ART HISTORY/ART THEORY PROPOSED MERGER

Background
Art history is a crucial and integral part of what we teach in the Art Theory undergraduate and graduate courses at the ANU School of Art. However, we do not make a sharp distinction between art history and other approaches to the visual arts, those drawn from art theory, art practice, cultural studies, for example. Our aim is to provide our students with a rigorous and rich training in the study of the visual arts which equips them for the contemporary world, as professional artists and professionals working in the arts sector, including museums and galleries. We therefore consider it crucial that our pedagogy be based not on exclusivity but on inter-related and, where useful, interdisciplinary approaches.
Note: I use the term visual arts in the broadest sense to refer also to craft and design.

Art historians in the Art Theory Workshop
All of the Art Theory staff identify as art historians at some level but we are also active simultaneously in a significant number of other areas including art practice, curatorship, biography and so on.

Existing collaborations between Art Theory and Art History
Combining Art History and Art Theory into a new department of Art History and Theory located at the ANU School of Art would formalise collaborative arrangements that are already occurring such as:

- Cross-listing of undergraduate courses.
- An Asian Art minor built from courses offered by both areas.
- Art Theory staff give guest lectures in Art History courses and vice versa.
- Postgraduate supervisory panels with members from both areas (a current Art Theory doctoral student has her Chair and supervisor in Art Theory and an adviser in Art History).
- Postgraduate conference programs which are open to students in both areas (and across the university). The Art worlds graduate symposium organised by Art History postgraduate students in 2012 included papers by both art history and art theory students. Art history students are invited to attend the SOA graduate conferences.
- Postgraduate master classes (not for credit) are open to students from both areas; for example, Dr Frances Gray’s workshops on phenomenology and art held at the School of Art in 2012.
- The School of Art Gallery hosted an intern from the Art History curatorship program which, in the words of Gallery coordinator, James Holland, ‘was a great success’.

However, these collaborations are not part of a coherent overall program and are not as substantial or as productive as they could be.

Possibilities for extending existing collaborations and introducing further initiatives
A merger of the two areas would create a bigger, stronger force of art historians/theorists, with a range of potential advantages. For example:

- The richer spread of research expertise would be beneficial for research grant bids as well as ERA purposes.
- Art history and art theory staff would be able to develop stronger collegial relationships and capitalise on each other’s expertise. This may involve the development of joint initiatives – not only in undergrad and postgrad education but in hosting conferences etc as well.
• Art history staff could benefit from and contribute to the Staff Research Forum, engaging in on-going dialogue to enrich the research culture and collaboration across both areas.
• Postgraduate students would benefit from the expansion of the research base by having greater, seamless access to supervisors in what are currently separate areas.
• Greater utilisation of external visitors funded through the RSH would become possible.
• We would be able to mount a stronger combined presence at peak conferences in the field, notably the Art Association of Australia and New Zealand.
• The combined department would provide a higher profile and presence so that we could better compete with the University of Melbourne and University of Sydney with recruitment of undergraduate and postgraduate students.
• A combined department of Art history and theory would mean we can present a more coherent image to the public. At present there is a lot of confusion and I am often called upon to explain who teaches what and where.
• A combined intern program could be developed across the three areas of Art History, Art Theory (Professional Practices) and Museums and Collections. This would allow the streamlining of otherwise uncoordinated approaches from ANU arts students to institutions and organisations.

And, the merger would strengthen Art Theory/Art History as a discipline at ANU and raise the SOA’s visibility, national and internationally.

**HDR coursework courses**

One of the biggest pedagogical advantages would be bringing together students who are artificially separated during the course of their studies but who are likely to work together in their professional lives – artists and curators for example. In the HDR program the content of the following two courses could easily be augmented to reflect this changed emphasis.

ARTV8107 Arguing Objects
ARTV8207 Writing About Practice

Both courses involve a critical engagement with works of art, writing about them from different perspectives, including art history and practice-led research.

**Art and curatorship**

Many SOA postgraduate students are active as curators during their studies, in relation to their own work and that of others. Bringing them together with art history students would provide the latter with crucial experience in curating exhibitions of the work of contemporary artists as an integral part of their studies.

It should also be noted that there is a great deal of national and international curatorial experience within the Art Theory Workshop which could be utilised more fully in a combined department that also incorporates Museums and Collections.

**Graduate coursework courses**

In the Graduate Coursework program, courses offered by the School of Art could be more widely promoted to Art History students; they would benefit from being part of a more diverse student cohort in the visual arts. This applies to:

ARTV8100 Points of View
ARTV 8208 Issues in Contemporary Craft
DART 8067 New Media, Innovation and Research

**Shared career pathways**

There is a long history of individuals trained as artists being employed in curatorial positions within art museums and galleries. At the National Gallery of Australia, for example, all the directors, with the exception of Brian Kennedy, went to art school. The following senior curators all trained as artists in the first instance: Robert Bell, Gael Newton, Roger Butler, Lucina Ward. Recent curatorial appointments to the NGA reinforce the fact that the skills and training acquired at School of Art are well suited to a curatorial stream: Miriam Kelly (Australian Painting and Sculpture), Sarina Noordhuis-Fairfax (Australian Prints and Drawing). Also in Canberra the directors of both Canberra Museum and Gallery and CraftACT are School of Art graduates (one trained in photography, the other in ceramics).

**A new name for a new department**
This is essential to underline the fact that the ANU has made a substantial commitment to the visual arts. The Art History and Theory Department is my suggestion for the title of the new entity.

**Co-location**
I see co-location of the Art Theory staff at the School of Art as crucial for the forging of the strongest possible collegial relationships, for the greatest benefit of students, the School of Art and the ANU.

**Museums and Collections**
My comments have addressed Art History and Art Theory but I think it is essential that the Museums and Collections program is also brought into the School of Art so that the Art History curatorship program and the RSHA offerings in similar areas can be better aligned.

Helen Ennis
Graduate Convenor, Research

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