

Artists brush up on technique at CAD-CAM summer school

By LINDA WALLACE*

BRISBANE artist Ms Virginia Barratt is no longer phased by sophisticated computer technology. Last week she was one of 12 artists to complete the first National Summer School in CAD-CAM in Adelaide.

The four-week course was an initiative of the South Australia-based Australian Network for Art and Technology (ANAT). It was held at the Advanced Technology Education Centre (ATEC).

The artists, from throughout Australia, worked in painting, sculpture, performance, architecture, audio/visual media and jewellery, fabric, furniture and interior design.

They had to banish their residual Luddite tendencies to understand the computer-aided design (CAD) system (which consisted of Cadds Man software developed in South Australia running on NEC workstations), then begin to push it to its limits.

Instructor and ATEC manager Mr Pat Tucker said he was kept on his toes by the new students and had to change his mode of teaching as the course progressed.

"Instead of rote, mechanical-style learning, they approached the system in an experimental fashion," he said.

The course also served to introduce the business side of technological development to lateral thinking.

Recently, at the school's Open Day, upper management people from software, hardware and allied manufacturing companies, along with the State Minister for Development and Technology, Employment and Further Education, Mr Arnold, rubbed shoulders with practicing artists and arts administrators.

"It is crucial to create an environment for dialogue and trust to develop between artists and industry," the executive director of ANAT, Ms Francesca da Rimini, said.

The business development manager of Adelaide's Technology Park, Mr David Biggs, said he believed the traditional resistance from industry was historically and culturally based.

Competitive

"Artists were seen as the ultimate laissez faire characters — bohemian and unreliable — but businesses, especially at the upper end of the technological spectrum, are becoming more sensitive to the fact of using people with a different conceptual approach if they are to continue to be competitive," he said.

"Perhaps business should be looking at bringing artists and similar thinkers into the design, research and development process at an earlier stage to give their company the leading edge when their products hit the marketplace."

But he also acknowledged the resistance cut both ways.

He admitted there were some artist types he had met who thought they should "roam through the hills and glens waiting for inspiration, and that working for industry would be the ultimate betrayal of their integrity".

The responses of the artists were enthusiastic. A number produced actual objects using numerically controlled mills and lathes.

"For me the month here has been intellectually expansive," Ms Barratt, a performance artist and dancer, said.

"I've developed a fluidity regarding the application of systems of knowledge, and feel like I've flung myself into the 21st century in ways I can't quite articulate at the moment."

Artist Ms Diane Mantzaris was trained as a painter, then began using a 2-D Macintosh graphics system as a tool. She said working with the CAD system's 3-D capabilities and limitless computer space became areas of exploration.

Following the national publicity gained by the Summer School, ANAT has been approached by other educational institutions to co-ordinate the running of similar events.

* Linda Wallace was a course participant and is an audio/visual artist and writer