

# Research in the ERA era

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# Global challenges

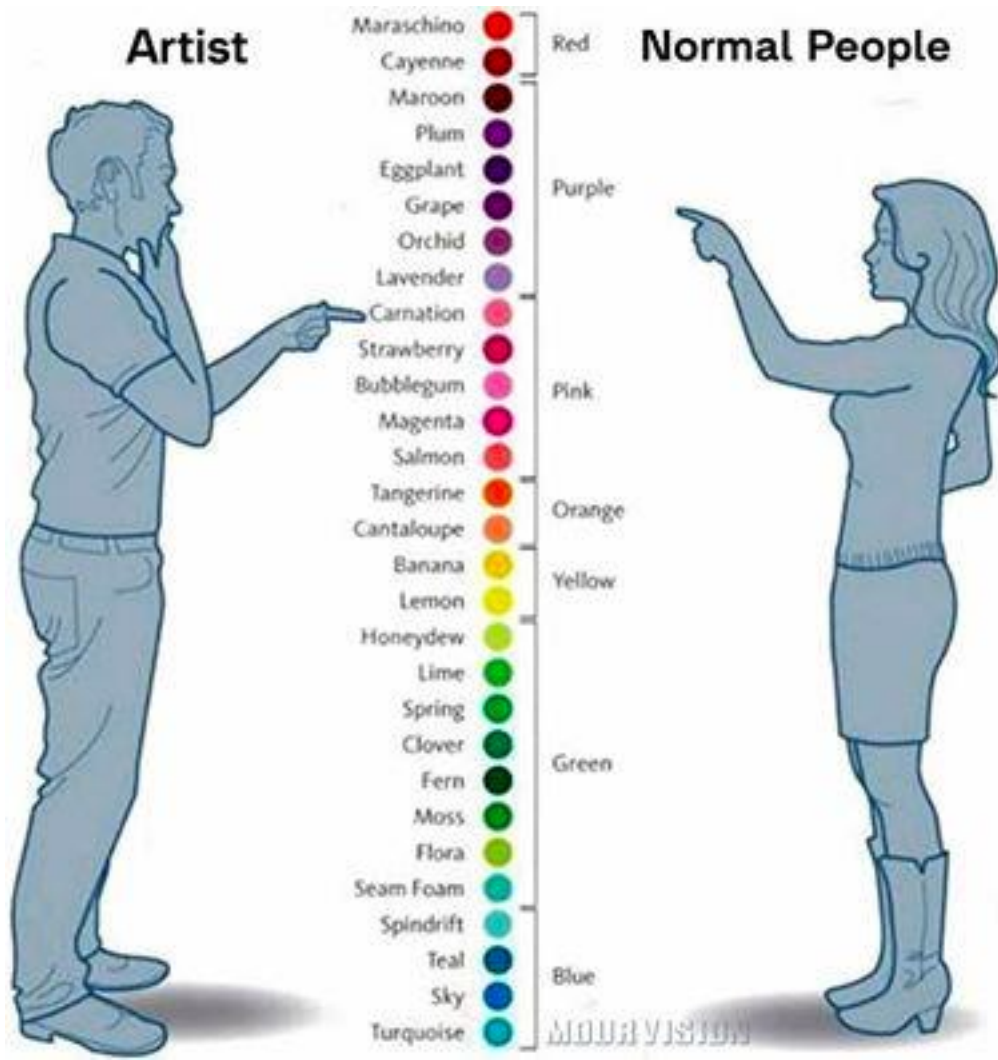
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De-regulated fees & a marketised sector

The pressure of STEM

Graduate Futures and Careers

Recruitment and sustainability



# Bob and Roberta Smith



Bob and Roberta Smith; Apollo Magazine  
[Creative schools: artists taking art education into their own hands](#)

# The global spread

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2001 RAE UK

2008 RAE UK (Panel Chair)

2002-03 Research Capability Fund

2000-06 Arts and Humanities Research Council

2004 Roberts Scheme - 500 Fellowships Panel

2009 Romania RAE

2011-12 PBRF New Zealand

2013-14 Hong Kong RAE (Panel Chair)



大學教育資助委員會  
University Grants Committee





# How they are different..

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**Hong Kong:** a 2<sup>nd</sup> serious *RAE* attempt at international scrutiny against diverse cost centres; 13 main panels; quality profiles, 25% of \$5.6<sub>bn</sub>

**UK:** mature 5<sup>th</sup> iteration, producing quality profiles, abandoned esteem, gained impact; potential £1.5<sub>bn</sub>

**Romania:** EU sanctioned light touch audit and visits

**NZ:** deep dive arriving at individual / status score.



# UK research is very concentrated

## Assessment funds (QR)

- Four unis receive 29% of all research funds
- 10 unis receive 50% of all research funds
- 23 unis receive 75% of HEFCE research funds
- Humanities & Arts relies heavily on QR

## Research Council funding

- Three unis receive 25% of Research Council funding
- Eight unis receive 50% of Research Council funding
- 18 unis receive 75% of Research Council funding
- Some subjects receive little from research councils, eg Law, music

# ...and yet very similar

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Creative Arts, Performing Arts, Design, Media – ‘a sector feels under siege... an immature sector being unfairly compared and measured...’

It is a dynamic sector with few proxy measures; it rejects conventional metrics

It is a sector where impact or dissemination is easily confused for esteem, and where evidence trails are weak... HDR is also relatively immature

# ...with similar evaluations

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Most schemes use 'indicators of excellence' –  
**Significance, Originality, Rigour**

Peer review ensures that 'scoring' stays true to the core academic discipline [unlike STEM: 3 decimal points, or 'paradigm shifting' expectations]

There are tensions between 'world-leading', 'world standing'- growing issues over the role of the 'user'

A leaning towards text, 'primacy of the hardback'...

# Subject spreading?

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For example – ‘Art’ can cover:

Art, artefacts, applied arts, animation, buildings, artefacts, crafts, ceramics, designs, installations, sculpture, software, **sonic arts**, music technology, media, cinema, patents, papers, texts, television, design history, licenses, policy papers, and so on, and so on...

# with permeable edges

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Architecture blurs into Built environment

Digital media .... computer science

Art history .... Social sciences

Textiles technologies... micro-electronics

CG animation ... computing

# What's in common?

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What was the **contribution** to knowledge?

What makes it distinct from existing research work?

If it is practice-led enquiry, how have you used the scholarly infrastructure to develop the work, disseminate the findings, moved the debate?

What was the nature of the original investigation or the enquiry: its critical characteristics; its hypotheses; what are the questions, aims and objectives?

# In the public domain...

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Can it be accessed, seen, visited, heard, or reviewed either in itself or through a comprehensive record of the event, activity, installation etc?

Can it be 're-visited' by those in the field who may want to find out more about what was done, why it was done, using which methods and approaches, and the eventual outcome. How do other people know about it?

Can **future generations** of researchers access the new knowledge, interrogate and employ it?

# Peer review and scrutiny?

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Was the output: subject to some form of rigorous quality assurance through [peer review](#)?

Has it been awarded a research council grant, a peer-reviewed award, some form of selective funding?

How was the work selected and how rigorous was that process of selection?

Can the panel apply the same rigour to commissions, exhibitions, artifacts, broadcasts, official reports, policy papers, patents, etc.



# Impact and Afterlife?

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Was it reviewed, awarded prizes, trophies, merits or other indicators of esteem?

Was there any recognisable impact or evidence of influence? Why is it important to other people? How do we know this?

How measured? Repeat business, sales, website hits, print runs, future commissions, etc.

‘Biblio-metrics’ ? Has the work been cited, reviewed, listed, drawn up as evidence, held as an exemplar by others in the field. **How well is this evidenced?**

# The expanded field

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“Every assessment scheme evidenced significant amounts of interdisciplinary practice, artist/curator projects and collaborations, installation, moving image, lens- and text-based work.”

“Larger submissions contained work that embraced many other disciplines : philosophy, critical theory, politics in fine art, English and creative writing, natural sciences, and computing.

*Is this domain drift or evolution?*

# Collaboration?

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“We saw considerable evidence of collaboration with science: fields of ecology and genetics; distinct crossovers between fine art and design, architecture and the built environment.

Everywhere: the enquiry into curatorial processes and histories has exponentially increased, especially in contemporary art and site-specific curating; this plays into urban design, community arts, engaged practices. *Hybrid academics?*

# The best design

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At its best, the design submitted for assessment

- establishes international standards,
- influences real world issues, was test-able
- helps effect behaviour change (in, for example, sustainability),
- invents new processes and materials,
- adds considerably to academic discourse about methods and rigour in design research.

# The 'worst' Fine Art

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Globally, some of the Fine Arts submitted for assessment:

- Was poorly evidenced
- Failed to identify the research content
- Did not shift the agenda forward
- Seemed disconnected to internal research groupings, Centres, axes of intellectual support

# Some notable gaps

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Fashion design in practice

Illustration and Graphic Design

Product design

Textile and craft practices

Communication design, typography

# Challenges

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Creating panels with sufficient bandwidth and range

Balancing peer review with proxy measures/ metrics

Clarifying definitions between advanced professional practice and research; between commission and patronage

Being clear that in research evaluation 'international' is not a geographical concept!



6,975 ROs



# Challenges: poor evidence

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“ In some submissions, more **care** could have been given to providing fuller evidence of the research process so as to give panel members the most **comprehensive** picture of how the output related to the field of enquiry, the questions that were being addressed and the overall articulation of the research context....”

*A mis-understanding of the use of the textual descriptor and the relative infancy of e-record systems [e-prints, Kultur, SuperNova, repositories].*

# Presenting the Evidence

... the challenge of assembling the portfolio

‘A physical or digital portfolio will be appropriate where an output and statement cannot fully represent the research dimensions. It must be sufficiently substantial to ‘constitute evidence which will allow sub-panel members to access the research dimensions of the work.’ (2012,87,§71.c)

NZ = 4 + 30 + 30 + 30

HK & UK = 4 maximum

# Presenting the Evidence

Drafting the textual descriptor...

to enable panel members to properly assess a research output and assist them to ‘access fully the research dimensions of the work’ (2012,8,§71)

*Hyperbole, rhetorical claims, over-claiming... but also some retro-fitting, post-hoc rationalisation*

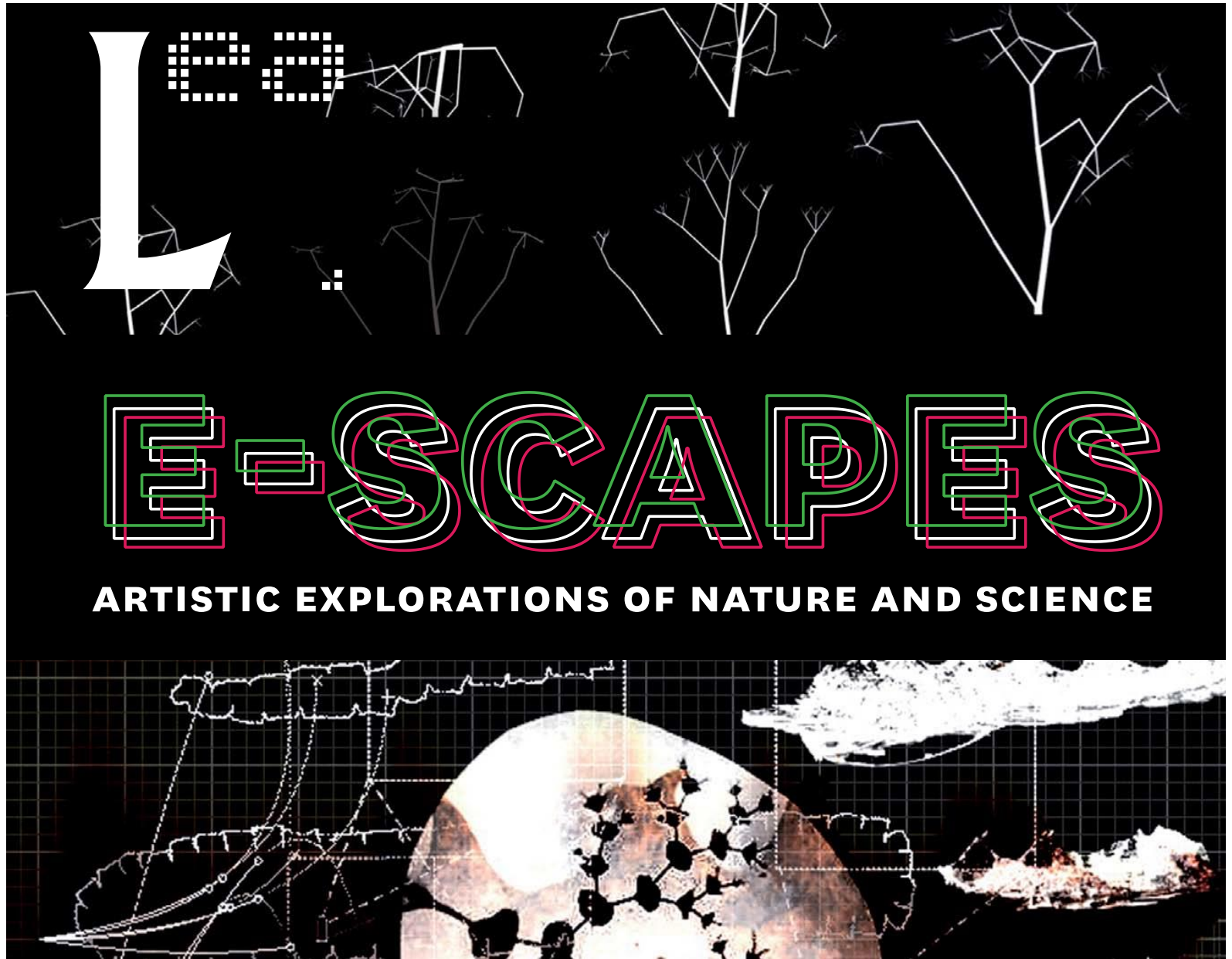
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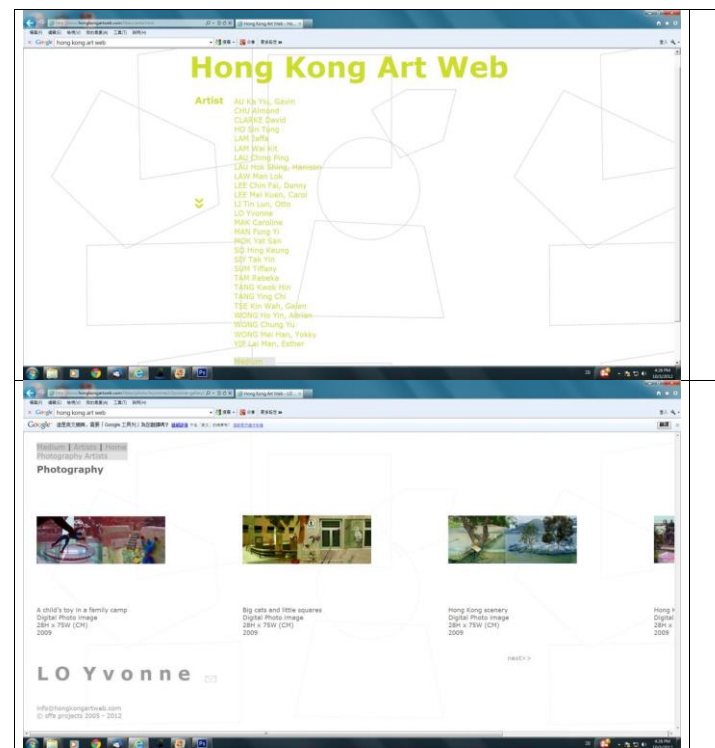
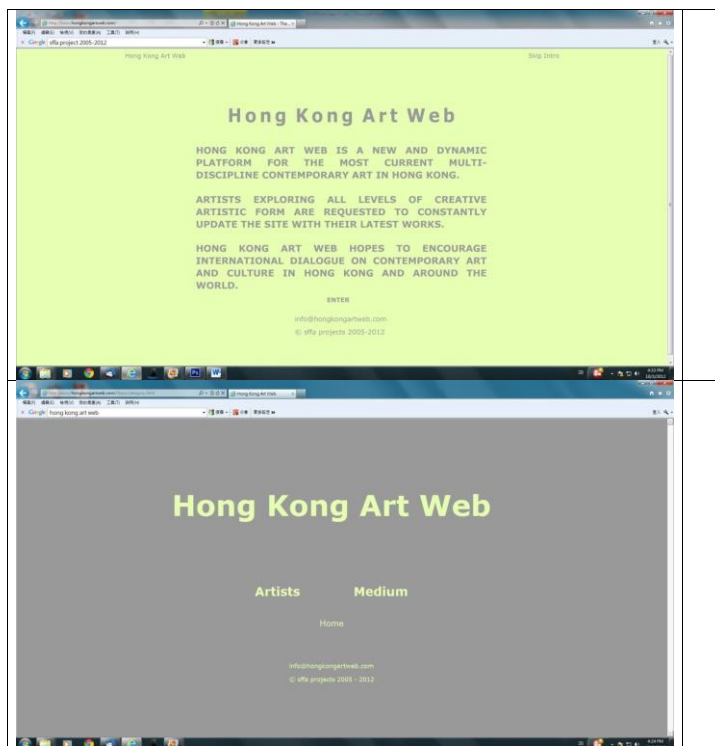
3. Artwork being selected and exhibit on line, joining the **sffa** project of the Hong Kong Art Web

Title: Family Work, 2009

Of which includes 4 prints and one photo installation work.

Invited participation to present works in Hong Kong Art Web, from 2008- present

Web site of Hong Kong Art Web, from 2005-2012



Schauplatz Natur

**DAS  
PARA-  
DIES  
IST**

**ANDERS**



# Challenges: impact of income

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“ ‘The panel took account of the impact of income, through large and small grants, as presented in individual submissions, in the context of specific departmental strategies, and was particularly interested in the relationship between inputs and outputs (of various sorts) rather than in inputs *per se*.’ .... It is evident that many larger grants produced little more than atomised outputs.”

Is there a sense of trajectory, a range of staffing, or all top end?  
Where is the staffing ‘shape’, where is succession?

# Income & environment

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“ Research income that had led to clearly demonstrable, high-quality research outcomes, and quantitative growth in research student activity that was clearly shown to be embedded in a vibrant postgraduate culture and to have led to fruitful doctoral and postdoctoral achievement, were rated especially highly....”

PhD / HDR environment – is a proxy for the health of the research eco-system.



# Research, practice, scholarship

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“ the panel saw considerable variety in levels of scholarship; occasionally compound ROs were presented as single RO ... a difficulty in accessing evidence of inquiry in some of the more traditional practices... and also in those aspects of design research that use practice as method....”

## Research through practice:

work conceived in a research context

## Practice-as-research

work conceived in other contexts and presented in a research framework

# Unclassified

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“ ... a percentage of outputs did not evidence research imperatives, either failing to meet the benchmark for national excellence in research, or failing to make accessible the research content within published professional practice. Much of the work that was deemed to be unclassified lacked evidence of critical and contextual framing, methodological clarity and scholarly rigour that might position its contribution as research.”

# Challenges

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“A welcome number of practice-as-research outputs were examined, and where accompanied by clear statements of the research contexts of the submission this was frequently very well received. In some instances, *where work had been developed in a professional context*, examination of outputs would have benefited from use of the opportunity to clarify their research contents...”

# Standing and esteem

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“ ... **art and design** researchers enjoy the highest standard of international acclaim and reputation... less detail on how individuals and departments had generated benefit, both recognition and influence was very well evidenced - from helping to shape national and international policy, to strong engagement with public bodies, galleries, museums, and industry, often on a global scale...

There is a very high % of ‘world leading activity’.

# RESEARCH EXCELLENCE FRAMEWORK







Thank you!