The arts industry

When artists seek to display their work in a gallery space they enter the arts industry. Here they may engage with curators, dealers, conservators, auction houses, art critics, writers and audiences, all of whom play various roles. In the marketing, promotion, display and critiquing of contemporary artworks many issues arise in regards to public perception of the art world, and the role of the institutions which support it.

This kit briefly addresses the roles of different types of gallery spaces including: public galleries, commercial galleries, artist-run spaces and online galleries. It is strongly recommended (and stated in the study guide) that students gain first hand experience by visiting different types of galleries and observing the different ways in which they market and promote their programs, engage different approaches to exhibition design, and present artists’ work.
Public galleries

A public gallery is an art gallery, museum or space that is owned, conducted or managed on behalf of the public. These galleries are primarily funded by the government using public taxes, and are accountable to the tax payers of the nation.

In Australia this refers to galleries owned by:

- Federal government
  E.g. Australian National Gallery, Canberra

- State governments
  E.g. National Gallery of Victoria, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Art Gallery of South Australia

- Local governments
  Regional galleries i.e. those located in regional centres or the suburbs of the capital cities
  Geelong Art Gallery, Bendigo Art Gallery

These galleries are funded by the Commonwealth, State and Local governments who established them and who have since maintained commitments to their development.

Due to extensive funding, National and State Public Galleries have excellent resources including diverse collections and programs. Their resources allow them to house separate departments for education, conservation, marketing, publications etc. National and State galleries have a primary responsibility to offer programs which advance education in the community. This is accomplished by promoting access to, and understanding of, their collections.

Roles commonly undertaken by public galleries include:

- The exhibition of artworks, both from the gallery’s own collection and/or works borrowed from other galleries, artists or private collections.

- The development of collections through acquisition of artworks – for example the NGV established the first separate Department of Photography in Australia in 1968. Today the collection houses over 8,000 photographic works.

- To undertake research into both historical and contemporary artworks.

- To maintain collections via conservation practices. In Melbourne both the NGV and the Ian Potter Museum of Art both have their own conservation departments.

- To promote the gallery and its collections via education and public programs such as guided floor talks, seminars and lectures, and via websites.

- Public galleries present a range of changing exhibitions and most are also involved in touring exhibitions. This is an important way of promoting both the gallery and the artists involved in the exhibition and making the exhibitions accessible to a wider audience.

Top: National Gallery of Victoria
Bottom: Bendigo Art Gallery
In Melbourne there are a range of public contemporary art organisations such as the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art (ACCA), Southbank; The Centre for Contemporary Photography (CCP), Fitzroy; The Ian Potter Museum of Art at The University of Melbourne; Gertrude Contemporary, Fitzroy; and the Linden Centre for Contemporary Art, St Kilda.

Not all public galleries have their own permanent art collections. ACCA exists to provide a venue for the display of contemporary art, and to promote education and discourse around new developments in contemporary art practice.

**Regional and metropolitan galleries**

These include those galleries in both regional and metropolitan areas. These galleries:

- Play a crucial role in collecting, preserving and presenting cultural heritage.
- Will often house exhibitions relating specifically to community groups and aim to reflect the concerns and experiences of their community.
- Derive funds from local and State Government and from a mix of admission fees, merchandising and private sector support.

**Commercial galleries**

Commercial galleries are distinguished by the fact that they are privately owned and operated. They play an important role in the arts industry by exhibiting, promoting and selling artists’ work. By nature they are run as businesses whose objective is to make profit through the sale of artworks. This can sometimes compromise the type of art stocked and exhibited.

Commercial galleries operate on the basis that the gallery selects artists whose work they wish to represent and take a commission or percentage of the sale of the work. In return for a commission on sales the gallery actively promotes the artists it presents by holding exhibitions of their work, inviting private collectors and other interested people to view the work and through private viewings.

Artists will usually have a contract with the gallery that outlines the rights and responsibilities of each party. Such a contract may include an ‘exclusivity’ clause, which restricts the artist to selling their work through the gallery exclusively. Many commercial galleries now have websites with biographical information on the artists they represent, and through which you can purchase works directly without ever setting foot in the physical gallery space.
ACCA funding and income generation

As a public gallery ACCA has two main funding partners: The Australia Council and Creative Victoria. There is an increasing expectation from funding bodies that public galleries should become more adept at raising their own funds. Some galleries generate their own income through offering membership subscriptions and charging admission for public events and admission – at ACCA, however, admission to exhibitions is always free.

ACCA’s exciting architecture means that the building is a very popular venue to hire for private events and these events help to raise revenue for the gallery. Public access to the gallery is never compromised as events always take place outside of gallery hours.

ACCA also receives donations from members of the public and corporate support through sponsorship. Sponsorship, which can take the form of either monetary or in-kind support, is not a donation and companies expect some return for their investment. In becoming a sponsor companies effectively buy the right to associate themselves with specific entities, such as ACCA, in order to procure positive impact for their sales, products and corporate image.

The role of the curator

A curator is by literal definition a caretaker, and within an art gallery or museum environment they are responsible for the maintenance, conservation and care of the works in the collection. In larger state Galleries and Museums this would also often involve the purchase of works to expand the collection. The curator is also responsible for providing interpretive materials to help people understand the exhibitions – these can include wall texts, didactics, exhibition brochures, exhibition catalogues essays, floor talks and interviews.

- As ACCA has no permanent collection the curator’s role is one of organisation, implementation and overseeing of exhibitions. The curator also decides which artists work will be featured and may choose the theme or subject of the exhibition.
- ACCA’s curators are also involved in the creation of our exhibition catalogues which provide people with information about the ideas behind the exhibition and the artists involved.
- ACCA’s curators work with exhibiting artists on their exhibition sometimes for several years before the exhibition is shown at ACCA.
- At ACCA artists are chosen to show by our curators and therefore neither submissions nor proposals are accepted.
Exhibition design

Exhibitions at ACCA are generally designed collaboratively by both curator and artist(s), depending the nature of the exhibition. Sometimes large themed group shows such as will be solely designed by the curator and at other times the artist plays a larger role in deciding how the space is designed and the placement of works.

Shown below are examples of preliminary exhibition floor plans for Nathalie Djurberg & Hans Berg: The Secret Garden. These plans illustrate sections of walls that were built to divide the galleries and create smaller, unique spaces. There are also sections of the doorways which were blocked up or narrowed with fake wall constructions to alter the viewing experience. Two other aspects of exhibition design that are considered are wall paint colour and artwork layout. A collection of images on the next page demonstrates how different and varied ACCA’s exhibitions can appear in each exhibition.

Top: Installation view, Ulla von Brandenburg: It Has a Golden Yellow Sun and an Elderly Grey Moon, ACCA, 2016
ACCA exhibition
design examples

Top to bottom, left to right:
Monika Sosnowska, ACCA, 2013
NEW13, ACCA, 2013
Ulla von Brandenburg: It Has a Golden Yellow Sun and an Elderly Grey Moon, ACCA, 2016
NEW16, ACCA, 2016
NEW16, ACCA, 2016
Framed Movements, ACCA, 2014
The Biography of Things, ACCA, 2015
Tacita Dean, ACCA, 2013
Presentation and conservation

There are many issues to consider when planning the conservation and presentation of artworks.

The very nature of much contemporary art requires that it be very carefully handled. At ACCA, works on paper and photographic works are often unframed, and quite often may be pinned directly on to the gallery walls. In handling work such as this it is important to remember that the natural oils from skin affect the PH value of the paper and can cause long term damage. To account for this, gallery staff wear white cotton gloves when handling artworks, particularly those on paper, to prevent any damage.

Some of the contemporary works ACCA exhibits are ephemeral, which means they only exist as artworks during the exhibition period. For these artworks it is important that they have been adequately documented through still photography (and sometimes video) and detailed installation plans to provide information to the artist, galleries or audiences about the work in the future.

More information about contemporary art conservation and preservation of artworks can be found here online:

INSIDE INSTALLATIONS: http://www.tate.org.uk/about/projects/inside-installations


DID YOU KNOW.....

ACCA is not a collecting institution and does not hold an art collection. Therefore ACCA does not have an in house conservation department. However, if we do require expert conservation advice our Exhibitions Manager contracts an external conservator for assistance.

When the artwork arrives at ACCA for exhibition it arrives in specially designed art storage crates and packaging, consisting of acid proof paper, bubble wrap and supports to ensure safe travel. Artworks travelling within Australia and internationally are transported by professional art couriers. When unpacked at ACCA, each artwork is carefully condition reported and photographed using a specific condition report template. Any issues are reported to the loan gallery or artist and, if necessary, an external conservator. At the conclusion of the exhibition each artwork is cross checked against the same template, packaged in the same way and transported safely back to its original home.
New technologies

Many contemporary artists experiment with new technologies. Works shown at ACCA using these technologies are often difficult and expensive to install. Issues also arise about how this work should be stored and, if it is a video work for instance, can copies be made. How should artists sell these works? Particularly if the technology used to make or screen them may soon be obsolete, or the fact that works are easily reproduced on the internet.

Artist’s increased use of multimedia, digital and internet platforms since the 1960s has called into question the conventional strategies used by conservators to preserve cultural artefacts. As past technologies become obsolete some older film and VHS artworks have had to be updated and digitised to ensure future use. Yet the original forms (e.g. film and VHS) are always kept and safely stored. Some digital file storage solutions include:

- Refreshing: migrating digital records from older hardware and software to current configurations;
- Restoration: the cleaning or repair of existing artifact or file, especially when the new version supersedes or replaces the original; and

Tip - More information about new technologies and ‘Variable Media’ can be found here:

The Variable Media Network: http://www.variablemedia.net/e/welcome.html

Lighting and temperature

Light is one example of a necessary element of the exhibition that can cause damage to the artwork. For example, exposure to strong artificial lighting and daylight can affect photographic works, causing them to fade, yellow and become brittle. Direct sunlight is the most harmful light source and incandescent (tungsten) lighting is generally preferred to fluorescent (which gives off high amounts of damaging ultraviolet light). When photographic and other works on paper are displayed at ACCA the tungsten lights are usually dimmed to help protect the works, which can be on display for 4-5 weeks. To prevent damage from exposure to light many galleries and museums have strict guidelines stipulating how long works on paper can be on display. However, due to the relatively short periods of display of artwork at ACCA this is not an issue.

For installations and sculptural works lighting may be treated more as an exhibition design consideration. The curator will work with the artist in deciding the ideal way to light and present the work. If the work is purchased or permanently recreated elsewhere, conservation lighting may then be reconsidered.

ACCA’s gallery climate control system is set to 20-21 degrees Celsius, to ensure that art works are not affected by the temperature within the space. The cavity space between the exterior walls and the galleries was also designed to act like a thermal buffer, keeping the temperature relatively even.

Again, due to the flexible nature of a Kunsthalle and the myriad of media in which contemporary artists work, ACCA is happy to adapt the gallery temperature to the artists wishes.
ACCA has both a Publicist, Designer and Online Communications Manager who work together, in consultation with the exhibitions and artistic team, on creating ACCA's advertising and marketing materials.

The marketing and promotion of exhibitions and events is strategically targeted toward audiences and sectors that may be interested in the themes or ideas being presented.

ACCA communicates to target audiences through the following channels:

- Email bulletins
- Social Media: Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube
- ACCA Website
- Digital advertising around inner Melbourne public transport stops and stations, such as Flinders Street
- Articles and advertisements in newspapers such as The Age.
- Advertisements on 3RRR community radio.
- Artist interviews and editorials online, published (eg. The Age / The Guardian) and on radio, such as ABC 774 Melbourne.
- Advertisements in Arts or Cultural magazines and journals including Art Guide, Time Out and Art Almanac.
Visiting ACCA

ACCA's FREE education programs are available for Primary, Secondary and Tertiary groups between 10am - 4pm from Monday to Friday.

Maximum 25 students per group for THINK and MAKE programs.

Bookings are required for both guided and self-guided School and Tertiary groups.

10am - 5pm Tuesday – Friday
12pm – 5pm Weekends & Public Holidays

Monday by appointment

Enquiries:
education@acca.melbourne
(03) 9697 9999

TERMS OF USE

This education resource has been produced by the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art to provide information and classroom support material for students and teachers. The reproduction and communication of this resource is permitted for educational purposes only.

ACCA Education has been assisted by the Australian government through the Department of Communication and the Arts’ Catalyst—Australian Arts and Culture Fund.

ACCA acknowledges the support of the Department of Education and Training through the Strategic Partnerships Program.