

**UNDER EMBARGO UNTIL 00.01 on 15.02.2021**

## ***BOB AND ROBERTA SMITH TALKS EXCLUSIVELY TO THE ARTS SOCIETY MAGAZINE***



Pictured: Bob and Roberta Smith for The Arts Society Magazine Spring Issue 2021 (photo by John Millar)

- **COVID-19 HAS ROBBED CHILDREN OF ACCESS TO ARTS AND CULTURE**
- **WE MUST TRANSFORM THE WAY WE TEACH ART**
- **WE NEED TO SPEAK UP AND CHALLENGE THE “POOL OF CULTURE”**

**UNDER EMBARGO UNTIL MONDAY 15<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY 2021:** In an interview for *The Arts Society Magazine* a passionate **Bob and Roberta Smith** speaks exclusively to Editor Sue Herdman about arts education being more important than ever before, why now is the time for us to speak up and take action, to prevent arts education from disappearing from the UK completely.

While the dismantling of arts education in the UK is deeply upsetting, champions of the arts such as **Bob and Roberta Smith** as well as **The Arts Society** are at the forefront of ensuring that arts education remains at the core of children’s experiences. In spring 2020, The Arts Society actively made a difference by launching their digital platform **The Arts Society Connected** available to the public as well as their 90,000+ members to help people through tough times caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. However, the devastating effects of the pandemic on arts education have been severely detrimental due to the lack of accessibility with museums as well as theatres closing, not to mention the closure of schools. This has caused a huge roadblock in children’s creativity and subsequently learning and development. Commenting on these issues, Smith says: **“Think of all those kids who [in this time] haven’t seen an amazing piece of new theatre, who haven’t been excited to lift a guitar for the first time; who haven’t been to an exhibition that spurs them to think: “I can do this”. That’s a huge loss”.**

Smith argues that art is a human right that all children should have access to as part of their education, he says: **“Teaching art is akin to a human right; art teachers are human rights workers. Art enables us to advocate for ourselves, using whatever medium works for us. It helps us process things, letting us sink into**

***our imaginations. It's about looking and listening to the world and asking: is that right? Artists are truth seekers. The less art you have, the fewer truth seekers."***



### **WE MUST TRANSFORM THE WAY WE TEACH ART**

Bob and Roberta Smith argues that making art is an 'invitation' to understand ourselves better and to be better people because of it; an outlook instilled in him by his mother (the artist Deirdre Borlase) from a young age. Smith says ***"When we have access to the arts – when you are teaching art – you're enabling something fundamental; you are helping people realise who and what they are."***

Smith suggests that these issues need to be tackled head on inside the classroom, telling The Arts Society Magazine: ***"Don't tell the student to look at Duchamp...ask instead what it is they want to do. Ask them how they are going to throw pebbles into the pool of culture that will cause ripples. There has to be a transformation in the way we teach art. It needs to be built on ideas of self-expression – that's the way it is done in the best art education. Make more. Encourage students to manifest the things they feel are important"***.



As a champion of arts education and the power of art which ***"makes the world a better place"***, Bob and Roberta Smith urges children and artists - both young and established - to make a stand in 2021 by asking the simple question ***"how about this?"*** when they look at anything new they are presented with. He said, ***"[how about this?] is what artists and designers are saying every time they pick up a paintbrush or pencil...it's important artists speak about issues like this"***. Without the support of arts education, essential questions are not being asked and important voices are being lost.

### **SUPPORT ARTS EDUCATION**

Both **The Arts Society** as the UK's leading arts education charity and **Bob and Roberta Smith** (a patron of *The Big Draw* and *The National Society for Education in Art and Design*) believe that art makes children powerful, allowing them the freedom of speech and creativity that they cannot find elsewhere.

Committed to supporting young artists, The Arts Society's projects to support arts education have included collaborating with the **Royal Society of British Artists (RBA)** to select young artists from around the UK to exhibit in the **RBA Star Student Exhibition at the Royal Over-Seas League and Mall Galleries**. This is an exciting annual opportunity for talented young artists to showcase their work in a professional and prestigious environment. Additionally, during the tough first wave of Covid-19 pandemic, The Arts Society launched an **Isolation Artwork Competition** in support of young artists and students during lock down, which took place on their digital platform **The Arts Society Connected**.

Chief Executive of The Arts Society, Florian Schweizer comments: *We all must not forget about arts education and can never lose sight of the power of art and the impact it has on our future. We are thrilled to have been able to facilitate this important conversation with Bob and Roberta Smith whose passion for art education mirrors our own as an arts education charity. In addition to The Arts Society Connected platform which is providing arts education to the public as well as our members, our local Societies are working extremely hard to give back and support arts education in their local communities; they are dedicated to funding and facilitating a range of projects including artists in residence in schools, workshops, art exhibitions and competitions, bursaries and awards and supporting teachers to teach art in schools. We are proud to be part of this much-needed mission and will continue to encourage visual arts and culture across the UK.*

### **ART FOR ALL – WE ARE ALL ARTISTS**

Widely known for his politically charged slogans and passion about arts education Smith's statements may come as no surprise, as they echo both his flash mob campaigns and his famous **Letter to Michael Gove** in 2011. Amidst the chaos of 2020, The Royal Academician showcased his solidarity to the arts with his new work at *The Royal Academy's 2020 Summer Exhibition* titled **THERE IS STILL ART, THERE IS STILL HOPE**. Smith is determined to ensure the next generation of artists is as confrontational and innovative as possible.

In his final words of his interview in *The Arts Society Magazine's* spring issue, **Bob and Roberta Smith** reminds us that each and every one of us has artistic potential and why artists are the true scavengers of society. He says, "[Artists] operate on the outside of society, picking up what is useful for their practice to get by... when we learn, we are in some sense mastering and replicating others' works and ideas'.

Bob and Roberta Smith stands up and out on uncomfortable truths, but always with the end goal of inclusivity.

**Sue Herdman's exclusive interview with Bob and Roberta Smith will be published in The Arts Society Magazine's Spring 2021 Issue (out on 16<sup>th</sup> February) and available online at [theartsociety.org](https://theartsociety.org)**

### **PRESS**

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### **NOTES TO EDITORS**

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**The Arts Society** is a leading arts education charity with a global network of over 380 local Societies, which bring people together through a shared curiosity for the arts. Our events provide welcoming places – locally, nationally and globally – to hear expert Lecturers share their specialist knowledge about the arts. Our 90,000+ Members contribute to and preserve our artistic heritage through volunteering and grants. Our strength is our people, joined together by a passion for the arts which can nourish and empower us all. Our work creates a better, healthier and more connected society. [www.theartsociety.org](https://www.theartsociety.org)





**Rob and Roberta Smith** (real name Patrick Brill) is a British contemporary artist, writer, author, musician, art education advocate and keynote speaker. He is known for his "slogan" art, is an associate professor at Sir John Cass Department of Art at London Metropolitan University and has been curator of public art projects, like *Art U Need*. He was curator for the 2006 *Peace Camp* and created the 2013 *Art Party* to promote contemporary art and advocacy. His works have been exhibited and are in collections in Europe and the United States. Brill co-founded The Ken Ardley Playboys and hosts the *Make Your Own Damn Music* radio show. His father is the landscape painter Frederick Brill who was head of the Chelsea School of Art from 1965 to 1979. His wife is the contemporary artist and lecturer, Jessica Voorsanger. Smith is currently working on his largest project to date, the *Thamesmead Codex*, a joint commission from Tate and Peabody Trust. And his latest book is *You Are An Artist*, published by Thames & Hudson.