



THE UNIVERSITY OF  

---

MELBOURNE

## Archives Digitised Collections

### Creator(s)

### Title

'The Teaching of Art History and Appreciation in Victoria from 1934 to 1984'

### Date

undated

### Description

Item: 1978.0039.00010

### Terms and Conditions

### Preferred Citation

University of Melbourne Archives, 'The Teaching of Art History and Appreciation in Victoria from 1934 to 1984', 1978.0039.00010

## The Teaching of Art History and Appreciation in Victoria from 1934 to 1984

A decisive factor in the formation of public taste was the teaching of art in the schools by those who had been trained in the academic traditions of the nineteenth century. Only in kindergarten and primary schools was art non-examinable and given free play as a creative activity. The movement that led to the teaching of art history and appreciation in the schools had its origins in the dissatisfaction of a group of teachers strongly opposed to the educational conservatism of the 1930s.

The leader of this group was Frances Derham, an artist and independent teacher who had studied under George Bell and was on contact with Arthur Lismer in Toronto, Marion Richardson in England and Professor Cizek in Vienna.

Shortly after Professor Joseph Burke arrived in 1947 to take up the Herald Chair of Fine Arts she suggested that the University should set up a committee of enquiry into art education in the schools. Gordon Thomson, later Deputy Director of the National Gallery but then an art inspector with the Department of Education agreed to act as honorary secretary. Copies of school curricula and syllabuses were sent overseas, and it was as a result of a letter from Sir Herbert Read, whose ideas on art education Thomson particularly admired, that Victoria became the first educational authority in the Commonwealth to abolish set examinations in art, apart from tests in manual skills required for technical qualifications.

Official action was taken through the Arts and Crafts Standing Committee of the Schools Board, which successfully recommended to the University the recognition of art as a matriculation subject and the appreciation of art as a paper separate from the assessment of portfolios of creative work. Through these papers it was possible to 'expose' the young to contemporary industrial design and architecture as well as painting and sculpture by providing rich illustrative material for classroom discussion, and arranging visits to buildings and displays of industrial design as well as art galleries.

2/...



An important influence both on the Schools Board and through the Council of Adult Education was Ludwig Hirschfeld-Mack, who devoted his life in Australia to carrying out the ideals of the Bauhaus in education. His belief in the role of the crafts in education was helped by a strong tradition of Swedish Sloyd in Australia.

The Herald Chair of Fine Arts, founded in 1946, was modelled on the Slade Chairs at Oxford and Cambridge, but with stronger emphasis on community services, which included initiating or supporting the Australian Council for Industrial Design, the Australian Society of Collectors, the Australian Society of Industrial Designers, the National Trust of Victoria (with Sir Daryl Lindsay), the National Gallery Society of Victoria, the Victorian Association of Art Teachers, and the Australian Society for Education through art, of which Professor Burke was foundation President. Regular courses of instruction and the establishment of a discipline in art history were expressly prohibited under the terms of the appointment. Professor Burke successfully negotiated with the donors permission to found a Department of Art History, provided all funds were provided by the University and his own involvement confined to the launching period. In 1948 he invited Franz Philipp, a former pupil of Valius von Schlosser in Vienna, to become the architect of the Department. Philipp, an inspired teacher who continued to attract brilliant students until his untimely death in 1972, first secured the assistance of Dr Hoff and in 1955 recommended Bernard Smith, who built up a strong school in Australian art history in Melbourne before being appointed to the first Chair of Art History and Directorship of the Power Institute in Sydney in 1967. This was followed by the Chair of Art History at LaTrobe University (1972) and the Chair of Visual Arts at Monash in 1975. Today the subject is taught at Flinders University in South Australia, the University of Queensland and the Australian National University. The most remarkable of all the developments in Victoria

3/...

has been the national influence of the Melbourne school of art history, which was a by-product not foreseen or intended by the founders of the Herald Chair. Only at Monash, where Professor Patrick McCairghy brought his experience in planning the Visual Arts Board for the Federal Government, have aims as wide as those of the Herald Chair been incorporated, although it may be fairly said that all the Departments of Art History so far established have carried on a tradition of community involvement. Professor Peter Tomory at LaTrobe has been particularly active in inviting art historians and stimulating scholarly publication.

For further information the student is referred to Education through Art in Australia, edited by Bernard Smith (Melbourne University Press 1958) and the authoritative study of art education in Victoria by Geoffrey Hammond, Changes in Art Education Ideology, Victoria, 1860s to mid 1970s, Ph.D thesis, Monash University, 1978.