Scholarship, 2007

Visual Arts

Assessment Report

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Commentary

The most significant aspect underpinning Scholarship assessment is its holistic nature. Awarding Scholarship involves the reading of two components, the workbook and the portfolio, that together form one picture. It is important that candidates understand that there are many ways to represent their performance at this level, all of which are capable of highlighting their own strategies, decision making, visual conceptual development, and conclusions. It is the role of the marking panel to ascertain the level of performance, comprehension, and expertise in the work presented, through identifying key approaches and visual thinking utilised by the candidate to transport their practice.

Together, the Scholarship workbook and portfolio articulate a series of factors, visual and conceptual arguments to form a body of exploratory and investigative work. At the top end in 2007, these submissions showed great clarity of purpose and focus. The visual knowledge and insight evidenced in the Outstanding Scholarship submissions was exemplary.

Candidates should be encouraged to enter Scholarship Visual Arts. For each of the five fields, the environment is positively challenging and competitive with many intelligent and articulate submissions achieving superb results.

The Outstanding Scholarships were awarded to those candidates who clearly operated inside their own practice, and exhibited a high degree of intentionality in terms of proposition, process and methods; they were both inventive and strategic with decision-making, and therefore displayed a strong sense of ownership. These candidates tended to establish their own contexts early on rather than searching for them, thus artistic reference and research became a critical tool rather than backup per se. Knowing their proposition and pursuing it with criticality (not just identifying terrain) tended to consolidate the practice through a sense of self-determination. Those who achieved this type of performance were intensely engaged in their brief / proposition, exploring and exploiting the conventions and concepts of their specific field, whilst also consistently renegotiating parameters and direction. They "hit the ground running", in that they didn't spend a lot of time backgrounding the brief; early research was incorporated into the body of work as an underpinning tool and / or driving context for the work.

At the high end of Scholarship, there was a greater degree of cross-disciplinary activity. This was successful when it was explored with purpose. This type of investigation needs to be appropriate, though there is a risk that the development of work can be literalised if the inclusions of other media disciplines are incorporated without clear or apparent reason. In 2007, in all subjects there seemed to be willingness to generate work without being held hostage by technique, and in general there was greater risk taking, both in picture making / object / installation decisions and the conceptual framework that underpinned the work. This culminated in "new moves" being made based on preceding artworks rather than shifts occurring only through the introduction of an artist model. It was good to see a high level of originality present in artwork, found particularly in those submissions driven by candidates' own practice.

The use of digital media continues to grow and impact on all of the five visual arts fields. Those candidates awarded Scholarship, skilfully managed the integration of this media, particularly when it was prioritised as a device (technical and / or conceptual). There is still a need for some candidates to be mindful of not undermining the visual quality and language of the artwork by marginalising and / or excluding key factors through poor management, such as image quality (colour and tonality), thus confusing the conceptual premise. There are definitely times where the range of digital media possibilities brings to the conversation a

conceptual and appropriately constructed element. It is important that candidates are cognisant of potential readings of the media and utilise it to its benefit, rather than for its ease of use.

The workbook portfolio relationship
There is still a growing range of interesting types and format / organisation of the workbook being presented. As stated early on in this report, there are numbers of ways through which to communicate material. It was particularly good to see further options being incorporated into the main body of practice, not just as an extra workbook page. The notion of further options exists as a method as much as other opportunities. The workbook itself allows for a parallel body of work to exist, and can operate as the space between works on the portfolio, as much as it is purely evidence of working process, thinking, and key developments. The important factor to keep constant is that the workbook supports, confirms, and reiterates with purpose the depth of research and academic pursuit of the whole submission. Again, the means for achieving this are subjective to the nature of the practice and engagement. When referring to artist models in the workbook, emphasis should be placed on the connections and relevance to candidates' own work, and not fall into a biography or history of artists' practice. Contemporary art and design practice should be referred to, not imitated.

Candidates should be encouraged to keep all accoutrements of research and making; thinking and documentation of work produced; and to submit this as workbook, even if they are not able to develop a workbook separately throughout the year. It is likely that there will be appropriate "workings" that could become workbook material. The standard of portfolios submitted for level 3 indicated that many more candidates were capable of achieving Scholarship.

DESIGN
The best performing candidates in DESIGN most commonly:
- engaged in a broad range of research strategies from the start; taking their own photos, engaging in dialogue with people and places that were appropriate, making drawings that established starting points and recording information using a variety of types of drawing
- included material in the workbook that was clearly generated throughout the year and relied on visual notation rather than on writing essays to underpin ideas and issues presented on the portfolio. Although this is not the only valid approach, it should be noted that the maintenance of a journal or workbook can enhance the candidate's opportunity to generate the depth and range of understanding required to meet the Scholarship criteria
- understood the type of workbook they were employing to add value to the portfolio and reinforce links. A number of legitimate types of workbooks were presented: scrapbook, new or parallel body of work, research and reference journal, shoebox (systematically presented and catalogued), and discussion, clarification and reflection document
- understood the best use of space and scale of imagery over the eight pages to declare the primary intentions, including initial context and research
- submitted workbooks that supported a critical engagement and, in many instances, produced a parallel body of work that built out of the portfolio. These workbooks presented a wide range of propositions with equally successful solutions that sustained a consistent aesthetic and took ownership of the brief in an inventive manner – "Good design is good ideas"
- presented workbooks that supported an informed investigation into typographic structures and font decisions. Open-ended propositions enabled candidates to discuss and explore a rich set of options that extended from one decision to the next; this kind of constant renegotiation opened up alternative interpretations for type and image relationships
- used drawing in an inventive and exploratory manner. Confidently took risks, understood aesthetic preferences and built on unexpected tangents. For example, format and media decisions were integral to the proposition and grew out of issues being explored
- experimented with media and often employed cross-disciplinary approaches, strong illustrative and photographic cross-pollination being one example. Candidates demonstrated material and technical

proficiency, which produced well-crafted outcomes that were both elegant and sophisticated in execution and understanding of the conventions being used

- referenced widely, making connections between established practice and produced their own work by employing a considered yet unexpected range of models. These candidates confidently located new intersections and positions by integrating strategies and pictorial tactics sourced from their research models

- clearly understood their proposition and demonstrated a knowledge of the issues and concerns that face designers in the world today. Candidates understood the purpose and function of their design and the nature of the methodology employed reinforced the central proposition

- provided evidence of ongoing and very genuine analysis of their work – when clarifying their work these candidates sometimes presented questions rather than answers. The outcomes presented original solutions that pertained to the central proposition, themes, and messages.

Candidates who did NOT achieve Scholarship in DESIGN lacked some or all of the skills and knowledge above and in addition they:

- closely modelled the artist model, rather than determining ownership and invention from a number of appropriate artist models

- collated a linear resource and research at the outset, which restricted development and idea extension, because research was not ongoing and informing key points of synthesis and transition

- determined a brief that was governed by a predetermined set of formats, which closed down the depth of inquiry

- produced a broad and disparate set of options that they were unable to systematically evaluate or advance

- revealed gaps in their analysis as decisions were let down by a lack of clarification and ownership of research, ideas, and visual decisions

- relied on written annotation in the workbook that described the portfolio rather than sustaining links and offering new insights into process and decision-making. Workbooks that promote synthesis and analysis are encouraged

- produced workbooks that simply illustrated each step on the portfolio rather than presenting workbooks that were bursting with ideas, and genuine references to formal and technical devices

- overly relied on successful aesthetic decisions whereby ideas and visuals became over-emphasised and over-exposed rather than pushing towards unexpected outcomes.

PAINTING

The best performing candidates in PAINTING most commonly:

- demonstrated a thorough knowledge of several forms of practice in contemporary painting, which often included such things as photography, illustration, installation, and sculpture. Candidates made well-founded, adventurous, and critical responses to the selected forms of work, at times juxtaposing and synthesising disparate types of work in clever and inventive ways

- produced submissions that reflected on their own cultural environment, often making lucid references to, or quotations from, established artists work that made their work relevant and sophisticated in contemporary art

- made fluent use of a range of media in one form of practice (eg contemporary landscape) that enabled conventional approaches to the subject to be challenged, evaluated and reformed. Other candidates demonstrated fluent use of a range of forms of practice within one media convention (eg super flat hard edge painting) to subtly evaluate and instigate new and complex redevelopments of the established and central proposition

- presented workbooks that increased the markers' depth of understanding about appropriate and critical decisions, about issues central to the work and the use of appropriate artist models. Such submissions provided clear evidence of the central inquiry in the work, as well as unexpected connections that were "driven" by that central inquiry

Candidates who did NOT achieve Scholarship in PAINTING lacked some or all of the skills and knowledge above and in addition they:

- made leaps that were too big from one phase of the project to another, thereby under-utilising possibilities important to the project. This seemed to be done in favour of introducing possibilities that, while legitimate, were disconnected from the possibilities that preceded them; thus, a central proposition was not adequately extended or re-phrased
- presented submissions that focused on laying out surveys of artists and artistic periods considered to be of significance to the project, without providing evidence of the assimilation of these influences into the work itself
- did not use their workbooks as a forum for revealing tests, advances and intelligent divergence
- appended a "further developments" section in the workbook, which amounted to a superficial decision, the implications of which were not signalled or responded to in the project as a whole
- presented workbooks that provided only more examples and wordy explanations of works contained in the portfolio and thus failed to provide evidence of greater depth, range and lateral working.

PHOTO

The best performing candidates in PHOTO most commonly:

- maintained a strong ownership of concepts and context, which although underpinned by context knowledge (artist models, knowledge of contemporary art), developed a personal project with an inquiring and testing practice. These often started at a high level with contextual knowledge already integrated and embedded into the candidate's own work
- employed further options for development that appeared less like a Scholarship requirement add-on and sat more genuinely in line with the project's investigation. Workbooks that included work not on the portfolio often showed strategic decision-making, indicating a robust and rigorous engagement with the proposition
- evidenced their knowledge of artists and related practices within a body of work, rather then sequentially applying one artist's study after the other. These candidates were able to pursue their development of original work with far greater success
- submitted workbooks that furthered and opened up discussion, which was potentially already being actioned within the portfolio, thus elaborating and extending evidence. There are many ways to use and put together workbooks, some advantageous aspects of these included:
  i. reflective writing, where candidates critiqued their own work and asked questions as a means to further their inquiry (answered through both visual and textual analysis; notes, figurings, etc)
  ii. discussion of other possibilities for own work when researching artists
  iii. parallel investigations that didn't make it onto the portfolio
  iv. informed, analysed, and debated decisions, made with a focus on visual explorations and developments, and strong research application
- were excitingly engaged in research. This was evident in their observation and discussion of issues from a contemporary art context, nationally and internationally. It is great to see candidates accessing current artwork through exhibition visits, books, journals and websites
- embraced the photographic medium and its ability (conventions and concepts) to explore their topic / subject. At a high level, candidates took photographic concepts and exploited them both technically and conceptually, in order to navigate complex and sophisticated propositions
- posed a strategic and well-formed enquiry, backed up by appropriate use of photographic language to actively develop artwork.

Candidates who did NOT achieve Scholarship in PHOTO lacked some or all of the skills and knowledge above and in addition they:

- picked up devices from the original context without understanding their purpose and often used these devices inappropriately. Such use of artist models included: emulations, utilising devices, or taking up

the artists' ideas and concepts – without some level of integration and rationalisation. This sort of reference to artist models often suggested confusion and misunderstanding on the part of the candidate

- produced linear submissions, which didn't offer up many investigative tangents and tended to be less explorative. Although the work may have had a strong, cohesive, and fluently executed quality, the generation and exploration of new ideas, new research, and new synthesis is required at Scholarship level
- did not accurately represent the learning journey undertaken for level 3. The production of high quality level 3 portfolios entails research, exploration, and reflection. It is this learning, including decisions not to pursue practical directions or critical analysis of work rejected, that can be evidenced in the workbook. Candidates needed to present this work, which has so clearly been undertaken in the production of the portfolio
- presented inappropriate extensions of ideas to the concepts inherent in the work. Candidates needed to question their decision to propose a video or installation as an extension option in the workbook, and consider its relevance to the project and their understanding of these methods. There are times when this is appropriate, but they need to lead on from the investigation already identified
- described, rather than contextualised, artist models. Scholarship submissions are not advantaged by including an artist's life story, technical explanation or by the inclusion of portfolio layout options; these in no way support a scholarly engagement. The workbook is not a key to the portfolio, and it needs to go beyond representing and describing the portfolio.

PRINT

The best performing candidates in PRINT most commonly:
- were able to demonstrate a breadth and range of processes applicable to the ideas they were dealing with
- used workbooks as a supporting document as well as a format whereby a number of other visual and conceptual possibilities were contextualised as extended possibilities
- were able to take ownership of their ideas at an early stage and used research to propel the work forward
- extended the media of print by successfully pollinating other disciplines into their practice. This occurred more effectively where it was in keeping with their own ideas and added to the work produced thus far
- identified and clearly articulated the intentions behind subject matter choice and subsequent application. This was often reinforced by strong conceptual thinking equally matched by a high level of technical mastery
- were able to contextualise ideas on a wider basis than just artistic models. This contextualisation occurred earlier in the learning and the concepts adopted enhanced the development of the work
- demonstrated a systematic approach to the presentation of their portfolios and were able to replicate this approach in the workbooks
- showed a willingness to take greater risks and be more experimental in the development of their work. This often declared itself in the way that print techniques were used in a similar manner to which drawing processes are often used to discover new possibilities
- demonstrated a very high standard of understanding of the techniques and practices utilised
- were selective of the tonality and / or colour they employed to successfully communicate their concepts
- used contemporary artistic models from a variety of artistic disciplines in relation to their own work
- reinforced the strength of drawing as a powerful graphic device to communicate clearly the exciting possibilities of contemporary art practice. This strength in drawing was further enhanced in the ways in which multi-media approaches were able to be accommodated without any loss of the graphic sensibilities offered.

Candidates who did NOT achieve Scholarship in PRINT lacked some or all of the skills and knowledge above and in addition they:

- relied too heavily on a set formulaic approach. Were unable to extend the possibilities they suggested
- were unable to communicate visually in a clear and purposeful manner what they were trying to achieve
- used the workbook pages as fillers rather than extensions / support documents to the portfolios. Too many pages were wasted with unnecessary mind-maps and repetition of ideas / intentions. Workbooks did not provide enough evidence of the choices made or why
- failed to offer extensive research into the ideas they were attempting to explore. Needed to contextualise outside of the models they referenced
- used the print techniques only to a satisfactory level
- needed to consider better strategies for presentation. Too many portfolio panels contained works that were variations on a theme
- needed to make better evaluative decisions in the development of work both pictorially and conceptually.

SCULPTURE

The best performing candidates in SCULPTURE most commonly:
- developed work consistently through using a logical approach that built on the characteristics of previous explorations. They reinvented and promoted a different focus for each work, albeit subtle at times
- utilised further options as a means to transport the practice. Further options were often present in both the workbook and portfolio with evidence of decisions to pursue or not discussed / explored in the workbook
- operated with a pace that displayed a wide range of thinking, aptitude and lateral investigation. These submissions were adventurous in nature, underpinned by a large body of work that enabled the scope of the project to be exploited well beyond a predictable outcome
- demonstrated an understanding of contemporary sculptural practice through research into relevant artist models. These submissions, and in particular the workbooks, demonstrated a depth and breadth of research with candidates critically and intelligently referencing artists appropriate to their own exploration. The artist models were used as a point of departure and reference point for the candidate to build on their own ideas
- demonstrated an ability to draw on a wide range of other relevant research material, enabling an intelligent exploration of and engagement with relevant social, cultural, and political issues. Some submissions addressed performance, and relational concerns; however, these modes of practice need to be understood and intelligently explored or there is a danger of the work becoming derivative and superficial. The best submissions of this kind demonstrated this understanding in relation to relevant concepts and thorough material, physical and social explorations
- identified the key issues in the work and sustained and built on these through a range of material and conceptual exploration. Candidates showed a depth and integrity in the selection of, and engagement with subject matter that offered a range of possibilities for developing a significant body of work. There was often an understanding that candidates really "owned" the work they produced
- successfully developed the conceptual underpinnings of the work through a considered material exploration. Within the expanded field of contemporary sculptural practice there exists a diverse range of different practices to draw on from the formal to performative. At this level, candidates were able to select and explore a mode of practice that best fitted their ideas and develop and refine an aesthetic that was wholly appropriate to a sustained development of the conceptual
- were prepared to experiment and take risks, but critically reflect and make strong, informed decisions about the direction of the work

- provided evidence of problem solving through physical play with materials and through documentation of time-based work
- were ambitious regarding scale and achieved a sophistication and high level of resolution in finished works
- demonstrated an understanding of the formal language of sculpture, and even in submissions that dealt with performance practice there was evidence that fundamental sculptural concerns were understood and expanded. There were very few submissions, however, that dealt with purely formal sculptural issues. Sculpture provides a valid and rich field of enquiry, presenting scope for numerous material explorations and outcomes
- employed drawing in a considered and sculpturally-informed manner, and utilised it in its widest sense as a tool to explore, develop and build on ideas
- used workbooks to expand on their proposition, through thorough research practice, documentation and / or drawings of alternate works that showed clear analysis and decision-making processes when considered in relation to the portfolio
- utilised methods of documentation that best suited the content of the work. In time-based work documentation becomes increasingly important as a means to represent the work on the portfolio. Still images and series of images clearly described the object, and / or action.

Candidates who did NOT achieve Scholarship in SCULPTURE lacked some or all of the skills and knowledge above and in addition they:
- did not pursue further options anymore than stating, here are some further options, which often were repetitive of what was already being explored. In this instance, there was no real indication that further options were viable or even appropriate to the practice. It is important that further options are identified and investigated in depth to facilitate the development of other opportunities
- pursued ideas in a literal and didactic way, the work serving to illustrate a concept rather than explore and build on it through processes, materials, and actions
- showed a lack of criticality and reflection in the steps taken and decisions made from one work to the next
- closely followed artist models, or else referenced a wide range of sometimes unconnected models, without any real evidence of understanding or reinterpreting the model, and making it their own
- presented work that was quirky and fun or that looked slick materially, yet lacked real substance, depth or understanding of sculptural principles and practices
- presented workbooks that merely repeated work found on the portfolio.