



Teaching the art of business

Emeric Peyredieu du Charlat describes how a business school incubator is combining art and business training to produce 'artpreneurs'

An abstract sculpture in a multinational's main entrance hall, an art foundation set up by a CEO passionate about paintings, an artist in residence whose work reflects company life, business schools that bring art onto campus through art management programmes, exhibitions or student clubs – business and the arts are not always a world apart.

Despite such initiatives, some still say that, where art is concerned, "business" is a dirty word. It smacks of compromise and commercialisation rather than the sort of creative freedom that should be a hallmark of the artistic.

However, the bare facts are that artists have to sell their art to survive. While such a view may not match lofty ideals it cannot be denied that doing business is therefore a key part of living from art. So, what if management schools made a real effort to see art and business as mutually beneficial?

Here we are not talking about simple sponsorship deals or the odd donation. Business schools need to recognise that the skills needed to head a firm are strikingly similar to those required to earn a living from art.

A struggling artist who wishes to become a successful one needs a business plan, communications skills, sales techniques and the sort of corporate relations that can bring support and funding.

In this way, any artist who makes a living has to have an entrepreneurial spirit. To succeed he or she must follow the same logic as a start-up: an original idea has to be brought to fruition, a public has to be found and a way of reaching this target audience has to be identified. Packaged together these aspects produce a profile that can perhaps best be defined as "artrepreneur".

This is something renowned French artist Fabrice Hyber acknowledged back in the 1980s. Famous in modern art circles the world over, Hyber has always harboured his own view on what business can bring to fine art.

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When other artists shunned working with firms he embraced the approach from the very start of his career. By 1991, he had formed a business partnership that allowed him to break the record for making the world's largest bar of soap, designed as a self-portrait. In 1994, he founded a limited company to promote dialogue between artists and business.

The approach gave him inspiration while also putting him on the modern art map. Exhibitions of his work have been held in countries as far afield as Japan, the US, Norway, Israel, Russia, Canada, Switzerland and Mexico.

Hyber was, and still is, convinced that the relationship between art and business education should be better developed. His own experience has taught him that creators of art can truly benefit from the sort of knowledge management schools dispense. What began as a personal philosophy took concrete form when Hyber became one of the key driving forces in the opening of a business incubator for artists: the first of its kind.

Going by the name of *les Réalisateurs*, the incubator began in western France and welcomed its first intake in the 2013-14 academic year. The choice of the city of Nantes as a base imposed itself from the start. Where better to launch the initiative than in the city where Hyber had studied art and which has deftly transformed itself over the past few years from industrial centre to a hive of arts and culture?



Calling on the long-term input of both his former art school, ESBANM (*l'Ecole Supérieure des Beaux Arts de Nantes Métropole*), and of Audencia Business School, *les Réalisateur*s was ready to open its doors.

The principle is to give a new generation of artists much-needed business acumen. Chosen by Hyber on the basis of their talent and desire to bring a well-defined idea to life, these artists are accompanied for 12 months by experts from both schools and by Fabrice Hyber himself.

While Hyber is on hand to provide crucial creative advice, ESBANM ensures that the entrepreneurs have access to top technical know-how. Meanwhile, Audencia offers four types of business classes that tackle the contemporary economic world, the corporate world, arts sponsorship and the contemporary market for art. The incubator involves three Audencia faculty and a core of four experts from the fine arts school, which also provides video technicians among its support network.

Thanks to funding from partner firms and from grants, the incubation period costs the chosen artists nothing. Their only remit is to present an interesting idea at the start of the 12 months and to turn it into an artistic reality by the end.

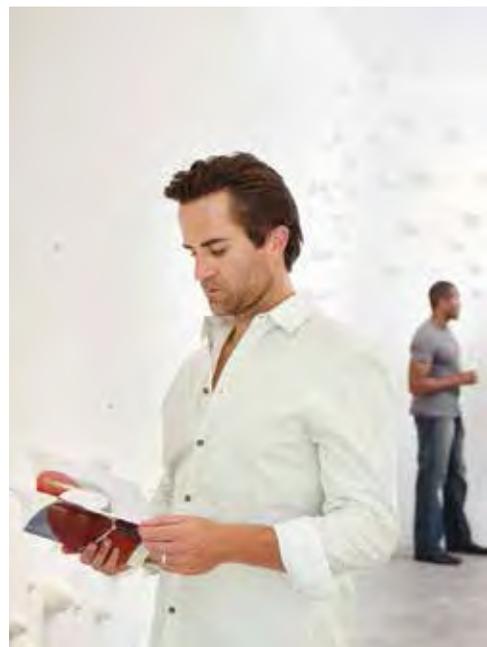
In its first two years the incubator served to test the approach on a wide range of projects that went a long way to proving its worth.

One success came from close work with a family of perfumers to produce an odour that sums up Nantes. A mixture of such elements as the iodine smell of the Loire River, the odours from industrial activities and the smells of cargo docks, the perfume was released as a mist through which the public passed, the perfume clinging to their clothes. Another artist teamed up with Meilland, a major international flower business, to create a



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new rose that stained so easily its pigment could be used directly to draw.

After two years of fine-tuning, the class of 2015-16 provided the chance to fit the final piece into the art and business education jigsaw. For the first time, the incubator's artists were coached by students from Audencia's cultural management course, one of whom is on an exchange programme from the Louvre Museum's art history school and one from a partner engineering school.

The artists and students met every month. This meant the artists' projects could be monitored and their needs assessed in real time. Taught to adopt a business mindset from the start, the four artists have developed a skill set that it is hoped will allow them to live from their art.

One example is Réjean Peytavin, whose concept is nothing less than a new way of measuring time. His "percentage clock" discards showing the hour of the day in the traditional way and instead displays the percentage of the 24 hours used up or still remaining. It is an artistic statement, but thanks to les Réaliseurs one that has the business backing that could make it a viable product.

The Audencia students guided Peytavin towards MEITO, an association of technical and electronics firms all working in the west of France. After giving initial input at the very start of the project, MEITO is now helping the artist to find firms keen to invest in the mass manufacture of the clock.

Like Peytavin, the other artists in the 2016 intake are still working on their projects. These have benefitted from the coaching given by the three students. Their works integrate the business world in diverse ways.

One of them is in contact with firms that could play the roles of technical consultants and partners

to help perfect Françoise Vanneraud's idea of producing art that represents the many uses a piece of land undergoes over the years. Much like geological strata, these layers of land use produce a visually striking insight into urban renewal.

To meet the challenge she must source just the right industrial material to allow these layers to be produced. This could become a solid business idea as archaeologists have already expressed an interest in using the perfected technique to publicise the result of their digs to the public.

Another 2016 artist is working on a limited edition of sculptures of the Erika wreck and oil spill. However, these sculptures will not be shaped by the artist but rather produced from an industrial mould.

The final artist has chosen to attack liberalism's dark side by working on the production of a theatre performance based on the views gathered from the office staff and metalworkers of real firms.

The success of les Réaliseurs is borne out by the rest of the 2016 intake and by those from 2014 and 2015 who now have firm careers as artists. Its achievements will most likely lead to the opening of a summer school for the entrepreneurs.

But the Nantes-based incubator could very well be the start of a worldwide wave of such establishments. For Fabrice Hyber this is just the first step. Given his international profile and contacts, there is every possibility that setting up a global network of this sort of incubator could be a reality in the near future. Perhaps art and business schools have found that they really can get along and be mutually beneficial.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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12

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