The following paper was presented by Jack Hobbs as a part of a panel discussion, "Toward a Socially Progressive Conception of Art Education," at the 1980 conference in Atlanta. As stated in the program: "Given the proposition that contemporary art education places insufficient emphasis on the interrelationship between art and society, the panelists will attempt to define what a 'socially relevant' or 'socially progressive' art education is or might be." However, Hobbs (the first presenter on the panel) attempted to show how present-day attitudes in art education do not favor such a direction. Besides Hobbs, the panel consisted of Robert Bersson (moderator), Edmund Feldman, Vincent Lanier, and Ann Sherman.

**ESTABLISHED WAYS OF THINKING**

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"Toward a Socially Progressive Conception of Art Education" suggests that each panelist is going to advance a proposal for a new kind of art education -- presumably one whose philosophy and practice are more socially progressive than the kind we now have. I do have some concepts about what art education should be, but I prefer to focus more on what art education is because I think we ought first of all to be very aware of the traditional thinking of the field and the ways in which that thinking is contrary to developing a socially progressive philosophy.

I want to make it clear that I am not one who necessarily delights in assailing anyone, especially my colleagues, for their allegedly antiquated ideas. Like a lot of people, I got my fill of iconoclasm for iconoclasm's sake in the sixties and early seventies, and I am not, in principle, opposed to traditional views. But to say that art education harbors a number of deeply ingrained, unexamined attitudes -- what Vincent Lanier has called "vulnerable ideas" -- is not an uncalled for charge.
To say this is also very ironic because, if there is anything that art educators take pride in, it is their open-mindedness and ability to beget innovation (called variously "divergent thinking" and "creativity"). But in fact, the basic practice of art education (as manifested in the schools and in teacher training) has not changed very much since World War II. In other words, the liberal image of art education, which is continually nourished by an altruistic and idealistic rhetoric, is belied by its seeming inability to make substantive changes.

Indeed the lack of creative thinking -- especially about social concerns -- may be more pronounced in art education than it is in other professions. Since the world of art itself does not have much social relevance, teachers of art are less likely to come into contact with new ideas having social currency. Unlike teachers of biology, they do not have colleagues working on the frontiers of medical research or making an impact on agricultural problems in Africa. Unlike teachers of English, they are not associated with a field in which people win Pulitzer prizes for new ideas and original uses of the language. At one time, art teachers perhaps received inspiration from the artistic avant-garde, but since the halcyon days of Abstract Expressionism and the explosive movements of the sixties, the avant-garde has been notably quiet and uninteresting.

Art education's comparative lack of stimulation from outside is inversely related to the stimulation it received from inside. In other words, art education tends to feed on itself rather than being responsive to intellectual and social developments in the world at large, let alone having any impact on those developments. The primary source of art education's intellectual nourishment is the university art department because that is where the future art teacher is trained, where the current art teacher sometimes returns to become retrained,
and where most of the writing is generated that appears in the various NAEA publications. (It is also where I work.) Thus it will be useful to describe some prevailing attitudes and values of this source in order to understand the world view of the average art educator. The balance of this paper will conduct such an analysis from three different perspectives: that of the department as a whole; that of the art education area; and that of recent graduates in art education. I think that it will become apparent from these perspectives that the world view fostered by the university art department is not conducive to a "socially progressive conception of art education."

THE VALUES OF A TYPICAL ART DEPARTMENT

Art departments differ greatly in size, structure, and curriculum, so it is difficult to make generalizations. But I think it would be fair to say that the areas of studio, art history, and design are perceived to be the main "cornerstones" of the typical department, with studio being the most important of the three. (Art Education is a fourth cornerstone, but only for those who intend to teach.)

The fact that the studio usually receives first priority is in itself suggestive. This may account for the tendency of many art majors to become very involved in either the technical aspects of making art or the subjective aspects of creativity as opposed to learning more about the philosophical and social aspects of art. In other words, students are encouraged to value the manipulation of forms over that of ideas. Be that as it may, all students are introduced to, and most become committed to, the values of the art world -- a complex of big-city galleries, arts magazines, collectors, reviewers, and critics -- of which university art departments are a minor adjunct. It won't be necessary here to enumerate those values because we are, basically, familiar with them. Not that we all understand the art world very well but most of us share its
overall point of view. Indeed, it is the litmus test for being a professional in art. Interestingly, neither the art world nor its values are understood by very many outside the profession, even those who are well educated.

It could be said that the cornerstone of art history balances that of studio because it values the art of the past rather than the present and stresses the cognitive rather than the creative. But there are parallels between the two. Like studio, art history concerns itself exclusively with the high world of art, in other words, fine art. In the past this meant the art of the ruling classes; today, it means the art of a relatively small art-educated subculture that I mentioned earlier—the art world. Furthermore, the contents of most art history seem to be focused on issues of stylistic provenance more than those of religious, social, and political provenance. Students are almost led to believe that real art history is an unbroken continuum from the caves of Lascaux through Chartres Cathedral, Cezanne, Cubism, to, finally, Post World War II abstraction; that art has a life of its own, a teleological certainty completely free of cultural circumstance.

In the few art department facilities I have seen personally, the design area was located in the basement. (I don't know if this is symbolic or not.) Whereas the studio component stresses the fine arts, the design area stresses the applied arts, but, actually, only for those relatively few who want to concentrate in an applied field, such as commercial art. Most art majors take only "basic" design—usually a requirement. Design, as a term, is open; as a course of study it suggests a broad scope of inquiry—no less than that of considering the ways in which the material culture affects our daily lives, even our realities. But, given the constraints of time, etc., teachers of basic design usually can do little more than teach a few "principles" of design. These principles are usually based on an aesthetic doctrine called "formalism", or, if approached
scientifically, Gestalt theories of organization. As we all know, the principles of design are often ignored or openly mocked in today's art world; formalism, as a theory of art, has little credibility now in the field of aesthetics; and Gestalt theories are out of favor in perceptual psychology. If so, the formalistic approach of basic design would seem to be somewhat out of date, and, if so, one would think that this would present some contradictions. But, as long as it stays in the basement, basic design continues to be tolerated by the rest of the department.

The point of this brief analysis of the typical art department is not to disparage the studio emphasis, the art world and its values, the fine arts emphasis in art history, or even the doctrine of formalism, but to show that these orientations comprise a total orientation that is essentially indifferent to what one might call a socially progressive conception of art. The missing cornerstone, in my judgement, is a "foundations" course—actually a series of such courses—that could help the student to be more sophisticated about the incredibly complicated situation of contemporary aesthetics and to put it in perspective. Even if the content were not committed to a socially progressive philosophy as such, it would at least be committed to making explicit the issues regarding fine art, applied art, and popular art, and their respective roles in society and human imagination.

THE VALUES OF THE TYPICAL ART EDUCATION PROGRAM

Whether art education is included as an area of the art department or is a department of its own probably would not have much effect on the curriculum of an art education program. In either case it would consist of certain core requirements in both art and art education. And the art education major, therefore, would encounter the values of both components; and hopefully, he/she would be able to synthesize both sets of values. The particular values of the art education component are not always, or even necessarily, conveyed by systematic instruction, but by the
nature and emphasis of the curriculum and by the "functional" philosophy of the art education teachers.

Probably, most of these teachers were raised on the art education ideals of the fifties and early sixties. We are all familiar with that era's slogans--self-expression and creativity--as well as what they referred to and entailed as a philosophy of art education. Art education faculty may or may not go along with that philosophy, but, in lieu of a well-articulated philosophy to the contrary, they continue to disseminate it to students (who will soon be teaching art themselves).

Like probably everyone in this room, I am very aware of the self-analysis that has been going on in our discipline over the past twenty years or so. (This panel is but one example of that continuing debate.) But I am also aware of the fact that the two decades of talk has failed to produce very many workable ideas. (One exception, of course, is Edmund Feldman's method of criticism.) More seriously, this dialogue has failed to produce a body of coherent theories. In other words, art education today, does not have an intellectual leadership--at least, not a very united one with a solid program to offer. In lieu of such leadership, the college art educator, typically, falls back on disseminating to his/her students the time-tested art education practice. This consists, simply, of having children make objects. The explicit or implicit rationale for this practice at the elementary level is that, somehow, making these objects is good for children's personality development.

If anything new is being introduced into this traditional practice, it is a degree of so-called "aesthetic education", perhaps the major, single idea to emerge in all the debate I mentioned earlier. But, the application of aesthetic education, as far as I can see, has not gone beyond giving greater attention to the visual elements and the principles of design, in other words, formalism.
The situation of college-level art education is reflected in the professional literature. The two trade magazines—Arts and Activities and School Arts—have not changed significantly since the fifties. They are still providing teachers with "new" ideas for art "projects"—everything from printing with egg cartons to marshmallow mosaics. The two professional journals—Studies and Art Education Journal—have changed their content, but, reflective of the general lack of leadership in the field, their philosophy and proposals have become so many-sided that they are unable, as yet, to function as the beacon for a new direction.

My intent is not to disparage the old values of self-expression and creativity nor the practice of having children make art. Surely there will always be a place for these things in art education—especially for the younger age groups. I even believe that the making of art, at times, can be "liberating" for older age groups as well. But, this invites the question: why has traditional art education completely ignored the liberating potential of responding to art? For example, the role of popular art and its effects—good or bad—on the collective unconscious of children and adults is a vast area of concern that has been largely neglected. But, again, my main purpose here is to show that the focus of traditional art education precludes giving very much attention to the social implications of art in the schools, let alone the possibilities of actually influencing society. And currently, the pluralism found at the leadership level (which, in effect, is no leadership) is of little help, one way or the other.

ATTITUDES OF ART EDUCATION GRADUATES

My analysis of art education graduates is based on first-hand knowledge of those coming to I.S.U. for further study. As advisor of Master's students in general, I have a unique opportunity to learn about the training, thinking, and goals of all our graduate students, regardless of their backgrounds and
the programs they are in. But I get to know, best of all, those in art education because that is my own area. Interestingly, the values that I have just described are literally "reflected back" upon the art department through the attitudes of these people who are returning for further study.

First, let me point out that not all who were former art education majors choose to major in art education at the graduate level. Many of those who have been teaching (and even those who have not) are most attracted to studio programs. (This, despite the fact that our studio programs are mostly filled up and, therefore, I do not encourage any applicants in that direction.) Of course, there could be many reasons for the popularity of studio programs among art educators, both good and bad: some feel that, by finding their identities as artists, they will become better teachers of art; a few still harbor a secret wish to become successful, creative artists. The most disturbing reason would be that some of these people respect studio pursuits more than art educational pursuits. If so, they are paradoxically reflecting a traditional art department attitude—a vicious form of snobbery—that puts down their own field. At any rate, in the overall market place of graduate art programs, the studio-artist model sells better than that of the art historian, the aesthetician, or the art educator. And this is often true even for those who are in art education themselves.

As for those who do elect art education, the excitement of aesthetics, philosophy, or research does not seem to fare much better. Many are interested in just getting the degree, or earning graduate hours to enhance their position on the salary scale, or, simply, picking up some practical suggestions that will help them in their own situation—all of which are legitimate goals, I suppose. But, allow me to make a couple of generalizations about their attitudes related to the profession of art that are germane to our analysis here: 1) many have a dislike of art history, which is reflected in their general lack of knowledge of this area, and 2) most look down on all cognitive approaches to art, which is reflected
in their disinclination to analyze art and to speculate about either its aesthetic or social ramifications. Let me also add two more observations: to their credit, Masters students in art education show a sincere commitment to teaching and improving their own teaching skills; and secondly, on the matter of art history and cognitive approaches, art education majors are no different from their colleagues in studio. What surprises me is that neither group really has a good grasp of 20th century art. Although many can identify the major styles, few have more than a superficial understanding of the social and cultural motivations behind the various art movements of their own time. But, again, why should they? This sort of thing has not been one of their primary interests, nor was it emphasized when they were undergraduates.

SUMMARY

This last point brings me back to the reason for this paper. My purpose was to assess the traditional thinking of art education by analyzing its source, the university art department, which I approached from three perspectives: the department as a whole; the art education area; and the art education graduate. That this thinking is indifferent to, if not hostile to, a socially progressive conception of art education is a warranted conclusion, in my judgement.

Perhaps all of us here have, in different ways, transcended this traditional thinking in our own minds. I would like to ask any of you: what specific programs do you have to offer that would reflect your particular thinking—especially having to do with a socially progressive concept? Perhaps we will hear of some from the other panelists.