

Approaching creativity playfully

The "Open Studio" at the Keramikschule Landshut

Annette Ody



The "Open Studio" at the Keramikschule in Landshut exists for about a year.

The unoccupied caretaker's flat at the College provided space for easels, canvases and paints. It all started when I was working on my own pictures in my principal's studio in the evenings and at weekends and students asked me if they could join me.

A group of interested students from all classes quickly formed, and I took pleasure in exploring painting with them. I now offer one day a week from 4-10 p.m. when they can become actively involved with art and painting. The concept behind it developed almost automatically:

Work in the Open Studio is intended to be extra-curricular and absolutely without restrictions. It is intended to make possible the quest for the students' very own formal vocabulary. Working in relaxed fashion with

paint on a white canvas in a stress-free environment. No advance pressure to perform. But criticism, some of it blunt, from other participants.

The atmosphere in the studio is domestic. In the caretaker's kitchen, students cook, bake and chat, and prepare for the next day's test in chemistry or material technology. Almost incidentally a piecing glance examines the fresh brushstrokes in a picture that in a moment will continue to be painted.

I participate in the work process myself, working on my own pictures, but only advising when asked to do so.

What is particularly profitable for everyone is the process of nonverbal learning from each other. Sometimes seeing and learning merge, without a great deal of talk. How simple learning can sometimes be...

Visitors to the school can now see many of our students' works in all of the publicly accessible rooms at the school. But they are not always exhibited in a satisfactory state of completion. The works sometimes prove to be difficult, as if wishing to remain in a dialogue with their creators, who between studio evenings, pass their pictures by a hundred times a week on their way from one class to another. The process of creation continues subliminally true visual communication develops imperceptibly, along with a lively filling up of inner voids and learning deficits and a potential sensitising towards artistic perception – without any effort, which humans at play otherwise have to invest in order to be able to learn.

In academic circles and in teaching art, developing a capacity for "thinking visually" is often discussed. The requirement is to develop an ability to achieve transcultural, functioning visual communication, working autonomously, reacting with team skills even in the individualistic environment of learning in the production of art.

Learners should have a high

degree of ability to approach complex questions in a problem-oriented fashion; they should have a quick grasp and understanding of all situations, even ambiguous or seemingly unrealistic ones, but they should also always be conscious of the environment, and permanently able to develop creative, original and ingenious ideas also employing social skills to dedicate themselves to the problems of others. All of this with at best meagre student grants. In many cases, our students spend their Saturdays and evenings at the supermarket check-out of filling shelves, give extra coaching, give care to people with special needs, work in organic food shops and distribute flyers all over town. Parallel to an eight-hour day taping into the wonderful world of ceramics, this is the financial side.

According to Rudolf Arnheim (Prof. Dr. em., Psychology of Art, Harvard University, USA 1904 – 2007), a person working artistically is usually trained to retain a clear orientation in highly complex perception situations and is able to solve problems clearly and creatively.

Yes! Professor Arnheim is right: our students demonstrate this repeatedly!

What I find most admirable is that many talents discover themselves in the Open Studio and none of the experience gathered there in experiments with colour, form and composition go unused. A transfer of artistic experience and achievement from the Open Studio to further work in the field of ceramics is a gift to the future, almost *en passant*. For me personally as the initiator of the Open Studio, it is always a very great pleasure and never, absolutely never superfluous stress – I can state that unequivocally.

Thus we can agree with Anastasius Grün, as well as Anton Alexander Graf von Auersperg (1806-1876) when he sings in somewhat simpler terms of the learning and working process described in high-flown academic terms above: "Bei der Arbeit magst Du singen, das verleiht der Arbeit Schwingen" – "If you sing at work, it makes the job fly".

Annette Ody, M.A. in art history and literature, master ceramist and principal of the Staatliche Fachschulen für Keramik, Landshut





ILLUSTRATIONS - l. to r.

- 1st row -
Judith Niedhart, Korbinian Köppl, Friederike Dux
- 2nd row -
Lilli Gaza, Johannes Schmidt, Marieke Riegel
- 3rd row -
Anne Welch, Julian Pittrof
- 4th row -
Verena Brummer, Melike Öztürk, Camil von Hofacker
- 5th row -
Carolin Immerz, Anja Wolfsteiner, Bianca Watzek





Melike Öztürk

The "Open Studio" at the Keramikschule Landshut

Tuesdays, shortly after classes finish, around 4.15 p.m., participants in the "Open Studio" at the Keramikschule know that it is that time again: "Ladies and gentlemen, the Studio is open now!"

The PA announcement can be heard in every classroom. the Studio is the converted caretaker's flat on the top floor of the school building. Canvases and easels are set up even in the bathroom and the kitchen of the former caretaker's accommodation. About 15 students from all years of the college make use of the opportunity to get involved with painting.

Painting, which otherwise has no room within the strictures of the crowded timetable. But workplaces for painting and experiments in colour are not only set up from bathroom to kitchen, serving to develop an artistic visual sense. Dancing also goes on in the Open Studio. In the caretaker's former dining room, there is a large mirror, in front of which students practice tap-dancing: students at our college can physically experience the art of movement in free tap-dancing lessons with Marion and Regine, two dancing teachers who also practice here themselves.

"Anyone who studies dance and learns how to move has a sense of design," is the opinion of our principal, Annette Ody, who has organised the painting and dance classes since coming into office. And success has proved her right: movement happens not only in dancing and in painting on what for us are unusually large canvases. I would especially like to emphasise that parallel to the act of painting, an open creative process is set in motion that strengthens the sense of solidarity among us students. We find new ways to relate to each other. Perhaps this is because an extra-curricular structure has intentionally been chosen for the

ILLUSTRATIONS - l. to r.

*1st row - Fanny Jentsch, Karoline Pracher. 2nd row - Elisabeth Pracher, Frederike Ahrendt, 3 row - Katharina Mellinghoff
bottom - Miriam Gebauer, Julia Himmelmann*

Open Studio. There is no bell to interrupt a creative phase, no pressure to perform in the conventional sense blocks the flow of ideas. We arrive at about 4.30 and go at 10.00 p.m. During this time, we cook, feast ourselves, chat and paint. But in the main, we work and experiment with colours. And this means hard work on the picture and, especially being critical of ourselves: nobody who is there misses what is going on on the canvases. "Dead paint from the tube", as Frau Ody puts it, is not allowed. We experience astonishing things with pigments and the infinite variety of colour harmonies in representations of peppers, landscapes, portraits, plants and nonrepresentational subjects. But we also learn about going to the limits, and what it is like not to be able to go on and to have come to the end of our current artistic resources. This last is particularly hard to deal with. But here we can learn how we do deal with it. This phase is transitional, a bridge to the next stage of learning something new. For instance, there are books lying around, art books in which we can take orientation from the work of other painters. Per Kirkeby and Chaim Soutine, for instance, are our permanent companions on our journey in art.

Towards the end, there is a collective critique, usually of one picture that has reached a special stage or has found completion in the course of this evening. This could easily be a picture by Frau Ody herself, who thus opens herself up to our dangerous criticism.

By now the all of the corridors and the entrance to the college are hung with our pictures from the Open Studio, catching the visitors' attention. There have already been enquiries about exhibitions.

Melike Öztürk, b. in Roth, Germany in 1974. Turkish citizen. Second year student at the Keramikschule Landshut. Before training as a ceramist, she trained to be a nurse and translates books from German to Turkish.



ILLUSTRATIONS - l. to r.

1st row - Sofia Braun, Lisa Morgenstern. 2nd row - Oliver Pflug, Katharina Raddaz. 3rd row - Thomas Auer, Michael Choubow, bottom - Vanessa Andronic, Matthias Hien.