

## Preface

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As always, the NASAD self-study provides an occasion for a degree of institutional introspection, and this year the Art School is in the fortunate position of being able to conduct this with extraordinary depth. Several years ago the Getty Trust announced an ambitious, multi-year project to examine the history of art making and presentation in Southern California from 1945-1980. Intended to include research from all the major art institutions in the region, *Pacific Standard Time* was a generously funded endeavor to understand the significant contributions and particularities of the artists, art schools, museums and non-profit presenting organizations in Los Angeles and the northern reaches of Orange County. The Art School and the gallery at Redcat were invited to participate, and, using a two-year advanced seminar as research tool, presented *The Experimental Impulse* in late 2011. Both the seminar and the exhibit focused on the range of alternative strategies informing art world thinking in the 1970s, from boundary-crossing new genres like performance and conceptual practices, to new forms made possible by new technologies like video and early digital media, to the insistent demand for change in organizational and curricular structure to reflect the needs of previously disenfranchised groups. The bulk of our research concerned the formation and early years of CalArts, and we came to recognize, with a fair degree of pride, how deep is our commitment to a progressive and dynamic form of art education that is student-focused, professionally oriented, and always open to reconsideration.

The Art School today is the successor to two separate schools in the original 1970 line up at CalArts: The School of Art and The School of Design. Elements of the DNA of both still inform the aspirations and behaviors of the School. The original art faculty – including the likes of John Baldessari, Allan Kaprow, and Nam June Paik – were deeply invested in rethinking the very nature of art, and took the opportunity offered by this new interdisciplinary institute to rethink the way that art could be taught. Understanding that art was no longer medium specific, they did away with the old categories like painting and sculpture, and insisted that the students consider first what they wanted to say, and then address how they would say it. Recognizing that this was more challenging than anything students would encounter in a more traditional art school, they created a mentoring program that would encourage the students to think of themselves as artists, and help them develop the course of study that would best help them achieve their stated goals. And, most radically, accepting that nobody can predict the future of art, they insisted on a teaching environment and classroom structure that would eschew expectation in favor of indeterminacy and ambiguity. The faculty of the Design School were equally experimental in their approach, but with a greater focus on the social. Under the aegis of Buckminster Fuller they were interested in designing and building new living and working environments, from temporary tent cities to easily constructed modular furniture. They too emphasized the parallel imperatives of rethinking basic practice, and being open to resulting outcomes. Both Schools understood themselves to be both radically political in their social outlook, and radically

practical, in their determination to engage their students productively and proactively with the professional worlds of art and design.

The first five to ten years at CalArts were tempestuous; experimentation is difficult and often dangerous to the careers of those who try to live by it. But these years were also highly productive, and CalArts faculty and alumni made important contributions to the development of art and design both locally and internationally. It was here that a feminist art project was first fully articulated, and the first feminist art journal, *Chrysalis* was designed and published by Sheila de Bretteville. It was artists working here – from Baldessari and Robert Cummings to their students James Welling and James Casebere – who definitively insisted that photography was an art form. It was here that both the Pictures Generation – Barbara Bloom Jack Goldstein, Matt Mullican, David Salle - and their immediate successors like Mike Kelley and Steven Prina, came of age. During the 80s the School, now Art&Design, became more stable, although the Institute's finances remained uncertain. What was not was the centrality of the School to the ongoing developments in the field, from the move into digital design to the investigation of more politically inflected practices like documentary and institutional critique.

For the past 20 plus years both the Institute and the School have been remarkably stable, while remaining dynamic and actively participatory in the wider culture. The president of the college has been in place for over 23 years, the dean of the school for over 21; there are still some faculty from the 70s and 80s, but there have also been new hires and new programs. During this time the school has steadily grown, adding studio spaces, facilities and students – enrollment during these past few difficult years has actually grown. Our work has continued to impact the larger culture, our alumni are omnipresent in every aspect of contemporary art and design, making innovative work, changing perceptions and paradigms, changing everything. We are proud of what these young artists and designers continue to do, and convinced that our particular pedagogical approach accounts for their success. The following report outlines where we are now, and, towards the end, presents some strategies for moving ever productively forward.

### Section III: Summary

Nothing ever stands still at CalArts, and the past five years have seen extraordinary improvements in the school's infrastructure. Responding to increased enrollment in the GD graduate program as a result of a curricular shift that created a new three year program for qualified students who lacked specific training in design fields, a new graduate studio in Graphic Design was created in ??, from space cooperatively and collaboratively given over by the Art Program. Following an Institute decision to reallocate space to enable the Dance School to do its work more effectively, this past year a new building, housing a studio classroom and 16 studio spaces for upper level undergraduates was opened, reaffirming the Art program's commitment to providing top quality working space to all students. This in turn allowed us to renovate old space to create a new collaborative studio space for Art & Technology graduate students and a new presentation space/classroom for the Center for Integrated Media. In moving things around we were also able to provide more studio space for undergraduates in Photography and Media, fulfilling a long felt need.

All four programs in the School of Art are strong, working to deliver productive, forward looking and adventurous artists and designers -- the art of the future. As exemplars of this success we can point to the fact that recent graduates have won extraordinary recognition for their work: Designers Scott Barry and Neel Doshi won a Creative Capital grant this year, photographer Karolina Karlic was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship in 2011, the year after she graduated, painter Patricia Fernandez was awarded a Joan Mitchell Fellowship on her graduation in 2010. Mariechen Danz and Liz Glynn, who both participated in the IM concentration before it developed in part into the Art and Technology program, were featured in the New Museum's 2009 survey of new art, *Younger than Jesus*. That same year an extraordinary total of 17 artists featured in the Whitney Biennial were associated with CalArts. Separately three earlier alumni, Edgar Arceneaux, Andrea Bowers and Rodney McMillian were awarded the prestigious United States Artists Fellowship. Faculty have also continued to achieve significant recognition: Charles Gaines was included in the 2007 Venice Biennale, and also won a United States Artists Fellowship, Martin Kersels, Thomas Lawson, and Shirley Tse have all been awarded Guggenheim Fellowships in recent years, and this year Allan Sekula was just presented the Lifetime Achievement in Writing on Art Award by the College Art Association, and Sam Durant is preparing a significant new work for Documenta 13 in Germany.

The School's reach into the world is an important part of its identity; this is a community of artists working to shape the present and future of the visual and performing arts. Ten years ago we were give the opportunity to expand this side of our work, into the non-curricular but still significantly pedagogical area of public presentation. The theatre and gallery at Redcat in Downtown Los Angeles have both proved extraordinarily successful in giving a much larger audience a clear picture of how we make art at CalArts, and how we think about it. Although it was constituted

and remains a separate entity, run by a professional curatorial staff, the gallery at Redcat has given rare opportunities to both faculty and alumni to present ambitious works to the public, works which in turn have proved to be highly charged teaching vehicles. Likewise with East of Borneo, the online magazine and archive begun two years ago, and now viewed by thousands of readers around the world – a forum for investigating the state of art now, here in Los Angeles. Again a vehicle for faculty and alumni research, and also, given the growing archive of material on the art of Los Angeles, a potent teaching tool.

The School face significant challenges in the coming year; the larger economy here in California as well as nationally, insures that. Everyone in higher education understands the dangers present in the confluence of rising tuition and student debt load, and the parallel tracks of enrollment growth and budget cuts are now par for the course. Despite the grim economy our applications have been higher than ever these past three years, and accordingly our enrollment has grown. While this has been good for the bottom line, it has put considerable pressure on staff, faculty and space. The benefits of new space have already been put to the test by increased numbers. These numbers also make required budget cuts that much more difficult to effect, although the reality of cuts does mean that each program finds itself with a compelling reason to reconsider aspects of the curriculum that need fine-tuning. The recent changes in the peer review process, now focusing more directly on curricular development, provides a useful context for this discussion.

Despite cuts and resultant reformations we are also looking at various opportunities. We have a search on going for a junior position in the Art & Technology program, and will launch a search for a painter in the summer. Graphic Design is using the circumstance of losing adjunct positions to consolidate various part-time positions into a new full-time hire. These changes inevitably put productive pressure on the current curriculum, not least because they open the door to greater diversity at the faculty level. (CalArts as a whole has done well in terms of recruiting students from diverse backgrounds, but despite real progress still has a way to go in diversifying the faculty).

The longtime stability referenced at the beginning of this report is also a harbinger of change. Long-serving faculty are now entering the phase of life in which retirement becomes a reality, and the dean will most likely not be still in place by the next re-accreditation cycle. It is time to begin thinking about succession. Until now the dean of the school has always been a practicing artist or writer who spends considerable amount of time teaching. The benefit of this broad based approach is that the leadership knows well what it is to be an artist and knows the current field, and by teaching, knows the student body and their interests and concerns. The increased demand for accountability from students, their parents, the politicians who represent them, and the accrediting agencies conspires to make the job of administering an art school more bureaucratic and time consuming than in the past,

and future deans are likely going to be less able to inhabit the larger profile. This will have consequences for the nature of the school that will need to be discussed and understood by everyone going forward. In a similar vein, the duties of the Program Directors have changed, and our proud tradition of collective governance, with directorship shared on a more or less revolving basis, may not be sustainable going forward. We may well need to consider hiring individuals with specific leadership traits rather than extensive careers or teaching abilities. This would be a huge change in our culture and it will be important to work together in finding the right balance.

The more immediate work of the next few years concerns further reconfiguration of workspace and curriculum to more fully answer the changing needs of a growing student body. We are already at capacity in the undergraduate program in Graphic Design, but applications are up, and it may well be worth finding more space and salary money to take advantage of this potential for growth. The faculty in Photography and Media must continue the discussion about the implications for their area as digital photographic imagery becomes ever more pervasive and accessible; how does the curriculum change, and what kind of studio becomes necessary to serve it? The Art Program has begun to rethink the Foundation year, incorporating new research into learning habits as they restructure both the teaching methodology and timetable, but also the space inhabited by the students. This rethinking of Foundation also meshes with an Institute-wide initiative to improve undergraduate instruction in both reading and writing – two basic skills often left inadequately taught in high schools under pressure to teach to the unfortunate tests mandated by No Child Left Behind. At the Graduate level we need to consider ways to grow and expand both Motion Graphics and the Art & technology areas, both to maintain position as advanced producers, and also to fulfill student demand.

CalArts has always seen itself as more than a simple art school; its mission is larger than that, for it sees itself as an Institution that actively shapes the national and international discourse on the arts, through the work of its faculty and alumni, even, on occasion, its students. There is always more to be done in terms of promoting that work, from improving faculty development opportunities to forging a tighter relationship with the gallery at Redcat, to expanding the global outreach of East of Borneo, to developing more complex, project-based exchanges with like-minded institutions in this country and abroad. History has shown us that in the modern era the arts often thrive in periods of economic trouble, and our research on the early years at CalArts certainly confirm that. We are undoubtedly facing some difficult years ahead on the economic front, but it is an exciting and productive time for artists and those who would learn to be artists. The Art School at CalArts is well equipped to take up that challenge.

## Q. Overview, Summary Assessment, and Recommendations for the Program

### 1. Strengths

- A caring and engaged Board of Trustees
- Stable, continuous, and dedicated executive leadership
- Excellent and experienced staff
- Visionary leadership in the School of Art which enjoys the trust of the faculty
- Extraordinary faculty who are both committed educators and nationally recognized for their leadership in their respective disciplines
- An educational program that in form and practice appears wholly aligned with the institution's unique, historic mission
- Excellent physical environment and resources that support a wide-range of traditional and contemporary studio practices
- Highly selective student body that is mutually supportive and fully engaged in deep personal learning and development
- Excellent collaborative/cooperative/community experiences
- Study abroad opportunities
- Excellent lines of communication among students, faculty and administration
- Responsiveness of library to faculty and student needs
- Productive mentor/student learning assessment mechanisms and feedback loops

### 2. Recommendations for Short-term Improvement

The visitors support the institution's commitment to engaging the community in the formulation of a new strategic plan.

### 3. Primary Futures Issues

CalArts and the School of Art within face futures issues shared by all independent, tuition dependent professional colleges of the arts. Continued consumer aversion to the comparatively high cost of private education and the acquisition of debt, increased emphasis on the ability of higher education to result in jobs, changing demographics, new sources of competition, and a more challenging fund-raising environment resulting in even greater tuition dependency are concerns shared within the independent art school community. As noted in the section on Evaluation, Planning, and Projections, the various levels of the CalArts Community demonstrate a complimentary awareness of the challenges these considerations place on their respective role in supporting the institution's mission. The excellence of CalArt's leadership and faculty and their shared commitment to the institution's unique mission should be considered important assets as it explores strategies for responding to these drivers from the external environment.