

# AAA AT THE DUNEDIN SCHOOL OF ART: INSTITUTION AND EKSTITUTION

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This issue of *Scope: Contemporary Research Topics* is devoted to documentation of and responses to AAA at the Dunedin School of Art in 2011. AAA: artists Adrian Hall, Alistair McLennan and André Stitt, respectively from England, Scotland and Northern Ireland, although their peripatetic lives have taken them around the world to many places.

In 2010, Carl A Mears and Michele Beevors mentioned the possibility of an AAA month-long residency in our School here near the southern tip of New Zealand, very far away from England, Scotland and Ireland. Support from the British Council and Otago Polytechnic (our home institution) followed and before we knew it AAA arrived. Looking back on their residency, the productive tension between 'ekstitution' in relation to 'institution' is foremost in my mind as Head of School (which by its very definition comprises an institution).

Artist and filmmaker Florian Schneider coined the term 'ekstitution' in 2010 to help explain the nature of self-organised and informal educational networks or events. AAA constituted such a 'network', and such an 'event', during their residency in our institution. Schneider writes that an 'ekstitution' is "...fluid, changeable, uncertain, not doctrinaire, constituted either in opposition or perpendicular to the formal physical and symbolic architectures of the institution, with its clear designations of inside and outside."<sup>1</sup> AAA inhabited the confines of our institution whilst questioning its constraints and making the artists' agency visible for their audience – mostly our students.

This is in keeping with AAA's experiences as artists who have worked critically within art schools. André Stitt writes elsewhere in this issue about the dynamics of the pedagogical environment at Belfast College of Art in the 1970s and also about the concurrent emphasis on "working outside the confines of the institution". Carl A Mears and Michele Beevors point to the involvement of students within the context of the Dunedin School of Art and its Gallery. For a while, the very structures, outcomes and processes of the institution were exposed, for example when Hall moved vertically into the inner spaces of the gallery architecture or when McLennan became a walking sculpture or when Stitt carved into his own flesh: instances when our understanding of the ontology of the known were profoundly unsettled.

Georg Scöllhammer urges art schools to "come back to a form of mobility which is also a form of academy".<sup>2</sup> This is what AAA gifted to our School. And, their gift came with a generosity which reminds us of Marcel Mauss's understanding<sup>3</sup>: the gift comes with generosity because it has to be repaid generously; it holds such force that it compels the recipient to repay it; and there is thus an ethics of behaviour embedded in the relationship between giver and recipient – a reciprocity which the audience (read: student) feels compelled to repay through retaining a qualitative critical mobility of practice in their own work – the ultimate repayment for the artist-teacher.

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- 1 See Fiona Woods, "Slivers of Critical Space: Some Thoughts on the Role of the Contemporary Art Institution", *Networks* 14, Summer, 2011: 2.
- 2 See Clémentine DeLiss., "Roaming, Prelusive, Preamble", in Steven Henry Madoff (Ed.) *Art School: Propositions for the 21st Century* (Cambridge Mass.: MIT, 2009: 133).
- 3 Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reasons for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, Trans. W D Halls (London: Cohen and West, 1923/1990)