

RE . Residencies as a
Pedagogical Tool in
Creative Education:
Why should we
consider them?
Why now? What role
could they have?

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Editors' Introduction

Residency and fellowship programmes can act as a valuable bridge between education and professional practice. Students are increasingly citing residency programmes as a framework to continue their work and as a holding space to consider their next move following graduation. But what might happen if you extended this bridge back into education? How might education not only acknowledge residencies and fellowships as spaces for practice, but actively think with and organise around these frameworks?

In September 2009 I was commissioned by *Blueprint* magazine to write an article about the newly — at the time — V&A ceramics galleries redesigned by Stanton Williams Architects. Set within the galleries was a new, fully-equipped studio space for artists in residence. A distinctive feature of this new addition was the glass wall marking the boundary between the galleries and the studio space. The clean, empty shelves, also in glass, and pristine tables and tools projected a sense of excitement and anticipation about the creative life that was going to flow in the studio. I remember being struck by the realisation that, with a new artist's studio set in the heart of its galleries, the museum was no longer only a curated container of collections, but also a dynamic place of production of new knowledge through crafts. The literal transparency between the artist's studio and the galleries established a new dialogue between the past, present, and future.

That first encounter with an artist-in-residence studio space in a museum left a deep impression in my mind about the potential of the exchange between the

artist, the location, the programme, the museum's collections, and the public. Since its establishment in 2009, the V&A residency programme has seen a succession of brilliant artists in residence and expanded across different disciplines that turned the museum into a dynamic space of creative possibilities in terms of experimentation and exchange between artists and the public. The artist-in-residence programme and their studio had a key role in bridging the gap between the museum and the public by making creative processes more visible and accessible.

Having seen how the introduction of an artist's studio worked in the context of a museum residency programme, I began to wonder what impact residencies might have if introduced into creative higher education. What would it mean if artists, external to the institution, were invited to carry out their practice at the very heart of a place like the Royal College of Art or Central Saint Martins?

Rather than thinking in terms of a literal "glass box," which risks suggesting a single prescriptive model, I now see the proposition more broadly as the

importance of *making space* for external practice within education. Unlike tutors, who are tied to programmes, or visiting lecturers, who come in for a specific purpose, the artist in residence is not primarily there to serve students or faculty. Their role is to continue their own practice — visibly, proximally, and on their own terms — in ways that make the processes of experimentation, failure, and discovery accessible.

This presence has the potential to reintroduce something vital to the culture of higher education: a sense of the studio as a shared site of production, debate, and negotiation. Sam Thorne describes the studio as “a constellation of relations”, and residencies within educational institutions could embody precisely this — offering students and staff alike the chance to witness and engage with a practitioner in situ. What emerges is less about the solitary “genius maker” at work and more about a collective dialogue that provokes questions: What is the studio today? How is it evolving? What does it mean for a generation of creatives working in increasingly hybrid, networked, and pressured contexts?

In this way, residencies could operate as a form of *pedagogical disturbance* – not disruptive in a negative sense, but as an enlivening “third space” between the structured rhythms of coursework and the unpredictability of creative practice. They could soften the boundaries between formal teaching and informal exchange, reminding us that learning in creative education often takes place in the gaps: in conversations, observations, and the visibility of process. Such an approach would not only restore aspects of studio culture that are under pressure but also model ways of working that extend beyond the walls of the institution.

I often find myself explaining to students the importance of residency programmes as a follow-up from creative education, particularly after an MA, as a way to carry on developing a research project and bridge between education and the creative industry. But what if one or more of those former students could become artists in residence within the educational institution? I have also been thinking about what role an artist-in-residence programme could have pedagogically if embedded within creative education.

How could the artist-in-residence studio be used as a pedagogical tool? In which ways could this tool enrich a programme and reinstate, at the heart of the institution, the culture of the artist's studio?

There are ways in which residency models could be tested and outputs shared among creative institutions so as to share the risks when piloting a concept, perhaps also by forming a consortium of partners even across regions and countries. Models adopted by cultural institutions could be taken as a starting point, as templates. Between 2013-18 I worked at the British Council in the Architecture Design Fashion (ADF) department, and part of the portfolio of projects I inherited was a residency programme in Finland. The British Council was, at the time, winding down their offices in the Nordic countries and, as a result, this small programme was kept going as a beacon to keep the dialogue and cultural exchange going between the UK and Finland. Through this programme, I understood the cultural value of residencies in the international context. Although very small in terms of budget compared to

other cultural endeavours, the nature of the residency allowed us to explore, through the open call, provocations and questions that resonated with the topics and debates needed in the Finnish design context. Together with the partners, we provided mentorship to the artist in residence – before, during and after their residency. The meetings provided an opportunity for exchanges between the resident and the participating partners, including myself, that helped the selected designer to brainstorm and discuss their ideas, processes, and outputs. This aspect is something that I find transferable to a possible residency programme in an educational institution.

Creative education requires conditions of learning and production of knowledge that are different from other environments. However, it is paradoxically becoming more specialised and structured, both in terms of courses and pedagogies. This might have consequences on learning environments as they become more formal and less organic. The exchanges are solely between students and tutors, and professionals come in only as guest lecturers; they are not embedded in the

educational institution. By contrast, in real life the boundaries are becoming more blurred due to the need to work more collaboratively. As a consequence, at times the teaching environment in creative institutions feels too institutionalised, formalised, and even disconnected from the real world. This formality, one could say, is not conducive to creative thinking and imagination in general, as it is structured around canons that are designed to facilitate administrative and health-and-safety procedures. The artist-in-residence studio could become a “third space” within an educational institution — as an alternative space for knowledge exchange — providing students (and indeed teaching staff) opportunities to connect with the artist in residence but also stimulate exchange, dialogue, and conversations about the creative process. Integrating a residency programme in the context of creative education could shift the formality of this relationship (tutor-student) and provide a space for more informal exchanges and visibility of processes that could inspire students and, indeed, academic and teaching staff in unexpected ways.

References

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Biography

Gian Luca Amadei is a researcher, tutor, and curator whose work explores the relationships between design, architecture, urbanism, and cultural context. He teaches on the Information Experience Design MA at the Royal College of Art and has previously lectured at the Universities of Kent, Nottingham, and Kingston. From 2013–18, he was Design Programme Manager at the British Council, developing international cultural collaborations across Europe and Africa. He is the author of *Discovering Women in Polish Design* and *Victorian Cemeteries and the Suburbs of London*, and co-initiated the *Looking Through Objects*, a curatorial project on contemporary women designers.

RE: Design Residencies publishes commissioned texts on design and architecture residency and fellowship programmes. Practitioners, curators, educators and residency organisers provide reflections, case studies and provocations on the role, value and impact of residency and fellowship programmes on contemporary practice and education today. RE: Design Residencies is a project collaboration between Stanley Picker Gallery at Kingston University and IASPIS, The Swedish Arts Grants Committee. The project has been developed out of two forums with many of the invited guests contributing further with texts based on their presentations.

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