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TEACHING ART IN POST-WAR BRITAIN: THE CASE OF THE BOROUGH GROUP 1945-1953

In the autumn of 1987 Galeria Zachęta in Warsaw in cooperation with the Museum of Modern Art in Oxford and the British Council hosted an art exhibition “Aktualności Brytyjskie. Wystawa malarstwa i rzeźby z lat 1980-1987” (New Art from Britain: An Exhibition of Painting and Sculpture 1980-1987). It displayed works of 26 artists, most of which, with the exception of Francis Bacon and Howard Hodgkin, were exhibited in Poland for the first time. The aim of the exhibition was to show the pluralism of art in Britain in the late 1980s with particular emphasis on the artists who in the early stages of their careers rejected the past to accept it in the later years.¹ Frank Auerbach (b. 1931) and Leon Kossoff (b. 1926) had each three paintings displayed in the exhibition, and as Andrew Brighton argues in the introduction to the catalogue, artists such as Auerbach and Kossoff “seem to be so much up to date because of changes in their outlooks which defend artists who make use of past painterly conventions rather than abolish them”.² What these two artists have in common is not only the same passion with which they put their paint on canvas, their expressive emphasis on form and their natural confrontation with the subject matter. In the early years of their careers, both Auerbach and Kossoff studied art at the Borough Polytechnic (today London South Bank University) under David Bomberg (1890-1957), a Polish-Jewish artist, who became the chief representa-

¹ A. Brighton, *Aktualności Sztuki* (New Art), [in:] *Aktualności Brytyjskie. Wystawa malarstwa i rzeźby z lat 1980-1987* (New Art from Britain: An Exhibition of Painting and Sculpture 1980-1987), an exhibition held at Galeria Zachęta, Warszawa, autumn 1987, exhibition catalogue, p. 19.

² *Ibid.*, p. 18. All translations from Polish are mine, DB.

tive of avant-garde art in Britain in the first decades of the 20th century and is one of the few of his generation who retained the modernist emphasis on structural form in his later, more abstract paintings.

Although he believed that “art cannot be taught” and that “artists are born”,³ David Bomberg asserted art’s natural consequence by stating that “it is stimulated in contact with Art & Artists & happens – it is like life – conception Birth & this is a mystery – but no less a mystery than Art”.⁴ In fact, he was a truly challenging teacher who inspired his students to become part of that mystery.

David Bomberg’s interest in architecture, and in particular its sense of mass, made him sensitive to buildings’ structure and stark geometrical form. Since his early interest in design, which during subsequent years evolved into full apprehension of architectural forms, the artist’s architectural landscapes from Palestine, Petra, Toledo and Ronda display “the meaning of the mass composition of the building rather than of their detail”.⁵ It was precisely this argument that decided that Sir Charles Reilly offered Bomberg a teaching position at the Bartlett School of Architecture. It was claimed that Bomberg’s architectural works, and in particular the sketches of London, could teach an architectural student more about the austere structure and volume of a building than any dexterous and scrupulous study of a trained architect.

Initially Bomberg was given Saturday drawing classes during which he took his students to Westminster Abbey, St. Paul’s Cathedral and the Victoria and Albert Museum, where they would draw the buildings’ elements and museum objects in which the feeling of volume was inherent.⁶ Bomberg’s major concern in his teaching method was that technical dexterity was irrelevant unless fortified by individual exploration.

Bomberg’s experience was stimulating to many students while his own method of commitment to “the structure of the organic character of mass”⁷ influenced many young artists. Richard Michelmore remembered the first lesson he got from his teacher at the Victoria and Albert Museum, when he was told to draw the Siena Pulpit and a sculpture cast of Michaelangelo’s *David*. He encouraged his students to explore freedom of expression, and Michelmore remembered how Bomberg stressed that “no holds are barred. The end justifies the means, whereas in all the training I had experienced the means justified the end. Distortion was irrelevant; colour was part of drawing, good colour arose naturally out of good drawing; good drawing; good drawing was delineation of

³ W. C. Lipke, *David Bomberg: A Critical Study of His Art and Works*, Barnes and Company, Cranbury, NJ 1968, p. 124.

⁴ D. Bomberg, quoted in R. Cork, op. cit., p. 259. Bomberg’s spelling and punctuation was often wayward; I have not corrected these in any of his writings cited here, DB.

⁵ D. Bomberg, quoted ibid.

⁶ R. Cork, op. cit., p. 259.

⁷ D. Bomberg, quoted in W. Lipke, op.cit., p. 119.

forms in relation”.⁸ Bomberg’s students were told to avoid literal and meticulous representation of a drawn object but instead to aim at reaching the real essence of a work of art. Moreover, in demanding that they dispense with traditional scrutiny of an image, he encouraged his students to treat it with a personal involvement. Michelmore never forgot how Bomberg asserted that “there is no fixed way in which a line goes, but there is a relationship between lines. There is then an order peculiar to one’s own vision of a thing, an order which underlies the image”.⁹ To his class, Bomberg’s approach was quite an alternative, as “to an architecture student his refusal to accept perspective was revolutionary in itself”, Michelmore recalls, stressing that “Bomberg was always requiring a wider and wider view to stop us fiddling about with detail, and this too ties up with this basic philosophy”.¹⁰

For Bomberg teaching was not merely a way to earn his living but a creative process. It was his most ardent students that made him realize that, as he saw them appreciating and pursuing the goals he had defined for them, and saw his challenging method in practice. For such an unappreciated artist as he had become, the realization that the new generation of artists was ready to take up his way of making art must have been particularly rewarding.¹¹

Bomberg deplored his contemporary art education system in Britain. He stated that “Anyone with a mind at all is able to see at what a low standard is the achievement of the study of Art in this country, both inside the Universities and out – the war is responsible for this. A great driving force is more necessary now than ever before to get the studentship on to a high cultural level, as much for its own sake as to arrest that factor of mediocrity apparent both in the Art Study and in the teaching thereof”.¹²

Despite such a deep conviction about the rightness of teaching art in post-war Britain, Bomberg had problems finding a teaching position at any of the art schools. For instance, his application for the post of the Head of Fine Art of Durham University was turned down.¹³ But at this unexpected moment it was the Borough Polytechnic that seemed to appreciate the artist’s passionate determination and offered him to take up day classes for American personnel in Commercial Art.¹⁴ This modest beginning marked the artist’s long-lasting cooperation and relationship with the Borough, which was to become the centre of the most vanguard and adventurous art education in post-war Britain.

Cliff Holden, one of Bomberg’s most devoted followers at the Borough remembered his first impression on encountering his new teacher, who ap-

⁸ D. Bomberg, quoted in R. Cork, *op. cit.*, p. 259.

⁹ R. Michelmore, quoted *ibid.*

¹⁰ R. Michelmore, quoted *ibid.*

¹¹ R. Cork, *op. cit.*, p. 259.

¹² D. Bomberg, quoted in R. Cork, *op.cit.*, p. 261.

¹³ R. Cork, *op. cit.*, p. 260.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

peared to him as the man “worthy of the most unequivocal admiration”.¹⁵ He first met Bomberg at an evening class at the City Literary Institute, where Bomberg taught drawing part-time¹⁶, and Holden remembered his being impressed by Bomberg’s explanations of his basic principles. “I’d been disillusioned with the curriculum of modern art schools, and dissatisfied with being taught by eclectic teachers. I mean by men who attempt to the impossible task of interpreting the practice of others while involved in that merry-go-round of teacher training teacher who will in turn produce teachers; I had been consciously searching for a master”.¹⁷ Cliff Holden sees the unique character of Bomberg’s Borough classes in that some of the students came “not to a particular school but to a special master who happened to be there”.¹⁸

Initially these classes seemed rather tentative, as the situation after the war demanded particular circumstances. Roy Oxlade, another student explained that “it is possible that Bomberg’s Borough classes would not have flourished at all, had it not been for the rather peculiar circumstances which schools and colleges were in at the end of the war [...] when art departments were starting up again and looking for students away in the services. In this atmosphere Bomberg’s first students acted somewhat as recruiting officers”.¹⁹

Cliff Holden, assuming the natural position of a leader, brought interested people from all parts of the city, and so at the outset the class included Edna Mann, Dorothy Mead, Dennis Creffield, Dorothy Missen, David Scott, Ian Gordon, Don Bradman and Cecil Bailey.²⁰ Other ardent class participants were Bomberg’s family: Lilian – his wife, who was also an artist herself, and Dianora, who was treated by her step-father as an artist.²¹

Frank Auerbach joined the class in 1947 when he was only sixteen, and his first impression of his new teacher was that it was “probably the most original, stubborn, radical intelligence that was to be found in art schools”.²² The fact that he had been taught by Bomberg in the very crucial stage of his artistic development during his formative years had a very important effect on his entire style of painting and has continued to influence him up until now. Although still quite young, he had studied art at the Hampstead Garden Suburb Institute, prior to his first encounter with his new master.²³ Nonetheless his experience in art was rather meagre since as he claimed he was “taught by people who were totally unqualified, and I was fairly innocent when I came to London”.²⁴ More-

¹⁵ C. Holden, quoted in R. Cork, op. cit., p. 261.

¹⁶ R. Cork, op. cit., p. 261.

¹⁷ C. Holden, quoted *ibid.*

¹⁸ C. Holden, *History of the Borough Group*, date of access: 1 Apr. 2006, www.cliffholden.co.uk.

¹⁹ R. Oxlade, quoted in R. Cork, op. cit., p. 261.

²⁰ R. Cork, op. cit., p. 261

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 262.

²² F. Auerbach, quoted in R. Cork, op. cit. p. 262.

²³ R. Cork, op. cit., p. 283.

²⁴ F. Auerbach, quoted *ibid.*, p. 285.

over, his former negative experience with studying art only fuelled his prejudice and belligerent attitude to his new teacher and fellow pupils. He admitted that, “The thing I knew was that one’s teachers were going to be silly fools and that one was going to rebel against them. I went to Bomberg’s class where he said to me, ‘Oh, so you think I’m a silly old idiot don’t you? [...] And I said in my [...] arrogance, ‘Yes, I do.’ He was delighted [...]”²⁵ Bomberg himself must have felt sympathy for this young insubordinate pupil who reminded him of his own rebellious attitude towards his teachers when he first met them at the Slade School of Art, where he had studied himself in 1911-1913. Auerbach further recalled: “I was sixteen when I came. I was a very immature and I am sure cocky and callous student, but I was there for a very long time”²⁶.

Auerbach’s fascination with the radicalism of Bomberg’s teaching resulted in him staying at the Borough classes “for longer than anyone else. I entered the class in January 1947 and stayed until it closed”,²⁷ he said, and asserted his deeply rooted dedication to his master: “I never joined any of the groups: I was there before members of the family [...] and I was there after the members of the Group had left”²⁸.

It was Holden, who brought the sixteen-year-old Dennis Creffield to Bomberg’s classes. Apparently Creffield wanted to meet the “real artist” and so was directed to Holden, who introduced him to Bomberg and “he was proposed and elected to membership of the Borough Group”²⁹.

Although teaching exhausted him so that he could not at all paint his own works at the same time, Bomberg’s dedication to his pupils remained strong and it was fuelled by his deep interest in the principles of art teaching. Among his papers on art and art history there is a *Syllabus* containing a *Series of Lectures on Drawings & Painting* dated 22 May, 1937, in which Bomberg suggested in one of the chapters “How drawing can be taught”³⁰ “The principle of the teaching should be to point out – if such be the case – the inadequate representation of the forms, not to alter the artist’s drawing, but to encourage the artist to feel more deeply or more generously about it, and the most effective way of demonstrating this is through the medium of the Teacher’s own draughtsmanship”³¹. The Renaissance emphasis on the teacher who should inspire his pupils to follow him, emerges as a concept crucial for Bomberg’s approach to teaching. It does not mean, however, that he exerted excessive pressure on his followers, just on the contrary, he did not consider himself a master that ought to be blindly obeyed; such an approach characterized his

²⁵ F. Auerbach, quoted *ibid.*

²⁶ F. Auerbach, quoted *ibid.*

²⁷ F. Auerbach, quoted *ibid.*

²⁸ F. Auerbach, quoted *ibid.*

²⁹ C. Holden, *op. cit.*

³⁰ R. Cork, *op. cit.*, p. 259.

³¹ D. Bomberg, quoted in R. Cork, *op. cit.*, p. 260.

modest leadership of the Borough Group later in his life. For he believed that “it is best to let the Artists find a method for themselves”,³² which proved how sensitive Bomberg remained to individual endeavours of an artist. Although his methods were highly innovative, the “mechanics of the class were quite orthodox”, Roy Oxlade recalled.³³ He also asserted that “A lot of his teaching was done by talking and gesture, which he did very quietly and individually”.³⁴ In general, Bomberg tried not to interfere too much in his students’ drawings or paintings and, as they were working, he went around the class and gave advice or encouraged them; “in place of the usual teacher’s demonstration on drawing showing the student how to get it right, Bomberg showed an interest in reality from the student’s point of view [...] and did in fact on occasions make a diagram on the side of a student’s work”.³⁵

Other students like Leon Kossoff, Dennis Creffield and Richard Michelmore witnessed Bomberg’s deeper involvement in their work than just delicate sketches on the side. In their cases Bomberg at times drew or painted directly over his students works to show them his way of doing it. Creffield remembered that Bomberg did it when “he saw that the painting was becoming confused through contradictory ideas. He had a wonderful ability to see what you were trying to do – and he would help you to clarify it – collaborating with your paint – to find a definition”.³⁶ He also recalled Bomberg’s urgency to teach his students not to bother about details, but nevertheless, make them aware that details cannot be ignored entirely as they make the whole: “Sometimes if our images became too generalised, he would work carefully at defining (say) an eye. In this way reminding us that although ‘the whole is more than the sum of the parts’ – the parts are not to be disregarded”.³⁷

Just as in some students’ cases Bomberg’s interference was admonitory, it was constraining and discouraging to others. A student found it difficult to compete with parts of the work done by his master and may have felt intimidated to work on images done by an already acknowledged artist: Creffield admitted: “I had gone on altering and re-drawing with charcoal and white conte crayon, and had arrived at a scrubbed out area of tone, ready to re-draw yet again, when Bomberg intervened; and after gaining my permission, he drew steadily for about ten or fifteen minutes, before arriving at a defined statement of the figure. At which point he handed me back the charcoal and said, ‘Now make it your own’. I could think of no way of doing this, without completely changing Bomberg’s drawing”.³⁸

³² D. Bomberg, quoted *ibid.*

³³ R. Oxlade, quoted in R. Cork, *op. cit.*, p. 290.

³⁴ R. Oxlade, quoted *ibid.*

³⁵ R. Oxlade, quoted *ibid.*

³⁶ D. Creffield, quoted in R. Cork, *op. cit.*, p. 291.

³⁷ D. Creffield, quoted *ibid.*

³⁸ D. Creffield, quoted *ibid.*

Cliff Holden, on the other hand, asserts that Bomberg's teaching was conducted in the spirit of Andre Lhote and Fernand Léger, whose open studios in Paris, Bomberg visited. But, he argues, "Lhote and Léger bred imitators", while Bomberg "was careful to guard against imitators and worked to release and develop the students' creative potential. He, therefore, rarely showed his work, and apart from a couple of works in London Group exhibitions, his students were unaware of what he painted or how it was executed. As a very special favour a privileged student would be taken to his home and shown one work to illustrate a particular point".³⁹ Holden particularly valued the time spent on discussing art with Bomberg which was not limited to classroom hours. Bomberg's enthusiasm to give his time and energy to his pupils without any concern for financial gratification was thus highly appreciated.⁴⁰

Bomberg's revolutionary teaching methods were more empirical and hence more valuable as he was capable of sharing with his students his arduous practice, and not just the theory that dominated other art classes in Britain. Some of his students admired his classes not for the sake of their theoretical input but for the practice they offered. Frank Auerbach admits that, "It wasn't his phrases that made sense to me, because my relationship to teaching was one of rejection and rebellion. I mean by itself [...] it was his practical instruction rather than his maxims which registered".⁴¹ Moreover, it made them believe that what he said came straight from an artist who thus was more trustworthy and reliable.

Auerbach as well as other students particularly admired Bomberg's rejection of predominant canons of art school teaching. Dennis Creffield commented enthusiastically upon Bomberg's methods:

a curious situation – classes within an art school but not of it – no diplomas or exams. You paid – or didn't – a small fee, simply to work with him. It was to all intents a private school. Of course the authorities didn't care for this. The schools taught debased academicism, and were repressive to innovation. So his classes were a beacon to people of spirit – they found there purposive seriousness and encouragement [...] that was the spirit in which he taught – giving everything that he knew and loved – holding nothing back – to a degree that can have been rarely paralleled.⁴²

These words stress the unofficial and anti-academic character of Bomberg's classes, but by no means imply a careless attitude of their teacher who emphasized innovatory techniques by finding individual talents inherent in each of his pupils and tried to respond to and develop them. Every student was

³⁹ C. Holden, *op. cit.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ F. Auerbach, quoted in R. Cork, *op.cit.*, p. 285.

⁴² D. Creffield, quoted *ibid.*, p. 262.

individually instructed according to his or her needs, as Cliff Holden confirms: “if the student was painting in a perceptual gloom he would be shown means of lightening his palette, if he was tentative he would be encouraged to become more engaged with the materials and throw it on in shovelfuls, to walk on it, or attack it with the knife – any means of making the mark was permissible. If the paint was getting thick so that the student couldn’t see the wood for the trees he would be asked to use coloured papers. If he was using thick lines which impeded the flowering of the form he could then experiment with small dots of colour”.⁴³ These comments evoke Bomberg’s demand and encouragement of his students to a physical contact with their work, and to abandon their constraints as to what is or is not acceptable when doing art. “[I]f the student were facile, using an aesthetic line, then Bomberg would give him a great lump of charcoal and cite Modigliani and John as examples of men who would tie the tool to the big toe and escape the domination of a facile hand,” Holden concludes.⁴⁴ The fact that Bomberg referred to his great contemporaries shows that he did not consider himself the only authority but encouraged his pupils to draw on the experience of other painters. It was still Bomberg, however, that his students liked to call “my master”, and the work they produced bore remarkable similarities to that of their teacher.⁴⁵ Bomberg himself asserted in his writings that “the fundamental creativeness of all true artists, great or small has been not only in making good works themselves but inspiring others to follow them”.⁴⁶ Thus his impact on his pupils was undeniably strong during the Borough years. Following the example of his great master Cézanne, Bomberg wanted his students to avoid his own mistakes and he asserted that “Cézanne often wished to communicate what was being revealed to him and desired a school that might have prevented followers imitating him for to understand is to avoid the weakness that permeates the blood stream”.⁴⁷

Another heartening account came from Cliff Holden, who stressed the open-mindedness and flexibility of his teacher, whose methods were “dogmatic and contradictory. It was a sort of battle between a trinity of teacher, student and model, a fight which could not take place away from the materials”.⁴⁸ Bomberg encouraged his followers to rely on themselves and their intuition and not become complacent with sole reliance on their learned skills or techniques.

Bomberg’s contact with his students as well as with the system of art education in Britain prompted him to write elaborate essays on art and its relation to education and society in that country. The ideas tackled in these writings undoubtedly were shared with his pupils, and continued to influence them out-

⁴³ C. Holden, quoted *ibid.*

⁴⁴ C. Holden, quoted *ibid.*

⁴⁵ C. Holden, quoted *ibid.*

⁴⁶ D. Bomberg, quoted in W. Lipke, *op. cit.*, p. 119.

⁴⁷ D. Bomberg, quoted in R. Cork, *op. cit.*, p. 119.

⁴⁸ C. Holden, quoted *ibid.*, p. 262.

side the immediate classroom. From these writings there emerged a major criticism of the art establishment, and an unflinching attempt of an individual artist to revolutionize it. The fact remains that in the post-war years, British art schools were still reactionary and many heads of art departments had not yet recognized the achievements of Cézanne, Picasso and Matisse, not to mention their own artists of the London scene. This was exemplified yet in 1949 when Sir Alfred Munnings, President of the Royal Academy of Art attacked Picasso and Moore for demoralizing art. Hence Bomberg's views and urgency to change the old-fashioned course of art education appeared heretical and dangerously revolutionary. In an essay *Reflections on Art and Artists* Bomberg highlighted the rebellious attitude of some of the youth that could lead to extreme movements in art, which he did not seem to approve: "The rebellion of youth with its mounting resentments denies mankind and negates the world: it takes refuge in the extremism of abstraction, which then becomes the invention of nature and is contrary to the process of creative thinking".⁴⁹ Hence Cliff Holden referred to Bomberg's teaching as a contradictory one, as on the one hand he encouraged his pupils to follow an alternative approach to art, but meanwhile openly rejected radicalism which his pupils found it hard to understand.

Aware of contemporary developments in abstract art, and being himself one of its major exponents, he attempted to warn his students against abstraction deprived of emotion which ought to be at the basis of an abstract image: "The Foundation (sic!) of any work of art is an abstract and gradually evolves towards expression of thought and feeling. It succeeds as an abstract only in so far as it is able to convey thought and feeling, and by juxtaposition of forms, becomes articulate".⁵⁰

Bomberg analysed the need to re-educate artists due to inadequacies of the past art education which he accused of corruption: "The full course is a re-education by shock treatment for those who in their formative years were prevented by a corruptive manner from acquiring the confidence of their natural inheritance".⁵¹ He thus blamed the art schools on depriving art students of their inborn talents and exploring impulse which were suppressed by forced adherence to representation and excessive training technical expertise. British art schools were even referred to as "corruption in the name of Drawing – the 'Hand and Eye' disease".⁵²

Bomberg's classes were also based on the practice of drawing from a model, as he stressed that "the exercise of drawing from the life brings out the individuality of the artist in the man",⁵³ but he certainly did not approve of precise registering of superficial appearances. He wanted to combine the art-

⁴⁹ D. Bomberg, quoted in W. Lipke, op. cit., p. 123.

⁵⁰ D. Bomberg, quoted *ibid.*

⁵¹ D. Bomberg, quoted *ibid.*, p. 125.

⁵² D. Bomberg, quoted in R. Cork, op. cit., p. 263.

⁵³ D. Bomberg, quoted *ibid.*

ist's personal endeavours and skills with the training in which he would cast off traditional and inhibiting canons to enable the students to indulge in their own spirits and invention. Such intermediary position of his teaching methods corresponded with Bomberg's own style as a mature artist, which was neither entirely provocative in its abstraction, nor accurately illustrational.

Bomberg was demanding on those who decided to follow him, and did not toy with accurate drawing but made them face an advanced level at which one could easily dispense with details. Hence Roy Oxlade remembers how he was warned against attending Bomberg's classes which apparently were teaching him to run before he could walk.⁵⁴

He aimed at instilling in his students a belief that an artist has a mission to fulfil, trying to share with his followers a conviction that man lives in a shattered world dominated by machines and technological advance in the face of which he should seek close relationship with nature. It is an artist's role to bring man to nature, by discovering "the spirit in the mass" in which "mass is nothing unless it is the poetry in mankind in contemplation with Nature". Indeed, the two factors often repeated and evoked by Bomberg at his classes were "the spirit in the mass" and "the structure". Bomberg attempted in his writings to explain the spirit in the mass which "the indefinable in the definable and this is a consciousness of that which we are all aware of in every manifestation and on every level of human existence".⁵⁵

Janina Baranowska, a Polish artist who also studied at Bomberg's Borough classes since 1946, remembers how he taught her the form: "At Bomberg's classes I did not learn well the techniques of colour use, but instead he taught me the form. I remember one of the first tasks in his studio for which one was supposed to draw an image upside down. When I finished my draft and showed it to professor, he praised it and asked me to draw more such pictures obviously also upside-down. This was an easy but at the same time an unusually effective exercise which liberated one from convention and trained an inexperienced eye".⁵⁶ Bomberg also taught Baranowska how to paint abstract images as the artist herself gradually "let loose the formality of her artistry, disposed of linear and graphic structures characteristic of British art of those times and expressed herself in rich avalanches, widely distributed layers, dark and dim chasms".⁵⁷

The popularity of the Borough classes became so widespread that soon the most devoted of Bomberg's students came up with an idea of forming an offi-

⁵⁴ R. Cork, op. cit., p. 263.

⁵⁵ D. Bomberg, quoted *ibid.*

⁵⁶ J. Baranowska, quoted in J. W. Sienkiewicz, *Polskie galerie sztuki w Londynie w drugiej połowie XX* (Polish Art Galleries in London in the Second Half of the 20th Century), Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej, Lublin; Polska Fundacja Kulturalna, Londyn 2003, p. 150.

⁵⁷ J. Baranowska, quoted *ibid.*, p. 151.

cially established group of artists united by the same concerns.⁵⁸ Hence the establishment of the Borough Group, named after the institution which assembled its members, the aim of which was “to further the aims of David Bomberg and to establish his students as professional painters”.⁵⁹ The Group would be a platform and a vehicle for practicing and furthering these ideas, making them accessible to the public by means of art exhibitions. Since Bomberg did not want to assume an official leadership, it was Cliff Holden, the most active of the founder members, who became the Group’s President. But all the members were aware that they were dedicated to one cause, and only David Bomberg was capable of saving contemporary British art from damnation of the academia.

Working within a group was certainly more motivating and inspiring to each member who was encouraged by Bomberg to pursue his creativity and “be proud to be an artist. Proud, that is to be engaged in an important work, and so to be an associate of all those generations of artists who had gone before. Proud but not egoistical”.⁶⁰ Dennis Creffield recalled his master’s indomitable optimism during the classes which could hardly tell of Bomberg’s hardship during his earlier life.

The Borough Group members also appreciated their leader’s attention to the student’s individual needs, and the fact that he valued the individualism of everyone: “He believed profoundly in individuality but regarded it as our birth-right. No need to strain for it, and falsely to contrive a precocious originality. The individual, given a sound foundation (good draughtsmanship) matured as inevitably and as slowly as a plant. That is why he believed in teaching – why he thought it necessary”.⁶¹

Creffield attested to Bomberg’s concern for each student’s personal endeavour as an artist: “He never taught a style of drawing but tried to help the students to aim in the right direction – to develop – a moral disposition – the artist as a man [...] The school of thick paint which is often attributed to him does not derive from his teaching but is the personal characteristic of certain artists who attended his class – or who have been taught by them. His classes were orthodox in form – no coloured lights or moving models – no contrived excitement. The student had to learn to conjure his own magic”.⁶² Moreover, it was the artist’s individual characteristics that could make him an artist and Bomberg was well aware of that when he stated: “The character of personality in the individual makes or mars the artist. The faith of a child and the Natural Gift to eliminate complexities and surmount the barriers which exist between thought and feeling is a substance of character necessary for the making of

⁵⁸ R. Cork, *op. cit.*, p. 270.

⁵⁹ D. Mead, *quoted ibid.*

⁶⁰ D. Creffield, *quoted ibid.*

⁶¹ D. Creffield, *quoted ibid.*, pp. 270-271.

⁶² D. Creffield, *quoted ibid.*, p. 271.

good drawings, paintings or sculpture, or any work of art. This cannot be taught. It is true to say that artists are born".⁶³ Moreover, he believed that it was art's role to discover such individual claims: "the aim of art is to understand and express the individual appreciation of the mass and to find the design that will satisfactorily contain it".⁶⁴

He also found the artist's personality paramount to the draughtsmanship, when acknowledging that a "definable difference between what is Vast and what is Vague in art is found in the personality of the artist and less in the merit of its craftsman-like execution".⁶⁵ The emergence of a true personality is an arduous and belligerent process as "the battle of ego that gives clarity obstructs the flowering of personality. True the flower will find its way to sunlight; it may be twisted or warped in the process but it will reach towards its sustenance".⁶⁶

Bomberg's activity at the Borough, the contact with his students and most of all his teaching practice prompted him to write about art and its role in the society in an essay *Art and Society: 1934-1938*. Perhaps it was his conviction about the artist's unburdened role in the society, implying his universal performance, which was the main reason why his teaching was so inspirational to many young students. But it was also the socio-historical context of angst and anxiety, in which young artists felt helpless about the wretchedness of the world and the post-war reality of overshadowed victory. Cyril Connolly gloomily predicted the time in which the contemporary man found himself, as the time when "an artist will be judged only by the resonance of his solitude and the quality of his despair".⁶⁷ And in such a gloomy world it was Bomberg's approach to painting that offered its frustrated followers an alternative of restoration of humanity's harmonious relationship with nature. This could be achieved thorough art, he argued, which was to counteract the dehumanization of modern existence. He warned against the consequences of shutting oneself away from the natural world, which undeniably is seen not only in the artist's alienation but permeates into his work which is likely to become too technical and superficial: "It is true that we are living in a scientific age of changing materials and production, and if one becomes obsessed with texture one cannot hope to reveal the underlying forces which govern the earth and all thereon".⁶⁸ Even to Bomberg himself, his art was a relief and counterbalance to his own deep frustrations and turbulent career which did not save him from neglect and oblivion.

⁶³ D. Bomberg, quoted in W. Lipke, op. cit., p. 124.

⁶⁴ D. Bomberg, quoted *ibid.*

⁶⁵ D. Bomberg, quoted *ibid.*

⁶⁶ D. Bomberg, quoted *ibid.*

⁶⁷ F. Spalding, *British Art since 1900*, Thames and Hudson Ltd., London 1996, p. 143.

⁶⁸ D. Bomberg, quoted in W. Lipke, op. cit., p. 123.

Although the Borough Group disbanded early in the 1950s, Bomberg continued to work as a teacher, and the influence on his students remained strong. Teaching became one of his passions especially in the final stage of his life, when the artist suffered continuous neglect from the art establishment. At that time the only solace came from his most loyal group of students. They regarded him as a master and gave him the so much desired recognition.

A new group of avid students started participating in his classes, and included Frank Auerbach, Leon Kossoff, Cecil Bailey, Anthony Hatwell, Gustav Metzger, Richard Michelmore, Garth Scott and Roy Oxlade.⁶⁹ Bomberg was happy to assemble these ardent followers, as his revolutionary teaching methods antagonized most art schools and only the Borough Polytechnic was interested in employing him. To Roy Oxlade as well as to others, Bomberg's classes now appeared as a liberating experience in comparison with the repressive methods they encountered at St Martin's School of Art or at Bromley College of Art. Oxlade remembered that "it was a generally accepted rule at Bromley while I was a student there, that any expression of individuality[,] what was called the students' 'own work', should be done in their own time, that is outside the art school"⁷⁰; and extended his mockery of the school's doctrine to comment that "the most serious declaration of change [...] was made by any student who stood up to draw at an easel upon imperial size of paper, who required room to walk back and forth from his work, and who risked becoming caricatured as a Bombergian".⁷¹ Oxlade's biting remarks were not limited to his own school but extended over the whole art education system which cultivated its provincial scorn for modernity: "there was a complacent and insular disregard for the modern movement as a whole [...] most English art schools were cosily insulated from a revolution which had begun fifty years earlier".⁷²

Bomberg helped his pupils develop an "elemental mark-making language",⁷³ which naturally excluded meticulous illustration and superficial decoration. According to Cork, his students always worked on large sheets of paper, standing up in front of an easel so not to inhibit natural sweeps of their arm which was thus encouraged to become more expressive.⁷⁴ The physical passion of this experience, reminiscent of action painting developments in America, required the students to employ a particular pose and approach "of attentive response to their drawings [...] One foot usually in front of the other, the non-drawing arm held out a bit for balance, they seemed to launch themselves bodily into the work, attentive to every shift of relationship between model and

⁶⁹ R. Cork, *op. cit.*, p. 288.

⁷⁰ R. Oxlade, *quoted ibid.*

⁷¹ R. Oxlade, *quoted ibid.*

⁷² R. Oxlade, *quoted ibid.*

⁷³ R. Oxlade, *quoted ibid.*, p. 289.

⁷⁴ R. Cork, *op. cit.*, p. 289.

drawing mark which was emerging as a synthesised structure on the paper or painting”.⁷⁵

Cliff Holden in his essay *The History of the Borough Group* also finds the connection between Bomberg’s style as forwarded at the Borough classes, and Abstract Expressionism, recognizing that “there was nothing like this happening in London, in Paris, nor New York at that time. This was proved some 10 years later during the middle fifties, when American Action Painting, Tachism and the New Abstract Expressionism reached London. Bomberg anticipated these movements, often using the same kind of terminology. But, compared to the American influence, Bomberg’s ideas were much more fundamental and profound, which made possible a development outside the usual controversy surrounding the question of figuration or abstraction”.⁷⁶

The Borough students were also invited to execute rigorous studies of a model, who remained in the same position during the whole evening, since as Creffield recalls, their master “preferred twenty drawings from the same position to twenty different positions”.⁷⁷ Such an approach emphasized the need to look deeply to find the most expressive and animated quality even in the static body of the model. That was why Bomberg took great pains at choosing the right pose for their model who was asked “to move around, only to stop her just as she was half-way between sitting and standing, to explain that she was now in a perfect pose”.⁷⁸ Precisely it was the tension in the body implying motion that became the most important element in the search for form. The results of these drawings from life often did not correspond to the actual appearance of the person that was being depicted, but it enabled the students to dispense with literariness and liberated their minds from an urge to make safe and lazy images. The sheer contact with the model was important for it invited a more open analysis of the mass in the model’s body.

Auerbach remembered his enchantment with Bomberg’s method which denied any scrupulous and superficial treatment of the model, which would discourage pupils from further search for “the spirit in the mass”.⁷⁹ He recalls the model sessions in which

People would draw and as soon as they seemed to be drawing in a way that was bitty or affected or mannered, or using a cliché learnt from art, he would refer people back to the model and say to them, “Look, there are these grand possibilities about this disposition of masses which you are betraying.” [...] He would suggest a total destruction of what the students were doing, and they would destroy it and go on. Probably at some point of destruction, at some point where they were not in the least

⁷⁵ R. Oxlade, quoted *ibid.*

⁷⁶ C. Holden, *op. cit.*

⁷⁷ D. Creffield, quoted in R. Cork, *op. cit.*, p. 289.

⁷⁸ R. Oxlade, quoted *ibid.*

⁷⁹ D. Bomberg, quoted *ibid.*, p. 263.

aware of having done a picture, he might stop suddenly and say, "There is some quality in this form".⁸⁰

Leon Kossoff was impressed by the emergence of form that Bomberg taught to his pupils, "Once I watched him draw over a student's drawing. I saw the flow of form, I saw the likeness to the sitter appear. It seemed an encounter with what was already there and I'll never forget it".⁸¹

Time limit of two hours during which the model was sitting for them, also demanded rapidity and simplification of their work, as Oxlade admitted that they "worked fast; they ignored all details of form, they improvised freely and imaginatively from the forms to avoid distortion; and they worked towards finding a synthesis of structure which had individual character".⁸² Oxlade also stressed "the student's awareness that he was engaged in a struggle. He was not there merely to make a study, a record of visual data but to *discover* a synthesis between four basic forces, the model, himself, the work and Bomberg".⁸³ These words point out a truly creative process pursued at these classes, which prompted the students to experiment, not just imitate the predecessors.

The radicalism of Bomberg's classes was something that most students found increasingly motivating. As Auerbach put it, "There was a radical atmosphere in those classes. There was a feeling that in the rest of the art schools something presentable had to be presented, but in those classes there was an atmosphere of research and of radicalism which was extremely stimulating".⁸⁴ Kossoff also attests to Bomberg's innovative methods which stressed the respect for individuality of each artist, and the great liberation he experienced having joined the Borough classes was a direct opposite to his previous school's approach:

The life room at St Martins, at that time, was very rigid and inhibiting, and I remember a feeling of relief and excitement when I first entered Bomberg's class. People were working in a way I'd only previously dared work when on my own. The atmosphere was intense and everyone was involved in an energetic manner. Bomberg was an intent teacher, showing respect for each individual student's work; and though he was objective and concerned when talking about the emerging drawing, he always kept something of himself of reserve. I admired this.⁸⁵

Some of Bomberg's most dedicated students were having serious difficulties when at the same time they studied art at other institutions and with differ-

⁸⁰ F. Auerbach, quoted *ibid.*, p. 285.

⁸¹ L. Kossoff, quoted *ibid.*, p. 286.

⁸² R. Oxlade, quoted *ibid.*, p. 290.

⁸³ R. Oxlade, quoted *ibid.*

⁸⁴ F. Auerbach, quoted *ibid.*, p. 285.

⁸⁵ L. Kossoff, quoted *ibid.*, p. 286.

ent teachers. The conflict between the heretical Borough teaching and the “far less abandoned way”⁸⁶ practiced at St. Martins, the Slade or the Royal College of Art, was inevitable. The young artists were still searching for their original artistic identity through facing an authority, and as Auerbach explains, “I had a number of teachers who meant quite a lot to me and from whom I learnt a lot [...] but I think that on the whole in my time as a student Bomberg was far more important to me than anybody else”.⁸⁷ When Creffield entered the Slade School of Art in 1957, any hint of Bomberg was viewed upon with scorn and suspicion by the school’s teachers. By the time he left in 1961, William Coldstream was Slade Professor, and Bomberg’s art was becoming increasingly appreciated and acknowledged. The fact of having been his pupil provoked high expectations and damning comparisons, even if the critic had thought nothing of Bomberg while he was alive.⁸⁸ Dorothy Mann had been offered a scholarship at the Royal College of Art, but after a year she was dismissed on the grounds that her work was too strongly influenced by Bomberg’s techniques, as the College was hostile to his ideas. In this conflict of loyalties she chose Bomberg, but consequently lost her grant.⁸⁹ However, not all the pupils were equally dedicated. Some, who were initially attracted to the Borough Group, officially never became its members and Holden asserts that “many, like Eduardo Paolozzi, Jo Tilson, Peter Arnold, Michael Fussell, Karl Weschke, and Andrew Forge, were at first excited by the ideas and the work produced, but, perhaps because they didn’t understand the activity and the kind of commitment required or could not tolerate the severe criticism that was meted out, they retreated back to the security of the establishment schools”.⁹⁰ This may imply that Bomberg’s classes did not merely develop the artist’s skills but, because of their demanding nature, they also shaped his or her character, which was not acceptable to everyone.

Auerbach points out to the inspirational nature of the classes that were to him a stimulus for a more concentrated achievement in his work. Although the outcome of some of the students’ work was not entirely successful, it was, nevertheless, conspicuous for their boldness and valiancy evident in their approach to art. “There would be these pieces of paper and these paintings which I think had very little of the sense of achievement, of the responsible achievement by the artist, but which bore within them a hint of something very grand and noble and profound in painting. They would carry in them somehow a language, hints of a language, of a greater depth and of a greater freedom and of a greater

⁸⁶ F. Auerbach, quoted *ibid.*

⁸⁷ F. Auerbach, quoted *ibid.*

⁸⁸ J. R. Taylor, *Back to the Drawing Board*, “The Times”, 23 Mar. 2005, date of access: 10 Mar. 2010, www.timesonline.co.uk.

⁸⁹ C. Holden, *op. cit.*

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

courage than most of the achieved art that was being created in other places in England”⁹¹

As Holden remembers, he attempted to warn his students against “some trivial success which might lead people away from grasping the form on the level on which the form is grasped in the great works of art of the world. It was those standards and his impatience with anything less that I found stimulating; and his total lack of self-preservation both for himself, which is hard, and also for other people, his students, which is even harder.”⁹²

By the end of 1953 the antagonism between Bomberg’s single-minded teaching style and that of the established art schools curriculum grew to an insurmountable level. It still seems miraculous that Bomberg managed to keep his teaching position for so long, as he was unwilling to compromise and make his approach more acceptable to other professors. It appears that his uncompromising and belligerent temperament in teaching was a major obstacle which did not help others to sympathize with him. “With Bomberg’s teaching there did not seem to be room for half measures [...] you were either for it or against it”⁹³ Oxlade explained. He was not even determined to placate others by adjusting his methods to the school’s demands, since he was never fundamentally convinced of the rightness of what he was doing, and Oxlade further confirms that “Bomberg himself always referred to his ‘approach’, with its implication of something empirical, experimental, because he [...] had doubts about the advisability, even the possibility of teaching art at all”⁹⁴ This in part explains why he found it hard to work within the framework of a rigid institution and “created fundamental difficulties within any institution which employed him, and where the general direction of studies was outside his control. He had no belief in the normally accepted ways of teaching art, and what is more important, he totally rejected the Art Schools’ objectives of the time.”⁹⁵ The revolutionary methods he developed had in mind the abolition of the so far established conventions of the academic art teaching, thus their failure in the context of academic hostility was inevitable. Oxlade explained that “The requirements of the National Diploma in Design and Bomberg’s teaching were totally incompatible, which meant that within the Art School structure of the time his influence was subversive. Furthermore, the special relationship which his teaching demanded meant that he could not ‘share’ students with other teachers whose methods were unsympathetic to his”⁹⁶ Auerbach remembers that Bomberg “wasn’t interested in whether they would pass exams or whether they

⁹¹ F. Auerbach, quoted in R. Cork, op. cit., p. 285.

⁹² C. Holden, op. cit.

⁹³ R. Oxlade, quoted in R. Cork, op. cit., p. 291.

⁹⁴ R. Oxlade, quoted *ibid.*

⁹⁵ R. Oxlade, quoted *ibid.*

⁹⁶ R. Oxlade, quoted *ibid.*, p. 292.

would have a painting to present at the end of the evening. He simply wanted them to be working at a most serious level".⁹⁷

Leon Kossoff, encouraged by Auerbach, joined the Borough classes in 1950.⁹⁸ He had studied at St Martin's School of Art before, where his teachers had warned him against Bomberg's unorthodox methods which could spoil his acquired style. But Kossoff was young and eager to get to know the controversial teacher, and his inspiring methods. "I had been aware of Bomberg as mysterious presence for some years", he recalls, adding that he "had seen some of his paintings and been very moved by them".⁹⁹

Although in general terms Bomberg's teaching enterprise seems to have amounted to a failure, it was still a success due to the influence he and his art exerted on the younger generation of painters. He continued to work and exhibit with the Borough Bottega, of which he was still the leader. And thanks to the Bottega, he could continue his teaching in the spirit of the Borough outside the institution itself.

The disbanding of the Borough Group, partly explained by the inability of its members to work together and pursue their common aim, was followed by the establishment of the Borough Bottega. In fact the foundation of the Borough Bottega in August 1953 with the honorary life membership of David Bomberg implied the artist's unswerving pertinence to lead his students along the path he foresaw for them.

Their first exhibition took place from 16 November to 4 December 1953, at the Berkeley Gallery in the context of the formation of a new artistic group.¹⁰⁰ At first there were no formal plans to initiate a new formation, only an idea to exhibit together, inspired at the last classes of Bomberg's at the Borough Polytechnic. They all agreed that the show should be called *Borough '53*, and Bomberg committed himself to writing a catalogue introduction.¹⁰¹ Later, they agreed to make a professional association, and in their three-point credo the arrangement of exhibitions occupied point number one: "To organize the display of members' works". Later followed the declaration "To revitalize art", and finally they all agreed to cooperate with other artists in shared exhibitions by aiming "To increase the serious practice of art by inviting unknown or well-known artists to exhibit".¹⁰²

After numerous arguments the newly-formed group agreed to adopt the name The Borough Bottega. This disclosed especially Bomberg's attachment not only to the institution of the Borough Polytechnic but to the previous Borough Group he established arguing "that eight years' work and associations lay

⁹⁷ F. Auerbach, quoted *ibid.*, p. 286.

⁹⁸ R. Cork, *op. cit.*, p. 286.

⁹⁹ L. Kossoff, quoted *ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ W. Lipke, *op. cit.*, p. 119.

¹⁰¹ R. Cork, *op. cit.*, p. 297.

¹⁰² Borough Bottega Group, quoted *ibid.*

in the name Borough, as well as prestige”.¹⁰³ The other part of the name, “Bottega”, did not merely imply his turning to tradition. Although it did refer to his fascination with the Italian Renaissance masters, which he clearly explained in the catalogue introduction, it also emphasized the workshop character of his Group, as opposed to the Royal Academy’s more scholarly approach. In this open criticism of the Academy, Bomberg maintained that “it is a prototype of the 15th-century Italian Bottega, that initiates to the profession, the workshop where the apprenticeship proved better than the system of academic training that followed in the 17th-century. The name Borough Bottega derives from the Polytechnic, S. E. 1, where the school was based in 1945”.¹⁰⁴ Moreover, he also evoked the impact of his own masters and teachers, who inspired him to great aims during his early career, on the formation of the Bottega: “for its foundation as a school of painting I had brought Sickert and his traditions and those of my Slade professors Fredk. Brown, Henry Tonks, Walter W. Russell, and Wilson Steer. I had learned my art close at their hands – and to Walter Bayes I owe this conception of an Italian Bottega and my earliest initiation”.¹⁰⁵ He accounted for the disapproval of his contemporary British painting on the grounds of mere imitation of external appearances, asserting that “it has become so facile with its own virtuosity trying to imitate the virtues of others, and if artists do not feel sick it is because it has become the fashion of painting to mirror one another’s complexions [...] structure has become less important”.¹⁰⁶ Above all Bomberg declared that “the Borough Bottega denotes the *spirit in the mass*” and in this respect it is a continuation of his artistic credo which had “brought the practice of my whole life’s work”.¹⁰⁷ Bomberg’s confidence must have been encouraged by heartfelt sympathy of his students, especially Gustav Metzger, who insisted that the Borough Bottega organize exhibitions of Bomberg’s works exclusively, as well as provide information in order to further “the understanding and recognition of Bomberg’s achievement”.¹⁰⁸ Such words must have cheered the artist who had so long been neglected by art circles and must have affirmed him that in developing the group of devoted artists he may continue to pass his appeals further. One of the means of conveying these ideas was by arranging exhibitions to enable the Bottega members to display of their works.

After moving to Spain and a failure of his plans to establish an art school in Ronda, it may have seemed that his teaching career at this point terminated. But it by no means suggested that his contact with his pupils or the Borough Bottega stopped. Bomberg continued to send his works to the Bottega’s exhibi-

¹⁰³ Borough Bottega Group, quoted *ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ D. Bomberg, quoted in W. Lipke, *op. cit.*, p. 120.

¹⁰⁵ D. Bomberg, quoted *ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ D. Bomberg, quoted *ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ D. Bomberg, quoted *ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ G. Metzger, quoted in R. Cork, *op. cit.*, p. 297.

tions, cordially invited by its members, thus continuing to influence their artistic ways. According to John Russell Taylor, even after Bomberg's transplantation to his "beloved Ronda in 1954, this tight-knit group of the faithful continued to spread the word of Bomberg's genius through their own art, with its heavy debt to Bomberg's teaching and example".¹⁰⁹

Frank Auerbach's paintings derive from his master's teaching a concentration on an organic structure expressive in what Bomberg's called "the incomprehensible density of cosmic forces compressed into a small space" seeking a unified form.¹¹⁰ Bomberg's classes "strengthened his lasting conviction that a painting must convey a sense of the tangible reality of its subject".¹¹¹ Moreover, in accordance with Bomberg's teaching, Auerbach searches for a structure that combines the autonomy of a work of art in itself with authenticity to his own experience. A careful analysis of some of Auerbach's works reveals undeniable traces of Bomberg's method, especially in his reliance on drawing as a fundamental means for further exploration. As regards some works, one could almost say that Auerbach's paintings are a modified version of Bomberg's after a half of the century, also because the pupil adapted his master's teaching to a contemporary subject matter of selected London buildings near his studio in London's Camden Town, where he has lived since 1954.¹¹² Others, such as *The Primrose Hill* (1967-1968), for instance, of the North London area series are immersed by a tangle of brushmarks, some zigzagging violently into space as if to hold the emerging image back. The balance between coherence and chaos is kept on a knife edge. In some of his portraits (e.g. *Portrait of Catherine Lampert*, 1982) Bomberg's fierce expressiveness takes on a tone of gentle allusion and subtle colouring that is Auerbach's very own development. He seems to share Bomberg's early enthusiasm for London as a metropolis, whose urban sprawl he records chaotically on his canvas. But unlike Bomberg, who depicted his city in geometrical abstractions, Auerbach becomes more expressive in his generously impastoed canvases. His early works, on the other hand, were still rather geometric and formal in colour, such as *Summer Building Site* (1952), but equally heavily impastoed, as he put on canvas layer after layer of paint until he arrived at a desirable "life" of his image (for instance, *Playing Room*, 1964). In some of his works, such as *The Head E.O.W.* (1961), the paint is laid so thickly on the canvas that it acquires qualities of a sculpture and hence evokes the interplay of shadows and light; although the canvas is highly expressive it also remains subtle and refined in its painterly texture. In this expressionist manner he most closely approaches Bomberg's

¹⁰⁹ J. R. Taylor, *Bomberg and the Borough Group*, date of access: 10 Mar. 2010, www.boundarygallery.com.

¹¹⁰ R. Morphet, *Encounters: New Art from Old*, an exhibition held at the National Gallery, London, 14 June-17 September 2000, exhibition catalogue, p. 33.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² *Ibid.*

belief in “the spirit of the mass”. Spalding argues that such insistence on emotional subjectivity is dangerous for the work of art may become too “solipsistic” which intensifies “a fullness of means but not always of content.”¹¹³ Nonetheless, both Auerbach and Kossoff succeed in portraying the incessant expansion of the urban area of London which in their work acquires a sense of changeability and liveliness. This is only possible because of their reliance on the Bombergian method which blended the subjectivity of response with the power inherent in the painted cityscape.

Leon Kossoff, similarly to Auerbach, was inspired by the growth of London’s urban metropolis, which he painted in an equally passionate manner as if determined to attack his canvas with the prodding and dragging brushstrokes soaking in paint which “dripped, dragged, flicked and coagulated”.¹¹⁴ It is almost as if the thick impasto had become the subject of his paintings of the gloomy Kilburn tube station or his views of Hackney which accordingly seem to be breathing as the “surface of the canvas is still moving, heaving and reforming like boiling tar”.¹¹⁵ Due to this heavy reworking of thick impasto, people and places that are well-known to him are rendered as more truthful representations of reality (e.g. *Two seated figures*, 1980). In the painting *Here Comes the Diesel* (1987), Kossoff’s indulgence in rich texture approached Action Painting, not in its abstraction, which was rather moderate, but in the way the paint dripped on the canvas. The juxtaposition is reinforced by the poetic treatment of the unpoetic subject matter of a passing train. Moreover, this painting takes after Bomberg a lack of illustrational refinement and avoidance of pure abstraction for its own sake. Hence, “the final picture is often achieved in a single session, the swiftness and intensity of the mark making being openly displayed”.¹¹⁶

What links Kossoff’s art with Bomberg’s methods more intensively is his reliance on drawing, which his teacher had always insisted upon. Kossoff gives primary importance to drawing, which expresses his commitment and involvement with the subject, and hence painting itself is conceived as a form of drawing. “Kossoff draws continually – a practice fundamental to his work – both from great past art and from the world around him”.¹¹⁷ And just like Bomberg in and around 1914, he manifests in his works “an unplanned symbiosis between the figures seen in these two contexts”.¹¹⁸ Indeed, he shares with his master a fascination for the urban scenes, since next to “family members, friends and nude models”, he vividly depicts the life of London, including the “building sites, street scenes, a crowded swimming pool [...] and the soaring

¹¹³ F. Spalding, op. cit., p. 164.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ R. Morphet, op. cit., p. 217.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

façade of Hawksmoor's Christ Church, Spitalfields".¹¹⁹ In its physicality based on the properties of light, colour and materials there also emerges the artist's powerful emotional response, as if to follow Bomberg's belief that the material richness of a work of art makes the artist conscious that the depth is in himself.

Dennis Creffield owes to Bomberg's teaching his ability of a draughtsman to make drawings which are then ultimate works of art in themselves and not just a painter's aid. The drawings are for him a means to achieve a high quality of paintings in oils. But, as Taylor claims, the paintings are not even obviously "draughtsman's painting",¹²⁰ implying that the skeleton was there first and was then virtually coloured by numbers. Although art history tends to underestimate drawing in general, relegating it to a second-class category, it arises from Creffield's works that both paintings and drawings "are given absolute parity of esteem", and "there is no sense that drawings are 'just drawings'".¹²¹ Creffield is delighted with such an approach, for he, after Bomberg, admits that "I have never made any distinction between paintings and drawings myself. They are both exercises of the same artistic function, and what is crudely called black-and-white is really nuanced and various as any range of colours".¹²² He makes an obvious connection to what Bomberg taught him at the Borough, as "Bomberg made no distinction between drawing and painting, both being based primarily on an appreciation of, and ability to render, the weight and mass of the subject. Some of his finest works, such as the thrilling landscapes of Ronda, are large charcoal drawings based on this principle".¹²³

In "The Times" review of his retrospective exhibition at the Flowers East Gallery, Taylor quotes Creffield deploring the inability of contemporary artists to make good drawings – "it is a problem that students are no longer taught to draw, as though the discipline is quite irrelevant to art in the 21st century?" – but observes that "it is only a comparatively recent thing for drawings to move out of the field of illustration and become recognized as valid artworks in themselves. And this recognition is still far from complete".¹²⁴ He moves on to recall that "when I went on to the Slade I found their approach to drawing unsympathetic, tending towards a very close, finicking particularity rather than making a satisfactory work of art. But since the Slade then was an entirely post-graduate institution, with no classes or formal teaching, I went right on drawing the way Bomberg had encouraged".¹²⁵

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ J. R. Taylor, *Back to the Drawing Board*.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

“Like all great teachers, Bomberg was in danger of enslaving the students whom he had come to liberate”.¹²⁶ But his deeply-rooted influence on his pupils, which has been manifested throughout their lives, was not just mere imitation. They have defined in their work the poetic, refined expression of conscious autonomy in paint – the total awareness – which is their most precious debt to Bomberg’s art. In fact it was clearly part of Bomberg’s “special genius as a teacher that he had a profound influence on all who studied with him, and yet at the same time in some way liberated them to express themselves with greater richness and freedom. All of his pupils bear the impress of Bomberg’s style and personality”,¹²⁷ but none simply becomes a copyist, for Bomberg would have objected to it.

Above all, Bomberg had a deep faith in his pupils, which provided them with profound affirmation and liberation. As Kossoff admits, “Although I had painted most of my life [...] it was through my contact with Bomberg that I felt I might actually function as a painter. Coming to Bomberg’s class was like coming home”.¹²⁸

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¹²⁶ J. Gross, quoted in W. Lipke, op. cit., p. 109.

¹²⁷ J. R. Taylor, *Bomberg and the Borough Group*.

¹²⁸ L. Kossoff, quoted in R. Cork, op. cit., p. 286.