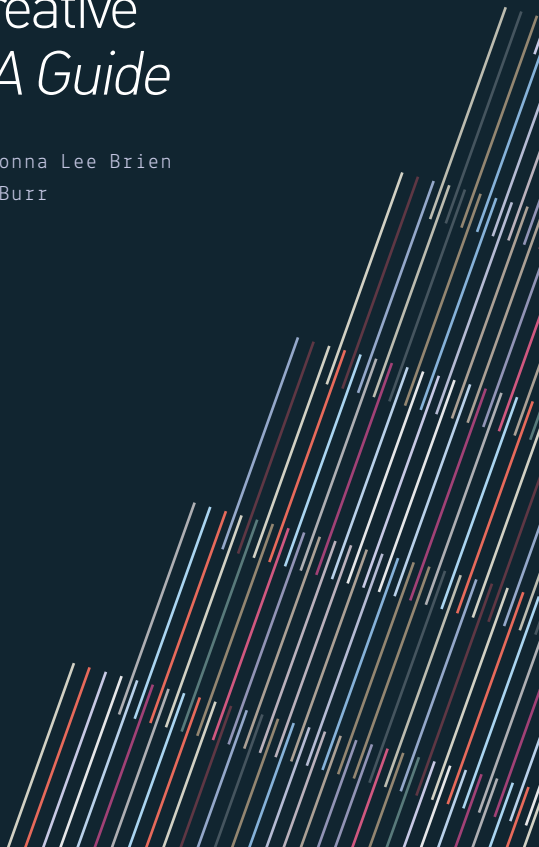


Examining Doctorates in the Creative Arts: *A Guide*

Jen Webb, Donna Lee Brien
and Sandra Burr



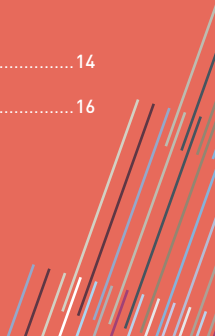


Written on the Land.
Work by Trevor Rodwell and
Sue Rodwell; photograph by
Trevor Rodwell 2011.



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1. INTRODUCTION



Creative arts disciplines constitute an important growth area for research higher degrees (HDR) and, in the years since Dennis Strand's landmark study (1998), have built a body of knowledge and set of practices associated with research and research training. However, there is little empirical or theoretical work that investigates how examiners of creative arts doctorates arrive at the commentary presented in their reports, or how such reports add value to research in these disciplines.

This project, 'Examination of Doctoral Degrees in Creative Arts', has investigated the assessment practices, processes and policies, as well as the beliefs and expectations of HDR students, supervisors and examiners in the creative arts. Through a series of roundtables, focus groups and surveys, along with benchmarking of university policies and processes, and analysis of a body of examiners' thesis reports, we have attempted to determine a number of issues. These include: whether there is agreement among artist-academics about what it means to do a creative arts doctorate; how we go about the work of examining creative arts doctorates; how readily university research offices and policies accommodate creative arts practice at this level; and whether, as a sector, we can establish standards of quality.

This booklet provides what we hope will be a useful 'taster' of our findings and a guide to informing improved examination practices, processes and policies. It is based on input provided by project participants, much of which is cited in the sections below.

We would like to draw attention to the generosity and dedication of these participants, who spoke warmly about the privilege of examining creative arts doctorates, and who repeatedly identified the formative nature of doctoral examination: that candidates under examination are our future colleagues and, thus, are being mentored as much as assessed. Here, we offer a compilation of comments and recommendations, along with information about creative arts doctorates and a brief bibliography of readings we found especially pertinent to the topic. The full project report is available as a PDF from the Office of Learning and Teaching and project websites (<http://olt.gov.au> and <http://creativedocexams.org.au>) or from the authors. We welcome ongoing discussion and debate about this important topic.

Sally Berridge, 2007,
from Gravy; photograph
by Sally Berridge.



2. EXAMINERS CHECKLIST¹

2.1 What an examiner might ask of a thesis

- Does it offer an original contribution to knowledge in the field?
- Does the thesis as a whole satisfy external needs as well as personal outcomes (that is, advances knowledge and not just practice)?
- Is the work as a whole scholarly, coherent and rigorous?
- Is there a thorough literature review that engages key and seminal works, and traces the line of thought across the topic area?
- Is there a thorough contextual review that accounts for key works in the same art form and topic area?
- Does the artwork show innovation, a line of argument, technical expertise?
- Is there a synthesis between the artwork and the essay?
- Does the essay use a vocabulary appropriate to the art form?
- Is the written work free of typographical and grammatical errors?

1 This content is taken from the transcripts of the roundtables and focus groups.

2.2 What some experienced examiners do

- I start by looking at the abstract; then the table of contents; and then the references; and then I read the acknowledgments, because you find out a bit about who the person is and what their connections are.
- I skim the introduction and flip through to the conclusion to identify: What are the questions? What are the key findings?
- I skim read first to get an initial sense of what the deal is between the writer and the reader, and a sense of how confident the writer is.
- I read the guidelines first, really carefully, because they're all different. I try to assess the thesis within that framework and be a bit generous toward it.
- I go straight to the creative component and try to see how the work stands, whether there's a question that the artist is asking and addressing, and whether the research question is in the essays and also in the visual work.
- I want to see whether the attention to detail is there in the creative work: for instance, whether an exhibition is hung properly; whether a novel is properly edited.
- I bear in mind that I can't evaluate production values as I would in professional practice because students don't have the resources available to professionals.
- I use a template to gather the kind of information that I need to write the report. There is a section on the questions that the student is asking and another on questions that I would want to ask that student. There's a section on the boring information about footnotes and typos; and I also record the kind of patterns that arise from the work.



- I write my report and then sit on it for several days so that I go back to it with a much cooler head and revise it. After all, the students don't need to know everything that's wrong with it.

2.3 What an examiner should do, be and know

- Provide good feedback: don't write too much; don't write too little; give them enough so that they can make the finished work as good as possible.
- Be a constructive critic and a 'friendly reader': read with an open mind.
- Be communicative: engage with the university over any concerns.
- Be a sane and decent human being.
- Be flexible, be generous, and be ready to be astonished.
- Be professional: read the whole work, follow the university's guidelines, and complete the examination within the timeframe.
- Know what academic rigour means, and have knowledge and insight.
- Know whether the candidate meets both professional and academic standards.


3. EXPECTATIONS OF STANDARDS FOR CREATIVE ARTS DOCTORATES²



- It would be a very boring world if we had standard creative doctorates, but there are no problems with developing a set of examination guidelines that are fairly consistent, and that retain the diversity of the current doctoral programs.
- There's no uniformity among creative arts doctorates, and there are no standards. There needs to be agreement among institutions about what constitutes a doctorate in the creative arts. We can't get a standard for examination until we have a standard for what the doctorate is.
- We're interested in standards, but not in standardisation. As the doctorate is very open-ended and very much dictated by that individual's creativity, so too is the examination of that doctorate.
- As long as it's open-ended and expressed broadly, the notion of trying to have a consistently high standard for higher degrees is an objective that no one would dispute.
- Perhaps more than a set of standards, what we need is a set of really good questions, and understanding about why we're asking those questions, and what are the terms for interrogation.

2 These too are taken from transcripts of the roundtables and focus groups.

- It is not possible to standardise the creative work. But it is possible to standardise the following elements
 - The contribution to knowledge.
 - The presence of strong intellectual inquiry.
 - The use of sound and relevant theoretical paradigms.
 - The rigorous demonstration of qualitative research and research methodologies.
 - The contextualisation of the findings.
 - The expected levels of discussion, analysis and conceptual thinking.
 - The length of the critical essay.
 - The length of the bibliography.
 - Statement of behaviours expected in examination.



Noting the Self: Contemporary autobiographical performance and its embodiment of three Buddhist universal characteristics. Performance by Tanatchaporn Kittikong 2007.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE EXAMINATION OF CREATIVE ARTS DOCTORATES³



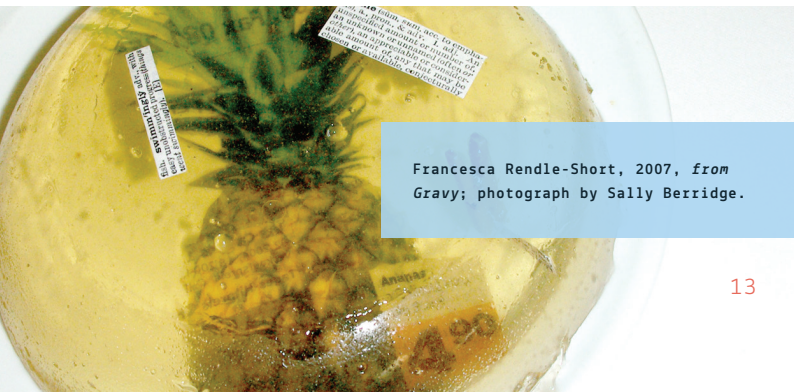
- The starting point
 - Benchmark the entry requirements for creative doctorates across institutions to confirm the content of undergraduate programs and the universities' expectations of the professional experience brought by prospective candidates.
 - Develop coherent guidelines to confirm the integrity and content of creative arts doctoral programs.
 - Produce a statement about what a PhD actually is.
 - Reconsider the nomenclature used for the critical element.⁴
- The structure of the programs
 - Introduce a standard exegetical model that includes an overarching research question, and a literature and contextual review.
 - Produce standards pertaining to evidence of scholarship regarding methodology, framework, evidence-based discussion, and bibliography.

3 These were developed by project participants, although not necessarily agreed upon by all. There was also no certainty about who should develop and embed these recommendations, though many participants looked to the Peak Bodies to take the lead.

4 Participants almost universally rejected the term 'exegesis'.

- Address: the relationship of the critical element to the body of work; the strength of the argument through both artifact and essay; the quality of the creative work; the professional skills, professional standards and intellectual quality displayed.
- The examiners
 - Require all examiners to be practitioners in the art field being examined, and also to be academics, and not solely commercial/practice-based.
 - Produce a statement defining and describing examiners' roles and responsibilities.
 - Establish a national register of examiners.
 - Institute formal examiner training, through input from heads of Postgraduate Research Programs, Research Offices and the Peak Bodies.
 - Make examiners' reports available to examiners as a training tool.
- The examination process
 - Produce standardised instructions for candidates, supervisors and examiners.
 - Establish benchmarks for examination guidelines.
 - Give more consideration to graduate attributes in the examination process (involves benchmarking of the universities' postgraduate attributes).
 - Institute a formal moderation processes such as exists for undergraduate assessment.
 - Consider instituting a viva voce process.

- The disparity between examiner supply and requirements
 - Investigate ways to overcome the difficulty of finding practitioners in the same medium and with the theoretical knowledge to examine a doctorate.
 - Include internal examiners on the panel, as an indicator of confidence in the quality of internal teaching teams and to contextualise the work for external examiners.
 - Develop mechanisms to encourage staff to become examiners for other universities (e.g., include examination in workloads and KPIs; stress that benefits that include gaining external recognition and demonstrating their capacity as scholars).
 - Raise the examination fee/honorarium to better reflect the significance and value of this work.
- Scholarship on examination
 - Hold regular colloquia for examiners and supervisors facilitated by Peak Bodies at their annual conferences.
 - Promote the scholarship of examination through journal and conference paper publication.

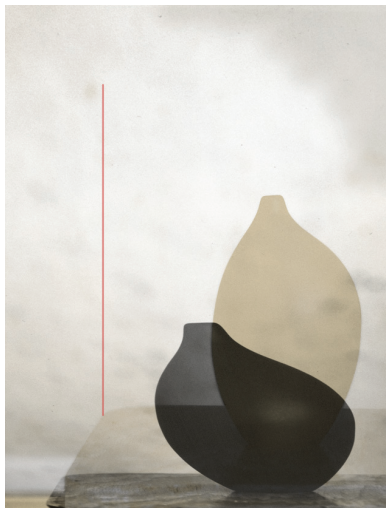
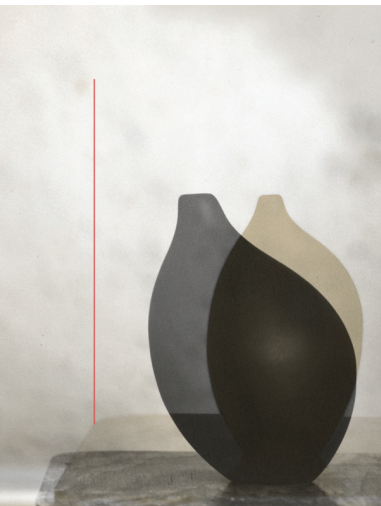


Francesca Rendle-Short, 2007, *from Gravy*; photograph by Sally Berridge.

5. TYPES OF CREATIVE ARTS DOCTORATE AVAILABLE IN AUSTRALIA

The project identified the variety of doctoral degrees in the creative arts offered by Australian universities.

Name of degree	Typical requirements
Doctor of Arts	thesis of 50,000 words
Doctor of Creative Arts	creative arts product/s plus 30,000–40,000 word essay
Doctor of Creative Industries	coursework plus research projects
Doctor of Fine Arts	creative artifact plus 10,000–15,000 word essay
Doctor of Music	creative project plus 10,000–15,000 word essay; or a significant portfolio of professional work only
Doctor of Musical Arts	80,000 word thesis; or a public performance plus 25,000–40,000 word essay
Doctor of Professional Studies	portfolio that can include creative arts artifact(s) and dissertation
Doctor of Visual Arts	exhibition or other documentation plus 20,000 word essay
PhD on creative art topic	75,000–100,000 word thesis
PhD with creative artifact	creative object plus 15,000–60,000 word essay
Professional Doctorate by publication	portfolio up to 80,000 words
Professional Doctorate by research	portfolio comprising dissertation, artifact, or other research outputs



Tim Thomas, 2012 (from top)
Vase 1, Vase 2 and Vase 3



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Mares in Spring,
Sandra Burr 2009.

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- Deakin University: Faculty of Arts and Education
- Edith Cowan University: Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts
- Griffith University: Queensland College of Art
- National Association of Writers in Education (UK)
- National Council of Tertiary Music Schools
- Queensland University of Technology: Creative Industries Faculty
- University of Canberra: Faculty of Arts and Design
- University of South Australia: Division of Education, Arts and Social Sciences
- University of Western Australia: Faculty of Architecture, Landscape and Visual Arts
- University of Wollongong: Faculty of Creative Arts

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5 Details of the project methodology are available in the final report and on the project website.



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