

Ideas in Transit - Teaching the Area of New Media Arts

Of the five Schools that operate at the College of Fine Arts, Media Arts is the newest. 2002 marks its first year of existence and in November, the first Digital Media students will graduate. Although the School's history may be short, the vision and commitment of its lecturers has put Media Arts on the educational map in Australia and the Asia Pacific region.

The School encompasses degrees and disciplines that tie together technology, communication, culture and systems of representation. Time-Based-Art (film studies), Photomedia (photography), and Digital Media (animation, motion graphics and interactive media) are each part of a broad educational approach by the College that acknowledges the importance of media culture in contemporary society.

The goal of uniting the disciplines that fall under the category 'new media arts' at COFA has been taken up by Head of School, Phil George.

In the following discussion, George and two academic colleagues talk about how people of different ages understand and work with 'media' and how the School of Media Arts is differentiating itself from other new media programs in content and approach to teaching.

"I think one of most interesting exchanges taking place in the area of media arts today

is that between the older and younger generations of people," says Phil George. "They're each bringing with them different understandings, and particularly different languages for interpreting and using 'media'."

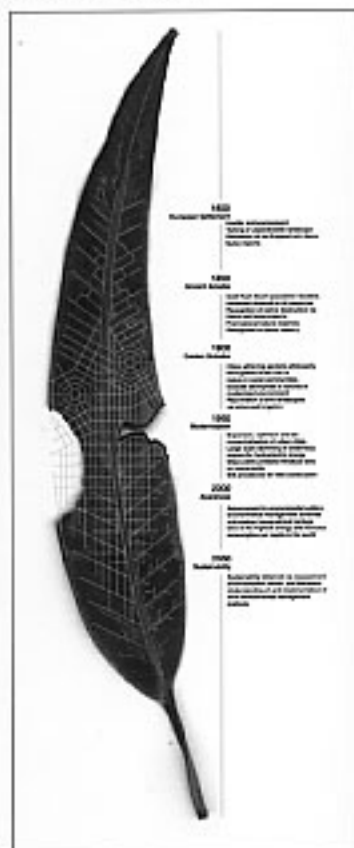
The younger generation, loosely described as those under 25, explains George, have grown up or come of age surrounded by computer usage. Although on the face of it, this may not translate directly as intricate knowledge of technology, it does mean a likely familiarity and expectation of how modern communication systems can be accessed and used.

"Young people bring with them an enthusiasm and in some ways an innate understanding of mass media and new technologies. In addition to being surrounded

by tv, radio, movies and magazines, most young people would have no memory of a time when computers did not assist with homework and connection with friends. Nor would they recollect a time when everyone did not carry a mobile phone to text message each other. They are used to their world being structured by a variety of media and technologies and they are used to adapting these systems to suit their needs."

Matched against this is an older generation's understanding of how systems of communication have been defining modern life since the telegram, the telephone and the television came into existence. "The critical difference is not that one group would necessarily be more media or technology literate, it's the different perspectives that they have on how media and technology influence life and drive change," explains George.

Anna Munster, a new media theorist and lecturer at the College of Fine Arts, takes the discussion further. "With the boom of the Internet, increased use of personal computers, and faster systems of connection, there has come the sense, particularly among young people, that the world has changed, that all this is 'new'. In some respects, it's true, the world has changed and many of the devices we use today are new. However, debates about the influence of media on society and culture have been taking place for most of the 20th Century. This is what we seek to teach the students, that they are part of a continuing convergence between art, commerce, ideas and people." **Continued Page 10**



Mary Benn, 3rd Year Media Arts Project on Australian Identity



Sarah Block, 3rd Year Media Arts Project on Australian Identity



Nick Potts, 3rd Year Media Arts Project on Australian Identity

Cover
Aysha Ahmed,
Untitled, Photography
and Digital Imagery
(See Student Profile
on Page 4)

A Tribute to the Life of Helen Stanwix

In the words of her friends at the College of Fine Arts, which includes classmates and lecturers of all ages and from all disciplines, Helen Stanwix was a special woman with exceptional talent. Her broad knowledge, dynamism, sense of joy and thoughtfulness



ensured that people were not just drawn to her – they wanted to spend time with her, and they wanted to learn from her. Her professional career as a writer and journalist took her around the world, however it was her passion for art that brought her to COFA and unlocked a world of creative energy in the areas of painting, photography and digital imagery.

In December 2000, Helen was diagnosed with stomach cancer. For 18 months, she fought the disease. Most remarkably it was during this time, that Helen, having secured a 3 year government scholarship, commenced her Masters degree at COFA after been awarded a first class honours degree from the COFA School of Art.

Although studying full time while intermittently undergoing radical bouts of chemotherapy could not have been easy, Helen chose to approach life with a positive and generous spirit. She celebrated the development of her own artwork and research and supported and encouraged the creative endeavours of those around her. At COFA, Helen will be most remembered for her strength and kindness.

Of course there are multiple sides to all people, and a side of Helen that was not shared with many people at the College, but which was obviously of vital importance, was her unwavering commitment to orthodox Judaism. It is through letters and papers sent to the College by Helen's husband Michael Frankel that we at COFA have come to understand better the things that were closest to Helen's heart – her family, her faith and her art, which she continued to create up until a week before her death.

On Tuesday June 25th, Helen Stanwix died. Family,

friends and colleagues attended her memorial service the following day. The College of Fine Arts extends heartfelt condolences to Helen's husband Michael and her daughters Kirsten and Jemima.

MEDIA ARTS FEATURE

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In his role as head of School, George, together with senior lecturers John Colette and Simon Hunt, has helped to create the Digital Media undergraduate degree. "Because the digital media degree is new, it has received a lot of attention in the past few years. However, there are strong relationships and overlaps between digital media, photomedia and time-based-art as taught at the College. Each addresses the theoretical, technical and creative components of what media is as an operational system."

Taking the Digital Media degree as an example, Colette explains, "A misconception of those who work in and around media arts is that if you are technically adept, you will do well. Graduates today cannot afford to think like this, which is why we encourage our students to engage with issues broader than just processes of production."

The Media Arts programs at COFA are considered unique for several reasons. They teach students how to ask questions and interrogate issues theoretically and practically. They encourage students to explore a wide range of creative expression options, including design and fine arts. They provide understanding of how to solve problems and produce good technical and creative work. Perhaps most vitally, however, the programs employ a group of lecturers who are enthusiastic about working with students.

"We want the students to get the most from themselves as possible," says Colette. "That's why we're here and that's why we teach."

"And", adds George, "we're here because the students have as much to teach us as we have to teach them. Media Arts is in many ways a collaborative experience. It's about building strategic alliances; capitalising on your own strengths and valuing and rewarding those of other people."

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