

LIFE SPORT
Issues

Conversation recorded between Lisette, Dave and Jas on 1 March 2019 in Sofia



Issue 1

Dear LS,

I don't have any money, yet I am considering studying art. I would have to take a student loan and work on the side. I will probably be in debt indefinitely and my parents are concerned. Do you think it's worth it?

- Anonymous

Dave: No

(laughter)

Lisette: I would say, I think you have to study art if you have no money!

Jas: Even more urgently perhaps.

L: Well, the question is, should you study if you have no money. I didn't have money when I studied art and I still don't have money. But, I mean, the end result is that you are an artist and it's a life that doesn't need a lot of money. Of course, that's a bit of a provocation because we are talking about austerity and the student loans are phenomenally high and crazy. If you don't have the perspective of earning money later on, you might never be able to pay them back.. Which is also fine. Maybe the other implicit question, and that's why Dave said so resolutely NO is 'what do you learn if you go to art school?'

J: Yes, or what's it worth?

D: Hm, what do you think being an artist is?

J: Well, do you need art education to be an artist?

D: If you want to be an artist, then you see it as a way to make money from art. If you see art as a profession and want to make connections and want to learn the industry, then art school is the right place to go to for you. But if you are just going into it not sure what it is, then I would say absolutely no. I think you have to understand that art education is an industry. It's a business and I think most young people don't realise this. The art institutions definitely don't tell them that. It only makes sense to go to art school if you are certain you want to make money out of art, otherwise no.

J: But how about from a human development point of view, is it worth it to attempt to become an artist and enter that whole conversation that you get in



art school, the feedback and engagement with what you create and put out into the world. Isn't it worth it also for that?

L: I'd say yes. If we talk about art schools today, yes it's an industry, and yes art is an industry and studying is only for people who have a lot of money.. I had the luxury position of studying art a long time ago when we still had the welfare state, but I still had a student loan and I had to pay it back for a long time. Of course it's great there are also many artists who didn't go to art school and they have the strength, the connection or intuition to do it. It's not that I learned so much in art school but sharing and connecting to a field, I think I could have never done that without art school.

D: But what you just described, is part of the art institution industries' way of selling the whole thing, which is most artists going to art education thinking that they are going to become artists. Most of them won't. You know that. But they feed you this lie, I believe it's a lie, which is that artists have great transferable skills, in which case, what you learned in art school can be redirected into any other field of work or study. I believe it's a selling point that doesn't hold true.

J: But life is not just about making money. Obviously it's a big part that you can survive during your study and afterwards, but you are going to take risks in life whatever you do. So is it worth the risk?

D: That's the point. The question is, is it worth getting into debt? No! If art education was free, I'd say yes, absolutely, everyone should go.. If it was free, everyone should go to art school and become an artist. It's great fun!

J: Yes, but equally you have no guarantee in other fields of study. Say you study business, you have to pay for that too. Only difference is that you end up being a business person and living that life. Is that any better, is that the better life?

D: For people who want to make money and don't want debt, yes. I don't know the statistics but I imagine most people who study business opposed to art go on into a profession where they are more or less guaranteed they will earn money later on.

J: What you just said would basically mean the only people who can study art are rich people..

D: No, I would say if art education was free, everybody should do it. Only poor people have to get into debt, and that is the question!

L: Education is very expensive, for example in the US and UK. Maybe that creates a very predictable type of artist. That's a problem. Also, schools like xxxxxx for example. Coincidentally, I was talking with someone yesterday, seeing an advertisement for an exhibition of a group of young artists where all

the biographies stated 'studied with professor so-and-so' next to their year of birth. It was pretty disgusting. That's the industry. They present this of course as this very old-fashioned master-student relation, and being at the 'best' school. That is networking, not even for the students but also very much for the professors making the students their product. I mean what kind of work is professor xxxxx making today anyway?

J: At least some schools like the one you mentioned are free, or almost free.

L: But that's very elitist in another way. You have to get in, and then they kind of own you and you are almost stigmatized. In this case, you get into the old white boys network!

D: That's part of the industry. The CV, where you studied, creating desire to go to the 'best' school in comparison to the others, to improve your chances to succeed.

J: Bringing it back to the question whether it's worth it, it obviously depends on what you want to get out of art education. If you want to be guaranteed to make money to pay back your debt and earn an income as an artist, it's obviously not really recommendable, but -

D: I remember always, and I still hear it now, that artists have great transferable skills. I just think that's the way they sell those courses to them: *Ok, there's a small chance that you'll be a professional artist and have galleries and sell, but you got great transferable skills and if you're at art school then you got even more of a chance.* I don't know..

L: That is also true. I learned very very little at art school, I must say. I was very much into theory but I didn't have any education from high school or my own background. So, it was the first time I got into contact with philosophy and I talked with some of my teachers on a conceptual level to understand notions of abstraction, etc.

J: That is worth it anyway.

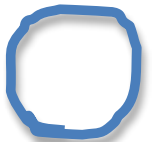
D: I'm not saying that it doesn't give you these great things and opportunities. It introduces you to many of them. What I'm saying is, it's not worth it.

L: But for me it's worth it!

J: You have one life, what are you going to do with it? If you feel like, I'm really interested in art, I'd like to study it, I would say, there's probably nothing better to do! Not that I'd know from own experience.

L: You didn't study art?

J: No, I didn't study fine art but I think it's a great conversation to enter. If



you're interested in it, then I don't see a better thing to do than getting art education.

D: So, if I'm the student, say, I didn't get into the good art school. I wasn't accepted but I have the opportunity to go to a lesser school. Would you say to me that I should still do it? I would have to take the same amount of student loan for the lesser school. What do I do?

J: I think you still do it. You'll still learn something about art, more than you would without education altogether. You could have a good teacher, you still have peers.. It could be random whether you get introduced to valuable things..

D: Not true. I've been to both types of schools, a lesser one and a better one..

L: And?

D: You get introduced to far, far less at the lesser ones.

L: Of course, yes.

J: But you still have people engaging with your work, giving you feedback and talking about it, your classmates..

L: I have to also talk from the other side. The question is it worth it.. I just developed a master program myself, so if I thought it wasn't worth it, how can I ask students to pay for it. If I thought it wasn't worth it, I wouldn't have done it, that's obvious. We also wanted to offer a course that is engaged with actual questions, some of these students had these questions already. But yes, is it worth it.. Maybe the students didn't think it was worth it. But of course this question was also posed: What do we get? Many of them are not going to make it as an artist. It's a difficult question..

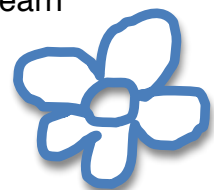
J: Maybe it was worth it for one of them, if not all. I mean, you still learn something, at the very least you learn about yourself.

D: It's really hard to live without money.

J: Yes, but it's great to be an artist.

D: Yes of course but you could end up with a huge amount of debt, having to retrain and then get into more debt. You need to question the course. The person posing the question sounds like they're thinking about taking an undergraduate course, like they just left school. Lisette's course is postgraduate, by then you already know the risks.

L: I agree but I want to look at the other side aswell. So, if we are talking about some young kids who are never going to make it as an artist and will



always suffer from this debt and cannot make a living, that's horrible. But in the end, they will find a way, not because they are an artist and it's so applicable to other fields, but because they are human beings and they will find a way. And then there is of course the person, who is an artist with every pore of their being, and it's great for them to be in art school, so they are fine with taking the debt, although of course that is never fine.. And then you have other people, where art is a way to survive somehow. In that sense it's really worth it I think. Maybe you don't survive really financially, but you survive.

D: What you are saying is true but it really depends on the person. The truth is if you are a young person really talented and very ambitious, you got a good chance to make it in the industry.

J: Yes but it's true also that there is the aspect of emotional and psychological survival. Making art as the only way to live, for emotional health and as the only way to live for some people. Of course you need to feed yourself, pay your rent, but maybe you'll find a way. In that case art education as a way to get involved would be worth it. Also, I think something strange would happen, or is happening to art, if only rich people study. It changes what art is and who makes art.

L: That is true for all fields. You need money to study. And if you don't have the money, you have to be brilliant.

D: That's what I meant by being very talented. Talented and ambitious, and a lot of them still don't get through for many different reasons.

L: I said something very provocative in the beginning: If you have no money, you have to study art! I think I said this to counter the idea that only rich people can study art because it's a luxury. NO! It should not be a luxury!!



LS Issues is a series of questions that we try to answer.
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