2008 and beyond

RENEWAL



Figures 69 & 70. Michel Tuffery, *First Contact*, concept image above and below at NZ International Arts Festival, image courtesy of the artist, Michel Tuffery, MNZM for the New Zealand Arts Festival at Te Papa, 2011.

The above image is an example of why the School can be justifiably proud of its many ex students' achievements. In this era further new accommodation was provided, including, for the first time, a large exhibition gallery open to the public, and the Bachelor of Visual Arts, along with a number of complementary postgraduate programmes expanded the School's offerings.

Applications may have been declining for the BFA, but postgraduate student numbers had increased, many of whom were again being accommodated off site. This and other long standing accommodation concerns relating to the School not having an exhibition space or a suitable lecture theatre no doubt contributed towards an announcement by the Polytechnic in June 2008 that a twin-level annex was being designed for the School by McCoy and Wixen architect, Regan Hall, to be added next to, and linked with, the School's Leith Block.¹ Lonie commented that "The annex, expected to be completed in February in time for the start of the 2009 academic year, will have flexible studio spaces upstairs and a large lecture theatre and spacious gallery downstairs. It will also be the School's front door, with a new main entrance leading out onto Riego St. The gallery was a first for the Polytechnic and a welcomed addition for students who needed to learn how a commercially run gallery worked. The gallery would be open to the public and would show the works of students and outside artists."² This was much welcomed news for the School.



Figures 71. New building with gallery, extension completed 2009 (photograph Pam McKinlay).

In February 2009 the new building, completed via a capital works grant from the Tertiary Education Commission, was officially opened by the National list MP, Michael Woodhouse, and described by Lonie as "a really clever and exciting space to be in" and she was looking forward to having around 225 art students together again. "It feels great to have a space to call home. The students are all on site and they are now a community."³ The new gallery had already been put to use and was featuring an exhibition of students' electronic art for the opening celebrations. Staff member, Neil Emmerson, in describing the gallery, said that "all the functionality and versatility required for the contemporary artist has been provided. Three pin plugs and computer data points abound overhead, on the walls and in the floor, while the floor to ceiling windows can be quickly screened when necessary. In the adjoining storeroom, a complex-looking control panel enables a lone person to effortlessly adjust lighting, exterior light and data projection."⁴



Figure 22. Sculpture student Natalie Wardell, at work on a multi-media work in "the Pit", Sculpture Department, 2016 (photograph Pam McKinlay).

February also saw the commencement of the successor to the four-year Bachelor of Fine Arts degree, the Bachelor of Visual Arts, offering students a three year programme, earlier specialisation and more choice than was offered in the BFA. It rapidly gained student approval as was clearly indicated in a later NZQA External Evaluation and Review report, which "revealed that all 22 of the students surveyed said that they would recommend the programme to others, with 90% saying that it represented a good investment in time and money." It continued, "There is strong value in this programme's studio-based learning and activities which are designed to give students the skills to operate successfully in a wide range of career pathways chosen by graduates of the programme. There was clear evidence of research-informed teaching, and that teaching was being undertaken by 'working artists'. However, many staff indicated that their workload was too high. Students also indicated a desire for more teaching time. This condition seems to have been exacerbated by recent restructuring. Improved management of [staff] work load and clearer expectations around research and availability of lecturing staff to students need to remain an important focus."⁵

A further boost to staff morale was the very successful organisation and presentation of a nationwide, Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Art Educators (ANZAAE) conference, which was held within the School of Art and the Polytechnic's School of Design during April. This was the second time the School had been involved in organising such an event, the first being an Australasian-wide conference held in 1996. This one was under the directorship of Professor Leoni Schmidt, who explains in her introductory welcome that "'art works - mahi toi' [the title given to the conference] is an opportunity for all of us to share ideas, perspectives, experiences and strategies with delegates from many other institutions and from different sectors within the educational spectrum: early childhood, primary, intermediate, secondary, tertiary and the museums and public art gallery sector. The conference is also an opportunity for delegates to renew old contacts, to grow networks, to frame new questions, to find unexpected answers, to debate and discuss issues concerning art and design education and its connections with contemporary art and design practices."⁶

All staff were involved in its running; from organising keynote speakers, supervising paper presenters and in many cases presenting a paper of their own, chairing panel discussions, running a range of hands-on workshops for participants to explore new materials, chairing special interest group meetings, organising a range of public exhibitions covering aspects of work from primary through to the tertiary level, and last but not least, arranging a number of delectable social events. Attendees received a comprehensive 91 page conference programme, which provided a synopsis of each of the 83 papers on offer, presenter biographies, and extensive information on all other conference activities. Some 300 art educators participated, many of whom came from overseas.

Within a week of the conference closing, documentation for four supplementary postgraduate programmes to complement the BVA degree, which had been under development over the past year via the guidance of Lonie and Browne was completed and submitted to the Polytechnic Academic Board. These were aimed at closing the gap between the three year BVA and the highly regarded MFA and to help bring the School further in line with trends occurring internationally across the tertiary sector following the 1999 Bologna Declaration. Academic Board conferred its approval and the material was soon on its way to NZQA, which in turn granted its approval, on 9th December, for the commencement of all programmes in February the following year.⁷

The additional programmes were: I.A one semester Postgraduate Certificate aimed at providing "students who may have left structured learning sometime before with the opportunity to develop in a guided programme the ability to create a systematic proposal supported by studio evidence that forecasts the form and content of a further exhibition, the proposal to be supported by relevant research methodologies." 2.A one-year Postgraduate Diploma in Visual Arts "to provide students who may have left tertiary study for some time with the guided opportunity to create a structured, systematic and



Figure 73. Sculpture student Jerry Howlett puts final touches to work in his studio in "the Barn", 2016 (photograph Pam McKinlay).

professionally exhibited body of work supported by a written text which demonstrates intellectual rigour and contemporary relevance." 3.A one-year Bachelor of Visual Arts (Honours) degree aimed at enabling "students who have already reached a degree of excellence in their undergraduate degree the opportunity to extend their ability to work within the visual arts in a way that demonstrates a systematic engagement with contemporary thinking in their chosen field, leading to an exhibition and related written text that demonstrates intellectual rigour and professional expertise," and 4.A one-year Master of Visual Arts aimed at providing "students with the opportunity to demonstrate mastery of the professional, conceptual and technical skills relevant to their chosen field in the production of an independently developed and original exhibition and written text."⁸

The prospectus noted that "Postgraduate candidates may evolve unexpected relationships between traditional subjects or create new syntheses from them. As the organisation of postgraduate programmes is shaped by their own proposal and desired end result, qualifications may be completed in one, or across several disciplines."⁹

A comment on curricula content appeared in the local news at this time titled "True to Human Form," referring to life drawing. "The Otago Polytechnic School of Art is one of the last schools in the country to offer comprehensive life drawing training to students. The subject is compulsory for all first, second and third-year students. 'It's basically about observation.' The head of sculpture Michele Beevors says, 'You're trying to situate the model in space. You're teaching perspective and mark-making and anatomy - those traditional things. It's helpful because it teaches them to slow down when they're looking. For an artist, it's about looking and then capturing what you see. It's revelatory.' [And the life drawing lecturer, Anita De Soto comments] 'The naked body can be a confronting subject for young artists. It is definitely one of the more challenging forms to represent. It's so complex. There are bones and muscles covered by skin. But when you become familiar with looking at nudes, it can become quite liberating. We draw people all shapes and sizes. We're lucky that we have some very confident models.''¹⁰ The teaching of drawing from the nude human figure, first introduced by Hutton in 1880, remains to this day, an important art educational practice within the School.

After four years as Head of School, whilst at the same time continuing as Programme Manager of the BFA and BVA, being responsible for a number of MFA students and teaching within the final year of the Art History and Theory programme, Lonie felt the urge to return to the classroom full-time. In discussions with colleague, Leoni Schmidt, she suggested that perhaps Schmidt might like to try her hand at heading the School. Schmidt had a doctorate from the University of Johannesburg, had joined the School's Art History and Theory staff in 1996, was currently the Academic Coordinator of Research and Postgraduate Studies, and whose published research had earned her the 2009 International Journal of the Arts in Society Award for Excellence in the Arts. Schmidt considered the idea and in July 2009, after discussions with the CEO of the Polytechnic, accepted the role of Head of School.

Moves to reduce the Polytechnic's teaching and administrative staff were continuing, as evidenced by the Polytechnic's CEO, Phil Ker announcing in September that after learning earlier in the year the Polytechnic was losing about 10% of its Tertiary Education Commission funding, "Five positions will be lost in the art school, while remaining staff will be asked to teach across disciplines."¹¹ Swiss born Max Oettli, Academic Leader in Photography since 2007, was reported in the local newspaper, saying that he believed "staff numbers were being cut because the polytechnic wanted staff to be responsible for more students each than at present." The paper further reported Jaenine Parkinson, Director of the Blue Oyster Gallery, saying that, "The polytechnic should try to find other ways of saving money and do everything it could to retain art staffing. The most valuable thing art students have is access to well informed staff."¹² Needless to say, their thoughts, along with letters of concern to the editor, held little sway.

Multi-tasking would now be expected from all staff, about which few would be happy due to their expertise usually being related to a specific field. However, the School's roll had dropped from three hundred over the past few years to nearer two hundred full-time equivalent students and some staffing cuts were not entirely unexpected. In replying to Ker's statement, Schmidt commented that "there was no doubt running the art school was expensive, but the school had an international reputation and would continue to prosper despite the cuts. The changes at the school meant they would have to do things smarter and better."¹³ After negotiations with staff and union representatives, the majority of staff chose in preference to redundancy, the option of moving from full-time contracts to proportional or part-time positions, reducing considerably and with minimal disruption, other than to salaries, the School's staffing hours.

Increased teaching pressures appear to have had little effect on the School maintaining its programme of public seminars, lectures and workshops, to which international and national artists and academics along with staff and senior students all contributed. And that year, for the first time a day-long public symposium was held, titled 'Illustrating the Unseeable: Reconnecting Art and Science,' held on 28th October and hosted by David Green and Susan Ballard of the School's Electronic Arts section. Eighteen presentations were offered by a number of the School of Art staff, University of Otago Science Department staff, and Natural History and Animation and



Figure 74. Anita De Soto in the Drawing Room, 2009 (photograph by Alan Cox).

Research practitioners. David Green later commented, "Having seen the primary focus as artists and designers in the service of scientific dissemination, throughout the day I came to realise that what was more interesting, was the kind of collaboration between artists and scientists that Julian Priest had identified. Ballard's selection by Superconductor; the Space Dialogue between architects and dancers described by Felicity Molloy; Clare Beynon's Antarctic Collaboration with Samuel Bowser; Mark McGuire's selection of Urban Artists Responding to Global Warming in Situ; and Stu Smith's Making the Graphic Visceral, are all examples of collaboration that do not only illustrate pre-existing concepts, but beyond that, synergise, synthesise and illuminate nascent ones. The symposium suggested that the art/science relationship can be a partnership without boundary. [It was] an intellectually, viscerally and exhilarating day's journey."¹⁴ This symposium was to be followed by many of the subsequent symposia, all with external partners and addressing the interdisciplinary connections between art and other fields of endeavour, e.g. law, medicine, literature and many others.

The beginning of 2010 saw the introduction of the four new postgraduate programmes, though due to lack of advertising time, application numbers were initially limited. Fortunately, ongoing programmes remained healthy as indicated by the Bachelor of Visual Arts accommodating some 150 students across its three levels, the Master of Fine Arts with over 30 participants, the distance learning Diploma in Ceramic Arts (level 6) with 60 students scattered throughout New Zealand and abroad across its first and second year, and a further 16 were still involved in the Bachelor of Fine Arts which was in the process of being phased out.

Of concern to the Ceramics section was an announcement by the Polytechnic in February, of "ambitious plans to demolish the old buildings on its School of Art site in Anzac Ave, and replace them with teaching spaces for more than 1000 art, engineering and horticulture students. The \$25 million redevelopment will be staged over 12 years, with trade students helping to construct the buildings to keep costs down. Initial plans show a multi-storeyed building on the Riego St boundary linking to a multi-storeyed rectangular building on the Anzac Ave

frontage. An atrium containing a student common room and upper plaza will link the buildings to the two new art school buildings which will be retained. Chief operating officer Philip Cullen said two main drivers were behind the project - the poor state of repair of the old art school buildings, and the need for the polytechnic to move out of L Block, the engineering department building opposite the art school on the east side of Anzac Ave."¹⁵ The process began in July with the demolition of the ceramics teaching studios, but leaving the drying, storage, glazing and kiln rooms untouched, and new studios were established in the School's Leith block. The area vacated would, from the start of 2011, house a new building, which would provide facilities for the School's painting students and accommodation for Bachelor of Engineering students.



Figure 75. Suzanne Emslie, Masters candidate, works on oversize sculptures in the Ceramic Studio, 2015 (photograph by Pam McKinlay).

Unlike the Diploma in Jewellery and Textile Arts, which had been subsumed within the BVA, the distance learning Diploma in Ceramic Arts programme was flourishing and continuing to gather enthusiastic adherents. By 2010, training centres had been established not only throughout New Zealand, but as far afield as South Korea and Japan. Grant was also in discussions with students from Dubai and Canada. He comments, "You get the feeling that people want to make pots again. With the decline in availability of ceramics programmes in schools and tertiary institutions, the Otago course offers a lifeline to interested students and in some cases has sparked a resurgence of interest in the craft. For example, at Waikato Polytechnic, where the pottery facility had become run down, interest in the remote course meant a revival of the department as students took on the work set by Otago under the eye of a Hamilton tutor."¹⁶

Of interest to ceramics students and staff, and quoted as 'a roaring success', was 'Fusion 2010', the 51st National Exhibition and New Zealand Potters Convention held in Dunedin from 9th - 25th April, which Grant and local potters helped organise. Its programme included master classes by visiting international artists along with a range of workshops and seminars being held in the School's Ceramics Section and at the Otago Museum. A

concurrent display of over one hundred ceramic works selected by noted potter, Peter Lange, was also featured in a gallery of the Museum.¹⁷ The Convention was attended by "one hundred potters from throughout New Zealand. [And] conference organisers had taken advantage of the relationship between Dunedin and its sister city, Shanghai to secure leading Chinese porcelain ceramist Huang Yunpeng as special guest for the event. Other guests at the conference are renowned ceramists Victor Greenaway, of Australia, and Kurt Spurey of Austria."¹⁸



Figure 76. Max Oetli (Head of Photography Studio) 2008 (photograph Alan Cox).

At the same time as the Ceramics Convention was reported, a very different article appeared in the local news, titled "Bomb Scare Sparked by Arts Project." "Emergency services were called to Green Island at 10.30am following reports that a number of suspected improvised explosive devices were taped to the Koremata St over-bridge. A 100m cordon was placed around the area, nearby residents were evacuated, and the Southern Motorway southbound lane was closed and traffic diverted through Blackhead Rd. The New Zealand bomb squad arrived by helicopter from Christchurch shortly after 1.00pm - just a day after they were called to a bomb hoax at Dunedin International Airport.

Oblivious to the unfolding drama around his home suburb was the third year Otago Polytechnic student Matthew Wilson, who was contacted by a family member after they read reports of the escalating situation. Mr Wilson said he rang police and identified himself as the owner of the five devices which were part of an arts project he had been working on for a mid-year exhibition. His devices - drink cans containing pinhole cameras which were sealed with duct tape and strapped to the bridge and nearby road sign - were designed to take a long exposure of the area. Taken to the cordon area by police, he was surprised by all the emergency services staff, media, and members of the public who had gathered around the area. The cameras were removed, and a sneak peak revealed a potential photographic art work inside. Mr Wilson said he was sorry for wasting police time and did not mean to spark a major alert. He had been told the four hour operation would have cost the taxpayer tens of thousands of dollars."¹⁹ Charges were not laid.



Figure 77. Leoni Schmidt, in discussion during a writing workshop, 2015 (photograph by Hayden Parsons).

Over the weekend of 13th to 15th August the School held a series of workshops for art, graphics, design and technology teachers in New Zealand secondary schools. "The weekend will include an exhibition of work by Otago art teachers, an afternoon of jam-packed updates of contemporary visual arts practices and their relevance for the classroom, and seven streams of workshops - each comprising 3 three hour sessions of hands on work - to choose from and to mix and match. Two lunches, drinks, snacks and coffee/tea occasions will provide time for social and professional networking and discussions about the contents of the sessions on offer. A tour of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery will be included. Come to our School and join in our community of practices for a happy and productive weekend."²⁰ Not only was this an example of the School reaching out to the community, but was also a positive way of informing teachers of what the School could offer secondary school pupils who may be contemplating tertiary art education.

The success of last year's 'Illustrating the Unseeable' symposium had set a benchmark, and this year on 29th October, an 'Art and Law' symposium, run in collaboration with the Otago University Faculty of Law and organised by Peter Stupples of the School's Art History and Theory section, proved equally popular. It was described as being "The first of its type in New Zealand, presenters drew on many of the substantive areas where art and law intersect. Topics included historical examples of artists and their patrons, art and colonisation, customary rights and sovereignty of centralised legislation, copyright and protection of legal rights to freedom of speech and expression and censorship. Presenters were drawn from Australia and New Zealand in what has been an illuminating and thought provoking event."²¹ Precedence had been established and a public symposium hosted by the School would in future become a heralded annual event.

This years 'Site' exhibition was, for the first time, held simultaneously with five other Polytechnic departments showcasing their students' work. The combined exhibitions' catalogue featured comments and illustrations of work from each of the departments, and the School of Art section stated that, "It is not always possible to tell what studio area the student started in, as they may make objects out of quite disparate materials or



Figure 78. Textiles student prepares for screenprinting, 2004 (photograph Alan Cox).

install moving images amongst complex crafted objects. They may consider political and artistic issues or they may be concerned with how we rethink space and intimate memories. The viewer may be asked to move through transformed architectural space or to sit in a movie theatre."²² Although the exhibition evidenced the interdisciplinary quality of recent years, it also presented numerous individual studio based art works, indicating a healthy breadth of student artistic endeavour.

A significant and entrepreneurial undertaking initiated in late 2010, and realised at its launch on Friday 18th November 2011, was the establishment of the Dunedin School of Art Foundation. It was announced in the local paper under the title 'Art School Planning Closer Ties'. "The Dunedin School of Art plans to build closer ties with the Dunedin community as it prepares to launch its new foundation endowment fund next week. 'It's about reciprocity between us and our community,' Head of School Prof Leoni Schmidt said yesterday. 'We want to expand to be more community-focused. We want to do things above and beyond the programmes we deliver and pull the community more into the school. It will also give students more opportunities to present their work to the public, and bringing the community into the school will add energy to the school. The art school is thriving and doing really well. Student numbers are up and night classes for the public are chock-a-block."²³

Art critic Peter Entwisle wrote, "On November 18th, I attended the opening of the art school's annual exhibition and the launch of its new foundation and endowment fund. Clive Humphreys, a lecturer at the school and a long established printmaker, acted as MC and several members of the new Dunedin School of Art Foundation were introduced. I'm not a fan of lengthy talk and ceremonies at such functions, but on this occasion felt relaxed. The foundation has established an endowment fund, the Dunedin School of Art Endowment Fund. The Otago Polytechnic and Perpetual Trust have provided seed funding and in the nicest possible way it is seeking the public's support. You can join it and of course you can make donations. After the Foundation launch, we all moved to view the exhibition and I was impressed. It is not like the graduate shows of yesteryear. It is more varied,



Figure 79. Third year painting student Maddison Kelly, at the easel in her studio, 2016 (photograph by Pam McKinlay).

sophisticated and less obviously derivative of teachers. There is a wealth of contemporary material. In fact, some things are simply stunning."²⁴

Maintaining adequate funding for the School is not an easy matter, but positive comments by past graduates can be very supportive to those contemplating committing themselves and their finances towards the study of fine arts within its environs.

"The Painting Department provides a good balance of theory and practical teaching. The tutors are genuinely interested in the creative development of each student."²⁵ "The Sculpture Department tutors are extremely knowledgeable and focused on creating a challenging and constructive working environment. ... Sculpture's awesome!"²⁶ "As an international student, I had some wonderful support. This included my two supervisors for theory and studio work, who provided great leadership and artistic direction. I'm still in contact with them today."²⁷ "I felt fortunate to have studied at the Dunedin School of Art because the quality of the programme was so high. The whole process of my Masters was quite rigorous. My research, practical and written work provided a solid foundation and reinforced my emerging career as an artist."²⁸

Throughout its history, the Dunedin School of Art experienced numerous teaching styles and influences, from the early academic copyist mantra, through impressionism, modernism, community and art teacher training, discipline oriented professionalism, and latterly, post discipline diversification. Many staff, students, buildings and programmes have come and gone, yet New Zealand's oldest felicitous school of art remains strong. A recent prospectus comments that students "choose the School for its resource competitiveness, quality of teaching and supervision and its sense of community. Our points of difference are our interest in an integrated theory/studio learning environment and our ability to retain well equipped workshops in all technical areas with appropriate technical support. The Dunedin School of Art has consistently focused on the development of excellence in the material aspects of art-making and is now one of the best equipped art schools in New Zealand."²⁹

At the postgraduate level, the current guiding philosophy is aptly described by Schmidt when she says "artists are expected to articulate the standpoint they are coming from, the concepts they are exploring through their work and how they fit into a larger community of practice. The writing and theory component of the Masters programme is where students extend their ideas further and further in conjunction with their making processes. It informs the subject being explored, and the materials and techniques being used to visualise these. In many ways the opportunity to explore the idea in depth, both intellectually and materially is the great beauty of postgraduate study. It's a time when people gain a lot of confidence as an artist because they focus completely and understand their own practice in relation to the contemporary scene."³⁰

Past alumni proudly acknowledge their allegiance, and those who now teach within its doors ensure its continued good health. The School's staff are nationally and internationally recognised as leaders in their fields of research and fine arts practice, and graduates are working as artists, teachers, curators and advisors in New Zealand and abroad. With its judicious mix of academic research and studio practice along with its internationally-renowned studios and workshop facilities, the School maintains a highly respected and well-deserved reputation as a significant artistic incubator and contributor to the cultural life of New Zealand. Perhaps, not surprisingly, students proclaim, "Dunedin, it's all right here."

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- 4 Ibid. 16 April 2009: 27.
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- 10 Otago Daily Times. 22 October 2009: 29.
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