Body of work

Activity 5: What is a body of work?

The purpose of the activity is to:

- identify what constitutes a body of work

Questions:

- What constitutes a body of work? (a) number of items (b) breadth.
- When should a student start a body of work in the senior courses?
- Will a student be penalised if they submitted body of work comprises examples of weaker work?
- What is the function of the V.A.P.D. in relation to a body of work?
- Can a body of work comprise components representing different forms/concepts etc?
- How does a body of work achieve conceptual strength and meaning?
- What is the role of the conceptual framework, the frames and practice in students’ development of a body of work?
The body of work

Students should be encouraged to explore a concept, topic or theme. They should experiment with a variety of techniques and forms, refining the concept as they progress (material and conceptual practice).

Students should regularly evaluate their own work and evaluation should also occur between the student and teacher. At this time teachers could refer students to sources of ideas, themes or examples and teachers might provide feedback in the VAPD (including a dated record). The evaluation process has the potential of leading students to new directions, deeper investigation or greater refinement of the work.

Students might be encouraged to investigate the work of other artists whose practice is similar to their own. In this way students learn that most artists explore an idea in depth producing a connected body of work (often over a lifetime) rather than disassociated individual works. Understanding the notion of a ‘body of work’ requires an understanding of artists’ practice.

The frames provide interpretations of and insight into the practice of artists and students’ works. The conceptual framework offers a basis for making judgements about a body of work; questions about audience response, how aspects of the world are represented and what/how the artworks are communicating to an audience.
As students gain confidence in evaluating their work and concepts they will become increasingly autonomous. The reinvestigation and evaluation of the concept implicit in the making of the body of work has the potential of refining and enhancing technical skill and understanding.

Selection for the final submitted work should engender the same process of negotiation and discussion between student and teacher as the evaluation process. It is important that students understand that the body of work should display the students’ intention and technical refinement and that it projects a coherent point of view.
Should the student choose to develop a body of work using a series approach it is important that each individual work in the series should exhibit a relationship to all others. The works could be related by concept or theme but engage a range of forms, or conversely, a variety of subjects or themes might be explored within the one form. However should the student choose to present only one work that work must convincingly provide evidence of sustained investigations with materials and ideas that, over time, have contributed to the conceptual strength and meaning of the work.

Below is an example of one work titled “Try Our Vacuum” by Maria-Davina Sirpis that could constitute a body of work.

At all times all experimentation should be kept, dated, and documented in the VAPD (including changes of direction and failed experimentation) as this may be called on by HSC markers to substantiate the processes and depth of the work.

The submitted body of work should not include exploratory sketches. All items should be the result of experimentations. It could be that some works are not as strong conceptually or in relation to technical accomplishment as other items. The selection of components for submission should be a learned skill that the student has developed with the aid of the teacher. Students should have an understanding of audience response and curatorial and art critical issues as a product of having studied content. Exercising discrimination in selection of submitted works already takes place with series or multiples of work in the present syllabus.

It must be remembered that the body of work has, in part, derived from the present propensity for submission of multiple works in several categories.

The requirements for each category of submitted works on pp. 32–33 of the syllabus are much the same as present requirements for submitted works, indicating that the anticipated numbers, sizes, multiples and forms of work will not radically change with the new syllabus.
The Body of Work: A network of related investigations

Conceptual strength and meaning – Technical refinement – Coherent point of view.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Works produced</th>
<th>Intentions as artists</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>over time</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Their own</td>
<td>Increasing <em>sophistication</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>practice</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Increasing</td>
<td>Practical and theoretical understanding of art making (the <em>frames</em> and <em>conceptual framework</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>autonomy</em></td>
<td></td>
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Production of a body of work should be an outcome of practice as opposed to a set task. Students should be encouraged, at the outset of the Preliminary course, to ‘sustain intentions’. A body of work should be the sum of art making in the senior syllabus.

The collection of work “Fish” by Polly Staniford, which was examined in Section 1A, could represent a body of work.
Activity 6: A group body of work

The purpose of this activity is to:

- broaden ideas about the possibilities for group works
- address the aim of valuing art
- consider ways to depict sites

In this next example, which is a collection of works, there is a network of related investigations; in this case, the subject that is represented is the link between works. It is a group work that responds to a site. In this case the group was 18 Creative Arts consultants and the site was Arthur Boyd’s property, ‘Bundanon’.
These works represent three of the thirteen works produced. They comprise a body of work generated by a group with a common purpose.

Only two members of the group had trained as Visual Arts teachers. Many did not have a lot of confidence in their abilities in relation to art making and worked in pairs on their work.

Participants were requested to collect material from the site and arrange it to represent their response and interpretation of the site. They discussed aesthetic judgement when collecting and selecting and arranging materials. They had already explored the history of the site. What frames have so far been addressed?

From the beginning participants were aware of evaluating their work in relation to audience response.

Each pair were provided with a timber frame with a back and perspex sheets within which to arrange their response. Other materials – crayons, pencils, paint – were also used to work into the composition. Participant’s were requested to insert a hidden message in the work that registered their response to the site.
This type of activity is particularly appropriate for a beginning year 11 group with a wide range of ability and a number of students taking visual arts as a new subject. They are introduced to an activity requiring aesthetic judgement, while avoiding the self expectation of being able to draw or paint realistically.

The prepared encasements of the works ensured a polish to finished products suitable for hanging or group exhibition.

This activity engendered a positive attitude to a group ‘body of work’ and encouraged a valuing of their colleagues’ works. All participants felt very positive towards the activity and their own artworks.