

TEACHER HIGHLIGHT

Leanne Shead

'Embrace uncertainty'

Tell me about yourself, explain what you do and how you got into teaching?

Originally from Sydney, I graduated from the Australian Catholic University in 1992 with a Bachelor of Education (Visual Arts). I taught Visual Art in NSW for 18 years, primarily boys, including Sule College, a Turkish Muslim Boys School. In 2012 I made the 'sea change' to tropical Cairns and have never looked back. I have been at Trinity Anglican School for ten years and I am thrilled to be starting a new journey at St Monica's College, Cairns in 2022. This will be my fifth school since 1993, covering all jurisdictions – public, private, and Catholic.

I thank my first Visual Art teacher, Ms Debbie Aldridge for developing my love and passion for art at high school. I knew from Year 7 that this was what I wanted to be, and I pursued this pathway and have loved every minute of it.

So, in a nutshell, what do I do? Maybe too much! Teach Visual Art 7-12, co-own an Art Gallery as curator, gallerist and workshop coordinator, Treasurer for the PAEA art network, Coordinate the BLA Visual Arts Awards, QCAA marker, completing a research Masters of Philosophy (Creative Arts) part-time at JCU, and try to fit in time to be a practicing artist.

How have you developed your career?

After moving to Cairns for a teaching position at Trinity Anglican School, within three years I was afforded the opportunity to become Head of Faculty, The Arts, and I stepped down in 2020 to open an Art Gallery and pursue tertiary study. With the senior system being quite varied in approach from the NSW Syllabus, I applied for panel in 2014. This was the best decision in learning how to navigate and inform my teaching practice in this space.

The other vital decision I made was to find an art network and to my delight, a well-established Visual Art educators network existed. The Peninsula Art Educators Association [PAEA] had been running in FNQ since 1993, and within a year I found myself voted in as President. I am currently the Treasurer and love the fabulous team I voluntarily work with. Further to this, I sought industry opportunities to widen my scope for community involvement in the Arts. I was part of the 2017-18 Advisory Team for TAFE Queensland, Cairns Campus, with decision making processes about YBlock, art spaces for students and practicing artists. I also applied for the RADF Committee (Regional Arts Development Fund) for local council and served two years [2018-20] on the panel assessing and allocating funding for arts-based projects in our region. These were fabulous growth opportunities.





James Cook University approached me to analyse their set text for the Undergraduate first year primary teaching degree, for the Arts. I developed examination questions for this course and was later employed as a sessional tutor, delivering the course at the Cairns campus via tutorials in 2020.

I was super excited to be selected as one of the six Expert Writing Team members by the QCAA, following this up by my involvement with five other amazing teachers to co-write the Cambridge textbook, *Creative Inquiry*. In 2020 I was selected as a Lead Marker and continued as a marker for 2021.

What role does the artist have in society?

Creating networks over the past ten years in Cairns afforded me the opportunity to build a

rapport with local artists and communities. I utilized TAFE artists and their facility for students to engage in full day workshops. Thank you to artists Jenny Valmadre [ceramics], Andrea Huelin [painting] and Darren Blackman [printmaking] for sharing their knowledge and skills through their expertise and humility.

In 2020 my partner and I decided that we would create a new venture and we established a local contemporary art gallery – Artview Gallery. [feel free to like us on Facebook]. There was a need for an additional platform for local artists, especially novice and emerging artists. We have exhibited 13 shows in our first year and are booked out for 2022. It has been hard work and a challenge to balance this with fulltime teaching, but the rewards both personally and professional have been enormous.

What art movements or styles do you most identify with?

I remember walking into the AGNSW and seeing McCubbin's, 'On the Wallaby Track' as a young teenager and I knew that art was my first love. Artworks that use light to engage and intrigue me. I also connect to work that is quirky and humorous, Yayoi is a favourite as is Koons [Puppy] and Piccinini. Contemporary work of Jason de Caires Taylor has me keen to visit the Gili Islands one day to swim in his underwater museums.

As teachers we never seem to have the time to create our own work. However, starting my Masters degree has been an excellence means to 'believing' and 'achieving' artmaking. My love for natural surface treatment drives my curiosity. Lichen in particular. Currently, I am experimenting with combining traditional mediums of drawing, painting, and printing with collage and mixed media. I'm really not sure where my practice is headed but am happy to enjoy the ride.

What's integral to the work of an artist, both emerging and established?

'Embrace uncertainty' is my current mantra.

Who are your biggest influences? (Educationally and artistically)?

My first teaching job in Sydney, working with David Sayer [at my own high school] was an amazing start to my career. David is an amazing painter, as well as a kind man and I thank him for being my initial work colleague, and for teaching me to love traditional oil painting, especially the smell.

Working at Liverpool Boys High School was the most demanding school, and it was here that I learned to 'teach'. Ian Buckle, aka 'the rock' was the most patient and supportive leader I have ever worked for, and I thank him for developing my skills, educationally and artistically in the Visual Arts. Becoming an Expert Classroom Profiling and passing on strategies, coping mechanisms and techniques to engage students was another pedagogical journey that has well-equipped me for a sustained career in teaching.

From Cairns, Janelle Williams (HOF, TBSH) is most probably the biggest and most pertinent influence educationally. Her knowledge, commitment and passion for Arts Education is bountiful and endless. I personally thank her for being an amazing mentor.

Artistically, I have Jacqueline Scotcher to thank for making me believe I can do and be whatever I want to be - artistically. Her passion and way of knowing inspired me to pursue higher education in the arts.

How do you seek out student art opportunities?

Knowing the abundance of artists in our region and their willingness to share their knowledge and skills, I implement a strategy where I spend less on materials and more on industry. Primarily using the budget to employ local artists to engage, meet and work with students from Years 7-12 has been highly beneficial. Having 'real' artists in the classroom shifted the mindset of the students and the work they started producing became diversified and personal.

I also utilize both local and state opportunities for students through exhibitions and competitions. Obviously, we enter four students into Creative Generation Excellence in Visual Art each year. This year all four students received a commendation (Top 100). ENERGY Exhibition is our local cluster exhibition where students from years 10-12 also are selected for exhibition. Furthermore, students from ENERGY are selected for the Flame Exhibition, female students who are matched to a mentor artist and create artwork to coincide with International Women's Week in March. Equivalent to the EKKA, we have the Cairn Show each year and we enter two sections. The Photography Competition [open to years 7-12] and the Wearable Art Competition [Year 9/10]. We have in the past been regional winners and students have been flown to Brisbane to compete at the EKKA.

We also have a network in Cairns called the BLA – Business Liaison Association, Excellence in Visual Arts, where Year 12 student enter folios of work for judging. I strongly encourage my seniors to enter their work, spanning from junior years through to current senior work. We have won this award for the past two years and as the winning School, I coordinate the event.

What's been your most profound gallery experience?

Opening my own gallery! Learning the additional skill of curation has been an awesome journey this year. If anyone is ever in Cairns, please pop in to say hello. I must admit that visiting MONA in Tasmania was an awesome experience, poo machine and all.

How do you create a classroom culture of innovation and critical reflection?

Lead by example. Currently, I am enrolled at JCU completing my Masters in Philosophy (Creative Arts) as a part-time option, under the tutelage of Associate Professor Robyn Glade Wright. I am using my current 'Practice-led research' project [Beauty or Blemish] to provide possible examples that parallel the senior assessment. Experimental work [using Lichen] with an established focus and inquiry question. Followed by a resolved work [through a mini exhibition at the Lux Gallery, JCU].

I also refer to my students as 'artists'. When they ask me a question, eg; What colour should I use? My response is, 'I don't' know, you are the artist for this work'. The catch phrase that follows is, 'but if it was mine, I would consider...'. So, they have autonomy but also support. I also never physically touch a students work. I do a sample on something else. Mark making is a like handwriting or a signature, everyone's style is different.

What's one thing in your classroom or studio you can't live without?

Air-conditioning! And even more seriously...students! I have been blessed with the opportunity to teach amazing students over the past 28 years. From the most challenging to the most endearing, I have encountered the full spectrum. But it is their individuality that keeps the job interesting. I always read the poem by Helen E. Buckley ['The Little Boy'](#) to year seven students. This is my motto. I tell my students I don't want '30 of the same thing'. Think outside the square, challenge me with an idea, do it differently.