Considerations of curators in the preparation, presentation, conservation and promotion of specific artworks from 2018 exhibitions

Students should analyse and evaluate the following:

- **Specific artworks** and their presentation to gain an understanding of the **intentions of the artist** and the **curator**.
- **Curatorial considerations**, **exhibition design** and **promotional methods** in preparing and presenting artwork for display.
- Methods and considerations involved in the **conservation** of **specific artworks** related to exhibitions visited this year.

**Curatorial consideration**

**Exhibition theme**

In *New Histories* Bendigo Art Gallery has invited contemporary artists to reimagine ten historic works from the collection. Drawing largely on significant works from the 19th and early 20th century collection of European and Australian paintings, the resulting exhibition is a series of thoughtful and challenging new works displayed alongside their historic counterparts and extending into all three historic courts of the Gallery.

Established in 1887, the Bendigo Art Gallery was founded by predominately white German and British wealthy colonials. With a particular euro-centric investment, these men had a vision of ‘art for the people’. The legacy of this early colonial agenda remains the core of the Bendigo Art Gallery’s 18th, 19th and early 20th Century collection resulting in a very male, Euro-centric collection of cultural objects that reflect the interests and homelands of the new colonists and favours a ‘Terra Nullius’ narrative.

*New Histories* adopts the idea that by acknowledging untold or repressed histories we can open up new views to the present and the future. Many of the contemporary artists in this exhibition have sought out the ‘hidden’ figures in history and the veiled narratives at play. Other artists have reimagined historic narratives as potential futures or introduced a parallel world, replacing one voice with another.

This simple act of re-examining what has ‘always been’ disrupts the status quo and enables a diversity of voices to be heard. *New Histories* challenges the nature of art as historic record and the authoritative voice of the art museum.

**Preparation**

Selection of works:

Historic works for the exhibition have been chosen for their symbolic and historical significance depicting periods of colonialism, the industrial revolution, international trade and early feminism. For example, the work ‘Too Late’ by Herbert Schmalz was the highlight of early Gallery visitor books and the Emma Minnie Boyd painting Afternoon Tea was the first work by a female artist acquired into the collection.
Contemporary artists in the exhibition were invited to participate. Artists were selected who maintain a practice motivated by social and political commentaries and work across new and traditional art mediums. The curator selected a historic work for each contemporary artist to respond to. Questions were posed: What did these works mean then? What do they mean to us now? Where can we go from here?

Budget
A budget for the exhibition was agreed upon with commissioning fees paid to artists as per the NAVA rates. Above the artists fees there were also some production fees involved for example the film work which required a large post production budget and Bridie Lunney’s work which involves a performer who is paid on each performance. The commission is non-acquisitive allowing the artist to retain ownership of the work after the exhibition. Each artist enters into a contract with the Gallery to make the artwork (an ‘Agreement’) and then signs a loan agreement agreeing to loan the artwork for the duration of the exhibition. These agreements cover fees, key milestones, dates, insurance values and expenditure.

Individual artists also sought their additional funding and the Gallery supported them in their applications. Pilar Mata DuPont decided on a residency style process for the creation of here work with a collective of artists. An additional 26,000 was provided by Australia Council of the Arts to realise that project.

Research
Research period began three years prior to the exhibition. Many artists visited the Gallery and archives, researching the artist files and catalogues in the Gallery Library. The curator assisted artists
who were overseas/interstate in sending scans of original newspaper articles, letters and pages of books via email for their research.

Top: Curator and artist Bridie Lunney in Library.
Lower: Correspondence from artist archive related to *A Primrose from England*
Development

Working closely with the artists in the months prior to the exhibition, some of the works required more involvement than others.

Case study: Gabrielle de Vietri – Letters to the Living

In response to the painting Homeless, de Vietri’s work Letters to the Living is a project to create a time capsule of letters written by parents in 2017 to their children, who will unearth the capsule 40, 50, maybe even 60 years in the future. The artist has invited parents from all backgrounds, in diverse family arrangements to contribute a letter to the project. With permission from the contributors, some letters have been exhibited, some broadcast and others, too personal to share, will be sealed up in the capsule for their children to uncover when they are parents, or even grandparents themselves.

The letters reveal the writers’ personal hopes and fears against the backdrop of uncertain political futures and drastic environmental shifts. The time capsule will be under the custodianship of the Bendigo Art Gallery until it is unearthed.

- This project has involved workshops, - marketing and planning – worked closely with our marketing team on recruiting participants to make the work (write the letters)
- Consulting with education and public programs team regarding the structure of the workshops
- Conservation requirements – how to create records that are going to be archivally sound when relying on members of the public to create records who are taking them into ‘non museum’ conditions. Participants were given a kit to take home included archival quality paper – acid free) archival storage sleeves and an instruction manual regarding suitable pens or pencils to use (non water soluble, graphite) when creating their letter.
- The curator and artist are in discussion about the future of the work whether it be buried or stored in climate control until its unearthing

Left: Letters from participants Right: time capsule installed in Gallery
Presentation

Exhibition design
The exhibition was designed in such a way that the contemporary works disrupt the flow of the historic courts – providing an ‘unexpected encounter’ for the public and therefore extending the ethos of the exhibition throughout the whole gallery. Similarly historic works were removed their ‘habitat’ situating them in contemporary spaces – inviting closer examination from the audience.

Early on in the planning the curator met with artists in the space to determine whether they confident responding in the historic courts – as this would dictate the scale, materials etc used. As the artworks began to take shape the curator began to design the exhibition and determine which works would be displayed in contemporary spaces and which would make ‘interventions’ in historic spaces.

A contractor was commissioned to create a ‘room’ for the film work to provide a dark space for viewing and avoid sound bleed. Walls of this temporary structure were also reinforced to accommodate for hanging of heavy historic paintings.

One of the challenges of the exhibition was the treatment of contemporary works and historic works together.

Images: Top, draft example of exhibition design, contemporary space. Above left, artworks on foam blocks to protect frames: Above right: Artist Denis Chapman installing his work, some artists were present and involved with placement of works.
Case study: Jacques Soddell

Sound Artist Jacques Soddell’s artwork required the installation of speakers behind Thomas Wright’s Sandhurst in 1884. This would potentially lead to vibrations over 4 month period which could have detrimental effect on the historic painting. The curator sought advice from Museums Victoria who regularly monitor vibrations in their collection on how to minimise the vibration and contact with the historic artwork. This resulted in the fabrication of a substructure behind the painting to create a buffer between the painting and the speakers.

Considerations for presentation

- Potential hazards
  - Signage was placed throughout Gallery to warn public of works in ‘unexpected places’ to avoid trip incident’s
  - Bridie Lunney’s work (pictured) required repositioning as was deemed dangerous to public (sculptural blades were raised to above eye level)
  - Hammocks required extra signage after public were found attempting to sit in them
  - Historic works were hung lower in contemporary spaces. Stanchions (low roped barriers) were placed in front of works where required.
Lighting
- Lights were focussed on historic works using spot focus lighting to create dramatic effect.

Didactic panels
Text was written by both the curator and the artists to assist the audience in interpreting each historic work and contemporary work in the exhibition. These texts were displayed alongside each works with NEW HISTORIES branding on them. This also served to delineate historic and contemporary works in the historic courts that were part of the exhibition (as separate from the Gallery collection hang).

Catalogue
The illustrated catalogue included installation shots and a statement from each artist about their work. The curatorial manager produced a series of succinct texts on each historic work and the exhibition curator set up the framework for the exhibition with a curator's essay.

Including installation shots in the catalogue allowed for a tight 10 day making it in time for the opening. However the writing and design process commenced months before the opening of the exhibition.

Above: Excerpt from catalogue: Below: Installation image, Phuong Ngo
Exhibition installation
Installation of Historic Courts - Majority of exhibitions of this size might be allocated two weeks of installation. This exhibition commenced one month out. This was due to the reconfiguration of our historic courts which involved a large amount of rehanging.
Contemporary Spaces - Some of the historic artworks weighed more than 150kg. This posed an issue with the walls in the contemporary spaces which were not designed to bear works of that scale and weight. This dictated to some extend the height of the works as we needed to seek out the structural reinforcement in the walls.

Conservation:
- Lighting: usual standards applied to painting e.g. maximum 200 lux
- Do not touch signage throughout
- Flow through – adequate space for viewers to move through and around artworks
- Security cameras in place

Preventive and remedial
Each object is handled carefully to avoid damage, using nitrile gloves. Paintings are rested on foam blocks and transported using a museum a-frame (on wheels). Lux and humidity levels are measured and monitored. Textiles works in exhibition are sensitive to light and humidity.

Condition reports:
Each artwork is examined upon arrival and assessed to ensure no damage has occurred. A condition report is completed for each artwork, checked by the artist/representative and attached to an artwork loan agreement.

Handling
Works are always handled with conservation appropriate materials – nitrile gloves or in some cases cotton gloves. Works are protected from damage with bubble wrap and acid-free materials.
Promotion
The Marketing Officer developed a campaign for the exhibition working with a pre-arranged budget. An exhibition brand was developed utilising the iconic painting A Primrose from England with Contemporary style font overlaid.

The Gallery promoted the exhibition via social media and print and online advertising. The Gallery also promoted the exhibition via its printed brochure, and media releases.

Publicity
The Gallery’s publicist arranged for media interviews including print, radio and television with the curators and some artists from the exhibition. This is scheduled for the day of the exhibition opening so press have an ‘exclusive’. In addition The Age (Fairfax), Radio National and Vault magazine all conducted interviews with the curator and the artists providing national editorial platforms for the exhibition.
Contemporary artists reimagine historic works from the collection of Bendigo Art Gallery.

ARTISTS:
- Denis Chuanman
- Seejum Cheung, Malise Heemans
- Pilar Mata Dupont, Isabelle Sully
- Fiora Wootstra
- Gabrielle de Vietri

FAMILY FIRST!
(Devon Ackermann & Paul Yore)
- Juan Ford
- Andrew Goodman
- Bridie Lunney
- Phuong Ngo
- Jacques Sadile
- Christian Thompson

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Sponsorship/logo tree

Advertisement in Art Monthly Magazine
Print advertisement with sponsors listed
Specific artworks

Select two artworks from the exhibition and discuss how they have been displayed.

Consider the following:
Intentions of the artist and the curator, for example:
- Do you think the curator displayed the artwork alongside others to suggest that the work fits into a particular theme? Discuss.
- Explain the height of the artwork e.g. eye level, above eye level and what effect this gives.
- How does the colour of the wall or lighting create a particular mood or effect?
- If relevant, how do you think the curator liaised with the artist to ensure that the artwork was displayed in line with the artist’s intention? What ideas were discussed and decisions made?

Title: ____________________________________________

Artist: ___________________________ Date: ________________

Medium
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Thumbnail sketch: ____________________________________________________________________________
Title: ____________________________________________

Artist: __________________________________________

Date: ____________________________________________

Medium

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Thumbnail sketch: __________________________________________