Hi Denise,

I am very happy for the submission I wrote in support of the proposed Art Theory / Art History merger to be put on the RSHA website in its original form, or in whatever form you consider most appropriate. I have copied it below.

thanks,

Ruth Waller

As Head of Painting at ANU School of Art I support the merger of Art History with Art Theory within the School of Art. This seems a natural and timely proposal, making efficient use of resources and staff and a very positive educational outcome for students in both the School of Art and Art History.

The teaching of Art History has always been an important component of our Studio Theory program in Painting. Secondary school art education currently generally lacks a significant engagement with art history, so our students come to us with little background knowledge. We have long incorporated a historical perspective into our studio teaching and our students respond very positively to this. They also benefit significantly from the excellent history courses currently taught in Art Theory. I imagine this amalgamation will further enrich the range and depth of art historical study available to our students and will be enthusiastically embraced by them.

Just as significantly, the students of Art History and Curatorship would benefit enormously from interacting with the staff and students of the School of Art by:

- developing a richer understanding of the nature of art practice: technically, formally, materially and conceptually, and gaining greater insight into the operation of the creative process;
- experiencing directly the issues, challenges and professional realities of contemporary practice in the work of School of Art students and staff; and
- learning from the distinctive approaches to critical analysis and reflection developed by art practitioners and theorists.

There is exciting potential for greater creative exchange and interaction between these two aspects of the arts sector. Several of the School of Art staff are also curators of significance. The School of Art also regularly produces graduates who have gone on to work on curatorial projects. Art History/ Curatorial students could work with art students in developing collaborative projects, to the educational and professional benefit of both parties.

Indeed, Painting Major Double degree student Annika Harding (now a curator at Canberra Contemporary Artspace) delivered a paper at the Art History students’ Artworlds conference during her Honours year arguing passionately for the benefits for Art History and Curatorship students having greater engagement with the School of Art.

Currently our Art theory staff are experiencing very heavy workloads. They are involved in teaching across the entire undergraduate student body of the School of Art, while in addition, carrying a very significant supervision load, given the large numbers of HDRs and Post-Grad coursework students the School of Art consistently attracts. With this merger our students could benefit from the additional supervisory contribution of scholars in Art History. Together Art History & Theory would constitute a stronger unit with shared benefits as regards research capacity and ERA performance.

Given the projected review of our curriculum in 2013, this is an opportune time to respond creatively to such a proposal and develop Art History & Theory at ANU School of Art as an area of distinctive expertise developed out of an effective integration of art history, art theory, curatorship and art practice.

Yours sincerely,

Ruth Waller

Head of Painting
ANU School of Art
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