

COPY

National Art School

Master of Fine Art

Candidate: Gary Deirmendjian

Examiner: Dr Peter Hill

The Examination

It has been a real pleasure examining this significant body of work. I am delighted to recommend that it be passed as “Research Satisfactory” (RS), with no changes or alterations necessary.

Background

Long before I was invited to examine this candidate I saw his work *fallen temple* in the Helen Lempriere National Sculpture Award, and I remember thinking that had I been the judge I would have picked this as the winner. I was curious about his work and wanted to learn more, so am very grateful for this opportunity to examine. I should say that I have never met the candidate (although I would like to in future) so there is no conflict of interest in me examining him.

The Creative Research and the Dissertation

It is often said that in research by higher degree the candidate is providing the examiner with the missing piece of the jigsaw puzzle – that tiny piece of new knowledge – that separates research from course work. This candidate starts by giving us a brief description of the whole jigsaw – the macrocosmic and the microcosmic – and weds this to his whole family history and personal memories and reflections. Had it stopped there this would have been problematic. However, we soon zoom in – metaphorically changing

from the telescope to the microscope – and are introduced to the artists and theorists (both contemporary and historical) who have influenced his work. These included the Ring of Brogar and ancient Greek sculpture at one extreme and Brancusi, Gormley, Gombrich, Berger, and Krauss at the other.

I was a little worried at first that there was no “conclusion” to the dissertation and, since higher degrees are technically an “exercise” to show that candidates have mastered the necessary research skills this seemed to be an important element that was missing.

However, on a close reading of the text I realised that the whole dissertation is in fact a “conclusion” to a life-long series of problems and questions and am happy to accept it as such.

The general tone of the dissertation was discursive so my response to it must be necessarily so. I particularly liked the candidate’s use of “gymnastics” and “classical ballet” as ways to describe his methodology, but finding neither suitable settled on the term “flamenco” an apt synthesis that introduces the emotional and flamboyant to the equation. In terms of material – and to an extent metaphor – I also think mud has become for him what fat and felt were to Joseph Beuys.

It is out of the above personal awarenesses that the candidate has produced the necessary “new knowledge”, or at least a “new personal knowledge” that makes the award of the degree entirely appropriate. But he goes further. His best work *fallen temple* uses neither mud nor metaphor in its bold physical presence. (dig a little deeper, literally, and there is of course mud and metaphor, but these are at best secondary elements).

There is an ambition to this work that is often talked about in artists’ bars but seldom realised in actuality – and here I think of Damien Hirst’s better pieces, of Christo’s on-

going projects, and of the Sistine Chapel that Michelangelo (mentioned as a strong childhood influence in the dissertation) painted when in his thirties.

Two Suggestions

Most of the physical artworks presented in this submission I would place firmly at the high end of a Master of Fine Arts degree. Had the dissertation been expanded into an exegesis and had it contained more critical analysis I would have been happy to award a PhD for the major work *fallen temple*. With this in mind I would like to suggest that the candidate thinks about building on this work and at some point – maybe not straight away – contemplates a PhD by project. The candidate is so obviously such an exceptional artist that we would not want him distracted too much by “text” so the exegesis model would be perfect. One of several places I could recommend is RMIT in Melbourne where such a degree can also be done by distance (ie, he could still live in Sydney).

Secondly, I think the candidate needs to move away from being over-influenced by Gormley and I felt the success of *fallen temple* was the fact that it did not seem influenced by other artists but had arisen fresh from the candidate’s own imagination. In my own area of Superfictions I often say that through creating a fiction one can set oneself a big project, even if there is no money yet to realise it. In the same way that a young architect can still design plans for monumental buildings even when they are still junior partners in an architectural practice. I would suggest the candidate looks closely at the half dozen or so monumental works that have been made for the Tate Modern’s Turbine Hall in London by artists as varied as Rachel Whiteread and Louise Bourgeois, and that he then goes on to draw up a blueprint for what he would do in that space. Imagine money is no object and you have all the technical help you desire. Afterwards,

you may even submit it to Sir Nicholas Serota at Tate Modern, and if he isn't interested there are now over 200 biennales of art around the world, each looking for major works. I would like to finish by congratulating the candidate and his supervisors - Geoff Ireland and Ron Robertson-Swann – on an excellent submission. As I said at the beginning, it was a real pleasure to examine.

Dr Peter Hill

17/12/06