



Professor John Dewar AO
Vice-Chancellor
La Trobe University
MELBOURNE VIC 3086
November 25, 2020

Dear Professor Dewar

The Art Association of Australia New Zealand (AAANZ) offers its strong support to the Visual Arts program and the Visual Cultures major at La Trobe University. Now facing major challenges due to the University's restructuring plans, Visual Arts and Visual Cultures are successful and distinctive units which make an important contribution to research and education in this region. It is therefore essential that they are resourced to continue and thrive as we enter the recovery phase after the unprecedented health and economic downturn that has transformed our society during 2020. This is even more important given the regrettable decision to drop major disciplinary programs at La Trobe including those in Art History, Screen, and Theatre.

La Trobe University has a proud tradition of supporting higher education in both greater Melbourne and regional Victoria, providing access to large numbers of students, many of whom are the first in family to attend university and includes a significant cohort of low SES students. Under the challenging circumstances of the recent financial downturn, the University is to be commended for keeping Visual Arts at the Bendigo campus as a new dedicated degree. However, the Association is concerned about potential cuts to staff and resourcing of this program, and of the new Visual Cultures major, as the University looks to organisational restructures in 2021.

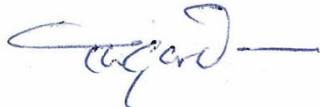
Visual Arts at La Trobe is a distinctive regional studio program, with a significant postgraduate cohort, which has a long history of serving the central Victorian regional arts community. The program has set up partnerships with regional art sector organisations including the Bendigo Art Gallery, the Castlemaine Art Museum, and takes part in notable events such as White Night Bendigo. Importantly the program has a strong research performance which has grown steadily since a restructure in 2016. The Association therefore strongly urges the University to retain existing staff as it moves forward next year in order to ensure that the program keeps its distinctive and thriving research, engagement, and teaching culture.

Similarly, the Visual Cultures major in the new Bachelor of Arts at Bundoora is an innovative, interdisciplinary major forming part of the new exploratory model bachelor's degree. It is unique in Australia for emphasising the importance of visual culture across historical and contemporary

art and media. Designed to be compatible with other majors taught at La Trobe such as History, Gender Studies, English, and Classics, it is creating a graduate cohort with transferable skills and high employability within the galleries, libraries, and museums industry sector. The major includes several subjects taught in collaboration with such major institutions as National Gallery of Victoria and the Bendigo Art Gallery. The Association for these reasons strongly recommends that the Visual Cultures major at La Trobe be retained in order to continue the ground-breaking efforts of staff in the major to transform teaching and learning in the higher education sector, and provide a stream of skilled graduates who can find their way in the burgeoning GLAM sector in this country.

Given La Trobe's long history of nurturing teaching, learning, and research in the Visual Arts and Visual Cultures disciplines, and the long-term trajectory of growth in the related industry sectors, the Association argues that only by supporting and retaining the staff in Visual Arts and Visual Cultures at La Trobe the University will retain its current position as a leading institutional contributor to our nation's cultural industries.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Wendy Garden', followed by a horizontal line.

Dr Wendy Garden

PRESIDENT, ART ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA & NEW ZEALAND