VCE Studio Arts
Unit 4- Area of Study 3
Art Industry Contexts
Presentation of Artworks to the public
INTRODUCTION

The exhibition of artworks to the public involves a number of people and processes. It is usually the culmination of months, sometimes years of planning and decision making. When a viewer sees an exhibition of artworks, they see the end product of a range of processes and decisions. There are three key processes in the exhibition of artworks. These are the curatorial content of an exhibition, the exhibition design and the promotion and marketing of exhibitions.

CURATORIAL CONTENT

Curatorial content involves deciding on the concept or idea for an exhibition and the types of artists/artworks that would be suitable for the exhibition and the proposed exhibition space. It then involves the process of locating or sourcing the artworks from the artist or the owners of the artworks and selecting which of their works will be chosen to be exhibited to match the concept for the exhibition. Finally it involves researching and writing appropriate material to support the exhibition. There is often a range of people making decisions regarding the curatorial content of an exhibition. A curator is a person who specialises in this role. Most curators are employed by public galleries. These specialist curators are also responsible for managing collections within the public gallery and developing the scope of the collection. Curators may be employed either full time or part time by large organisations such as the National Bank or BHP Billiton to manage their art collections and curate exhibitions of those works from time to time. Many curators work freelance and will often on their own initiative develop an exhibition of artworks by artists they have selected. Freelance curators often utilise artist run galleries as exhibition spaces. Freelance curators are often invited to curate a particular exhibition in a public gallery or as part of a festival or arts event and in this context are described as guest curators.

Gallery directors, gallery assistants, artists and art academics are also regularly involved in curatorial content even though they do not describe themselves as curators. A detailed outline of the three main activities involved in curatorial content will be provided.

DECIDING ON THE CONCEPT OR IDEA FOR THE EXHIBITION AND THE TYPES OF ARTISTS/ARTWORKS THAT WOULD BE SUITABLE FOR THE EXHIBITION

The first part of planning an exhibition involves making decisions related to the concept or idea behind the exhibition. A successful exhibition of artworks generally has an idea or concept which links the artworks in the exhibition. This creates an exhibition that represents more than just a jumble of objects and ideas. In most cases the person planning the exhibition will know where the proposed exhibition is to be held and has definite limitations about the size and facilities of the exhibition space. The curatorial concept behind an exhibition usually falls into one or more of the following categories.
The exhibition is being held to showcase the artworks of a single artist (either living or dead)

Public galleries often hold exhibitions of the artworks of one artist who has made a significant contribution to the art world. These artworks are not for sale and belong to other galleries, private collectors and/or the artist. The curatorial concept of a solo or solo retrospective exhibition is essentially based on highlighting the best work of that particular artist over a period of time. The selected artworks would highlight interesting features of the artist’s technique, style or subject matter. The artist is usually someone with significant international or national acclaim. Large public galleries like the NGV International regularly hold ‘blockbuster’ exhibitions of artworks by international artists like Rembrandt, Salvador Dali and Andy Warhol because these recognised artists have a strong hold on the public’s imagination and massive ‘pulling power’ to entice people to visit art galleries. The curatorial content of a ‘blockbuster’ exhibition not only attempts to showcase the feature works of the renowned artists, but may also focus on the more infamous or interesting aspects of their personal lives and practice as an artist. In the case of solo exhibitions held in smaller regional public galleries, the gallery director will sometimes attempt to feature an artist who has some significance to the region which may interest local and visiting art viewers.

A retrospective or survey exhibition is an exhibition that includes the artworks produced by one artist over a long period of time; in some cases it may represent their life’s work. A retrospective exhibition for a living artist is usually only awarded to living artists who have been practising for more than 25 years. A retrospective exhibition in a public gallery is a mark of considerable status in the art world. For example in 2006, The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia at Federation Square held an exhibition titled ‘Angel’ which was a retrospective exhibition containing works from Australian sculptor, painter and printmaker Deborah Halpern. The artworks exhibited were from a period of 27 years of artistic practice from 1979 to 2006.

The exhibition is being held to showcase the work of a group of artists that highlight a particular art form or technique.

For example, the Centre for Contemporary Photography (CCP) in Melbourne each year holds a group exhibition called the Kodak Salon. This group exhibition features the best photographic artwork of artists from all over Australia. The CCP website describes this annual group exhibition in the following way.

"The Kodak Salon is an annual event celebrating the latest developments in photo-based practice. An open-entry exhibition and competition the Kodak Salon provides an excellent opportunity to exhibit work in a professional, high profile context. The Kodak Salon is one of the largest and most renowned photographic award exhibitions in the country, including artists from all around Australia."

In 2010, the NGV International held an exhibition called Re-VIEW. The curatorial concept behind the exhibition was to enable viewers the opportunity to enjoy a small selection of some of the great international photographs from the NGV International Photography collection. The exhibition was curated by Isabel Crombie, Senior Curator of the Photography collection at NGV International.
In 2010 The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia at Federation Square held an exhibition titled *Stick it!: Collage in Australian Art*. The curatorial concept underpinning the exhibition was to highlight artists who used collage in their works. Collage describes the technique of gluing or attaching paper, fabric, natural objects and ephemera to create or enhance an artwork. The NGV website stated that this was the first exhibition at the NGV to focus on this art form and it included collages by Australian artists such as Sidney Nolan, James Gleeson, Robert Klippel, and Brook Andrew.

_The exhibition is being held to showcase the works of a group of artists that exhibit a similar artistic style or belong to a particular group of artists._

For example in 2010, *Heide Museum of Modern Art* held an exhibition called *Cubism and Australian Art*. The exhibition curators were Sue Cramer and Lesley Harding. The curators intention in this exhibition was to show the impact of the revolutionary movement of Cubism on Australian art from the early twentieth century to the present day.

In 2010 the *National Gallery of Australia* held an exhibition titled *Masterpieces from Paris: Van Gogh, Gauguin, Cezanne and Beyond*. It featured 112 of some of the best-known Post-Impressionist artworks from the *Musee d’Orsay* in Paris, one of the great museums of 19th century art.

_The exhibition is being held to showcase the works of a group of artists whose work is relevant to a specific cultural, political or environmental theme._

In this type of exhibition the curator usually develops a theme or concept which he or she thinks will have interest or appeal to the general public. The curator then invites or selects artists to exhibit artworks which relate to that curatorial concept. For example, *The Biennale of Sydney* is a contemporary visual arts event that is held every two years. Each Biennale is held in Sydney's leading art venues and public sites and it is renowned for showcasing innovative contemporary art from Australia and around the world. Each Biennale has a different curatorial concept. For example, the 2010 Biennale of Sydney curatorial concept was *The Beauty Of Distance: Songs Of Survival In A Precarious Age*. The website for the Biennale stated that; “Situated in the heart of Sydney, in a land that has traditionally regarded distance as a disadvantage, the 17th Biennale of Sydney will celebrate the beauty of distance by including art from around the world. But why should distance be good or beautiful? Distance allows us to be ourselves despite the many capacities we share. We are all the same, yet different and it is our differences that make us—according to the circumstances—beautiful, terrifying, attractive, boring, sexy, unsettling, fascinating, challenging, funny, stimulating, horrific or even many of these at once.”

In 2009, the *Mornington Peninsula Regional Gallery* held an exhibition called *A Changing Land: Devilbend*. The curatorial concept of this exhibition was to showcase the way a range of artists considered the themes of sustainability, climate change and protection of species in relation to the Devilbend Reserve. *Devilbend Reserve* is a natural reserve in the Mornington Peninsula region which was under threat from development.
In 2010 Tarra Warra Museum of Art in Healesville, Victoria held an exhibition called Bushfire Australia. The curatorial concept of the exhibition was to examine the recurrence of bushfire imagery in the work of Australian artists, including artworks made in direct response to the Black Saturday 2009 fires. The intention of the curators was to create an exploration of bush fires as a dramatic Australian phenomenon.

Curators can be criticised if the curatorial concept is too broad or meaningless. For example in 2008, art critic Andrew Mackenzie criticised the curatorial concept behind the Adelaide Biennial exhibition Handle with Care 2008 which was curated by Felicity Fenner. The curatorial concept behind the exhibition was about how artists expressed their anxieties about the fragile state of our world. Fenner invited 22 Australian artists to create works that dealt with this concept. In an article in Art Guide Australia Mackenzie stated:

“Handle with Care presented ‘diverse responses to the fragility of the world’, encompassing social, cultural, geo-political and environmental dimensions. It was an unimaginably large premise. Maybe its’ the times we live in, but it seemed to me that this theme could accommodate just about all of the contemporary art I can think of. What artworks these days, except for the more benign Archibald portraits, do not exhibit some sign of anxiety or disquiet? Perhaps more importantly, I found the jumbling together of many distinct anxieties just a little too forced. Was this a good exhibition? Two questions come to mind. Did the show add to the potency of any one of the works? And did the art works collectively add up to a greater experience than the sum of its parts? I’m afraid not. Handle with Care gets high marks however for audacious curatorial intent. But in the end it seems the wrong show for the right art. Its big idea was too big, despite the quality of art it subpoenaed as evidence.”

The exhibition is being held to showcase the works of artists based on the award of an art prize or an educational achievement.

The curatorial concept of this type of exhibition is usually directed by an imposed requirement or outcome. For example the Art Gallery of NSW holds an exhibition each year of the finalists in the Archibald Prize which is a prize awarded to the best portrait of an Australian man or woman distinguished in Art, Letters, Science or Politics. The entries are judged by the Trustees of the Art Gallery of NSW and the winner receives a prize of $50,000. In 2010 the prize was sponsored by Myer. The prize dictates the curatorial theme of the exhibition which is focused on portraits of Australian people.

The exhibition is being held with the primary purpose of selling the new or recent works of an artist or artists.

In the commercial gallery context most solo exhibitions relate to the exhibition of new artworks developed by one artist over a year or several years. The primary purpose of the exhibition is to sell these artworks. These exhibitions are often titled “recent works”. The conceptual development of the theme or subject matter of the exhibition and the title of the exhibition is driven by the artist. However, gallery directors often assist artists in thematic or subject matter development. For example in 2010 commercial gallery Gilligan Grant Gallery held an exhibition called Little Wonders,
an exhibition of recent paintings by Beth Kennedy. Kennedy developed the theme of the paintings around women who were in love, lost and often dislocated from their own feelings.

The Gilligan Grant Gallery website stated; "The women in her paintings are in love and in doubt and quite often alone in the interiors they inhabit. An air of the unresolved hovers and deliberately ambiguous narratives are created to draw the viewer in."

Similar to commercial galleries, when artist run galleries hold exhibitions of recent works of an artist, the concept of the exhibition will be driven by the theme of the artist's recent artworks. In this context the artist is largely the curator of their own exhibition. This is also the case in galleries where artists have hired space and are left to organise the idea and content of their exhibition usually without any assistance from the gallery.

Commercial galleries and artist run galleries often hold group exhibitions of various artists with the intention of selling these artworks. To make the exhibition more cohesive, there will usually be a curatorial concept to the exhibition. For example in 2010, commercial gallery Gilligan Grant Gallery held a group exhibition called "Who Got The Bunny," which featured recent artworks by five of its represented artists. The curatorial theme developed by gallery director Therese Gilligan was based on each artist's interpretation of the mythological Easter Bunny.

THE PROCESS OF LOCATING OR SOURCING THE ARTWORKS FROM THE ARTIST OR THE OWNERS OF THE ARTWORKS AND SELECTING WHICH PARTICULAR WORKS BEST MATCH THE CURATORIAL CONCEPT OF THE EXHIBITION

Once a curatorial concept has been developed and the type of artist(s) and artworks to be included has been identified, a curator must then organise the selection and gathering together of those artworks for the exhibition. The curator must develop an inventory or checklist of the artworks to be included in the exhibition. For obvious reasons the curator must ensure that the number and types of artworks in the exhibition are compatible with the physical space of the proposed exhibition space. There is no point in organizing 100 artworks if the space can only comfortably hold 60 artworks. The curator must have a good working knowledge of the dimensions and attributes of the exhibition space they are proposing to use.

In a commercial gallery exhibition of recent works by artists, this is quite easy to arrange. The gallery and the artist usually have had considerable dialogue about the type and number of works that the artist is producing. The gallery director knows approximately how many works of the artist will fit comfortably in the exhibition space proposed. The role of the artist and the gallery director in organising the curatorial content of these exhibitions is to ensure thematic consistency with the stated aims of the artist. An artist might produce 20 works to exhibit, but only 12 are selected to exhibit. The director of a commercial gallery will often 'cull' works from the exhibition which are incongruous with the artist's stated artistic intent or are of a lesser standard. Usually by the time the exhibition is ready to be installed, the gallery and the artist have agreed on the number and type of works to be included. The artist delivers all the available work at a predetermined time before the exhibition is due to be installed and subsequently opened by the gallery.

Where artworks are being exhibited for a prize like the Archibald Prize, the artworks would have already been selected through a selection/judging process. Entrants in the Archibald Prize are required to deliver their works for inspection by the judging panel. The curator would then keep the works of the successful applicants for inclusion in the exhibition.

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Public galleries often hold exhibitions of artworks which are sourced entirely from their own collections within the gallery. It is the role of the curator to create new stories and new associations with the artworks in their collections. The curator should know their own collection quite intimately and the task of gathering the artworks from within the gallery is relatively easy. For example in the exhibition *Re-View* discussed above at the *NGV International*, all the photographic works were sourced from the *NGV* collection.

The intent of the curator, Isobel Crombie was to select a photograph from each decade from the 1840s onwards, to show the evolution of the art form of photography. Artists included in this exhibition were William Henry Fox Talbot, Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, Man Ray and Ansel Adams. Curators sometimes commission artists to create specific works to fit their curatorial concept. For example the artworks exhibited in the Adelaide Biennial *Handle with Care* 2008 were specifically commissioned from 22 artists by the curator Felicity Fenner.

Where an exhibition features works that belong to private art collectors, other galleries and/or artists, the task of gathering these works together becomes more complicated. The curator has to know which of the artist's works are suitable for the curatorial concept behind the exhibition and then find out where these artworks can be located. Websites are now an important tool for curators in identifying suitable artworks.

The curator is required to seek permission from the owner of the artwork to exhibit the artwork and arrange to have the artwork delivered. Freight costs involved with artworks can be expensive. This often involves costly insurance to cover damage or loss in transit and in some cases special conservation measures. The more valuable an artwork, the more complicated the procedure. In large public galleries there is usually someone described as a Registrar who is involved in the physical movement of artworks to and from the gallery. Large public galleries sometimes restrict the lending of valuable artworks for exhibitions because of the risk of losing those works or having them damaged. To make life easier, curators often develop curatorial concepts around artworks which they know they can easily source from artists or private art collectors. Freelance curators in particular often curate exhibitions based on the artworks of their colleagues who they know are eager to be in an exhibition. The curatorial concept is often determined after the artworks have been identified. There is considerable risk in this strategy because the curator is often forced to make up a vague or broad concept in an attempt to include all the available works under a unifying theme. In reality there is often little if any connection between the artworks.

Public galleries now take advantage of what are called travelling exhibitions. Public galleries often create an exhibition which they send 'travelling'. Curators associated with that public gallery are involved in organising the curatorial concept of the exhibition and arranging for all the artworks to be gathered together. The exhibition is then sent to other public galleries who have been selected or who have elected to hold that exhibition. The *Archibald Prize* exhibition discussed above is a travelling exhibition which tours public galleries across Australia. The 2010 exhibition at the National Gallery
of Australia Master pieces from Paris: Van Gogh, Gauguin, Gzanne and beyond was a travelling exhibition curated by the Musée d’Orsay in Paris, which owned most of the works in the exhibition.

In 2010 The Jan Potter Centre: NGV Australia at Federation Square held a major retrospective called Rupert Bunny: Artist in Paris. This was a major retrospective exhibition of the work of Australian artist Rupert Bunny (1864-1947). This travelling exhibition was organised by the Art Gallery of NSW and curated by Deborah Edwards. The exhibition was first held at the Art Gallery of NSW in 2009 and early 2010 and then it travelled to the NGV in Melbourne. The exhibition included over 100 works. Several of the works in the exhibition had never been seen in Australia, including paintings from the Musée d’Orsay and private collections in Europe. The NGV was itself a major lender to the exhibition, with 18 works from the NGV Collection. Elena Taylor, from the NGV, was involved in the exhibition as a coordinating curator.

In 2010, Benalla Art Gallery hosted a travelling exhibition called Other side art, the first retrospective survey of the work of South Australian indigenous artist, Trevor Nickolls. This travelling exhibition had already been exhibited at several public galleries including the Ian Potter Museum of Art in 2009. The exhibition was curated by Michael OFerrall, a freelance curator who had a long association with Trevor Nicholls. For example, O’Ferrall was the curator of the official Australian Pavilion at the 1990 Venice Biennale, where Nickolls’ work was exhibited.

In Australia there are several government bodies which provide funding to help galleries pay for the expenses associated with the curatorial content of travelling exhibitions. For example, Visions of Australia, is an Australian Government program which supports touring exhibitions with funding assistance to develop and tour Australian cultural material across Australia.

RESEARCHING AND CREATING THE INFORMATION THAT OUTLINES THE EXHIBITION CONCEPT

Once an exhibition has been organised, the curator needs to provide information about the exhibition for the viewing public. In exhibitions involving the work of one artist over an extended period of time, the specialist curator or other people such as authors, artists and academics often write what is called a monograph. A monograph is a detailed catalogue of the work and life of the artist as it relates to works featured in the exhibition. It will usually contain personal comments from the artist, biographical detail about the artist and relevant social and artistic commentary from art critics, art historians and acquaintances. A monograph can range from a few pages up to a large book. For example, in 2010, Tarra Warra Museum of Art held a survey exhibition of the works of Australian artist George Baldessin curated by Maudie Palmer and Elizabeth Cross. To coincide with the exhibition Australian Galleries (the commercial gallery which represented Baldessin during his life) teamed with author Harriet Edquist and the George Baldessin Estate to publish a 260-page monograph, George Baldessin: Paradox & Persuasion.
Where an exhibition contains works of different artists it is the role of the curator or gallery director to organise a catalogue explaining the exhibition. For example the curator of the Re-View exhibition at the NGV International Isabel Crombie wrote the catalogue titled Re-View: 170 Years of Photography. It contained detailed discussions about the photographs and the photographers included in the exhibition.

The curator is also required to write the information which may appear on the panels discussing each work. There may be detailed information about the artwork such as where and why the artist created it and the personal circumstances of the artist at the time. This form of information is commonly seen in exhibitions within a public gallery. Sometimes this information is confined to just the specific details about the medium and dimensions of the artworks featured. In exhibitions containing recent works of artists, such as in a commercial gallery or an artist run gallery, the artist usually provides what is called an artist's statement about what he or she is intending to achieve in the works in the exhibition. This forms part of the curatorial content of the exhibition. In exhibitions where the work is being sold details about prices will also be included.

Other supporting materials in an exhibition involving curatorial input may include the contents of narration for audio aids such as headsets, video or film presentations, interactive educational modules, online information and other explanatory material about the historical, personal or cultural context of the artworks or the artist.