



EDITORIAL

ARTS-BASED EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH NO LONGER NEEDS MARTYRS

A SMALL TRIBUTE TO MARK ROTHKO'S TEACHING PRACTICE

LA INVESTIGACIÓN EDUCATIVA BASADA EN LAS ARTES YA NO NECESITA MÁRTIRES. UN PEQUEÑO HOMENAJE A LA PRÁCTICA DOCENTE DE MARK ROTHKO

Dr. José María Mesías-Lema

University of A Coruña <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8278-7115>

Ten years ago, when this school started, progressive art methods were looked upon as a suspicious motivation and experiment. Today this method needs no martyrs. The method has extended itself to various public school buildings, which have become distinguished and admittance sought after for this very reason. (Rothko, "Scribble Book", 1934, p. 44)

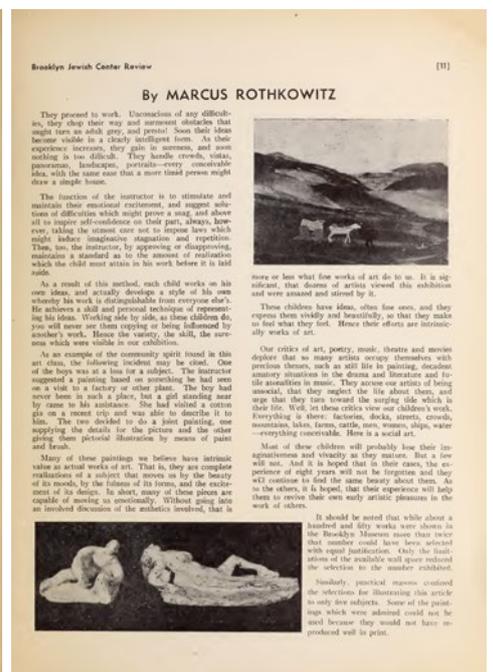
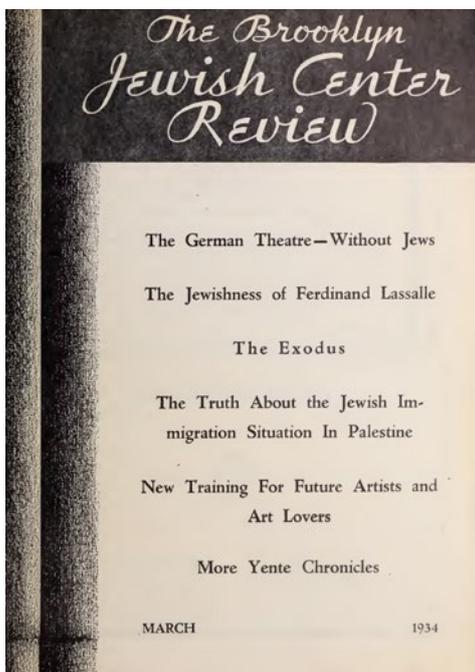


Image 1. "New Training for Future Artists and Art Lovers", 1934.

Art history textbooks are full of critical texts on Rothko's remarkable work. It is shocking to discover that one of the most transcendent artists of the twentieth century had a passion that had been fulfilled for more than twenty years: teaching art to children. Hardly anyone, myself included, was aware that Marcus Rothkowitz had made a living as a teacher at the Brooklyn Jewish Center in New York. And not just any teacher, but one of the good ones. In which case, this "earning a living" does not mean "earning a salary" for subsistence in order to be able to paint. Perhaps, we can legitimize this statement because, through the reading of his personal writings, we are overwhelmed by the rigor, ethics, dedication and responsibility in these two facets, never neglected. Painting and teaching converge during a period of twenty years and throughout his life. I have always admired the coherence of such people.

His first article published in 1934, "New Training for Future Artists and Art Lovers", marks the beginning of the artist's thinking based on his observations and experience in the classroom. He focuses his discourse on three axes: 1) art, visual and plastic language for all children, not only for those with talent 2) appreciation of the artistic productions created by children 3) the value of art for creation as a fundamental part of childhood and adult life. Rothko will develop these ideas in several writings that delve into the need for children to narrate, express and argue ideas through artistic language. And to this end, we can summarize his discourse on the teaching-learning of art in four concepts:

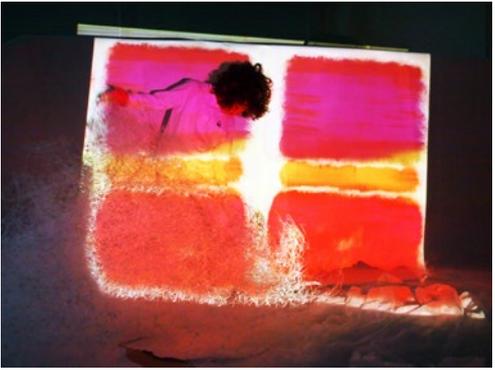
- **Art as language:** it is a method of recording our lived and imagined experience, our personal reactions, with the same simplicity as we do other daily tasks, but through plastic and visual language. Children always have good ideas and express them in such a way that we feel their inner scenery: "If you do not believe this, watch these children work, and you will see them put forms, figures and views into pictorial arrangements, employing of necessity most of the rules of optical perspective and geometry, but without the knowledge that they are employing them. They do so in the same manner as they speak, unconscious that they are using the rules of grammar" (p. 10).
- **The classroom as a way of life:** The art classroom creates community and alterity, respect for others and for their artistic productions, because the collective aesthetic experience helps them to relive the artistic pleasure in the works of others. When they enter the classroom, all the materials are ready to be used and experienced. All students come full of ideas and, as their experience increases, they become more confident in their lived experience of the artistic processes. Each child works with his or her own idea with a very high level of demand, because they will be part of a collective exhibition: "Well, let these critics view our children's work. Everything is there: factories, docks, streets, crowds, mountains, lakes, farms, cattle, men, women, ships, water –everything conceivable. Here is a social art." (p. 11).
- **The importance of creative processes in childhood:** All children admire artistic procedures and techniques, therefore, teaching has to increase their sensibility based on experimentation, because it is not our job to create artists. The creative act is a social action. Imagine students on a desert island, inactivity and boredom are necessary to awaken the instinct and enable them to create to their heart's content. Considering that the creative period is usually depleted before the age of 12, and that it is very short, the artistic processes in childhood are of vital importance for adult life. But giving them freedom is not synonymous with students doing whatever they want, for example, Rothko developed an endless list of elements of visual language to address during childhood.

- **The role of teacher-artist:** Mark Rothko defined this dual role in a 1941 text. He conceptualized this double task, where the teaching function involves stimulating and suggesting concrete solutions to overcome blockages in the artistic process, without imposing rules that stagnate the imagination. “The perfect teacher who will teach a creative artistic activity must have a double profile. First, like any other teacher, he must have sufficient insight and preparation to assess the child’s personality, background and potential; his mere presence and demeanor should create an atmosphere of relaxation and confidence; and must share the social approach to the educational process involved in this activity. On the other hand, and this is truly the important requirement of this study, the teacher must possess the sensibility of an artist. Art must provide the teacher with a clear and direct language, capable of inspiring the student’s understanding and the inherent excitement that this intrinsically entails. The teacher-artist is usually the one who best accomplishes this mission” (López-Remiro, p. 54).

If only we had been his students! That is the feeling that remains, like turpentine suspended in the air, after reading his personal writings. We can imagine his classes, the space of individual creation that he offered to his students, from the confidence to the mistake, to the failure, to the procedural, to the expository as a way to enhance childhood productions... In short, we cannot say that he conducted Arts-based Educational Research because there was simply no such concept, nor the need to label everything that happened in educational processes. In fact, he was openly critical of the educational fads of the “false theorists, interior decorators of social history and philosophy, who have no relationship with the truth, and who distort the facts to market their fragile machinations” (p. 35). However, his teaching expertise, not as an isolated practice, but deep in time and forms, in his pragmatic and intellectual knowledge, grants coherence to his being a teacher-artist and to the artistic research within the teaching practice.

While his first texts focused on his teaching role and the teaching-learning processes of the arts in childhood, when his artistic career began to take off internationally, he continued to work as a university professor at the California School of Fine Arts, at the University of Colorado and Tulane University. His last text, upon his acceptance of an Honorary Doctorate in Fine Arts from Yale University in 1969, would become a prophecy of the future direction of contemporary art:

“When I was young, art was a solitary practice: there were no galleries, no collectors, no critics, no money. However, it was a golden age, because we had nothing to lose and a whole vision to gain. Today this is no longer the case. It is a time of immense abundance of activity and consumption. I do not dare to venture a guess as to which of the two circumstances is better for art. However, I do know that many of those who are driven to this mode of life are desperately seeking pockets of silence in which to root and grow. We all hope they find them” (López-Remiro, p. 219)



Images 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9. "Project with preschool students in the CEIP of Sigüeiro, 2016", Mesías-Lema, 2019, p. 172-173.

His entire discourse, considered from a retrospective of almost 90 years, is still fully valid today to be assumed by teachers and art education professionals. In fact, in 2016, from a preschool classroom, we wanted to pay a small tribute to Rothko as a teacher-artist, for his invaluable contribution to art education in childhood. Starting from his ideas, from his works as great atmospheres of color, as a chromatic epidermis that invades the spectator, we decided to mimic them, with movements, feeling the artist's stains and expressing the energy and vitality of the works with the body (Mesías-Lema, 2019). We wanted the students to experience Rothko's work from the inside, as he said in an interview: I paint large canvases because I am inside them. "I conceive my paintings as dramatic works; the forms in the paintings are the actors. They are created from the need to have actors capable of moving and executing gestures with no shame. Neither the action nor the actors are predictable, nor can they be described a priori. They begin an unknown adventure in an equally unknown space" (pp. 100-101).

Arts-based educational research is based on classical references such as Dewey, Pierce, Schön, and is born out of the "pragmatist epistemology: to rescue and work with the lived professional experience as a launching point for the construction of new knowledge through analysis, reflection and criticism." (Mesías-Lema, 2012, p. 233). In the field of arts education, María Jesús Agra (1994), international authority in this field, who initiated this line and laid the theoretical foundations more than thirty years ago. She advocated a teaching role from the praxis of artistic learning based on action plans. This advance contributed significantly to the understanding of practice and research in arts education as a space for the integration of artistic action as a model of educational research. We can consider this thesis as the pioneer of Arts-based Educational Research in our country. Subsequently, Agra (2005) would develop the methodological corpus from the narrative, and it would be expanded from an epistemological and argumentative perspective by Ricardo Marín (2005). The mentorship of senior scientists such as Agra and Marín-Viadel, instilled in a whole generation of researchers, enough confidence to open emerging fields in shifting grounds, always from the intellectual restlessness of wanting to change art teaching in the classroom.

This journal aims to be a loudspeaker for the quality of teaching and learning practices in the arts, but from the perspective of research. Teaching practices devoid of a solid and deep artistic and pedagogical argumentation, detached from rigorous and stable research processes over time, do not build knowledge or help to advance in the scientific field. We agree with Garcés (2021) when he states that the debate in education has been reduced to rivalry and conflict between superficial formulae, with innovation as the backdrop of neoliberal discourse. Therefore, we want to create a scientific space for the community of professionals who simultaneously and inseparably move between art and education, as two close, interconnected and merged worlds. It is our task, as representatives of the scientific community, to respond with our actions, demands and needs to a living, organic and transferable research. We must observe how Arts-based Educational Research is also a regenerating change in arts education practice, that which is constantly in friction with the realities that it addresses. Only in this way can we reconstruct the epistemological field of arts education in cultural, social and educational contexts.

We have spent too much energy trying to explain to professionals outside our field what Arts-based education research was or what it was not. Arts-based educational research no longer needs martyrs. It needs to be given visibility, used by experts in the field and defended by researchers who take risks in this line, based on quality and scientific argumentation. The creation of this journal is a collective attempt to appreciate our field of research, to disseminate it and to feel proud of it. We intend for this scientific space to be a place of dialogue, debate and risk. All beginnings are difficult but exciting. As Rothko said: "art is, for us, an adventure into an unknown world, which can only be explored by those who are willing to take risks" (1943, in López-Remiro, p. 69).

If we don't do it, who will?

REFERENCES

- Agra Pardiñas, M. J. (1994). *Planes de acción: una alternativa para la Educación Artística [Action plans: an alternative for art education]*. Editorial Universidad Complutense de Madrid.
- Agra Pardiñas, M. J. (2005). "El vuelo de la Mariposa: la investigación artístico-narrativa" [The flight of the butterfly: artistic-narrative research']. En Marín-Viadel, R. (ed). *Investigación en Educación Artística [Research in Arts Education]*. Editorial Universidad de Granada.
- Garcés, M. (2021). *Escuela de aprendices [School of apprentices]*. Galaxia Gutenberg.
- López-Remiro, M. (2007). *Mark Rothko. Escritos sobre arte (1934-1969) [Mark Rothko. Writings about art (1934-1969)]*. Paidós.
- Marín-Viadel, R. (2005). La "investigación educativa basada en las artes visuales" o "arteinvestigación educativa" *Investigación en Educación Artística [The 'educational research based on visual arts' or 'educational artresearch' Research in Art Education]*. Editorial Universidad de Granada. En Marín-Viadel, R. (ed). *Investigación en Educación Artística*. Editorial Universidad de Granada
- Mesías Lema, J. M. (2012). *Fotografía y educación de las artes visuales: el fotoactivismo educativo como estrategia docente en la formación del profesorado [Photography and education in visual arts: educational photoactivism as a teaching strategy for teacher training]*. Editorial Universidad de Granada.
- Mesías Lema, J. M. (2019). *Educación artística sensible: cartografía contemporánea para arteducadores [Sensitive art education: contemporary cartography for arteducators]*. Graó.
- Moreno Montoro, M^a. I. y López-Pelaez, M^a. P. (coords.) (2016). *Reflexiones sobre investigación artística e investigación educativa basada en las artes [Reflections about art research and Art-based educational research]*. Síntesis.
- Rothko, M. (1934). "New Training for Future Artists and Art Lovers". *The Brooklyn Jewish Center Review*, pp. 10-11.