

FOREWORD

Leoni Schmidt

Jim Tomlin played a major role in the history of the Dunedin School of Art. It is hard to imagine the move to the current workshop-rich campus or the transition to degree and postgraduate degrees without his vision and steady hand. Therefore, it is apt that Jim wrote this comprehensive history of the School. His broad – and detailed – view over the 146 years of the School's existence reads as a fascinating account of an art institution's life and times, complete with amusing anecdotes and real insights into the challenges facing art education at different times in New Zealand.

Some key issues emerge from reading Tomlin's well-researched account. One becomes aware that the School was embedded in its community from the start, an aspect of its life that continues to this day with real connections to galleries, artists' groups, and arts collectives in Dunedin and further afield in New Zealand.

Secondly, with lecturers from the UK and later from Europe, the School commenced with a connectivity that has expanded over the decades to a considerable international network existing today as manifested through, for example, a swathe of exchange and study abroad agreements with partner institutions across the world. Today, the Permanent External Advisory Committee retains its role as a formal mechanism for the School's connectedness with the world outside its walls.

Reading across Tomlin's account of the years, one becomes acutely aware of the precarious nature of the art institution. Wars had devastating effects as on all aspects of New Zealand life; but continuous changes in policy and in the understanding of the importance and autonomy of the visual arts also plagued the School. Sometimes its autonomy was taken for granted; sometimes the School was diminished within larger structures; at other times it came under attack for its very insistence on the necessary autonomy of the arts. During these changes, staff members were often buffeted about, with some losing positions and livelihoods. In the light of such events, it's all the more heartening to read how the School survived each adversity that came its way, surviving through a flexibility and adaptability fuelled by an unwavering passion for the visual arts and their role in society.

Tomlin's decision to emphasize the importance of workshop facilities when the School moved to its current Albany Street site was crucial for the retention of the hands-on teaching and making which remains a point of difference for the School. In today's context many art schools have lost much of their plant and visitors to the DSA are astounded by the availability, for example, of jewellery benches, welding equipment, analogue photography dark rooms, lighting studios, printing presses, and ceramic kilns that provide students with on-site studio facilities. As Bridie Lonie mentions in her CODA to Tomlin's history, this feature of the DSA has for a long time been balanced by a scholarly focus on the historical and theoretical contexts of art, both old and new. Otago Polytechnic's focus on the interface between practice and theory has been manifest in its Art School for many decades.

Another aspect of the School's history is the continuous interplay between the fine arts, design, and the crafts over the decades. The reader is able to recognize changes in attitudes as emphases on these areas shifted over time, often dependent on staffing and also on external factors such as student demand and dominant philosophies about the nature and function of a visual education. Sometimes, the fine arts were in the ascendancy, sometimes

the crafts were more at the forefront than at other times, and often design subjects were interwoven in the curriculum. This is understandable for an institution originally envisaged as a place where students could study to eventually earn a living.

As Bridie Lonie points out in the CODA to Tomlin's history, we now find ourselves again in an era focusing on work opportunities for students. The Dunedin School of Art has retained its workshops and studio-based teaching and making alongside a strong emphasis on history and theory as relevant to contemporary visual arts. However, in our era, the demands for student work-readiness and a student-centred education are currently feeding into an institutional vision for the future of a College of Art, Design, and Architecture co-located on a rebuilt Albany Street creative precinct, probably as from 2019. Once again, the challenges for the Dunedin School of Art lies in retaining its own identity within this mix, while responding creatively to new synergies offered through this opportunity. I am confident that the lessons passed on through the many years of the School's existence will stand us all in good stead in this process.

Thank you to Jim Tomlin who has done a sterling job of researching and writing the *Dunedin School of Art: A History*. There is much to enjoy, much to smile about, and much to think seriously about when reading this work. It's publication is timely as we move towards yet another iteration of the School's ability to adapt flexibly to external factors and new ideas, always remaining current and passionate about its core business: the teaching and making of art based on a passionate belief in its social benefits for all.

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