FERAL ART SCHOOL PAPER: (v4RHM)

TITLE: What Artists Want, What Artists Need: A Critical History of the Feral Art School, Hull, UK, 2018 - Present.

Fig. 1: we need to decide on an opening image

INTRODUCTION

The title of this paper is taken from an event organised by Feral Art School, Hull, UK, in June 2019 which brought together artists, educators, curators, and arts employers, to discuss the future organisation and sustainability of Britain's visual arts sector. The Feral Art School is an independent institution established in Hull in 2018 by artist-educators following the winding down of Hull School of Art and Design. This dismantling added to the long list of the UK's lost art schools documented in the photo-ethnographic work of Beck and Cornford (2014). It also left many of the city's art teachers unemployed and potential art students without facilities. Feral Art School [FAS] is one of the most recent examples of alternative art school provision established in the UK over the last decade. Many, if not all, of these alternative art schools have emerged in direct response to the educational reforms implemented after the UK Government's *Independent Review of Higher Education Funding & Student Finance*, or Browne Review (Department for Business, Innovation, and Skills, 2010). This now-infamous review resulted in the replacement of student grants and block grant for public universities with a system of student loans and trebled tuition fees. Beyond the headline fees increase to £9,000 p.a. for domestic undergraduate students, a figure which has risen with inflation to its current cap of £9,250 p.a., this review signified a reconfiguration of higher education from public to private. The broader economic context of austerity was used as a justification for the stealth creation of a loosely regulated 'level playing field' which would allow new private-for-profit providers to compete in a fully marketised sector (McGettigan 2013: 3-5). An immediate consequence was the removal of state funding for undergraduate arts and humanities subjects, apart from a few exceptions. Against more apparently economically productive subjects like science, engineering, technology, and maths, these were deemed as national non-priority. Effectively, this privatised the country's art school provision at a stroke (McQuillan 2010).

The post-Browne era has not only witnessed the disappearance of historic art schools, but the rebranding of former municipal colleges of art as 'arts universities', primarily to appeal to the lucrative overseas student market. Inversely, some arts faculties within neoliberal universities are self-

identifying as 'schools of art'. Within the broader humanities, the government vision for new providers is perhaps embodied in the philosopher A. C. Grayling's New College for the Humanities – a self-styled elite liberal arts college with aspirations to charge £18,000 p.a. for degrees taught by celebrity academics. Since the Browne Review, over 40 alternative art schools have been established in the UK (Kosmaoglou, 2021) alongside FAS. In their own ways, each of these seek to ameliorate the social, cultural, and pedagogical damage of the Browne Review. The paper below seeks to contextualise the emergence of Feral within the commodified, marketised, and financialised (McGettigan 2013: 175-6) HE sector. It also situates FAS within the broader UK alternative art school movement which collectively attempts to imagine an alternative future for art education. Following an explanation of the aims and rationale for the establishment of an alternative art school in Hull, this paper will conclude with testimonies from participants from the first two years of Feral Art School's existence. These are held as evidence of both the efficacy of alternative provision and the social, cultural, and pedagogic gaps left by the neoliberal model.

THE ECONOMISATION OF ART EDUCATION

The broader effects of the Browne Review (2010) are now becoming visible on the HE landscape (Palfreyman and Tapper 2016). The current fees cap of £9,250 p.a., has become the sector rule rather than the exception, preventing genuine market competition over price. One reason for the failure of this experiment in marketisation is the difficulty in accurately assessing value for money between providers. Aside from the consumer satisfaction data of the National Student Survey (NSS), and quantitative performance metrics like the REF (Research Excellence Framework), and the recently introduced TEF (Teaching Excellence Framework), or instrumental data from DELHE (Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education in the United Kingdom), there is no objective way for measuring the relationship between price and quality of specific courses, other than institutional reputation (McGettigan 2013: 48, 59). In a de facto prestige market, institutions are disincentivised from setting lower fees, which connotes budget or lower quality provision to both competitors and prospective consumers. The Department for Education's recently published 'Post-18 Review of Education and Funding', or Augar Review (DfE 2019), has revived criticisms of the current fees structure. Commissioned partly in recognition of the political toxicity of the status quo, it contains proposals for either a blanket reduction in the fees cap to £6,500 p.a., differential fees based on the quality of provision, or a negative grant for low-value courses (DfE 2019: 135). The Browne review (DfBIS 2010) repeatedly used the signifier 'priority courses' to implicitly refer to STEM courses deemed worthy of limited continued support. In post-Augur discourses which emphasise 'value for money', arts subjects are increasingly argued to be low-value based on projected graduate earnings (McGettigan 2016) and the increased likelihood of arts students partially or fully defaulting on their loan repayments. Figures from the Institute for Fiscal Studies [IFS] suggest that arts graduates cost the taxpayer 30% more than engineering graduates (Busby 2019).

The underpinning problematic animating the questions of both these reports can be encapsulated in Wendy Brown's concept of 'economization' (2015: 17-45). For Brown, 'economization' describes the process by which neoliberalism incorporates noneconomic spheres of cultural and political life into its logics. Following economisation, hitherto existing cultural institutions, such as universities and art schools, are run according to the logic of modern international firms, and every aspect of them is monetised. Within such schema, students are figured simply as market actors whose decisions are driven purely by economic factors. McGettigan (2013: 25, 57, 64) has equated this model of economised higher education to a human capital in oneself, where the risk of debt in the present is leveraged against one's future earnings potential. Jeffrey Williams (in Edu-Factory Collective 2009: 89-96) has highlighted that commodified systems of education are underpinned by a hidden curriculum which he refers to as a 'pedagogy of debt'. This disciplinary pedagogy not only centralises financial factors above pedagogy in determining student course choices, but also shackles students to the neoliberal system via a personal debt mountain. Equally codependent with the system are the university vice-chancellors who overstretched in the post-Browne years, investing in an arms race of signature buildings to seduce the next generation of student-consumers. Even the most sympathetic find themselves mortgage-committed to the inflated fees. As Williams argues, one consequence of the economisation of education is the civic lesson that 'no realm of human life is anterior to the market (in Edu-Factory Collective 2009: 95); a lesson which the cultural theorist Mark Fisher (2009) has encapsulated in the concept 'capitalist realism'.

Within this new landscape of capitalist realist, economized higher education, arts education is presented either as poor value for money, or perhaps a private indulgence for the bourgeois classes. Unsurprisingly, this has had an effect on application rates to arts courses, with recent reports

indicating they have fallen to the lowest numbers in decades (Adams 2017). This decline has been compounded by the recent COVID-19 lockdown which has also gravely threatened the revenue streams of universities. On April 23rd 2020 the Times Higher Education ran an article which predicted a £2.6bn budget shortfall across the university sector, largely from a 16% reduction in domestic application rates, and a 47% reduction in international applications (McKie 2020). Faced with such budgetary shortfalls, many institutions will follow the decisions of Bristol, Sussex, and Newcastle and save costs through the non-renewal of temporary and hourly-paid contracts (Batty 2020). This reduction in staffing will disproportionately impact upon arts disciplines, whose faculty historically comprises part-time, fixed-term, or hourly-paid staff supplementing professional practices through teaching income. Furthermore, institutions will most likely concentrate on supporting more lucrative, less resource heavy courses than arts degrees.

The arts sector has responded by attempting to define the value of arts education beyond the apparent paucity of graduate earnings. The National Society for Education in Art and Design (NSEAD) and the International Society for Education Through Art (InSEA) have both been central lobbyists within the governmental All-Party Parliamentary Group for Art, Craft and Design in Education. Here, the campaigning has centred around the inclusion of art in the list of government priority subjects. The Arts and Humanities Research Council's recent report 'Understanding the Value of Arts and Culture' (Crossick and Kaszynska 2016) conceives 'cultural value' holistically and macro-socially. The report explicitly underlines the economic benefit of the creative industries, whose estimated Gross Value Added (GVA) contributes £76.9 billion and 2.62 million jobs to the UK economy (Ibid: 86). However, this economic impact is also supplemented by the less tangible benefits of the arts to national wellbeing (100-112), innovation (86), community building and urban regeneration (71-4). More polemically, the report argues that the arts are an essential force for inculcating engaged citizenship and civic agency. Citing continental theorists like Nicolas Bourriaud (1998) and Jacques Rancière (2004), whose work has in different ways defined the politics of aesthetics, alongside case studies of public art such as Alex Hartley's *Nowhereisland* (2004-12), the report argues the case for arts as a precondition for political engagement (Crossick and Kaszynska 2016: 58). Here, their concerns overlap precisely with those of the political theorist Brown (2015: 39-42), who argues that the most severe consequence of economisation is the absolute depoliticisation of the social body. For Brown, the transformation of *homo-politicus* into *homo-oeconomicus* ultimately threatens the health of democracy itself.

Nevertheless, the Browne Review was met with initially fierce political resistance, including the largest mass student protests in modern UK history, in London on 10th November 2020. Many of these students had voted for the coalition government's junior partners, the Liberal Democrats, who immediately reneged on their manifesto promise to remove HE tuition fees if elected. The 'youthquake' (Cain 2017) which carried Jeremy Corbyn to the position of Leader of the Opposition (2015-19) was energised by his commitment to abolish student fees. Outside the euphoria of spectacular mass rallies at Glastonbury, one can see demonstrable evidence of a continued politicisation and self-organisation within the UK student body. Increasingly, students have been threatening litigation to demand the legal rights that their newfound status of educational consumers entitles them. Similarly, students across the country are organising rent strikes following the COVID-19 lockdown. This sense of political organisation has been particularly evident in the wave of autonomous art schools which have been formed since the Browne Review.

Fig.2: Still from the Feral Art School promotional video https://www.feralartschool.org/about-us/

THE HISTORY AND AIMS OF THE FERAL ART SCHOOL, HULL

A comprehensive list of all alternative art schools can be found on the website of artist-researcher Sophia Kosmaoglou (2020). A series of interviews with some of the most influential international alternative art schools has also been published (Thorne 2017). The common denominator of these institutions is that, by necessity, they operate independently of state or institutional support. Though ideologically divergent, alternative art schools are united in opposition to the current trajectory of arts HE, each seeking to facilitate access to those hitherto excluded. Many seek to avoid the pitfalls of incorporation or institutionalisation by operating as quasi-gift economies or co-operatives. Most offer some, if not all, of their programmes for free. Beck and Cornford argue that, beyond their pedagogic function, provincial art schools represent 'a distinct cultural formation' (2016: 8). Juxtaposed with the neoliberal, economised art school, these forms of organisation must be considered as political (Earl 2018). Whilst there are numerous alternative examples in metropolitan centres with famous art schools (Glasgow's 'School of Civic Imagination (2017-present); London's 'The School of the Damned' (2015-present) and' AltMFA' (2010-present), many of these institutions have been established in provincial towns where former municipal art schools have been closed down or subsumed within larger institutions (Margate's 'Open School East', 2013-present; Southend's 'The Other MA'). In 1973, Warren-Piper identified 68 separate art schools in England and Wales alone (1973: 30). Frith and Horne's influential *Art into Pop* (1987) argues that every small town had an art school. Beck and Cornford (2016: 8) argued there were as many as 180 in total in the UK. In 2020, hardly any of these original UK 'schools of design' remain. Alternative art schools serve not only a pedagogic and cultural purpose, but also represent new forms of self-organised mutual aid and community rebuilding. Beck and Cornford (2016: 18) argue this 'civic function' of the art school transcends economic value. As intensifiers of disciplinary specialism, and as viable alternatives to universities, the art school experience cannot be replicated by university art departments. Nor can their expanded economies of 'difference and distinctiveness' be reproduced by the 'simulated bohemias' (13) of the cultural quarters now ubiquitous in most UK cities. At a time when the COVID-19 lockdown threatens the provision of arts education provision across the sector, alternative art schools raise important questions concerning whether artists themselves, rather than the 'economised' university, are best situated to teach the next generation of artists and creatives.

As stated, the birth of FAS lies in the dismantling of Hull's historic School of Art and Design [HSAD]. Established in 1861, this institution produced notable alumni, including painter David Remfry

RA, sculptor John Davies, graphic designer Trevor Key and artist Brian Griffiths. Despite its geographical isolation, it fostered numerous innovative cultural projects that punched well above their weight, including RED Gallery, Hull Time-based Arts, and the work of Pippa Koczerek and Chris Dubrowolski. In 1901, the School of Art moved into purpose-built accommodation, where it remained until a new art school building was commissioned in 1972. Despite several name changes which tracked the structural changes in higher education, the School of Art retained its identity and continued to fulfil its vital role in the development of a creative community in Hull, while maintaining links with the national and international world of art and design. Becoming part of Hull College of Higher Education in 1976, which in turn morphed into the University of Humberside, the University of Lincolnshire and Humberside and finally into the University of Lincoln, the School of Art was abandoned by the latter institution when it left the city of Hull in 2006. At that point, it was taken over by Hull College of Further Education, whose site was adjacent to the art school, and renamed Hull School of Art and Design. For a period of ten years, HSAD thrived, providing an increasing number of BA(Hons) degrees validated by a range of HE institutions and contributing significantly to the income of its parent FE College, which by this time had become Hull College Group, in a climate where large FE colleges were being encouraged to engage in expansion projects. By 2016, it became apparent that Hull College Group had overreached itself, producing a large deficit which set it on a downward path from which it has yet to recover. Wholesale staff redundancies followed in 2018, including the voluntary redundancies of thirty-five of the forty HSAD staff, who saw all too clearly what the future held for HSAD. The dismantling of nearly 160 years of higher education in art and design was swift and sudden. Although some art provision remains, the art school is no longer a presence in the city. As Beck and Cornford (2014: 38) argue, the traditional provincial art school was deeply embedded in the local area and culture, not to mention the civic imaginary. What is subsequently lost is more than an art school.

A number of the artist/educators who took redundancy from HSAD joined with other artists in the city to create the founding board of Feral Art School, which was established in June 2018 by incorporation as a Community Interest Company (CIC) with cooperative values. Aware of the precarious future for the training and employment of artists in Hull, and the institutional priorities of Hull College Group, this group of artists began exploring alternative structures. In particular, they sought to create opportunities for open access skills and practice development in the visual arts, particularly in collaboration with the Cooperative College in Manchester. The decision to establish a cooperative basis for FAS was influenced by the work of Mike Neary and Joss Winn, in particular their paper 'Beyond Public and Private: A Framework for Co-operative Higher Education' (2017). This paper argues for the cooperative model as a solution to 'the issues that arise from a more marketised and financialised approach to the production of knowledge' (Neary & Winn, 2017). For them, cooperative learning represents a form of negative social critique which contains the seeds of a post-capitalist society.

Emerging from an economised higher education culture which directly led to job losses, FAS grew from the opportunity to rethink the purpose of an art school. In particular, this involved rethinking both its internal and external relationships, its social role, and its institutional priorities. Feral Art School's vision is to provide opportunities for people to engage with making art through high quality experiences, fresh formats and alternative approaches. It does this by offering learning experiences at introductory and specialist levels for those with a curiosity for engaging with and making art work, regardless of previous experience and skills. These include courses in print, drawing, painting, textiles at introductory and advanced levels plus fashion, tailoring and photography as weekend and short courses. Supported painting and textiles studios spaces are also available. It encourages experimentation and challenges accepted practices within disciplined and well-organised frameworks. Artist-led sessions are based on cooperative learning principles, with artists working in partnership with participants to share skills and make work through a collaborative process. Feedback from workshop participants, social media, and exhibitions are key to decisions regarding future directions. In order to maintain maximum flexibility and reduce overheads, FAS operates nomadically across the city of Hull in a range of venues. These buildings are often secured in partnership with other organisations ranging from arts and community development groups to property developers. The co-operative values, central to FAS, acknowledge the vital role played by each member of the organisation, making full use of their talents and interests, whether as artist/educators, organisers, or strategists. All work towards the same end of developing FAS as an enabler of opportunities for participation in visual arts and culture. As a CIC, any profit goes back into the organisation, to expand its activities. It provides employment for artists as tutor/mentors, recognising the importance and quality of their input by paying them above the rate paid by many HE institutions.

'Strategy' may come from the neoliberal institutional lexicon, but at its core it simply means finding a way to grow in relation to circumstances. FAS emerged from a context in which large HE structures are creaking under the pressures of a challenging financial situation. Here, questions of pedagogy seemed to get buried within concerns with 'value for money'. As the recent Demos Report (2020) says, 'change is hard for people to navigate - but it's also unstoppable'. The COVID-19 crisis has made everyone aware that responsiveness to change must be built in as part of any strategic development. The FAS strategy is incremental, using grant funding to test each stage of its development to ensure its sustainability, then moving on to the next stage in the same way. This has enabled it to build up activities for which it has evidence of a proven need, costed at an affordable level, and to grow its audience year on year. It recognises the importance of developing a number of strands to its activities, in order to stabilise its funding base and to address the needs of different audiences. It identifies the groups with whom it works as follows:

1. Adults who wish to engage with visual arts activities to learn skills, gain knowledge, understand how artists work and become part of a community of conversations about art and culture. Within this wider grouping, participants have different needs:

    a. Those with non-traditional education backgrounds who may have had little opportunity to take part in art and cultural activities.
    b. Those who wish to build on previous experience of visual art practice.
    c. Those for whom social or financial circumstances have excluded them from participation in cultural activities, e.g. ex-offenders, asylum seekers and those on low incomes.

2. Adults with some experience of art practice who wish to pursue this consistently and independently.
3. Adults who wish to pursue a specialist, higher-level visual arts training at undergraduate or postgraduate level.

Supported by a small legacy grant from Hull 2017 UK City of Culture, the first programme of courses was set up in September 2018. Since then an expanded programme has been developed, with support from Arts Council England National Lottery Project funding. Partnerships with local organisations and artists' networks have enabled Feral Art School to facilitate the setting up of a number of artist studio collectives where participants work alongside professional artists. These offer accessible, affordable opportunities for emerging artists to develop their practice and strengthen the cultural community in Hull.

As a co-operative whose members, including student representatives, depend on and support each other, FAS has also developed wider partnerships which have supported its growth and contributed to its thinking. Alongside the development of activities local to the Hull city region, FAS is building a credible and distinctive role within the national and international community of arts organisations. By ensuring that it is plugged into wider networks, it aims to ensure that it is developing into an organisation with stability and relevance to current contexts and needs. Its partners include artist-led networks including School of the Damned, TOMA, the Festival of Alternative Art Education, and the Slow Marathon network, with whom FAS collaborates to create events and further opportunities for artists. FAS has developed international networks through exchanges with the Reykjavik School of Visual Arts and Curated Place, and academic networks as a founder member of the Cooperative Learning Federation, which includes partners such as the Centre for Human Ecology Glasgow, Free University Brighton, Alt-FAD Wales, School of the Anthropocene Cambridge/London, RED Learning Cooperative, Leicester Vaughan College, and the Social Innovation Centre University of Central Lancashire. With these partners, FAS is gradually constructing a model for higher education experience that has educational values, student needs and co-operative learning at its core.

The Demos 2020 report asks 'What possible reason is there for us to still operate through 19th and 20th century systems and bureaucracies?'. The development of FAS, as part of the wider alternative art school movement, raises the fundamental question of whether the majority of art schools are outmoded. Many of the members of FAS came through art schools at the point when they had more autonomy, and when the importance of pedagogy was not stifled by financial concerns. FAS self-consciously attempts to incorporate the best of the 'old order' within an experimental new organisational structure. Experimentation, creativity, and collaboration are all key aspects of its ethos. These features are increasingly absent within monolithic university art departments. One important,

but as yet unresolved, question is the relationship between FAS and mainstream providers. Certainly, there is a perception that 'quality' provision is provided solely through formally accredited institutions. A significant challenge for alternative providers is communicating their quality to potential students. To seek accreditation means jumping back into the very system from which FAS has extricated itself from. Such a move would also reintroduce the bureaucratic pressures which tend to get in the way of teaching and learning. Another difficulty, faced by all alternative art schools, is the question of wages. The School of the Damned avoids this problem with their gift-economy or timebank model. Here, the time spent by lecturers teaching is paid back by the labour of the students on tasks chosen by their lecturers. The model of employment used by FAS is more traditional and has grown to accommodate the needs of the school and those it employs. It is an important ethos of FAS to pay its staff fair wages, though at the moment it is not in the position to offer full-time contracts. However, all of the school's faculty are practising artists, supplementing their teaching income through the sale of work and artistic commissions. Teaching for FAS enriches both their own work and the experience of those they teach. They take on as much or as little teaching as they choose, which provides them with some income and with the flexibility to maintain their own practice. The ongoing challenge for FAS is to find ways to stay true to a vision of providing 'what artists want' and 'what artists need'.

Fig. 3: Workshop at Feral Art School (date needed)

COOPERATIVE ART EDUCATION

Neary and Winn's article (2012) argue that a central feature of a cooperative university is an 'accountable social compact' between the university and its 'surrounding society'. A cooperative art school must go further than establishing relationships between artists, educators, and the local economy, and reassert its civic function at the creative centre of the country's provincial towns. Beck

and Cornford's distinction between the traditional art school and the neoliberal 'culture shed' is not simply one of rival institutional structures, nor a preference for Victorian architecture over postmodern façades. It concerns the underpinning ethos of the art school. Here, Neary and Winn's framework for understanding cooperative operation can help us understand not only the cultural value of art education, but how it can function as a creative gift economy (Hyde 1983) which can challenge the hegemony of current neoliberal models.

Neary and Winn's framework for cooperative higher education covers six broad themes. The first theme is 'the capital relation', which relate directly to the economisation of education discussed above. Secondly, a reconceptualization of 'the social' as a way of overcoming a 'false dichotomy' between public and private. Thirdly, three categories (social knowing / social organisation / social movement) which collectively form a 'universal model' that more accurately reflects the processes of collective learning within cooperative universities. This 'universal model' is underpinned by five 'catalytic principles', such as 'solidarity', 'democracy', and 'livelihood'. These principles are realised through three routes into cooperative higher education (conversion, dissolution, creation). Finally, three 'transitional themes' are identified as essential components of a viable cooperative institution concerned with the incubation of 'social wealth'.

Step by step, Feral Art School is constructing a pathway through these themes. This is steered at a strategic level, but can already be identified in the testimonies of the students and tutors who are part of this cooperative adventure. For example, Tom began studying painting at Feral Art School 18 months ago. He describes the experience as "a breath of fresh air" and that "the workshops have filled me with so much enthusiasm and excitement". More significantly, there is demonstrable evidence that students like Tom are starting to become evidence of the catalytic principles which energise the routes in cooperative learning and the cocreation of social wealth. Tom:

> "Along with other participants I very much share the ambitions of the Feral Art School in offering us a space to further develop our painting skills and styles as well as offering us mentoring and support with our individual artwork".

Another student, Bruce, is a retired Lecturer in English from the University of Hull. He has taken three courses at Feral Art School, which have allowed him to develop a fledgling artistic practice. His testimony demonstrates a similar sense of solidarity and critical sensitivity to the broader aspects of social learning that underpin the project.

> "The three Feral Art School courses I have taken so far really opened the door to painting for me: the very first session in June 2019 was liberating in giving me for the first time a sense of just being able to enjoy using paint in itself. I have been painting for myself regularly ever since, as well as producing work in the classes, and was delighted to be part of the amazing exhibition in January 2020. The three artists leading the workshops have very different styles, approaches and ways of working and I've benefited immensely from all of them in ways that have been supportive, encouraging, inspiring and challenging all at once. I'm already looking forward to my next workshop when restrictions are lifted. And I am extremely pleased to be able to support the exciting and forward-looking project plan Feral has developed. The plans have an innovative vision engaging with the local community and offering pathways for individual and group artistic development. In the present difficult circumstances, it is admirable that the Feral Art School team is providing a positive view for the future and I am in wholehearted support of them".

Another student, Chris, states that the school has given him the opportunity for 'a belated first taste' of art education. Sushie's testimony evidences not only an enthusiasm for the courses but a developing sensitivity to the cooperative values and pedagogic reciprocity which underpin the institution. Sushie: Dobson

> "Working with Andi and Lindy, the print workshop leaders, has been amazing. They are both excellent artists as well as lovely people, great for making you think you can achieve things and being more confident, as well as being super generous in sharing their skills and talents".

Similarly, tutors view themselves as co-participants within the project, rather than the hierarchical tutor / student dynamic of the conventional art school. Dom:

"Working with Feral Art School as a mentor enables me to connect with other artists. I enjoy helping to develop their skills and cultivate new creative experiences. We create spaces for dialogue about contemporary arts and culture, with a diverse audience. The structure of Feral allows me to keep delivery content fresh, and relevant. As an artist-led initiative, the working environment is based on a genuine sense of mutual respect for each other's creative expertise and experience as artists".

Andi:

"As an artist and educator, I have worked for a range of organizations and institutions. Working with the Feral Art School is a very positive experience. Workshops are planned and delivered by practising artists. Participants sign up because they want to learn techniques and develop their ideas, and they produce great outcomes. Feral is a co-operative organisation, students can become members. The Feral equal opportunities policy means that people of limited means can still access and benefit from our courses. Feral Art School learning experiences are life enriching and encourage participants to explore their creative agenda.

Feral workshops are becoming more and more popular. Even though the Corona virus has worked against us, we have fully subscribed courses ready to start whenever this is possible".

We conclude with Andi's testimony as it not only demonstrates the collective belief in the cooperative values shared by all members of Feral Art School, but also demonstrates the institutional resilience and confidence which can be achieved through solidarity and mutual aid. Institutions like Feral Art School will become more and more vital in the reconfigured educational landscape, as will the underpinning principles of cooperative learning and social wealth which drive their success. At a time when a pandemic has accelerated change in all aspects of life, it is a good moment to reflect on what has been lost alongside the removal of art schools from provincial towns, and what might be gained by their reestablishment in progressive new forms. At their hearts, such initiatives could contribute to an understanding of the cultural value of art education, whilst shaping the social, cultural, political, civic, and romantic imaginary necessary for the health of democracy itself.

Fig. 4: Feral Art School Exhibition at (venue and date needed)

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