

Marion Richardson and the Crab's Claw

Introduction

When Marion Richardson began her work, art teaching was suffering from the tyranny of the 'object'. In the year 1908 she gained a scholarship to Birmingham School of Art, then under the direction of R. Catterson-Smith, although some years went past before she was actually taught by him. She spent most of her time drawing crab's claws, bathroom taps, umbrellas, ivy leaves and antique casts and her future did not seem very bright. Indeed, she was faced with the prospect of taking a job in a school herself and teaching recurrent generations of children to draw crab's claws, bathroom taps, umbrellas, ivy leaves and antique casts, and all for what? The reason for all this drawing was not clear to her, and furthermore the experience of drawing in that way had little to do with her experience of art.

A letter she received from C.F.A. Voysey some years later must have summed up for her the attitude that drawing was concerned with making likenesses of dead forms, for in it he said:

"The diagrams of dissected flowers and leaves, representing their real form, such as we see in pressed leaves and petals, is the most stimulating to the creative faculty of any exercise I know".¹

The words 'their real form' should be stressed here for they suggest the presence of a belief in nature as chaotic and imperfect, while somehow masking an ordered reality which can be discovered through laboratory studies. According to this view, a flower's reality can best be seen when it has been dissected, and a scientifically accurate drawing will capture this essence.

It was the 'object' that dictated what was to be drawn, and when the drawing was completed, it was the 'object' that was used to judge the success of the drawing. If it had been made accurately, then this indicated that the student was a skilled draughtsman. Skill itself was seen almost as if it was something that existed outside the student, as the object did; he had to reach out and take it in to himself. The student brought very little of himself to this process. He was seen as empty, needing to be filled with skill in drawing, a skill that was acquired by diligent application to preliminary exercises concerned with umbrellas and crab claws. Even when he had acquired a degree of skill it was still as if he needed to be filled with the external object before he could put an image down onto paper.

Marion Richardson's Career

Such were the attitudes of art education when Marion began her career, but before going any further, it may be useful to sketch the briefest of reminders of Marion Richardson's career. She was born in Kent in 1892, and in 1908 entered the Birmingham School of Art. In 1912 she obtained a teaching post at Dudley Girls' High School, originally to fill in temporarily for a member of staff who was ill; but she stayed there for eleven years as the permanent art teacher, and a further seven years beyond that, working as a part-time teacher.

The results she obtained from the children throughout the age-range of the school were so striking that they attracted the attention of artists and critics of the stature of Roger Fry, A. Clutton-Brock, Laurence Binyon, Duncan Grant and Clive Bell, and this after she had been teaching for only five years. The publicity that the results of her teaching methods received created an increasing demand for the Dudley girls' paintings to be exhibited in London and the provinces, and for Marion herself to lecture to a wide variety of groups and societies. She also was sent as a delegate to a number of national and international conferences.

In 1925 she was appointed lecturer at the then London Day Training College (Later to become the London University Institute of Education), and five years later she left to become a District Inspector of Art with the L.C.C. In this post she influenced attitudes to art education by her lectures, articles and exhibitions of children's work, and her schemes for the teaching of handwriting, until the outbreak of the Second World War. She was then forced into a new role organising the education of refugee children in Oxfordshire until ill health brought her compulsory retirement from the L.C.C.'s service in 1940. She died in 1946, at the home of her friend, Miss Plant, in Dudley.

Drawing Techniques

Marion's first experience of being taught by Catterson-Smith himself was a revelation to her. His students drew with their eyes shut, from lantern-slides they had been allowed to see for only a few moments. They learned to form, clarify, retain and rely on a mental image, even when they drew with their eyes open, but they were not allowed to watch what their hand drew until they had learned to recognise that a drawing made with their eyes closed very often managed to capture deeper qualities than those in an 'accurate' copy of the appearance of an object.

Memory training in art teaching was not a new idea: Lecoq de Boisbaudron's book *The Training of Memory in Art* had been first published in 1847, some sixty-five years before Marion was taught by Catterson-Smith, although it was not available in English translation until 1911. Marion had a well-read copy of the second (1914) edition², which shows that, with training, remarkable feats of drawing from memory can be achieved. This book makes clear, at the same time, that the point of these exercises is to sharpen the concentration on the 'object' and thus increase the power of observation. The student is trained to form an image of the

object rapidly and accurately in the mind's eye, and to trust to the detailed correctness of that image so that later he will be able to draw rapidly and accurately any crab's claws, bathroom taps or umbrellas that may come his way. It is only fair to Lecoq to say that he contributed considerable developments in the *kind* of object that was presented to students for drawing, preferring live ones rather than still and lifeless objects, but objects they remained, albeit human ones in motion. The basis upon which he established the work of his more advanced students was the development of their ability to produce 'not only a general resemblance to the model, but an absolute likeness'.³ His advanced work was more innovative, however, dealing with studies of moving models in natural surroundings. The student's ability to retain in his memory an 'absolute likeness' of the object enabled him to record accurately fleeting glimpses of nature – such as might be gained from a galloping horse. Even in Lecoq de Boisbaudron's break with the past, therefore, the object remains the measure against which the success of the drawing is judged. He adds to this point of view, almost in passing, in saying that 'this new course of study gives great impetus to the faculty of invention and to the growth of personal outlook'⁴, and remarks that clarity is also conferred on the images of imagination as a result of these studies.

Catterson-Smith, however, took things one tentative step further. In her book *Art and the Child*, Marion Richardson describes⁵ how he encouraged his students to regard mental imagery as 'the source of ideas', and not just their servant, and he encouraged them to let this imagery 'lead them where it would'. Although she does not make it clear what Catterson-Smith actually did to encourage them in this respect, she suggests that he changed the locus of the origin of pictorial subject matter; that, at the very least, he opened up for her and other students the possibility that visual ideas for drawing might originate in the mind and that the student might possess subjective resources of his own.

Links with Psychoanalytic Theory

However tentative these steps may have been towards actually changing the way he taught, it is clear from his correspondence with Marion long after she had left Birmingham that he was interested in the relationship of his work to the ideas that were developing in psychoanalytic theory. The ideas put forward first by Freud and then by Jung in their published works from 1900, when *The Interpretation of Dreams* was published, portrayed the unconscious in its capacity as a spontaneous producer of visual imagery. Catterson-Smith felt that this method of encouraging inner visual imagery was in some way related to unconscious activity. He wrote: 'A book I have been studying for some time is 'The Unconscious' by Morton Prince, an important American psychologist – He deals very fully with the memory – and the subconscious workings of the mind – showing pretty definitely that there is a subconscious mind at work with constructive,

organising, and creative capabilities. And he shows how one can get in touch with it by the development of a state of 'abstraction' and thereby bring into consciousness products of that creative side of the mind as well as much more of the stored up content of the memory than is generally used – I have no doubt that the method of closing the eyes and evoking an image is on all fours with that abstraction state—'⁶

Had it not been lost until 1953, he would have been able to read Jung's paper *The Transcendent Function* which was written in 1916. This paper first describes the activity that Jung called 'active-imagination':

'Critical attention must be eliminated. Visual types should concentrate on the expectation that an inner image will be produced. As a rule such a fantasy-picture will appear – perhaps hypnagogically – and should be carefully observed'.⁷

It certainly confirms that Catterson-Smith was right in the supposition that his work was related to developments in the field of psychoanalysis.

Beginnings of Inner Vision

He left to his pupil, however, the task of pushing the development of his ideas into practice, and when Marion Richardson was appointed in 1912 to teach art at Dudley Girls' High School, the lack of a lantern and suitable slides forced her one day to make do with giving the children a word picture, a description of a local street by moonlight. She asked them to visualise the picture it evoked and then to paint the mental image as soon as they could see it clearly. She had been a word-weaver since childhood, when she used to invent bedtime stories to tell her two sisters, but now the paintings that resulted from her description surprised her. She admits that the results were probably influenced by the fact that she had seen the Dudley street as a picture, and therefore reduced its detail to what was artistically significant. Furthermore, it was a moonlit scene, which further reduced the amount of inconsequential detail. However, the point was that she had established her teaching on a different basis from that of producing a likeness of an object. She was asking children to paint an inner vision, a picture that was independent of objective reality. Since each painting of her description was an individual's subjective reaction, each painting could only be judged 'right' by the child who had painted it, and no longer by the teacher. She had found a way of breaking free from the stranglehold of the crab's claw that she described in *Art and the Child*.

Later on, she did use objects in the art room for the children to draw, but she used them in a new way: she regarded the object as a stimulus to inner vision, as were her stories. One thing she did was to light them unusually, by candle light for instance, in order both to reduce a complicated group to its essential shapes of light and dark and to increase the emotional impact. She would also present a lesson with a certain amount of dramatic panache by whisking

away a cloth that had been concealing objects arranged on a table to make them into a mysterious lumpy parcel that demanded to be opened; or even by drawing back a curtain which hung in front of a still-life. This was a way of stressing the mystery and excitement attending the first impact that a subject made on her class. She got her students to feel something about what they were drawing, and to feel it so strongly that the feeling transformed the image of the object into the individual's inner vision. Her realisation that this was possible came when she saw those first results stimulated by her description of the moonlit street. She saw that each child brought to the scene an individual quality of feeling that had been missing from the faithful copies of umbrellas and bathroom taps, and went beyond the natural observation that Lecoq de Boisbaudron was aiming at. It seemed to her that she had found access to a new dimension of the children's ability.

So important was inner vision in her scheme of things that she seems to have tried to make a bridge between her teaching about materials and the world of the inner eye which she sought to strengthen. Most obvious in this respect was her work with colour, where she invented what came to be called 'The Wool Game'. She collected many hundreds of pairs of skeins of coloured wool. One set of skeins was fixed to a sheet and numbered; the other set of skeins was hung, each on its separate hook, on another sheet that was placed at the opposite end of the room. A child was given a number, went to the first sheet, and found what colour wool corresponded to that number. The child then had to remember the colour, go to the other end of the room, find the same coloured skein, and bring it back to the numbered set to prove that they matched exactly. In this it seems that Marion was aiming to bring the inner world of vision and the outer world of technique closer together by training the children to visualise colour with great precision. She also aimed to give colour an emotional significance by storing the school powder-colours in large sweet jars carefully placed on a shelf against a white wall so that they were clearly visible in their pure form. Because of this they must also have attracted some of the delighted anticipation that was usual in sweet shops where different coloured boiled sweets were chosen from just such jars.

The point of the classroom experiments with beetroot juice and gravy-browning instead of paints was the appreciation with which the children returned to rose madder and burnt sienna, really seeing them and savouring their quality for the first time in comparison with their poorer substitutes. But the teaching of the magic of colour did not stop there. She savoured the names of the colours for their own onomatopoeic sake: 'cerulean', 'veridian' — and she described how some of them were made. Sepia, derived from the ink of a squid, a creature living in the deepest trenches of the ocean, to which tropical sunlight only palely filters, surrounded by grotesque luminous shapes, trailing weed, and

darting shoals of tiny flame-coloured fishes ... This description has some of the ingredients of a Dudley painting, a candle-lit still-life, a gas-lit street on a rainy night, the 'incandescent' scenes which Marion described, and which she discovered could so stimulate the children's inner vision.

The quality that she had discovered in her pupils' paintings was as difficult to assess as it was to find words to describe it. She reached for metaphors from music: harmony, rhythm. She talked, and the children talked, of pictures 'rhyming', and possessing coherence and significance. It was clear that she had moved away from objective standards — from comparing object and drawing to assess skill. So she was teaching in the much more uncertain area of the subjective reactions of her students. Important here was the feeling of significance when confronted by art that later found expression in the aesthetic theory of Roger Fry and Clive Bell, and in different ways appeared in the work of the Post-Impressionists, and the German Expressionist Movement. An estimate of the difficulty with which these discoveries were accepted may be made when it is remembered that Marion was working in an educational context whose life-blood was a continuous flow of marks: how else could one monitor the progress of the child?

She persisted with her work, however, sustained by the enthusiasm of the children and their deep involvement with whatever they were painting. Such intensity of work is familiar in junior schools, but the problems of maintaining it through adolescence and beyond have still not really been solved. All too easily an apparent cynicism and disillusionment sets in, and work becomes, at best, mannered and self-conscious, and at worst, merely careless or even non-existent. This was a problem that Cizek, working in Vienna along somewhat similar lines to Marion Richardson, never tackled: he accepted this loss of enthusiasm as an inevitable fact. If children left his classes, he did not ask why, or attempt to win their interest back; he accepted it as a developmental stage. Marion, however, had apparently found a way of dealing with it: of maintaining the spontaneity of the work through this difficult period so that her students emerged with a persistent confidence in their individual vision.

This vision was nurtured on a dramatic departure from the accepted standards of art teaching and its adherence to objective accuracy. The departure was a further development of the technique of describing a scene and getting the children to visualise the picture it evoked. The children were encouraged instead to shut their eyes and paint whatever they saw. The result is an extraordinary series of tiny non-figurative paintings not only possessing sometimes the economical qualities of a magical symbol, but also as often displaying an unusual inventiveness in the techniques used to achieve the effect that was seen. These are what came to be called 'Mind Pictures'. Marion's emphasis on the mental image was strong. It was the *image* that was to be drawn, not the object itself, and so some confusion between the 'Mind Pictures' and the other Dudley

paintings is understandable. The distinction between them is that the 'Mind Pictures' derived from images that came spontaneously into the mind's eye, while the other paintings were the result of images that were stimulated by a description, a visit to Dudley or some other teacher-directed activity.

How could the teacher judge the success of these paintings? The 'Mind Pictures' were representations of a uniquely private experience. The only thing to do was to get the children themselves to criticise them, and consequently each one carries some such remark as: 'This is what I saw', 'It was like this but shimmering'. What is more, Marion found that each child tended to produce a recognizably individual kind of 'Mind Picture'. The implication was obvious: each child, left to himself, had a dreamlike source of visual imagery that did not depend for its expression on the imposition of adult stereotypes and conventions of 'correct' drawing. Marion's task was to find ways of putting children into contact with this source as early as possible, and by valuing whatever it led them to produce, to give them confidence that this inner vision was acceptable and reliable. In notes she kept for the book on children's drawing that she never wrote, she says: 'It was not long before I discovered at Dudley that the children's vision was guided by an inner impulse, an inner certainty that was distinct from and far superior to any instructions that I could give'.⁹

This, then, was the quiet Dudley revolution. It took place not long after 1912 and reversed completely the traditional roles in the teacher-child relationship. She sums up this reversal in a passage from the same notebook:

'The big change is that whereas we used to think of art as something that we ourselves possessed and the children lacked we now regard it as part of a child's inheritance just like his capacity for play which we must take care not to interfere with. It is, broadly speaking a reversal of the old position, being *they* who have and we who have forgotten'.

So children are artists. What did she mean by this? It is an idea with which we seem to be so familiar now, although in fact what we are familiar with is often a sentimental extension of an idealised view of childhood. Marion, for most of her life, was not sentimental about children. We hear it said that, left to themselves, children will scribble naturally and spontaneously; that children are delightful innocents, so what they produce is delightful and innocent. Marion found all this sentimentality irrelevant to her main contention: 'It is often said that children are natural artists. I am sure that this is true, but not sure that people always give the right reasons. It may be said merely because children produce drawings that are delightful and refreshing to jaded adult tastes. I want you to consider the child tonight as *really* an artist having a natural love of drawing and a spontaneous and intuitive impulse to paint and to pattern'.¹⁰

She based her valuation of children's art on something quite precise and essentially unsentimental. In an expanded form of a 1919 lecture

she says: '... art exists to express visions – to create, not to create the illusion of reality'. Children have visions and the power to create, unless it is destroyed by adults. Marion puts it this way: 'They have nearly always got something interesting and personal to say and the faith to say it, unless we intimidate them by trying to make them say it better than they can. Then their confidence in their own vision collapses'.¹¹

In this connection she notes the remark made to her by the mother of one of her ex-pupils who, aged five, had just started school:

'Before he went to school he thought he could draw anything. Now he is not sure. The teacher has told him that his flag is wrong'.¹²

This passage speaks for itself, and Marion found it sufficiently significant to be worth recording as a separate entry in her notebook. The down-to-earth realism of the previous quotation, however, is worth stressing: 'They have *nearly* (my italics) always got something interesting and personal to say...'. The implication of '*nearly* always' is that children sometimes have nothing interesting to say, and sometimes are more concerned with trendy trivia than a personal vision. The passage also implies that what children say through their art really could be said 'better' if adult standards of excellence are applied. The point is, however, that adult standards should not be applied to children's work if these standards are concerned with technical competence, or if they are concerned with adult conventions of expression, or with adult experience of the world.

Marion Richardson saw children's art as the equal of adult art in some ways. They employ the same processes in producing art and it comes, in each case, from the individual vision. But she saw important differences. The adult's art must depend largely on adult experience, which must be wider than a child's if it is to be relevant to the adult world, and the adult's art must also make use of adult conventions in artistic expression. Marion says in her notebook:

'A child's technique is a perfect means of expressing childish experience. The ruin of children's art is the effort of the teacher to make a child form its experience into adult forms of expression that are foreign to it'.¹³

What the Art Teacher must do

It is the teacher's job to protect the child from influences that tend to deform the child's experience or the forms of expression that are natural and appropriate to the child. The child must have the freedom to be a child, although freedom in itself, is not enough. The teacher must provide more than freedom if the child's integrity is to be assured.

'Those who have taught children know that they are fundamentally serious about whatever they are doing. The frivolity of the modern adult world is foreign to them, and the high spiritual level of great art and its subject matter makes a direct and simple appeal. This state of mind is in no way incompatible with children's natural gaiety. But it is the teacher's

job to give the key note; everything depends on her ... People think that freedom is all that a child wants and that given it he will inevitably produce little works of art. It is not so. The child looks to the teacher to keep him in the narrow way, for in spite of his great natural gifts, he is, of course, easily capable of destroying and producing wrong as well as right work. He is very, very suggestible, and will abandon his own good ways in favour of all sorts of wrong ways that he admires. In this he is very like certain native artists. The teacher must do for the child what a good tradition does for the native'.¹⁴

How easy it is to assert that children are natural artists, and turn this into a sentimental paean of praise for anything produced by a child. However this sentimentality was not indulged in by Marion Richardson; on the contrary she rejected any assertion that all child art is good, in saying: 'But in admiring and valuing the work of children we must not make the mistake of thinking that everything that they do is good — is art. They too (are) capable of using drawing in an interested instead of a disinterested way and among children's drawings are the good and bad just as among adult art'.¹⁵

Even now one can hear complaints, often from ex-students themselves, that art schools tend to teach a recognisable style of drawing, so that the trained artist finds that all too often he has to rediscover his personal vision from beneath layers of sophisticated technique. When Marion met Roger Fry, in 1917, and showed him paintings that had been done at Dudley, it was at an exhibition in the Omega Workshops. Fry had collected an exhibition of the drawings of the young children of artists, and was concerned to show that children who had not been to art school often managed to avoid having their artistic individuality submerged beneath a veneer of acceptable visual clichés. A sentence from his introduction to an exhibition of work by the Dudley schoolgirls held in Manchester shows his view of what usually happens to a child who attends drawing lessons:

'He is at once shown the incorrectness of his mental pictures and encouraged to adopt others, with the result that, the mind, ceasing to hold any clear mental image at all, the hand fumbles, hesitates, wavers, and the pencil records nothing but its nerveless inexpressive gestures'.¹⁶

Roger Fry had met someone in Marion Richardson who based her teaching on the conviction that what children drew naturally, with innate correctness that could not be given to the child. It could only be taken away by heavy-handed teaching. The loss of this confidence could be avoided if the child was taught to place increasing reliance on his mental images. Teaching should be directed towards the imagination and not towards the product. The product, in Marion's teaching, assumes an important diagnostic function, giving evidence of the strength of the imagination. It is not enough that children should be taught to produce acceptable products because in art teaching this is nearly a guarantee

that those products will not be art. If art is an expression of an individual vision, then teaching must be concerned with methods of clarifying that vision and increasing trust in that vision. It must not be concerned with what that vision looks like. To quote again from Marion's notebook:

'The mistake is to consider the result on paper for its own sake so to speak, rather than the state of mind that lies behind the work of art (child's-drawing) and is expressed through it'.¹⁷

Roger Fry appreciated the problem and Marion Richardson offered a solution to it.

Her achievements

What did Marion achieve during her life? She certainly got a lot of children to paint some very attractive pictures, and though this may be how she is remembered now it goes no way towards doing her justice. It is possibly expecting too much to hope that these pictures should now be seen as evidence of the success of methods of stimulating the imagination of artists.

It is in a way unfortunate that she spent so much of her life actually teaching in ordinary classrooms for her memory tends to persist only in the minds of a dwindling company of some of her elderly ex-pupils. Had she published her book about children's drawings, things might have been different. Many of her pupils have carried on her work, and developed it further along lines of their own which, one suspects, is just what she would have delighted in. But as her influence has spread it has also tended to dissipate, and the image of her own personality has developed blurred edges. The only direct links with her that remain, apart from the archive material in the Birmingham Polytechnic School of Art Education, are her publications, *Writing and Writing Patterns* (1935) together with the *Dudley Writing Cards* (1928), and *Art and the Child* (1948).

It is too easy to see Marion Richardson's effect on the teaching of art as a significant phase of history, having its effect once and for all in the past. It is too comforting to regard her as marking the dawning of the new age, standing at the point where art teaching emerged from the darkness of a wrong-headed approach to its present state of 'enlightenment'. She introduced potato printing into schools, and encouraged the use of large sheets of paper and big brushes. She introduced powder paints as we know them now. She designed easels for use in schools to replace desks, and a broad pen nib to replace the pointed ones best suited to 'copper-plate' script; these are items which we can now order freely from schools suppliers. Marion suggested that classrooms be painted light, pale colours, with details, or perhaps one wall, picked out in something strong, like orange¹⁸ and she instituted a regular circulation of pictures through schools. In short, she was instrumental in many of the transformations that have taken place in the school environment, turning it from a 'practical' institution with dark brown and green gloss paint, to the relatively humane setting it now is.

These material benefits came about as a result of a change in the philosophy of education; without such a change, the reason for them would have been missing. This change at the philosophical level was fought for by Marion, her L.C.C. colleagues and the teachers whose support she depended on, and it was given tangible expression in the physical changes that were made in and around schools. However, the fact that such material benefits become institutionalised and perpetuated does not in any way guarantee that the philosophy that gave rise to them will similarly persist, continue to be understood, or developed.

It is all too easy to regard the material as the real achievement, and to forget the philosophy which it expresses. Marion was aware that the new adjuncts of art teaching were appropriate to the emphasis on 'free expression' and 'visualising'. She was also conscious of the danger that teachers would nevertheless forget what, in reality, free expression and visualising were all about. I quote: 'We want something much bigger and freer and we label what we want 'free expression', 'visualising' and so on. But we must be careful that in the name of visualising and free expression our teaching does not become rigid and uncreative again. It is possible to say 'visualise' and yet to discourage anything in the nature of a vision, that we ourselves do not quite understand. This may be more harmful and destructive to art than the old copy books were. They were frankly copying and demanded care and a little skill – nothing more. The new ways sometimes only pretend to be free, pretend to encourage the child's own expression of his own vision'.¹⁹

Throughout her teaching Marion seems to have laid constant emphasis on technique and the use of various materials. Constant experiments seem to have been carried out, for instance, with colour. Paints were actually forbidden to the children for a time, and they were made to use instead gravy browning and beetroot juice and curry powder. They drew with charcoal and conté crayon as well as HB pencils, made their own brushes and explored the possibilities of every available kind of paper.

The 'Bauhaus' approach

All this sounds very familiar to us now as a result of our acquaintance with new developments in schools in the sixties. These took their origins from the *Basic Design* work initiated in the colleges in this country by William Turnbull, Victor Pasmore, Richard Hamilton, Harry Thubron and others. They, in turn, drew their inspiration from an aspect of the work begun in the Bauhaus in the twenties. The fact that Marion Richardson was also working at this time would make it appear logical to suppose that she was aiming in the same direction but this was not so.

Maurice de Sausmarez, in an article in *Motif*²⁰, explores the links between the *Basic Design* movement and the work of the Bauhaus under Gropius. He quotes from the preamble to the account by Gropius of the Bauhaus' preparatory course,

emphasising various sections which, he says, '... make it clear that (Basic Design) does not profess to be a means of producing art but a means of investigating the primary elements and factors of constructive and creative experience, of understanding the nature and behaviour of these factors and of physical materials through testing them in a disciplined variety of ways'.²¹

Basic Design work is therefore a preliminary stage to the production of art, and is concerned with providing the student with a visual grammar. Familiarity with this grammar will enable him to express whatever ideas he has. Marion Richardson puts things exactly the other way around. She lists two difficulties in the production of art: 'First the inability to feel or see clearly and second the inability to carry out what has been mentally conceived'.²²

The first problem for the artist is to visualise clearly. It is only when he has done this that he needs to search for the appropriate technique for the expression of that vision. 'Much of the actual beauty of a work of art consists in the fact that it is trying to say a thousand times more than it can say. Vision must always be ahead of technique; when it is not, technique flaunts itself to try and conceal the poverty of vision – this is true in painting no less than in writing or speaking'.²³

Marion's first aim in teaching was to stimulate vision. Subsidiary to that was the need to place at the disposal of vision as large an array of techniques as possible. The study of materials was by no means unimportant: she saw it as essential for the satisfactory expression of vision. The importance that materials had for her was conferred by the presence of vision. Conversely, if there was no vision, there was no need for materials since there was no desire to express. Of course, at the same time it was her claim that, where children are concerned, there is hardly ever a lack of vision, only a teacher's lack of ability to recognise vision in the child.

Some of the experiments that Marion's pupils carried out with materials may have looked superficially similar to those carried out in the name of 'Basic Design'. In reality, however, they have very different aims. While basic design work can be directed precisely at the material, and at its properties, Marion's exercises always pointed beyond the material to the personal. They never ignored the material or regarded it as insignificant; they looked beyond it into the realm of vision and the emotional significance of the material; and far from despising design and function, it should be remembered that Marion Richardson was among the first to establish links of the most practical kind between education and industry, having interested industry in producing children's designs on commercially printed fabrics, and working and corresponding with Frank Pick and the Council for Art and Industry.

Concluding remarks

The revolution that Marion Richardson brought about through her own work and that of her pupils may now be a part of the history of art teaching. We may now be able to point out to many material advantages in education which derive from her work and suggest that her influence was widespread and lasting, but there is a sense in which the revolution that she started has not yet got under way. In part this is because of the dilution that her influence has suffered with its spread, as well as the ease with which her classroom activity can be copied without reference to the philosophy that, in the first place, gave rise to the activity. It may even be that what she was proposing is beyond the ability of all but the most highly gifted teachers to achieve, and we may therefore have to face up to the implication that there is a technique of teaching which cannot itself be taught.

What she proposed was the education and development of the imagination in which the end-product is a kind of person, and not a kind of picture. The picture has a diagnostic function in the relationship between the teacher and the pupil, and that relationship is a dynamic one in which the understanding and imagination of both teacher and pupil grow. It is not one where the pupil learns to produce the kind of picture the teacher likes.

Must we accept that there will remain an élite of teachers of the exceptional standard of Marion Richardson and that the rest of us can learn little from the work they do? Why have we also failed to follow up Marion Richardson's work? *Writing and Writing Patterns* has been widely misunderstood, and used for years precisely as the copy-books it was designed to supercede. 'Free expression' has been misinterpreted as a licence for school art departments to produce careless and undisciplined work — an image the art department suffers from to this day among teachers in other areas of the school and college. In consequence, a kind of desperation has set in among teachers and administrators alike, and rather than continue to work with no clear goals and a lack of structure to art teaching, a reaction has ensued towards 'Design', which appears to offer clearly-defined standards of achievement. These standards, however, are based once more on the object — that crab's claw — and embracing them has led to art teaching becoming separated from the education of people; materialistic standards replacing humanistic ones.

In a materialistic phase of the world it may be appropriate that education should concentrate on the material from which objects are made, and maybe it is therefore understandable that only the material benefits of Marion Richardson's work should still persist. But it is ironic in view of this situation that the tyranny from which she freed art teaching in her lifetime should have been the tyranny of the object.

References

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2. Item 2075.
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4. Op Cit. p.39.
5. Marion Richardson: *Art and the Child*, p.12.
6. Item 525: Letter from R. Catterson-Smith dated 24.11.26.
7. Jung: *Collected Works VIII*, para. 170.
8. Marion Richardson: *Art and the Child*, p.15.
9. Notebook.
10. Item 3047, p.1.
11. Item 3049, p.14.
12. Notebook.
13. Notebook: 'Written probably after 1st reading of *Art and Understanding*.'
14. Item 3047, pp. 1-2.
15. Notebook.
16. Item 3200: Whitworth Gallery programme, Spring, 1928.
17. Notebook.
18. See Item 3042: *Education for the Consumer*
19. Item 3049, p.2.
20. *Motif VIII* (1961).
21. Op. Cit. p.5.
22. Item 3049, p.15.
23. Item 3049, p.16.

Note: Unpublished material drawn from Birmingham Polytechnic School of Art Education Marion Richardson Archive is referred to by Item Number alone.