

Art? Art! Art...

An Audience Development Handbook for Public Art Galleries and Museums

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THE PURPOSE	3
THE PRINCIPLES	4
CREATE AN EFFECTIVE ENVIRONMENT	5
Example #1: Making the title a genuine invitation	5
Example #2: Valuing viewers' responses	5
SCAFFOLD PRIOR KNOWLEDGE	6
Example #3: Refreshing what we know	6
LEARN ANOTHER WAY OF LOOKING	6
Example #4: Providing the code	7
MAKE THINKING VISIBLE	7
Example #5: Designating space for viewers	7
ACCEPT ALL RESPONSES	8
Example #6: Including all responses	8
ENGAGE IN ACTIVE LISTENING	8
Example #7: Using judgements as starting points	8
LOOK FIRST ASK QUESTIONS LATER	10
Example #8: Artists' talks & studio visits	10
Example #9: Curators' talks	11
BUILD THE CONVERSATION	13
Example #10: Creating an alternative catalogue	13
Abdul Abdullah	15
Pat Brassington	17
Matt Calvert	19
Michael Cook	21
Amanda Davies	23
Fiona Hall	25
Ben Quilty	27
Lucienne Rickard	29
Cyrus Tang	31
Nathan Taylor	33
Daniel von Sturmer	35
Megan Walch	37
CONCLUSION	38
THE CURATOR	39
THE SUPPORT	39





THE PURPOSE

This handbook is for people working in the visual arts who are engaged with developing audiences in Australia's regional art galleries and who would like to expand their viewers' experience of contemporary art.

Across Australia a wonderful network of regional galleries present programs and events that enhance the cultural landscape of their communities. Primarily funded by local government, these important institutions come in various shapes and sizes. Some are revitalized existing buildings; others have been purpose built. Some manage collections, curate exhibitions or present touring exhibitions from other places, or all of the above.

This project was generated by The Rosny Farm Arts Centre, the cultural precinct owned and operated by Clarence City Council in southern Tasmania. The Centre incorporates a series of small spaces often promoting local community projects and arts practice, and a renovated colonial barn that has been refurbished as a multi-arts space for presenting music and visual arts events.

The purpose of such facilities is to acknowledge, reflect, celebrate and perhaps even provoke local communities and enhance their creative capacity. Maintaining and building audiences is an ongoing challenge.

The role of contemporary art in regional galleries is a critical one. The tension between the reticence of some audiences and the desire for more demanding cultural events can be problematic. This manual was developed in conjunction with a project that was designed specifically to empower audiences to engage with demanding contemporary art in positive and meaningful ways. We would like to share our experience with you.

**Museums
& Galleries
of NSW**

C
CLARENCE
ARTS & EVENTS

Conversation

THE PRINCIPLES

The title of this handbook, *Art? Art! Art...*, comes from the project of that name undertaken by The Rosny Farm Arts Centre in 2016–17. The project was simultaneously an exhibition, research, a community intervention, an audience development project and a marketing opportunity.

Pivotal to the project's ethos is the equal value placed on both the artwork and the viewer, in recognition that an artwork needs viewers to make it make sense. The exhibition presented works by twelve significant Australian artists: Abdul Abdullah, Pat Brassington, Matt Calvert, Michael Cook, Amanda Davies, Fiona Hall, Ben Quilty, Lucienne Rickard, Cyrus Tang, Nathan Taylor, Megan Walch and Daniel von Sturmer, which were beautifully displayed in the sublime Rosny Barn. The vital role of viewers was acknowledged through the exhibition design that actively encouraged engagement with the artwork and open sharing of viewers' responses. The experimental aspect of the project was through the enactment of a particular strategy for engaging with contemporary art's more challenging aspects as directly as possible. To this end the curator undertook many conversations with individuals and groups who visited the exhibition and viewers were encouraged to write their responses. The viewers' responses collectively became the exhibition catalogue, which is included in this handbook as an example of the capacity of viewers to read and interpret what may seem on the surface to be obscure, difficult, elitist art practice.

Creating an environment in which the dynamic between art and audience was made readily apparent relied on a particular approach to contemporary art and its interpretation that is supported by a number of important principles that we invite you to consider.



CREATE AN EFFECTIVE ENVIRONMENT

The theoretical underpinning of this approach draws considerably from the notion of effective problem solving, in particular the concept of 'active listening'. Essential to this approach is providing the conditions in which tentative and sceptical viewers can openly articulate their responses, both positive and negative, as a necessary first step in engaging with unfamiliar and challenging experience. Equally important is the role of the institution. To be effective it is necessary for the institution to accept the responses of the audience no matter what they might be. The effectiveness of this method involves the process of reflecting back to audience members what they have been heard to say, not just directly in the words they use but more importantly between the lines, in the meanings that their words and associated behaviours carry. The underlying premise is that the process of being heard will give the audience the confidence and insight to take the next step into unfamiliar territory.

Example #1: Making the title a genuine invitation

In our project, we considered the potential of the exhibition title to provide viewers with evidence that their trepidation about contemporary art was being heard. The title, *Art? Art! Art...*, was chosen as a way to recognise that some viewers find contemporary art confusing, confronting and lacking. By acknowledging this up front it was hoped that viewers would feel genuinely invited into the space and that their concerns were valid.

Example #2: Valuing viewers' responses

Another way we sought to create an effective environment was by making viewers aware that their responses were vital to the artmaking process. We made this tangible through a purpose-built 'hub' in the centre of the gallery where viewers' responses were written on specially printed cards and collectively displayed, thus giving visual equity to the artwork and the responses to the artwork.

SCAFFOLD PRIOR KNOWLEDGE

It is impossible to learn new things if there are no hooks from which to hang the new information and experience. Assisting viewers to be aware of their prior knowledge in the first instance, can create a more solid and secure place from which to build new understandings of ways of looking at art.

Example #3: Refreshing what we know

In our project we provided viewers with a framework that described various ways in which art operates with which they are already familiar and then extended this framework to less familiar forms of contemporary art.

1. REPRESENTATION is about translating the 3D reality as we see through our eyes onto a 2D surface. We have learned to tell whether it looks real because we have learned the rules of perspective, proportion, shading and colour modulation that make things look real.

2. EXPRESSION is about emotions and feelings. We have learned to read what colours mean and how texture can describe moods and sensations. We can decide whether we can feel the feeling or not.

3. ABSTRACTION is about line, colour, form, contrast, the picture making terms, and we can judge whether everything seems balanced and resolved or not and whether we enjoy the arrangement.

WHAT HAS CHANGED? In the 1960s the modern western world seemed to reach a tipping point with an explosion of dissent that generated feminism, civil rights, the environmental movement, gay power, youth revolution and upheavals in education for starters. This was a time when almost everything that had previously been assumed to be desirable was questioned, pulled apart and scrutinised from every angle. The battle for inclusion, acceptance of difference and equal rights continues, and as art follows life, so art has become argumentative and conversational too.

LEARN ANOTHER WAY OF LOOKING

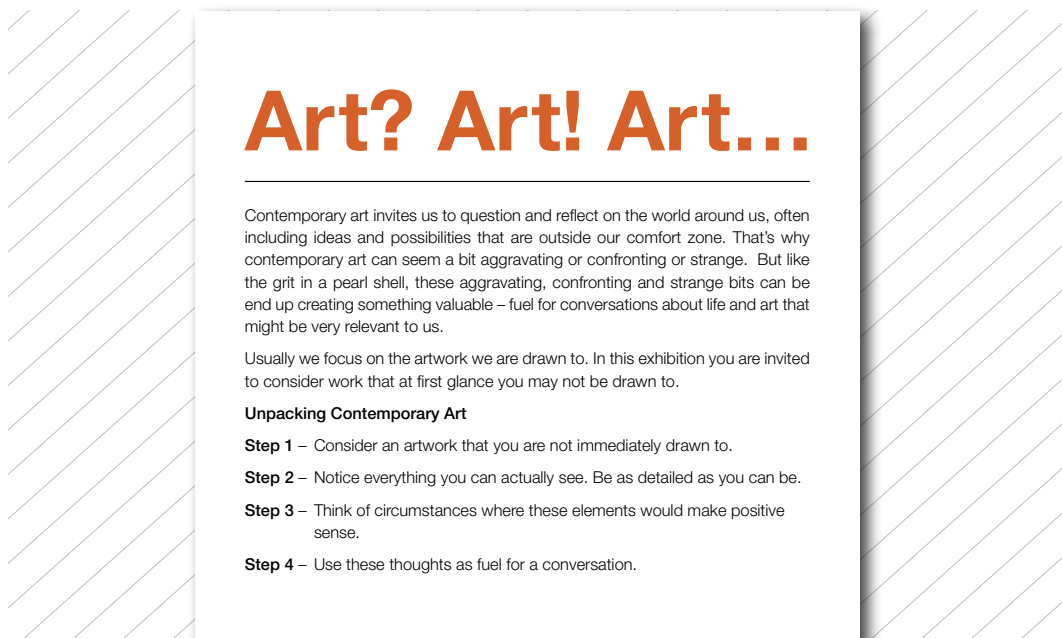
As a consequence of this history, contemporary art has tended to mess with and contradict the more familiar forms of artmaking. Nowadays, where we might prefer beauty, there can be messiness and confusion. Where we crave resolution, there might be loose ends and odd bits. Where we seek emotional connection, there can appear to be cold repulsion. With contemporary art all these odd details create triggers for conversations about ideas, propositions and alternative worlds.

A difficulty that has emerged as a consequence of the more conversational situation is that it takes time to figure out. Appreciation of an artwork used to be almost instant. With representational work we could tell immediately if the perspective, proportion and shading were right. With expressionist work we could decide in a trice whether the emotional effect worked for us. With abstraction we knew whether the arrangements of the formal aspects made for a well-constructed image. And there is still plenty of art that works in these ways. But with contemporary artworks there are questions to be asked, ideas to be unpacked, connections to be made, understandings to be uncovered. It's more like a vibrant conversation with a stranger than a silent aesthetic experience that we have quietly on our own.

To engage with contemporary art therefore, viewers will need to learn an appropriate code for looking.

Example #4: Providing the code

In our project we printed an outline of this other way of looking, setting out the steps that can be useful in engaging directly with contemporary art. You might like to use it with visitors to your gallery.



It is important to note that with this way of looking, it is useful to notice everything, as it's not always clear what might be important. This is not difficult to do as contemporary art is made from the stuff of life. While this kind of art may not conform to the viewers' concept of art the stuff itself is recognisable, and what's more viewers know where the stuff fits into their lives. The more detail the viewer can identify from looking, the richer their interpretation can be. And it may be something seemingly incidental that triggers a meaningful insight. This means encouraging viewers to consider all the things that they see even if they seem wrong, inappropriate, silly, messy, unsolved or a thousand other negatives that contemporary art can throw at them.

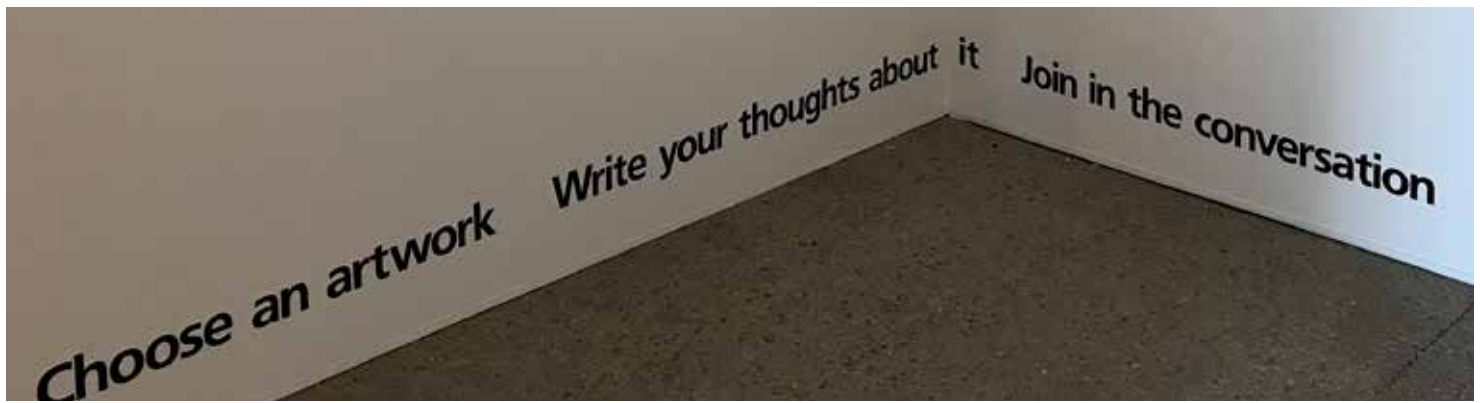
MAKE THINKING VISIBLE

Remembering all the information that one may find in an artwork can be difficult. It is hard for our brains to hold onto lots of information simultaneously. Saying aloud what is seen is useful but writing things down can be even better, at least at the beginning when the new skill is being learned. This way everything that is noticed can be taken into account.

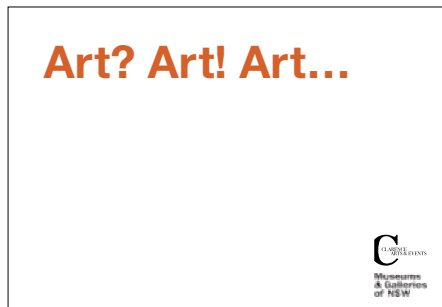
Curators and gallery guides can help individuals and groups to their make thinking visible, however this is a very time consuming process. An alternative is to create an opportunity in the gallery space for viewers to share their responses in a collective gathering of feelings, thoughts and ideas.

Example #5: Designating space for viewers

To achieve this in our project we chose to create a special place in a prominent position in the gallery that was easy to access and use.



We also printed special cards for viewers' responses in order to highlight the fact that their comments were important and valued.



And we wrote instructions for what viewers could do on the walls of the hub:

Choose an artwork
Write your thoughts about it
Join in the conversation

ACCEPT ALL RESPONSES

To ensure everyone is included in the conversation it is important to accept all responses no matter how positive or negative they might be. Validating viewers' experience strengthens the connections with the artwork.

Example #6: Including all responses

In our experiment we displayed all contributions no matter how banal or contentious they may have been. In this way, everyone who chose to participate was included. Feeling included is key to participating further.

Audio or video methods of gathering comments could be used as well, although the simple technology of writing and placing cards on the wall means that everything is available to everyone all the time. It is also a cheap and effective tool where resources are limited.

ENGAGE IN ACTIVE LISTENING

Many galleries already provide opportunities for feedback, often in the form of comment books. A quick analysis however reveals that these are often filled with simple accolades and brickbats: Well done! Great show! Congratulations! Not my cup of tea, etc. Judgements like these usually mark the end of the experience. With contemporary art it is more useful for viewers to use their judgements as starting points for reflective consideration and understanding.

Example #7: Using judgements as starting points

We chose to go beyond the viewers' judgemental responses by offering a reflective comment from the curator that focussed on the understanding of art that individual viewer's judgements revealed. It was heartening to



note that viewers not only spent time deciding what to write on their card, but they also read what others had written and sometimes made an additional response of their own. In this way visual conversations about the artworks and art in general were developed in the gallery over the duration of the show.

Art? Art! Art...

SOCKET MAKES ME FEEL UNCOMFORTABLE WITH THE IMAGERY. IT FEELS A BIT ODD. I AM UNCERTAIN ABOUT THE CUT. PERHAPS IT IS A NAVELE OR ANOTHER PART OF THE ANATOMY. NOT SURE WHETHER I SHOULD LOOK. I AM FASCINATED BUT ALSO KIND OF REPULSED.



Curator's response

Art shouldn't make us feel uncomfortable?



Art? Art! Art...

No I don't think that is right. It is ok for art to make us a bit uncomfortable. The work makes me feel sick but I keep looking. It's odd and intriguing. I am suspended somewhere between looking and turning away.



LOOK FIRST ASK QUESTIONS LATER

Many viewers are interested in finding out why artists do what they do and how they go about it. In our approach we suggest that information about the artists and the artworks be made available to the viewers, but we also encourage viewers to engage directly with the artwork *before* they read or listen to the interpretations of others.

While artwork can be difficult to understand to start with, we encourage viewers to do their best to look first and make their own interpretation, and only then to find out about the artwork from the perspective of the artist or the curator. In this way, the viewer is able to see how their interpretation relates to the artist's ideas and intentions and to experience the satisfaction of making a personal and authentic connection with the meaning of artwork.

Studio visit to Amanda Davies' studio



Example #8: Artists' talks & studio visits



Example #9: Curator's talks

Art?
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Art...

BUILD THE CONVERSATION

Artist statements, curatorial essays and floor talks are commonplace in galleries these days and can be very interesting. The problem is however, if viewers perceive particular artworks negatively, why would they bother to read or listen to others speaking about them? Having the opportunity to experience their own thoughts and responses reflected in the gallery space is one way to break the barrier between audience and artwork.

Example #10: Creating an alternative catalogue

In this instance we chose not to produce a catalogue or provide statements in advance so we did not pre-empt viewers' responses to the works. As an alternative we created a 'viewers' catalogue' of reflective conversations by amalgamating the viewers' responses recorded on comment cards with the many conversations the curator and gallery volunteers had with individuals and groups during the exhibition.

The following reflective conversations indicate how viewers felt about and interpreted the artworks in the exhibition. The responses have been edited and ordered into a flowing exchange between the collective of viewers and the curator.





Conciliation (of self), 2015
digital print, 100 x 100cm

Reconciliation (of self), 2015
digital print, 100 x 100cm

Restitution (of self), 2015
digital print, 100 x 100cm

Courtesy of the Artist & Lisa Fehily

ABDUL ABDULLAH

V: I don't like this art because I don't understand it.

V: I like the way he is holding the monkey. The tender touch and fragility in the monkey's hand almost makes me want to cry. Beautiful.

V: To me the photos are equally tender and tough.

C: What has the artist done to make you think this?

V: The way he is holding the monkey is very caring. This is not what is really expected of a stereotypical man. A glimpse of a possible side to masculinity we need to see much more of perhaps?

C: Is anything in the image strange or unexpected?

V: He's wearing a monkey mask. This could be something about evolution... something about us having the same origins.

V: Humans are no different to animals – no better than other animals. We need to care more about the environment so the animals can continue to exist.

V: I'm but not sure about use of animals in art... is it a real live monkey? Was the monkey sedated? If yes, that is not OK!

V: It's just a theatrical mask, so what's going on is a performance not real life. The man is playing a role. Could be trying to be more like the monkey so the monkey feels more comfortable.

V: There is a residue of gaffer tape that has been removed from the mask. Perhaps the mask has been repaired.

V: I think it's a Planet of the Apes mask, and where there's tape is where the hairy bits were. So perhaps the man has taken these bits off to be more exposed – to make his face more open for the monkey to see. It's like the man has chosen to wear the mask to connect more to the monkey – to show empathy and compassion.

C: What about the tattoos?

V: There are some tattoos. They all look like he's done them himself. There's one of the Southern Cross with a crescent moon around one of the stars. I think that is a Turkish symbol or Muslim? The symbols don't really go together.

V: The artist has a Muslim name so perhaps it is about how he has to change to fit in.

V: Or it could be that we decide to do something to make people from other cultures feel comfortable by trying on what it might feel like to be the other person. To stand in their shoes, just like the man is standing in the monkey mask.



Socket, 2007
pigment print, 85 x 64cm

Courtesy of the Artist & Bett Gallery, Hobart and Arc One Gallery Melbourne

PAT BRASSINGTON

V: This is weird. It is a unusual artwork.

V: It doesn't really make sense to me. I'm just wondering what the true meaning might be?

C: Where would you place this work on a scale of 1 to 10, where 10 is perfect realism?

V: It's kind of OK as it is a neck but it is a bit weird, so maybe 7 out of 10. It's kind of surreal rather than real.

C: How does it work as abstraction?

V: Well, it is balanced and symmetrical and simplified so it's ok as an abstract I guess. But I don't think that's really what the work is about.

C: How about expression?

V: It's quite creepy

V: It makes me feel uncomfortable. It feels a bit odd. I am uncertain about the cut. Perhaps it is a navel or another part of the anatomy. I'm not sure whether I should look. I am fascinated but also kind of repulsed.

C: Art shouldn't make us feel uncomfortable?

V: No, I think it is ok for art to make us a bit uncomfortable. This work makes me feel sick but I keep looking. It's odd and intriguing. I am suspended somewhere between looking and turning away.

C: If a work creates feelings does it also have to 'mean' anything? Could the feeling be enough?

V: Not having to work out a meaning would be a relief.

V: At the same time, I think the work can be read more literally too. The socket could be a reference to technology. And being cut makes me wonder about the technology/human interface and whether technology is wounding us.

V: I connect with the sexual inference – the hole in a beautiful female skin in the back of neck or other place of body. The male and society use their power as a knife to cut into the woman's body. The female body is opened by the violence.

V: I am drawn to the nape of the neck, it's so elegant. I am reminded how special the neck is to the geisha in Japanese culture. I think a hole in that spot could be fatal. And I wonder what could be plugged into that socket? So the image generates lots of intriguing questions.



The Birds, 2010
glass on aluminium panel, 180 x 120 x 2cm

Courtesy of the Artist

MATT CALVERT

V: I don't think much of this one really. It's a pretty simple image and a bit too kitsch for me.

C: What do you see?

V: A cute little child from a children's picture book. She has her head bowed like she is thinking about something. She might be holding something. A bird? I'm not sure.

V: The cute kneeling child is a disconnected focal point. It is a simplified silhouette with no detail. It reminds me of those silhouette lockets in the past that people use to have made to remember their loved ones.

V: There are birds, crows I reckon. They have sharp claws, like the Hitchcock film also called The Birds. They are a symbol of death.

V: Everything is black too, which is another symbol of death.

C: What about the glass?

V: It has been smashed.

C: If glass is broken like this what might have happened?

V: Something violent. It's sharp and dangerous.

C: What about the background?

V: The figure is almost floating in a cloudy space. There is no background detail – a bit like a dream perhaps – or a memory.

C: Can you make a story out of all those things you have noticed?

V: It is sad and lonely. Something awful has happened to the child or in the child's life, probably a death of some kind. It has a dark message – the future looks gloomy.



Mother (Merry-Go-Round), 2016

inkjet print on archival Hahnemuhle cotton paper, edition of 4 + 1 AP, 120 x 180 cm

Courtesy the Artist and Andrew Baker Art Dealer, Brisbane

MICHAEL COOK

V: There is such a sense of loss in the way the young woman is looking into the distance. Perhaps she's waiting for the absent child. Or she could be remembering her own childhood. Or looking from her past into the future. When I first came here from the UK I lived in a small town and felt lost like that.

V: It could be an Aboriginal place she is in – so that would make it about the stolen children. She is very elegant and 60s. Is she from this place, or was she taken from here. It is an empty and abandoned landscape. Has she forgotten this place or is she remembering?

V: The contrast of the woman's elegant clothes against the black and white background is interesting and for me raises questions about the social status of Aboriginal in Australian society.

C: You don't expect to find an Aboriginal woman dressed like that in this kind of place?

V: I wonder why her costume and elegance is shocking? We're not expecting to see a gorgeous Aboriginal woman in this location where we'd expect a marginalised person to be.

V: The work reminds me of the film 'The Dressmaker'. It also reminds me of the women in the television documentary about the 1967 referendum to count Aboriginal people in the census I saw recently. They all wore nice hats and gloves with their neat tailored suits. It is not the image of Aboriginal people we see on TV these days.

V: Having been in some of those remote places, I've seen the people trying to maintain decorum. So much sadness but also a fighting spirit.

V: It's creepily familiar.

V: I think the photographs are made digitally as the shadows aren't quite right. This means that different bits of the image were made at different times and then put together. I feel this disjuncture puts the various things in the image out of time, and out of place too.

V: The artworks relate to the big conversations that we need to have – the sad story that is still playing out.

V: I'm not usually drawn to photography in a gallery context, but this is compelling and thought provoking.



Tuesday 4th April, 2017
oil on linen, 92cm x 111cm

Lacrime, 2017
oil on linen, 31cm x 35.5cm

Courtesy of the Artist & Bett Gallery, Hobart



AMANDA DAVIES

V: She's a very good painter. They are very good paintings. Very realistic! But why did she put those things on the lady's face? It looks weird.

V: The lady looks sad, I think her face hurts. (Oscar – 2.5 years old)

C: What else are we looking at?

V: There are two paintings but they are facing the wall. They are wrapped up. Hidden from view.

C: Wrapped in what?

V: They are not wrapped in bubble wrap ready for sending somewhere. They're dustsheets like they cover furniture with. It indicates that the owner is going away. The paintings are being covered for their protection for a while.

V: They remind me of shrouds. The square black painting represents death or emptiness too. And the sheets are secured with tape that is black. So the paintings definitely have something to do with death.

C: What about the other colours?

V: It looks like there are streaks of blood on the left wall.

V: The colour of the walls is a bit too pink too.

C: Where else do you see this colour?

V: It's like the colour the artist uses for painting her own skin. So it is all very visceral and fleshy. A self-portrait perhaps?

C: The title is 4th April 2017. What do we find if we Google that date? We could add death or tragedy to the search.

V: Google Quote: As the events of Tuesday 4th of April 2017 unfolded, 89 people were killed and 500 people were treated in hospital, when the town of Khan Sheikoun, in north-west Syria, were exposed to Sarin gas dropped from warplanes. Condemnation mounted as the Syrian government was blamed for the appalling attack of its own people.

C: Does knowing this make a difference?

V: Yes, I would have responded differently had I known the significance of the date to start with. Without that knowledge I found the face paintings off-putting in spite of the painter's talent.

V: The artist's eyes have been opened. Her journey into art and its power was a fantasy. Welcome to the real world! She needs handkerchiefs to dry her tears. She cries coils of paint and streams of colour. She is empty now. She packs it up and puts it away. And dissolves!

V: I am wondering why I don't ask when I see a woman weeping, what caused her tears? And offer her comfort.

V: The state of the world is very distressing right now... I would like band-aids for my eyes.



Counting for Nothing (map of Syria), 2017
oil on aluminium, 85 x 57 x 3cm

Energy to Burn (details), 2017
oil on aluminium, each element 19 x 20cm

Sticks and Stones (edition: 4/5), 2016/17
aluminium, 44 x 32cm

Courtesy of the Artist & Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery

FIONA HALL

V: I personally don't like this one because I don't see the point of it. What does Coke Zero One mean? I don't understand the point or message that is meant to be shown.

C: What do you see?

V: Red, white, black and grey faces on flattened cans? The faces are confronting.

C: What do you mean?

V: The portraits look aggressive, or perhaps desperate. They are bandaged and red-eyed. Some are emaciated, on death's door. They are a bit like mug shots. And they are all men... except the babies perhaps... and skulls.

C: What about the cans?

V: The aluminium cans are the backdrops to these painted portraits. They are predominantly Coca Cola and energy drinks with the aggressive words highlighted. The drink cans are made by multinational companies and stand for corporate culture and America.

V: Though the drinks have 'zero' health benefits they are promoted as pleasurable despite having clear warnings on the cans e.g. zero, die, free, punched, monster, assault. Some are high sugar drinks and some have the sugar removed and replaced with bitter tasting chemicals. Either way their power is made of next to nothing and they are definitely not good for health. They just make young people aggressive and that is highlighted by the words.

C: And the colours?

V: The colours are mostly black and red. That represents aggression and power and war. And the font that 'Mother' is written in is what Hell's Angels and the Nazis used, which is all rather frightening.

C: Have you seen the subtitle of the first work?

V: Map of Syria. The country is fragmented with the word zero marked out and there are circles like targets. The surface is all messy and destroyed. The country has been reduced to a bleak eagle eyed view – a map of broken roads with desolation everywhere. Behind it all the ever-present representation of the West – the Coca Cola brand! The corporate multi-national world!

If that's a map of Syria then perhaps the portraits are victims of war locked in prison. I can see the marks where the days have been counted off or it could be counting the bodies.

C: What about the Sticks and Stones piece?

V: It's razor wire, which would also mean prison. Behind the wire is a simple dirt grave. People are dying inside the prison. I'm thinking maybe the portraits are asylum seekers locked in detention centres rather than just prisoners of war? Or is that the same thing?

C: If we put the pieces together...

V: It could be about the horrors of war and man's inhumanity to man in locking up people who have already had so much to deal with that they are just on edge between life and death if they have not already gone over. And all to keep the US economy going. And for what? For the benefit of corporations that make useless products like Coca Cola that are no good for anyone.

V: I know it's about Syria, but to me it also evokes Eastland's Shopping Centre. I love that something I ordinarily would not love has taken me. It is so thought and soul-provoking.



Skull Rorschach, 2008
oil Rorschach on canvas, 190 x 140 cm

Courtesy of the Artist & Jan Murphy Gallery, Brisbane

BEN QUILTY

V: I don't really like skulls, but I'm drawn to the paintwork in this. From afar it is very different to close up. You see something new each time you look.

V: I love the texture but what is the message?

C: What do you see?

V: There are two skulls. Ben Quilty taught in an Indonesian prison, his two favourite students were executed – hence his pain represented by the two skulls.

V: They remind me of memento mori... death... Remember you will die.

V: I love the strong thick strokes and the symmetry.

V: The two skulls have been made like children at primary school make butterflies. It makes a mirror image. But the two sides are not quite the same. The one on the right was painted first. You can see some gaps in the paint on the left hand one. The left hand one has thicker paint too. So they are kind of the same but different.

V: The viscosity and reality of the thick paint makes it feel substantial – more real if you like. You can feel the suction of the paint as the canvas was pulled apart. I think it wasn't easy, it took quite a lot of effort.

C: The title refers to Rorschach. Do you know what that is?

V: Something psychological that show whether you are crazy or not. They reveal the subconscious.

C: Things that are hidden?

V: Yes. Our blindspots. What we want to ignore.

C: What about the colour? Where does that come from?

V: The colours are earthy. I'm reminded of burial green moss or a burial in clay.

V: The colours also remind me of camouflage of the uniforms that soldiers wear in the desert. So that is about hiding too.

V: So the two skulls might be at war but actually they are made of the same stuff and share the same fate. But we choose not to see. And anyway, in the end it is dust to dust. So what is the point?

V: Remembrance – Lest we forget!

V: What a waste!



Love, 2016

graphite on drafting film, 148 x 200 cm

Courtesy of the Artist & Bett Gallery, Hobart

LUCIENNE RICKARD

V: I don't understand this image. It looks unfinished.

C: Being unfinished is a problem.

V: Only the skin is in detail. The covered up bits are very sketchy. We can only really see the exposed surface.

V: Not that we really can. It is not easy to see. The detail hidden the black shapes is amazing, but you have to move around and into the light to see it. he's a boxer so it's like you have to spar with him. The marks in the background could be left by his fancy footwork as he danced around the ring.

V: I like the movement in this piece. It's great. And how the light seems to reflect the features even on the solid black.

V: I don't like the boxer on his back. He has fallen down and is a bit helpless. No longer as strong as he would be if he was standing. He's a bit vulnerable.

V: This poor bloke has been stunned by the last blow. Look how he is trying to raise his head, to get up from the canvas but he can't! He's hopped into the ring. He has the gear. He has the gloves, the shorts, the shoes. But not the skill. He's been floored. He was not in good shape for the fight. He's let himself go. He's old and flabby. It was not a contest. He should have retired. He's taken a lot of beatings like this before but no doubt he'll be back for more – when he heals.

V: Not sure about the 'love' in the title. Where is the love?

V: He's been knocked down. Possibly shows the hardships of love.

V: He's fallen for someone? Head over heels!

V: Or the artist demonstrates love though the intense process she uses. It must take an age to draw like this. And it is odd that she has chosen this subject and then given it so much care.



Remote Nation, 2008

standard definition video, duration: 13.56 mins

Courtesy of Artist and Arc One Gallery, Melbourne

Courtesy of the Artist & Arc One Gallery, Melbourne

CYRUS TANG

V: There is no point to this. It isn't a nice artwork.

C: What do you see?

V: The tiny village that looks European to me is lost in the fog. All is silent except for the relentless dripping sound. The town is empty. There is no colour. Is that snow falling from the roofs?

V: I see change – continued and continual. But what happens when all the snow has gone?

V: I dislike how long it goes for... it's boring for 14 minutes. It would be okay for 1 minute.

C: Art should be quite quick to absorb.

V: I find it very calming and it totally captivates me for a brief period.

V: There's not enough time to slow down these days?

V: But the roofs cave in and walls collapse. I think the village is submerged in water and slowly crumbling and dissolving as a consequence. Once it starts it cannot stop. Could be the aftermath of an atomic disaster, the crumbling of civilization, the effect of global warming, or simply solid and seemingly substantial things returning to dust.

V: Time dissolves everything eventually. We're just made of clay.



Best Before IV, 2016
acrylic on board, 75 x 80cm

Courtesy of the Artist & Bett Gallery, Hobart

NATHAN TAYLOR

V: Seems odd. I'm not getting the reasoning behind this. Why would you want to waste coffee and donuts?

V: And why photorealism in 2017? Who cares if you can do magic tricks?

V: The artist has a superb technique. It's better than a photograph, because the artist has spent time thinking about the subject. It's not magic, it's about skill and as I understand, about the huge food wastage in the western world.

V: Seeing the beauty in something that has been thrown away is interesting to think about. Looking at a yummy donut that has gone to waste and a coffee that wakes us up and gives us energy, being thrown away, makes me wonder why.

V: It is not good to litter.

V: I think it is about waste and the throw away society we live in today. The coffee cup's bigger than life size because it is a big problem. Did you see that documentary about how many paper cups are thrown away each day in Australia? Scary!

V: It's an extremely beautifully worked piece. I still can't believe it's not a photograph. How many times have we seen something like this – something half eaten, tossed away.

V: I like the focus on the 'dropped takeaway coffee'. As if the drinker has responded to the hot topic of the negative contribution takeaway coffee makes to landfill.

C: Is anything odd?

V: It's just a bit messy at the edges – a bit unfinished.

V: I relate to not finishing it. I can't function without coffee. So, if the coffee gets spilled why bother finishing anything. I think it's humorous!

C: What do you see if you get up close?

V: There's a pencil sketch of the painting and lots of calculations.

C: What do you notice about the numbers?

V: They have lots of decimal places – 48.35124003, 2.252158893 etc.

V: The artist needed to be accurate and to work things out to so many decimal places.

V: That seems a bit extreme. He might be having a joke with us.

C: He's done that deliberately.

V: He might just want us to think about how difficult it is to make these kinds of photographic realist paintings. That he had to be very accurate to get the perspective to look right.

V: He showing us the process? So being unfinished was necessary otherwise we might not see this.

C: Painting very realistically is hard work?

V: Yes, no wonder not many artists paint this way these days.



small world (landscape painting), 2012

duration: 5:46 mins, colour/ silent, HD Digital video (4KHD transferred to 1080p)

Courtesy of the Artist & Anna Schwartz Gallery, Melbourne

DANIEL VON STURMER

V: I'm not drawn to this because I don't have the patience to sit and watch it unfold. I'm impatient.

V: Sorry, don't have time to watch paint dry either.

C: There's nothing to see.

V: Looks like a building. Then a mosque perhaps. Then a corner of a room. And finally a flat shape.

V: First I saw the white and then it reversed and I could only see the negative black space. Then back to the white again.

V: I loved witnessing the perspective and colonnade materialize then dissolve in this small world.

V: Nails the OCD in me! I find it completely satisfying.

V: It reminds me of watching the last bit of water drain from the bath as a child.

V: I never feel comfortable judging an artwork without knowing the meaning behind it but this one simply doesn't interest me enough to find out what it means.

C: Art should always mean something.

V: I don't think it has to mean anything particularly. It's very meditative. The pace is constant and mesmerising... more an experience to be lived through rather than an object to look at. It's nice to slow down and watch it unfold. We don't slow down enough these days.



Pink fucks black, 2016

oil, enamel and glitter on composite panel, 150 x 150cm

From a series entitled *The Spill*

Private Collection

MEGAN WALCH

V: I don't get this one at all... it's so aggressive. I wouldn't want this on my wall. It would be hard to live with.

V: Lots of visceral shiny paint – lots of pink but it doesn't do anything for me. It's just a decorative splodge to hang on a neutral-coloured wall for someone who is looking to brighten up their lives. Is it art or decoration?

C: Art should be more than decoration?

V: At first glance, I found this piece boring and abstract. I couldn't read a meaning into it. But on closer inspection I noticed the differences in texture, the highly reflective black coupled with the bright colours fading into white. I normally would have skimmed over this piece but I found an odd sense of satisfaction in it.

V: The painting has the delicious materiality and sensuality of paint. I think it's about the 'stuff' of paint.

V: This piece bothers me because it is derivative to me, harking back to art of 40 years ago and hence, what's the point?

C: Art should be absolutely new and original.

V: No, why should it? That's probably not possible anyway. We all build on the past.

C: What are you seeing?

V: It's confusing. It's very free and fluid but then there are these other controlled bits that are painted in. It is very uncomfortable. So much going on! There are matt areas and shiny bits; beautiful bits and messy bits. So much movement! I couldn't live with the chaos.

C: There's too much going on.

V: I can see a serpent or perhaps it's a Chinese dragon?

V: Or a Sumo wrestler?

V: Am I allowed to see a superhero here? Movement and murder abound.

C: There's some kind of fight going on.

V: It is dynamic movement that won't stand still that's for sure

V: To me it's awakening disturbing awareness – a prickling physical sensation.

V: It's confusing, messy, in a state of flux, dangerous. It's pretty horrid really, which is kind of how contemporary life is in many respects, especially the politics and the situation with the environment.

CONCLUSION

Viewer conversations reveal the degree to which looking intensely and reconstructing the artwork through reflecting what is seen can be the stimulus for a rich and meaningful interpretations that in turn can lead to a greater appreciation of the more challenging aspects of contemporary art. The viewers' judgements no longer need to be the end of the matter but rather can mark the beginning of expansive and meaningful encounters with ideas and perceptions about the world we all live in.



Art? Art! Art...



THE CURATOR

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www.newaudiencesforart.com

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