Submission concerning Professor Howard Morphy’s Change Management Proposal: 
RSHA Restructure dated 22nd July 2013

From Professor Sasha Grishin AM, FAHA, Sir William Dobell Professor of Art History, ANU

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The so-called Change Management Document is disappointing, poorly reasoned, inaccurate and does not take into account the considerable number of corrections and feedback made in the formal and informal consultations over the past two years. There is a clear failure of process as feedback is being ignored which in any way contradicts the intentions of the proponent of this proposal. Surely it is a failure of process for the main proponent of a radical and very unpopular change to the structure of the teaching of the humanities at the ANU to be responsible for the assessment of the feedback and the critique of his proposals.

All the comments made below have been made on many occasions in submissions by academic staff and many postgraduate students in Art History and Curatorship.

Our objections primarily concern two aspects of Professor Morphy’s document, namely:

Item 2 Proposed Outcome

2. Strengthen Art History and Art Theory through the integration of Art History from the School of Cultural Inquiry into the School of Art.

And

Rationale: Enlarged School of Art

Art History & Curatorship in the School of Cultural Inquiry and Art Theory in the School of Art jointly comprise 9.5 FTE staff (4 FTE in SCI and 5.5 FTE in SoA). Joined together in a single program within the School of Art they would create one of the strongest bodies of art theorists and historians in Australia and would enable ANU to occupy a leading global position in art history and theory. Separately neither Art History & Curatorship nor Art Theory has critical numbers to support the existing teaching load or take account of the exigencies of leaves of absence. Each will continue to depend on temporary appointments to cover leave of absences and neither can cope easily with unanticipated staffing issues.

Younger staff would have greater opportunities for research development with less teaching pressure placed upon them. The separation has been one of the reasons why ANU has not been able to take advantage of its stellar individual reputation in Art History in the award of research grants. For example over the past 5 years there have been no ARC applications from the Art History group due to the pressure of maintaining teaching obligations.

ANU has a number of leading art historians and if they were managed more as a whole, the overall performance would be enhanced. The combined unit is likely to increase graduate coursework numbers by opening up the possibility for new programs with the option of common core teaching to both cohorts of undergraduate students. The staff members of both schools have close relationships with the national cultural institutions and a more coordinated approach will bring benefits to the ANU and increase the visibility of the exceptional contribution RSHA makes to Canberra’s cultural life. The creation of a single program of Art History and Theory will have no effect on the present degree programs but will facilitate the planning of new initiatives and coordinating staff appointments.
Submission

We argue that the proposal would seriously weaken the teaching of Art History and Curatorship at the ANU, simply because the main purpose of the SoA is to train art practitioners, while the purpose of Art History and Curatorship is to train art historians and curators. The proposed shotgun wedding would destroy the discipline of art history at the ANU and it is for this very reason why the universities of Melbourne and Sydney, Queensland and Adelaide, all of which have very distinguished art schools, have rejected such mergers. These mergers have happened in a number of instances, for example at Monash university, to the demise of the discipline.

Suggestions that Art History and Curatorship has failed or is working below capacity at the ANU is demonstratively untrue. As noted in our annual reports over the past decade our success rate in undergraduate teaching, HDR teaching, publications and in areas of public policy has been outstanding. Two of our four staff have been awarded ALTC awards, a third a CASS teaching award. There is nothing in Professor Morphy’s proposal that could assist us in our functions as the art school staff will continue to teach practitioners with courses designed for that purpose while we would continue to teach art historians with courses designed for these purposes, except we would be separated from our natural home in the humanities (where our students come from and belong), such as English, Classics, History, etc. If Professor Morphy argues that the merger will have “no effect on present degree program”, there are no savings to be made in teaching flexibility. Unless programs are closed, changed and integrated, the workloads cannot change. Graduate coursework numbers which we have been building up, contrary to what is stated in Professor Morphy’s proposal, will decline if we are forced into the art school. We attract these candidates precisely because we are not part of an art school and have developed an outstanding reputation. If we join a model of the other 27 art schools which offer such courses, any savvy prospective student will select Melbourne or Sydney, rather than us. Our very strong HDR program will suffer, existing students will leave and it will be more difficult to attract new candidates of calibre, once we are competing with COFA, RMIT and the VCA, all much stronger art schools than Canberra, rather than with Melbourne and Sydney universities as we are at present. This point has been made in numerous submissions from our postgrads to Art Working Party on the proposed merger.

Professor Morphy’s rationale is littered with factual errors. His claim the 9.5 staff in art theory and art history (3 of whom in SoA lack a PhD qualification) would make this into the strongest gathering of art historians is simply nonsense as a quick glance on the internet would make clear (something pointed out on numerous occasions). There is no explanation how the younger staff would benefit in this shotgun wedding while teaching loads remain constant to support the existing programs. No ARC applications made by Art History staff over the past 5 years is simply not true, as a quick check of the records will show. That temporary appointments need to be made to cover OSP is not true, while for LSL, this is fully funded and is part of the Enterprise Agreement. At the moment Art History is part of a teaching unit with Film Studies, which brings our teaching size to 6.5 and there is no explanation as to what happens with the joint courses and degrees. The tragic thing about these proposals is that all of these and many other objections have been made on numerous occasions and have been simply ignored. This is a failure of process.
Possible solutions. The SCI is viable and should remain and art history will continue to flourish within this school. If Professor Morphy is determined to destroy or disestablish this school and merge it into languages, Art History can continue to coexist within this newly merged school, which will teach such things as Ancient History, Literature and Classics, with which Art History has a natural affinity.

What is really needed is a proper review of the teaching of the humanities at the ANU, including the SoA, and within a broader review conducted professionally and at arms length, possible synergies could be determined. What is presently proposed in the RSHA restructure is poorly thought out and will harm teaching and research in the humanities at the ANU.

Sasha Grishin