

The irresistible rise of the independent art historian



As the academic year comes to a close, we are looking to the future, continuing our enquiry into the nature and needs of

freelancers and independents. This is an important moment of transition for the group and we would like to invite you, as members, to contribute your perspective on what it means to be an independent in the current economic climate.

The AAH as a whole is in the midst of a re-brand and campaign to increase awareness of the AAH and the subject of art history, as discussed at the October 2015 Away Day in London and the April 2016 AGM in Edinburgh. As part of this change, F&I-administered grants are suspended while the entire grant structure is under review. The Committee is thus concentrating on developing a new programme of events and resources, and in doing so we are seizing this opportunity to rethink who we are and what we offer.

The Rise of Freelance and Independents

Our 2015 member survey reported that 80% of our members identify as 'independent' and that 65% declared that they had or were working towards a sustainable freelance or independent career, with only 17% declaring that they were transitioning towards full-time employment.

Many respondents further expressed an interest in a career that encompassed different niches of the art world, straddling and combining diverse specialties, such as academic research, art education, museum work, consultancy and writing.

This complements a national and international trend. The 2011 Labour Force Survey revealed that there are 1.56 million freelance workers in the UK. This has increased from 1.39 million in 2008, a rise of 12%, and the number will likely rise again in the next survey. As members of the arts and media, our sector is the greatest proportion of independents in a single industry. Within the EU, freelance numbers have increased

by 45% in 2013, from just below 6.2 million to 8.9 million, making us the fastest growing group in the EU labour market.

This trend is compounded by the appeal of portfolio careers for UK graduates. An Elance Report of 2014 noted that freelancing is now seen as a highly attractive and lucrative career option by 87% of students with first- or second-class degrees, and that 38% reported that they were drawn to the possibility of working across a variety of specialities.

Enabled by new technology platforms and incentivised by economic turbulence, the trend of gigging among Millennials indicates that the growth of freelance work will continue to rise.

Who are Freelance and Independents?

Traditionally, F&I have defined our group as representing anyone independent of an academic institution. In light of our member survey and national trends, we are expanding this definition to encompass a range of career combinations.

In expanding our working definition, five categories have emerged:

- ◆ the **independent contractor** (who does freelance, supplemental or project-to-project work)
- ◆ the **moonlighter** (who supplements full-time work with freelance engagements)
- ◆ the **diversified worker** (who combines multiple kinds of work and specialities)
- ◆ the **temporary worker** (who has a single employer, but the status is project-dependent)
- ◆ and the **entrepreneur** (who is a small-scale business founder identifying as independent).

Art historians are increasingly freelancers by this rubric and all the more as the effects of budget cuts and zero-hours employment continues to rise. We seek a balance between improving the image of freelance work and advocating for the political and legal protection of freelancers and entrepreneurs. We see our mission as relevant to both those who sustain themselves from a portfolio career and those whose ambitions extend beyond their institutional affiliation.

Freelance & Independents Group Committee

Everyone can be contacted on independents@aah.org.uk
Please state the topic in the subject line.

Kate Aspinall – **Group Chair**

Maria Photiou – **Treasurer**

Lara Eggleton – **Secretary**

Mary Jane Boland Judith Jammers

Veronica Davies Arlene Leis

Frances Follin Janet Tyson

Catherine Hunt Beth Williamson

We continue to enquire into the specific needs of you, our members. Currently, we comprise one-fifth of the total AAH membership. We can improve on this – attracting new members from recent graduates as well as seasoned freelancers, consultants and moonlighters. We have never been more relevant than we are now.

Goals Going Forward

Endemic problems for freelance work include isolation, career instability, opportunities to demonstrate credibility, and support in keeping up to date with qualifications as well as available technologies and legal considerations.

The success of the Directory is an excellent start, and we are currently researching further possibilities for online resources as well as reconsidering what sort of events can best meet your needs. We are open to comments and suggestions, so if you would like to share your thoughts on past activities, or point us in potential future directions, please contact me.

We are also on the look-out for new and proactive members to join the Committee. If you are interested, please go to the F&I page on aah.org.uk, where there is a form to download and fill in.

Finally, we are pleased to welcome a new committee member, **Beth Williamson** (see right), who has already proven herself an excellent addition to the team, as well as a new treasurer, **Maria Photiou**.

Kate Aspinall

Chair, Freelance and Independents

Beth Williamson – new member of the F&I Group Subcommittee



Beth Williamson is a freelance art writer and researcher who specialises in the history and theory of art in Britain in the 20th century.

From 2009 to 2014 she was a Research Fellow at Tate. Recent publications include her monograph on Anton Ehrenzweig, *Between Art Practice and Psychoanalysis Mid-Twentieth Century* (Ashgate, 2015) and

chapters in *The London Art Schools* (Tate Publishing, 2015), *On Artists and their Making* (Unicorn, 2015) and *Imagining a University* (Mead Gallery, 2015). She also consults on grant writing, budgeting and project management.

Her own research has been supported by the AHRC, the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, the Barns-Graham Trust and the Hope-Scott Trust.

Beth has a PhD in Art History and theory from the University of Essex and an MA in Contemporary Art, Criticism and Philosophy, also from the University of Essex

Art Historians & Arts Professionals Online Directory

www.aah.org.uk/directory



This searchable database makes AAH members' skills and expertise readily available to those seeking experts on art, architecture and visual culture.

The Directory is free to join and to use. Any AAH member can opt to be included.

Just log in to the AAH website Members Area and click *Edit Your Personal Details* to create or update your member profile and opt in to the Directory. (It may take up to 24 hours for new or updated data to appear online.)

Anyone looking for an art historian or arts professional can access and search the Directory straight away, by artist name, period, style and geographical location.

www.aah.org.uk/directory

AAH Widening AAH Membership

As an AAH member we hope you appreciate the benefits that membership brings to you personally, and the work the organisation does to raise the profile of the discipline and to support those who work within it.

AAH membership is continuing to grow, but we can encourage even more people to join. If you know people involved with art history, be it in education, or in museums, please let them know about us. Ask them if they've ever heard of the AAH and, if they haven't, point them in the direction of our website and our membership benefits. *The most likely thing to spur them on to join is a personal recommendation.*



Here are some of our member benefits:

- ◆ Reduced fees for the AAH Annual Conference and Book Fair
- ◆ Significant discounts on subscriptions to the AAH's journal *Art History*, including online access
- ◆ Conferences and forums covering a variety of subjects and periods for students and professionals
- ◆ Art Historians & Arts Professionals online directory
- ◆ Opportunities to apply for funding to support academic activities
- ◆ Discounts on subscriptions to relevant journals and on selected books, magazines and catalogues
- ◆ Regular news and information updates via *Bulletin* and *e-Bulletin* newsletters