CHAPTER 3

The Processes and Parameters of Fine Art PhD Examination

Kerry Dally, Allyson Holbrook, Anne Graham & Miranda Lawry
University of Newcastle, Australia

The merger of art schools into academic institutions and the consequent proliferation of higher degree courses in the visual arts has created pressure for these courses to justify that their research content 'measures up' to more traditional research practices.

This study aimed to identify the parameters for PhD examination and research practices in the field of Fine Art through interviews with Fine Art examiners as well as an analysis of written PhD examination reports. A comparison of PhD examination reports across disciplines revealed that there were similarities as well as some significant differences between the type of feedback provided by Fine Art examiners and feedback by examiners from other disciplines.

Interviews with 15 Fine Art examiners from 11 Australian institutions provided information about the expectations, standards and models of evaluation in the Fine Art field as well as how examiners perceive their role and what constraints are evident in current examination processes.

Introduction

In traditional research disciplines such as history or physics, examination procedures and processes have been refined over a long period of time and there is much that is taken for granted about the standards applied, but what of the newer research disciplines? To what extent do the supervision and examination practices from other disciplines work well for the new ones, especially those with a 'practice' aspect such as Fine Art? The study of examination in Fine Art provides a unique opportunity to explore how research supervision and assessment practices develop and how standards are established.

More than 1500 Creative Arts Research Higher Degree (RHD) candidates are enrolled in universities in Australia, including Music and Drama (DEST 2003). Fine/Visual Arts candidates account for a growing proportion of the total. More than half of Australia's 38 universities offer Fine and Visual Arts programs at the research higher degree level and a smaller number at doctoral level. At present there is still considerable fluidity in thinking and practice in relation to the Fine Art PhD in Australia and elsewhere. Unlike other fields where the outcome is defined as a thesis that contributes to knowledge, the core product of PhD study in Fine Art is an artwork that is an act of creation. A great many of the pioneering doctoral students in Australia have been established artists whose credentials in producing original works were in place before they entered the degree. This has added a unique dimension to the debate on what constitutes the 'contribution' of the PhD, and has created some issues for supervision and examination that has not arisen in more traditional disciplines. In this climate, as candidate numbers grow and debate continues, the small pool of Fine Art examiners has been influential in setting standards, forging new practices, setting the tone and, in some essential respects, defining the new degree.

The study reported here investigated assessment practices currently employed by a sample of Australian Fine Art examiners. The findings will inform debate about the future of the Fine Art higher degree, its comparability vis-à-vis other disciplines, and contribute to more clearly articulated and appropriate practices and processes in both Fine Art supervision and examination.

Research in Fine Art and Investigations of Doctoral Examination

For the past decade, the nature of research practices in the field of Fine and Visual Arts has been the focus of much debate. Although initial concerns regarding the legitimacy of research in these fields has not yet been resolved, the debate has moved on to questions of the equivalency of Fine and Visual Arts doctorates with doctorates in traditional disciplines and how the products emerging from creative arts doctorates can be assessed. The following brief review will investigate earlier discussions about the legitimacy and equivalency of practice-based research and then consider what impact current

examination processes have on establishing the criteria and standards in the visual arts field.

In the US, the term arts-based research is used to describe a type of research which results in both a creative work and a written text (Eisner, 1995). In the UK, the term practice-based research refers to the type of doctoral research typically conducted in either the creative arts or professional fields and which combines both practical and written elements (Hockey, 2003). In Australia, practice-based doctorates involve the production of a creative work accompanied by a written thesis or exegesis. In accordance with the model recommended by the UK Council for Graduate Education (UKCGE, 1997) most Australian institutions require the exegesis to articulate the research process, to clarify the significance and contribution of the art work and to locate the art work in its current or historical context. The terms 'arts-based' and 'practice-based' research are used synonymously in this paper.

Arts-based research has been described as an 'inquiry process' which may not necessarily follow a predetermined course (Baronne, 1995). Unlike scientific research, which typically begins with hypotheses and a clear direction as to how these 'guiding questions' will be investigated and tested, practice-based research may often be 'non-linear' (Eisner, 2002). Although the written text that accompanies an artwork may define a specific research problem or situate an art work in its current or historical context it has been suggested that the initial theoretical framework may change over the course of the research degree. There is often an interactive relationship between the theory and the practice such that, throughout the process of investigation, one has the capacity to shape and influence the direction of the other (McLeod, 2000). McLeod refers to this process as a 'see-saw' effect. Eisner (2002) has described the mutual responsiveness between the theoretical and practical elements thus: 'In the process of working with the material, the work secures its own voice and helps set the direction' (p.7).

Among the makers of art, there are many voices arguing that 'artistic' research should not be coerced into conforming with narrow and rigid scientific methods and that despite its 'non-scientific' basis, the seemingly chaotic nature of practice-based research represents a valid methodology (Fordon, 2000; Gray & Pirie, 1995). It has been suggested that art works have the potential to make a 'significant contribution' to both their field and to society because of their capacity to present a new or provocative perspective to an audience and to awaken viewers to new ways of seeing, thinking and knowing (Eisner, 1995). According to Eisner, this capacity bestows a stamp of legitimacy upon alternative research methods, since originality and significance are considered to be the hallmarks of research, at least at the doctoral level. Although the debate about the value and validity of practice-based research has not been resolved, the question of whether this type of research is legitimate appears to have been superseded by questions concerning comparable and equivalent standards between alternative and traditional research methods.

As both enrolment numbers and the types of doctoral degrees have increased, there has been a commensurate desire to establish comparable standards of research across different academic disciplines. In the UK, attempts to clarify and define benchmarks in doctoral research have revealed that difficulty in the quest to ensure equity of standards across disciplines is compounded by two complicating factors. These are, firstly, a lack of consensus and consistency across disciplines as to what PhD programmes are attempting to achieve (Powell & McCauley, 2003; Shaw & Green, 2002). Secondly, differences in assessment criteria and practices, not only across disciplines, but also between institutions may be a cause of inequitable assessment outcomes (Denicolo, 2003; Powell & McCauley, 2002). Powell and McCauley's (2003) survey of 29 research degree examiners found that there were fundamental differences among examiners in what they thought candidates needed to do during their research programmes and how candidates could prove they were 'worthy of the degree'. The majority of these examiners believed that assessment of a candidate's worth rested solely with an evaluation of the 'products' of their learning, while a minority of respondents indicated that the products arising from a doctorate cannot be assessed in isolation of the training aspects of the degree. For this latter group, 'research degrees are about the process of learning about research' (p. 80) and therefore it is the process rather than the product that should be judged.

This second issue, how the PhD should be judged, has also attracted considerable interest across all academic disciplines. In their review of institutional policies governing the PhD examination process in 20 British Universities, Tinkler and Jackson (2000) found that there was considerable diversity in the criteria and guidelines provided to examiners. While there have been calls for greater consistency among institutions in their assessment processes, Denicolo (2003) warns that 'too much standardisation' of criteria and examination practices could 'stifle' innovative research. Denicolo calls for 'a responsive, transparent and equitable means of assessment that recognises diversity in both product and process of higher degree study' (p. 88).

The role of the examiner has also been implicated as an important component in determining both assessment criteria and assessment standards. In the UK the variety and 'opaqueness' of institutional guidelines has been blamed for forcing examiners to rely on their own 'idiosyncratic' criteria (Powell & McCauley, 2003). Similarly, Australian examiners seem to prefer to employ their own criteria rather than use the guidelines that might be provided (Mullins and Kiley, 2002) even though these guidelines appear to be more consistent across Australian institutions than in the UK context (Pitkethly & Prosser, 1995). Apart from the difficulties in attaining consistency between institutions, and consensus among examiners, in the case of a Fine Art doctorate, the assessment process is complicated by the inclusion of an art work as well as a written thesis or exegesis.

The debate over whether a creative product can adequately represent the research process that led to its making has not yet been resolved (Durling,

2002). However, Eisner (2002) has suggested that the final exhibition in a Fine Art doctorate can be regarded as part of a larger process. Eisner believes that in artistic research the 'journey' or research process is paramount and that the merit or worth of this journey can be adequately represented in the artefacts produced. Moreover, these works can be competently evaluated by a 'connoisseur' whom Eisner defines as one who can 'notice in the field of their expertise what others may miss seeing' (p. 187). Eisner acknowledges that the act of judging an artwork ('educational connoisseurship') involves a deep and complex engagement with an artefact and that this engagement is typically conducted in solitude and can be difficult to explain to others. Thus the role of the examiner in the Fine and Visual arts requires a dual ability to 'judge' the worth of both a creative product and a written text. How current examiners balance their judgement between these two components will have an influential role, not only in setting the standards for the Visual Arts PhD award, but also in shaping the nature and focus of the still evolving research higher degree courses in this field (Lawry et al., 2004).

Aims of the Study

This paper reports on the findings of a study that draws on interviews with 15 Fine Art research higher degree examiners and an analysis of the content of 30 Masters and PhD examination reports. The main aim of the study was to provide detail about current assessment practice in Fine Art.

The specific questions guiding the project were:

1. How do examiners approach examination at the Research Higher Degree level in Fine Art?

- 1.1 What are the processes and how do examiners engage with them?
- 1.2 How do examiners perceive and interpret their role?

2. What standards and criteria are applied in the assessment of the work of Research Higher Degree candidates in Fine Art ?

- 2.1 What assumptions and expectations are brought to the examination?
- 2.3 On what basis are judgements made? Do they vary between the exegesis and the exhibition and how are these elements balanced?

3. Are the reporting practices and research expectations of Fine Art examiners comparable to those in other disciplines?

- 3.1 What themes and emphases are most evident in Fine Art examiners written reports?
- 3.2 Compared to reports from traditional disciplines, are there gaps or 'silences'?

Approach

Participants and Data Collection

Participants: During 2003 the Australian population of Fine Art examiners (54 were known and traceable at the time) were invited to participate in the project. They were asked to provide their own copies of up to three recent Fine Art Higher Degree examination reports that they had written with all identifying information removed and/or participate in a telephone interview exploring the Fine Art examination process. Responses were obtained from two thirds of the population. Those who chose not to participate were too busy (for example completing their own PhDs), had no copies of their reports or could not find them, felt their breadth of examining experience did not meet our requirements, or were unavailable for interview. Overall 16 provided reports, 17 consented to participate in the interview process and 15 interviews were obtained. Although the sample can not be considered 'representative' it does cover a broad range of individual perspectives.

All those interviewed had examined several research theses, usually in more than one institution and about one half had been an examiner at least 12 times, and had examined PhD work across several Australian states. Reports and examiners were not matched to safeguard confidentiality and not all those who volunteered to be interviewed were those who provided reports. Of those who sent reports 9 were also interviewed. All the academics were practising artists and two in each group (i.e. the group who provided reports and the group interviewed) had a PhD.

The team also investigated the documentation on Fine Art research higher degree examination provided by 16 institutions across each of the seven Australian states and territories.

The telephone interview: The interviews explored two key areas of interest: i) examiner encounters with examination procedures in Australia; and 2) examiner expectations of student research in Fine Art and how these expectations translate into final judgements at examination. Given the commitments and geographical spread of the examiner group telephone interviews were the only possible option. The interview protocol had been sent ahead and the questions were asked in sequence with flexibility to probe (Appendix: interview schedule attached). The interviews ranged from forty-five minutes to an hour. Two members of the team with a Fine Art background shared the delivery of the questions while a third member operated the equipment. The fact that the interviewers were from the same field and shared the same technical discourse and could empathise with the experience of the examiners was important here and partially mitigated the need for the gestures, nods and other physical cues that usually accompany, and play a key role in eliciting a 'contextually natural' response in a face-to face interview (Shuy, 2001). The interviews were fully transcribed, entered into QSR N.Vivo 2.0 and coded by question and by emergent themes.

The examiner reports: A total of 30 Fine Art examiner reports (50% on Masters theses and 50% on PhD theses) from 11 institutions were obtained. The reports were scanned, checked and edited to a standardised line length and layout and entered into *QSR N6 software*. The reports were then coded using a hierarchical structure of categories (hereafter the 'core' coding categories) that had previously been trialled and used with a large data-base of PhD examiner reports from traditional research disciplines. There are five core coding categories with nested sub-categories. The act of coding occurs at the sub-category level. The categories include:

1. *Examiner and Process* - detail given by the examiners about themselves, their background and the process they are undertaking.
2. *Assessable Areas* - comment about subject matter and presentation of the thesis under examination, the substantive elements of the thesis and the project at its heart - e.g. the literature review, methodology, discussion.
3. *Dialogic Elements* - specific features of examiner discourse that reflect on the nature of academic communication – such as the use of first person
4. *Evaluative Elements* - all comment that contains evaluation and judgement
5. *Report Organisation* – how examiners structure their report

An independent samples t-test revealed that there were no significant differences in the categories of comment in the reports of the Fine Art examiners on PhD and Masters theses. Given the small amount of Fine Art cases, both Masters and PhD reports were combined into one set and compared with 600 examiner reports from two institutions across eight broad fields of study. The eight broad fields of study included Agriculture, Architecture, Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, Business, Education, Engineering, Health and Science. After this stage was completed the reports were further examined using *QSR N.Vivo 2.0* software to support more intensive, fine-grained, analysis alongside the interview data (also entered in *N.Vivo*).

The figure below provides a schematic of the design

The Processes of Fine Art Research Higher Degree Examination

In Australia, the doctoral examination typically involves two or three examiners, with at least two of these external to the institution. Institutional guidelines for most traditional disciplines focus on the written thesis and its qualities alone because that is the subject of examination, whereas the requirements for a doctorate in Fine or Visual Art generally include an exhibition as well as a written component. In order to gauge the diversity of Fine Art higher degree award requirements and current examination practices among Australian institutions, the guidelines for examination and descriptions of Fine Art examination processes for a cross-sectional sample of 16 Australian institutions were surveyed. This analysis revealed that in the few cases where institutions provide the option of presenting a written thesis as the only requirement for a Fine Art PhD there is a general indication in the guidelines that such a work should be examined along the same lines as theses in any other discipline. The more common requirement for the award is an exhibition accompanied by a written document. The written component is typically referred to as an 'exegesis' and most institutions indicate that this document should be treated as providing 'explanation, exposition or interpretation' of the works produced. However, there is considerable variation between universities regarding the form that an exegesis should take and how the visual and written components of a Fine/Visual Arts research higher degree should be evaluated. Guidelines pertaining to the length of the written component in Fine Art Masters Degrees specify lengths ranging from 5,000 to 20,000 words, while for PhD Awards specifications range from 20,000 to 50,000 words.

Although some institutions provide specific criteria for the written component of the award most require that in the case of both Masters and PhD awards there should be an 'integral relationship between the creative work and the documentation'. Typically the term 'thesis' is used to describe the combination of exegesis and exhibition and examiners are instructed to consider both the studio works and the written component as being 'mutually essential' to establishing the quality, strength and originality of the research. The examination criteria do not require separate assessments of each of the written and practical components, nor is a weighting usually specified, however, there is the expectation that judgements of the two components will be balanced.

There is also variation among Australian institutions in the manner in which the examination process is conducted. Some differences include the sequence in which the written and practical components are examined, whether examiners of the same thesis are to collaborate in their judgement or come to a judgement independently, and whether or not candidates are invited to be involved in discussions with examiners about their work. In the majority of institutions surveyed, the examination process required that the exegesis be submitted to examiners *prior* to their viewing of the exhibition. The period of time between submission of the exegesis and examination of the visual component ranged from one to three months. Less common was the practice of providing the exegesis to examiners at the same time that they

viewed the exhibition. In these cases, examiners were able to view both components simultaneously and take the exegesis away with them for further reference during the writing of their reports (Dally et al., 2003).

How Examiners Engage with the Processes

Of the examiners interviewed, most preferred or at least were used to, receiving the written component before viewing the exhibition. Examiners explained that the opportunity to read the thesis beforehand provided a 'background' to the exhibition, although some examiners suggested that there was the potential for disparity between the expectations built-up from reading the document and the experience of first seeing the exhibition. There were differences among examiners in their preferences for being involved in meetings with the candidate. Slightly more than half of the informants valued the opportunity to speak to the student, with examiners favouring individual, informal interactions with candidates over formal panel 'interrogation' processes. These examiners indicated that discussions with the candidate typically helped to 'clarify' issues or questions that may have emerged from their reading of the exegesis or viewing of the exhibition. While some examiners were 'open' about the value of conversing with the candidate, a number of informants suggested that such meetings were unnecessary and that despite the fact that different products are being assessed in the Fine Arts doctorate, that conventional examination practices from other disciplines should be adhered to. These examiners perceived that the quality of a candidate's work should be evident in the work itself and that examiners should not rely on 'explanations' from the candidate to inform their evaluation.

I think what you're producing is a piece of academic work within a University system. It doesn't depend on what the candidate says. What is submitted is what must be assessed, either in visual terms or in textural terms, so a viva can help you understand where the candidate is coming from but basically the assessment must be done on what is presented within the University. That's the case across all the Faculties. It's really important to uphold. I just feel a viva is adding extra information but not really a necessary aspect of the degree. (informant 3)

I think submissions in the end should stand or fall on the way they're presented. If it needs a viva I'm not sure that it is actually ready to examine. (informant 11)

One examiner felt that a 'viva' or meeting with the candidate was not only unnecessary but may prove to be disadvantageous to Fine Art candidates by creating 'unfair demands'. This examiner referred to the viva as a 'third element in the examination', along with the exegesis and the exhibition, that a candidate was required to pass.

In regard to collaboration with other examiners, the majority of informants indicated that they were not opposed to meeting and conferring with other examiners during the exhibition period. However, informants reported that group consultations among examiners was not always permitted.

... half the institutions in the country still say, in writing that they don't want any contact between the examiners. Sometimes the examiners are there on different days and you never even know who they are unless you ask. And sometimes you might be told. Sometimes you can turn up not knowing whether you're actually meant to discuss it or not. I've been in examinations where I know we're not meant to discuss it and we've been there on the same day. (informant 11)

Although examiners generally appreciated the opportunity to confirm their evaluation of the work, most informants were adamant that they wanted to come to their judgement on both the exegesis and exhibition individually and independently before any mandated process of discussion or collaboration with other examiners. Informants noted that it was common for there to be a consensus among examiners about the quality of a thesis, but emphasised that the process was one of 'consultation' rather than 'collusion'. Examiners considered the independence of their decisions to be a crucial element of the examination process, with some informants indicating that, although examiner agreement may be professionally affirming, it was neither a necessary nor desired outcome of the consultative meetings.

I think you have to make an independent decision at this level. I don't think it is something where you go into a kind of bargaining situation. That's for the universities to sort out. If there are conflicting opinions about the work, that's for the university to sort out, it's not for the examiner to sort out. (informant 14)

Adherence to Guidelines

It was evident from both the interviews and the written reports that the importance of following institutional guidelines is a strong theme among Fine Art examiners. Examiner adherence to institutional guidelines was not evident in the examination reports from other disciplines analysed in this study (Holbrook et al., 2004), nor is it reflected in other Australian research. Using sub-headings as indicators, and matching these to institutional guidelines, an analysis of the 600 examiner reports from other disciplines showed very little evidence of examiners working specifically to guidelines for reporting with less than 20% of examiners overall, structuring their reports according to prescribed guidelines. Previous interviews with Australian examiners, particularly in the Sciences, have also suggested that examiners believe they 'know' how to proceed without adhering strictly to guidelines (Mullins and Kiley, 2002). This is not entirely surprising in traditional research disciplines with a single examinable component that differs very little between institutions. However, perhaps because of the greater diversity among institutions in both course requirements as well as examination procedures, Fine Art examiners emphasized that knowledge of the guidelines, 'ground rules' and even the nuances of institutional culture were very important in determining their approach to examination.

While sanguine about the variety in procedures, examiners would opt for more uniformity based on best practice. They expressed the desire in particular for clear instructions, especially about who they can talk to, in what sense, and with what legitimacy during the exhibition. There were those who believed that most elements could be spelt out:

...what the process is, what the degree is, what the student topic is, what the procedure is going to be, what the criteria is that they should be looking for, what standard you expect the work to be at. I think all of those things can be spelt out. I don't think that just because it's Art it has to go into the blandest mumbo jumbo – the 'unspoken'. You can be very quantitatively clear about what the examiner is required to do. (informant 7)

How examiners perceive and interpret their role

Personal qualities: There is clear evidence in their interviews that the examiners have arrived, through experience and with the benefit of interaction, at a model of examination that delineates the qualities required of examiners regardless of specialisation or background.

There is general consensus that there should be a mix of appropriate expertise, skills and understandings on examiner panels. It emerged that certain personal qualities defined the model examiner. Adherence and respect for guidelines has already been discussed. In addition examiners identified:

- a serious commitment to Art and the standards that define 'good' Art and high quality academic endeavour
- empathy for practice
- fairness and reasonableness
- flexibility
- decisiveness
- independence
- openness, with a preparedness to be wholly surprised, and sometimes at a loss

I think they should have a deep commitment, a deep understanding of art, art practise, art theory, art history. I think they need to be exemplars...I don't think many people do, by the way, have a deep enough understanding to undertake the task. (informant 13)

You need the same sort of high academic standards in Fine Art as you would in examining in any discipline, you need to know your discipline, have a good academic grounding and a broad understanding of your discipline. I find that where examiners are very experienced in their practice, they're much more relaxed about making judgements. (informant 2)

I think they need to be objective beyond their own personal preferences. I think they need to have discretion and sometimes there needs to be courage. I think there needs to be an understanding of various

circumstances and I think people need to be able to deal with the process quickly...I think in the interests of fairness it needs to be dealt with quickly. (informant 11)

Many of the qualities above are forged through the experience of examining.

Exploring vs gatekeeping: Examiners were given considerable scope to explore their role and, while they noted the importance of standards, they did not emphasise that there were standards to be upheld as much as standards to guide and shape the discipline. The absence of a gatekeeper discourse is notable. That examiners in traditional disciplines see themselves as gatekeepers to the academy has been raised in a number of studies (Jackson and Tinkler, 2000), and is closely tied in with confidence about what those standards are and a clear sense of progression in a research career. That it is not a discernable theme in either Fine Art examiner interviews or reports may be because the field is still 'open', still a territory to be explored – a pioneering space, but also because the examiners see themselves not just as arbiters but as advisors, fulfilling a constructive role in shaping the candidate's development.

I still believe there can be a formative assessment at the end that is an assessment that helps to continue the learning that is going on ... within the degree, so I think that is another very important part, that if you have two or three significant artists examining another artist, they can contribute to the development of that artist during the examination process as well. (informant 15)

Informants for the most part did not delineate assessor and supervisor roles. One informant noted that they mediated the 'tester' role to one that was more contextualising – an '... investigator. Trying to investigate what it is the candidate is attempting to achieve' (informant 12). The informants certainly do not focus on the need to be expert. Their main concerns are that they are flexible and responsive enough to deal with the unexpected fairly and efficiently and identify the qualities of the artwork and exegesis in a manner that is legitimate in the merged contexts of art and academe.

To pursue the exploration theme in another direction, it seems examiners feel driven to explore and engage with all elements of the student work and this is most evident in their reports where they detail and 'explore' the elements of the work and convey their understandings to the reader. The closest comparison we can find in other disciplines is in some branches of science where experiments and their outcomes are synthesised, dwelt upon, and represented in detail by some examiners. Such text captures the examiners' depth of immersion in, and celebration of, the new and surprising. In this way they are really taking on a co-investigator role, playing a part in the candidate's journey – co-travelling through the medium of 'appreciating' and experiencing the art.

Examiner Expectations about the 'Quality of the Work'

In research higher degree studies, unlike other levels of education, the links between teaching goals and assessment practices have not been well articulated, if at all. Fine Art examiners do not propound a shared philosophy of assessment, or an educational understanding of the nature of assessment built on educational research, but they are not alone in this in higher education (Denicolo, 2003; Powell & McCauley, 2003). It is very clear however that there is agreement on what constitutes acceptable and unacceptable doctoral and Masters level work in Fine Art grounded in accumulating experience (Lawry et al., 2004).

Integration and completeness: 'Informedness' is what examiners expect at the PhD level. The PhD is about knowledge, positioning, technical expertise – 'maturity', and the ability to write lucidly and present well. The words, 'coherence', 'consistent', and 'connected' were frequently applied in the interviews and the reports. It was also expected that as a whole (not necessarily all the parts) the work involved in a project would be 'sustained' and 'substantial'. It is the integration of all of the elements that produces the model PhD in Fine Art. It is the expectation that all these elements are in place, and that authority is reflected in this combination, that distinguishes the Masters from the PhD.

...there's something about the authority of that work that makes you know that the person is doing it from an informed basis and from a platform of substantial experience (informant 6)

Although the informants used terms such as 'new', 'fresh', 'imaginative' and 'innovative' to describe desirable characteristics, very few examiners volunteered 'originality' as a quality that they looked for when examining an exhibition. The word, was used in a minority of examiner reports in no standard or particular way. When directly asked whether they expected to see evidence of originality in a Visual Arts thesis, examiners appeared to be evenly divided, with about half of the examiners appearing equivocal about the usefulness of this concept in judging visual arts doctorates while the other half indicated that originality was almost a given in any artistic process. Among this latter group there was almost unanimous agreement that the exhibition should demonstrate originality and the exegesis should explain and contextualise the significance of the candidate's contribution.

I believe passionately that visual arts research actually can be carried out through a practical investigation...and that the investigation can provide genuinely new and original knowledge in the field. (informant 14)

Although examiners believed that the exegesis should elaborate and communicate the research process underlying the artwork, they also expected that the exhibition should convey the research basis of the project. Examiners expected to see evidence of the research process, not only in the written component of the thesis but also in the art works emanating from the doctoral journey.

In the exhibition, I would look for the development of the ideas that the student had begun with, how they had worked with them and over the period of years, developed them and then whether they had been able to resolve whatever challenges and difficulties came through in the work and how well they had demonstrated that. (informant 9)

In many ways it would seem that successful art research practice involves similar steps to traditional research practice, that is, the identification of a problem or issue, locating this issue in the current field, exploring and resolving the issue and communicating this process both through the art work and the exegesis.

The research intentions of the project are clearly outlined and the research focus well-defined. This examiner knew what the candidate was attempting and what X had researched in order to locate [the] project quite specifically within X's chosen domain. The exegesis diligently documents the process of the research. The testing and trialling of the ideas is critically presented and analysed. The presentation of drawings, journals plates and early images... [provided] excellent support to the thesis by clearly articulating the development from early literal representations to a sophisticated relationship with artefacts. (report 0303000101)

The work itself is rigorous and reveals consistent intellectual evolution and is aesthetically rewarding. The exegesis that to my mind is often misunderstood and abused as a form of presentation, is a delight to read, it not only meets the requirements laid out by the university but is written in a clear and engaging way. It is a personal story, but it is not indulgent, it accommodates affect yet is factual and written with a keen sense of its historical context. It is clear all the work submitted is genuinely part of an ongoing exploration of the human consciousness interfaced with the material world. (report 030800020)

The exhibition is the core of the research

Examiners consider all the components of the examination in an holistic appraisal, but as one informant stated, 'the exhibition is the core of the research', and this was a message that emanated from the entire body of sources used in this study. While the key qualities noted above may resonate strongly with those identified by examiners in many other disciplines, suggesting direct comparability, there are important differences, and the primary difference stems from the primary focus – the practice – and the blend of objectivity and subjectivity with which the examiner approaches the act of judging it.

The artwork has to be convincing. In conjunction with a clear integration of the research focus, the artworks should demonstrate an extensive level of application and exemplary technical proficiency. Interestingly, the examiners had difficulty identifying 'unacceptable' standards for the exhibition component and commented that it was unusual to encounter unsatisfactory levels of

artistic practice in doctoral examinations. When 'unacceptable' standards were identified it was generally in relation to the absence of a research framework or a disjunction between the exegesis and the exhibition. Illustrations were provided of exhibitions that bore little relation to the exegesis, where no 'development' was evident, particularly if the works that formed the core of the exhibition were not produced as part of the process.

Despite the fact that the exhibition component was regarded as the 'flagship' of the Fine Art Higher Degree, the majority of examiners still had high expectations about the quality of the written component. Examiners indicated that they expected the exegesis to be a lucid and detailed account of the candidate's research process. Overwhelmingly the exegesis was seen as a 'supporting' document to the artwork, and its purpose is to explain the investigation process, contextualise the focus of the work and articulate how and why the artwork is significant. When examiners were asked to identify an unacceptable standard for the exegesis they identified inadequate research and poor presentation as the primary indicators of unsatisfactory work. Examiners identified as unacceptable, research related features such as, 'sketchy research', 'broad generalizations without qualification' and 'inadequate references'. Work that was 'poorly expressed' or 'poorly edited' was criticised, along with 'shoddy presentation', 'muddy thinking' and ideas that were 'vacuous, disconnected and incoherent'.

The exegesis appears to fulfil a similar role to the literature review in conventional theses by positioning the work in the current context of its field. Similar to examiners in traditional research disciplines, the candidates are expected to demonstrate a 'comprehensive' understanding of the subject being explored and provide evidence of 'broad reading and broad research'. It is this element that was often required to be changed because it can be, whereas it would be almost impossible to require change to, and undertake a re-examination of, the studio practice. Hence it may be perceived by those outside Fine Art that the exegesis is the intellectual and research core of the work, when it is actually a tangible and durable manifestation of an accretion of knowledge that works in conjunction with the studio practice. On its own, the exegesis may make no significant advance to the field under study, and it is not evident that examiners expect it to.

Reporting Practices and Research Expectations of Fine Art Examiners

The content of examiner reports are crucial in determining the outcome of PhD examinations. Although, examiners provide a rating or recommendation of the outcome for a thesis, university examination committees may override an examiner's recommendation on the basis of the strength and clarity of their justification of that recommendation. If the reporting process in new research fields is significantly different to that in established disciplines, then this has the potential to have an impact at the university level of decision-making. The following section examines some of the differences and similarities in the examination reports collected from Fine Art examiners with those from 600 PhD examiners across a range of disciplines, with a particular emphasis on

the nature of judgement. Table 2 shows the categories of evaluative comment that were significantly different between the two groups of reports. The lines of text devoted to each category are expressed as a percentage of the total report. A complete analysis of the differences between these two groups of reports is provided in Dally et al. (2003).

Themes and Emphases in Examiner Reports

One consistent finding that has emerged from previous analyses of reports across traditional research disciplines is that these reports are characterised by an emphasis on providing comment that is 'formative' (Holbrook & Dally, 2003). 'Formative' comment is characterised by examiner engagement with the substance of the thesis where the thesis is treated as a work-in-progress that will benefit from constructive criticism. The examiner assists the candidate by providing new lines of information and instruction as to how the thesis can be improved. Even in cases of the highest ranked theses it is exceedingly rare for an examiner not to make some suggestions about how to 'improve' the thesis or publications arising from the candidate's project. Bearing in mind that the written report of the Fine Art examiner draws together all the elements of the Fine Art examination and so is not directly comparable with the conventional thesis examination, it is nonetheless evident that Fine Art examiners provide significantly less formative feedback in their reports with 8% as compared to 27% of the total report devoted to this kind of comment. Although Fine Art examiner reports were significantly shorter than reports from other disciplines (mean of 97 lines and 134 lines respectively), because each category of comment was calculated as a proportion of the total text in a report, the actual length of a report does not impact on the proportion of report devoted to each category of comment.

Compared to examiners from traditional disciplines, Fine Art examiners were also less likely to give 'prescriptive' advice suggesting 'quick-fix' solutions intended to bring the thesis to a rapid closure. Fine Art examiners were more likely to offer general commentary that was intended to be instructive or informative, but not in the sense of requiring or actioning change. A typical illustration of the latter is an instance where an examiner states that the candidate has employed a 'risky' strategy because they directed the viewer, 'assuming' that the 'viewer is visually and imaginatively engaged at the beginning and then disengaged at the end'. The examiner explains that opportunities for 'personal discovery' - the opportunity to pause, reflect, go back and move on, supports and enhances the 'intellectual and aesthetic experience', but to direct a viewer's experience is to 'erode' such opportunity. In cases such as this the examiners provide criticism and impart a lesson, but they do not require action. Fine Art examiners tend to couch their criticisms in a way that acknowledges the difficulty that candidates would face if they were required to alter an artwork.

Examiners devoted the same amount of their report (approximately 40%) to the exhibition as to the exegesis. However, the instructive comment was directed primarily towards the exegesis. Of the 30 Fine Art reports, only 5 reports (17%) contained instruction as to how the exhibition could have been

improved, while 10 reports (33%) contained advice detailing improvements to the exegesis.

The category *other judgement* includes both positive and negative judgement, as well as judgement that is neither positive nor negative. Compared to examiners from other disciplines, Fine Art examiners took a more positive tone in their reports overall with twice as much comment devoted to perceived strengths in the study (27% versus 13%). The higher proportion of *other judgement* in Fine Art reports reflects the higher incidence of both positive judgement and judgement that was neither positive nor negative. Typically, this latter or neutral type of comment was directed at the exhibition component of the thesis. In these instances the examiner appeared to be making a judgement about the exhibition but used a discourse that, as yet, has not been observed in reports on conventional theses. These comments reflect the language of an art critic or art reviewer where the qualities of the work are explored in regard to the impact they have on the reviewer. Rather than offering statements confirming that the work was judged to be 'acceptable' or 'not acceptable', the language used by Fine Art examiners typically described their own personal response. This language is more vivid, individualistic and esoteric than the language used by examiners from other disciplines.

The journals and notebooks were the laboratory for ideas and the sculpture articulated those ideas in concrete form. Although I felt some of the sculptures fell well short of their promise, other pieces successfully offered readings that transcended the ordinary. My response from these works was one of pleasurable confusion in the face of a multitude of arresting options. In their own individual way these particular pieces echoed a key operating principle of modernism – freedom... (report 031500050)

The examiner typically provides description, impression and interpretative critique, as if interpreting the artwork for other viewers and anticipating its communicative resonance.

Despite the fact that Fine Art examiners provided more positive feedback to candidates, they appeared hesitant to give a universal endorsement, tending to qualify their evaluation by the use of phrases such as 'I personally thought that....' 'This is how it appears to me', 'These are my opinions of, and responses to ...'. This tendency to personalize rather than generalize and objectify their judgements was evident in the comparison between the percentage of Fine Art and other examiners who used first-person dialogue in their reports. Compared to 65% of examiners from traditional fields who used first-person dialogue, 83% of Fine Art examiners adopted this more 'collegial' form of dialogue in their reports.

The relatively small proportion of formative comment may appear to suggest that Fine Art examiners regard the Fine Art thesis as a 'finished product' and are reluctant to direct the candidate to address perceived imperfections in the work. However, acceptance of the thesis as submitted does not prevent Fine Art examiners from implying criticism of the work as evidenced by a tendency

to speculate on aspects of the work that may have been improved, particularly the exegesis.

Those interviewed tended to see the role of the examiner report as educative rather than strictly summative. The report was also seen as providing the artist with the valuable art-world commodity of constructive critique: 'a good neutral clinical reaction to the work...always a valuable thing' (Informant 10). The supportive role of the document was regarded as 'a given'. The combination of 'honesty', 'care' and 'courtesy' as well as 'constructive' and 'positive' comment to balance the negative were seen to be necessary elements and that this could be a difficult and even 'agonising' process to get right. The examiner reports in the study were very carefully crafted and positive in tone. Wholly negative reports were seen to be unnecessary and there were no examples in our sample. When negativeness in the written report was mentioned it typically was raised in relation to poor supervision.

I always start from the idea of encouragement rather than devastating criticism, and it really brings us to a really crucial area which is supervision. So often the critique that I have to address to the candidate is really addressed to inadequate supervision (Informant 4)

Where such text occurred in the reports the criticism was oblique albeit emphatic:

For work of this quality to be so undernourished, unsupervised, is tragic (report 131311930)

Two informants noted that where criticism had been most pronounced in their reports it was aimed at the supervisors who were perceived to be at fault. They stated: 'I feel like almost apologising to the candidate' (Informant 4); 'I actually feel the students have been let down' (Informant 1). While a small number indicated they considered the report could draw forth some strong emotions, most saw the process as constructive for the candidate and as indicative for the supervisor. Drawing on their own growth as supervisors some noted:

When you get a report back from an examiner about one of your own students and they pointed out various deficiencies in the work then you can... say; 'well as a supervisor I should have picked that up' (Informant 7)

I picked up early on in my experiences as supervisor that I needed to encourage the students to demonstrate their journey...the examiners indicated they would like to have seen this sense of work becoming resolved at the end...(Informant 6)

These comments highlight the cumulative impact that current examiners have on shaping the standards and outcomes in Fine Art higher degrees. The feedback provided in examiner reports, has the potential to influence not only the candidates under examination but also their supervisors. If supervisors amend their supervisory practices to accommodate examiner suggestions,

then subsequent candidates will also be affected. Current examiners appear to be acutely aware of the power and responsibility they have in 'training' supervisors through the reports.

... what you are trying to do is provide constructive criticism from where you stand and one hopes that one provides really good advice. I think good examiners reports do have a very significant impact (as training for the supervisor) (informant 14).

I think the written report is really, really important in that notion of the examination being a formative thing. I think it is also formative for the institutionand for the candidate... and the supervisor of the candidate. For the institution and the supervisor, I think it can lead from time to time to better process. I think it can improve the supervisor's capability of supervising.....I think it is very important for the supervisor. (informant 15).

Research Expectations of Fine Art Examiners

The thought of this [the PhD] being an end point would be a nightmare, wouldn't it!?

We asked examiners directly if they thought a PhD in Fine Art was more an end than a beginning to prompt reflection on the role of the degree and to further tease out the reason for the small amount of formative comment in the reports. No one saw it as an end, but it would be fairer to say this question proved far more interesting because it posed such a challenge to the informants, causing them to traverse new territory and highlighting just how influential the first cohorts of experienced artist candidates have been in shaping the approach to examination and in thinking about the 'use' and 'level' of the doctorate.

I'm perfectly comfortable using the PhD as the terminating degree for a visual arts study. I think it can be the end of structured research, but it may not be and it can be the beginning of unstructured research and art practice. Then again, it may not be. I actually don't think it has a position of hard edge. I see many, many, very accomplished artists, undertaking a PhD and they do it because they say they want to understand their grounding a bit better and they're not doing it in any way to interrupt their practice at any particular point. Their practice was good before they started. Their practice was terrific when they leave but the PhD was part of the process of them grounding their work. (informant 15)

It [the doctorate] exists in terms of what your intention is. I would see it as a kind of cusp, at its maximum potential it is a stage of major consolidation within that person's practice. It's a period of extensive and rigorous examination, research, and coming to conclusions, and you know, resolutions within practice, and developments within practice as a result of all that. So I see it as a consolidating period that comes both after and before so it will continue on and provide the basis of an enriching practice.(informant 13)

That 'research training sets you up for a particular kind of practice' is a common idea, but in some instances there are suggestions that this is a particular form of art, a hybrid academic art, in others it is more a resolution of practice – a positioning (as evident above), and in yet others, a new and different career a 'research career' as defined in other disciplines, something a new generation of students in Fine Art will have access to as a matter of course:

I think we benefit from aligning ourselves with the expectations of other University disciplines, and I think we therefore should be saying that the PhD really is the training ground, if you like, the beginning of a career rather than something that would happen at the conclusion and I know this has been very blurred in Fine Arts because of the wave of very experienced practitioners coming through (informant 2)

The PhD is the end point in terms of examination, but it's only the beginning in terms of an academic career. I'm not speaking about an artistic career here, perhaps. (informant 3)

Not all examiners felt that the movement to the PhD was such a good thing:

unless you want to teach in an institution I could not see any really good reason why you would want to do a PhD...Fine Arts is the round peg hammered into the square hole and it just doesn't fit a lot of the time (informant 5).

Others felt that doctoral forms other than the PhD were worth exploring, and some mentioned the importance of seeing the transition in perspective

We've got to have a good perspective on how people construct their careers and what people's goals are and we've got to see Australia in an international context. (informant 10)

Conclusions

The current investigation of examiner perceptions of the processes and parameters of Fine Art higher degree examination has revealed a number of important findings.

In regard to course requirements and the examination process, the analysis of 16 Australian institutions revealed that there is considerable diversity in guidelines and practices among Australian institutions at present. The typical elements comprising a Fine Arts higher degree examination include:

- an exegesis,
- an exhibition (which may in turn have multiple parts, presented in multiple ways, including a catalogue, notes, evidence of earlier work);
- possible interaction between the examiner and the candidate; and
- possible interaction among examiners

It is hard to gauge how the diversity of institutional course requirements and examination procedures influences the outcomes for Fine Art higher degree candidates. Together with the sheer variety of studio works and exegesis styles this situation calls for both a flexible examiner group and a cautious one. While acknowledging that the processes and products of Fine Art higher degrees are different to traditional disciplines, there were concerns that the procedure for examining Fine Art exhibitions and exegeses should adhere to the same practices governing examination of conventional written theses. Some examiners appeared to be uncomfortable with the idea of meeting with candidates or collaborating with other examiners, since these procedures were not followed in traditional disciplines. So, while examiners were prepared to accept considerable diversity within specific examination practices, they did not want these parameters to deviate too far from traditional examination procedures. This current pioneering group of Australian examiners emphasises the need to follow guidelines while at the same time realising that some degree of rationalisation of process would be desirable. Perhaps examiners are prepared to tolerate the diversity in examination processes because they share Denicolo's (2003) fears that a universal 'standardisation' may stifle innovative practices.

The examiners valued independence and autonomy in judging the artworks and in this way appeared to conform to Eisner's (2002) notion of a 'connoisseur' acting in solitude. However, the examiners were also open to the idea of collaborating with other examiners after making their independent judgement and noted that there was generally agreement among examiners about the standard of an exhibition. Although consultation between examiners is not implemented at every university, it has been suggested that the 'critiquing' of artworks by a panel of experts acts as a kind of 'peer review' process in establishing the validity of research processes and outcomes (Sullivan, 2004).

Many of the relatively new areas of doctoral research such as education and sociology built their disciplinary definitions from the sciences initially and reactions to positivism latterly, but the role of the examiner in those fields while new was not a pioneering and exploratory one as it is in Fine Art. Examiners in Fine Art appear to take on and seek out a mentoring role more than a gatekeeping one, and are more co-investigators than assessors. Partly because they are breaking new ground in their discipline, but partly too because the role of the art critic is to communicate how a work impacts on them, how they understand it, how it feels to them and works for them, not (as is more expected in academe) for the discipline as a whole. With such a frame of mind they expect to be surprised and excited. Moreover the impact of the artwork is immediate and total, it is the 'positioning' that is gradual and an accretion of what is already known. Unlike their counterparts in other disciplines who essentially work in the context of the latter, it would seem that the Fine Art examiner works within different temporal frames as part of the process and this is reflected in both the intellectual compartmentalisation of the components and the very deliberate holistic synthesis that occurs. Clearly this is a process that needs to be researched more intensively.

In the assessment of Fine Art Research Higher Degrees the criteria applied draw on the worlds of Art and Academe. Examiners seek evidence of 'development', where at the very least the work is 'positioned' in relation to the academic literature and bodies of artistic work, and at best contributes something new, both experientially and tangibly. However, originality was not identified as the defining feature of a Fine Arts higher degree. Examiners rarely mentioned 'originality' unless directly probed to discuss this aspect. On the contrary, 'research' was not specifically addressed in the interview questions, but was mentioned spontaneously by each of the examiners as an essential criteria for the PhD award. Examiners appeared to be in agreement that the worth of a candidate's work is vested in its research basis and manifest in a systematic inquiry, an integration of the theoretical and practice elements, technical sophistication and literary competence. The legitimacy of the award seemed to reside within the diligence of the research process and the 'authoritative' representation of this in the studio practice.

Examiners appeared to anticipate that they would be looking at the work of a 'mature' rather than a 'novice' artist. This is not surprising, given that the pioneering candidate group is unusual in an academic context. Many of them are already technically expert in practice - established artists whose lives have been devoted to producing creative and unique works, and they are using the opportunity of PhD study to position this work. There may be no clear divide between their body of work and their doctoral contribution. In this situation the candidate role can be unclear, adding to the uncertainty that already exists about the research component of practice and its contribution to knowledge at the instructional level. While examiners appear confident in identifying research elements in PhD studies, how practice-based research is conceived, conducted and facilitated in the Fine Arts field is yet to be clearly articulated (Piantanida, McMahon & Garman, 2003).

In terms of the nature and thrust of evaluative comment in Fine Art examiner reports, there is considerable difference compared to other disciplines. Fine Art examiner comments are couched in more positive and personal forms, and comment is generally less directly 'usable'. Despite the fact that Fine Art examiners seemed to regard their role as a 'mentor' and that the examination itself could be viewed as a formative rather than a summative evaluation, compared to examiners from other disciplines they provided less comment about how candidates could improve their work. Examiners acted less as instructors and assessors, and more as translators and investigators. Assisting the candidate to communicate the work and at the same time actively seeking understanding - seeking connections between exegesis and exhibition, seeking input from the candidate, and exchanging impressions with, and seeking confirmation from other examiners.

It was noted that Fine Art examiners devote a considerable amount of their report employing a type of 'neutral judgement' that neither praises nor condemns the thesis nor instructs the candidate. This 'critique' appears to communicate what the examiner understands from viewing the exhibition and reading the exegesis. While it is unusual to find this 'interpretative' element in reports from other fields, this dialogue may communicate much to both the

candidate and the supervisor who presumably are conversant with this form of discourse. According to Bruner (1996), in appraising artworks 'The object of interpretation is understanding, not explanation' (p.90). Thus, when examiners describe the impact that the studio work has on them without overtly declaring the work as 'good' or 'bad', it may be clear to the candidate and supervisor that merely by demonstrating their 'understanding', examiners are acclaiming the value and validity of an exhibition. However, since university committees have ultimate responsibility for determining the final recommendation that is applied to a candidate's thesis, it is important that those outside artistic circles widen the parameters of what constitutes a legitimate research goal. If university committees are constrained by the belief that 'explanation' is the only valid research outcome then the discourse employed by Fine Art examiners revealing 'understanding' may not be recognised as an endorsement of the contribution of a Fine Art thesis.

Whether intentionally or otherwise, Fine Art examiners tend to devote less than half of their comments to the exegesis, but when they seek changes these are usually in relation to the exegesis, and they may refer to deficiencies in the written component that a reader outside the field would normally regard as very serious. Because the examiner's concerns are not typically explained in detail in the reports, nor are their suggestions for change made in a prescriptive or formative way, examination committees may find them difficult to relate to the examiners overall recommendation (i.e., whether of not they recommend an outright pass or fail, or require minor or major changes) which derives from a holistic approach wherein the artwork has greatest weight. It has been suggested that because doctoral exhibitions are a 'finished product' they are less amenable to changes and therefore attract less critical comment than written theses that are typical in other disciplines. As noted by the Fine Art examiners, it is difficult to alter a completed exhibition if there are concerns about the studio practice. However, this situation is no different from traditional disciplines where examiners may be dissatisfied with the design, conduct and/or methodology of a study and yet pass a thesis because, despite perceived flaws in these fundamental and unchangeable elements of the thesis, there is sufficient evidence to demonstrate that a candidate has reached a required standard (Powell & McCauley, 2002).

Finally, similar to other disciplines (e.g. Powell & McCauley, 2003), there were diverging opinions among Fine Art examiners regarding the purpose of a PhD. While examiners generally held a common view about what constitutes acceptable standards of work, there appeared to be less consensus about what doctoral candidates learned and how their development during their candidacy would assist them in future pursuits. Because doctoral awards are a relatively new phenomenon in the Fine Art field this lack of consensus may in part be due to the very different types of students who are currently undertaking doctoral studies. As noted by the examiners, some candidates are established artists who undertake a PhD in order to 'polish' their practice and position their work, while less experienced artists may be 'developing' their art practice and research skills in pursuit of an academic career.

Thus, in this emerging field the role, of not only the examiner but also the supervisor, is complex and still evolving. The newness of the field, the diversity in doctoral candidate's capabilities, the as yet undefined parameters of arts-based research practice and the variety in examination procedures requires examiners and supervisors who are knowledgeable, flexible and supportive. By setting examination standards, the current generation of Fine Art examiners are implicitly determining which practices will be encouraged and which approaches will be discouraged by supervisors. While it is important to ensure equivalency of academic standards across disciplines it is also important to preserve the unique features of arts-based practice and research. Explicating the contexts and practices of artistic research will assist those outside the arts field to understand different approaches to creating and representing knowledge. This investigation of how current processes and examiner perceptions influence the shape of Fine Art doctoral learning and outcomes adds to the growing body of literature which attempts to articulate and validate the methodology and goals of alternative research practices.

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Appendix

Interview Schedule

Date _____ Informant Number _____

Introductory comments:

Thank you for agreeing to take part in our interviews with Fine Art examiners. We are very grateful that we can draw on your opinions and expertise.

We have a few sets of questions focusing on the role of examination in Fine Art, the different components of the examination process, the qualities you look for in a Fine Art thesis and any challenges you face in the examination process.

We will be recording this session, please tell us if you want us to stop the tape, otherwise it will run for the duration. Please feel free to use examples and illustrations in the knowledge that identifying information will be deleted from the transcripts and specific comments will not be attributed to individuals. Transcripts will be sent to you for checking and additional comment.

Do you have any questions or queries about this interview and its use?

Did you receive the interview questions prior to this interview? YES ____NO ____

Thank you the interview will now commence and we are switching on the tape recorder

Questions:

To begin please tell us what experience you have had examining research higher degrees in Fine Art?

First your thoughts on the process and its components

What type of guidelines or knowledge do you draw on to help you examine?

Have you a particular philosophy about examination in Fine Art?

Are you aware of taking on a particular role or roles during the examination process?

Do they differ across different components of the examination?

What particular qualities and skills do you think an examiner in Fine Art should have?

Have you been involved in a viva? YES ____NO ____

What specific contribution do you think a viva can make to the examination process?

Do examiners generally reach a collaborative agreement?

The qualities you look for in the student's work

When you accept the invitation to examine what qualities do you hope to find in the student's work overall?

What qualities do you look for in the exhibition and what qualities do you look for in the exegesis?

What do you consider as an acceptable standard for the exhibition? The exegesis?

What do you consider an unacceptable level of work for the exhibition? The exegesis?

In what ways do you balance your judgement between the exhibition and the written component to determine a final result?

Do you think that the way the examination process is conducted can influence your judgement?- for example- how does reading the exegesis before you see the exhibition influence your judgement of the exhibition?- and vice versa- how does seeing the exhibition influence your judgement of the exegesis?

Your thoughts on originality and contribution, particularly in regard to PhD theses.

Firstly, how do you interpret the request to judge whether a PhD makes an original contribution to the field?

Do you expect to find originality and/or evidence of a significant contribution in both the exegesis and the exhibition?

What impact do you think your written report has? (e.g. on candidate, on supervisor)

Do you feel the university committee takes full account of your comments?

The last section deals with your feelings about any challenges or constraints connected with Fine Art examination.

In your opinion are there particular challenges or issues connected with examination? Can you please provide one or two examples to illustrate typical difficulties or challenges you have faced.

How do you think these issues can be addressed?

From your own experience what do you believe are the main training needs of Fine Art supervisors or examiners?

Finally, there is debate in most other disciplines about whether the PhD should be regarded as an end-point or a beginning. What position would you take in this debate in regard to the Fine Art PhD?

That concludes our list of questions. Is there anything else that we haven't covered that you would like to add or discuss?

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Table 1 Fine Art examination data sources

The group who provided reports

N =16

-
- 50% male, 50 % female
 - from three eastern Australian states
 - comprising 4 curators, 1 artist, 10 current academics and 1 retired academic (3 heads of school, 1 professor and 7 senior lecturers)
-

The group who were interviewed

N = 15

-
- 60% male, 40% female
 - from three eastern Australian states
 - comprising 4 curators, 8 current and 3 retired academics (2 heads of school, 3 professors, 1 associate professor and 5 senior lecturers)
-

Table 2: Proportions of the category ‘Evaluative elements’ text units that differed significantly ($p < .05$) between Fine Art MA and PhD examination reports (N=30) and PhD reports from other disciplines (N=600)

Coding Category Evaluative Elements	Fine Art Reports Mean% (SD)	Reports from other Disciplines Mean% (SD)
Formative instruction	8.3 (16.0)	27.1 (25.3)
Instructional commentary	15.7 (14.8)	9.7 (13.9)
Prescriptive instruction	1.3 (2.7)	7.9 (11.4)
Other Judgement	34.8 (17.3)	16.1 (17.4)
Positive Judgement	27.4 (18.7)	12.8 (16.4)