

ACADEMY OF PERFORMING ARTS IN PRAGUE
FILM FACULTY

BACHELOR'S THESIS

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FILMOVÁ A TELEVIZNÍ FAKULTA

Filmové, televizní a fotografické umění a nová média
Obor fotografie

DIPLOMOVÁ PRÁCE

**VÝUKOVÉ STRATEGIE V UMĚLECKÉM VZDĚLÁVÁNÍ: REFORMA UNIVERZITNÍCH
STUDIJNÍCH PROGRAMŮ UMĚLECKÉ FOTOGRAFIE**

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BACHELOR'S THESIS

TEACHING STRATEGIES IN ART EDUCATION:
REFORMING FINE-ART PHOTOGRAPHY PROGRAMS IN UNIVERSITY

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Prague, 2019

Declaration

I declare that I have prepared my Bachelor's Thesis/Master's Thesis, Dissertation independently on the following topic:

under the expert guidance of my thesis advisor and with the use of the cited literature and sources.

Prague, date: April 29, 2019

Signature of the candidate

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Camille Pomeau". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned to the right of the text "Signature of the candidate".

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Abstract

This thesis examines contemporary Fine-Art Photography teaching in universities. It is a multi-layered study on curriculums from the most reputable photography programs to analyse the current problems surrounding Fine-Art Photography degrees in higher art education. For this, I have used two methods of research: (1) literature review of books and essays that focus on the subject of teaching methods and art degrees in universities located in the western world, and (2) individual case studies of curriculums in reputable universities for their Fine-Art Photography programs. I have examined literature from contemporary artists who have given their opinions and proposed improvements on the education systems found in art schools, with the intention to present solutions for teaching and curriculum reform. This thesis aims to challenge the meaning of being an art student in photography in the contemporary art world, by questioning the definition of an artist-photographer, and introducing a multifaceted reform to the more traditional approach to photography in the art world.

Tato kvalifikační práce se věnuje současné univerzitní výuce umělecké fotografie, a to zejména v podobě analýzy studijních kurikul vybraných prestižních programů, na jejichž příkladech práce poukazuje na problémy, s nimiž se tato výuka potýká. Předkládaná analýza se opírá zejména o: (1) literární rešerši textů, jež se věnují problematice výukových postupů v oblasti uměleckého univerzitního vzdělávání v západním světě; (2) případové studie kurikul vybraných prestižních studijních programů umělecké fotografie. Argumentace práce dále vychází z textů respektovaných umělců, kteří reflektují současný stav a navrhují dílčí změny vzdělávání na uměleckých školách. Cílem práce je zpochybnit adekvátnost tradičního chápání postavení studenta umělecké fotografie a role uměleckého fotografa. Práce dále předkládá návrh reformy těch aspektů tradiční výuky umělecké fotografie, které se v rámci současného umění zdají být nefunkční.

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Introduction

Considering to study art at a university can be a hard decision to make. Seeing that art itself is a hard subject to teach or to even learn, a student must reflect on all the different challenges studying art comes with. Angela Vettese touches on the subject with her statement: "And we should never forget that an art school is a school of doubt: one teaches a subject that cannot be defined, since art is both an endless challenge and an asymptote."¹ Perhaps it is natural to question the education system in the context of art, and necessary to ask ourselves why one should even attend university in a world where higher art education is seen as more of a luxury than a benefit; a futility as opposed to something more advantageous.

Since the beginning of the 21st century, universities' art departments are facing a drastic need to reform their programs in order to more properly fit the ever expanding scope of how people create art. The flagrant rise in popularity of new media technologies, for example, has been putting pressure on schools to expand their increasingly outdated classical approaches to teaching and training their students. New media technologies defined as "various kinds of electronic communications that are conceivable due to innovation in computer technology."² These technologies include graphic design, digital art, online video games, 3D design, virtual reality, video and audio streaming, etc. We find artists of today are increasingly implementing these technologies in their scope of work.³ As Gen Z and Millennials are the generations occupying most of the space in universities, their views and demands are felt strongly, and have the power to change curriculums. How can prospective artists and art students fully realize themselves when they do not have the proper resources to do so? How can they justify paying for an art degree when it would perhaps make more

¹ Vettese, Angela. *Art As A Thinking Process*. Sternberg Press. Accessed April 24, 2019. <https://docplayer.net/3074877-Art-as-a-thinking-process.html>

² "What Is New Media? - Definition from Techopedia." Techopedia.com. Accessed April 25, 2019. <https://www.techopedia.com/definition/416/new-media>.

³ "What Is New Media? - Definition from Techopedia." Techopedia.com. Accessed April 25, 2019. <https://www.techopedia.com/definition/416/new-media>.

economic sense for them to purchase a good laptop and PhotoShop? Bill Gaskins wrote an article in 2016 focusing on issues of higher art education in the United States and describing an alarming situation. His conclusion was: "Arguments for studying art cannot rest upon a defence of tradition or the status quo."⁴ In America, art departments in universities are also facing a major diversity issue. Most students that are accepted into programs have the same experiences and similar perspectives on the art world, which doesn't allow a lot of room for improvement or change. He stated: "Students could shape the future of art education within and beyond the academy."⁵

Other very well known artists have called art education out on their practices. Luis Camnitzer wrote a very interesting article in 2007, titled "Thinking About Art Thinking" that has been the subject of many of his lectures in universities. The main focus of the article is how art education approaches the term 'work of art'. He challenged universities' curriculums by explaining the strong toxic relationship between museums and galleries' demands, and how students are being taught in school. He asked: "Is the mission of formal art schooling than to prepare feeders into the market or to form researchers in cognition?"⁶ These are only a few examples of important criticisms that bring students to question their goals while enrolled in universities.

Fine-art photography programs in universities is an even more disputed territory to study. With tuition rising every year and long competitive admission process resulting in the creation of homogenous groups of students inside programs, photography in art schools has reached a crossroads in the education system. It is a medium that is expanding and changing at an incredibly rapid rate, and the presence of new technologies is reshaping the artform itself so frequently that it is difficult to understand where these changes will lead, or what it will mean for photography as an artform.

While some universities have defined new media art and technologies as

⁴ Gaskins, Bill. "Higher Education in Art Is in Crisis-Now's the Time to Reform It." Artsy. February 03, 2016. Accessed April 24, 2019.

⁵ Gaskins, Bill. "Higher Education in Art Is in Crisis-Now's the Time to Reform It." Artsy. February 03, 2016. Accessed April 24, 2019.

⁶Camnitzer, Luis. "Thinking About Art Thinking." *E-Flux Journal*, no. 65 (Summer 2015). Accessed April 24, 2019. http://supercommunity-pdf.e-flux.com/pdf/supercommunity/article_1148.pdf.

separate degrees, others are making new media technologies part of the fine-art photography curriculum. This creates some controversy in universities, and raises certain questions, including: what qualifications should professors have before being allowed to teach these subjects, the evaluations of the students in the context of a fine-art degree that focuses on photography, and what degree title a graduate should hold upon completing such a program?

Another colossal problem inside the curriculum isn't just the issues listed above, but also the relationship between the art market with universities. This is pushing students to meet a certain standard before they even start growing and achieving a creative process. As Camnitzer explains: "I now believe that traditional approaches to the teaching of art appreciation leads students towards refined consumption rather than advancing their critical thinking and creativity."⁷ While it is no doubt important for students to understand the history of art, namely their chosen field, and understand the basics on creating a technically sound work of art, students spend more time questioning and criticizing art than working on their own growth as an artist. Practical training becomes less important in the academic setting, with many professors choosing to focus on theory instead. For artist-photographers, this oftentimes leads to mimicking an aesthetic, topics, and technical stylings that have been used by other photographers just because it might look good in a gallery space, or please their teachers. In my experience, students spend more time concentrating on refining a style of photography than thinking about the message behind the photographs. As a consequence, such teaching strategies lead to self-directed learning. How can one find their own creative process in a space where they are only rewarded for a certain aesthetic or a specified way of thinking? The short-lived relationship between the student and the teacher doesn't give much opportunity to elaborate on one's creative process. While I understand it can be argued that the student must make time for their art on their own, it can also be argued that students are not properly equipped with the assurance, or confidence, necessary to go out into the world and shoot.

⁷Camnitzer, Luis. "Thinking About Art Thinking." *E-Flux Journal*, no. 65 (Summer 2015). Accessed April 24, 2019. http://supercommunity-pdf.e-flux.com/pdf/supercommunity/article_1148.pdf.

Students in universities are pushed to create art that is standardized by galleries and museums. They are taught to follow a cookie-cutter model of how critics define “good art”; and while there certainly are standards on what sets apart genius from amateur, these rules should be set loosely as opposed to steadfastly. As a result of this issue, the universities’ admission process is very much related to the trends in art that are showcased in galleries and museums. It’s important that institutions show their students at the very beginning of their studies that they are ready to be self-taught, and that their perspective on art and what they’re creating can fit into a model.

It is extremely hard to determine which university has the best fine-art photography program since art cannot be calculated and ranked through a grade or some sort of mathematical process with concrete numbers. Instead, art schools are ranked through reputation and popularity. Italian Vogue published an article in 2015 titled ‘Where To Study Photography’, where the magazine compared the best photography schools in the world by testing those factors. They interviewed world-renowned photo editors, photography experts and curators to choose the best schools to study photography in. Some of the professionals that they interviewed were Lars Boering the managing director at World Press Photo, Azu Nwagbogu the director at African Artists’ Foundation and LagosPhoto Festival, photo editor and curator Arianna Rinaldo, photographer Andrea Star Reese, the director of photography at WIRED Patrick Witty and many more.⁸ The top universities that were repeated the most in the article were the International Center of Photography in New York City, United States (ICP), the Royal College of Arts in London, United Kingdom (RCA), and Yale University in New Haven, United States. These 3 universities hold an important reputation among photography programs in universities around the world. They have highly regarded programs and influential names attached to the list of teachers and lecturers. Therefore they form a good sample of universities to use as research in providing adequate information in terms of how universities approach fine-art photography teachings.

The aim of this thesis is to target the key problems in fine-art photography programs in universities while researching attempts to reform teaching strategies that

⁸ Glaviano, Alessia. "Where to Study Photography." Vogue.it. June 23, 2015. Accessed April 24, 2019. [https://www.vogue.it/en/news/vogue-arts/2015/06/23/where-to-study-photography/.](https://www.vogue.it/en/news/vogue-arts/2015/06/23/where-to-study-photography/)

certain universities have adopted and some that were proposed by artists themselves and teachers through articles and literature. How we should approach fine-art photography teachings rests upon three factors. Firstly, the admission process, because it gives a good understanding of what universities are looking for and their expectations. Secondly, the use of new media technologies other than photography during the studies in universities, as it helps to define what is a fine-art photographic degree and the future of what it means to study fine-art photography. And lastly, how the schools can create a learning environment that extends beyond academia without restricting the creative process of students into trends set by the art market.

They are important questions to be asked. Have fine-art programs involved at the same pace as the art world in universities? Can both photography and new media technologies coexist in the same art degree? And if they can, then how can students have the freedom and the support to create with other technologies and expand their choices of media within fine-art photography courses? And lastly, how can we build a healthy relationship with the art schools and the art market?

Chapter 1:

The Admission Process in Fine-Art Photography

The destiny of art schools rests in the hands of the application process. Where the schools make the conscious decision of who deserves a place in the education system and who doesn't. The admission process in fine-art photography programs varies from university to another. The student first needs to make a choice on where he or she would like to complete their bachelor or masters. If we research the admission process in the most reputable photography programs in universities, there is one thing that is automatically noticeable: the high-intensity level of skills and knowledge that is demanded from the applicants and the high cost of tuition. These high standards set by the institutions are put in place during the admission procedure to be able to standardize the quality students that study inside their high-level programs.

Firstly, the way that they process applicants starts with a competition⁹. In English, a university uses terms to describe the admission process like "exam", "interview" or a simple "review" of students portfolio. Although in France and in French-speaking countries, they'll use terms like "concours" which directly translates to a competition. This term is a lot more representative of the application process. Most fine art programs have a review of students portfolio, interviews and sometimes exams as part of their admission process. As a whole, these requirements put students against one another and it makes them compete for their place inside the program. Yale University is clear when it comes to the matter: "The School of Art requires for admission a high degree of capability and commitment. [...] In either case, admission to the School of Art is on a highly selective and competitive basis."¹⁰ Such practices fine-art educational institution come with a cost for the education of the students that are accepted. Luis Camnitzer explains it perfectly:

⁹ Bourdieu, Pierre. *The State Nobility: Elite Schools in the Field of Power*. Polity Press. 1996. ISBN 0-7456--0824-8.

¹⁰ "Admission to Yale School of Art." 2018. Accessed April 24, 2019. <http://art.yale.edu/Admissions>.

*If art schools operated under an open system focused on improving communal creativity and communication rather than on a specialized market they would not filter admissions with the intention of investing only in the futures of a few. The few are those students who, in fact, will need the least amount of education to make it. They are motivated and ready for autodidactic.*¹¹

What Camnitzer tries to explain is that the admission process already standardized by universities only lets place for fewer students that would benefit from the education system and that have potential in becoming great artists. Instead, universities are more likely to invest their time and money in the students that meet their academic level from the start of their education and therefore be ready to be self-taught.

Consequently, like in most elite educational institution, students that inform themselves on the admission process or start their admission process are constantly met by high expectations. Maybe these practices are beneficial in subjects that are as concrete as certain fields of science and history, where learning and teaching rest upon something that is tangible and standardized. Is applying the same rules to elite art programs favourable? Perhaps, this might be a good time for higher art educational institutions to question themselves on what is an education in art and who would benefit from it. Let's start the fact that education in art is something that is extremely abstract and that needs constant readjusting depending on the student and the program. It is absolutely impossible to follow a methodize system or approach when it's time to judge and critic art or the artist itself. If there were such a system, the art world would be at a standstill. Flexible methods from the teachers are extremely important. Angela Vettese explains this mentality extremely well: "Art is not a reassuring tool. It brings about anxiety and a sense of loss. It asks us not to rely on our certainties. It wants us to

¹¹ Camnitzer, Luis. "Thinking About Art Thinking." *E-Flux Journal*, no. 65 (Summer 2015). Accessed April 24, 2019. http://supercommunity-pdf.e-flux.com/pdf/supercommunity/article_1148.pdf.

rethink the world. And subsequently, art education also must continuously understand and redefine itself.”¹²

When analysing the bigger picture, teaching practices in art schools are a good reflection of how universities treat the admission process. The top universities for fine-art photography programs work in a very similar way in terms of standards. However, universities should invest in students that show potential instead of choosing students that already have a lot of experience in the art world. Concentrating their efforts in students that need it the most might be a more gratifying way of working, and it will open the door to a cognitive approach to art instead of an economic one. As a consequence, it is also a solution to a less competitive environment for art students, where students are more focused on sharing and helping each other instead of competing against one another.

It's also interesting to simply read what are these universities expecting from the students' admission. Yale University School of Art has such concrete and set boundaries on their admission process that they ask students to use Mac OS, the most expensive technology in the market, to standardize their images when creating their portfolios: “We strongly recommend that you review your images on a Mac OS to be certain that they are accurately represented.”¹³ This might seem like a small requirement, but it sets a certain standard, not of quality, but of luxuriousness. Not every student, especially while studying art, has the funding to own a Mac computer, and other less expensive technologies out there can compete strongly in terms of quality and specs against Apple's Mac computer. The school should be prepared to accept portfolios and digital photographs in their admission that come from any computer or program. This shouldn't be in their admission process requirements.

For The International Center of Photography's master program, the school highlights tuition on their entire admission section on their website. Students are notified during their application process that they need to be able to afford to live in New York

¹² Vettese, Angela. *Art As A Thinking Process*. Sternberg Press. Accessed April 24, 2019. <https://docplayer.net/3074877-Art-as-a-thinking-process.html>

¹³ "Admission to Yale School of Art." 2018. Accessed April 24, 2019. <http://art.yale.edu/Admissions>.

City and pay tuition up to \$34,063 per year.¹⁴ This situation proves that not only fine-art photographic schools are interested in students that are already fitting into their standards of aesthetic and ready to be self-taught, but they're also narrowing down their selective pool of students to a certain economic class. It's also important to put into consideration that New York City is one of the most expensive city to live in according to the 15th Annual Demographia International Housing Affordability Survey published in 2018¹⁵ and that most prestigious fine-art photography programs are located in towns and cities that cost a fortune to live in. The same applies to the Royal College of Arts located in London, United Kingdom and the Paris College of Arts in France. Not to mention that some art schools, like the Royal College of Arts, faced criticism from their students for the lack of exhibition time and resources due to cuts from governmental support.¹⁶ In 2015, the school was ranked top university for art and design in the world alongside with reports written by the U.K's Independent that students were "complaining about cuts to degree show opening hours, as well as how the fees were being spent."¹⁷ Tuition at the Royal College of Arts is on average reaching up to 20,000£ per year depending on the degree, the program and the citizenship of the student.

Universities tuition fees are rising every year regardless of the degree. However, narrowing down the demographics of students in fine-art programs to an economic factor is a dangerous thing to do. Fine-art programs should have more financial help from governments, especially in elite universities where students have access to world renown artist-photographers and lectures as part of their education. The preservation of education in fine-arts is gratifying for any nation and should not be overlooked. In 2010 a study was published by National Assembly of State Arts Agencies in the United States on why should government support the arts. The results from the section answering why

¹⁴ "Admissions: ICP-Bard MFA." International Center of Photography. February 25, 2019. Accessed April 24, 2019. <https://www.icp.org/school/programs/bard-mfa/admissions>

¹⁵ Pavletich, Hugh. "15th Annual Demographia International Housing Affordability Survey." 2018. Accessed April 24, 2019. <http://demographia.com/dhi.pdf>.

¹⁶ Gaskins, Bill. "Higher Education in Art Is in Crisis-Now's the Time to Reform It." Artsy. February 03, 2016. Accessed April 24, 2019. <https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-higher-education-in-art-is-in-crisis-now-s-the-time-to-reform-it>.

¹⁷ Clark, Nick. "Royal College of Art 'in a State of Jeopardy' as Staff Quit and Students Protest." The Independent. October 01, 2015. Accessed April 24, 2019. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/royal-college-of-art-in-a-state-of-jeopardy-as-staff-quit-and-students-protest-a6675941.html>.

should government support artists and art organisation were extremely constructive. They came to the conclusion that:

*Artists form the foundation of a state's creative environment. Artists act as creators and individual entrepreneurs who provide many of the products and designs that drive innovation and shape a state's cultural character. Many artists also work as educators, providing training in creative skills and passing on cultural traditions from one generation to the next.*¹⁸

Students questioning themselves on if they can afford a high cost of tuition as part of the decision on if they can submit their admission in a fine-art photography program is upsetting. There should be more attention on grants and scholarships for art directly from the beginning. This would give access to a much more diversified pool of applicants. The United States higher education system is facing a much different scenario than the rest of the world, with extremely high tuition rates and student loan debt. The International Center of Photography located in the U.S does offer a number of scholarships to its students and they make it clear that they are available at the beginning of the admission process. However, they also address that any students, international or American citizens, need to pay the same price in tuition if they are not on scholarship. Any applicants are then informed with a very salty price of 34,063\$ for their education per year with an annual fee to use the faculty lab of 2,700\$.¹⁹

Considering that any investment into a higher education degree is a serious decision to make, the ones who can afford to study a higher education degree in fine-arts are part of a smaller demographic usually attached to higher economic class. This definitely restrains the diversification in art students inside universities and this is why it

¹⁸ United States. National Assembly of State Arts Agencies. *Why Should Government Support The Arts*. Accessed April 24, 2019. <https://www.culturalpolicies.net/web/files/83/en/US-WhyGovSupport2010.pdf>.

¹⁹ "Admissions: ICP-Bard MFA." International Center of Photography. February 25, 2019. Accessed April 24, 2019. <https://www.icp.org/school/programs/bard-mfa/admissions>.

would be benefiting for fine-art programs like photography to demand and put a lot more emphasis on government funding and scholarships.

Art schools cannot rest upon an outdated practice of competitive admission procedure. Art education needs to be built on a foundation of community work instead of an ambitious agenda. Competition in art schools creates a hostile environment where students spend more time comparing their work with others instead of helping each other grow as artists. Art is a lot about learning how to learn and expanding a creative process and methods that will be used when the artist's graduates and cannot rest upon the education system for support. Angela Vettese explains:

It would be pointless to ask an art student what he or she does or does not lack—this is to be discovered on one's own—though the idea is to provide a base of common knowledge in order to avoid continuous reinventions of the wheel through the retracing of the experiences of others.²⁰

It's crucial to remember that the admission process should concentrate on what can the school give to the students, rather than what can the students give to the school.

Finally, the admission process for students shouldn't be described or treated as a competition. Schools should review portfolios and treat interviews as a stepping stone to create diversity inside fine-art photography programs. The goal of an educational institution is to teach material that will benefit students. When schools only accept students through competition, it restrains communal work. These winners now form a group were during their studies will see themselves as rivals. How can you compete with art? How can you be best at something that is impalpable? Students should be evaluated on their drive to improve their creative process and their sense of self as an artist. They should be taught to be more curious inside their studies. Especially as artist photographers are growing to be more and more diversified inside their medium and

²⁰ Vettese, Angela. *Art As A Thinking Process*. Sternberg Press. Accessed April 24, 2019. <https://docplayer.net/3074877-Art-as-a-thinking-process.htm>.

breaking barriers as they're developing the ability to move freely inside other media. They're redefining the concept of what it is to be an artist photographer, and that's worth putting more attention into.

Chapter 2:

New Media Art in Fine-Art Photography Degrees

New media art has infiltrated the education system by bringing new perspectives on how to work with technologies in art. These technologies such as interactive media, video art, sound art and interdisciplinary art practices are naturally showing a lot of interest in the creative process of students, and consequently pushing aside classical photography training and the use of visual images as part of curriculums. This leads to a fundamental question. What is an education in fine-art photography? According to the College of Art in Paris, a bachelor in fine-art photography is “[...] a solid understanding of the image-making process. The program considers not only the technical aspects of image creation and production but also examines how photographs are disseminated, presented, discussed, used, documented or archived: in short, how they function in today’s image-driven society.²¹ This is a very good description of what a fine-art photographic course should imply. Students should be able to graduate with an impeccable understanding of how to work with visual images in the context of contemporary art. However, should these programs accept other forms of media technologies inside the creative process of fine-art photographic students? This question is much harder to answer. Some would like to argue that mixing both lets place to progress and freedom, and some would like to say that mixing both lets room for mistakes in the curriculum since both art forms need different teaching techniques.

A lot of universities have adjusted their curriculum consequently by creating full-time bachelor and masters program focusing on new media. The International Center of Photography in New York has responded to the strong demand of new media artist wanting to study or use new media technologies in their art by creating the “New Media Narrative” one year certificate:

²¹ "Bachelor of Fine Arts in Photography." PCA. February 04, 2019. Accessed April 24, 2019. <https://www.paris.edu/programs/undergraduate-programs/photography/>.

The program is designed to encourage the spirit of innovation emerging among photographers and artists as they explore new possibilities for creating work and engaging audiences. [...] Stories are shaped by and delivered through screens, mobile devices, and VR headsets. In turn, these platforms are changing how photographers and storytellers approach their craft—new skills are now required to tell the important stories of the day. ²²

Some universities have even put place programs that include both photography and new media art teachings in the same degree. Vilnius Academy of Arts in Lithuanian have put in place a bachelor degree called “Photography and Media Arts”. The degree’s purpose “is to educate media artists who are able to independently use various photography and new media technologies, implement individual works of art and take part in group creative projects.”²³ The distinction between a fine-art photography degree and a degree that includes new media art, is that one have the resources to teach students about the use of technologies in art like digital audio, video, virtual reality technologies, video games and 3D modelling, etc. Universities that advertise new media art as a degree has most of the resources in teaching and in guiding students inside the world of technologies used in the art world that fall under new media. Students have in this case, access to different pieces of equipment as well as classes related in the field they wish to explore and create in. This is a strong distinction that needs to be made and created in the curriculum because of the differences that are apparent in both fields. These types of programs take a lot of time and research to be created. New media art isn’t something that can be taught by any type of art teacher. It takes someone with a good grasp of the subject to be able to guide their students in the right direction.

²² International Center of Photography. "New Media Narratives." April 18, 2019. Accessed April 24, 2019. <https://www.icp.org/school/programs/new-media-narratives>.

²³ Vilnius Academy of Arts. "Photography and Media Arts | Undergraduate | Vilnius." 2014. Accessed April 24, 2019. https://www.vda.lt/en/study_programs/undergraduate-ba/photography-and-media-arts/photography-and-media-arts-undergraduate.

In theory, new media has its own space inside the art world. However, fine-art photography degrees creates a gateway to the exploration of different technologies during an art student's studies. Many photographers through history have used alongside photography; video art, sound art, and other technologies as part of their creative process or their artworks themselves. New media artists that are part of the Irish Museum of Modern Art's collection include Jaki Irvine, Clare Langan, Candida Höfer, Grace Weir and many more.²⁴ These artists represent an example of how photography is always working alongside with artists who use new media technologies inside their practice. Most of their projects include using photography inside complex installations with new media technologies.

Now, trying to create strong programs that include a strong fine-art photography education for its students alongside an education in new media can be a precarious thing to do if not approached in the right way. Sara Kember and Joanna Zylińska wrote an interesting book titled 'Life after New Media: Mediation as a Vital Process' where they addressed that: "The old versus new division plays a special role among those oppositions in that it not only brings together affect and matter but also inscribes media into a progressive developmental narrative."²⁵ This is a great way to approach new media art within fine-art photography education. It's impossible for educational institutions to stop the ongoing flow from what is old media to what is new media. However, this does not mean institutions should abandon fine-art photography, but simply redefine it. In 1976, photographer Michal A. Smith wrote an article on teaching photography. He describes two ways to approach teaching photography that was present in the 70s; one that is very traditional with a master/student dynamic, and one that is seen as non-traditional, with a mentality that the student plays a much bigger role in the learning scenario. He goes on to say that both of these teaching techniques don't really work, and here's why:

²⁴ Irish Museum of Modern Art. "What Is (New) Media Art?" Accessed April 24, 2019. <https://imma.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/whatisnewmediaartbooklet.pdf>.

²⁵ Kember, Sarah, and Joanna Zylińska. *Life after New Media: Mediation as a Vital Process*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press. 2012. ISBN 978-0-262-01819-7.

Neither of these approaches is adequate because neither truly encourages nor enables the students to have a full range of experience. Both approaches tend to choose paths for the students rather than allow them the freedom to make their own choices. Because I believe that this freedom is of crucial importance for a student's growth [...] ²⁶

When Smith talks about having such freedom inside teaching techniques concerning photography, it translates very well to how fine-art photographic degrees have evolved in the past decade. Since photography is forever growing and evolving into different technical and conceptual approaches, so should fine-art photographic degrees. Art students should never feel limited when it comes to their creative processes. Yale University has even built an entire centre focused on the use of Digital Media Narrative as part of their art school called 'The Center For Collaborative Arts and Media'.²⁷ However, their photography program is still described as very traditional, and not allowing place to a lot of room for freedom: "Students receive technical instruction in black-and-white and colour photography as well as non-silver processes and digital image production."²⁸ Describing photography in a very traditional matter, Yale prides themselves on possessing an extremely reputable program that is purely focused on photography as a medium of choice. In perspective, this isn't much of a problem if the students wanting to study there hold their description of photography as something that is simply traditional. However, not facilitating a certain freedom for students who might want the ability to explore their creative process in different directions might create a sense of imprisonment in creativity.

The solution to this problem isn't simple, but one word should be retained for universities that offer a fine-art photography degree: adaptation. "Artists have also been drawn towards non-traditional media because they are specifically interested in

²⁶ Smith, Michael A. ON TEACHING PHOTOGRAPHY. Accessed April 24, 2019. <http://www.michaelandpaula.com/mp/onteachphoto.html>.

²⁷ "Center for Collaborative Arts and Media (CCAM)." Programs | Center for Collaborative Arts and Media. Accessed April 24, 2019. <https://ccam.yale.edu/programs>.

²⁸ Yale University School of Art: Photography. Accessed April 24, 2019. <http://art.yale.edu/Photography>.

exploring the (rapidly changing) relationship between media, technology and society.”²⁹ If students are more attracted to new media technologies within their creative process, then they should be guided properly with resources that include courses taught by teachers with the experience. Letting the students be self-taught as a solution to this matter might not be the right solution. After all, an educational institution should offer its students the appropriate knowledge to be able to practice art. New technologies need a lot of adapting and learning. For example, it’s not everybody that can use advanced programs like Adobe Premiere Pro without a educational course. If a student presents the curiosity to create complex video installations as part of their creative process and final outcome then they should be presented with the proper teachings to guide them through it. This is a good example of how New Media can be introduced into a fine-art photography degree. Students should have access to be able to incorporate digital audio and even art based on virtual reality if they please.

Fine-Art Photography is an extremely complex form of art that is constantly being redefined, and it is time that photography programs in elite art schools redefine their definition of what it is to teach artist-photographers. Galleries and Museums are already turning their attention to the younger generation redefining their artwork and priding themselves on freedom of working in non-traditional mediums. “Even though new media artworks may directly reference or evoke aspects of popular media production and exhibition, artists generally aim to solicit modes of engagement that are specific to the spaces and sites of Contemporary Art.”³⁰ Universities already such a strong relationship with the contemporary art market, it would be foolish not to engage in it. It is imperative that they listen to their students and observe the change occurring in the field fine-art photography.

²⁹ Irish Museum of Modern Art. "What Is (New) Media Art?" Accessed April 24, 2019. <https://imma.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/whatisnewmediaartbooklet.pdf>.

³⁰ Irish Museum of Modern Art. "What Is (New) Media Art?" Accessed April 24, 2019. <https://imma.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/whatisnewmediaartbooklet.pdf>.

Chapter 3:

The Relationship Between Fine-Art Photography Programs & The Art Market

It is, in fact, impossible to deny the strong and long relationship that art schools have with galleries and museums. In the 21st century, most universities own galleries or museums as part of their institution. However, the question is: where and how will the students continue their work inside the art world after their graduation? This is how the relationship between the art market and art school continue to grow and becomes stronger. Now it is debatable that the school represents some kind of a break of what is called the standards of the art world, where students can create freely: "The whole mechanism has become a somewhat suffocating and self-referential system of power from which the school may represent a break."³¹ This is the case with smaller institutions, where the admission demand is rather low and not as intensive as the top-rated photography schools. It is also the case with smaller fine-art photography programs inside an art academy like summer programs, workshops, etc.

Unfortunately, as an educational institution becomes more and more reputable, certain standards in art start emerging. Camnitzer explains this phenomenon inside art programs: "The art they produce is supposed to attract as great a quantity of appreciative viewers as possible in order to sustain the market by consumption of museum tickets or direct purchase of the art works."³² This is a very capitalistic approach to art, nonetheless it's not a misrepresentation of the reality that artist-photographers live in.

³¹Vettese, Angela. *Art As A Thinking Process*. Sternberg Press. Accessed April 24, 2019. <https://docplayer.net/3074877-Art-as-a-thinking-process.html>

³² Camnitzer, Luis. "Thinking About Art Thinking." *E-Flux Journal*, no. 65 (Summer 2015). Accessed April 24, 2019. http://supercommunity-pdf.e-flux.com/pdf/supercommunity/article_1148.pdf.

The first key factor that creates a relationship between schools and the art market is inevitably money. The art market and the economy of arts is directly rooted inside the art school. Students complete bachelors and masters in fine-art photography in order to obtain the status of professional. Students will study for years and spend an astronomical amount of money on tuition to be able to become professionals in an attempt to live off purely from their art. Now, this is certainly a misleading advertisement that schools offer: come and study with us and you can become an artist. The reality is that students will be facing a much more different fate than the one that their school promised. Most artist-photographers will seek a higher art education degree. This seemingly separates them from the commercial photographers, even if years after most of them will end up doing commercial work to pay their bills. Anton Vidokle states in an article he wrote titled 'Art without Market, Art without Education: Political Economy of Art': "The problem of professionalization is connected to the proliferation of MFA programs, which have become a prerequisite for young people entering the arts"³³ And this is true, most students who study fine-art photography end up doing their master's in fine-arts for the possibility of teaching positions in university after their graduation. An artist with the goal of living purely from the production of their own art is simply impossible. Even if it was the case, "Walid Raad recently pointed out, the average lifespan of financial success in the art market (in places where there is such a thing)—a period during which a successful artist's work is in active demand by collectors—is a mere four years."³⁴ With this said, art schools are selling their students the dream, or the possibility, to work and prosper inside the art market in the same way a doctor or a lawyer would study for years and be able to practice a career inside that field. Yet if universities truly subscribe to this promise, they must train their students to create within the trends of museums and galleries. The art that is produced in art schools needs to meet a certain standard of form and aesthetic that can be exhibited, sold, and collected inside the contemporary art world. These trends are set by collectors, investors and curators. What sells inside galleries and museums, is essentially what art schools will

³³ Vidokle, Anton. "Art without Market, Art without Education: Political Economy of Art." *E-Flux Journal*, no. 43 (March 2013). <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/43/60205/art-without-market-art-without-education-political-economy-of-art/>

³⁴ Vidokle, Anton. "Art without Market, Art without Education: Political Economy of Art." *E-Flux Journal*, no. 43 (March 2013). https://www.e-flux.com/journal/43/60205/art-without-market-art-without-education-political-economy-of-art

teach. Not to mention that the evaluation of students work is based more on the form of the artwork and not on the meaning and creative process.

Now one of the solutions to these inevitable problems is maybe to stop selling fine-art degree as a gateway to an artist's career, since artists cannot sustain themselves with their art only. However, fine-art photography programs are probably offering a more gratifying education since they teach students at the very beginning the basics of working commercially. Most curriculums offer classes that teach artist photographers to work inside studios, to edit photographs on Adobe programs, to make their own books and print their own photographs. These are all important skills that will benefit the artist photographer when he or she will need to find a sustainable income after graduation. On the other hand, it's impossible to deny the fact that most of these skills can be learned with a simple online tutorial or small photography course. The basic photography skills a photographer needs to learn to work commercially isn't the reason why students enrol in universities. They're on the search for something that is much deeper than sitting in an office and editing magazine photographs.

Another solution to this problem is creating small academic art schools focused on the relationship between the teacher and the student, and open to alternative ways of teaching art. This includes fewer exams that create tension and competitiveness. It also includes programs taught by teachers that praise learning and communal creativity. There are many very good examples of these types of institutions:

[...] Michelangelo Pistoletto and Olafur Eliasson, have decided to transform their living and work spaces into schools, or, as in the case of Marina Abramovic', have taken on the responsibility of creating a brand-new school: the less they are legitimized by the diploma they can issue, the more radical they are. From the viewpoint of an increasingly

coercive system, the function of the school, at least in part, is to rid itself of its own shackles. ³⁵

It's not necessary for a photographer to study a full bachelor's and a master's degree in fine-art photography to work commercially for magazines, events, and studios. When students enrol inside a fine-art photographic degree in university it's to aim at the dream of becoming an artist. It's mainly to learn and refine a creative process that will benefit them when they will be entering the art market without the support of a university's ecosystem. This transition is what students train for during their studies. In school, they are taught about the history of art, what's been created in the past. They're also taught about the trends of today, and what is popular and getting attention inside the contemporary art world. In the end, they're being evaluated accordingly by combining what we know, and what is trending. If we think of the art school as the door to the art market, then students are trained consequently to survive in a competitive, money-driven world. The way Angella Vettese describes the art market is interesting when we consider what we know about fine-art degrees:

Without denying the role of the collector, art market laws have become mind- boggling. Furthermore, a desire for some respite also derives from the endless overlapping dynamics of shows, museums, magazines, auctions, and all the other gatekeepers on the roadmap of success. ³⁶

Some artists have decided to avoid this tunnel vision that is focused on success and money by creating their own educational institution. This is a beautiful way to imagine what a fine-art degree should be. However, after a lot of research, it becomes difficult to find such curriculums for fine-art photography.

³⁵ Vettese, Angela. *Art As A Thinking Process*. Sternberg Press. Accessed April 24, 2019. <https://docplayer.net/3074877-Art-as-a-thinking-process.html>

³⁶ Vettese, Angela. *Art As A Thinking Process*. Sternberg Press. Accessed April 24, 2019. <https://docplayer.net/3074877-Art-as-a-thinking-process.html>

Conclusion

In closing, fine-art photographic degrees need to be reformed. We cannot continue to teach in a traditional matter, programs that are fueled with competition and driven by the status quo. Fine-art photography degrees are extremely polyvalent and offer a great basic understanding of what is art and how to communicate ideas. The use of visual images in art is an amazing tool for any student to build a confident and strong creative process. It exercises the brains in so many ways and teaches an artist how to insert a narrative inside their work. It's absolutely incredible how gratifying studying fine-art photography can be. With this said, key factors that are part of a fine-art photography degree need to be revised and transformed in order for the programs to grow in a better direction. As said throughout this thesis, there are three major components of the higher art educational process that directly affects fine-art photography degrees.

Firstly the competitive highly standardized admission process that needs to be destroyed. This way of working actually stops the ongoing flow of creative progress inside art. New perspectives and ideas always emerge when change is inserted inside an ecosystem. The admission process cannot be treated as the curation of a perfect group of students that are sharing a homogeneous creative process and aesthetic that is ready to win it all. On the contrary, schools should choose students that all think differently, that share a different vision on what art is and that don't have much experience inside the art world. Students shouldn't have a concept of what their art should look like or be like. They should be able to jump inside this learning experience head-on with an open mind and sense of community. They should be ready to unlearn and relearn everything they know about art, and that's the beauty of studying art. It's an intangible fragile ecosystem that is forever transforming and developing. That's the main reason why schools should be more open to students that think differently and that don't fit into their pre-existing mould. This also applies for this strong demand in new media technologies in art.

Fine-art photography degrees need to accept with open arms the concept of artist photographers using a multidimensional perspective to what is fine-art photography. The use of new media technologies inside the creative process of a student should be taught in school. Progress cannot be stopped, therefore if curriculums in universities don't transform themselves in response to the demand in New Media art, they will be left behind and slowly disappear. There is no other way to deal with the progress of technologies inside the art world than to adapt alongside with it. Should new media art degrees and fine-art photography degrees be mixed? Only if the school can build proper educational resources. Also, students that use classical photography cannot be forgotten or judge differently. Both should coexist inside a program with the help of educating teachers accordingly and rebuilding curriculums with the proper courses. This is crucial for the survival of the student artist outside the educational ecosystem of photography.

This leads directly to the relationship between universities and the art market. How can fine-art photography programs in universities build a strong curriculum that goes beyond academia? This is part of the main goals that higher educational institutions have: the education of individuals for their future. Schools need to treat their curriculums as something that is serving students and not the other way around. The art market should only serve as a point of research and inspiration. It should not have an influence on how students create in terms of the format their projects, and how they should work. It shouldn't be a standard either. The art market is simply there to be inspirational. Students should never feel the need that they need to create art inside a box and limit their ascetics and formats to something that can be sold and catch attention. It is simply impossible to create any kind of strong ascetic standards when it comes to fine-art photography.

In the end, the main points to remember is that students that study in fine-art photography have the power to demand change. They have the opportunity to shake things up, to use different mediums to create with freedom. No art students should feel like they're stuck and put against any standards. "Hito Steyerl stresses the importance

of “occupying” the art schools, treating them as halls of freedom and not as places of “boring production of knowledge.”³⁷ What differs fine-art photography then other forms of fine-art is the understanding of the power of narration. How to create a visual dialogue. Artist photographers have an excellent grasp of the skill of communicating with art. That skill is applicable later to many different mediums and the possibilities of being able to create anything with the option of so many incredible forms of technologies. The artist photographer is a versatile artist and a rebellious student that will not let the structure of education stop them from being able to express themselves with freedom. Tradition is a thing of the past, and the new generation will not stand for it.

³⁷ Vettese, Angela. *Art As A Thinking Process*. Sternberg Press. Accessed April 24, 2019. <https://docplayer.net/3074877-Art-as-a-thinking-process.html>

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