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artworkers

HOW DOES THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CURATORS AND ARTISTS INFLUENCE EXHIBITIONS, AND MORE IMPORTANTLY, THE RESULTING CREATION? ARTWORKERS APPROACHED A NUMBER OF INDUSTRY PROFESSIONALS TO PROVIDE INSIGHT INTO THE CREATIVE PROCESSES BEHIND CURATING.

INTERVIEWS BY PIA ROBINSON

CURATOR CREATOR OR DICTATOR ?

Image: Mariam Arcillia installing *Pap Spears* exhibition, 2008. Image courtesy of 19 Karen.



SHIRALEE SAUL

Freelance Curator

Shiralee has variously worked as a producer, web developer, project manager, writer, gallery director, curator, editor, educator, art director, consultant, researcher, arts bureaucrat, graphic designer and set painter. She is also the co-founder of 'social museum' Curiosity Cabinet at <http://curiositycabi.net>.

Artworkers (A): What is your process for curating a show?

Shiralee Saul (SS): It's generally a bit intuitive, sometimes I put things together because they seem to relate, and it's only later that I see how they work in relation to the rest of the show. I most enjoy finding new artists and new works. I think many curators are forced into, or prefer, to shuffle around those that have already been officially recognised... I want to see new things and have new experiences – be taken to places I haven't been before. I assume that there are other people who want that too.

A: How do you relate to artists and also work with artists?

SS: I see exhibitions as ultimately collaborations, even if the artist isn't directly involved in the decision-making process of putting the show together. Often, I work with artists making something new specifically for the gig, which I might not even see until the installation. There the collaboration may be more obvious, as I have input both through selecting the theme, for example, and often into the production process whilst they may be very involved in determining how it is installed. Sometimes I can extend what they're doing by presenting it in a new way, sometime a work can unexpectedly bend the show into a new direction.

A: Do you believe that 'superstar' curators can sometimes take the limelight away from the actual artists involved in exhibitions?

SS: It's a bit easy to criticise curators who are enjoying a moment in the sun. There are precious few opportunities to do so ... in my own experience, people only really acknowledge your input publicly if you've screwed up. There are certainly very few curators in Australia who more than glimpse the limelight... and even fewer are those who are independent of big institutions and their marketing resources.

Above: *Pap Spears* opening at 19 Karen. Image courtesy of 19 Karen.

A: What do you believe the future of curating is going to be?

SS: I think everything is up for grabs. Of course, people will continue to make, curate and sell traditional art in traditional exhibitions in traditional venues – but the Internet has changed everything. User-generated content, global access, and 'Web 2.0' technologies are encouraging the creativity of people who would never have even tried to get past the gatekeepers. People can likewise become virtual curators and collectors – and not even know that that's what they're doing.

A: Do you have any tips on how to curate your own show/ a show?

SS: Curating your own show is like acting as your own lawyer – fraught with difficulties. I'd always recommend working with someone else, even in an un-official capacity when you're organising a show of your own work. They can see things that you may not, and they are less likely to be blinded by sentiment.



Left:
Experimenta House of tomorrow,
 the Arts Centre Black Box, Melbourne, 2003.
 Image courtesy of Experimenta.

MARIAM ARCILLIA

Artist, Curator and Gallery Director

Gallery Director of 19 KAREN Contemporary Artspace, Mariam is a Gold Coast based curator, artist and writer who engages in community and commercial projects that support local and emerging artists.

Artworkers (A): Do you believe curating is as creative as the production of art?

Mariam Arcillia (MA): Yes because to me a curator is more than a person who manages and displays another person's artwork. A curator is a facilitator, a researcher, a confidant, a negotiator, a promoter, a provider of booze and carrot sticks, a graphic designer, a writer, a salesperson, a communicator, and more often than not, the artist's biggest supporter. Curators are responsible for the coming-together of artistic content. I believe these aspects make curating just as creative and self-fulfilling as producing a piece of artwork.

A: What is the process you employ for curating a show?

MA: Firstly I develop a project idea for a show, then I approach artists who I feel will respond strongly to creating works based or inspired by the rationale. The artists and I then discuss the creation and presentation of the works, which is my favourite part. As the show approaches I organize publicity materials, and arrange for interviews and articles promoting the artists.

A: Has there been a time when you had to resolve a conflict with an artist? If so can you elaborate?

MA: To organize a show, especially if it's a non-profit project, or if it is held in a huge space, can be daunting. There have been instances where all artists want the same spot in the gallery, or whose works have compromised or delayed the project. But what I've learnt from this is that you can't satisfy every artist, and every artist can't satisfy you. Things go right, things go wrong, such is the nature of arts-making, but as long as the respect and collaborative energy is still present between curator and artist then everything will work out in the end.

A: What do you believe the future of curating is going to be?

MA: I believe we will begin to see more artist-as-curators, and curators-as-artists, and curators-as-reviewers, and artists-as-gallery-directors, which is why I think the word 'curating' is one that cannot be typecast, it is always evolving.

NICHOLAS CHAMBERS

Nicholas is a curator in the contemporary international art department at the Queensland Art Gallery.

Artworkers (A): Do you believe curating is just as creative as the production of art?

Nicholas Chambers (NC): Sure, it can be. For example, artists have long been involved in curating exhibitions and I can think of many for whom exhibition practice is as significant an activity as the production of artworks. In the case of professional curators, I think there is a growing awareness of 'the exhibition' as a distinctive form of creative practice with its own specific history. This has led to the development of a real diversity of approaches to curatorial work – sometimes, but not always, on the side of experimentation and creativity.

A: What is your process of curating a show?

NC: It depends entirely on the type of show. At present I am developing a solo exhibition with American artist Spencer Finch that will take place in the Gibson Entry of the Queensland Art Gallery and the Gallery of Modern Arts Media Gallery. The Gibson Entry piece will be a large-scale, site-specific work and, as a result, there will be many people involved in the production of the work both at the Gallery and in the artist's studio. A major part of my role in this instance will be to facilitate dialogue between all involved and manage the overall project. For the show in the Media Gallery the process is more one-to-one, working closely with the artist to make a selection of new and existing works.

A: How do you relate to the artist / how do you work with the artist?

NC: With the greatest respect, of course! Again, this differs depending on the type of exhibition.

A: Do you believe on an international level that on some occasions the curators' superstardom is taking over the show?

NC: Sure, on some occasions. And, of course, there are some curators who are doing really fantastic work and deservedly receiving attention for it. At the end of the day, the best exhibitions are often those where the curator is not so visible – where the exhibition is predicated less on a curator's exegesis than a sophisticated platform for art works to communicate with an audience.