

# DDCA 2019 Leadership Forum and Tertiary Leaders Round Table

**Creative Arts Research Measurement and Assessment:  
does scale/scope matter?**

Prof Ross Woodrow

In this paper I'm addressing the first Question posed for discussion:

*What do the proven discrepancies between metrics-based measurement in STEM research and peer review assessments in the arts reveal, and what do we do to reach a more commensurate position across disciplines and across the sector?*

It will be three years before the next iteration of the ERA and who knows what form it might morph into, remembering that is, in 2009, after five years or more of discussion of the RQF, almost overnight it mutated into the ERA 2010 trial to the surprise of many. Creative arts and design were two of the discipline clusters chosen for the trial in 2010 since it was assumed these disciplines represented the complicated or difficult end of any scale for measurement of research or assessment of its quality.

This myth, that creative arts research is inherently problematic, persists despite ten years of an ERA process where NTROs have been subjected to a three-tiered peer-review process more rigorous than most editorial oversight using the singular process for refereed journal articles for example. (See my [NTRO: A Model for Change in NITRO August 11, 2016](#))

There is certainly no need for forced adaption or reinvention whatever profile the next ERA takes. Besides the ERA was not a necessary exercise to prove the legitimacy of creative arts research. I am old enough to remember the post-amalgamation period from 1992 to Feb.1997 when creative outputs in category "H" for design and "J" for visual art were recognized, counted in research quantum, and eligible outputs for ARC research grants. I was given one of the 16 or so ARC small project grants awarded in 1995 so obviously I remember it with fondness sharpened by the resentment of the thirteen years of exclusion that followed.

<https://www.rosswoodrow.com/bush-burial>

**BUSH BURIAL** (May/June 1996) Faculty of Art & Design Gallery, The University of Newcastle, Australia.  
Fully-funded with an ARC small project grant (\$8,820) under the "J" category of publication



## Appendix A: List of key NTRO decision makers in Australia

Readers of *NITRO* will know that in August 2018 the DASSH Associate Deans Research conducted a survey of 30 key NTRO decision makers in the 19 field “involved in scoring ERA submissions, assessing ARC applications and other forms of research assessment at the national level”.

The results have been published in *NITRO*

April 18, 2019

<https://nitro.edu.au/articles/2019/4/18/report-analysis-of-the-criteria-used-by-key-decision-makers-in-australia-to-judge-the-academic-quality-of-ntros>

I have given my assessment of the survey in *Business as Usual* in *NITRO* April 18, 2019:

<https://nitro.edu.au/articles/2019/4/18/business-as-usual>

And Jen Webb and Ross Gibson have also published their take on the survey. *Accounting for creative arts research* June 7 2019

<https://nitro.edu.au/articles/2019/6/7/accounting-for-creative-arts-research>

Name	Responded to say they would complete the survey?
Barwick, Linda	Yes
	No
	No
Brien, Donna Lee	Yes
Brophy, Kevin	Yes
Carlin, David	Yes
	No
	No
Ellison, Liz	Yes
Gibson, Ross	Yes
Gough, Paul	Yes
Groth, Helen	Yes
Gwilt, Ian	Yes
Harley, Ross	Yes
Hetherington, Paul	Yes
Holmes, Jonathan	Yes
Hope, Kat	Yes
Keating, Meg	Yes
Kerrigan, Susan	Yes
	No
Kroll, Jeri	Yes
Lester, Libby	Yes
Lidberg, Johan	Yes
Marsh, Kathy	Yes
McAuliffe, Chris	Yes
Meyrick, Julian	Yes
Millard, Kathryn	Yes
Miller, Sarah	Yes
	No
Richards, Ian	Yes
Sierra, Marie	Yes
Tait, Peta	Yes
Tolz, Joseph	Yes
	No
Webb, Jen	Yes
Wise, Kit	Yes
Woodrow, Ross	Yes

As flawed and misconceived as this survey was it is all we have to work with and indeed as noted in the published outcomes “this data can provide a starting point for the sector to continue discussions and develop more consensus about the importance of issues such as the scale of the NTRO, the importance of the success of the NTRO in the practice community, or **the presence of a strong academic research question in the research statement.**”

[Obviously, I will ignore this last mistaken mantra from commentators in discursive disciplines to give primacy to a propositional question in framing non-discursive research outputs]

I’ll focus on the wide range of opinion on the importance of scale of the NTRO in judging quality, and touch on the importance of success of a NTRO in the practice community. Without wrongly assuming (as those framing the survey do) that this is an easily identifiable distinction between academe and a practice community in many disciplines in the sector. In some disciplines, academe could be seen as the hub or nucleus of the associated industry.

To focus discussion, or sharpen your views, I want to present a three creative works for your consideration each chosen to highlight respectively; magnitude (dimensional scale), duration (in time-based work) and number (in a group of works or body of work). The survey demonstrated that many reviewers were from institutions that did not rank outputs on a granulated scale beyond one unit of value. An output was research or it wasn’t. A number of universities have the three divisions such a minor, major, significant or portfolio item, standard and major. Ultimately, peer-reviewers in the ERA are asked to rank the outputs on a granulated scale of value that will convert to the five-point ERA qualitative measures so this is something we need to resolve as a sector.

Most importantly, with the increasing use of the portfolio submission it is vital to have at least a minor/standard or other binary to capture on record the potential items for construction of a portfolio.

In some disciplines in the sector the first part of this binary might be interpreted to include professional practice. Certainly other disciplines are interpreting white papers and other government reports, that were once excluded as non-research practice, as perfect candidates for portfolios. Interpretation of a portfolio item spins on that key statement in the ARC definition outputs.

A portfolio is a collection of **research outputs** that institutions submit as a single NTRO. It is made up of **research outputs from the same underlying research endeavour that on their own may not meet the definition of research**, but when collected together have coherent research content. All items within the portfolio must fall within the ERA reference period.

If they are already “research outputs” [novel, creative, uncertain, systematic and transferable or reproducible] and accumulation can make them acceptable, it would be logical to assume this is an issue of magnitude as mirror of the hierarchical progressive division in discursive fields, for example: Letter or note, journal article, book. 0/1/5.

A working party (including Paul Draper from the Queensland Conservatorium, Trish Fitzsimons and Pat Laughren from Griffith Film School and me from Queensland College of Art) set up at Griffith in 2009/10 across all creative fields, established Professional Practice as a discrete category for classification and the Minor and Major research categories on the proposition that writing a symphony is a more significant enterprise than composing a ring tone and that generally a ten-second animation required less logistical coordination, if not cognitive input, than does the creation of a feature film or documentary. We also realised that beyond scale and duration the scope or reach of an output also plays a role in comparative judgements of importance across different works – the scale and/or editorial-quality of the audience, if you like. This was of course long before measures of engagement and impact were discussed by the ARC. And I’ll leave that area for Paul Gough to develop next.

Nevertheless, I should restate the obvious: the judgement to identify a creative output as a minor work can never be made on scale alone. For example, a small piece of jewellery, made by an Australian creative artist being purchased for the collection of MoMA in New York or the V&A in London would undisputedly offer ratification for its significance since it is something that has been achieved only once in the past decade. However, the rarity of such examples, only reinforces the need to identify “minor” works to be used to make up a portfolio.

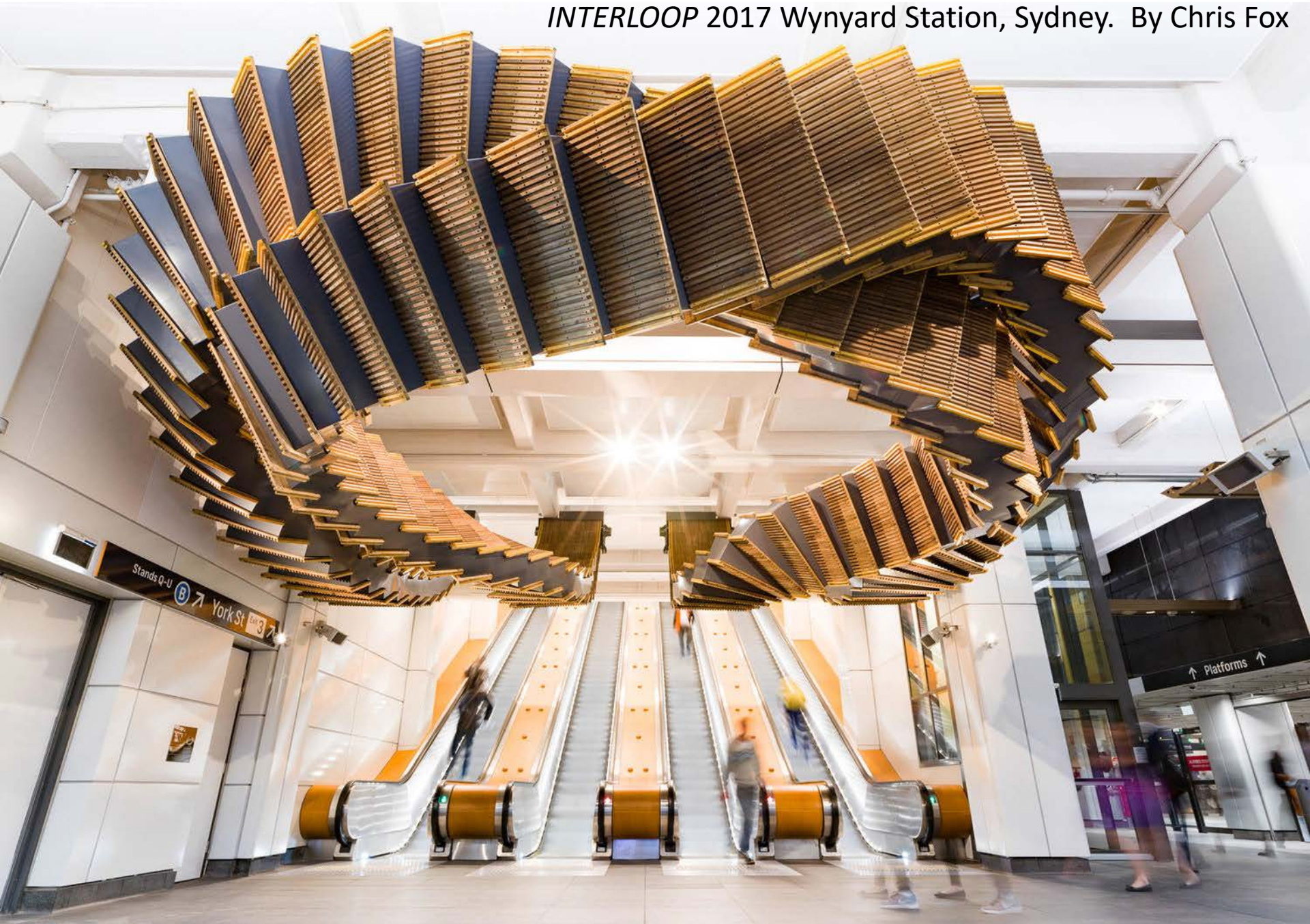
## **SCALE and SCOPE**

**Three examples:**

**SIZE**

**DURATION**

**NUMBER**







Taking 6 months to design and engineer, INTERLOOP took 12 weeks to fabricate with over a kilometre of welding, before an intensive 48-hour installation period. The vast twisting accordion-shaped sculpture reconfigures the heritage escalators into a stitched form. Suspended between two ends of the building, INTERLOOP measures more than fifty metres in length, weighs over five tonnes, and weaves in 244 wooden treads and four combs from the original escalators.

Above and Statement below from the Chris Fox website:

*Whilst paying homage to the past, it also, simultaneously, looks forward to the future. First installed in 1931, the historic timber-escalators served Sydney's commuters for over eight decades and held a sense of time, journeys, and travel before they were removed in 2017. INTERLOOP resembles, in part, the original escalators whilst creating an otherworldly space above people's heads. In experiencing the installation, people are often stationary on an escalator whilst also travelling, allowing for a moment of pause that occurs mid-motion. The sculpture resonates with people in this state, referencing all those journeys that have passed and are now interlooping back. INTERLOOP provides an important legacy, helping to maintain and celebrate the historic identity of the city, while also looking to its future.*

On average 100,000 people each day pass beneath this work.

The work won a heritage and several other awards. Almost 100 citations can be listed: reviews, discussion or analysis in the popular press and online media.

None of these in peer-reviewed sources, however.

A video of Chris Fox explaining the background to the work is on his website:

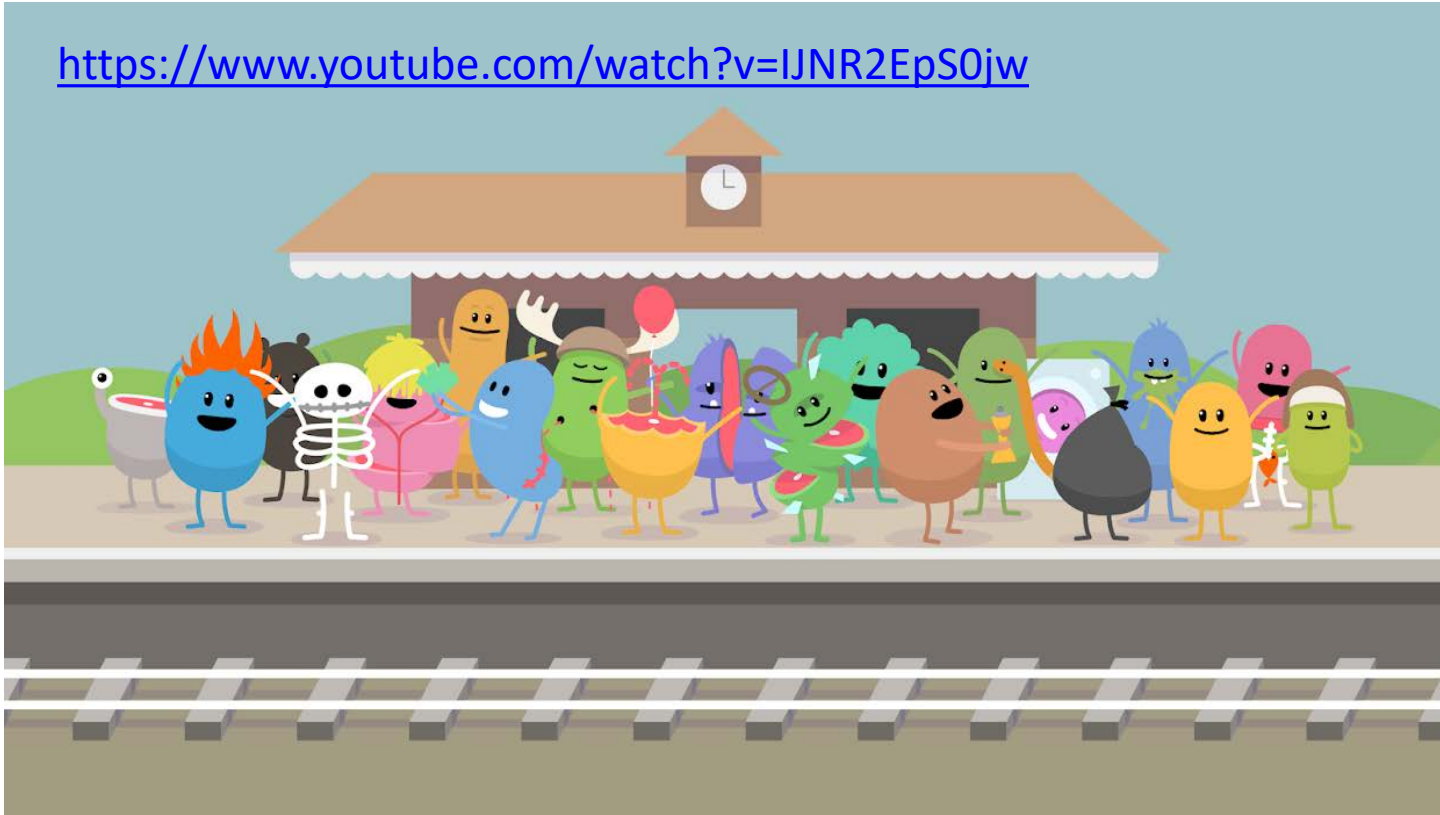
<https://chrisfox.com.au/about>

**Its clearly a large project and the audience is enormous, beyond measure over a decade. So how does it rank on a three point scale of: 1 portfolio, 2 standard or 5 substantial ?**

## duration

I'll now continue the railway theme with the animation *Dumb Ways to Die* from 2012 that was commissioned by Metro Trains in Melbourne to promote railway safety. I hope you all remember it, since doubts were created on reading a recent post on YouTube by *Marlin Rabid dingo3* claiming "If you remember this you automatically qualify for a veterans discount pass." [I should note that Marlin was close to the 183 millionth viewer of the video.]

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IJNR2EpS0jw>



The animation (3 minutes long) was by Julian Frost, Lyrics by John Mescall, music by Ollie McGill from the band *The Cat Empire*, and performance by Emily Lubitz of *Tinpan Orange*.

The video had 20 million views on YouTube in the first week it was released.

The first game it spawned still rates at 4.3 out of 5 from 1.5 million reviews in the Apple app store. The video has earned more than 60 million dollars in revenue.

**It has been written about or referenced in over 1000 books and articles including in over 20 peer-reviewed books and journals**

From the McCann advertising website:

*The first game app climbed to number one in 22 countries including the US, UK, Canada and Australia, with over 103 million downloads and 7 billion unique plays coming from every country in the world.*

*In November 2014, Dumb Ways to Die 2: The Games was released, taking the safety message even further. It became the number one app in over 90 countries, with more than 80 million people pledging to be safe around trains and nearly four billion mini-game plays in just three months.*

*Dumb Ways to Die was the most awarded campaign in the history of Cannes (with 28 Lions, including five Grands Prix).*

*More importantly, 127 million people have stated that they would be safer around trains because of the campaign.*

It was claimed there was a 20 per cent drop in “dumb behaviour” on train platforms in the Melbourne area in the two months directly after the launch of the safety video, with incidences of near misses at stations also down 20 per cent against the annual average and in the twelve-months after, a 21% decrease in serious rail incidents or injuries.

This work has not been submitted to the ERA review process so I'll ask you to rank it on a four point scale **0** not ERA eligible, **1** portfolio, **2** standard, **5** substantial.

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This time there is probably a "correct" answer "Not eligible."

Since it is most doubtful this project would have ever been given ethics approval in any Australian university since it would be very difficult to argue away the trivializing of a death in a railway accident and the traumatic effect this could, and no doubt did, have on families of such victims every time it was played.

I would argue that such ethical demand is a singular distinguishing feature of art inside the academy and outside it.

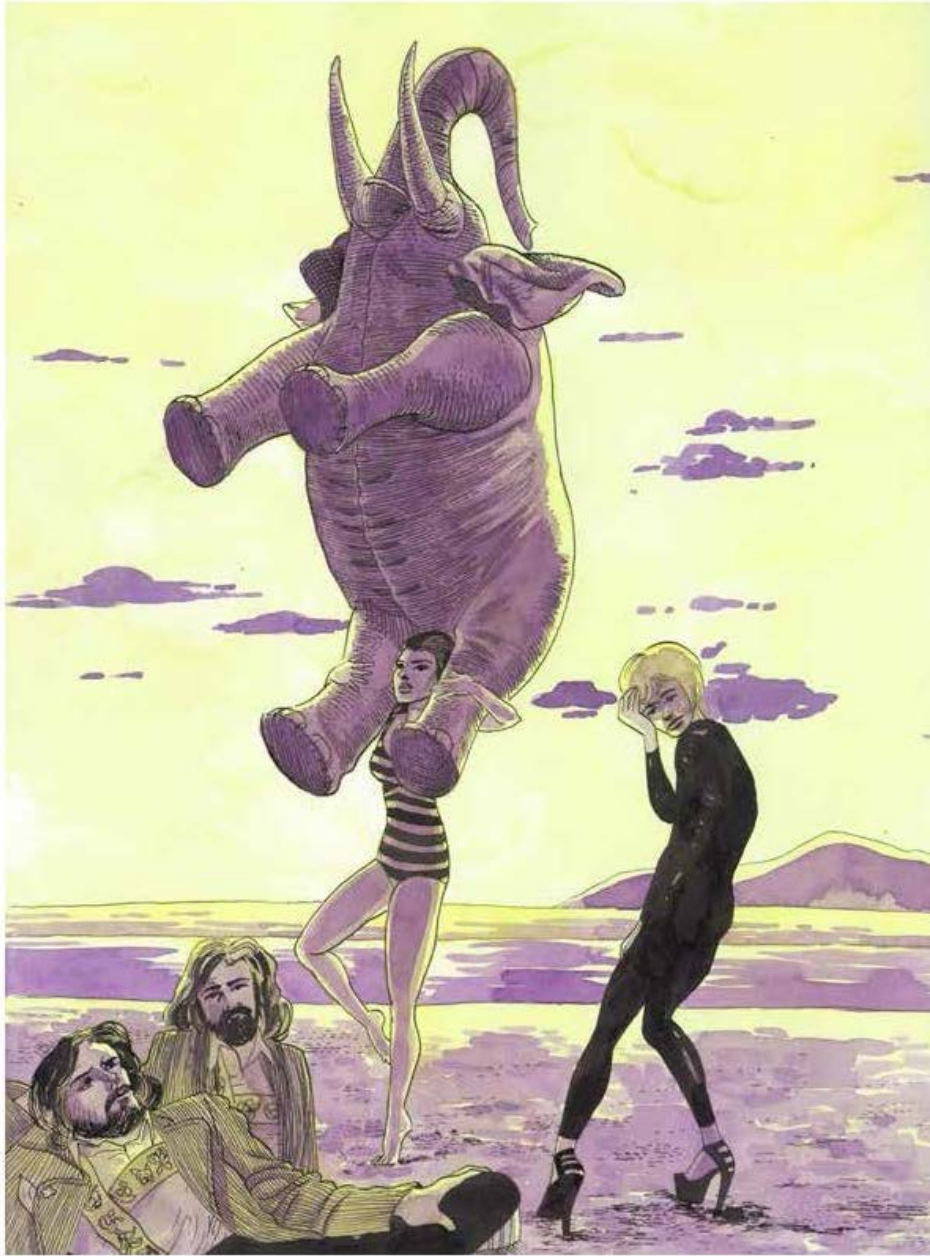
However, for the right reasons, the academy does generally protect the freedom of expression in the creative arts. My final example dealing with numerical magnitude probably offers some proof of that.

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I'm about to show four works (on average, each a little over A3 scale) by Jonathan McBurnie from his exhibition *Dread Sovereign* PINNACLES GALLERY Nov. 2017 - Jan. 2018

The question I'm asking: "would you consider these four works exhibited in a group show, at the MCA for example, would be sufficient to award a journal equivalent "1" unit of value in ERA assessment"

number

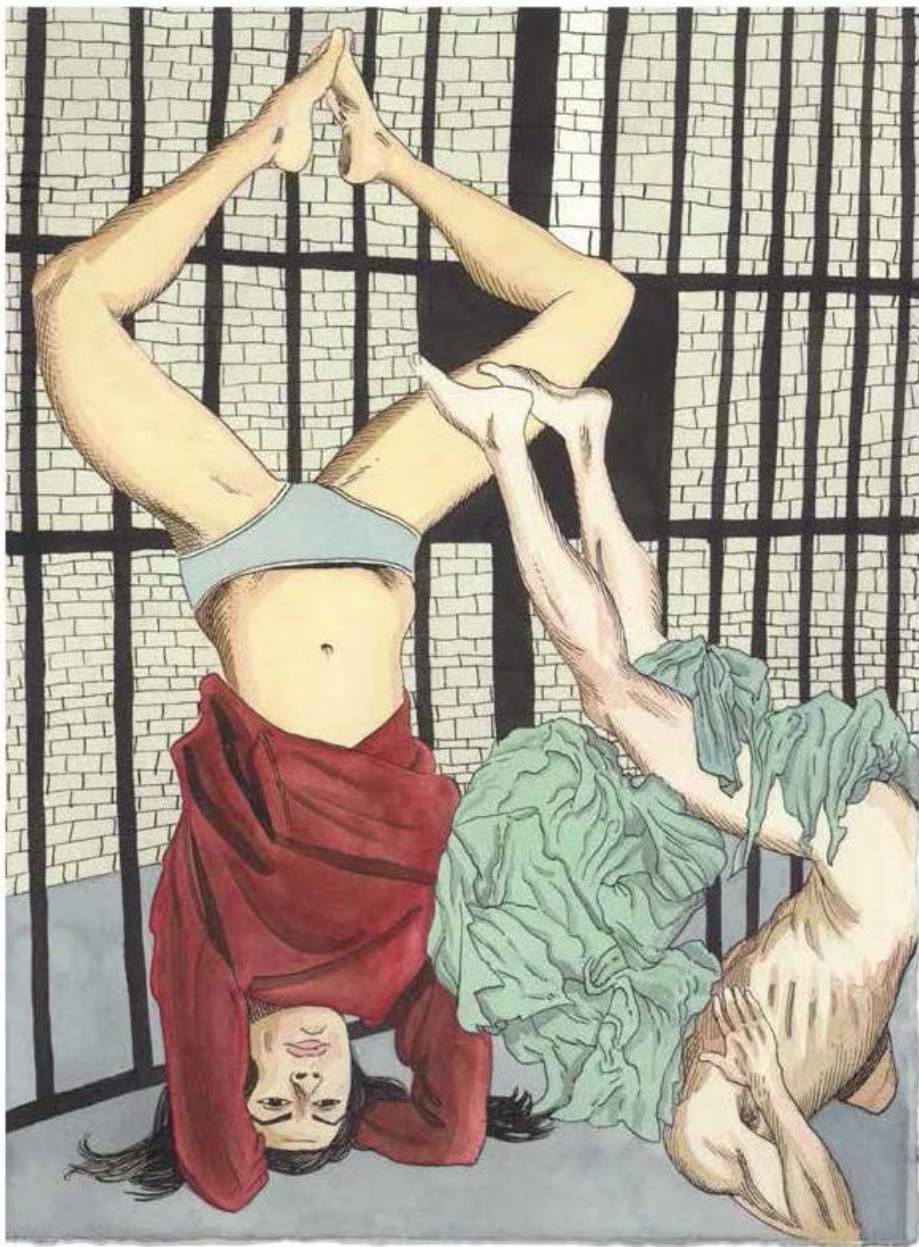


*Polymath My Fucken Arse 2017*  
Ink and watercolour on paper

Jonathan McBurnie

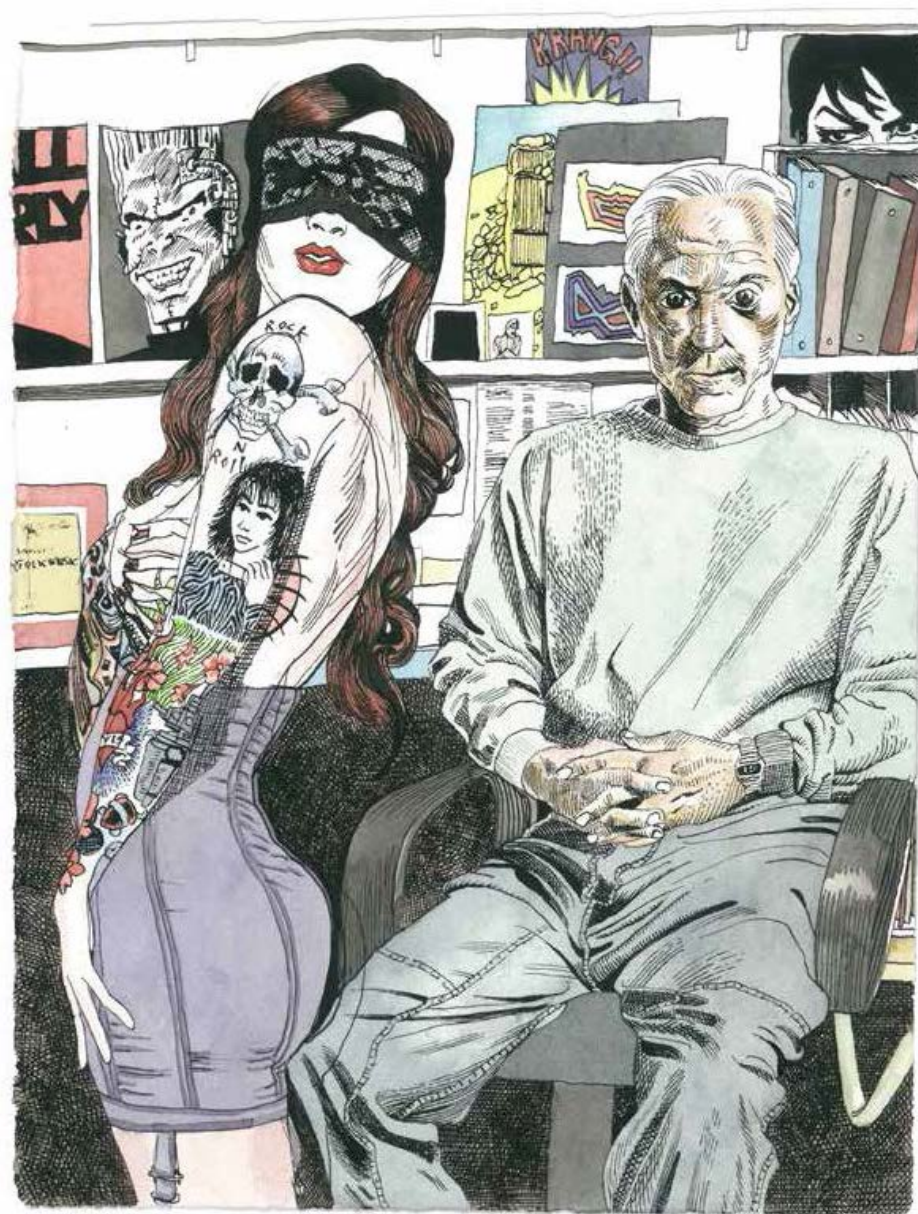


*Big Meat 2017*  
Ink and watercolour on paper



*The Dead of the Experiment* 2017  
Ink and watercolour on paper

Jonathan McBurnie



*'Life drawing is my bag, too' he said. I winced.* 2016  
Ink and watercolour on paper

*Dread Sovereign* Jonathan McBurnie PINNACLES GALLERY Nov. 2017 - Jan. 2018



The catalogue and exhibition in Townsville was prefaced with this disclaimer

Please be advised that this exhibition and supporting publication contains imagery that may be considered offensive. Many of these art works are intended to be subversive, shocking, satirical, ironic, erotic, sincere, explicit, challenging, self-deprecating, contradictory and critical. These works are intended to challenge many of the notions that we take for granted in contemporary society, and hopefully make us think about the world in which we live,





Jonathan McBurnie's Doctoral exhibition at Sydney College of the Arts 2014

To give some specificity to numerical value, consider visiting this exhibition as an examiner. The expectation, that a PhD submission exhibition will demonstrate three to four years of intensive investigation, usually demands the evidence of a substantial body of work. The four works I just showed were post this Doctorial exhibition, I might add. Nevertheless, four works at that scale would not be acceptable for a Doctoral show, certainly not without extensive illustrated exegetical support and evidence. How many would be expected? “It depends” is of course the only possible response since the number of outputs are absolutely dependent on the specific demands and approach of each Doctoral investigation. The same applying to every creative arts research output.

To a far less degree, the same dilemma applies in judging the quality of a peer-reviewed journal article, since such articles can vary in scale from two pages to taking up the entire journal. The difference is that both ends of this spectrum of magnitude are each awarded a “1” unit of value.

# Jonathan McBurnie: the College Years (2011-2014)



The aim of this and continued discussion to understand and refine the factors external to the creative output that influence our qualitative evaluation of it, should not be to establish definitive standards as norms in measure of magnitude, numerical or durational scale. We know the negative outcome of the suggestion made twenty-years ago by Jeff Parr for “three works in a group show.” What we have discovered here is that the degree of difficulty in measuring quality of small-scale works decreases when they are accumulated but too many other variables come in to play in figuring the optimum cut-off point between a small single work and a “body of work”. The answer is not necessarily, if ever, in the research statement and each case must be taken on its merits for like all professional judgements they get more refined or accurate the more experienced reviewers become with synthesizing the complex of elements involved.

If the portfolio is to be used effectively for NTROs each sector must ensure that binary categories are at least established to identify and record outputs that are candidates for building a portfolio.

Ross Woodrow