

# The South Australian School of Art History Project

Report presented to the Friends of the South Australian School of Art  
Annual General Meeting, August 25 2011

As Chair/ Convenor of the South Australian School of Art History Project, I am pleased to present this report to the Third Annual General Meeting of the Friends of the South Australian School of Art. At the 2010 Annual General Meeting, I reported that 'much hard - and often invisible work - had been done' on the South Australian School of Art History Project. This year I have much pleasure in reporting that much exciting 'visible' progress has also been achieved in addition to ongoing 'background' research and administrative work, which, in any professional research project, is rarely understood or acknowledged but essential to high quality outcomes. This is especially so in a new university environment where research excellence is prioritised and strictly monitored. Our project has always aspired, and will continue to aspire to, high standards of scholarship as befits the School's illustrious history and reputation.

Within this framework many 'visible' SASA History project outcomes have also been achieved over the past twelve months in the form of exciting 'new' and accessible archives, many of which had been considered lost during various re-locations and changes in nomenclature of the South Australian School of Art over the past century and a half. In addition to developing our (now burgeoning) ongoing bibliography and archive of historical material, the following highlights include a vibrant and regularly updated online presence which provides members and website visitors with new research on school history, a special event and online catalogue publication in partnership with the Art Gallery of South Australia and other outcomes listed below.

## HIGH 'VISIBILITY'

### A new birthdate

Persistent research can uncover amazing facts!. Our most significant discovery is new information that demonstrates the School's foundation date as a public institution was 2<sup>nd</sup> September 1861, not 1856 as has been previously understood. 1956 was the date when Charles Hill commenced his private art school, before taking over the role of Drawing Master in the new School. 1861 also coincides with the School of Design's first 'home' in the South Australian Institute Building's which also celebrates its sesquicentenary this year. For details see [SASA History Project Report pages in FriendsSASA Newsletter, July/August 2011.](#)

So as the School of Design's proud descendant, the South Australian School (incorporated in the School of Art, Architecture & Design in 2009) will be celebrating its *official* Centenary from September 2011 through the next year - and this also coincides with the University of South Australia's 21<sup>st</sup> Birthday Celebrations. As part of these double celebrations, The SASA History Project is planning an art education symposium in 2012 which will provide an overview of past and present tertiary art education in Australia.

**This means we can celebrate the School's sesquicentenary all over again during the next 12 months!**



Then (1875)



& Now (2011)

The South Australian Institute Building

## Friends SASA online

The work of the SASA History Project now enjoys ongoing public visibility through the School and Friends of SASA websites and newsletters, and 'Snapshots' of past staff and students, regular SASA History Project reports, articles of historic interest and calls for information from Friends SASA members, which have resulted in valuable and accessible archival information coming forward. This online presence is due to the highly skilled and dedicated efforts of Dr Jenny Aland PSM, who is *FriendsSASA Newsletter* editor and website manager. This is a separate role from undertaking major SASA History Project research as part of her position as Adjunct Research

Fellow (AAD) at the University of South Australia. It has been very fortunate for all members that we have someone who can combine these two different positions with consummate dedication and skill.

### **A White Glove Event**

The highly successful exhibition/presentation, *A White Glove Event* was a special afternoon presented at the Art Gallery of South Australia (AGSA) on October 22 2010, with curators/presenters, Dr Aland and Dr Zeplin, with Maria Zagala, Associate Curator, Prints, Drawings and Photographs at AGSA. Conceived as a fund raising event for the SASA History Project, this proved a prestigious milestone as

*...a unique opportunity to view rarely seen works on paper from the collection of the Art Gallery of South Australia made by artists who were staff or students at The South Australian School of Art during the first hundred years of its existence (1861 to 1961).*

From all reports, including letters, emails and a review in *Kalori* by Dr Avis Smith, the event proved to be a particularly memorable occasion where participants inspected, marvelled at and reminisced over 40 prints, watercolours and drawings, at close and personal range. Below are excerpts from two participants' responses:

*I write to thank the Friends of the South Australian School of Art for providing both the opportunity and the sponsorship for present students, to view exquisite original artworks in the recent a White Glove Event,....the Event was a highlight for me this semester; and inspired the presentation of my final works for Studio Specialisation, the Pages of Memory Series. (Kaz Pederson, final year AAD Glass Specialisation student).*

*....Harry Pelling Gill's watercolour rendering of aborigines in a tent, and his treatment of a coastal scene south of Adelaide, revealed a sensitivity of approach to his subject that I personally thought surprising, considering his somewhat stern reputation as an advocate of the South Kensington School's method of teaching art,...This art gallery experience was not only enjoyable, but also extremely valuable from an historical perspective...it enables us to better understand the traditions of our art in South Australia, how it has changed, where we are now, and perhaps anticipate some interesting future pathways... (Dr Avis Smith, 'Response to a White Glove Event, *Kalori*, 2010).*

An illustrated, scholarly catalogue accompanied this event, co-authored and published by Dr Aland and Dr Zeplin. [Follow the link for the illustrated catalogue online as well as reports, letters and reviews, etc.](#)

Acknowledgements to Maria Zagala and AGSA, and to FriendsSASA for handling payments and providing refreshments.



### **Research Resources**

[A Bibliography of Stanley Street resources](#) has been developed by Dr Jenny Aland, as well as a research paper, *20 Years of Graduates, 1958-1978*. This is to be published online and can be purchased at a nominal price by Friends of SASA; it has already been assigned an ISBN number.

### **BEHIND THE SCENES: SCHOOL TREASURES DISCOVERED**

In addition to organising access permissions, searching, documenting, image copyright processing, scanning, collating and writing, Dr Aland has been steadfastly pursuing SASA archives, re-discovering documents that were considered 'lost'. While trudging out to UniSA Mawson Lakes document stores and sifting through uncatalogued material, our intrepid researcher also uncovered some precious handmade School magazines, which she laboriously scanned for posterity. Since then UniSA's Repository and Archive Metadata Services Coordinator, Kate Sergeant recently contacted me with the news that some historical documents relating to the South Australian School of Art have now recently made available online by UniSA's library. These include:

- '5 volumes of newspaper clippings collected by the School from 1895-1982
- Art club magazine (1889-1908) the magazine produced by the School

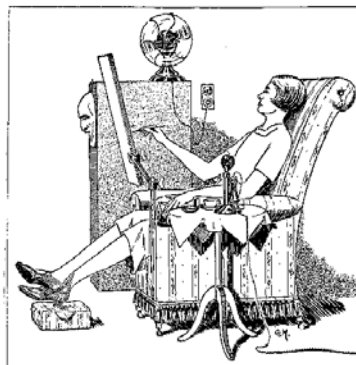
- Paint Pot (1925) a later magazine produced by the School
- Forerunner (1930-1938) another later magazine produced by the School

To find them search the University Research Archive using the terms “art special collection” ([this link should perform the search for you](#))”

There are also 2 volumes of photographs from the School and a minute book from the committee who initiated the HP Gill Memorial medal. We have also identified and are in the process of sending 3 more volumes for digitisation. These volumes are a collection of notes written by HP Gill in 1878 (notes from lectures by Dr Zerffi on the history of art, and other notes on savage and native art) and 2 volumes of correspondence from the School dated between 1900-1922.’

We are delighted with this new digitised treasure trove and Dr Aland has posted a few of these ‘jewels’ in the latest *SASA Friends Newsletter*. [http://www.friendsasa.com/sasahistoryproject\\_Update.html](http://www.friendsasa.com/sasahistoryproject_Update.html) This access is a great step forward for information about School history. It is also amazing how news clipping books can cast unexpected light on an ‘epoch’ of institutional history. These are recommended for lively, forthright, opinionated, and sometimes scandalous, reading.

Below is an image from *The Paint Pot*, MCMXXV (1925), Vol 1, No 1, p. 17. ‘Drawing by G. Mathwin, *Comfort for Art Students*’.



COMFORT FOR ART STUDENTS  
Drawing by G. Mathwin

## HP GILL MONOGRAPH

Dr Aland is currently exploring the possibility of publishing an edited monograph of a significant but as yet unpublished manuscript on Harry Pelling Gill by the Late Gerald Fischer, a former State Archivist who died in 2010. Gill was a controversial figure as Master (Head/Principal) of the School of Design 1882-1915 and Honorary Curator of the Art Gallery of South Australia (1892-1915). Dr Aland’s Masters thesis was titled *Art and design education in South Australian schools, from the early 1880s to the 1920s: the influence of South Kensington and Harry Pelling Gill* so, who better to undertake this task of honoring Fischer’s work?

## FUNDING THE HISTORY PROJECT

The few art school histories that exist in Australia and New Zealand (Queensland, Canberra, Ilam (Christchurch, NZ) and Elam (Auckland, NZ) have been, or are being fully supported by, universities or participating major art galleries. This art school history project is a voluntary endeavour which is supported by Friends SASA. Our 2010 application to the South Australian History Trust for funds towards writing our proposed publication *The Stanley Street Years* was not successful, although deemed as ‘excellent’ in a very large and competitive field (71 applicants for \$35,000 total funds). We received positive feedback, the valuable opportunity to reflect on our achievements and to compile a useful ‘dossier’ of information towards future applications. We are grateful for enthusiastic encouragement from referees, Jack Cross, Professor Ian North, Max Lyle and Jack Condous and are seeking further grant opportunities. Our appreciation also extends to Friends SAS Board in seeking new if not appropriate, avenues of funding.

Friends SASA was established in 2008 as an initiative of the SASA History Project Committee with the prime objective of fund raising for this project. Since then, the Friends Board has diversified its activities to include AAD scholarships, Friends’ exhibitions and other events, including the very special fund raisers of art school ‘celebrity’ interviews, which present ‘living’ SASA history. Since the SASA History Project has no ‘budget’ per se, all requests for reimbursements and honoraria for Dr Aland have been administered by the Friends SASA Board.

Due to ongoing Friends SASA Board perceptions of overlap between the separate activities of History Project research and Friends website/Newsletter activities, a Sub-Committee of Friends SASA Board (SASA History

project) was formed in March 2011 to clarify these respective roles, especially in relation to budget. This was convened by Dr Zeplin, with Dr Aland, and Friends Board members, Bill Morrow and Jack Cross. The unanimous recommendations that were presented to the Board on April 1 included acknowledgement of the SASA History project as an autonomous research venture which welcomes Friends SASA support and co-operation in terms of financial contribution, but not in decision making within the researchers' field of expertise. To ensure future clarity and transparency, the sub-committee also recommended that all SASA History Project accounts should be forwarded through the History Project Chair. In this way, it is hoped the SASA History Project and the Friends will continue their close and mutually supportive relationship. To date, not including direct Board payments for Friends Web and Newsletter work and reimbursements for research consumables, History Project honoraria is estimated to be in the vicinity of \$4000 over the 4 year period since 2008. I look forward to receiving confirmation of these figures and the Friends SASA Board's response to the sub-committee's recommendations.

### **RESIGNATION FROM FRIENDS SASA BOARD**

Due to increasing responsibilities in my role as Portfolio Leader of Research Education in the School and related duties on a School Executive with reduced senior staffing capacity, I have 'edited' external commitments to focus on research participation in the SASA History Project, I therefore resigned from my position on the Friends SASA Board as AAD Head of School nominee in February 2011. The SASA History Project is dear to my heart and I will continue leading the project, in much appreciated and invaluable collaboration with Dr Jenny Aland, 'Researcher Extraordinaire', and the SASA History Project Committee, as well as SASA Friends, who continue to receive my strong support.

### **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

The SASA History Project belongs to us all and has become increasingly important at a time when many 'craft' departments of Australian art schools are being 'rationalised' (read discontinued) through the corporatisation of universities. Of course, similar changes have occurred at numerous times in the past so our 150 year old history, our stories of survival - and success - become even more relevant to the present day situation. Hopefully, this special project, with the work of the Friends, can connect these repositories of past information and knowledge in a useful way with today's - and tomorrow's - aspiring artists and teachers.

*Since Friends SASA members receive SASA History Project news hot off the press, don't forget to become 'part of history' by renewing your Friends SASA subscription!*

HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO US ALL - AND CONGRATULATIONS - TO ALL THE THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE WHO HAVE BEEN ASSOCIATED WITH THE SCHOOL.

**Dr Pamela Zeplin**

***Chair/Convenor, South Australian School of Art History Project Committee***

**August 10 2011**