# Reflections on Art Education

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## Introduction

This essay examines the recent curriculum reform of the Rotterdam University’s Willem de Kooning Academy within a tradition of Western art education. It is quite clear to us that the professions related to Western art education programmes are currently undergoing major transformations; perhaps for the first time in history, there is no obvious path toward a new professional practice with its own clear rules and visual conventions. Art education has always been linked to prevailing norms within the professional practice; therefore art schools were able to establish institutional and educational practices which in turn had a stabilising influence on the professions. This is clearly no longer the case in the 21st century.

During the past few decades, Western art education has been unable or unwilling to adapt sufficiently to shifting economic and cultural realities on one hand, and on the other hand to the new technological requirements which its graduates must face. Thus these graduates have often been insufficiently prepared to face market conditions, and ill-equipped to contribute in a meaningful way to the rapid developments in the communications industry. Other education programmes outside the field of art education have emerged to fill this void, but they have done so without the critical-artistic perspective characteristic of art education, which is necessary in order to arrive at a meaningful design practice. Thus, mass communication and internet technologies have come to be dominated by technical formats and standards. Furthermore, shifting social relationships have changed the nature (even the very definition) of the public, and of the need for artistic production. The consumer is increasingly co-creator; do-it-yourself attitudes and methods are challenging the traditional role of the expert, as well as the cult of the unique; meanwhile, service design is becoming as important as product innovation.

Art education will have to embrace a radical transformation if it is to go on playing a meaningful role in this changing world. The new curriculum of the Willem de Kooning Academy (WdKA), Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences, implemented in all of its education programmes from September 1, 2013 onwards, is a major step in this direction. Within the community of art education programmes, the WdKA’s new curriculum stands out as one which specifically addresses contemporary challenges facing art education.

This essay begins with a brief historical overview of art education, describing various schools and their relationship with the professional practice and the world at large; then we shall describe some important characteristics of the changing international professional practice of artists and designers; and finally, we will examine the resulting changes in the field of art education in Rotterdam, as well as further changes yet to come.

## 1. Tradition

Historically there have been six main models or examples for art education. In chronological order these are:

The master-apprentice system

The Italian Renaissance academy, and subsequently the Académie des Beaux-Arts

19th-century arts and crafts education

Bauhaus

Black Mountain College

Cal Arts, Los Angeles

These are all iconic examples, as they profoundly influenced the way art (and later also design) was experienced and appreciated at important turning points in history; they played a major role in announcing the arrival of a new historical period, and in establishing standards and values of artistic representation for those periods. Since World War I, the accelerating succession of historical periods in Western culture and society has meant that, while successive schools have been internationally influential, they have been so for increasingly brief periods.

However, all of these schools have made lasting contributions to the current system of art education.[[1]](#footnote-1)

### 1.1 Antiquity and Middle Ages

The master-apprentice relationship, which already existed in the Antique period and was institutionalised during the Medieval period into the guild system, was based on the prestige and authority of the master as a highly-skilled practitioner of his trade. The artistic profession had a well-defined body of stylistic and aesthetic conventions, as well as an established set of technical skills in which the master was expected to be proficient. The apprentice (and in a later phase of his ‘study’, the journeyman) learned his master’s trade through unquestioning imitation. The apprentice could even, under the master’s supervision, contribute substantially to artworks being produced under the master’s name. In this period in history, originality was not a desired quality, nor was the inclusion of personal, idiosyncratic or otherwise expressive visual elements. Reproduction and emulation, and working in the style of a well-known example, were not perceived as a lack of artistic vision, imagination or proficiency, but rather as a demonstration of one’s mastery of the proper form and style. One did not wish to break with tradition, but to belong to it. Art in the present-day sense did not exist: creative intellectual labour was the privileged domain of the philosophical sciences, and of music and poetry. Visual art was ‘merely’ a craft.

Traces of the master-apprentice model can still be found in contemporary art education: for example, the relationship between teacher and student within the relatively sheltered environment of the classroom; or in contemporary educational systems, particularly in Germany, where there is a tradition of students working under renowned artists, according to their specific instructions and often through the intermediary of their assistants.

The master-apprentice model, based on the assumption that artistic proficiency can be learned through imitation of a renowned master, was predominant from the Medieval and Renaissance periods up until the aristocratic culture of the Baroque period. These were rigidly regulated societies with clearly established social classes. Acceptable modes of thought were dictated by the religious and aristocratic classes, and there was no upward social mobility. The content of art was mostly determined by the church, which held that all worldly reality was subordinate to a higher religious reality.

### 1.2 Academy

The Académie des Beaux Arts, the first state-controlled institute for art education, was founded in France in the 17th century, in order to facilitate the realisation of an increasing number of state commissions for artworks. Artists were trained within a strict framework, so that they may absorb and master the one and only correct style. The Académie’s model was copied in most Western countries; the 18th-century Royal Academy of Arts in England was particularly renowned for its strict rules based on a consistent theoretical system, all of which now seem quite mannered and artificial. From the 17th century onwards, an increasingly strict separation between church and state meant that state institutions and aristocratic families held sway over political and social life, imposing their world view through academic doctrines.

Artists were valued for their technical proficiency. The artist’s apparent facility in realising an artwork, and his degree of erudition (as well as that of his patron, who commissioned the artwork), expressed through the complex symbolic iconography found in the artwork, were important factors in the definition of artistic mastery. By now, the natural sciences had begun to complement (rather than challenge) the traditional Christian view of the order of the world and the universe, resulting in a search for an elegant symbiosis between science and religion: the universal regularity of science was seen as a demonstration of the grace of the hand of God, who had created the world according to natural laws which men could learn and understand, all for the greater love and praise of God. But this was also a time of great upheaval: the Christian world was torn apart into two hostile factions. In the Catholic lands, the Baroque style aimed to inspire a sense of awe through grandiose artworks for a highly privileged upper class (opera houses, St. Peter's Basilica, Bernini's baldachins); whereas in Protestant bourgeois society, the reading, discussion and interpretation of the Bible led to a new interest in depictions of small-scale, realistic everyday life (Vermeer, Jan Steen).

In Catholic countries, the Academy encouraged its students to develop their ability to dazzle the crowd through their technical virtuosity and adventurous exploration of subject matter and composition, as long as the style and content remained within the strict societal norms and conventions of the day. The Protestant reformation, although founded on a rebellion against the old social order, was in fact artistically very conservative: here, the Medieval master-apprentice tradition was upheld, and the visual arts were seen as a useful tool for warning mortals against the dangers of thinking they might be any greater than God had made them; the only life which held any true value was the eternal afterlife, where all scores from this temporary earthly life would eventually be settled.

In the Romantic period, which began in the early 19th century, the Academy’s ideology of artistic virtuosity was further developed into the cult of artistic genius.[[2]](#footnote-2) The notion of the uniqueness of the individual went hand in hand with the emancipation of the citizen, who now occupied a social position which had previously been the privilege of the religious and aristocratic elite, according to a world order legitimised by a complex Christian ideology. In the new bourgeois society, on the other hand, politics and a teleological view of history served to provide various justifications for a new individual-centred (Western) world order. Though all of these justifications were based on the same general assumption that society could and should be engineered for the greater good of all, they also held contradictory views as to how exactly this society should function, as well as the means needed in order to achieve it.

With the Romantic movement, artists began for the first time to question the rules set by academia, and to overcome these rules by defining new ones, which in turn would also be set aside as other new movements took over.

The Academy’s lasting influence in the West can be seen mainly in today’s institutionalised and formalised education programmes, where teachers are expected to conform to established guidelines. Today’s art education programmes were largely developed in parallel with other higher education programmes, systematised and regulated according to models applicable to all approved establishments of higher education. The assumption here is that art is something that can be learned, so that a student’s academic career is a path leading directly to a professional practice at a certain established level, for which there are clear professional standards; the state is responsible for monitoring the quality of the curriculum and the application of these standards.

### 1.3 Arts and crafts

The industrial revolution and subsequent methods of mass production created a new demand for education on an unprecedented scale. The 1851 World Fair in London made it painfully clear that mechanically produced goods were ugly and lifeless. New craftsmen were needed, who could apply the new mechanical production techniques to the creation of quality products. In the cities, dignitaries sponsored clubs and associations where young workers could take evening classes in drawing and other techniques mainly focused on building.[[3]](#footnote-3) Though engineers seemed to have taken over the fields of design and building, their soulless products left much to be improved. This created a demand for arts and crafts schools as well as technical schools. Most of today’s art schools were originally founded either as 19th-century arts and crafts schools, or as 17th-century academies; the Beaux-Arts tradition generally operated on a higher social and intellectual level than the arts and crafts schools, which were more practically oriented as vocational training.

### 1.4 Modernism

In the first half of the 20th century, the Bauhaus in Germany and the Black Mountain College in the United States broke with academic tradition, adopting radical new principles focused on the development of individual artists with a personal stake in designing industrially produced goods for society as a whole. The Bauhaus emancipated applied design, bringing it to the level of fine art, while Black Mountain College was particularly influential in its adoption of anti-authoritarian principles; teachers were seen as mentors and facilitators, working together with the students to run the institute and generate income.

Here the Romanticist notion of artistic genius was combined with a belief in engineering modern society for the greater good; the artist was a visionary, marching in the front ranks (the origin of the term ‘avant-garde’) of the army of humanity on its way to a better future. Machines would soon liberate us all.

Something of these notions can still be found in today’s art education programmes: ideas that originated at a turning point in history, the dawn of the modern age, when new technologies, new methods of mass production and the rise of civil leadership led to broad social reforms, new labour and power relations, and new aesthetic values. The individual in his uniqueness needed to be liberated from any ruling class, or any class-determined world order. In the arts, the most intimately personal vision became a vehicle for the universal (as in expressionism); conversely, abstraction became a new aesthetic for the machine age (as in constructivism). On another level, Bauhaus and Black Mountain College brought about a symbiosis between elements of the Beaux-Arts and the Arts and Crafts traditions. Design was emancipated to the level of fine art; and all arts were expected to play a positive role in humanity’s struggle towards a better society, which was seen as the logical and inevitable conclusion of our historical journey, from primitive tribes to a fully developed and liberated universal community of humankind. The philosophy of the uniqueness of the individual had by now taken over all aspects of Western culture. Social sciences such as psychology and sociology were founded on a humanist belief in the primacy of the individual. In this world view, artists were the idealised embodiment of the notion that each human being is indeed individually unique and valuable.

### 1.5 The 1960s

The California Institute of the Arts (colloquially known as CalArts and located near Los Angeles) was founded in 1961 and is often described as a direct descendant of Black Mountain College. CalArts soon became famous for its anti-authoritarian stance which, in line with the countercultural ideals of the 1960s, held the promise of liberation from bourgeois morals and conventions. The power of creativity and the spirit of non-conformism would help bring about a better society than the one inherited from the previous generation. The optimism of social engineering had been permanently discredited by the horrors of World War II, while the fresh horrors of the Vietnam War demonstrated that only critically and creatively thinking individuals could manage to bring down the ‘evil commercial capitalistic’ world of the older generation.

The culmination of these ideals can be found in today’s art education: the teacher is a living example of an independent artist, who does not follow any specific style but instead creates artworks, grounded in concept development and a critical view of society, which seek to engage, challenge and respond. The student is expected to follow this example. Indeed, students tend to identify with artists who have rejected the established order of an older generation. The dialectic of this historical period has usually been defined in terms of young against old, rather than rich against poor.

### 1.6 The current situation

Today’s institutes for art and design education are focused on educating competent practitioners, by stimulating each student’s individual qualities and thus enabling them to make use of relevant techniques in order to produce original and meaningful contributions to the profession’s historical body of work.

Teachers do not work according to any predefined definition of art, not even their own, but rather challenge their students, discussing with them concepts which call into question artistic traditions as well as social norms and values.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Institutes which now serve as models for others, do so based on their curriculum and the professional reputation of their teaching staff. An institute’s success is not based on its educational philosophy and underlying definition of art, but on the subject matter of the curriculum and the reputation of its teachers and alumni. Examples include Goldsmiths, RISD, Central St. Martins and the Royal College of Art.

Now that there is no longer a single dominant conception of style, and that the gap between fine art and applied art no longer applies, one may well wonder which guidelines an institute and its students are expected to follow.

There are several ways in which an educational institute may be successful. The institute may have acquired a certain national or international reputation among the general public, based on the success of its alumni. In the long term, wide brand recognition in itself is no guarantee for actual quality: however, a good reputation often attracts good students and good teachers, allowing the institute to maintain its acquired reputation. An institute which loses this reputation, will have a long way to climb before it can re-establish its standing.

Some academies have acquired a reputation for a particular discipline or a specific group of teachers; the fashion design department in Antwerp is a good example of this. The department becomes a school within the school; the department’s fame can also reflect positively on other departments.

## 2. The changing 21st-century professional practice

2.1 Technology and collaborationNew technological, social and macro-economic developments have brought about extremely rapid developments in the professional practice of artists and designers.

New technologies and new modes of communication are having a profound effect on the nature, content, form and scope of art, design and education. The impact of new digital technologies cannot be overstated. The relatively low cost of using relatively complex technologies has not only democratised the production, distribution and consumption of art and design products; it has also democratised aesthetic values. New technologies and methods of communication are no longer the privileged domain of professionals, but are increasingly becoming available to amateurs and consumers. This has fundamentally altered the relationships between the artist/designer, the industry and the consumer.[[5]](#footnote-5) The artist/designer no longer enjoys a monopoly in the fields of aesthetics, design and (small-scale) production; the industry no longer holds a monopoly on (mass) production processes and marketing; consumers increasingly handle their own production and distribution. In all these changes, technological innovations (in both hardware and software) play a central role. The complexity of the techniques requires collaboration with experts, as well as new attitudes toward the mastery of technique. Students will be required to familiarise themselves with digital technologies, at least to the extent that they are aware of the possibilities and limitations of these technologies.

As the role of consumers in designing products goes on increasing, designers must learn to adopt co-creation processes. But even the integrated development of product service systems requires artists and designers to acquire new knowledge and skills.

However, research[[6]](#footnote-6) has shown that students of visual art education programmes in the Netherlands are primarily consumers of digital technologies and digital media, and tend not to indentify or present themselves as producers of digital products. Their knowledge of software and hardware is limited, as are their ambitions for production using digital media, production of digital products, and digital distribution.[[7]](#footnote-7)

Another remarkable conclusion of the aforementioned research is that students generally do not work collaboratively, and do not think of digital communication platforms as potential tools for working on collaborative projects or distributing digital products. This contrasts sharply with the professional practice, where loose and constantly shifting (digital and international) collaborations are increasingly becoming the norm. This in turn has led to a new understanding of authorship. Art and design are no longer an exclusive act by a single individual artist or designer; meanwhile, mass communication and private communication are becoming increasingly intertwined. The consequences of these changes reach far beyond the domain of the arts, affecting the curriculum of all higher education programmes.

### 2.2 Local / global

International relations are also rapidly changing. The dominant position of Western economy and culture is no longer taken for granted. As a result of ongoing crises compounded by failing governmental oversight, public confidence in the liberal capitalist foundations of the Western economic system, and in the ability of governments to solve current problems, has eroded. Meanwhile, shifting age demographics and perpetual national debts create an impression of passing on the bill to the next generation, with the risk of a new clash of generations. A rapidly growing global population, and the emergence of new economic world powers which have managed to free themselves from Western domination, are threatening to quickly deplete whatever natural resources are left (regardless of whether we will even be able to meet the growing demand for food). Millions go on flocking to the huge cities, where there always seems to be work and money for those who can find it, leaving the countryside to be plundered by corporations eager to exploit its soil and natural resources.

Shrinking confidence in governments and economies, together with increasing urbanisation, have already led many people to start seeking alternatives. These can be found in small informal communities which have developed their own barter systems (exchange of time and services) or even their own local currency. Also, an important shift can be observed in Western values. Economic growth and earning money are no longer the sole factors for determining status. Small-scale economies, sustainability and the search for a sense of purpose are increasingly seen as essential values, and publicly adopted even by large multinational corporations.

New technologies, specifically fablabs and 3D printing, hold the promise of enabling in the near future a shift in traditional production processes, from manual labour and assembly-line production towards local high-quality customised production. This in turn would signify a shift from the globally organised supply chain (with knowledge-based economies in wealthy countries and production industries in low-wage countries, linked together through global transportation and distribution industries) toward locally organised industries where on-demand conceptualisation and production are increasingly the norm.

2.3 The changing role of artists and designers  
The contemporary professional practice of artists and designers can be described as: hybrid, multidisciplinary and international. Hybrid, in the sense that artists and designers produce both fine art and applied work, and rely on fluctuating combinations of various sources of income: sales of independent work, work commissions, traditional employment, and subsidies.

Although most artists and designers have received specialist training, the professional practice of the overwhelming majority of artists and designers today is only partially specialised.

The multidisciplinary character of the professional practice is also multi-faceted; the artist or designer with specialised knowledge and skills may be part of a multidisciplinary team of artists, designers and/or other specialists; the artist or designer may be a generalist, working with various media or in various disciplines; the artist or designer may assume different roles, depending on the nature of the task, within teams collaborating on projects; or, the artist or designer may function as an equal partner in a co-creation process with a client from a different discipline or sector.

The international nature of the professional practice is largely based on the speed and global range of modern communication media; artists and designers are able to connect worldwide, 24 hours a day, and to collaborate using digital communication platforms; furthermore, they tend to find their sources of information and inspiration locally as well as globally. Discussions on art and culture take place on a global stage, and the market of supply and demand has also become a global one.

The distinction between artists and designers, founded on the historical dichotomy between on one hand the tradition of the Académie des Beaux-Arts (*artes liberales*) and on the other hand the tradition of artisans and craftsmen (*artes mechanicae*), has become irrelevant. Both artists and designers can work on projects and commissions whose scope and complexity are defined and limited in practice by specific goals and budgets; and both artists and designers can create products and services based on their own personal creative ambition, and find a customer for these products and services only after they have been completed. It should be noted here that this artistic and financial independence, which has been a key element of the professional practice of visual artists ever since the Romantic period, has in fact remained unchanged: it has always been a hybrid or partial professional practice. Visual artists create their own market; there is no job market in the traditional sense, with clearly formulated replacement needs.[[8]](#footnote-8) What is obvious, however, is that the state’s role as patron and protector of the arts can no longer be taken for granted.

All these developments require artists to embrace interdisciplinary or trans-disciplinary approaches to art and design processes, as well as a critical historical awareness, and an acute sense of the challenges and developments of the present as well as the near future.

### 2.4 Professional practice and education: conclusions

We now face important choices in the development of a position on how best to prepare students for a successful start of their professional career, so that they may contribute in a meaningful way to the contemporary field of art and design in Western and non-Western societies:

1. The idea that art and design are subject to fixed rules is an outdated concept. Yet many of the complex conventions and techniques which have come to define art and design clearly demonstrate the need for comprehensive bachelor and master education programmes.
2. Technical expertise and critical engagement are essential requirements of artistic practice, and as such must occupy a prominent place in the education programmes.
3. Regardless of the economic sector in which the artist/designer chooses to make a living, all practitioners must develop strong competences in the fields of collaborative strategies as well as networking and entrepreneurial skills.
4. The intense and inspiring relationship among students and between students and teachers within a learning environment is an essential condition for the development of the critically engaged artists which the professional practice requires.

These are the four pillars on which the academy of the future will be built. It is the institute’s responsibility to ensure that this happens in a manner which does justice to the institute’s own historical curriculum and reputation, while giving concrete meaning to the choices made in terms of the new curriculum’s focus on specific domains (defined by markets as well as by cultural factors).

The choices the WdKA has made, and the way in which these choices are implemented within a coherent curriculum, will be described in the following section.

## 3. The Willem de Kooning Academy

The WdKA has taken on the momentous task of fundamentally reviewing and updating its education programmes and organisational structure, according to the following principles:

1. The WdKA has always been an academy with a strongly practical-minded, sometimes commercial, character. Conceptual ability, a media-oriented outlook and an active international presence have always been clearly recognisable in the curriculum, and must remain so.
2. The WdKA chooses to keep up with the times and to focus its education programmes on the contemporary professional practice, as well as emerging practices.
3. The WdKA’s education programmes attract large numbers of talented students. Those talented enough to be admitted and eventually graduate must be provided with a head start in every aspect of their professional practice.
4. The professional practices are varied, as are the professional roles which graduates can be expected to assume within different projects. In order to gain a clear understanding of their possibilities and opportunities, students must learn entrepreneurial skills as well as practical knowledge.
5. Artists and designers are often required to work as part of a team. The complexity of the various projects and media, and the multi-layered intricacies of engaging with a heterogeneous public, all require collaboration with various specialists and actors in the production process. The WdKA makes good use of its position as part of an all-round university of applied sciences, by proactively seeking collaborations and crossovers with like-minded and otherwise related fields of knowledge and education programmes, within the university as well as in the world at large.
6. Good teachers must prepare students for an increasingly complex and heterogeneous professional practice. This means that at least part of the teaching staff must be not only professional artists/designers, but first and foremost professional teachers.

These principles have led to the formulation of a vision on education and professional practices, which in turn has required the adoption of a completely new curriculum.

The professions are undergoing major and rapid changes, as are the products of these professions. Although the necessary insights and skills are deeply rooted in a professional tradition which continues to set the standard for emerging practices, students must become proficient in new forms of knowledge and collaboration. The education programmes no longer make any distinction between art and design; both approaches are active in the arena of public space and commercial production from the perspective of their own disciplines. New challenges are arising in the fields of technology, public space, engaging with the public, and shifting international relations. All these challenges must be reflected in the graduation profiles.

Media focus, research skills and entrepreneurial skills must be integrated as part of the student’s competences for each phase of the curriculum. In order to achieve all of the education programme’s goals, the curriculum’s individual components must form a coherent whole. This requires a project-oriented approach, which in turn demands new teaching methods. Teachers will now be team members with tasks and responsibilities focused on academic goals, rather than custodians of a specific academic subject within the whole of one year’s curriculum. This will require changes in staff policy.

### 3.1 The curriculum

The WdKA distinguishes three work fields for graduating artists and designers, each with its own economic orientation and operational business model.

*Social Practices*  
Social Practices are artistic practices focused on enhancing the quality of life of individuals or groups within society, by raising their awareness, educating them, or contributing to their sense of identity. In other words: helping people to improve themselves in their relationship with their surroundings. Here, the social engagement of the artist, teacher or designer takes precedence over his/her personal expression. Through engagement with image and design, individuals or groups are shown a new way of perceiving their own world, and of finding their own place within this world.

*Autonomous Practices*  
The Autonomous Practices profile focuses mainly on the artistic ambition and expressive possibilities of the (individual) artist, teacher or designer. Autonomous creative entrepreneurs formulate their own goals and assignments, based on their personal vision of the world and the human condition, and give shape to this vision; working from their studio, they then find a market for their independently developed products or services.

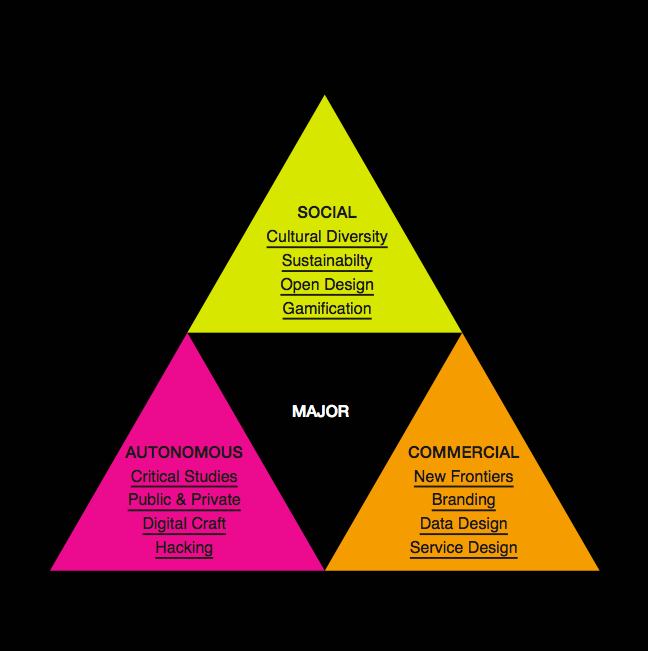
*Commercial Practices*  
Commercial Practices combine artistic practice with an original vision of everyday reality, in order to promote and improve the exchange of ideas and goods between various parties. Marketing and commercial principles are combined with concept development and visual aptitudes, focused on reaching a large audience. The visual product or service is largely determined by the situation in which the commission was formulated, or the opportunities of realising large-scale productions for a large audience.

During the course of their studies, students who initially started out within a traditional artistic discipline will increasingly focus on one of these three work fields and learn its methods and conventions. This will become their graduation profile.

Within this chosen profile, students learn to identify their strong and weak points, and how these apply and relate to various professional roles.

Students learn to work collaboratively, with students of other visual disciplines, and where applicable also with students of other education programmes not directly related to art and design.

*The ‘pyramid’ below shows how the major specialisations relate to the challenges within each domain specialisation and to the three graduation profiles.*



During the course of the education programme, the strict division between the different academic disciplines will be left behind. For the WdKA, the traditional distinction between independent and applied work is no longer relevant. Students work in interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary settings on challenges specific to the emerging culture: the markets and the world of the present and the near future. Creative individuals learn how to collaborate in cross-over settings, and even how to develop new specialisations. In order to make this possible, and to organise the educational programme in a flexible way, focusing on current challenges rather than fixed professional conventions, the traditional major-based specialisations will be gradually replaced by new challenge-based domain specialisations. For each economically defined domain, each challenge is addressed according to the requirements of that particular domain.

Within the three profiles, the education programmes are organised according to four domains: *In Transit, Public Space, Technology (Open Source)* and *Experience Strategies*. Within these domains, relevant themes and challenges from the professional practice are defined for each profile. The choice of specific themes and challenges is based on the WdKA’s vision of the future professional practice of its graduates.

### 3.2 From major specialisations to domain specialisations

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Autonomous Practices** | **Social Practices** | **Commercial Practices** |
| **In Transit** | Critical Studies | Cultural Diversity | New Frontiers |
| **Public Space** | Public & Private | Sustainability | Branding |
| **Technology (Open Source)** | Digital Craft | Open Design | Data Design |
| **Experience Strategies** | Hacking | Gamification | Service Design |

Social Practices

* **Cultural Diversity** focuses on the experiences and behaviours of groups or individuals who manifest themselves in their urban environment and along various dimensions or registers (lifestyle, art, religion) as ‘local world citizens’.
* The accelerating shortage of natural resources, the changing economies and the growing world population all demand a reorganisation of our modes of production, transportation and consumption. Within **Sustainability** students research how this process can be designed and influenced.
* **Open Design** embraces a participative design methodology, where users are invited to modify the design, making the design process a dynamic one. Designers can publicly share their design according to ‘open source’ principles.
* **Gamification** is the application of game design principles to non-game situations, focused on boosting the motivation, involvement and active participation of the target group.

Autonomous Practices

* **Critical Studies** explicitly operates on a meta-level, discussing and questioning the legitimacy of fundamental issues, on a theoretical (conceptual) as well as practical (operational) plane.
* The blurring of boundaries between areas of tension, such as the virtual and the physical, or the public and the private, generate new perspectives of ownership and exchange. This requires new perspectives on intervention and design of **Public & Private** space.
* **Digital Craft** focuses on creating and reinventing creative tools, combining analogue and digital technologies, and reconsidering how the two can be combined.
* **Hacking** means finding applications for a system which were not intended by its creator, resulting in a shift of consciousness. Quick and simple alternatives are preferred above more complex solutions.

Commercial Practices

* **New Frontiers** focuses on the exploration of new markets. Students develop powers of observation and an ability to recognise opportunities for internationally expanding their business activities and their professional appeal.
* The media and the methodologies which individuals and organisations use for communicating their identities are changing, requiring new marketing, communication and design strategies for branding, city marketing, profiling, etc. **Branding** focuses on research, design and strategy development.
* **Data Design** focuses on identifying meaningful information in large amounts of data, and coherently communicating this information to a target audience.
* By facilitating and enhancing the dialogue between users and designers about behaviour, desire and motivation, **Service Design** improves the quality of an interaction, product or service. These methodologies are used for the creation of user experiences.

These are the challenges which have currently been defined for the various domains and graduation profiles. Naturally, this is a flexible system. Depending on developments in professional practices, markets and artistic visions, these challenges can be updated or even replaced by new challenges.

The WdKA’s research agenda is currently determined by these challenges. Research by teachers and students, as well as collaborations with external partners, focused on solving or re-examining practical problems from these domains, must therefore concentrate on these subjects.

### 3.3 Working methods

From September 2013 onwards, the education programmes will mainly be implemented in project-oriented teaching formats. This means that there will be less traditional classroom teaching, and more collective study and focused individual study in open ‘stations’ (which replace the traditional studios and workshops). The teacher’s main role is to guide and supervise (groups of) students. The education programmes are structured chronologically into four quarters per year. All of the WdKA’s four-year education programmes consist of three phases. The first phase focuses on *Profession* and *Concept* (quarters 1 to 6); the second phase focuses on *Broadening* (quarters 7 to 12); the third phase, the graduation phase, focuses on *Deepening* (quarters 13 to 16).

The new education programmes are nurtured and supported through increased collaboration with *Creating 010*, the Rotterdam University’s institute for research and innovation, as well as a limited number of strategic partnerships with internationally renowned universities.

Didactical quality will be the main factor in determining staff policy for the coming years. Master-level training for existing teachers, and an increase in the number of teachers with more contract hours (supplemented by a flexible pool of temporary and guest teachers) are the most essential elements of this policy. Accommodations and facilities, including the stations and the electronic teaching environment, will be further customised to meet the requirements defined by the curriculum.

## Conclusion

The development of the curriculum described in these pages, and the consequences of its implementation on accommodation and staff policies, have required a huge effort on the part of the academy’s teachers. Since the summer of 2011, they have managed to combine their regular teaching duties with research, development and training focused on implementing the new curriculum. In the course of this process, they have thoroughly assimilated and further refined this curriculum. Since the spring of 2013, the curriculum’s originators and developers have coached the rest of the teaching staff, helping their colleagues to fine-tune their working knowledge of the new programme. This way, the curriculum has been implemented from the bottom up, so that the teachers are true shareholders in the new programme.

Of course, the introduction of the programme is not the final stage. We can already glimpse a future of alternative academies; for example, the academy as a living and working community for students and professionals. If there’s anything history can teach us, it’s that in the long term, the most successful academies are those which continue to evolve, by organically adapting to their changing environments, while those unwilling or incapable of change are destined to extinction.

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1. The various educational systems have been well described and exhaustively documented. For a brief description of the systems listed here, see: Honour and Fleming, *A World History of Art*, London, 1995. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The Romanticist notion of genius was eloquently analysed by Egon Friedell in essays written in the early 20th century. See E. Friedell, *Abschaffung des Genies*, Zurich, 1985. The concept of genius is not an objective fact, but rather an idea we like to believe in, and which has characterised Western art from the 19th century onwards, including Modernism and post-World War II movements up until Pop Art. This concept has now become outdated. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The Willem de Kooning Academy, for example, has its roots in the association ‘Van Hierdoor tot Hooger’ (literally, ‘From Hereby to Higher’) founded in 1758. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The changing role of the artist is very well described in an essay by C. van Winkel, *De Mythe van de Kunstenaar* (‘The Myth of the Artist’), Amsterdam, 2007 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. For an excellent description of the new social relationships which will radically transform urban environments and they way they are experienced as a result of the daily use of new communication technologies, see W.J. Mitchell, *City of Bits, Space, Place and the Infobahn*, MIT, 1995. The book describes a vision of the future which has now already become a reality. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Aldje van Meer, *I Would Rather Design a Poster than a Website,* Rotterdam, 2012. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. It is doubtful whether our teachers are sufficiently competent in these fields to provide their students with the necessary knowledge and skills. Also, we must realise that our students do not necessarily share the older generation’s fascination with digital media. For the younger generation, computers are nothing new; they are simply appliances. As a result, many students show a preference for traditional techniques, which represent different notions of value. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. A recent paper by C. van Winkel and Pascal Gielen offers an excellent overview of this hybrid practice, describing the age-old tradition of the artist as independent entrepreneur. C. van Winkel, P. Gielen and K. Zwaan, *De hybride kunstenaar: de organisatie van de artistieke praktijk in het postindustriële tijdperk* (‘The Hybrid Artist: The Organisation of Artistic Practice in the Post-Industrial Age’), ’s-Hertogenbosch, 2012. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)