

2021 President's Report

The 2021 has again been a difficult year. Following a sense of optimism in the early half of the year, a new, more infectious Delta variant of the COVID virus was discovered in New South Wales in May. The academic year was again disrupted and teaching went online for many institutions in both Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand. Artists, contractors and sessional staff were again amongst the most severely affected with exhibitions postponed or cancelled for a second year and demand for sessional teaching staff evaporating.

The annual conference, an early casualty of the pandemic last year, was postponed with the intention of holding an in-person event in 2021. However with more widespread lockdowns and border restrictions the conference was converted to an on-line event. While this was deeply disappointing, there have been a number of benefits that have resulted in higher participation rates with 79 panels, 300 speakers and over 440 registrations including participants from a range of countries such as Chile, Mexico, Canada, the US and cities in Europe and Asia.

I would like to express my gratitude especially to the conference convenors: Mark Ledbury and Donna Brett from the University of Sydney for their hard work and continued commitment to the conference over the past two years. Thank you to the conference committee: Paul Donnelly, Salote Tawale, Verónica Tello, Deborah Ascher Barnstone, Chiara O'Reilly and Ira Ferris for delivering such a successful conference in 2021. And a special thankyou to Conference Convenor: Nick Croggon for all his work behind the scenes organising the conference logistics and ensuring the conference safely pivoted to an online format. It has been a marathon effort by all involved. The conference program with its focus on ensuring inclusivity, together with the online format, have resulted in one of the most successful conferences the Association has held in recent years.

During 2021 the Association conducted a review of the Advocacy Working Groups. With shifting priorities brought about by the global pandemic and increased social activism from the BlackLivesMatter and the #MeToo movements it was decided that, rather than spread our attention thinly across a range of issues, we would reduce the number of working groups and focus on developing key initiatives throughout the year. As a result, what was formerly known as the Decolonising Working Group has now been retitled the Indigenising Working Group to better reflect changing perspectives. A values statement has been created and is now available on our website. AAANZ is committed to the ongoing review of our processes and activities to ensure the Association is inclusive of First Nation's perspectives and we aim to grow our First Nations and Aotearoa Māori and Pasifika membership. To assist with this end we invited Badtjala artist, curator, writer and academic Fiona Foley to join the Executive Committee as Indigenous Australian representative. She holds this position alongside Yamatji academic and curator Stephen Gilchrist. Academic Ngarino Ellis is our Māori and Pasifika Representative.

A major initiative AAANZ instigated this year is the publishing program for early career researchers. This has been developed by AAANZ in association with publishing house Taylor & Francis, with the intention of publishing a series of three monographs. The series will be divided into two rounds with proposals for the first two monographs selected in the first round in 2022. The program will open early 2022 and eligible members are invited to submit a proposal. This initiative has been developed in recognition of the difficulties recently completed doctorates and early career researchers face getting a PhD published as a book. The selected applicants will receive mentoring and assistance with developing their thesis for publication by the series editors, Rex Butler and Anthony White. I would particularly like to thank Rex Butler who has driven this initiative and Anthony White for assistance developing the program. More information including application deadlines will be available early next year on our website.

The pandemic did not appear to affect interest in the annual prizes this year. Both the Art Writing and Publishing Awards and the Research in Focus Prize received high numbers of submissions. Thank you to all judges together with the sponsors including: Art Monthly; the Australian Institute for Art History, University of Melbourne; Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetū; Monash Art Design & Architecture, Monash University; Power Institute, Foundation for Art and Visual Culture, University of Sydney; University Art Museums Australia and Professor Terry Smith, FAHA, CIHA. Their generous support ensures AAANZ is able to recognise outstanding contributions to the field of art publishing and research. For the first time the award winners and judges' comments will be published in the March issue of *Art Monthly*. This is an important initiative that will further promote arts writing in the region and raise the profile of the Awards.

Due to the ongoing impacts of COVID the Research in Focus Prize was held again this year, replacing the annual PhD Prize that usually takes place during the conference. The Research in Focus Prize is a video presentation based on research that aims to support and reward excellence in communication about art history and practice-led research. Thank you to sponsors of the prize Taylor and Francis for their continued support.

Following a review of the PhD Prize conducted this year, it was decided that the Prize will no longer take a presentation format, either as a video or in person. Currently the prize recognises presentation and communication skills rather than the merits of the final submitted exegesis. This decision has been made in response to feedback from entrants, academics and former judges and will better align with the aims of the prize to acknowledge the rigour of research and the quality of the final thesis. Details of the new format of the PhD Prize and entry requirements will be available on the AAANZ website early next year.

AAANZ again partnered with the Australian Institute of Art History in 2021 to administer the Research Grants. Six grants of \$5,000 each were made available to First Nations, emerging, institutional and independent scholars for projects that advance knowledge and research in art history. This year the grant round attracted 30 applicants from Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, which was a 20% increase upon last year. Thank you to the selection panel: Joanna Mendelssohn, David Hansen and Anne Dunlop for their time and expertise determining the recipients. Grants such as these are particularly important at this time with

so much disruption causing financial hardship for many researchers and I thank AIAH and their donors for making these grants available.

Thank you to the team at the Centre of Visual Arts (CoVA) at the University of Melbourne who are responsible for publishing the *Australia & New Zealand Journal of Art*. I'd particularly like to thank Editor in Chief Ian McLean and Editorial Coordinator Jeremy Eaton who work tirelessly to deliver two issues each year, together with the ANZJA Board hosted by Su Baker, Pro Vice-Chancellor and Director of CoVA and members Ryan Johnston, Director, Buxton Contemporary; Vikki McInnes, Victorian College of the Arts; Christopher Marshall, University of Melbourne; Claire Roberts, University of Melbourne and Anthony White, University of Melbourne. It is gratifying to see the journal go from strength to strength with a publishing program aimed at developing the editorial skills of early career academics. A substantial growth in readership this year of over 30% reflects the importance of the journal, not only for sharing current research and critical thinking, but also in terms of providing a platform for engagement and connection with the research and ideas of other scholars, which is particularly important at a time when other opportunities for engagement are limited.

While it has been a difficult couple of years AAANZ has emerged in a strong position with increased membership and a program that connects members through the annual conference and journal, acknowledges their contributions to scholarship and debate, and fosters a new generation of academics and writers through initiatives such as the publishing program. If we have learnt anything over the past two years of the pandemic, it is the importance of an organisation such as AAANZ which provides avenues for engagement and connectedness around shared values of the importance of visual art, craft and design.

In closing I would like to thank the Executive Committee for their support throughout the year. In particular Katrina Grant, Marketing and Communications Coordinator; Korin Lesh, Treasurer; Anthony White, Advocacy Representative and Rex Butler.

Anthony White is stepping down from the Committee at the end of this year. Anthony has been a stalwart of AAANZ and has served for over 16 years, first as Victorian Representative from 2000 to 2002 and then from 2012 to 2014. He was Treasurer from 2000 to 2005, President from 2014 to 2018 and recently Advocacy Representative from 2019 to 2021. Under Anthony's Presidency the Association developed a number of initiatives including the Directory of Art Historians and Art Researchers in the Asia Pacific Region, launched last year. It continues to grow with 169 entries and is now searchable by country. He conducted a survey of AAANZ members in 2016 and in response to feedback expanded the Executive Committee beyond regional representation to include an Indigenous, Māori or Pasifika, Student, Artist and International representatives to ensure the Executive Committee better understands the needs of members. He initiated the Advocacy Working Groups including the Decolonising Working Group, the Open Access Art History Working Group and the Employment Outcomes Working Group which carried out research to enable the Association to better argue for the tangible employment benefits study in art history and related disciplines brings. As both President and Advocacy Representative he has been involved in numerous campaigns to address issues affecting the sector, particularly recent decisions to reduce university funding and merge departments. His judicious stewardship

over the years ensured that AAANZ was in a strong position to weather the storms of recent times. Anthony will be a big loss to the Executive but will remain involved in the Publishing Program and overseeing the Directory.

And lastly a special thank you to AAANZ Business Manager, Rebecca Renshaw. Without Rebecca's dedication, commitment and hard work, that extends way beyond the six hours per week she is employed, the Association would not be in such a robust state.

Wendy Garden
AAANZ President
December 2021