

## STRONG INSTITUTIONS

Monash Fine Art, like many contemporary art schools, engages with an artwork in all stages of its life-cycle: from its production, presentation to its discursive and critical framing. In the last 30 years, in an important parallel, the department has nurtured and facilitated a community of practice-based researchers across its academic staff and postgraduate cohorts. In 2022, Monash Fine Art as part of a Faculty of Art Design and Architecture is embarking on a cultural agenda in dialogue with *Impact 2030*, Monash University's ten-year strategic plan. *Impact 2030* prioritises three global challenges for the university's research and teaching agendas: climate change; global insecurity; and thriving communities - underpinned by a commitment to Indigenous Acknowledgment, access and representation.

### ***An art school as a stronger institution***

A strong institution like an art school, working across the fields of art and education, needs to create multiple access points to various communities, ideas and cultural frameworks. A strong artistic institution ensures it not only reflects the plurality of society but also the diverse critical, creative and professional capacities of art in everyday life. Through its studios and classrooms, the contemporary art school asks students to *observe, relate, speculate, intervene, disrupt and develop divergent solutions* with images, objects, experiences, ideas and words. Students develop important strategies and responses to the most pertinent social questions of our times via the production of their artworks.

Artworks framed by institutional contexts (galleries, museums etc.) and practice-based research in the university are to different extents fields that rely on different markers of specialised discernment. However, in asking students to *relate, respond, speculate, intervene, disrupt and develop divergent solutions*, the art school is also preparing students for the vital roles in Australia's creative industries. Artistic and critical strategies are key in gallery contexts, but they are also the transferable skills for the 593,000 makers and enablers that underpin Australia's 111.7 billion dollar creative industry. Art schools need to both defend the autonomy of the artwork and the associated specialised labour and discourse of its production but also clearly advocate for the value of creative practices and their more lateral values across different fields, cultural contexts and industries. This is an important challenge for contemporary art schools with their broader demographics and desire to increase enrolments. We would be doing our students a disservice if we only emphasised narrow models of contemporary art and disregarded the potential of embedding the multi-faceted applications of creative practice into the curriculum.

Federal, state and municipal funding bodies for the arts, parents, and career teachers of prospective students, ask a similar question regarding contemporary art's contribution to society - just with different wording.

A contemporary art school engages and impacts society in the publication and presentation of its research. One of the keys to the social imperative of contemporary art, is art's capacity to foster publics around the most pertinent issues of the day. Artists make images, objects, experiences, ideas and words in response to the complexity and specialisation of STEM focussed fields, the climate crisis and global insecurity. The creative responses of contemporary art to these issues through the visualising and modelling developed at art school, through various artforms, make a public argument for the urgency of our current global challenges.

At the same time though, a strong art school must operate like a local community hub, where the breadth of educational contexts, opportunities and resources needs to be shared with the community at large. Art schools need to become more porous spaces where the value of postgraduate practice-based research and the enriching experiences of secondary school workshops, masterclasses and community residencies are distributed across

the suburbs and diverse communities. This role of access and advocacy needs to be better adopted as a shared responsibility across the different art schools through ACUADS and HEPPP funding, in conversation with the Australia Council for the Arts, NAVA and secondary school curriculum authorities. To ensure the sector thrives these organisations need to urgently address the overall waning enrolment of tertiary based Fine Art programs; the disparate access to specialised art facilities across secondary schools; and the limited space devoted to Art making and Art History across primary and secondary education respectively. This advocacy work will benefit the entire arts ecology giving the art school an important leadership role in the broader public conversation around the impact of creative practice on emotional and economic wellbeing.

A stronger art school will always be a space for the production and appreciation of images, objects, experiences, ideas and words. But it also needs to generate spaces for authentic interdisciplinary endeavours that engage community, business, social engagement, emergent technologies and critical pedagogies, as an initial set of examples. As a starting point Monash Fine Art will more actively work with our Faculty neighbours - Architecture and Design, embracing the overlaps in discourse, methodology and values rather than perpetuating the silos that are sometimes built between these fields. *Wominjeka Djeembana*, Monash Art Design and Architecture's Indigenous research lab is an exemplar of interdisciplinary research. From the *Fire to Flourish* project, a program that grapples with fire disaster resilience and community development developed by working with artists, economists, sociologists and environmental scientists; to *Repairing Memory and Place*, an urban water research project encompassing collaboration across architecture, planning, geography, Museum Victoria and municipal associations.

There might be conflict and incongruent spaces created between these modes of practice, but these differences become markers for the authentic interdisciplinary research initiated. These collaborations need to be resourced adequately, not only in relation to infrastructure but also with time. The success and failures of these projects - like any art process - will demonstrate to students how art can be differentiated and valued as part of various creative modes of Australian making and enabling.

A much-vaunted highlight of most graduates' art school experience is the community that is built between students. In their formative years the art student grapples with the representation and the role of self in relation to contemporary social, ethical and cultural contexts. This conception of community needs to broaden however, so that students can see the niche art world as one of many worlds that recognise art making as an essential and invaluable function of contemporary life.

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