

Humanities Alumni

Jo Nicholls-Parker, Mayoress, Christchurch City

Jo graduated from UC with a BA in 2002 and attained her Postgraduate Diploma in Art Curatorship in 2007. She is now enrolled for a Masters in Cultural Studies and Philosophy.

“What have you been up to for the past 5 years?”, we asked.

Well, good question. Five years ago I made a choice to temporarily leave my partner of seven years (at that time) — now my husband — for the high seas to work as an Art Auctioneer for an American Art Gallery based in Florida and Detroit. This contract required six months of my time cruising from Los Angeles to Mexico and to approximately a dozen destinations in the Mediterranean. When I returned I found that this exertion had altered both our lives to the extent that we were in a position to make the shift from Banks Peninsula to Christchurch City and involve ourselves in the mayoralty.

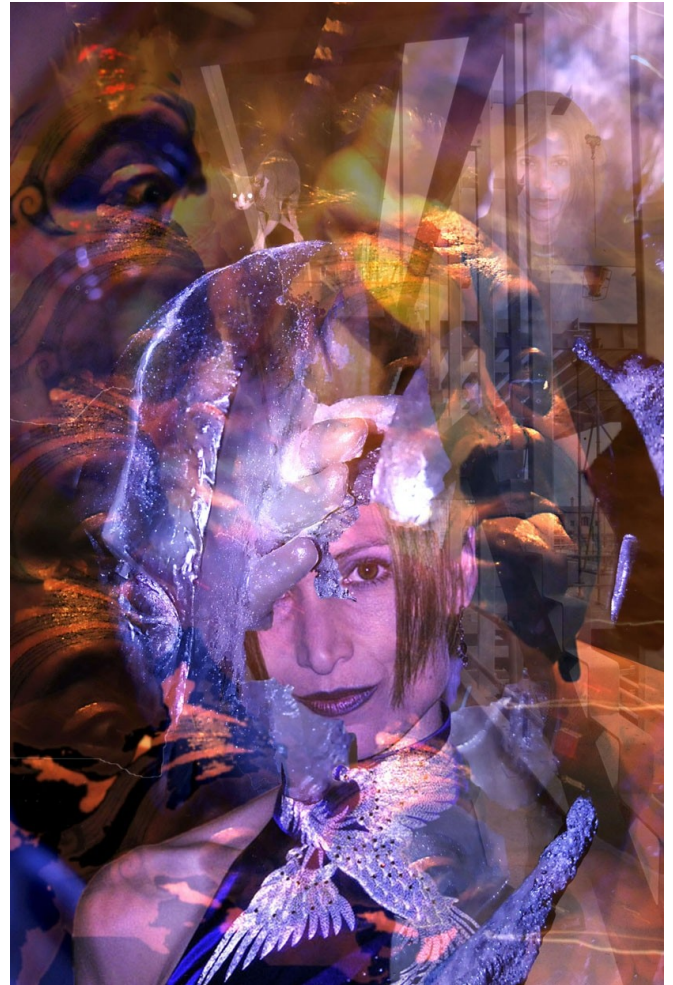
The mayoralty and the purchase of a digital camera came together, so that I could reap what I had sown many years ago at the Whitecliffe College of Art and Design, where photography was a part of my Graphic Art and Design Diploma — I was in a position

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to record events as they unfolded at City Hall. I took my camera with me on a combined Christchurch City and UC delegation to China. The Mayor and I arrived early in Beijing to witness the signing of the Free Trade Agreement between New Zealand and China. The Christchurch City delegation arrived a couple of days later as we set about to maintain, renew, and build sister city relationships. The UC delegation was led by then Pro-Vice Chancellor Scott Davidson, who was accompanied by International Relations Professor Marion McEwen, whose purpose was to recruit students from select

Technological Institutes in China.

Today, I continue to manipulate the images I took on that trip in 2008, using design software to merge images and to create a kind of “new media” photography. In total I have 65 images, a direct result of having been asked to exhibit at the Shanghai Expo this year. But, as the Expo is not a Trade Show, nor an opportunity to showcase New Zealand, I am yet to see if these images will in fact make it to China. However, I can’t get away from the fact that most of the images feature Mayor Bob Parker — of strategic use to the Shanghai oriented outcome only!



Preparation for Civic Citizenship Ceremony
Self-portrait by Jo Nicholls-Parker

In 2007 I enrolled at UC in the Postgraduate Diploma in Art Curatorship offered by Art History. This was a great year for me. The Postgraduate Diploma was relatively new to UC, brought in by Desmond Rochfort a couple of years prior to my enrolment. The fact that the qualification was new to the South was a big plus in my view, as the demand for graduates with art curatorial skills at the national level would become focussed on fewer individuals. The difference between an ordinary Honours degree in Art History and the Art Curatorship Diploma is that in the final stages of the Diploma students would normally become involved in internships.

The brilliance of 2007 was in the timing. The internships involved me in both COCA, the Centre of Contemporary Art, and the Christchurch Art Gallery. At COCA I organized an exhibition called ‘Preview’ which is now a part of COCA’s annual calendar to promote new artists. At the Christchurch Art Gallery the exhibition programme that year included the 125th Anniversary of the UC Fine Arts Department.

Thus my involvement with the history of both the

Christchurch Art Gallery and the University of Canterbury grew substantially as I discovered images from the past that later contributed to the UC website. I also discovered the wonderful MacMillan Brown Library.

There was more to 2007 than UC, however. There was my marriage, and then there was the campaign for the Christchurch Mayoralty. In a sense, this combination of pressures brought my UC Bachelor of Arts degree “to life” for the first time ever.

Now, in 2010, I am enrolled in the School of Humanities and writing again, exploring global humanitarian issues that engage with the heroic, athletic, cultural, and philosophical perspectives that the developed world must address in the coming era of multiculturalism. This work is inspired by the coming 2012 Olympic Games to be held in London. And I’m not sure that I will want to stop. The complexity of the ideas on this topic is already substantial, hard to keep up with, and, in my view, in need of implementation.

In 2010 the combination of UC, a mayoral campaign, and the City Hall is again at work, this time on Museum Codes of Ethics, which protect and allow artefacts to be repatriated. The benefits of an international body, existing extramural to parliamentary discourse, overseeing Museum Codes of Ethics are evident in the reconciliation

processes that indigenous cultures embrace. The Museum and Art Museum codes, I believe, will help me find political resolutions for some aspects of the multicultural debate this year.

My UC studies keep me sharp for the serious side of the mayoralty. The social side involves me with a lot of people a lot of the time and this invigorates my research. I can dance to my own tune only because I have the support of the Mayor. I am not an elected representative nor am I an employee, but the Mayor’s diary involves the Mayoress on a daily basis, which is why I have an office at the Christchurch City Council. I write and research from this office, and my research is, in the greater scheme of things, very relevant to Local Government. The events I attend are, more often than not, events where the Mayor has been asked to speak. This has enabled me to develop an appreciation for political representation and to keep up with how the political debate is being played out. Just as the politician must refine, define, regress, and build his or her debate, I must find relevance in all discussions that reflect on City Hall. This is the environment in which I learn about people, observe how people conduct themselves, see what people think is acceptable, confirm that professional conduct stands people in good light, come to terms with the fact that political transparency can



Fast Track 'Meetings with Remarkable Men'
The Mayor by Jo Nicholls-Parker

counter commercial enterprise, and add to a multicultural debate that the developed world must take very seriously in the twenty-first century.

As I broaden my involvement in the Arts and Humanities I can see that my focus is ultimately humanitarian; and that our conduct creates opportunity for the future. Humanitarian issues have always involved arts, cultures, and languages; idiosyncratic pasts spur mutual conversations about the future. One of my special interests is to see that “new media” is paid due diligence for its work in the area of “new migration”, where the now transnational nature of universities involves the global movement of people. Thus, the University of Canterbury’s decision to place Art History in the School of Humanities sits well with me! Ultimately we will see a somewhat different kind of Arts student emerge.



The Merger (Sonia Mkoloma, Mark Solomon,
Eugene Feng)
by Jo Nicholls-Parker