

The Art Rooms and Artists-in-Residence at King's College, Cambridge since 1967

1. Introduction

As I write this in May 2019, I am the current *Coordinator and Art Teacher* at King's College, Cambridge. I look after the two Art Rooms in College, found at the top of Staircase 'A'. I believe it is worth noting down something of the history of the Art Rooms (which are also known as the Art Centre).

I have gathered the information in three ways: from conversations, reading information and testimony in a number of books and, most usefully, research in the College Archives.

This text should be taken as little more than a series of notes. But I hope it is of interest to those who come across it. Comments and suggestions to fill in the gaps in the story or omissions and errors will be very well received!

I hope this brief, if incomplete, history provides a useful context for our current activities and prompts conversations about the value of the *practice* of the visual arts at King's.

2. Artists in residence 1967 – 1979

The idea that King's might host and support artists 'in-residence' in College began in earnest in 1967. The first appointment was a musician, Roger Smalley (1943–2015), as a 'Composer-in-Residence'. Smalley was exploring techniques, especially using electronics, developed from the music of Stockhausen. Smalley was followed by the musician Tim Souster (1943–1994), who was 'in-residence' from 1969. They knew each other and worked together and, in 1969, cofounded Intermodulation, a contemporary music ensemble.¹

In 1968 the College appointed the first visual artist, Mark Lancaster (b. 1938), as 'Artist-in Residence' for two years. So, the musicians and visual artists overlapped. Michael Craig-Martin (b. 1941), also a visual artist, who was in residence from 1970 to 1972, writes that King's Fellow, Bob Young (1935–2019), an American historian of science, was the driving force behind the Artist-in-Residence scheme. Young was familiar with this idea from American universities, but it was a little-known idea on British campuses at that time.²

Artists-in-Residence were appointed by the College Council following recommendations from Fellows. There was no formal definition of the term,

¹ From Smalley's obituary in *The Telegraph*:
<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/11823573/Roger-Smalley-pianist-obituary.html>

² From: *On Being an Artist*, (2015), M. Craig-Martin.

'Artist-in-Residence'. Artists included musicians, visual artists and poets. The artists had considerable freedom to pursue their work as they chose. The only condition was that they should live in Cambridge and work in College, at least during Full Term. Judging by the correspondence in the College Archives, Fellows were looking for artists who not only were going to contribute to the 'cultural and intellectual life' of the College but were also at the cutting edge of their practice, in whatever form that took. The artists were amply supported and offered a stipend 'equivalent to that of a Research Fellow or University Assistant Lecturer of their age'.³ The artists also were offered accommodation and a 'special allowance to meet the costs of materials, etc. which you would use in your work'.⁴ The funds for this were allocated from the 'Advanced Educational Fund'. This was established in 1966 and Council agreed that £3000 a year could be allocated to that fund so that grants could be made for 'Advanced Students for special educational purposes'.⁵

For visual artists, there was a room allocated as a studio. It seems this was the smaller of the two current Art Rooms at the top of Staircase 'A'. The College Annual Report of November 1969, referring back to the previous academic year, records that 'The Artist in Residence has provided a focus and stimulus for amateur painters, and has undertaken the setting-up of an Arts Centre in the College – rooms on A staircase with studio facilities.' It seems the larger of the current rooms was set-aside for students' use, for workshops and other informal activities the Artist-in-Residence might initiate. The term Arts Centre, seems quite grand, given that, as L.P. Wilkinson writes in his book, *A Century of King's*, it 'proved useful to students painting stage scenery, but it can hardly be said to have released much pent-up artistic talent'.⁶ Wilkinson also noted that the rooms occupied by the Arts Centre and studio were previously the domain of Oscar Browning and then Sheppard.

It cannot be coincidental that an artist such as Lancaster was in-residence at the same time at King's as the musicians Smalley and Souster. King's actively supported these cutting-edge modernist forms of artistic creativity. Indeed, Lancaster was followed in 1970 by another avant-garde contemporary artist, Michael Craig-Martin. Perhaps echoing a disposition towards artists-in-residence at King's at that time, David Hockney wrote, in a letter of recommendation for another artist proposed for King's, that the prospective candidate's artwork is 'full of intelligence and perversity – a rare and perhaps very English quality'.⁷ This and other correspondence in the archives confirms that King's was looking to take real risks with the artists and their work by promoting avant-garde artistic thinking, yet acknowledging that this would but located within the customs and tradition that King's embodied.

³ 1971 in a letter from G.E.R Lloyd, Senior Tutor.

⁴ 1972 in a letter from The Provost.

⁵ KCGB/4/1.6/2 – 21 May 1966.

⁶ L.P. Wilkinson, *A Century of King's*, (1980).

⁷ Letter from Hockney, 1972.

Lancaster's two-year stay at King's was very productive. The Tate Gallery has two of works completed by Lancaster during his time at King's and the catalogue entries for both works, entitled *Cambridge Green* (1968) and *James Gibbs* (1970), reveal his fascination with systematic methods and geometric structures of mark-making which he used to construct abstract compositions. The Tate catalogue entry for Lancaster's *James Gibbs* suggests that the work was painted in the rooms Lancaster occupied at King's College from 1968–70, which were in the exact lateral centre of the Gibbs Building, facing the Founder's Court. Lancaster was inspired by the pattern, symmetry and structures within the architecture at King's. James Gibbs (1682-1754) designed this building for the Founder's Court. There is a photograph of Lancaster in what appears to be a coat made by Ozzie Clark standing above the triangular pediment outside these rooms. This is not where the current Art Rooms are at the top of Staircase 'A', which is where it seems the studio and 'Art Centre' were located – at least by the time Craig-Martin was in residence from 1970. So perhaps Lancaster's residential accommodation was in Gibbs, whilst the studio was on Staircase 'A' of the Wilkin's Building as described by Craig Martin and alongside the 'Art Centre', which Lancaster clearly helped to invigorate.

Irish born artist, Michael Craig-Martin, followed Mark Lancaster as Artist-in-Residence at King's. Apart from his now worldwide reputation as a highly significant visual artist, Craig-Martin was an influential Tutor at Goldsmiths College, London, during the 1980s as Damien Hurst and the Young British Artist generation emerged through shows such as the *Frieze*.

In his book, *On Being an Artist* (2015), Craig-Martin writes in detail about his two years at King's. Lancaster and Craig-Martin were already friends as both had been art lecturers at The Bath Academy of Art at Corsham. Craig-Martin was 28 when he came to King's – Lancaster only a few years older. They were young artists exploring challenging conceptual approaches to art making. I suspect, because Lancaster knew him well, and as Lancaster's two years at King's was clearly a success in artistic terms with a significant work produced and number of prominent exhibitions, his opinion of Craig-Martin as an appropriate artist to follow him as Artist-in-Residence must have carried some weight.

Craig-Martin writes that there was not really an interview as no one else was under serious consideration. He reports that Bob Young, the Fellow responsible for the artist-in-residence program, 'came bounding across the lawn to greet me. To my astonishment he was wearing a long flowing African shirt printed with a large abstract pattern in yellow, red and black, blue jeans, and open sandals.'⁸ It was not what Craig-Martin had expected at the venerable King's College, Cambridge and, despite his shoulder length hair, he felt increasingly uncomfortable in his 'King's Road' suit as he met other casually dressed College Members.

In terms of his own development, Craig-Martin confirms that the two years at King's were 'exceptionally productive' and that the work he contributed to two

⁸ From: *On Being an Artist* (2015) M. Craig-Martin

pivotal exhibitions in 1972, *The New Art* at the Hayward Gallery and the *Seven Exhibition* at the Tate, were produced at King's. It was an enormous benefit to an artist to have a dedicated (and heated) studio to which he could withdraw to work unhindered and un-worried about teaching responsibilities or having to pay bills. Craig-Martin had many of the privileges of a College Fellow, including certain dining rights. It seems that he swiftly became a well-integrated and welcome member of the family of King's. Craig-Martin questions if, outside of the social interaction, whether his presence had any impact on any more than a handful of individuals at King's.⁹ Nevertheless, he met many students including those from other Colleges – notably Anthony Gormley, then a student at Trinity, who went on to study fine art at Goldsmiths and the Slade before emerging as one of the world's leading sculptors.

The third visual artist-in-residence was Stephen Buckley (b. 1944) from 1972 to 1974. Buckley was later to become Professor of Fine Art at Reading University in 1994. He won a prize at the national painting competition 'John Moore's Exhibition 9', at Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool with work made at King's. There is a long letter from the Provost to Buckley in the College Archives (1972) setting out the appointment and the thinking behind it.

'Ordinary junior members of the College will gain benefit from personal contact with a practicing artist [...] you should actually work in the studio in the College, but besides that we hope you will extend your activities in the direction of the Art Centre next door [...] we hope you will do what you can to encourage active artistic activity among junior members and help arrange exhibitions, lectures or art classes as may be appropriate'.¹⁰

3. Running the 'Art Centre' from 1992 to 2019

A composer, poet and then a filmmaker followed Buckley in the 1970s but as yet (although pending more research) there is no clear information about the residency scheme or the Art Centre during the 1980s. The story is picked up again with reference to David Ward, the photographer who was at King's in 1990 and then there is a note about a student sculptor and King's alumni, Kate Millar who was in College making art for a year from 1991.

In 1992 there was a change of direction as, rather than College looking primarily for a practicing artist to work as an artist-in-residence, Hermoine Holmes was appointed as a 'Co-ordinator and tutor' for the 'King's College Art Centre'. Following Holmes, Rose Rands was offered the post of 'Artist – King's College Art Centre' in 1994. However, in a letter that Tess Adkins, Senior Tutor at the time, and sent to Rose, the role is described in terms more appropriate to appointing an art college tutor rather than principally one of artist. Rose was asked to 'run eight hours of taught studios a week, preferably in blocks of four hours, during University Full Term'.¹¹ This, then, was a very part-time role, as indeed it is

⁹ From: *On Being an Artist* (2015) M. Craig-Martin

¹⁰ Letter from Edmund Leach 1972

¹¹ Letter from Tess Adkins 28 July 1994

today. Rose spent 13 years at King's supported, particularly as a serious illness gradually took hold, by her husband Nelson. She died in 2007. Subsequently, Cambridge-based artist and art teacher, Donald Stubbs briefly took on the role until September 2009. The Cambridge artist, Natalie McIntyre, followed Stubbs. It is not clear when she stepped down.

I was appointed in February 2015. There had been a lull in Art Rooms' activity. I discovered there were life-drawing sessions on a Wednesday and Thursday evenings organised by groups external to King's. But the Art Rooms were little used by King's students. Indeed, by early 2015 the smaller of the two rooms had morphed into a giant storeroom where anything and everything had been left (or dumped). The pile of discarded stuff reached half-way to the ceiling.

Now, in 2019, Art Rooms offers a cultural centre for the practice of visual arts and design at King's. We welcome anyone from the broad family of King's. This includes all Members and Staff and, indeed, their partners and families too. Inevitably there is a breadth of activity as the Art Rooms is set up to support complete beginners through to artists and designers who have an established, well-developed practice.

There are typically four ways the Art Rooms are now used. Firstly, they are a space for individuals and small groups to make art independently. There are tools, materials and equipment for this. Secondly, the larger Art Room becomes a temporary gallery space. So, from September 2015 to June 2019 there were 30 exhibitions. Some shows offer students a chance to organise and share their artwork, perhaps for the first time. For example, as I write in late May 2019, an exhibition in progress is by second year architect, Oluwasemilore "Semi" Delano. Other shows are by well-established artists and/or researchers. For example, a highlight early in 2017, was the exhibition of film stills selected by the world-renowned ethnographic filmmaker, Professor David MacDougall from Australia National University. These were from a series of children's films made in India. The third area of activity in the Art Rooms is a varied programme of workshops and life-drawing sessions. To give a flavour of this, the first four weeks of Easter Term 2019 saw two dry-point printmaking workshops for King's Members organised in partnership with the Cambridge School of Visual and Performing Arts, several life drawing sessions and a demonstration of how the main Art Room can become a camera obscura, so that an inverted image of the Chapel flooded the space. Finally, the fourth aspect of Art Rooms' activity is that I am able to help individual Members with tutorial style teaching support for their art practice. This employs the art school 'crit' based pedagogy where artwork and/or ideas are discussed one-to-one or in small groups.

Also in the Art Rooms, there is now a thriving student Art Rooms' Society that organises student exhibitions, workshops and events. Every year the Art Rooms hosts the King's College Rylands Art Prize. In addition to regular life drawing sessions for King's students, the Thursday evening life-drawing evenings at King's have been running almost un-broken since the early 1970s. They were

originally initiated through the University Graduate Society and King's offered space and a regular weekly slot in the 'Art Centre'.¹²

4. In summary

Should King's have an artist-in-residence again? It is an odd feature of the University of Cambridge, as a leading world university, that the *practice* of visual art is not formally part of the University. There is, of course, a very well-respected academic tradition of Art History at King's. Where art practice exists, it is usually very much on the periphery of life, perhaps seen as a hobby activity – a relaxing diversion from academic thought. This is in contrast to a central role for excellence in music – both practice and theory. Although there are many wonderful examples of art in the University Colleges and there are professionally curated spaces to show art such as the Heong Gallery at Downing and the West Court Gallery at Jesus, the *practice* of art is much less visible. At King's the experiment in the late 1960s and early 1970s of offering visual artists a studio, a generous stipend and two years simply to make art was a great success for those individuals, even becoming pivotal in the development of their careers. King's contributed to contemporary art in Britain. It is harder to say if the presence of a succession of three visual artists from 1968 – 1974 (Lawrence, Craig-Martin and Buckley) was of significance to those who met them in College. But I suspect it was an intangible but real contribution to cultural thinking at King's. Now the focus of the Art Rooms at King's is on an open view of art practice, which is potentially for everyone in College whether they are complete beginners or highly sophisticated practitioners. Students have the opportunity to make art, show their art, curate shows and meet a range of art practitioners, some of whom have nationally significant (and occasionally internationally significant) careers. These visitors teach workshops or show their work on the Art Rooms' walls. I continually debate whether this is the best approach, although I am sure of one thing: long may the Art Rooms continue.

Dr. Nigel Meager
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¹² Personal correspondence with Dennis 'Goldie' Goldsmith, convener of the Thursday evening Graduate Society Life Drawing sessions.

Appendix 1: List of visual artists, composers, a poet and a photographer in residence at King's

Robert Smalley, 67–69, composer
Mark Lancaster, 68–70, visual artist
Tim Souster, 69–71, composer
Michael Craig Martin, 70–72, visual artist
Stephen Buckley, 72–74, visual artist
Gordon Crosse, 74–75, composer
Tom Raworth, 77–78, poet
Maurice Hatton, 79, filmmaker

Then there is a gap on the records through the 1980s until:

David Ward, 90–91, photographer
Kate Millar, 91–92, student sculptor

From 1992 to the present part-time appointments were made (see Section 3 above).