scope
Contemporary Research Topics

art & design 31

November 2026

Editorial

https://doi.org/10.34074/scop.1031012

RESEARCHES, PRACTICES, DISCIPLINES, SEMINARS, ARTICLES, REVIEWS, REPORTS, ARTIST PAGES

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Published by Otago Polytechnic Press.

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The Dunedin School of Art (DSA) Lunchtime Seminar series is an annual public programme that runs on Thursdays throughout terms one to three of Otago Polytechnic's academic year. The seminars started in 1998 with the first cohort of Master of Fine Arts (MFA) students and has grown into an outward-facing forum for research. Presenters now include artists, curators, art-writers and others whose contribution to their field is likely to be of interest to DSA students, staff and members of the wider arts community. In 2026, there were 23 seminars on topics ranging from wetland ecology to machine-made painting, from the philosophy of time to how to "get yourself in trouble." There were three seminars by ceramicists and two by contemporary jewellers. One seminar, by a curator at a contemporary art space, addressed artist-run initiatives, one documented an exhibition of archives about a feminist and gender-non-binary collective, another reflected on an artist's survey exhibition and two more on exhibitions and collections within public galleries. Two seminars were based on practice-as-research undertaken as part of a PhD, while seven of the other presenters hold doctoral qualifications.

Seminars are sometimes undervalued in terms of their research contribution. Yet the preparation that goes into them can equal that for writing a scholarly journal article. A DSA lunchtime seminar might test material destined for publication or an opportunity to reflect on a recent project. Importantly (in the context of this editorial), a seminar presented, for example, as part of a DSA residency often turns into a peer-reviewed article in *Scope: Art & Design*.

Having had the pleasure of convening the lunchtime seminar programme for several years, I have an acute appreciation for its role in fostering research in the visual arts. While the primary activity at an art school is the making of artworks, insofar as art can take any form whatsoever, and artists can be interested in any aspect of life beyond art, art practice as research potentially brings into play as many disciplines as have ever been conceived. The scope of *Scope: Art & Design* is likewise boundless, and it is the editor's peculiar privilege and challenge to grasp and shape these often unfamiliar forms of knowledge.

The DSA seminars take all manner of forms and modes of delivery: formal lecture, commentated slideshow, off-the-cuff oratory, panel discussion, participatory dialogue, inspirational exhortation … I remember the Auckland painter Denys Watkins presenting image after image from his decades-long career, each accompanied by a rumination that seemed to be the least obvious thing he could have said about the given work. DSA photography tutor Rachel Allan turned the lecture room lights off and sat at a desk reading quietly, mesmerisingly, from a meticulously composed script. And Jess Nicholson spoke without notes, conversationally, but without hesitation or digression, barely even an 'um', as if she had memorised a text expressly designed

to seem idiomatic. The performance of a spoken seminar, just like the style and materiality of an artwork or the phraseology of a journal article, is intrinsic to its meaning. And the inimitableness of that delivery is liable to leave an imprint on a student or other audience member as much as the content—to be, in short, inspiring, the catalyst for another's creative endeavour.

Delivering a public seminar is never an easy thing, not even for the most experienced and confident amongst us. It takes a considerable effort and can cause extreme anxiety—something an audience is not always cognisant of. Moreover, it is typically unpaid work. The DSA lunchtime seminar speakers are extraordinarily good and generous people. One can only hope that they have an inkling of the extent to which they contribute to the life of the art school, the lives of those who attend and the vitality of the panoply of disciplines to which they (knowingly and unknowingly) contribute.

The lunchtime seminars bring together, in one room, a bunch of terrifically interesting people, which feels increasingly like a galvanising and encouraging force in difficult times. Since the COVID pandemic, the seminars have also expanded their reach by way of an ever-increasing online audience, many of whom live outside of Dunedin. This can only enhance relationships between art institutions and between people who want to make and do things for good in the world. Long may the lunchtime seminar tradition endure and inspire, and continue to be an incubator for curiousness—to represent, in itself, the value of arts-based research and to yield further research for publication in journals such as *Scope*.

* * *

Scope: Art & Design 31 begins with an article by Eva During (Ding) about her MFA project, which culminated in an installation of mounded, creased and sewn black aluminium mesh sculptures evoking, in the white gallery space, the airy mountain landscapes of *shanshui* (Chinese ink painting). During constructs a theoretical framework that describes the relationship between material spaces and cultural memory, including Peirre Nora's concept of 'lieux de mémoires' (sites of memory) and Friedrich Nietzsche's 'horizon,' which constitutes what is remembered, and therefore remains present, and what is forgotten, invisible or latent. The physical dislocation of migration produces a heightened awareness of this horizon, particularly of its instability; it holds both a sense of alienation from an adopted cultural setting and the conditions for change. By translating the floating feeling of two-dimensional ink paintings into three-dimensional forms in space, During's DSA Gallery installation created the potential for viewers to experience the shifting perspectives that shape life and memory. The article makes an important contribution to understanding the relationship between an artist's life and their work, beyond simple notions of self-expression or representation (beyond what one already knows about oneself). It suggests that making is a process of actualising relationships between people, cultures and environments.

Sophie Aitken elaborates a feminist reinterpretation of the story of the 'swan maiden,' an ancient myth that has emerged in multiple cultural contexts and was consolidated in European folklore during the Middle Ages. It is easy to see patriarchal oppression in the tribulations of a swan who turns into a woman, and, through the theft of her magical feathered cloak by a hunter, is forced into the roles of wife and mother. Aitken, however, employs Barbara Creed's concept of the 'monstrous feminine,' in tandem with Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection, to emphasise that the figure of the swan maiden signifies the extent to which women—or, as the case may be, animals—cannot be confined to passivity, or the extent to which they elude patriarchal

impositions of control and order. The artworks Aitken produced for her DSA BVA Honours project take the form of cushions embroidered with episodes from the swan maiden tale. They chart a transformation not only of swan to woman to domestic housewife, but of the stability of the domestic space and the agency of the swan maiden who ultimately liberates herself and her daughter. In keeping with During's ontological framework, Aitken reveals how her interpretations of the ancient myth, and by implication of immediate social realities, changed through the process of giving them material form.

In "From Verb to Adverb: Contemporary Painting from Within and Beyond the Self," Sam Loe also considers how being in touch with the dynamism and complexity of one's own body can be an empowering act, both for the painter and the feminist. Loe's work takes painterly gesture as a starting point for a series of transformations that include cut-out fragments of mark-making used as stencils for further manifestations of variously intuitive, intentional and chance-based actions. In her article, Loe differentiates her paintings from the gestural mode of mid-twentieth-century (especially male) abstract expressionists. She takes as her point of departure New Zealand artist Judy Millar's call for painting to operate as an 'adverb,' modifying the self-possessed, declamatory 'verbs' of 'action painting.' This can be taken to mean that the artist is attuned to *how* she is making—Loe's examples of adverbs include 'presently' and 'somatically,' and there is an implication, too, that painting can be carried out 'caringly.' Painterly gesture therefore assumes ethical and relational dimensions, and, like Aitken's feminist reinterpretation of a literary representation, enacts a challenge to stultifying oppositions, such as mind/body, control/chance, language/feeling and self/others.

Mackenzie Hayward-Williams similarly extrapolates from self-care a concern for people more generally who are compelled to navigate a society that does not always accommodate, or indeed is often violently hostile to, neurodiversity, chronic illness and gender diversity. *Poor Sick Clown* is a series of sculptural textile works that visualise people who function both as the butt of the joke, as puppets pushed and pulled by social norms, and as knowing satirists, prepared to look silly if it means that they draw attention to arbitrary and oppressive expectations. Hayward-Williams finds support in queer theorist Jack Halberstam's appreciation of 'failure,' as well as Sianne Ngai's 'aesthetic category' of the 'zany' (exemplified by the bumbling but deceptively perceptive female protagonist of the 1950s sitcom *I Love Lucy*), highlighting the impossibility and futility of what is conventionally, and capitalistically, regarded as 'success.'

In the context of contemporary commercial fishing, nets manufactured from synthetic rope have proved to be devastatingly successful. As Kari Morseth describes in "Culture, Place and Time," the rope is so durable that it lingers in the ocean for years on end in the form of 'ghost nets,' indiscriminately killing marine creatures and generating plastic pollution. Morseth, in her MFA project, returned to the material, technical and ecological knowledge held in ancient European and Māori traditions to weave sculptures out of harakeke, muka, pīkao and kiekie. As a Tangata Tiriti artist, she acknowledges the meanings bound up in these materials—tikanga associated with gathering harakeke, or the story of the celestial captain, Taramainuku, who gathers up the souls of the dead in his net, carries them in his waka and ultimately releases them into the night sky as stars. She also channels her own Norse ancestry, such as the story of the deity Rán who captures and drowns sailors in her fishing net—a reminder of the vanity of human endeavours in the face of the power of the elements. Morseth is exemplary of the contemporary artist whose research into the histories and potential of materials might well prove indispensable to human adaptation in a perilous future.

Morseth's project included participatory rope-making workshops with members of the public at Bathgate Park and community groups at Artsenta (an art studio for people who use mental health or addiction services) and Moana House (a residential community for adult male offenders). Siau-Jiun Lim's article details an ongoing project with residents at two Dunedin rest homes, providing painting materials and tools and encouraging an exploratory approach to mark-making. Lim was initially prompted by the experience of doing volunteer work in rest homes and witnessing the tendency for television to become a default passive activity for people with impaired mobility. The Painting with Residents initiative represents research in the form of an inquiry into the possibilities of painting for activating the mind and body, emotions and memories. Lim is careful to emphasise that her workshops are not therapy in a clinical sense (even if they are therapeutic). Nor, it seems, is she 'teaching,' in the sense of methodically instilling the technical, contextual and conceptual dimensions of contemporary art. Rather, the workshops encourage the residents to embrace the shared realities of artmaking—anxiety, frustration, doubt—and to cultivate openness and curiosity.

Mona Bekhit's article reflects on her exhibition of a body of work that invoked multiple layers of sensory experience while remaining, as it were, at arm's length, or accessed primarily through sight. She made ceramic sculptures in the form of marble runs and needle-like forms that could operate as instruments. The noises of the instruments were turned into a soundscape played in the space where the objects were exhibited. The sculptures themselves, however, while conducive to viewers moving, bending and craning to appreciate their materiality—and perhaps tantalising in their texture and promise of sound—were not for touching or playing. The title of Bekhit's article, "Strike," refers to the 1925 film of that name by the Russian Sergei Eisenstein, and reflects Bekhit's interest in the rapid and repetitive visual montage used by Eisenstein to convey, in a silent film, the raucous activity of an industrial production line. Bekhit also discusses the ideas of another filmmaker, Jan Švankmajer, who suggests that visual forms can activate memories of other senses, such as touch and hearing—he calls it 'tactile memory.'

Scope: Art & Design 31 concludes with a section of reviews, reports and artist pages. Grant Banbury reviews an exhibition of ceramics by Cheryl Lucas, Richard Stratton and Chris Weaver at The National in Christchurch. Ruby Meades promotes the benefits of 'game jams' to test ideas, grow skills and confidence and expand networks. Ryan O'Malley, who was an artist-in-residence and delivered a lunchtime seminar at DSA in 2025, evocatively sketches in the background to his reduction woodcut print, … *shaped by the will of the Universe*, which adorns the wall at the Riego Street entrance to DSA. Finally, Eva During (Ding) brings us full circle with the transcript of a spoken word artwork poignantly eliciting the artist's lived experience, a latent aspect of the installation discussed in the first article of this issue: "Blue skies, white clouds, stars, rains, seas, boats, traffics, flat whites, cries, loneliness, misunderstood moments, work, work and more work, 9 pm washing dishes, 3 am baking scones, lunchtime exhaustion, after-work soreness, pay days, day offs."

Edward Hanfling is Postgraduate Coordinator at the Dunedin School of Art. He writes regularly as a critic for *Art New Zealand*, has published articles in journals such as the *Burlington Magazine*, the *Journal of Australian and New Zealand Art*, the *Journal of Visual Arts Practice* and *Third Text* and books on New Zealand art, including the co-authored *250 Years of New Zealand Painting* (Bateman, 2021). He is editor of *Scope (Art & Design)* and *Junctures: The Journal for Thematic Dialogue*, convenor of the DSA Lunchtime Seminar programme and co-convenor of the Visual Studies Research Network.