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Brara, Noor. "Art School Confidential," *New York Times Style Magazine*, July 6, 2022.

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Whether or not one decides to go to art school depends on a great number of factors, including, of course, one's ability to get in, which sometimes has more to do with luck than with talent, not to mention an awareness that art school even exists and that being an artist is a viable option, which for many people, especially those from disadvantaged communities, can be a discovery in itself. This aside, it's usually a matter of weighing the benefits — namely training and time and space to think and make work — against the often literal and sometimes substantial costs. There's no clear answer, but what is clear is that art school alone cannot make you an artist, or shield you from self-doubt, uncertainty or rejection. Perhaps for this reason, some artists are most grateful for the sense of community provided by those they met while students — often a classmate or teacher becomes a lifelong friend, collaborator or mentor, someone who shows up regardless of the state of the other person's career.

Below is a compilation of personal histories in which contemporary artists talk about their time in art school. They show that experiences vary widely — Paul

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Anthony Smith is in favor of reframing art school as a kind of technical school for developing a skill set, while Mariko Mori credits the theoretical underpinnings of classes at the Independent Study Program of the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, with making her more grounded in her practice — but also that a formal program can be useful, or at least motivating, even when it becomes something to push against. Amalia Ulman, for instance, felt she had to discard much of what she was taught at art school in order to rediscover what truly propelled her to make art. What the novelist George Saunders once wrote of artistic mentorships seems apt here, too: “At the end of the mentoring period ..., the student snaps out of it, disavows the teacher’s view, which is starting to feel like a set of bad-fitting clothes anyway, and goes back to her own way of thinking. But maybe along the way, she’s picked up a few things. These are things she likely knew all along, of which the teacher simply reminded her.”

Mariko Mori, multidisciplinary artist, 55

The Independent Study Program of the Whitney Museum of American Art, student, class of 1993; Chelsea College of Art and Design, B.F.A., class of 1992; Byam Shaw School of Art, foundation course, 1989



Mariko Mori's "Magic Mirror" (1993), a self-portrait made when she was 26 and attending the Whitney Independent Study Program. © Mariko Mori

My mom was an art historian of Western renaissance art, so I was around that a lot as a child. But I remember discovering, at around 9 years old, a postcard of a Jackson Pollock painting. It was the first time I'd encountered Abstract Expressionist painting, and it was sensational for me. I felt this sense of total freedom. I loved art and design both, so I applied to Bunka Fashion College in

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Tokyo and went there. Now, here's where it takes a bit of a turn, and I think I'm finally ready to reveal my secret. I wanted to continue my studies in fashion after that, so I sent all my design work in a portfolio to apply for a foundation course in the U.K. at the Byam Shaw School of Art. But [the school] did not offer a fashion course, only fine art. So I made a mistake. I got to class and didn't see any sewing machines — it was a drawing class — and that's when I realized it wasn't fashion college [laughs]. My English wasn't good enough to explain the error. And it was only for a year, so I decided to stay, and that's how I ended up shifting my interest.

I found more freedom in London than in Japan, where the education system was much more formal, even for creative disciplines. It was nice to have your own studio, to make your own decisions, to have tutors to talk to who had successful careers of their own and who treated you as artists whose work was deserving of their time and attention and even criticism, which was very precious to me. And the libraries were excellent. After that, I did the Independent Study Program at the Whitney Museum, which was a really good steppingstone to the New York art world. We were given studio space in TriBeCa and a lot of mentorship from artists and curators and writers. It was very stimulating for me intellectually. I got to see tons of exhibitions and absorb the energy of the city, which can be overwhelming, with the help of the right people. I think a lot of students find the program challenging because in addition to making work, you're expected to do a lot of theoretical studies, and those things can be hard to balance. But for me it was significant because I learned to ground my work more deeply in concepts I was interested in. It's easy to get lost in your own work, and I'm not necessarily sure that's a good thing. ... Even now, I do conceptual writing for my projects, and I find it very helpful.



Mori's "Art as Fashion" (1991), a photo of the artist from 1991, when she was 24 and a student at London's Chelsea College of Art and Design. © Mariko Mori

It isn't necessary to go to art school, I don't think. It really depends on your personality. But I do think it can be helpful. When you're in the art school

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environment, you have time to look at yourself, to build your confidence, to be nurtured by other artists and talk with them about your work sincerely. At the same time, if you already know what you want to contribute to the world, if your life is already rich with experience and there's something that you'd like to offer to the public, I believe you're ready. But for a lot of people that can be intimidating, and for them it's perhaps better that their practice is built privately, at least for a while, before they go out there.