

Dear Alumni and Friends of the Department of Fine Arts, HKU,

I'm writing to you to offer you an update on developments in the Department of Fine Arts. At the end of this month, June 2006, I will come to the end of my period as Head of the Department of Fine Arts, due to the creation of a 'School of Humanities' combining the existing Departments of Fine Arts, Music, Comparative Literature, History, Philosophy and Linguistics. This new school will be a 'Department' under the university regulations in the same way the Department of Fine Arts has been since 1978, with a single school head. This restructuring, which has been undertaken by the Faculty of Arts for administrative rather than academic reasons, will have many implications we are not yet fully aware of, but I want to make it clear that there will continue to be a programme in 'Fine Arts' as before, for existing and future students. Students will still be able to major in Fine Arts and indeed the name 'Department of Fine Arts' will continue to be used to identify the focus in art historical teaching and research within the School of Humanities. Certain functions that I have been performing as Head of Department will now transfer to the acting Head of School, Dr. Matthews, but matters directly related to the Fine Arts teaching programme will still be largely handled by Fine Arts teachers, we expect, and Mrs. Muir has agreed to take charge of organizing our undergraduate programme. Ms. Koon will take over from Dr. Thomas in handling postgraduate matters, while Dr. Thomas will take on an overall coordinating role with the new title of 'Chairperson'. I will be going on study leave next year in order to make some progress with my research, and so will not be holding any administrative roles in the immediate future.

Due to the retirement of Dr. Stanley-Baker and Dr. Wan the picture for Asian art history teaching in the Department has been a little uncertain over the last year or so, but I am pleased to announce that we have now made two full-time continuing appointments in the Asian art area. Ms. KoonYeewan, a specialist in C19th Chinese art, will take up one of those posts, while the second will be held by Dr. Roslyn Hammers (a specialist in Song and Yuan dynasty art), who will arrive in July. A full range of offerings in Asian art history, with many completely new courses, will be available next year. Chinese and Japanese art will continue to be taught, of course, but one exciting new development will be the re-launch of teaching in the area of Indian art, which has not been offered in the Department for several years since the retirement of Dr. Ghose.

The past year or so has been a time of considerable change in the Department, and with the Faculty restructuring it seems that changes will continue to be seen in the year to come. Only in the last few years has there

been a widespread recognition in Hong Kong (especially in policy-making circles) of the importance of the arts, and the provision in visual arts education remains at a lamentably low level for a city of Hong Kong's wealth, size and international aspirations. For this reason it is perhaps regrettable that the Department of Fine Arts will be losing its administrative autonomy as a unit committed to the historical and critical interpretation of art at a time when the city should be enhancing visual arts education. Even in China and the region as a whole the study of art history is still relatively underdeveloped, and a comprehensive art history programme such as we have here in which the discipline is taught up to PhD level in several areas is rather rare.

While for us in the Fine Arts area the crucial role of arts education in arts development, and the crucial role of the arts themselves for the city's future cultural identity and development may seem obvious, within a university there are always competing priorities and funding may not always be forthcoming at the level we would wish. Increasingly there is a view that we should be looking to the community for support and in a sense the future of art history at HKU following the disestablishment of the Department of Fine Arts as a formal administrative unit will depend on whether the community at large wishes to support our initiatives. I personally would like to see the development of an Art History Research Centre at HKU, enabling us to become a regional centre of excellence in art history that could benefit the region as a whole, but such a vision would only come to fruition if there was support for it in the community at large. Whether it be in terms of support for larger initiatives of this kind or smaller projects more directly aimed at the benefit of current students we would welcome any offers of support that our alumni and friends feel able to offer. I personally find it very awkward to ask for money for any project or entity in which I am directly involved but I want to mention that we have recently set up an Endowment Fund for Art History for the benefit of donors who might wish to specify the use of a gift to HKU as being for the promotion of teaching and research in this area. Under a special scheme currently still active, Dr. Stanley Ho has generously offered to match donations by HKU alumni to the University.

As we search for ways outside the protective structure offered by Departmental status to persevere with our mission of contributing to Hong Kong's intellectual and cultural development it becomes increasingly clear to us that Fine Arts alumni have a potentially very valuable role to play. We try to keep in touch with you by emailing invitations to our seminars and other events, and by passing on information about job opportunities, and

several of you have told us that you appreciate this chance to keep in touch with our activities and to retain a sense of belonging to the Department. Over the last 28 years since the Department's founding many students have studied with us, and we do not have current contact details for all of them, so please send us information about your most recent contact details as they change, and encourage any other Fine Arts alumni you know who are not on our mailing list to get in touch. Please send all updates to Grace Wong at: gslwong@hkusua.hku.hk. We are planning a new area on our Departmental website (<http://www.fa.hku.hk>) for the posting of news about alumni and their activities, so please also send Grace short announcements about any news you have, personal or professional, that you would like to see shared with other alumni. We hope this will be a way for alumni to keep in touch with one another, or to re-establish contact if lost.

Remember that we are always happy when former students drop by to visit us, so do consider visiting our Department Office (Main Building Room 235, as before) if you find yourself on or near the campus. Or come along to one of our seminars or other academic events if you can!

Yours Sincerely,

David Clarke