

## Feature

### Remembering the Bauhaus

**Playing by Eye: Modes of Expression (Emma Hardaker and Bobbi Rae)**

**16 November 2018 –14 February 2019.**

**Leeds Arts University, Vernon Street Exhibition**

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Leeds Arts University's Vernon Street Campus has a long and significant history in the development of art and design education. In the 1950s (a significant point within British Modernism), a model of art and design education was developed that was derived from the Bauhaus 1922 curriculum. Evidence for this can be found in the historical records created at the time of the principle Eric Taylor (from 1956 to 1970) which remain in the University archive. These ideas continue to be important in contemporary art and design education and practice. Most recently an exhibition, *Playing by Eye* created by Modes of Expression, revisits some of the early ideas about visual language, play and expressionism. Their work exists to instil within the viewer a sense of joy and wonder through the juxtaposition of abstract shape and lyrical colour.

Writers, teachers and practitioners from the 1950s and 1960s like Eric Taylor, Alan Davie and Roger Coleman have remained important and relevant today. Such historical sources also provide a link to earlier Bauhaus models and philosophies of education. The original Bauhaus principles relating to play and experimentation were very influential in developing the Basic Design course at Leeds. A period of time where a student could explore visual language and materials before they specialised continues to be valued by educators and is fundamental to the current Pre-BA Foundation course.

Evidence for this can be seen in a document found in the University archives called *The Developing Process: Work in Progress, Towards a New Foundation of Art Teaching* developed at the department of Fine Art, Kings College, Durham University New Castle Upon Tyne and at Leeds, published in 1959. This document explains and expands the philosophy of art and design education dominant in the Art school and in particular the Foundation Course in Art and Design. In 1959, Coleman said, "As a concept of Art education, basic design has its origins in the Bauhaus particularly in the pedagogic work of [Paul] Klee and [Wassily] Kandinsky and the teaching programme of Johannes Itten".

The artist's own playful exploration of the formal elements of design such as line, form, colour and space was seen as the basis of art and design education. The artist could discover for themselves through experimentation the characteristics of their own visual and tacit knowledge. One key feature of the philosophy at Leeds in the 1950s was that it sought to eradicate the boundaries between fine and applied art promoting a common language that is the basis of both art and design disciplines.

Alan Davie who was a Gregory Fellow from the University of Leeds explained the emphasis on an individual's creative journey. He wrote in 1959 detail about how he taught drawing and in doing so described a model of experiential learning.

To demonstrate the dynamic of the creative force I usually begin with simple exercises in pure idealess activity: direct putting down of black marks, with no end in view, purposeless and aimless. Strangely enough the student finds that to work without thought requires a great deal of mental discipline and it is some time before he can achieve an image without the intermediary of reasoning.

Here, the characteristics of the materials were explored without the tutor prescribing what the correct way of using the charcoal was. Rather than imitating though the copying of another artist's style or mimicking a skill learnt though watching a demonstration, the student was finding his or her own creative method. By working with no end in view, the action of mark-making could be considered almost with a sense of *being in the moment*.

Hardaker and Rae claim in their exhibition flyer that their recent exhibition is based on the traditions of mural painting and kinetic sculpture. However, it also resonates with a belief that colourful abstract forms can bring delight to the viewer. The exhibition celebrates the creative process based on experimentation and play where their form of expressionism is based on in creating order out of many visual possibilities.

Known for their vibrant work sited around Leeds, it is appropriate that Hardaker and Rae chose to install their recent exhibition in the Art School. Their visually harmonic artwork and approach talks to the rich history of the space.