Scholarship

2010 Assessment Report

Visual Arts: Photography

COMMENTARY

The Photography Scholarship cohort firmly established itself within the requirements of this particular discipline. Successful Scholarship submissions capably engaged in systematic and innovative visual inquiry to do with both photography and contemporary practice in the Visual Arts.

In general the submissions that gained scholarships had an obvious ownership around the direction of the work undertaken. This was apparent in the way that the premise for the portfolios was often established early on, which subsequently allowed candidates the time and room to develop complex and sophisticated understandings of a photographic proposition. These submissions were able to sustain an open-ended process of inquiry through the development of practical activities and continually reinvented photographic ideas that critically built upon that learning.

Typically, Scholarship Photography was characterised by a wide range of genres and approaches engaged in what is clearly experiential; sourced from the student's own world, background, interests and circumstances. Many candidates began their workbook with a proposition. The best of these framed this in a broad context that provided options, pathways and approaches that were open-ended. They did not have predetermined specific outcomes, nor did they preclude the necessity to continually revisit or remodel the inquiry in light of critical insights that emerged from the analysis of the practical activities undertaken. This promoted genuine engagement with the proposition, as work was developed and allowed for new research to emerge during the process of the investigation, as opposed to the research being a descriptive record of finite concerns.

Candidates who were awarded Scholarship Photography utilised the workbook for evidence of 'critical' thinking and creative options that fell outside the often-linear direction of the portfolio. Workbooks manifested the candidate's individualised approach and ongoing engagement with photography and the contexts in which their work derived meaning.

At Scholarship level, candidates evidenced good understanding of the discipline based conventions that they were working with; analogue, digital, collage and direct photographic processes. With the increased opportunities to 'manipulate' images through the use of digital processes came the increased potential for their arbitrary application. Critical decision-making was inter-dependent between conceptual concerns and their practical manifestation within photographic technologies. Work that lacked critical consideration of processes included the arbitrary use of layers/filters (creative play) and random use of text; where text and image as a pictorial and conceptual concern were given little consideration.

Successful engagement came through for those who understood 'seeing' – visual literacy, including formal pictorial devices like cropping, manipulating depth of field, the purposeful sequencing of images, the deliberate control of colour and tone etc. A variety of approaches were employed; formal, documentary, cinematic narrative, the constructed studio image, the documenting of a performance event etc.

Successful candidates demonstrated an understanding of the difference between subject matter and ideas. Those more limited candidates wrote a description or analysis of their subject matter disguised as a proposition. Those not achieving Scholarship usually did not have a photographic proposition. Subject matter was limited to a single object, i.e. subject matter such as 'jars' or 'fish' has limited potential. There was some confusion demonstrated between subject matter and ideas. Candidates needed to ask themselves *what are the ideas inherent or related to particular subject matter and what is it that I am endeavouring to find out about, in photographic terms?'.*

The most effective workbooks operated as a working document (commentary of thinking), which was both evaluative and reflective. Here candidates worked across pages rather than dividing into headings. They considered the workbook a total whole, an active document and record of visual development and thinking. They didn't reiterate what was on the portfolio, but rather the workbook added, interpreted and informed the proposition. Candidates who used standardised formats and headings for workbook pages limited the scope for representing the true sense of development/ progress.

In the awarding of Scholarship, the workbook is seen in relation to the portfolio and not as a separate entity. The workbook operates in many ways to help the viewer 'understand' the portfolio. For candidates with obvious ability at level 3, the addition of a workbook and the entering into the Scholarship examination extends and enhances learning.

SCHOLARSHIP WITH OUTSTANDING PERFORMANCE

Candidates who were awarded Scholarship with Outstanding Performance typically:

- identified photographic propositions that enabled sustained complex and insightful investigations
- employed a multitude of strategies within research, and extrapolated options through the careful evaluation of the ideas generated
- synthesised contextual/conceptual and/or formal modes of working from established practice into an individually conceived body of work
- critically understood photographic genre and were able to fluently deploy photographic technologies and methods that were appropriate to conceptual/aesthetic intent
- integrated workbook and folio completely to link ideas of research, established practice and student's own ambitions within the subject
- demonstrated strategic approaches to practical exploration and theoretical research with one informing the other, thereby substantiating interests with authority and inventiveness
- understood the value of producing outcomes in order to move forward; reflecting a critical and decisive approach to practice that enabled work to communicate a clear and distinctive point of view.

SCHOLARSHIP

Candidates who were awarded Scholarship but not Scholarship with Outstanding Performance typically:

- demonstrated a clear understanding of the parameters of an investigation, by utilising visual strategies located in contemporary practice to develop and extend an individually conceived photographic proposition
- understood how to manipulate photographic language and conventions to create a complex and interesting investigation
- produced work that was both elegant and sophisticated in its execution, demonstrating a high level understanding of photographic conventions
- used photographic techniques and processes fluently in keeping with the aesthetic intent in order to achieve purposeful resolutions
- expanded an enquiry beyond a derivative, descriptive superficial understanding of artistic influences

- sustained a constructive and informative relationship between the workbook and the portfolio
- employed purposeful strategies for the layout, ordering, sequencing and editing on the folio and workbook that were appropriate to conceptual requirements
- operated with a comprehensive sense of ownership and purpose throughout the enquiry and were able to communicate visually complex ideas in a succinct manner.

OTHER CANDIDATES

Candidates who were not awarded Scholarship or Scholarship with Outstanding Performance typically:

- misunderstood what was appropriate and realistic in established photographic practice at this level of study
- did not identify a proposition with sufficient scope and depth to enable a sustained investigation of photographic ideas
- failed to adequately grasp, select, draw together a range of experiments with media and photographic conventions into a coherent inquiry
- utilised artist models haphazardly in order to justify changes in work or as a reference list to establish subject matter.
- wrote lengthy descriptions about "concepts", "symbolism", "meaning" behind works that were not visually manifest within the work
- used written language to describe photographic intentions when the visual work was unable to communicate these ideas formally and/or conceptually
- presented work that was not technically competent for the required level of performance
- failed to elucidate and sustain a purposeful and structural relationship or connection between the workbook and the folio.
- replicated or re-presented the same images from the folio in the workbook which offered little additional evidence and did not advance the argument or understanding in a meaningful way
- used the workbook to descriptively record step-by-step the process rather than as a critical analysis of the 'journey' undertaken
- appended a "further developments" or "extensions" section in the workbook, which amounted to a superficial 'add on' or tangent that did not advance or contribute to the overall thrust of the inquiry.