

ARE 6049: History of Teaching Art
Independent Project: Art in Daily Living
Karissa Ferrell
Summer A, 2012

Art in Daily Living: Exploring the Historic Relationship Between 'Fine' Art, Education, & Visual Culture

Introduction to the project:

With websites like *Pinterest* and *Etsy*, and magazines like *Martha Stewart's Living* and a host of others, people have maintained or regained interest in handmade and unique wares that were once eclipsed by industry and mass production. People want to learn the skills their grandmothers, grandfathers, dads and mothers never had the time to teach them. They also want to connect socially through these art-making processes. I propose this phenomenon is both "old" and "new," and has ebbed and flowed through the history art and education. For this project I chose to explore the historic connections between 'fine' art and daily living. I created an interactive timeline that tracked the interaction and influences between art history, art education, and visual culture (or artifacts from everyday life). Mapping these incidences of "art in daily living" I discovered a few periods when art history inspired visual culture and art educators took notice and followed suite. In general I noticed that art education lagged behind artistic innovation and visual culture served to reinforce the values of both artists and educators through fashion and product design, advertisement, and magazine illustrations and instructions, which informed viewers of how to make or get the latest style.

Throughout much of art history and art educational theories, elitist attitudes have succeeded in separating 'fine' art from the 'craft' or 'low' art of everyday. Occasionally through history there have also been points of synergy between art education, visual culture, and artists.

I began my research by scouring Stankiewicz's (2001) book *Roots of Art Education Practice*. I found reoccurring terminology that connected art education to everyday life, for example *manual training*, *industrial drawing*, *decorative drawing*, *arts*

and crafts movement, etc. I connected these art educational theories to their place in time and searched for examples of visual culture and works by American artists. Once I plotted these findings I was able to establish trends or groupings of incidences where artists and art educators used subjects and techniques related to everyday life. From the collection of visual resources I began to see strong connections emerging in the art of the 1930s, 1960s, and today. For my final project I produced an interactive timeline to display these artifacts with links to articles, images, and videos. The website also allowed me to share my findings through social media.

I can't help but pose this research question and analyze my findings from a contemporary perspective. The resurgence of handmade "craft" trends has impacted today's artists and visual culture. My students are influenced by D-I-Y blogs and as an educator I struggle between wanting my lessons to be based on 'traditional' 'fine' art approaches and wanting to connect with the D-I-Y visual culture that my students are influenced by. My purpose for researching this topic also includes tracing the roots of contemporary trends like "*yarn bombing*," as well as establishing the points in time where art education became disconnected from everyday life. Like any topic plotted through time, ebb and flow cyclical patterns emerge. The following section is a summary and analysis my observations.

Summary of Findings and Observations:

Stankiewicz (2001) writes about how American art education emerged initially as a means for industry and innovation internationally. In 1880, Walter Smith was influential in bringing the everyday world of industry into the art classroom. Those who understood how to create and read drawings had advantages in the growing industrial economy. Schools enforced industrial drawing and manual training in an effort to build international trade after the Civil War, by making textiles, furniture, and decorative objects more stylish, tasteful, artful... and therefore more competitive in the international market (Stankiewicz, 2001).

The second "spike" on the timeline was between 1860 and 1910 with the international "*Arts and Crafts Movement*," which had a lasting impact in America through the 1930s. The core values of this movement were in reaction to the

impoverished state of the decorative arts at that time. Industrialization had assumed priority over aesthetic appreciation, forerunners of this movement sought a balance between form and function, refined traditional craftsmanship, elegant folk revival stylistics, and a connection between art and everyday life (Jirousek, 1995). The leaders of the movement were essentially anti-industrial and advocated for economic and social reform against the working conditions.

Artists Frank Lloyd Wright, William Morris, and the architect Charles Voysey were influential in establishing and spreading their values through their art. Simultaneously, the growth of magazines like “*The Craftsman*,” “*Ladies Home Journal*,” “*House Beautiful*,” and “*Better Homes and Gardens*” spread these aesthetic values and encouraged people to participate in their own crafts, sewing, and home decorations. Looking back at the history of art, a few other noteworthy movements began in America between 1910s and 1930s that linked art to daily life, specifically the *Ashcan School of Painters*, *Dadaism*, and *Documentary Photography*. Each of these movements sought to challenge the authority of the academic art-world.

Ashcan painters, many of which had backgrounds as political cartoonists and magazine illustrators depicted mundane moments of local scenery and popular culture in a style greatly influenced by *Impressionism* and *Early Modernism* (Doss, 2002). *Documentary Photography*, was anything but neutral in the 1930s. Artists like Walker Evans, Jacob, Arnold Genthe, and Dorothea Lang produced images that caught the public eye and gracefully exposed the dire reality of life after the Great Depression. Through his camera lens, Evans captured American life as it was. His “principal subject was the vernacular—the indigenous expressions of a people found in roadside stands, cheap cafés, advertisements simple bedrooms, and small-town main streets” (metmuseum.org, 2004).

French-American *Dadaists*, Marcel Duchamp and Man Ray aimed to challenge the very notion of the separation between art and life by producing a series of everyday objects or ‘*readymades*,’ which shocked audiences and critics alike. The impact of this art historical moment would not fully be recognized in art education and visual culture until *Neo-dada* and *Pop* artist Robert Rauschenberg created his ‘combines’ to work in the “gap between art and life” in the late 1950s (Doss, 2002).

The 1960s-1980s saw yet another “spike” in the connections between art and daily life. Spurred on by the *Neo-dadaists*, artist Andy Warhol impacted the art-world and visual culture in the 1960s with his *Pop Art* movement. Warhol again searched the mundane realm of everyday life for his subject matter, choosing to represent soup cans, soda bottles, and celebrities in a way that was visually exciting and easily recognizable.

Warhol — like the *Dadaist* before him — challenged the conventional values of the art-world such as originality, authenticity, and skill. His work was met with much art-world criticism, however, the public loved it because they could identify with the subject matter, it was light hearted, and didn’t require special knowledge to understand. Warhol’s style quickly entered mainstream fashion and product design. What he had originally appropriated was quickly being reabsorbed into visual culture, which helped to define the modern era in fashion and consumer culture. Young ladies were encouraged to make their own clothing and the D-I-Y trend continued through the counter cultural “hippie” era of the 1970s. Comic book illustrations and the underground *Graffiti Art* movement were also prime examples of art entering into daily living.

At this time, few art educators were up to speed with visual culture. Vincent Lanier rants about the disparaging state of art education in various critical essays written in the mid 60s and 70s. He makes a plea to art educators to step up to the plate and realign curriculum to reflect technological developments. He even challenges educators to define the possible applications for technology in art (Lanier, 1966). Many educators maintained the status quo emphasis on formalism, elements and principles of design, aesthetic appreciation, and standardized curriculum rather than teaching their students to use video technology, *readymade* objects or make screen print fabric designs.

Looking at contemporary art and visual culture over the last 20 years it is easy to see how the D-I-Y craze has grown into commercially viable businesses like *Etsy*, various handmade craft fairs such as *Maker’s Faire* and *Patchwork Indie Arts & Crafts Festival*, online D-I-Y tutorials like *Instructables.com*, as well as countless blogs and art discussion forums. Today’s fine artists are still crossing boundaries into everyday life, for example “yarn bombing,” Andrea Zittel’s “Pods” and her “*Institute of Investigative Living*.” Businesses employ artists and designers to create bold and courageous new products and urban spaces; many of which are focused on sustainability and clean/green

energy.

It seems the future is bright for art and daily life to continue thriving together. However, I would argue that today art education still lags behind the innovations of ‘fine’ artists and a cultural link between art and everyday life.

Concluding Thoughts:

Today, more than ever before, ‘high’ art and ‘low’ art are merging with daily living through the resurgence of craft fairs and the increasing economy for handmade goods. People are again choosing to buy and use aesthetic things that were not produced by machines, objects that were handmade with care and time, objects that represent local aesthetics, as well as, those exchanged through fair trade with international craftsmen. It is clear that American culture desires handmade wears and yet most Americans are not getting the art education they want (Claringbold, 2008). Many people were never taught how to knit, sew, build furniture, or do metalwork; these skills are sometimes passed down through families. As recently as the 1990’s these ‘applied arts’ are largely absent from school curriculum. In order to learn these skills people have had to teach themselves. Technology and social networking have served to bridge this gap through D-I-Y blogs, self-publishing, online tutorials, open-sourced pattern sharing through sites like *Thingiverse.com*, and sharing through social bookmarking sites which are often blocked to classroom teachers.

After researching “Art in Daily Living” I am confident that it has both a historic and contemporary place in curriculum. I believe the interest in decorating and beautifying ones’ surroundings and making art that is accessible to the masses should remain an aspect of art curriculum and it is my hope that I can inspire my students to see transforming possibilities all the things they encountered everyday.

Project Link:

<http://www.tiki-toki.com/timeline/entry/47484/Art-and-Daily-Living/>

References and Works Cited:

Claringbold, C. (2008). Parents teach art: A DIY approach to elementary school art

education. Retrieved from <http://www.etsy.com/blog/en/2008/parents-teach-art-a-diy-approach-to-elementary-school-art-ed/>

Doss, E. (2002). *Twentieth century American art*. Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press (pg. 35-51, 68-72, 140-146).

Jirousek, C. (1995) "The arts and crafts movement". Retrieved from <http://char.txa.cornell.edu/art/decart/artcraft/artcraft.htm>

Lanier, V. (1966). Newer media and the teaching of art. *Art Education*, 19(4) 4-8.

Unknown. (2004). "Walker Evans (1903–1975)". In *Heilbrunn timeline of art history*. The Metropolitan Museum of Art Department of Photographs. Retrieved from http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/evan/hd_evan.htm

Stankiewicz, M. A.(2001). *Roots of art education practice*. Worcester, MA: Davis Publications (pg. 45-83).