Art Production
Course Code: ART315112

As if an echo of last year’s introductory comments, this year’s External Assessment could be, again, likened to a meticulous medical procedure, with the barest of ‘first encounter’ anomalies being encountered. The number of candidates continued to increase capping this year’s total at 810. This is exemplary evidence that Quality Assurance is flourishing and those institutions which had previous concerns have rallied to ally that which had drifted beyond the grid of rationality. Logic dictates that departments with less than 20 candidates should be more vigilant of Quality Assurance discrepancies or fluctuations because of the intimacy of the scale and, while this marred some marking last year, that spike seems to have been resolved.

Far from surging trends, there has been a couple of minor ripples within the usual statistical uniformity. What was previously listed as the ‘Photography contagion’ has been inoculated by a decline from 51% of folios down to 42%. Mirrored similarly by Digital submissions which shifted from 4% to 1.7%. Perhaps these studio areas are finally redefining that blur between Graphic Design/Photography/Digital to more accurately assert its foundation. This may be evident in the rise of Graphic Design folios from 4% to 9%. It would be warming to pronounce the roaring return of Painting and Drawing, but the reality is a slight increase within Painting from 18% and the stable continuity of Drawing at 14%. Slender variations also occurred in Printmaking, Video and Ceramics, (although one college represented 66% of the candidates). Mixed Media and Sculpture experienced upward trends with increases of 2 – 4% and 1 – 4% respectively. The Mechanisms of marking continue to be buoyed by the dynamic interaction of both sessional examiners and observers to the process of External Examination. Continued encouragement of Art Production teachers to participate is an absolutely crucial component of Professional Learning and, while it was encouraging to witness an increase in the number of ‘Expressions of Interest’, only 26 registered state-wide. Those who participated found it exhilarating!

There is little doubt that the Art Production Syllabus is being delivered with both integrity and virtuosity. The perpetual cycle of this it is the totally invigorating experience that the panel is subjected to within the eclecticism of folio outcomes. What was a previous concern is no longer an issue as there was clear evidence that candidates have been made explicitly aware of The Assessment Guidelines and there were virtually no instances of inadequate evidence of the theory component. There were slight glitches, but they were easily rectified. The assignments were unambiguously presented and the relationship between the Major Research Paper and the body of work was unequivocally obvious. The concern about the tendency to use the Major paper as a personal statement of practical intensions or as an instructional description of some technical process has been virtually eliminated. However, word count remains concerning with some minors emerging as ‘check-lists’ or a couple of paragraphs and majors hovering well below the minimum requirement. Given the relationship between the theoretical and the practical at Pre-Tertiary level, this is perhaps a further focus for Quality Assurance in the future.

There is little doubt that we have created a monster, a glorious monster, sustained by the further increase of numbers this year. Those colleges experiencing declines in previous years have stabilised with balances across the Production and Studio Practice syllabuses indicating a pro-active triumph of the Visual Arts on their behalf. Likewise some of the bigger colleges had increased candidature including inspiring increases at two colleges, giving them the highest number on record for those institutions, a staggering 90 and 108 folios. Of those schools that had previously struggled to meet the demands of the syllabus, there was a New Media folio of such overwhelming passion, individuality, technical prowess and pure visual virtuosity that the examiners were left speechless. While the achievement was demonstratively sophisticated, the content pushed such boundaries as to be for a limited audience only. A palpable loss for Art Rage!

Although Photography continues to cast a discernibly dominating shadow over the marking process with its 338 folios, the decline of nearly 60 candidates perhaps suggests that the previous enigma of quality, quantity and rigour appears to be resolved. Perhaps a great many acknowledged the requirements of the subject and adjusted their enrolment status accordingly. However, the culture of elevated internals continues and the enthusiasm towards thin displays abounds. Some examples would barely satisfy an elective. Perhaps the examination of
Photography continues to remain problematic because of an over-weighting of in-class exercises, limiting the time available to develop personal pathways.

An abundance of possibilities often remained in stasis within the support, suggesting that uncertainty had martyred the final submission. The polarity of this were those maestro folios of imposing erudition, which, in the instance of the Examiners’ Choice, rivalled many contemporary practitioners. This was clearly that discipline’s Apotheosis. While it continues to represent an immersion within the familiar visual realm of a seductive spectacle, macro obsession, nostalgia, topographic panoramas and, more recently, awkward ambassadors of Bonds and Berlei, it is at the very least, healthy and very, very popular. For the first time in a number of years Parkinson’s Photography appeared to be in hibernation with the Brothers Grimm.

Graphic Design had either a Lazarus moment or it finally acknowledged a genetic obligation to Digital Art. Regardless, its metamorphosis is complete with the fusion of text and image now relegated to an anachronism. Where bodies of work attempted a rally the old order; they largely stood bereft of the rudiments of ‘Design’, replicating either a cloned transformer hallucination in alternating colours and text or borrowed a gaggle of gangsters. To the Screenager Generation connection to a techno-universe is well beyond umbilical so this clawing resurgence of 9% may trigger future statistical eruptions. They embrace a brand new stratum of electronic bombardment and, as combatants of the pixelated tempest, their imagery should reflect a new species of outcome a millennia beyond a picture with words. The very best was highly experimental with coded narratives of angst and injustice. There was also a rise of ‘Digital Painting’ which may even eventually challenge the stalwarts of daubing and smearing. With murmurs of the pending erasure of Visual Communication at Tertiary level, the business end of visuality within advertising and marketing appears to be homeless and perhaps a rebranding is now necessary.

The designer has always had a choreographic role and this has traditionally implied questionable licence. Increasingly, issues of copyright are emerging with only a small number of candidates actually generating their own primary sources suggesting a plethora of un-cited imagery. Similar spillage occurs across the visual diaries of all studio areas with smorgasbord blurs of influences and original idea generation in conflict with each other. Clearly there is a reluctance for Graphic Designers to provide evidence of Support Material beyond technical processes and, while this may be critical in discerning the ownership of imagery and the obvious evolution of outcomes, it belies the ‘Art’ content and reduces the folio to pure mechanics. A huge proportion of assessment process is understanding the candidate’s journey through their encounters with kindred spirits. Perhaps there is a precedent for teasing out process from influence with the provision of separate journals?

Painting continued its rise with stealth but, rather than roaring, it appeared to be wearing dentures. Although traditionally the loud-mouth of the studio areas, the folios appeared to be both muted to the point of near conservativism and reductive in terms of quantity. Angst appeared to be subsumed by politeness and any previous examples of ‘bite your face off’ Expressionism appeared to be comatose. There was an abundance of respect for the materials and imagery, with realism dominating. They often ‘followed in the footsteps’ of icons, with technical prowess being a significant factor. Of those folios displaying virtuosity, there appeared to be a concentration of a desire to articulate the image rather than convey a reverberation of concept or content. There were many examples where the material had been joyously applied and there is clearly a renewed peerage of highly competent articulators of genre, but very few ‘exemplary’ bells rang. Candidates appeared to be more comfortable painting pictures of ‘things’, much like an attempt to photograph with paste. The world domination by stencil is over with a mere slither of examples being displayed. The best represented some overt political aspirations, but claustraphobic exhibition decisions sometimes marred the power of the punch.

Drawing consistently maintains its status beyond the anchorage of a fundamental design device for other studios. However, much like its wet relative, painting, the subject matter eluded the brave and experimental by rendering the world of objects and stories. Scale was the most dominating feature. Few had the fortitude to extend beyond A1 and the eloquent replication of life was the mandate. The most fluent authority in graphite chose portraiture and managed to convincingly activate the medium to articulate actual life. Much of the subversive, commando commentary of social network pathways that was so prevalent last year was retired for a re-iteration of almost Disneyesque illustration. The wild slumbers and the doodle prevails. The bastions of graffiti have adopted Robert Crumb, as mischievous cartooning was exacted by coloured markers. Here commentary and attitude presided over a funeral pyre for the mandala. Fearless of colour theory, their creatures of parody paraded their sentiments on a palette of neon. Drawing may still be with us, but it is sporting brand new clothes.
Printmaking almost doubled its percentage of folio representation this year. While it requires considerable investment in mechanics and process, it is heartening to experience its continuity as a viable studio consideration. One campus remains the standard bearer by not only contributing nearly 33% of the discipline's candidates, it provides the very best examples every year. There is always something significantly unique about these folios because they invariably grapple with issues and presentations that push beyond the boundaries of conventions and conformity. Rather than relying on the sheer physical beauty imbedded in the inbuilt 'success factor' of the outcomes, some folios re-invented themselves by asserting potent contemporary attitude. Here it exerts its conceptual superiority over a sequence of randomly snapped farm animals or delicately scribbled anecdotes. While they all may contain merit the balance between the intellectual and the actual appears askew.

Mixed Media maintains its status as the visual art scape-goat. It's much like the re-cycling bin for all those folios that exist outside the templates of convention. This perhaps implies the notion of rule breaker or the discipline for anarchy, but in reality it's the coat rack. Collage was represented, a miniscule number of paper-cuts were represented and assemblages were represented. While there was a sense of an orphaned studio where competence was a stranger, there was a stunning example of abstract paper cut dioramas, which apart from sheer effort, were aesthetically magnificent. In line with the trends of some other disciplines, Mixed Media almost doubled its representation this year.

That hazy horizon between Sculpture and Installation appears to have a reconciliation. Either that or the latter is missing in action. With Sculpture quadrupling its representation of this fading speciality this year; one college dominated the field with 20% of its folios being 3 dimensional. As it is perhaps the most challenging of all areas to confront, it was rewarding to experience the variety and intensity of interpretations of both material manipulation and theoretical aspirations. The antithesis was a clumsily constructed anthropological project that attempted to address a slogan-like statement of political integrity through the assemblage of random objects and artefacts. Although meritorious, it was difficult to comprehend the exemplary internal ratings.

Video is a redeeming practice and its operation function allows it greater and longer audience that any other atelier. Nothing else is time based with the formal properties of beginning, middle and end. As such, the examination process is longer and perhaps a greater conundrum as you are lured into an experience of problem-solving. It initiates the question as to what the answer is to this controlled performance. While it is very difficult to produce outstanding examples that warrant exemplary ratings across all criteria, of the 16 samples 2 were deemed absolutely outstanding. While its specialisation requires significant emersion in technology, there remains concerns about Media Studies cross-pollination as some videos remain grounded in one subject but not the other.

The sensual interaction of an individual and a material are the defining characteristics of the art activity. Any body of work that physically constructs from scratch abounds with romantic nostalgia. For this reason, the studio area with the smallest representation attracts this subjectivity because it barely survives within this syllabus. Whereas Production Ceramics remains a relic, the hand-crafting of objects remain true to artistic conventions by seriously addressing abstraction, figuration, worldly facsimile and caricature. Much like Printmaking, there are isolated outpost where it is revered and it proliferates, and one college needs to be celebrated by submitting 66% of the state's Ceramic folios. May its champion endure and never fade.

I am always astonished by the extraordinary achievements of this subject. I continuously blather on about the true treasure of this island being the candidates we examine. It is a humbling privilege to both teach and assess these candidates every year and I am constantly overwhelmed by the incredibly rich diversity of outcomes. These are extraordinary times and they are their extraordinary times and to experience them together enriches the soul. The talent within the teaching staff in this state is incredible and I am honoured to work with you and mark with you. I thank you once again for making this job one of life's great pleasures.

2015 Studio Statistic Breakdown

Photography – 42%
Painting – 20%
Drawing – 14%
Digital – 1.7%
Graphic Design – 9%
Sculpture – 4%
Printmaking – 1.9%
Video – 1.9%
Mixed Media – 3.8%
Ceramics – 1%