Submission - in response to the proposal document Change Management Proposal: RSHA Restructure (22 July 2013) – Andrew Montana

‘Every image of the past that is not recognised by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably’, Walter Benjamin, Thesis on the Philosophy of History, 1940.

Thank you for the invitation to make a submission regarding the proposed merger of the Humanities Discipline with the School of Art. This forms a part of the proposed disestablishment of the current School of Cultural Inquiry (SCI) at the Australian National University and the establishment of a new School of Languages. I draw your attention to the fact that the proposal document Change Management Proposal: RSHA Restructure dated 22 July 2013 does not mention Art History and Curatorship. Moreover, current directorship bathos in this restructure documents fails to address the Working Party reviews and the learned convictions of staff and students in SCI. The restructure document is disingenuous.

My submission in response to the Change Management Proposal RSHA Document confirms that the views of Art History and Curatorship staff is in league with the staff of our other disciplines in the SCI.

It confirms that the teaching and research staff and the students of Art History and Art History and Curatorship oppose the proposed merger with the School of Art and will join our Humanities cognate areas in the current SCI with the newly established School of Languages.

Why? The document has no budget proposal plan; no mention of the impact the proposed changes will have on students who undertake quality degrees, in fact no pedagogical or culturally directed basis.

Unfortunately, the recent report on the new pathways to the world of art at the School of Art at the ANU in the Canberra Times (July 25, 2013) may be interpreted as promoting the appropriation of contemporary indigenous art practice and ignoring changes in indigenous arts practice and non indigenous art practice across the centuries, because these practitioners are dead and their art making is not visible but related to ‘history’. This report is out for the world to see, and Professor Sasha Grishin’s irrefutable response published in the Canberra Times (July 31, 2013) concerning the proposed merger of Art History and Curatorship with the School of Art is also out for the world.

- The Art History and Art History and Curatorship disciplines play a leading and vital role in the learning and development of the many Humanities oriented ANU undergraduate students, and the large number of postgraduate art history students taking Masters and PhD degrees.
- The discipline is a Humanities pillar of inspiration, encouragement, expertise, research publication records and pedagogy. This proposed merger with the Art School is opposed by students who are astonished, disoriented and disgusted by the potential sacrifice of their monies, ambitions, and career opportunities in the arts and the humanities, and the disrespect for the expertise and value of their teaching and research academic staff in the current SCI.
- It is proposed that Art History and Curatorship remain with the other Humanities disciplines teaching and researching in the current SCI and it forms an integral part of the proposed new School of Languages

Why study Art History and Art History and Curatorship as a part of an integrated Humanities School at the ANU?

This practise develops the skills to undertake primary and secondary research, write coherent and well argued essays and papers, which are fully documented and sourced. Students gain knowledge in research, acquire confidence to speak to peers and in public about art history, and learn that the study and interpretation of art history brings together analytic skills in penetrating cultures, societies and periods. This enables a student to make lateral connections, think independently, and to develop a specialist language that transmits and communicates information, creative ideas and aesthetic philosophies in writing and in presentations.
The study of art history illuminates subtleties, respects traditions and challenges orthodoxies. In turn it gives back an enormous amount of knowledge about changing cultural, political and aesthetic social processes that contribute to the empowerment and pleasure of communities and audiences.

The quality of academic, scholarly education is severely compromised for present and future students by a merger with the School of Art. Further, the vocational possibilities in the wider world of gallery and art museum work in arts education, arts administration, public programs, arts philanthropy, curatorship, research and writing is compromised. A basic job in these sectors requires a degree in Art History and/or Art History and Curatorship and advertisements do not advertise that a degree in studio practice is required. Some artists and former students of studio practice return to the ANU to gain a degree and postgraduate degree in Art History and Curatorship, with a view to a career change.

Personnel employed in the arts sector have studied Art History, and Art History and Curatorship at the ANU:

Throughout Australia, many former ANU Art History and Curatorship and Art History students work as curators, researchers, writers, educators, directors and philanthropic developers in our art galleries, art museums and universities:

The following persons represent a small section of the Art History and Curatorship alumni and current student body of Art History and Curatorship. There are many other graduates of this program who contribute to local, national and international communities and are in professional contact with Professor Sasha Grishin, Dr Charlotte Galloway and me:

Carol Cains, Curator, Asian Art, National Gallery of Victoria

Dr Michael Brand, Director, Art Gallery of New South Wales.

Lucie Folan, Curator, Asian Art, National Gallery of Australia

Lucina Ward, Curator, International Painting and Sculpture, National Gallery of Australia

Dr Christopher Chapman, Senior Curator National Portrait Gallery

Dr Jane Kinsman, Senior Curator, International Prints and Drawings, National Gallery of Australia

Laura Webster, Art curator, Australian War Memorial

Harriet Elvin, CEO, ACT Cultural Facilities Corporation.

Ben Divall, freelance Art curator, Edinburgh

Jane Cush, Director, Goulburn Regional Gallery

Melanie Eastburn, Curator, Asian Art, National Gallery of Australia

Bree Richards, Curator, Australian Art, Queensland Art Gallery

Dr Ann Sanders, Research and Exhibitions development, National Portrait Gallery

Dr Deborah van der Plat, Academic and freelance curator, University of Queensland

Associate Professor Peter McNeil, Academic, University of Technology, Sydney, University of Sweden.

Gwen Horsfeld, Visitor and Learning Services, National Gallery of Australia

Thomas Middlemost, Curator, Wagga Wagga Art Gallery
What does a typical job advertisement for a competitive position in the art museum sector outline as the key criteria and what is the expected qualification for an assistant curatorial position?

Responsibilities:

Under general direction and professional supervision participate in the control, maintenance and care of the art collection, including:

- Prepare recommendations related to acquisitions;
- Undertake accessioning and cataloguing of works of art;
- Arrange for movement of works of art through the collection management system and upgrade data and arrange for conservation of items;
- Ensure all relevant documentation is entered in collection management system;
- Respond to copyright issues in relation to the art collection;
- Perform project, publication and research assignments.
- Contribute to the development and implementation of related policies, strategies, systems and standards.
Manually handling and movement of a wide range of objects including but not limited to works on paper, framed works of art and items from the collection.

Liaise with researchers, dealers, museums, institutions and organisations and respond to public enquiries related to the art collection and provide advice on its historical and cultural significance.

Contribute to the activities of the section including taking responsibility for project and administrative tasks.

A Tertiary qualification in the field of Art History or Art History and Curatorship is required for the assistant curatorial position.

Clearly, the above position requires an art historian, a thinker, writer, researcher, organiser, documenter and communicator, with the important public interface role of advisor on the collection’s historical and cultural significance.

Why? Intellectual flexibility is acquired through studying a breadth of historical periods and cultures in Art History, whether these engage with traditional, modern or contemporary Western, Asian or Australian indigenous arts. An Art History student does not seek to be an imitator or forger of art techniques but to situate art and artists in the wider political, social, intellectual and aesthetic context.

Staff in Art History and Curatorship in the SCI at the Australian National University

The Art History and Curatorship lectures and researchers in the SCI are PhD qualified in their discipline. A small staff, each member is well published both in Australia and internationally. Professor Sasha Grishin is an Order of Australia and is the Sir William Dobell Professor of Australian Art, and is releasing a major publication on the history of Australian art and developing an exhibition and catalogue for the National Library of Australia and the State Library of Victoria Galleries. I am publishing a major book in the end of this year and was the recipient of prestigious grants from the arts philanthropic foundations. Dr Charlotte Galloway serves as a trustee on an international heritage advisory board, is an Asian arts specialist and is an expert witness in courts of law on Asian art. Each teaching and research Art History and Curatorship staff member clearly strives to uphold and extend the reputation of this Humanities discipline., as sworn by our submissions.

The Art History and Curatorship Student body.

Apart from the large number of undergraduate Art History and Curatorship students, there are over 20 PhD students enrolled currently in Art History, and a large number of Masters students. None of them is a practicing artist, as the Art School at the ANU caters for artists’ objectives, through studio practice, a practice orientated short Honours thesis, a practice reflective postgraduate thesis and ultimately exhibition exposure, through the School of Art Gallery and often at Canberra Contemporary Art Space.

Art History engages with scholarly documentation from across many centuries to the present day, and engages with historic and contemporary artworks and archival documents interpretatively; it is evaluative and engages with material hermeneutically. It is a philosophic and aesthetic enquiry that engages with, and seeks to uncover the material conditions of life, both historic and contemporary, This knowledge base is looked for by employers- through the degree or the post-graduate degree in Art History and/or Art History and Curatorship.

Art History continues to attract students outside of CASS into its student body. These students with strong literacy levels come from the disciplines of Law, the School of Art, Commerce, and International Relations. The Art History and Curatorship program attracts international students from China, Japan, Singapore, Italy, the US, France and Eastern Europe. At the graduate level, our students work on course work and programs in conjunction with the other Humanities disciplines in the SCI.

Where to from here? In line with my other teaching and research colleagues in the SCI, my submission opposes the merger of Art History and Curatorship with the School of Art. As a highly ranked Humanities discipline, devoted to the progress and development of students, and the advancement of knowledge through
its staff and graduates to the world, Art History and Curatorship must remain with the SCI intellectual
disciplinary cognates, and both schools merge in their entirety with the newly established School of
Languages. Compelling objectives of this merger with the School of Languages are: advanced pedagogy,
the synergies of the integrated Humanities, the national and international cultural, economic and
humanitarian benefits, and the economic infrastructural merits, and not least this University’s management
reputation.

This is the broader vision for our Humanities students at the ANU, endorsed by my colleagues across the
SCI.

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University.  July, 2013