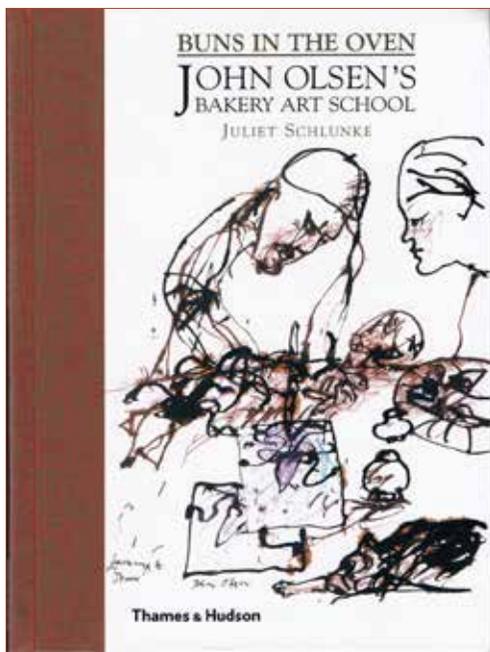


BUNS IN THE OVEN JOHN OLSEN'S BAKERY ART SCHOOL



by Juliet Schlunke with advice
to his students by John Olsen,
Thames & Hudson, 2016

A strange book this, in which the Yin and the Yang elements appear to ride off in different directions, thus creating a chaotic tension that may be completely in accordance with the master's philosophy.

In 1968 John Olsen opened an art school in an old bakery building in Paddington. One of his first full-time students was an eighteen year old country girl named Juliet Schlunke, who rather like Alice in Wonderland tumbled into the Bakery Art School not knowing what to expect. In the form of an autobiographical novel, Juliet relates in surprising detail the events that changed and moulded her future life. This narrative however is interrupted every few chapters by a tall figure in a black Cordoba hat and flowing scarf, Olsen himself, who leaps onto centre stage, wielding a paintbrush instead of a sabre, and pronounces

enthusiastically on Rodin, Degas and Renoir, or the correct way of cooking a paella. Then, having stunned the audience into submission, he abruptly disappears and can be seen heading for the local pub with Clifton Pugh or Fred Williams in his wake.

Now what the world badly needs are good teachers; they are few and far between, and by all accounts John Olsen was a brilliant teacher. What he managed to communicate to his students was not so much specific knowledge or dogma, but a wide-hearted appreciation of our artistic past, and an understanding of how those 'monuments of magnificence' relate to life itself. The works of Rembrandt, Velasquez and Goya are not there to gather dust in a museum, but are there to enrich us now, opening our eyes to the novelty and the wonder of the world around us,

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and to make us deeper human beings. Poetry, painting, art appreciation, drinking and cooking all come together in a general enhancement of the senses.

This ecstatic philosophy, not so fashionable since 2001, but clearly a galvanising force of the optimistic days of the 1960s, was a heady mix for Juliet Shlunke. Her time at the Bakery Art School was a time of accelerated learning, full of daily discoveries, some enlivening, some bitter. A young woman's character and destiny were being formed, sometimes without her knowing it; such as when her mentor Olsen casually remarked: 'You really should go to Madrid and see the Prado.' Such pronouncements from a charismatic teacher can have the force of a hypnotic command. Later Juliet Schlunke moved to Spain and lived in Madrid for twenty years.

John Olsen, as a man and as a painter, has always had a healthy appreciation of the Dionysian aspects of life. Sometimes however, that Dionysian spirit threatened to get out of hand in the Bakery Art School. On one occasion, Madame Lash, who had compliantly modelled for the students, took up her whip and commanded all the males in the class, including the tutors, to divest themselves of their pants and underpants ready for her inspection. The males meekly complied. This was followed by the forcible stripping of Juliet Shlunke, who was left bewildered and upset by the experience.

There are a number of rumbustious incidents narrated such as Robert Dickerson being knocked on his back by a jealous student; but for the most part the prevailing



Juliet Schlunke

attitude at The Bakery appears to have been one of hard work and sustained friendships.

This publication by Thames and Hudson is lavishly illustrated with examples of students' work, along with some beautiful colour reproductions of Olsen's own paintings, drawings and etchings.

Buns in the Oven, John Olsen's Bakery Art School, a tandem collaboration between teacher and pupil—the pupil now a successful artist in her own right—gives a fascinating glimpse into a time when many believed that art and music could change the world. That belief in a sustaining humanistic culture is more needed today than ever before. The old artist/warrior in the Cordoba hat insists on having the last word:

Let us not deal with surface

Let's get into the engine room of art

*At the Bakery we mostly concentrated on drawing
Students were not encouraged to follow contemporary
fashions...*

John Ellison