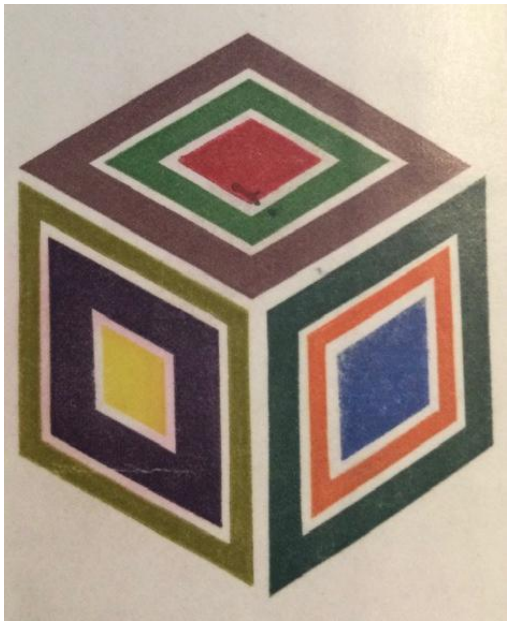
The Female School of Art at Gower Street in the 1850s

The Government School of Design was wound up in 1851, and management brought under direct control of the Board of Trade. Henry Cole and Richard Redgrave were appointed as joint directors respectively of management of the national institution and of the artistic curriculum, and Henry Cole proceeded to introduce sweeping changes to the organisation and financing of the institution and its associated 'branch' schools throughout Britain.

Between them Cole and Redgrave enhanced the scope and standard of training at the central, senior, school, which moved to South Kensington, in 1857, and rigidly specified the training which would be offered, with public financial support, to students there, in the 'branch' schools of design, and in the hundreds of general elementary schools throughout Britain.

Possible illustration: Frontispiece to Richard Redgrave, RA, *A Manual of Colour* (1853), "shewing the relative surface proportions in which the primary, secondary and tertiary colours harmonise with each other".



As far as the female students in London were concerned, Cole introduced what were effectively junior and senior schools of art and design. The junior school became known as the Female School of Art, and continued under Fanny McIan's management moving to better accommodation in Gower Street in late 1851. While these changes had detrimental effects on the status of the school within Cole's structure, it offered considerable opportunities and benefits to female students who, with the help of scholarships, gained access to advanced tuition in the central school, including drawing from life and painting the draped model. Class sizes were expanded and there were prospects of advancement to students who excelled.

The senior female school was co-located with the senior male school and both moved to South Kensington under the Headmastership of Richard Burchett, in 1857. By this stage the senior female school (confusingly sometimes also referred to by contemporary and modern writers as the "Female School of Art") offered the same advanced classes in art, including painting from life and modelling,

which the male students enjoyed, as well as 'technical' classes exclusively for female students in lithography, wood-engraving and painting in enamel on porcelain. Financial support was available to female students accepted onto a teacher-training scheme which enabled them to pursue their art and design training despite financial hardship in comparison with the growing number of more middle-class students.

Student numbers in the Female School, once established at Gower Street, doubled over the course of the 1850s, from fifty-nine before the move to Gower Street, to one hundred and sixteen at Gower Street in 1858. Many of the students continued their studies in the central school, completing the full course of qualifications with the help of scholarships intended to equip them to teach in the schools of design, including Laura de la Belinaye, Annie Carey, Sarah Doidge and Helena Wilson. Others, such as Eliza Turck**,** moved on, after a period in Gower Street, to study at less rigidly design-focused establishments.

However, Henry Cole increasingly questioned the value for money of a junior school at Gower Street exclusively for female students, especially as other branch schools of design in London established themselves and offered tuition to both young men and young women. In 1859, having secured the retirement of Fanny McIan two years previously, Cole informed the acting Headmistress, Louisa Gann, that the Gower Street school was redundant and non-viable. Louisa was prepared for this decision, and agreed with Cole that if a new organisation could be formed to take over the management of the Female School, she would attempt to keep it in business when the Government ceased to pay rent on the premises in Gower Street in June 1860.