (Mar., 1972), p. 64.

⁵¹ Hillman-Chartrand, H., ‘The Arts: Consumption Skills in the Post-Modern Economy’ in *Journal of Art and Design Education*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (1987), p. 36.

⁵² Withnall, A., Osborn, M. and Charnley, A., *Review of Existing Research in Adult and Continuing Education, Volume X: The Economics and Organisation of Adult and Continuing Education* (Leicester: National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education, 1982), p. 16.

⁵³ Keynes, J. M., ‘Economic Possibilities for Our Grandchildren’, originally published in *Nation and Athenaeum*, 11 and 18 October 1930, and subsequently in *Essays in Persuasion* (London: Macmillan, 1931), p. 328.

recreational courses created satisfied individuals and satisfied individuals would create a more civilised society.⁵⁴

At the end of the twentieth century, however, local authorities ceased to invest in recreational adult education. Consumption skills were neglected because governments found the rewards of non-vocational skills difficult to measure. The postwar vision of a civilised society through individual betterment was no longer popular. Adult education was, from the 1970s onwards, increasingly weighted towards the development of productive skills through vocational training, as opposed to imparting skills of consumption through cultural and recreational courses.⁵⁵ The enjoyment of life became a private good for which the individual alone should pay (a transition explored in chapters 4 and 5).

As the prevailing political ideology shifted from social democracy towards market liberalism, state support for adult education was pared down and, in the process, leisure painting changed from a social activity to a predominantly private pursuit. Nevertheless, the number of leisure painters steadily increased into the twenty-first century (see chapter 6, p. 184).⁵⁶ According to Scitovsky, growth in amateur artistic activity in the US was not because, as Braverman had argued, artistic pursuits compensated for the loss of stimulation as producers in work, but rather because they compensated for the loss of stimulation as consumers in leisure:

There seems to have been a great expansion in the scope of activities engaged in for the satisfaction they yield. There is a great flowering of handicraft and artwork. ... It ranges from leatherwork, jewelry, and pottery making to painting and sculpting, and it is undertaken by people willing to accept a lower money income for the sake of more creative work, by housewives, by employed

⁵⁴ See, for example, [Cmnd. 2601] *A Policy for the Arts: The First Steps* (London: HMSO, 1964-5), p. 14.

⁵⁵ Scitovsky, *The Joyless Economy*, pp. 231-2.

⁵⁶ Fox and Richards, *Results from the Sport and Leisure Module of the 2002 General Household Survey*, pp. 38-40.

people after their regular work, and by those whose independent income enables them to do what they most enjoy. All such work is designed to provide challenge and stimulus for those doing it ... In short even though puritan attitudes, lack of consumption skills, and disdain for the generalist deprive us of much enjoyable stimulation as consumers, we can make up for the loss by seeking the creative satisfaction of productive work.⁵⁷

In 1975, an editorial in *Leisure Painter* magazine recognised that the ‘substantial numbers’ taking up the arts and crafts were doing so as ‘a general reaction to, and disenchantment with, mass produced, stereotyped objects’.⁵⁸ In an increasingly affluent society where photomechanical reproduction was cheap and widely accessible, most amateurs who had the time and space to pursue art could easily afford to purchase inexpensive reproductions. Instead, they chose to spend their time and resources making their own pictures. This was not primarily about saving money; although paint and materials had become increasingly inexpensive as the century wore on (see chapter 7), making could be more expensive than buying mass-produced prints. The uniqueness of the handmade product, combined with the personal and social rewards of creative production was, however, incomparable with price.⁵⁹

Scitovsky implies that production skills were easier to come by than consumption skills. It is an assumption which underlay much of the groundbreaking creative adult education provided by London County Council and the Educational Settlements Association during the interwar period (see chapter 4, pp. 138-9). Yet the idea that production and consumption were separate, or even antithetical – an excess of one leading automatically to refuge in the other – is misleading.⁶⁰ The leisure

⁵⁷ Scitovsky, *The Joyless Economy*, p. 280.

⁵⁸ ‘Editorial’ in *Leisure Painter* (July, 1975), p. 1.

⁵⁹ Scitovsky, *The Joyless Economy*, p. 262.

⁶⁰ It is an argument reminiscent of Albert Hirschman’s in his book *Shifting Involvements*, where disappointment in the public sphere of life leads to a withdrawal to the private sphere (and vice versa). Hirschman, A., *Shifting Involvements: Private Interest and Public Action* (Princeton: University Press, 1982).

painters of the twentieth century were not so very different from the ‘original’ amateur artists of the leisure class, who did not paint to relieve the drabness of work, but rather the ennui of leisure. For the leisure class, skill in the production of the arts was intimately linked with skill in the art of consumption: each was regarded as a route to the other. Similarly, for many ordinary leisure painters, making fine art led to the development of consumption skills, and vice versa. The Ashington Group, for example, demonstrated the model of learning by doing: by having a go at painting, they learnt to appreciate the work of other artists. The British Institute of Adult Education’s touring exhibition *Art for the People*, meanwhile, inspired some visitors to go home and try their hand at making their own art.⁶¹ Creative production appealed to amateurs with various levels of skill in the art of consumption, from Basil Yeaxlee’s workers, who gained more from physical activities such as painting than passive pursuits such as reading books (see chapter 4, p. 139), to cultured amateurs such as J. B. Priestley, whose polished repertoire of consumption skills was equally conducive to the enjoyment of leisure painting (see chapter 8, p. 245).⁶²

Two opposing views of the impact of affluence on the creative drive have been explored throughout this study. The first was that affluence dampened personal creativity as consumerism numbed the urge to make; mass production provided artefacts to the consumer at low cost, reducing the need for individuals to make things for themselves. The second view was that an increase in both leisure and disposable income facilitated the pursuit of artistic creativity; affluent society created a vacuum which inspired a search for meaning – a search that was inexpensively satisfied by the pursuit of creative activities.⁶³ The rise of the leisure painter cannot be explained by

⁶¹ Constable, ‘The Growth of Popular Interest in Art’, pp. 5-6.

⁶² Yeaxlee, B. A., *Lifelong Education: A Sketch of the Range and Significance of the Adult Education Movement* (London: Cassell, 1929), pp. 152-3.

⁶³ Maslow, A. H., ‘A Theory of Human Motivation’ in *Psychological Review*, Vol. 50 (1943), p. 383.

either view in isolation. Production and consumption were not two distinct realms, but rather interconnected and interdependent activities. Consumerism both created and served an appetite for creativity. This was achieved indirectly and directly: while consumer dissatisfaction (stemming from the banalisation of art or a lack of consumption skills) drove amateurs towards art making, consumerism simultaneously satisfied amateur artists by furnishing them with the materials required to produce art.

Artistic creativity originated from a natural, biological drive, but was shaped by exogenous forces. As the art critic Roger Fry argued in 1920, art is ‘conditioned more or less by economic changes, but these are rather conditions of its existence at all than directive influences’.⁶⁴ Fry was discussing the high arts he engaged with as a critic, yet his statement also holds true for leisure painting. Affluence facilitated the development of creativity within the experience of ordinary life by supporting the amateur pursuit of art: the state contributed towards adult education art classes, individuals formed art societies, and consumerism provided affordable literature and materials. Everyday creativity was not depressed by exogenous economic forces; throughout the century, the allure of the handmade continued to resonate for producers and consumers alike. Political and economic cycles affected the structure of participation from time to time, but failed to diminish the overall scale of activity as the rise of the leisure painter continued, unabated, into the twenty-first century.

⁶⁴ Fry, *Vision and Design*, p. 10.

CONCLUSION

CONCLUSION

Revising values

*'We stand at the bar of history for judgment, and we shall be judged by the use we make of this unique opportunity. It is unique in many ways, most of all in the fact that the public not only has its conscience aroused and its heart stirred, but also has its mind open and receptive of new ideas to an unprecedented degree.'*¹

*'The war has caused us to revise our sense of values. We have begun to feel that behind all those acute but temporary urgencies that crowd in upon every moment of our lives, there lies a set of more permanent, more real demands that only art can satisfy.'*²

In the wake of the First World War, John Maynard Keynes wrote that economics should be the 'handmaiden to civilisation'.³ By the end of the twentieth century, civilisation had become the handmaiden to economic growth. An increasingly instrumental view of cultural value came to dominate, as the 'creative industries' were calibrated and measured for their fiscal benefits, and the fine arts required to provide economic justification for their existence.⁴ Yet creativity was not merely a component of economic growth: it had value for people in their everyday lives. Instead of the usual approach, which focuses on celebrated artists, this study examined artistic creativity within the experience of ordinary life. A far greater number of practicing artists were amateur than professional but, because the majority of leisure painters

¹ [Cmnd. 9107] *Interim Report of the Committee on Adult Education: Industrial and Social Conditions in Relation to Adult Education* (London: Ministry of Reconstruction, 1918), p. 29.

² Newton, E., 'Art for Everybody' in *Britain Advances* (London: British Council pamphlet, 1943), p. 13.

³ John Maynard Keynes, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (1919), quoted in Laurence, P., 'The Intimate Spaces of Community: John Maynard Keynes and the Arts' in *History of Political Economy*, Vol. 39, No. 1 (2007), p. 301.

⁴ DCMS statistical bulletin for January 2009, reprinted in 'The Creative Sector: Higher Education in Facts and Figures' (Universities UK, 2009), p. 3; see also 'Creating Prosperity: The Role of Higher Education in Driving the UK's Creative Economy' (Universities UK, 2010); and also Florida, R., *The Rise of the Creative Class: And How It's Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life* (New York: Basic Books, 2002).

produced art in their spare time for pleasure rather than pay, amateur art, and the quality of life it delivered, has been consistently overlooked.⁵ By bringing the amateur back into the spotlight, and exploring how artistic creativity was organised and experienced by ordinary people in twentieth century Britain, this study revealed how the creative drive was affected by affluence and consumerism.

Summary

In the opening chapters, I outlined the theoretical and historical background to the study. The introduction placed leisure painting within the broad field of creativity research and explored its intersection with debates about work and leisure, affluence and consumerism. In chapter 1, I located the amateur's position within the wider art world, from the interwar period until the end of the twentieth century. Introducing the themes that were carried throughout the rest of the study, I examined the economic changes which facilitated the growth of leisure painting in postwar Britain, and followed the changing nature of participation in relation to broader political and cultural shifts.

In the first of the empirical chapters, I examined the social dimension of artistic activity. While the bulk of drawing and painting took place in private, art societies and art exhibitions provided artists – amateur and professional – with additional social incentives and rewards. Art societies developed a sense of camaraderie amongst members, and operated as a commitment device for busy amateurs, ensuring continuation and progression. The social organisation of artistic creativity had a

⁵ Like many activities that took place outside of the market – see Offer, A., 'Introduction' in Offer, A. (ed), *In Pursuit of the Quality of Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 15. While some amateurs avoided the market, most artists, amateur or professional, were simply not counted as part of Britain's economic output – see Hewison, R. and Holden, J., *The Right to Art: Making Aspirations Reality* (London: Demos, 2004), p. 10.

fractal quality: at every level, the structure of activity looked much the same. Values filtered from top to bottom – the local art club modelling itself on the Royal Academy of Art, for example. The fractal nature of artistic activity provided a means for individuals of varying artistic aptitudes to rank themselves; finding an appropriate level at which to operate encouraged those uncertain of their talents to ‘have a go’, taking their interest as far as their skills and enthusiasm could carry them.

Amateur art societies grew significantly in number and popularity in the immediate postwar, as ordinary people enjoyed a greater amount of disposable income and leisure time. In the last quarter of the twentieth century, the number of new societies coming into existence began to level off. To some extent, societies had reached saturation point: with every village and town having at least one art society by the 1970s (most towns had several), there was little need for the formation of new groups, when existing memberships could simply contract or expand to meet the ebb and flow of local demand. Throughout the period, societies were subject to a natural cohort phenomenon: they were usually founded by a particular group of similarly-aged individuals and, as this group grew old, so too did the society. If the original cohort failed to attract ‘new blood’, the society would fade away with its founding members.⁶ The cohort phenomenon was generally a cyclical, rather than terminal, affair: although groups appeared to become perilously old, in fact there was a regular turnover of members of a certain age.

From the late-1960s onwards, however, British society grew increasingly private and family-orientated. A gradual drift towards individualism intensified the fragility of membership cohorts and many art clubs suffered what Eric Hobsbawm

⁶ Terminology used by several amateur art societies when discussing the problem of attracting new members (see chapter 3, p. 125).

described as ‘the breaking of the threads which in the past had woven human beings into social textures’.⁷ For some societies, the problem of declining membership was compounded by changes within the organisations upon which they had previously relied – benevolent employers supporting the activities of the work art club or local authorities subsidising exhibiting venues and meeting rooms, for example. The adoption of increasingly market-orientated practices by companies, organisations, and even public bodies, priced many art clubs and societies out of the venues they had hired to meet, make and exhibit. Some were unable to continue.

The withdrawal of support from art societies was symptomatic of an ideological shift which, in the late-twentieth century, also impacted negatively on the provision of recreational adult education. In part three, I reviewed the provision of adult education art classes, which were offered by Local Education Authorities as part of a broader repertoire of leisure courses in creative subjects. Classes in drawing and painting catered for various levels of skill and talent: opportunities for pure enjoyment were provided alongside routes for professional development, and progression between the two was encouraged.

Following the Second World War, recreational adult education was subsidised by the state on a large scale in order to attract people from as broad a range of socio-economic backgrounds as possible. This provision, set out in the 1944 Education Act, was inspired by London County Council’s adult institutes, which had, during the interwar period, provided arts and crafts classes to residents in some of the capital’s most deprived inner city boroughs. These innovative classes were taken-up with enthusiasm by working class students, many of whom had never before tried their hand at fine art.

⁷ Hobsbawm, E., *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914-1991* (London: Abacus, 1995), p. 334.

The pursuit of artistic creativity through adult education was, in the immediate postwar, regarded as a public good, of benefit to the individuals who took the classes and, in turn, to their communities and to society in general. In the last quarter of the twentieth century, however, the drift towards individualism was accompanied by an ideological shift from social democracy to market liberalism. Non-vocational courses such as drawing and painting were reconceptualised as a pleasure for which the individual should be prepared to pay. Subsidies were removed from recreational classes and provision came to be mediated by the market; an education in art continued to be popular with adults who could afford the rising cost of classes but, with those on smaller incomes excluded, its social reach contracted.

While the number of art societies began to stagnate, and the social reach of adult education art classes receded, consumer interests relating to the amateur pursuit of fine art went from strength to strength. Over the course of the twentieth century, amateur artists were served by a growing range of commercial products and services. Part four examined the development of the market for self-help literature and affordable art materials. While publishers printed books and magazines with how-to guides and inspirational interviews, art materials manufacturers produced enticing new products for a continually-expanding base of amateur customers. In the last quarter of the twentieth century, the growing circulation of art magazines for amateurs and the rising production volumes of affordable artists' materials coincided with the shrinking breadth and reach of art societies and adult education art classes. Whilst the individualist and consumerist society reduced opportunity in one sphere, it created opportunity in another. Where social avenues through which to explore the creative drive had fallen away, consumer interests developed to fill the gap, sustaining the appetite for creative activity into the twenty first century.

In the final part of the study, I examined the motivations which drove amateur artistic creativity in postwar Britain. The personal testimonies of a number of leisure painters discussed in chapter 8 revealed amateur art making to be about more than simply ‘art for art’s sake’. The quest for artistic creativity was inspired by both intrinsic and extrinsic incentives; creativity was a good in and of itself and, for many amateurs, it was also good because it led to good outcomes. While the slowing pace, the sense of flow, or the escape from the daily grind were intrinsically motivating, extrinsic incentives such as camaraderie and status, financial reward from the sale of work, or the utility of a painting made for a specific purpose, also encouraged commitment and continuation.

In chapter 9, I explored how these personal motivations were shaped by external forces. Since John Ruskin and William Morris, critics have argued that mass production and consumerism led to a decline in everyday creativity. While the biological urge to create was certainly conditioned by exogenous forces, the evidence presented in this study suggests that affluence, which brought forth mass production and consumerism on a grand scale, broadly facilitated creative activity within the experience of ordinary life. The urge to make did not decline because consumerism left little time for other productive activities; rather, material comfort created a space which, for many people, necessitated a search for meaning. Affluence engendered a desire for something that would imbue life with a value that was not easily fungible and, at the same time, provided the opportunities and resources necessary for this creative exploration – from art societies and adult education classes to commercially-produced books, magazines and art materials. In their quest for self-actualisation, leisure painters were producers *and* consumers of artistic creativity: they consumed

the materials necessary to produce art, the unique artefacts they created, and the ideal of creativity itself.

Two visions

In this study I sought to uncover how affluence and consumerism affected the creative drive within the experience of ordinary life. The rise of the leisure painter indicates that affluence and consumerism did not discourage personal creativity, but rather facilitated an unprecedented growth in the take-up of creative leisure pursuits like fine art in the second half of the twentieth century.⁸ At first glance, this appears to be an uplifting story in contrast with the usual pessimistic assumptions about the impact of mass production on the creative drive. Yet the scale of activity obscures an ideological shift which had, by the late-1990s, fundamentally changed the nature of participation.

In the second half of the twentieth century two different visions of creativity were expressed. The first, which emerged from the Second World War, was essentially egalitarian. This vision was particularly clear in education. Progressive methods of art education, which became the standard in state schools in the postwar era, created an appetite for artistic creativity in more people than ever before. This appetite was served by recreational adult education. The encouragement of artistic creativity amongst ordinary people through subsidised leisure classes was part of a civilising process, which sought to cultivate public welfare through personal self-

⁸ For an impression of the scale of this rise see Hutchison, R. and Feist, A., *Amateur Arts in the UK: The PSI Survey of Amateur Arts and Crafts in the UK* (London: The Policy Studies Institute, 1991), p. 23; and also Fox, K. and Richards, L., *National Statistics: Sport and Leisure Results from the Sport and Leisure Module of the 2002 General Household Survey* (London: HMSO, 2004), pp. 38-40. The socio-economic breakdown of leisure painting in adult education is examined in Sargant, N., *The Learning Divide: A Study of Participation in Adult Learning in the United Kingdom* (Leicester: National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education, 1997), p. 84.

fulfilment: a collectivist goal served by the nurturing of individual needs.⁹ The second vision, which took root in the last quarter of the twentieth century, was consumerist. Personal creativity ceased to be regarded as a public good, and was reclassified as a consumer good, whereas in the postwar years it had been both. The popularity of adult education art classes continued to grow but, because the chief beneficiary was now seen to be the individual and not the community, the cost was placed on the student rather than the state.

The rise of the leisure painter was closely related to the steerings of the welfare state; while the artistic creativity of ordinary people was broadly encouraged and, to a certain extent, supported by the state in the postwar period, towards the end of the twentieth century this support was deliberately withdrawn. The withdrawal of state subsidy from personally satisfying pursuits such as recreational adult education classes, where many leisure painters first developed an interest in art, was not born of necessity. While the seeds of a postwar artistic efflorescence were sown in a period of hardship and deprivation during the interwar period and the Second World War, the push for cuts grew out of relative comfort in the last quarter of the twentieth century. Community grew out of hardship and austerity out of community. As the political consensus shifted to the right, the collectivist spirit of the postwar settlement began to fade and, with it, the importance ascribed to the development of personal creativity within the experience of ordinary life.

Public resources were, however, only part of this story. Leisure painting did not, statistically at least, wane in the shift from egalitarian to consumerist vision; the drift towards 'self-regarding individualism' that began to show itself in the late-1960s was

⁹ Mara, G. M. and Dovi, S. L., 'Mill, Nietzsche, and the Identity of Postmodern Liberalism' in *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 57, No. 1 (Feb., 1995), p. 2.

not incompatible with the development of personal creativity.¹⁰ The state subsidised a very small proportion of amateur activity; most leisure painting was privately funded and voluntarily undertaken, and had been so throughout the postwar period. Amateur artistic activity had always been pyramidal in form, with the base comprising the many ‘individualists’ who worked alone.¹¹ Towards the end of the twentieth century, the base of lone artists continued to expand, supported by the manufacturers and publishers who furnished amateurs with affordable art materials and educative literature.

That the scale of activity increased well into the twenty-first century suggests that the transition from social democracy to market liberalism was not bad for everyday artistic creativity. Yet while the overall number of participants may not have been adversely affected, the ways in which leisure painters were able to participate changed significantly. Artistic creativity emerged in this study as a social pursuit; not every leisure painter engaged in art socially, but additional rewards existed for those who did. The social context provided individuals with opportunities for personal development and satisfied individuals benefited society as a whole. By the end of the century, opportunities for ordinary people to express their creative drive socially, and enjoy the various benefits derived from the social organisation of artistic activities, diminished. Where once adult educationists had endeavoured to provide creative experience for people from all walks of life, now art classes served only the more affluent sections of society. The availability of artists’ materials at bargain prices in supermarkets and discount outlets made it possible for amateurs on lower incomes to

¹⁰ Offer, A., ‘British Manual Workers: From Producers to Consumers, c. 1950-2000’ in *Contemporary British History*, Vol. 2, No. 4 (Dec., 2008), p. 545.

¹¹ ‘Individualists’ was a term used to describe artists by the newly-inaugurated Arts Council’s secretary-general and vice-chair in 1949: Evans, B. I. and Glasgow, M., *The Arts in England* (London: The Falcon Press, 1949), p. 80.

continue in isolation, but consumer products were unable to nurture the communities fostered by art societies or the routes of progression provided by recreational adult education. As the twentieth century drew to a close, most leisure painters had little option but to paint alone.¹²

The rise of the leisure painter is part of a larger story in the history of twentieth century Britain: a story about values. Whilst challenging the assumption that consumerism was bad for British society *per se*, this study found that the shift from one set of values, which nurtured social growth through individual development, to another based primarily on market exchange, undermined the foundations of the good society envisaged at the end of the First and Second World Wars. The men and women who stood at the ‘bar of history for judgment’ following the First World War imagined a future rich with possibility.¹³ It took a generation but, in 1945, the dream of a civilised society for everyone was drafted into the blueprint for the postwar settlement. In the immediate postwar, the communal value of individual fulfilment was prized; personal growth was encouraged and supported through the strengthening of social ties. In the transition from social democracy to market liberalism, however, intangible values were discounted. In late-twentieth century Britain, the consumerist model won out over the egalitarian model and, marking the end of a powerful belief in human improvement, society was gradually stripped of the benefits that had, for a fleeting moment in history, been regarded as central to the vitality of the nation.

¹² To paraphrase American sociologist Robert Putnam in *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Touchstone, 2000).

¹³ [Cmnd. 9107] *Interim report of the Committee on Adult Education* (1918), p. 29.

Avenues for further research

Creativity does not originate only in the successful ideas of creative geniuses, but in a broader range of activity of which we still remain, for the most part, unaware. Apart from studies of the well-heeled amateurs of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the historical record of amateur artistic creativity is limited. A major hurdle is the limited range of primary sources. A first measure to redress the lack of attention paid to everyday artistic experience would be, therefore, to begin a detailed longitudinal study of creative activity. This could encompass a range of indicators, not just fine art, and would assist not only future historians, but also the development of arts policy, which tends to overlook the huge swathe of amateur activity in the UK, both currently and historically.

A thorough investigation of the intersection between the take-up of creative pursuits and age, ethnicity and gender would be beneficial, as would an in-depth psychology of the creative drive as experienced by ordinary people in their day-to-day lives – a survey which could then be compared to existing psychological studies of professional artists.¹⁴ An international perspective to the study of everyday artistic creativity would also be fruitful. Anglophone cultures (the US, for example, underwent a similar postwar boom in leisure painting) could be compared with the European context, as well as that of developing countries and emerging economies.¹⁵ Is the rise of leisure painting an Anglo Saxon phenomenon, a side-effect of the welfare state, or simply a by-product of affluence and consumerism? What are the

¹⁴ Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi's survey of 91 'creative' individuals, for example: *Creativity: Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1997).

¹⁵ See, for example, Bell, D., *Work and Its Discontents: The Cult of Efficiency in America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1956), p. 38; and also Buehr, G., 'Art Education and the Amateur' in *Bulletin of the Art Institute of Chicago*, Vol. 42, No. 6 (1948), pp. 87-90.

economic, social and political conditions that best support the development of artistic creativity within the experience of ordinary life?

The field of creativity research straddles a number of disciplines, from psychology and anthropology to sociology and history. Greater interdisciplinary collaboration will help develop a far broader understanding of how and why economic, political and social conditions affect the development of creativity. Understanding how exogenous and endogenous forces interplay to impact on the creative drive is an important step towards a better account of the fascinating but elusive concept that is creativity, and its relationship with personal and societal wellbeing.

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