

**THE NOTTINGHAM TRENT UNIVERSITY  
SCHOOL OF ART AND DESIGN**

Proposal for the Masters of Arts Degree in FINE ART

By Registered Project

to be studied part-time

Name – SHAUN BELCHER

**Signed by Student: *Shaun Belcher***

Date: 4<sup>th</sup> January 2013

The Supervisor(s) has read the Proposal and confirms that it should be considered by the Registration Board as academically valid and viable.

Signed by Supervisor:

Date:

Signed by Supervisor:

Date:

**Title**

‘Perfect Maps and Imperfect Practice: Rethinking Frayling's categories.’

**Aim**

My aim is to explore notions of artistic research as defined by Sir Christopher Frayling (1993) in the Royal College Research Paper No.1. Specifically I will be interrogating the notion of ‘research for art and design’ as part of the current debate surrounding the efficacy of studio-based artistic research as being valid within the university system. I shall do this through both articles and corresponding cartoon practice.

**Brief description**

A textual and drawn practice based investigation into artistic research that will create both articles and drawn (cartoon, comic strip) analysis of the debate and contribute an original perspective on a much discussed area of current artistic research i.e. research about artistic research from a fresh perspective.

I will draw on contemporary debate in the field especially Elkins (2009, 2013), Mottram (2009) and Biggs (2008, 2003) which specifically relates to fine art but I will also draw on the wider art and design field.

## **Rationale**

### **Knowledge and understanding**

My current fine art practice is informed by a body of cartoon practice begun in 2005. This practice has been exhibited widely, published online and has illustrated a wider body of my critical writing on the subject of contemporary fine art practice, politics and pedagogy. The work shows a sustained and comprehensive understanding of the technique of cartooning and online dissemination for agitprop ends.

It is my intention to develop this body of work through engagement with the debate over validity in artistic research which has been current since Frayling's definitions were first published in 1993. This engagement will lead to my direct involvement in online debate ( through social media and blogging) and research conference attendance and presentation of both text and visual essays (this involvement is detailed later in this proposal under 'Content' section and includes national conference presentations and publication). This will place my work firmly in the wider international art critical and drawing, design and theory research environment.

My approach is original and possibly unique in combining cartoon and written versions of arguments in linked documents. My understanding of techniques of research will be greatly enhanced by a very close examination of the theoretical underpinning of the arguments for and against practice as research.

### **Skills, qualities and attributes**

The uniqueness of my proposal will demonstrate a very high level of self-direction and high level problem solving. Its' very uniqueness will mean that support will at times come from both inside and outside the University in online debate e.g. James Elkins, Mark Staff Brandl and Hilary Robinson. I also value highly the specific supervisory help that will be given within the institution in terms of drawing (Deborah Harty) and pedagogy (Carol Jones)

The proposal being both written and drawn will show a high level of effective communication across a variety of media: Drawn, written, web interactive and film animation (possibly).

This approach will create further opportunities both as part of CPLD within my institution and outside as my professional research career develops.

## **Content**

The core of my proposed practice will be the drawing of cartoons analysing contemporary fine art and design art research theory. This will take a variety of forms. Paper and pen, canvas and paint and possibly animated sequential comic strips, (stand-alone images sequentially filmed in the manner of the RSA animated series). The imagery will examine the specific question highlighted in the title above ('Perfect Maps and Imperfect Practice: Rethinking Frayling's categories.')

- How does contemporary artistic research view itself and debate problematic paradigms?
- Can an art object that contains both figures and text convey research theory? Thus disproving Frayling's doubts over 'research FOR art and design'
- Can sequential art/ graphic novels be a carrier of art theory or are they simply illustrative vehicles for conventional art theory narrative?
- How is meaning and reading of the work affected by altering:
  - the medium through which it is produced – animation V drawn sequences, book publication?
  - the textual content of the work – can theory be explicated through cartoon?
  - the context in which it is shown – i.e. research conferences V art exhibition

In order to interrogate this I intend to:

- Engage in an on-going dialogue with my personal contacts, specific subject supervisors and peers as a means of constantly challenging the focus of my practice, questioning my central concerns and refining the criticality of my approach to both practical and theoretical aspects of the study.
- Research into the practice of relevant sequential and cartoon artists, specifically in the first instance contemporary artists whose concerns centre on questions of art theory, cartooning and politics such as Mark

Staff Brandl, Pablo Helguera, Saul Steinberg and David Shrigley. The first two of whom I am in direct contact with and will hopefully provide interview material.

- Create a sequence of online reflective journal entries detailing both practice and research theory as it is investigated and cross-currents in thought between textual and studio practice.

These will be available online at the following URLs:

**Blank Canvas:** A reflective journal of my daily studio practice.

<http://www.shaunbelcher.com/canvas/>

**Graphic Research:** A reflective journal detailing my excavations of art theory and theory about theory.

<http://www.shaunbelcher.com/research/>

- Exhibit the work as it develops, both as smaller individual, and mixed (MA peer) exhibitions at NTU (Staff Shows), as well as seeking international, national and online outlets for the work.
- Moogee the Art Dog cartoons have been exhibited in the following venues since 2008:

2012 October – Nottingham Open : Castle Nottingham

2012 October – Crocus Gallery Nottingham : Drawing Project show.

2012 September 10th – 11th Drawing Research Network curated Digital Exhibition to coincide with DRN Conference.

2012 March March 5th -16<sup>th</sup> NCN Gallery Nottingham in aid of Epilepsy Action and National Doodle Day

2010 November 27th – December 4th ‘The Public is not Invited’ Group Show Nottingham (part of Sideshow to Brit Art Show).

2008 July 17 – 20, Group show ‘Penned’ Artscape, Baltimore U.S.A.

in the Pinkard Gallery, Bunting Center, Maryland Institute College of Art.

2008 July – Moogee the Art Dog at Goldfactory Contemporary, Nottingham.

- Engage and participate in research culture on national and international level:

To this end I have so far contributed to the following conferences and publications during 2012.

2012 September 12th – 14th – Drawing and Cognition Research Group– STEAM Conference – Wimbledon School of Art – Invited artist (Drawings created to be published in TRACEY journal proceedings)(International)

2012 September 11th and 12th – Drawing Research network Conference 2012 – Loughborough University - (Moogee V Frayling cartoon strip created to be published in TRACEY journal proceedings)(National)

2012 September 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> – Practice makes Perfect Symposium: Swansea Metropolitan University – (Paper 'Grey Ravens: Rethinking Frayling's categories submitted to Sage Young Voices Journal publication)(National)

2012 March 2nd and 3rd Mostyn Arts Centre – 'With Humorous Intent' – Symposium – guest speaker – subject Moogee the Art Dog.(National)

- I intend to submit papers to research journals on a continuous basis in 2012- 2013 – especially related to drawing and art theory.
- I have also been invited to participate in the STEAM conference in September 2013 at Teacher's College Columbia University New York.
- Ethical dimensions: Consider what possible implications there might be with regards to the work focussing on power relationships and politics within institution I work in. Consider career implications of more 'extreme' work being displayed?

**Submission**

I intend to submit a coherent body of cartoons and published works including related texts both provisional and published academic journal articles and images. Some of the cartoon images may arise as the final outcome of a film/animated process in which their creation documented and these could be shown separately as moving image if successful.

As noted, the Reflective Journal will be a collection my own interrogations of working practice and theory and of online questions and answers with practising artists and art theoreticians whose concerns are in line with my area of study. This will include my interview with Matthew Collings published in matter Magazine issue 1 (December 2011) and an on-going sequence of Craft V Content debates published online. This will be presented in an edited blog format including a summary detailing how these responses have critically influenced my understanding of my practice.

**Learning outcomes:**

**This is a detailed mapping to the Learning Outcomes detailed in the module specification for the Research and Context Module.**

**Knowledge and understanding.****After studying this module you should be able to:**

Articulate a project that demonstrates potential for advanced research in your subject title. Communicate preliminary research findings/work in progress through a formal presentation:

This project combines art theory, pedagogy and cartooning at an advanced level. James Elkins stated that some of the cartoons would have been published in his second edition of *Artists with Phds* (2013) if he had seen them before the book went to press. The presentation of the 'Cartoon Research Paper' 'Grey Ravens: Beyond Frayling' at the Drawing Research Network conference drew a comment from the head of Postgraduate Research that it 'bold and brave' and 'would qualify as suitable material for a PhD' at Loughborough University.

Demonstrate the ability to conduct advanced research independently, in support of a Learning Agreement that demonstrates your comprehensive understanding of research methodologies, techniques, ethical considerations and personal development needs.

This proposal not only includes a body of fine art practice but a forensic examination through drawing of the status and arguments in current artistic research (Pre REF) and an examination of independent art practice and its relationship to that theoretical underpinning. It links directly to future course development as part of CPLD (Visual Thinking M.A. /Animation B.A) and takes into consideration ethical limits of agitprop and institutional criticism when working in such an institution. It does not however view this as a constraint on valid critical exegesis.

Demonstrate subject specific knowledge, an understanding of the broader contexts of your subject and locate your research within wider theory and practice.

The proposal is located within a large body of theoretical research on the validity of artistic research which is international in scope. The depth of my subject knowledge and context is shown by the outside connections I have built and the level of those



interactions. Recognition at conference level by DRN and the International Drawing and Cognition Network has reinforced this validity.

**Skills, qualities and attributes. After studying this module you should be able to:**

Evidence your development as a reflective practitioner by critically evaluating your work and the work of others.

Moogee the art dog is an art critical animal and does little else than critically evaluate, construct and deconstruct art theory and contemporary practice through cartoons and writing.

Show evidence of a comprehensive understanding and management of advanced research, technical and professional skills that will support the intended project and Learning Agreement outcomes.

See above for high level indicators which include conference presentations, peer review, magazine articles, exhibitions etc etc Interrogating the very processes of teaching and evaluating artistic research presupposes a deeper knowledge of those processes. I believe I have explored this area in depth and will continue to delve deeper throughout the project.

### **The methodological framework**

The written theoretical research will consider a range of secondary sources in particular documents relating to discussing Frayling's categories.

This will constitute an in depth literature review (see Bibliography).

My approach will be qualitative. There may be some element of action research if required. Mostly I will take a traditional social sciences qualitative approach to the material. At times I will question this approach which common in practice-led research as being 'anti-scientific'.

### **Resource implications**

#### **Supervision:**

- Personal Supervisor – Deborah Harty (drawing)  
Programme Leader and second supervisor (pedagogy)– Carol Jones.

#### **Physical Resources:**

- Possible photographic studio based work utilising Canon camera, studio lighting for single-frame animation.
- Technical assistance with the use of both camera and lighting in the studio setting to create a single-frame animation.
- Technical assistance with the above
- Library Access – books (interlibrary loans as necessary); journals

**Further resources:** I have a painting studio which I can use and see no other resource implications in my proposal.

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## **Timetable**

**(This is of necessity vague due to the problems of taking a year of absence and subsequent illness)**

The MA by registered project will be completed part-time over two years, commencing September 2010 and with completion in July 2013 (leave of absence 2011-12).

### **September 2010-July 2011**

The Research and Context period will include:

- RESEARCH: Tertiary and secondary research by literature, documents online and discussion through social media (e.g. facebook threads) books, articles.
- Primary research conducting online interviews (Matthew Collings and Craft V Research).
- Completion of Registered Project Proposal and Learning Agreement.

The Development period:

- IDEATION: Primary Research via practice, visualisation, observation. (Moogee exhibitions)
- Further secondary research.
- Writing articles and submission to journals and conferences. ( September 2012)

### **September 2012-July 2013**

Project realisation and presentation:

- COMMUNICATION: Primary Research via display of practice, visualisation, observation.
- ELICITATION: Exposition via display at M.A. show and evaluation of responses (primary research).

