

SCHOOL OF MEDIA ART
College of Fine Arts
U.N.S.W.

CORPORATE PLAN 1991 - 1997

1. INTRODUCTION:

The **School of Media Art** has at its centre the belief that the production of artwork is contextually dependent, significant within a society, and significant to a society.

In this century the questioning role, of the arts in society has been emancipated from the duties of narrative, of diverse propagandising previously expected of it, and the contemporary responsibilities accrued are closer to that of philosophy than ever previously. At the latter end of the twentieth century the rapidity of technological change confounds the staid preconceptions of modernism and also the expectations of those generations trained to wonder with leisure, and having the time to dwell.

Of course the plural roles of "art" permit all and will continue to allow in suitably mutated forms - as novelty, as exquisite and gorgeous entertainment, as fine inspirational acts, like Soviet gymnastics or Chinese opera - devoted connoisseurs to exchange passwords of cultured cache' with the going currency, and the industrial model will march on with product designed to fit those cultured expectations.

Media Art must move further. It must take seriously the responsibility of our times and as its concerns. Its *arenas* of special awareness are those of dimensions beyond illusion or narrative, or mere dexterity. Its traditions of concern, of mass, of space, of difficult median areas such as the aural, the kinetic, and the mixed perceptual assault in space and in time, must now take on ironically the illusions of virtual reality and the conceits of the binary.

These new proliferations of challenge will indeed mediate in the future / present / tense between traditional *arenas* of engagement and between people ever more alienated from their perceiving and from the exercise of their own will. The implications and ramifications of the worlds of digital technologies and the human condition are unknowable and huge. This is a truism. The most urgent role for artists in the arena of Media Art it seems to us is simply to engage in direct speculative research, and production too if appropriate using with increasing knowledge and pertinence these new tools available, directly sublimating realizations which are both current and enduring and which help to forge a clearer vision for the decades ahead.

It should be recognised that this School is an interrelated trio of Studies areas which span a variety of media traditions. These are Photographic Studies, Sculpture Studies and 4D - Time Based Studies. Given the premise that: these independent traditions of making and doing, in order to employ or touch on, the range of perceptual mechanics within human capability, may be legitimately combined or repositioned in specific contexts; then an academic structure based upon a comparative analysis through experience and informed critique is predicated within this structure.

To the best of our ability and budget this has been the recent strategy which has been confounded and at times confused by the histories of more traditional means of art practice. What now emerges as being of paramount importance to this School and its role in the future efficacy of art within contemporary society (which must be seen in global and less parochial terms) is the deliberate identification of specific criteria for the needs of those young artists attempting to grapple with the utterly complex relationships of varied craft traditions, dimensional and perceptual understandings relating to space and time, and with the tornado of ethical dilemmas inherent to our practice in such times.

Having recognised the necessity of those traditions of making and craft skill within the school it should also be noted that not only will silicon technologies need to develop and demonstrate their own distinctions alongside older forms of making, but irrevocably they have changed and modified the production of those forms - and more importantly the very way in which we view them.

Current available technologies are obsolescent in only three to four years. This approximates the duration of an academic undergraduate degree. It further suggests that the future validity or effectiveness of any academic course will depend upon its ability to 1) effectively fund the updating of the equipment upon which it depends and 2) to ensure that within its structure a continuity of reevaluation is inbuilt, together with the structural possibility of reforming with greater pertinence at relatively short intervals.

1.2 MISSION STATEMENT:

The School of Media Art recognises the urgency of a contemporary and a responsible art practice which will offer a cold mirror to the covert realities of our rapidly changing world.

It undertakes to provide for the younger artist, to the best of its ability the most appropriate intellectual and motor skill training within a network of interlinked media traditions. Thereby they might develop the confidence to forge a practice for themselves which will positively affect their surrounding society in terms which might extend beyond that of the aesthetic "gasp". This might contribute to the re-evaluation of human values and potential through intelligent application of those very tools which might otherwise engineer their own destruction.

These considerations are unique to the development and survival of the School of Media Art, and unique strategies need to be devised for their resolution in as much as the other two schools within the College have particular needs and specific priorities.

Should these priorities eventuate, this school is unique in its offerings in N.S.W. and is singularly placed to be the only institution in Australia where such current practices may be researched with adequate theoretical, and practical support. There is enough evidence of the need for such a school from the increasing numbers of undergraduate and more particularly M.F.A. students applying for the courses we already offer and at that research level the calibre of those artists desperate to take advantage of the opportunities already available is remarkable.

2 EDUCATION:

2.1 Undergraduate: B.F.A., servicing B.Art Ed., B. Des., and B.Art Th.

2.2 Postgraduate: M.Art , coursework; M.F.A. research;

1993: M.Media Art & Technology, 2 year research Master's with placements in industry, for the redefinition of attitudes to high and low technologies by artists, and the development of contemporary art which will help to define the role of proliferating technologies.

2.3 As now, the school views itself as an *arena* for critical debate and the seminar programmes to do with the Masters courses are open to ex-graduates and draw many interested professionals in the field . Further to this engagement with the world outside and the after-sales service to graduates; workshops, conferences, and seminars are seen as being increasingly important for both raising revenue, and establishing a dynamic, and a credibility within the professional community. The possibility of working with established organisations such as

A.N.A.T. to host International Symposia on School-related topics is already being explored.

2.4 **VISITING ARTISTS / SCHOLARS:**

Biennale and other visitors have already benefited from having had the help of students on their projects, plans are being discussed with regard to the sponsorship of pertinent visitors who would establish models of practice for the whole school community. British Council, V.A.C.B. and other funding bodies will be apposite. Exchanges of both staff and students are being considered currently with Asian neighbours. It is envisioned that the first of both will be under weigh by 1992, which will herald an annual programme.

3. **RESEARCH ACTIVITIES;**

The entire academic staff is considered as a professional and practicing body. Some are linked with other institutions through registration on Masters programmes, many more are regularly exhibiting artists with: commercial galleries, independent, or public exhibition spaces, and many have represented Australia in prestigious International exhibitions or festivals. It is the policy of the School to support such research as being critical to the credibility of the School on a variety of levels. Staff are encouraged to take their professional day for the continuence of this essential professionalism.

4. **EQUIPMENT:**

This School has a symbiotic relationship with an expensive variety of technologies. While the function of the school is concerned with the training of Artists - it is a reality of our time that survival has to be found in a myriad of places. Many of our graduating students will be looking to the industry to gain a livelihood and further their experience while their career paths become more clearly defined. Some graduates will define their studies further by gaining entry to specialist courses such as the A.F.R. & T.V. School. Some will earn their living as

professional industrial photographers, and many more will take advantage of the nimble minds which result from this particular kind of training to forge new pathways in art, and new directions in life and society.

The only way to ensure adequate professional level equipment of the necessary currency, is to **lease** and to purchase on a strict **amortisation** programme. This has been a major breakthrough for us and we shall continue to develop these programmes by looking at three year planning cycles.

New initiatives in equipment within the school will be looking toward research funding programmes for funding. Major items and functions necessary in these categories are :

a. **Paper Mill**, for cast pulp works and custom made paper for a variety of functions.

b. **Digital recording / editing** , now entering the domestic environment, at a professional level it offers substantial savings in the long term , and allows perfect recording and synch for film ,video, and sound work.

c. **Computer editing & animation**, which should be developed in conjunction with the Computer Centre, allowing highly accurate and extraordinarily time saving down loading of information directly onto tape.

d. **Portable high temperature kilns**, for more flexible in scale ceramic works, and easier storage in areas blighted by lack of space.

e. **Foundry - Ceramic shell process**, rapid high quality castings, economically produced of good scale.

f. **Hard Copy**: of high quality of potentially large scale from digital image recorders, and image synthesis from work stations. Cross-over from Photo-optics and software programmes, the steady erosion of photo-chemistries in photography.

5. INFRASTRUCTURE;

5.1 **Computing:** Each study area will be developing its own basic computing needs - for image manipulation, or animation, or sound editing as it has been, and as it becomes necessary. Major computing work will be carried out in the Computer Centre, which should be being developed bearing in mind the needs of **all** the study areas. **Ethernet or an equivalent** within the school should allow access to information, and communication within the school and without. Electronic mail should replace pedestrian memos and desktop to desktop image and text communication should properly be a reality by 1993. These developments will ensure that the much hoped for **ARNET** link will become indispensable. Over the next six years fibre optic communications at a campus level will need to be planned for as telecommunications leaps forward.

5.2 **Library:** this facility too, with the increase of research degree students should be further developed with optical disc information storage, and certainly within a year with the help of ARNET new Clann indices will allow readier access of information which will need to be immediately accessed.

The function of magazines / periodicals / journals to similarly dispense urgent information must be maintained as a high priority. Within ten years hard copy from desktop devices, or displays on V.D.U.s will eventually make such material redundant, but until it disappears entirely, the need is serious. And when it disappears the need for adequate storage / filing space will still remain, as will the need for additional study spaces for the increased number of research students on the one campus.

5.21 **The Ivan Dougherty Gallery,** a directorship of the last two years placed the outward looking stance of the gallery firmly on the needs of college and courses.

It is to be hoped that this gallery, which as a model of professionalism and as a focus of debate is one of the Colleges most valuable assets, will continue to offer greater metropolitan Sydney the variety of demanding and current exhibitions, which has characterised it's recent history. This highly proficient space with that courageous policy as ably continued, will do much to act as a foil for the new policy at the **Works Gallery**. This, in showcasing the work of all levels of our students should be able to anticipate the kind of avuncular encouragement, from that senior gallery which will do much to lift the criteria of apathy or cynicism, characteristic of so many of Sydney's younger art venues.

5.3 Technical Support, As the needs of the school to maximise resources militate toward evening classes and weekend student access, the provision of technical and support staff will have to be increased by **four** over six years. **Two technical officers** and **two store people** to maintain toolroom and facility access outside normal shifts, and to supplement demonstrator roles in the presently diminished Academic staff.

An **Administrative Assistant** to the School is necessary for the previous reason and also to more efficiently cope with the administrative tasks proliferated by the needs of the University superstructure. The essential nature of this need will be clearly evident by the end of 1992, it would also provide a better understanding, both ways between Administrative and Academic units of the College.

6.0 PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES:

6.1 With Secondary / TAFE Students, it is proposed that by mid 1992 Secondary students will be being catered to by being offered Saturday morning introductory courses, and that this might be engineered as one possible route for entry to the B.F.A. programme. Similarly T.A.F.E. students might gain special access by other extracurricular short courses.

6.2 **With Industry**, as all studies areas have to some extent relationships with industrial sponsors, it is foreseen that this will continue to be necessary to supplement diminishing funds and to maintain access to current technologies.

6.3 **In the Industry**, in the " art industry " short courses offered to artworkers and associated professionals will generate funds necessary to finance materials needed for student projects. In three years consumable budgets available for coursework materials have quartered, while student expenses drawn against them have soared. Academic standards in this school are maintained in part, in ratio to the extent of practice prior to critical analysis, drawing into the school artworkers of a professional level can also help to supplement available models of enquiry and practice, in addition to fiscal urgencies.

As previously mentioned in 2.2 the proposed Master of Media Art & Technology - 1993 - will seek to place research artists with industrial enterprises as " artists in residence ". They would gain training and access to inaccessible high and low end technologies, and their lateral creativity could be seen as desirable enrichment for the establishments concerned. Sources of potential involvement include C.S.I.R.O., Letraset, Kodak, Macintosh, and T.N.T.

7.0 **TARGETED OBJECTIVES:**

7.1 **Student Intake**, the School has reached an optimum size for its physical restraints. However as has been stated, to provide the necessary educational dynamic across so many diverse media, this overall dimension needs to be maintained. In keeping with the observations in 1.0, a softening of the inner structure of the school will allow movement and swell to be accommodated across more flexibly placed Studies Areas.

Regular short term review of these perceived needs of means and academic goals will maintain appropriate

targets. Prioritising the needs of higher degree students will establish high, visible criteria of academic excellence, to benefit through example, the lower degree courses.

7.2 **Equipment**, as 4.0, but noting also the need for regular maintenance budgets of a realistic scale.

7.3 **Visitor Programme**, is essential to our varied needs. Distinguished specialists and innovative professionals provide essential knowledge and opinion to feed the groundswell of academic debate, complementing the steady questioning of the full time academic staff.

7.4 **Building Improvements**, within the next two years it will be necessary to review the accommodation for the photographic courses, in the extreme basement of **block C**, there is the possibility of extending, through excavation, an ideal **darkroom** to separate the graphic arts darkroom from the mural enlarger. Arguments for this include health and safety, and also practical convenience with increased servicing to other courses.

If the lecture theatre is redesigned, it will be possible to maintain a studio space under a mezzanine floor in block A, for a stable base for the **Foundation programme** of the school, also a philosophical foundation of the school profile.

Stage 2, of the **new building** programme should also allow as soon as possible, the construction of a **bridge** between the Computer Centre, and the stairs between 4D and Photographic Studies, for the closer functioning of all these areas.

Among the urgent priorities of space and building in the near future is the clear need for practical spaces and studios as permanent bases for all major students in the B.F.A., B. Art Ed., and B. Art Th. programmes, and also for the higher degree students, whose continual presence around the school does so much for the level of academic seriousness in the atmosphere of the campus. These observations are made in keeping with the

school policy of flexible thinking and regularly reassessed goals and academic needs: of scale, of parameters of concern, and of criteria of excellence.

Physical resources should similarly be viewed with non-specific and specialist practical areas being reassessed according to pedagogical need. This situation was neglected in the past and is currently hampered by fixed territorial thinking. A fact which must cause later reassessment of available spaces in the new building.

But because of the crises engendered by the situation - it has had a positive side effect by precipitating an awareness of the need for increased daily access to the campus in extended hours, and course restructuring. The negative effect is also visible in the marginal level of acceptable standards visible in the work produced by students on the undergraduate courses.

7.5 **Academic Staffing levels**, have been severely cut within the full time cohort. Seven full time lecturers lost over the last three years, including senior staff, have placed unacceptable loads upon those few remaining. Over the next six years it would be hoped that a happier financial climate will allow a return to these previous staffing levels especially with the higher number of students within the school now, which will be maintained.

A **senior academic** should be available to complement the role of the Head of School, and a **senior lecturer** be appointed to specifically help with academic issues of course maintenance and development. **Two other full time lecturers** are also needed in the time based media area. These positions need to be addressed immediately, within the next year, and over the next two or three an aim would be to reinstitute **one full time lecturer** for the three dimensional subjects, and photography will need replacement lecturers for those **two lecturers** who resigned.

Part time lecturers are critical to the varied input necessary to the school but a balanced level of full time staff will ensure a stable trajectory of academic development and a fairer distribution of academic / administrative chores.

Adrian Hall - 16th May 1991