

Why

We

Our

School?

Don't

Start

Our Own

School?

Bruce High Quality Foundation University, New York (2009–)

Bruce High Quality Foundation University (BHQFU) is free, open, and a little chaotic. Aside from its crit-based, semester-long seminar program, the school hosts as many events as possible: performances, gigs, screenings, parties. It was founded by the anonymous Bruce High Quality Foundation in 2009, and since then—aside from a coast-to-coast road trip called *Teach 4 Amerika*—it has been based in Manhattan. Though autonomous, the school remains a little connected to the “Bruces” (as they are mostly referred to), and continues to expand. When I visited, they were in the process of launching a new residency program and had recently opened a gallery called FUG (or Foundation University Gallery), which was presenting a Guerrilla Girls exhibition.

I met Andrea Arrubla and Sean J. Patrick Carney at BHQFU’s walk-up space, where the Lower East Side meets Alphabet City. When I arrived they were finishing a staff meeting, so I waited out on the fire escape. Sean—who is the school’s outreach director—joined me soon after, and we talked about an essay he had just written for *artnet*, about the recent news that USC’s entire MFA class of 2016 had taken the decision to drop out. Andrea, who is the school’s facilities manager, and Sean are closely connected to the young community of artists who gather at BHQFU, both of them having started out as artist residents there in 2014. Prior to this position, Sean spent five years working in arts administration at a range of universities, including NYU. We spoke about the MFA complex, the Free Cooper Union movement (many of whom had attended BHQFU), and finding “generative rather than reactive solutions.”

Andrea Arrubla and Sean J. Patrick Carney

Let’s start from the beginning. How and when did BHQFU get going?

Sean J. Patrick Carney: The origin story is that in 2009 a bunch of people at the Bruce High Quality Foundation collective’s studio in Brooklyn were hanging out, having a barbeque, and bemoaning the MFA complex in the United States. As a drunken joke, someone said, “Why don’t we start our own school?” Which they did. They got some support from the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, a nonprofit-granting organization, and a physical space in Tribeca. It was pretty loose; anybody could teach a class. No one was on payroll or anything like that.

Andrea Arrubla: We fondly refer to those days as the Anarchy School.

SJPC It got some press and attention. There was a nice Roberta Smith piece in the *New York Times*. But I first encountered the school a couple of years later, in 2011, during the *Teach 4 Amerika* tour, which Creative Time supported. The Bruces went to eleven cities and visited art schools like Tyler in Philadelphia and San Francisco Art Institute, but also alternative spaces like Roots & Culture in Chicago and the Soap Factory in Minnesota. I saw them speak at Pacific Northwest College of Art—a little art school in Portland where I was working at the time. During this hiatus, when there wasn’t a physical location in New York, they were going out and sort of spreading the gospel.

Traveling in a converted limo, right?

*Teach 4
Amerika* tour,
Los Angeles,
2011



SJPC Absolutely. It was painted like a school bus. They were giving a sort of performance-lecture that was about the archetypal art student, who—statistics-wise, based on the demographics of art schools—is a white girl. They'd tell this story about her involvement with art and her relationship with debt, as well as the history of the professionalization of the artist. And then they'd do something slightly different at alternative spaces, which would be a little more of an open-forum conversation. The Bruces got pretty reinvigorated seeing how many people responded to the tour. They came back here to New York and opened up this space. Formal classes started in the spring of 2013, after an experimental fall 2012 session featuring a course called simply "Curriculum." That fall session was about people getting together to work out what we were going to teach come spring.

So "Curriculum" was a collaborative way of forming the school?

AA Totally. It was basically a group of artists, led by Haley Mellin, who met regularly to discuss the types of classes they wished that they'd gotten to take in art school. The idea was to borrow the parts about art school that they liked while excluding the parts that seemed counterproductive to being an artist.

SJPC Then they launched the more official semester in spring 2013, with classes like Brad Troemel's "Chat Room" and Nozomi Kato's "Japan Studio." We've followed that model since then. We do two semesters per year, which are obviously related to the traditional academy schedule, but there are some things that normal schools do that make sense ...

AA You can't fight everything!

SJPC For example, you need faculty breaks; you need an end point and some kind of structure. At this point we have a consistent-ish faculty.

How many are there and who are they?

AA Well, last semester we had "Sculptural Forum" with Elizabeth Jaeger. Nicole Wittenberg taught painting critique, which was called "Ball Gowns vs. Mini Skirts." James Brittingham had a class, "Collage and the Grammar of Images," that ran both fall and spring semesters. Jarrett Earnest, our faculty liaison, has taught as well in a class called "Color Feelings" with Nathalie Provosty. Sean has taught on comedy. And two poets, Sophia Le Fraga and Ana Božičević, taught "The Poetic Act," which looks at poetry as performance or via its relationship to the Internet and to the visual. That's easily been one of the most popular classes of the last year.

SJPC And we had a sex-ed workshop with Ana Cecilia Alvarez and Victoria Campbell! By necessity, a lot of the courses are critique or conversation based instead of studio focused. The reason for that is we just have this one large room—it'd get really cluttered quickly if we had too many courses where work was being made during class. So, for critiques, most of our students will bring their work to BHQFU to present that evening and then take it with them when they go. It'd be awesome to have more studio space and art storage, but we're in downtown Manhattan!

Class at
BHQFU's
Avenue A
loft, 2013



It's intriguing that you not only keep the model of semesters, you take the high school-style titles of classes too, like sex ed. It feels less like an analogue to the MFA than a high school of sorts. How are you coming to the people who teach classes? Are they friends?

SJPC They're people who know the school socially or else have an understanding of it. Others are friends.

AA Something that I think makes us special in the group of alternative spaces is that we host as many events as possible, which provides a nice backup to the curriculum. As experimental as we want to get, there's something to be said for having the structure of fourteen-week classes. But that's why the events are so valuable. They allow us to bring in a bigger community and audience, and to explore programming by community members who may not be comfortable with teaching formally.

SJPC The public programs mean that you can be a really active participant in this community, even if you can't commit to, say, every Tuesday at 7 p.m. for sixteen weeks.

How do you guard against three hundred people turning up one week then a handful the week after?

SJPC It self-selects. There are always one hundred people at every first class. And then by week three there's forty, and at the end of the semester there are twenty-five or thirty really dedicated people. For a long time we were like, "No application! Radical inclusivity, blah blah ..." Now we're talking about making people formally register with more than just their e-mail on the website. Or even to fill out some demographic info, because now that we're a nonprofit we have the opportunity to apply for different types of funding. It'll be an interesting experiment. A couple of us have required registration for our own classes, which has significantly thinned the herd and brought in people who really wanted to do it. It's funny how much a ten-minute online form will deter people who would have lost momentum after a couple of weeks anyway.

Interesting that you could have a series of classes that start with one hundred people and could finish with twenty, in terms of how that might inform the teaching or conversation—it shifts, over several months, from a lecture to a seminar.

SJPC Absolutely, and that happens a lot. I went to grad school and there was a rapport in my small cohort of fifteen people, which came from being together so much. That happens with classes here, but it's still good to change the classes up. Otherwise it could run the risk of getting cliquy. Because we have some people who have been going to school here for three or four years. Understandably, they have a different relationship to the place, so they're more comfortable with making their voices heard. Which is awesome, but you also want to make sure that it doesn't create an intimidating environment for someone who's brand new.

How did you both become involved with the school last year?

AA We were both part of the Summer Emerging Artist Residency in 2014.

SJPC Yeah, and I'd done a little bit of teaching the semester prior, kind of by accident. I was a student in Brad's "Chat Room III," and he had to step down from his position as instructor. Haley Mellin, who was still involved at the time, offered the class to me the same week that I interviewed for the summer residency to which I'd applied. Naturally, I jumped at the opportunity to do both!

AA When the residency ended, BHQFU was looking for a facilities manager and I applied for and got the position.

SJPC When Andrea started working full time, in fall 2014, I was still full time at NYU. But I was teaching at BHQFU again and had started working part-time as the outreach coordinator. In late November, the Bruces offered to take me on full time as outreach director, so I quit NYU and joined the team. For most of spring 2015, there were three of us full time, which included Joe Kay. Joe left in April to pursue other stuff, so now it's me and Andrea holding it down on the day to day.

You've recently expanded the "campus" and opened a new space called FUG, which stands for Foundation University Gallery, correct?

AA Yes, it's a project space located just a few blocks from the schoolhouse. It opened up this spring and we've done two exhibitions so far: "Noah Davis and the Underground Museum" and the Guerrilla Girls BroadBand's "#ProvokeProtestPrevail." The idea is to stage exhibitions, events, and other special programs that are longer term and wouldn't fit at the school. Come fall, we'll have an exhibition of paintings by Betty Tompkins and host a visiting artist residency with an international collective called Ensayos.

SJPC The space came about unexpectedly—a random bar conversation led to viewing the space with the landlord and we ended up securing a lease in a couple of days. We're still defining the idea of FUG, but we're always building the plane as we're flying it anyways. A nice thing about FUG was that the extra space allowed us to expand the summer residency program this year to include eight artists instead of just five. The summer residents get both BHQFU and FUG to use as studio space or exhibition space, whatever they see fit.

How do the residency programs work?

AA We've ultimately decided that the visiting artist program at the FUG is going to be invitation only. We had done an open call, but it went out on some residency listings and many of the people applying were just sending the same proposal to dozens of spaces listed. We think FUG, and its relationship to the school, is very unique. We want artists and groups who really get BHQFU's mission to participate, and we learned that a broad, open call for that program wasn't necessarily the best fit.

SJPC But our summer program is an open call. A stipulation is that artists have to be living and working in one of the five boroughs of New York City to apply. It's evident to us that our

community is New York, and so we want to make sure that we serve that community first and foremost. We get hundreds of applications, most of which are amazing because New Yorkers know about BHQFU and apply with summer proposals that really vibe with our ideas. This summer, we gave the keys to eight awesome artists for three months, with a stipend as well.

And the residency program is free to apply to and free to attend, like the classes?

SJPC Yes, it is all totally free. One thing to note though is that there are positives and negatives to the lack of the exchange of capital. In one way, it's awesome that we don't charge people money. On the other hand, it's interesting to see how things that in an institution would be directed in a particular manner become interpersonal rather than money focused. It's almost relationship-esque. If there's something that's wrong, they perceive that the people who make up the school have failed them. As opposed to at a proper school, where you might think of the *institution* as fucking up. When Joe still worked here, one thing he used to say was that when people come in here they perform their "institutionality." No matter how much we're this radical alternative, they still come in with this same kind of expectation or hangover from a regular school.

AA Visually, that's represented by the amount of coffee cups left at the end of the day.

A friend of mine once said to me something like, "You know, utopia is fine and everything, but someone's still got to turn the lights off."

It's the coffee-cup question.

AA Somebody's got to do it.

SJPC Some people still act like they're consumers of this culture. Which is funny, because while we might ask them to volunteer or help out with something, in general we basically give them what NYU charges \$60,000 a year for.

AA Sometimes more.

You've described the school before by saying, "Students are teachers, are administrators, are staff." That suggests an antihierarchical structure, one that's pretty fluid. But what you're suggesting is that you have to have something in place—whether it's having general managers or designated course leaders.

AA Because this is such a close community and people have been here for years, it's hard to explain to them that we can't just give out jobs. At the same time, it also brings with it a wave



Class at
BHQFU's
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loft, 2013

of realization that people are meant to outgrow this place as well. It can't just foster you forever. And that's a good thing, because things grow and change.

Let's talk more about the community. Who are they, broadly defined? Who's coming through this space?

SJPC Probably more than half have been to art school. Maybe they already have a degree and they're looking for the things they loved about school but without all the bullshit they encountered there. But we also have a lot of people who aren't artists, who aren't necessarily coming here to learn to be an artist. At this point we've got a diverse-enough offering where we have writers, musicians, designers, a lot of comedians have started to come ...

Why's that?

SJPC I did some classes in comedy, and Andrea and I have been letting some comedians do performance nights here. Right now, it's really about expanding on that.

AA That's the Swiss-army-knife part of the school, where it's a community center. That's so needed in New York, even though everybody here seems like, "Oh, I'm in the know," or whatever. But that's very hard for a lot of people, especially for the younger part of our community who just came out of college. They're in the first- or second-year rut of, "What am I doing? Where did

my education go? How do I apply that to what I want to do?" That's where I found myself when I started finding out about the school. The sense of support that the actual physical space provides, through hosting events, is that it brings the people who may not have been to art school or who don't know how to talk about art discourse or don't have agency to have conversations with people just because they're under the same roof.

SJPC I've seen people who have come to New York, found this place right away and are like, "Oh my God, there are people like me here!" But then maybe all they need is three or four months and then they've got their own thing going on. They don't really need to come here anymore. It goes back to when the Bruces did the *Teach 4 Amerika* tour. It wasn't about building a BHFQU in Minneapolis or LA. It was simply saying: "Here is a set of questions that we used to do this one thing. Take what you like, leave what you don't, then do your own thing." It gave people their own agency or optimism to start their own school or gallery.

You've got a town-hall meeting tonight. What goes on there?

SJPC It's our first, and it's going to go one of two ways. Everybody wants the school to be their version of the school. And that's literally impossible.

Is there a question or theme for the meeting?

SJPC It'll be about what's working and what isn't. We're going to live stream it, we've had an event up on Facebook and have been inviting students for quite some time. A lot of it came out of a moment last semester when a few people were saying that they didn't feel like this organization is transparent

enough. But because we're so close to it, we're like, "What isn't transparent?! I don't get it." So resolving that is what tonight is partly about.

What it comes down to really is that lots of people don't understand how this place runs. How does it run? *Money*. How else do you have an apartment in the East Village? Who's underwriting that?

And so who is underwriting that right now?

SJPC Philanthropy. Our development director, Sophie Oakley, works her ass off to do a benefit dinner that several art collectors and wealthy people of New York very much like to come to. We did it this spring, in late April, at Julian Schnabel's house, Palazzo Chupi, in the West Village. His house is crazy! His son, Vito, is the Bruce High Quality Foundation studio's art dealer. We have an amazing list of supporting artists who are very famous—like Cindy Sherman, Lisa Yuskavage, or Alex Katz—who give us works to auction, and that money goes straight to paying the electricity bill, rent, faculty. The dinner happens annually, and we're trying to diversify that funding model.

But all of that is so uninteresting to tell the students, you know? When we say, "Well, we have a benefit dinner, people bid on work, and we turn around and run the school with it," they're just like, "But where does it *really* come from?" And the real answer is that fund-raising is, from a certain perspective, maybe boring. There's really nothing conspiratorial about what we're doing—it's really practical and matter of fact! But it's illogical to someone conditioned by capitalism that you would raise \$400,000 in a night and then not use it on yourself.

AA Their questioning of us also connects to the larger question of where does the money go, and who has most of it in the art world. Emerging artists who come to the school—well, it's hard not to be bitter about that world. So I can understand why they're questioning a place that they love.

SJPC I'd question the hell out of it too. I mean, before I saw how the sausage was made, I had my own bizarre theories about how much money the school had and where it came from. It's interesting to see how humble it actually is though, now that I'm on the inside.

How sustainable do you see the model of an annual benefit as being?

SJPC We'll keep doing the benefit, but the idea is that our model diversifies considerably. This year I've applied to a dozen grants for us—we'll see how that goes. And we started doing

"Bye, Felicia," the end-of-year exhibition and holiday party at BHFQU's Avenue A loft, 2014



Overleaf: Poet Monica McClure reading excerpts from her book, *Tender Data*, at its release party, BHFQU's Ave A loft, 2015

a fall benefit. Because our spring benefit, the dinner, doesn't really include students, they ask, "What goes on at this illuminati gala? And it's like, [*whispers*] "Well, people have dinner..."

So you've tried to keep those two worlds apart.

SJPC For a student who is maybe twenty-two, it's probably not the most fun event, you know? That's why we started to do this other thing last fall. It was to celebrate our nonprofit status, which happened in summer 2014, and the party was called "Not for Profit." We called it that as a joke, to make it clear we weren't taking anyone's money for anything that didn't directly go toward making the school the best it can be. It's like micro-philanthropy that everyone can participate in. Our friend Dev Hynes, who does the band Blood Orange, performed pro bono. It was a two-tiered ticket system: \$20 if you were a student, \$50 if you weren't. Five hundred people turned up, and tons of our students were totally able to afford a ticket—open bar; it was a huge crazy party. That event got us a ton of visibility and brought a whole new community of people in. And this party is important. It allows our students, most of whom aren't particularly well-off, to not only have an awesome time but to really know that they're giving back. It's just \$20, but when it all adds up, they're together making a really impactful donation to their school.

To talk a little more about context—I know that the original BHQF came out of Cooper Union. And Cooper, as of 2014, has no longer been free.

AA A lot of the Bruces attended Cooper, which as you say was a free art school from when it was established in 1859 until last year. There's definitely something to be said for having experienced going to a free school, and how that frees you up as a student, an artist, a person. When the decision to bring in tuition fees at Cooper happened, there were major protests by the student body. Additionally, alumni, faculty, and staff voiced their support to the student activist group, many arguing that Cooper was actually acting illegally and violating their charter by charging tuition. Of course, the Bruces were full supporters of these protests. Many people involved in Bruce over the years would have never been able to afford to attend college if it hadn't been for Cooper's tuition-free policy.

Those protests culminated in a sit-in in the president's office.

SJPC Yeah. Cooper officially announced in April 2013 that they'd begin charging tuition for the first time in over 150 years.

A group of students, calling themselves Free Cooper Union, banded together in President Jamshed Bharucha's office for a total of sixty-five days to bring visibility to what they argued were gross mismanagements of funding at the school.

There were multiple conversations and meetings with the administration during this time, with the students and some faculty demanding accountability.

I've seen an image of pizzas being delivered by a pulley system attached to helium balloons.

AA Yeah, the Bruces sent emergency pizza. Throughout all of that, a lot of the Free Cooper Union kids attended school here.

SJPC This was also their off-site meeting place. We may or may not still have a packet of vegetable stock from during the occupation. The rule was that you couldn't throw it out—it's a relic of the sit-in.

More recently, we've done some panels with those guys. We've hosted some of their dinners, and now there's the Committee to Save Cooper Union, which is the group that's taking legal action against Cooper. The New York Attorney General is leading an investigation into Cooper's handling of its finances, because it appears that they grossly mishandled an endowment. The Cooper debacle is just one of many that illustrate how obscenely out of touch many college administrators are with their faculty and student bodies. Cooper placed so much importance on a new building and other areas to the detriment of its own community. But all of the events around Cooper gave us a jolt here at the school. It made us see that this has to keep going.

AA The fact that Cooper wasted so much money on building infrastructure really resonates in New York especially, with the terrible housing situation. It's crazy to watch all of this happen alongside what's happening at USC.

Sean, you wrote a piece for artnet about the University of Southern California's MFA program and the dropping out of an entire class of students.

SJPC Yes, that piece ruffled a few feathers, but for the most part I've heard extremely supportive feedback. USC, following a trend of corporatizing higher education, has been systematically stripping financial resources from its well-respected MFA program, and is instead focusing on this bizarre school of entrepreneurial studies funded by Jimmy Iovine and Dr. Dre.

It's gross. And after nearly a year of unproductive meetings with the administration about slashed funding, broken promises, and intentional obfuscation, the entire class of 2016 dropped out collectively. It was a bold and powerful move on their part, as they'd already gone into debt. But I wanted to highlight their bravery and bring in a barbed, insider perspective to arts administration. I worked for half a decade as an administrator and have seen firsthand how ugly so much of it is, and how completely unrelated to art the majority of the decision-making is.

It's been about three years now since student debt in the US topped \$1 trillion. Now it's about \$1.2 trillion.

SJPC It's more than credit-card debt, which is just insane. I'll never pay off my student debt. I shouldn't have children, lest I leave that to them.

In the UK now, more than 75 percent of people who are currently in higher education will never pay off their student loans. But the level of debt in the UK is still quite paltry compared to the US.

SJPC It's a bubble. It will be like the housing market, because it's a generation of people who will not purchase homes, who will not buy cars, who will not have children, who will not do all of these things that create the economy. There are no jobs. We're doing the school not only in conversation with the price of higher education, we're also doing it as the first generation in the United States who is going to do shittier than its parents.

I'd been working in traditional schools for a very long time. Dre and I have been working together here this past year, but I was still working at NYU till December. There I was teaching and mentoring students, but most of my work was administrative. It was a joke of a job, but I took it so I could move to New York. It was soul sucking and awful. I couldn't sleep and I was depressed. I felt as though I was just sucking tuition fees from the students.

We were talking about Cooper Union, and there's certainly been a major shift from that generation of artists—like Hans Haacke—who taught there and are associated with institutional critique, to our generation. There's a move from institutional critique to critical institutions. It's not necessarily about infiltrating the existing institutions anymore, so much as setting up small-scale, self-sufficient organizations.

AA I think the burden of debt has prevented people from thinking in a certain way. We had to get to the lowest point, where most of us have to admit that we'll be in debt until we die, to think,

well, we can still do something. Look at the USC kids. That's what it takes at this point—build from the bottom; see what else we can do. At this point, there's nothing else to lose.

SJPC Increasingly, what we're doing is finding generative rather than reactive solutions, alternatives, and options. I still don't believe that you can be meta-systemic, that you can operate outside a system of values and critique it. However, infiltration *through* the institution—à la institutional critique ...? I mean, how much "infiltrating" am I going to be able to do at NYU? Am I going to be the wacky teacher who says, "Burn your diplomas! Woo-hoo!"? [Laughter] But seriously, what does it really *do* to try to dismantle from the inside? Maybe it's better to exist in parallel. There's an alternative reality that's going on.

I'm not going to dismantle the art market in Chelsea; I don't even give a shit that it exists, it doesn't bother me. I don't care if a group of white, male abstract painters produce luxury items for rich people.

AA But we can use that to make something good.

SJPC Right. I'll take their work for our auctions if they want to get a tax write-off. But I'm not critiquing them by doing that. In a funny way, coming here every day relaxes your politics, because rather than constantly feeling beaten down and angry, there's a sense of accomplishment and community. I mean, I know we're still all fucked ...

AA But something good is brewing.

What are the like-minded initiatives that are on your radar?

SJPC Before things got crazy with the benefit auction, we were jokingly trying to start something at the AICAD, the Association of Independent Colleges of Art and Design, which is like a club for all the private art schools. So we wanted to start a completely fake association for all of the fake schools. We reached out to a bunch of places: Open School East in London; the Mountain School in LA; this school I helped start in Portland, the Conceptual Oregon Performance School, which started right after we saw the Bruces' talk during their *Teach 4 Amerika* tour in 2011. We just wanted to get something going, though we didn't know what it would look like.

AA But it's happening on its own. People are reaching out more and more.

SJPC We all have similar complaints about what's going on, but such radically different approaches. Instead of trying to fix



the whole university system, we all realized where our talents lie, so we make an institution that fills a particular niche. These projects don't even have to look similar—of course they wouldn't. Why would weirdo people with left politics who are obsessed with education all come up with the same system?

Though also, as we were saying earlier, in working out all of the things that you want to get jettison from the traditional art-school system, you wind up realizing all of the things that make a lot of sense, that shouldn't really be messed around with. For example, a physical space is important, just like semesters are important to give structure to a year.

SJPC It's so nice. We were invited to the College Art Association annual conference. It was some weird panel on DIY education or something here in New York, and it sucked!

AA It was pretty awful.

SJPC Though it was an admirable proposal for a panel. Alongside us, there were BFAMFAPhD, which is a group that does a lot of research around arts education; the Public School; Utopia School, both of which are like-minded and alternative approaches to education, though they don't operate physical locations—all of these little models. But then we were alongside RISD ...

AA And the Little Zapatista School!

SJPC But we found ourselves in the weirdest position. Because the guy from RISD thinks that we're crazy anarchists who want to burn down his campus in Providence. But then on the other side the people from the Utopia School think we're capitalist pigs because we pay rent ...

AA And have a logo ...

SJPC Or because we have standardized e-mail addresses... But we thought we must be doing something right if the crust punks are pissed at us but so are the white-shirted administrators. It means we're agitating somebody. We're being hyperbolic and joking, of course, but it is interesting to feel like you're straddling two different worlds who appear to be at odds with one another.

Above: Artist Ariel Jackson performing at BHQFU's Ave A loft, 2014; below: U+IRL, co-organized by Olav Westphalen and Giovanna Olmos, BHQFU's Ave A loft, 2015

But locally, here in New York, there aren't a lot of projects that have a space. For example, Pioneer Works is doing an education program, which is very different to what we're doing. We have let the New York branch of the Public School have classes here in our space. They have a cool model, because it's open-source. This guy Mike Pepi, who's a great writer and a friend of ours, taught a class called "Cloud-Based Institutional Critique," which has met here in our space.

Likewise, Cooper people have used the space. And so has ASAP, which is the Artist Studio Affordability Project.

So you've talked about some contemporaries, but how about predecessors?

SJPC To speak personally, all of this activity reminds me of growing up and doing punk shows, making zines, running record labels with friends, and so on. The sense of not getting annoyed when the culture you want isn't happening, but just making it happen, no matter how ragtag and simple it might be. If you want there to be a punk scene in your hometown, then you've got to: rent halls, buy a PA system, invite bands from out of town and let them stay at your house. It's a self-sufficiency model. Rather than feeling defeated, you just do it yourself.

Small-scale ways of building communities often feel much closer in spirit than invoking, say, Black Mountain College or the Hornsey sit-ins.

SJPC Yes, definitely. There are definitely artist collectives who do all of that too. That's why I was drawn to the Bruce collective, because it seemed like they were doing everything wrong, but it somehow worked out for them. I've always felt more connected to people who run their own publishing imprints or record labels, or whack-job art collectives like the Bruces, than people who run other schools. I just don't know a ton about what's happening. And that's why the obvious go-to is Black Mountain College, just because that's what they taught us in art school. But there's so much going on now I don't even know about.

AA Often we have guests who will talk about Joseph Beuys, say, and I'll be like, "What are you even talking about?!" We're just doing it.

Beuys always rears his head ...

AA Well, "Beuys will be Beuys ..."

SJPC Whenever older artists in New York say, "You don't even know what New York was like in the '70s," I say, "I don't know what *anything* was like in the '70s!" We certainly have a relationship with history, but maybe the lack of information that exists right now is a good thing, but there's nothing discouraging in terms of what hasn't worked. We're just doing it blindly, trying to make a school.

Also, with the exceptions of the Bauhaus, Black Mountain College, CalArts, and perhaps Nova Scotia, there often aren't records of art schools, of what made a given program fruitful at a certain moment.

These things can be hard to pin down.

AA Because everyone was busy doing it! They didn't have to prove it for the purposes of profit.

SJPC And it's hard for us, in terms of the transparency of our school, because of course nobody kept records for the first few years, because nobody thought that this would still be around. They maybe took a class pic at the end of the year, but that was about it.

AA Seriously, I've found class attendance lists on old paper plates ... That's how things were recorded for several years.

SJPC But now we do keep those things—we feel that it is important to document. It's becoming really apparent that this is a real, important moment in history. And we need to document and author it so that somebody in the future who doesn't understand it isn't the person to do that.

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