

The Art World

by Craig Judd

The “art world” is a constantly expanding loose series of organic relationships that sustain and nurture each other.

The purpose of these relationships is to maintain a level of excitement and interest in the display and spectacle of objects and forms that are given the label Art.

This system of production and consumption did not exist before the 19th century. In diagram form the art world looks like this (although not in any particular order or understanding of precedence):

ARTIST
ART AUDIENCE
COLLECTION
COLLECTORS
ART GALLERIES- STATE, COMMERCIAL, ARTIST RUN/INDEPENDENT SPACES
FUNDING ORGANISATIONS
ART DEALERS
ART PRIZES
ART FESTIVALS/ ART FAIRS/ BIENNALES
ART SCHOOLS
CURATORS
CRITICS
ART JOURNALS
LIFESTYLE /FASHION MAGAZINES

Art is a form of information exchange. Art tells stories. Art makes people think and ponder about themselves and their world. Art is both entertaining and infuriating.

At the core of the art world is the ARTIST/PRODUCER who makes work for the art audience.

The ART AUDIENCE is composed of members of the general public. The art audience is a body of people who are interested and intrigued by what art can suggest and provoke. One of the great challenges for Art and artists is to increase the numbers of people that compose this audience. Without talk or dialogue within the art audience and beyond there would be no contemporary art.

Art can also stimulate the desire for ownership in this audience. One of the most crucial elements of the art world is the ACQUISITION AND COLLECTION of art works by private individuals. There are also state and corporate collections. There are as many different types of collection as there are different people. One of the ways that art gains value is through the keeping and collection of objects over time.

STATE COLLECTIONS contain works that are deemed by critics and curators to have high cultural and historical significance. The state gallery/museum has what is known as a permanent collection. From this collection certain elements are chosen to be displayed for the enjoyment and edification of the general public.

The climax for any artist is to have work acquired by a state institution. This location gives both the artwork and the artist an aura of respectability, worth and permanence. Most state collections of art began in Australia in the late 1860s early 1870s. The first public museum in the modern sense is the Louvre opened to the public in 1790.

Since the 1970s CORPORATE COLLECTIONS have become an important element in the art world. Works are usually acquired to grace the corporate headquarters. However there is also the idea that these art works are also a good investment, that the monetary value of the works will increase over time. The type of collection depends a lot on the type of corporation and the

interests of the proprietors. For example a Sydney law firm, Allens, Arthurs, Robinson, owns one of the largest collections of Australian contemporary art. It is now quite common for large companies to have their own art collection and curators to take care of them.

PRIVATE COLLECTIONS by their nature are usually more personal, quirky and idiosyncratic. Sometimes the privately owned collection is given to the state for the benefit of the people of that nation. For example the Mary Turner collection of early Australian Modernists was donated to the Orange Regional Gallery while the Power Bequest is the core collection of the Sydney Museum of Contemporary Art. The Loti and Victor Smorgon Collection of Contemporary Australian Art is on display in several art galleries around Australia. The extraordinary works in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London are mostly donations from private collections.

In state institutions there are a range of museum professionals to maintain these collections. There are curators, conservators, installation crews, registrars, security guards, cleaners, educators and guides, publicists and designers.

THE CURATOR is literally a Keeper of a Collection. They are someone who is in charge of a collection of objects or artefacts. The occupation has similarities to that of a librarian. Where as a librarian takes charge of the order and classification of books and sets of information, a museum or art curator orders and classifies information through the research, interpretation, display and interaction with artefacts or objects.

The main occupation of the curator is to keep the collection at peak condition. To fulfil this function the curator should have a clear and comprehensive understanding of the contents and condition of that particular collection.

Ideally the curator should also have knowledge of the history and derivation of the works that are in the collection. That is, how they came to be acquired and in what collection the work might have resided in before it's present location - this is known as the provenance of the work.

The curator ideally should be able to augment and complement that collection with the acquisition of new works. With permanent collections, this requires that the curator to make reports and presentations to the trustees and board of directors or funding committees arguing the importance of this new purchase.

Within any Australian art gallery/museum environment funds are always scarce. There are usually a range of institutional priorities that govern acquisitions - for example there might be a policy of only collecting contemporary photography for a number of years and so on. There are also within any state gallery and museum several curators in charge of different areas. At the Art gallery of New South Wales there are curators of Australian Art, International Contemporary Art, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art, Prints and Drawings, European Art, Asian Art, Photography. All of these curators are vying for limited funds to augment and enhance pre existing collections.

Consequently an important role for the curator is the ability to generate sufficient interest and excitement to gain sponsorship and monetary support from outside of the institution for the particular collection in their charge.

The curator is also in charge of the preservation and conservation of the collection. He or she recommends that work be sent for repair etc to conservators.

The curator oversees any loans to other institutions with the help of the Registrar.

Since the 1960s the curators of permanent collections have had a more pro-active approach to their occupation. Today the onus on most curators is to give easy access of that particular collection to the general public. Curators have adopted a more public profile, speaking to the media, giving lectures and writing articles and reports about the collection. Often the curator is called upon to give advice about similar works in other private or public collections.

The curator organises the display of the collection for public and or private view. This relatively minor part of the occupation is often seen to be the most glamorous and exciting element of the work of the contemporary museum/art gallery curator. It is with the exhibition of works that there is the possibility of making new stories or new associations with objects/artefacts. While having a high level of final responsibility, in fact, curators choose arrange and display works with the help of a team of other museum specialists such as researchers, education specialists conservators, registrars, and preparers.

As well as working with the permanent collection the curator often generates more extensive, larger scale exhibitions that combine works from other private and public collections, both interstate and international. Again, there are institutional demands. In order to get an exhibition up on the walls from the initial proposal requires numerous meetings and consultations with the gallery director, exhibitions manager, education/public programs and advertising managers of that institution. In general an exhibition in a state institution has a lead in time of 2-3 years sometimes up to 5 years! In this process the initial proposal or idea becomes diluted or completely changes. Smaller exhibitions have a lead in time of about a year.

FREELANCE OR INDEPENDENT CURATORS are not necessarily associated with a permanent collection or state institutions. In the last twenty years, they, like the curators of permanent collections have become more visible and vocal players in the world of contemporary art. The freelance curator is commissioned to gather together works and to organise an exhibition around a particular brief or theme. Sometimes this exhibition might tour, so the curator is also an exhibition manager coordinating venues, transport, insurance and publicity. In state institutions these activities are not collapsed into one person but are conducted by a team of individual professionals.

Although there is an assumption that this person is an expert in the arts, curators can come from a range of experiences and backgrounds. Sometimes the curator is an artist or collector, sometimes the curator has a more traditional background that derives from the world of museology or academia.

The Biennale of Sydney has commissioned individual curators as well as groups of people to choose works of art for display. The taste for individual or collaborative curatorship is largely determined by what is known as cultural fashion.

Individual curators can create a more homogenised and unified response to a particular brief. Indeed over the last century some curators have gained star status because of their choices. For example, the first curator of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, Alfred H. Barr, believed that Cubist art was the definitive beginning of Modern Art and so consistently collected and displayed artwork to underline his thesis. Barr's vision has left such a stamp on art history that there is a tradition that states now that Modern Art begins with Cubism. There are now however a range of differing opinions as to that beginning.

Without the curatorial diligence of Daniel Thomas at the Art Gallery of New South Wales there would not be the recognition and understanding of the importance of such artists as Grace Cossington Smith, Margaret Preston and Thea Proctor and their role in the promotion of Modernist tendencies in Australia. More recently, and again at the AGNSW Hetti Perkins, the curator of Yirribana Gallery has been pivotal in the development of a greater appreciation for Aboriginal Art. Hetti Perkins was the curator of the Papunya Tula Exhibition (2000). This comprehensive overwhelmingly moving display revealed for the first time the derivation and development of painting styles in the Western Deserts of Australia.

The Biennale of Sydney has been organised around the two favoured models of curatorship the individual vision and a collaborative approach based on a committee of curators with different expertise and different experience. The 1998 Biennale of Sydney, *every day*, had Jonathon Watkins as the sole artistic chair. In contrast, the Biennale of Sydney 2000 had a curatorium (a committee) of six highly regarded international and Australian curators. Within the art gallery/museum world the committee approach to the creation of large-scale exhibition

projects is now tending to be favoured - it lessens the workload for individual curators and it leads to more mixed or heterogeneous exhibitions in terms of works and concepts.

The proposal for Biennale of Sydney 2002 follows this model. Richard Grayson the new Artistic Director is working with a curatorial "think tank" or "sounding board" that includes practicing artists and curators such as Susan Hiller a UK based conceptual artist, Ralph Rugoff, curator and cultural critic from San Francisco and Janos Sugar, a new media artist from Hungary.

(The World May Be) Fantastic is Richard Grayson's concept title for the upcoming Biennale of Sydney 2002. The Artistic Director says that Invention and Imagination are to be the central themes of the exhibition.

Grayson is excited by the idea of the fake, something not quite real or true but never the less convincing. He enjoys how models, miniatures and experiments can suggest different systems of knowledge and logic. The works in the exhibition will explore how artists use different ways of story telling and fictions to interpret the world.

There are some curators who have a "hands on" approach to their work as coordinator. There are some curators who demand and there are also some artists who expect constant consultation and negotiation in the production of art. This involvement is quite important and often essential for site-specific works and much installation art. Alternatively there are some curators who take a more distant and formal approach by delivering briefs and waiting for the works to be made to the specifications of the brief.

The role of the curator is also to view the work and make some decisions as to the suitability of the artist and their work in relation to the brief. Ideally the artist and curator complement each other with the shared aim to provide the general public with a unique experience or encounter with objects materials forms and ideas.

The art world also includes ARCHITECTS AND DESIGNERS who specialise in exhibition and lighting design. For example the Australian firm Denton, Cork and Marshall have designed the new Museum of Victoria, the Museum of Sydney and have recently gained the commission to design and build the new wing of the Art Gallery of New South Wales which is to house the collection of Asian art.

Collections are dependent of course on the amount of funds and available space as well as the commitment or drive of the institution, corporation or individual. The reality for most collections is that there are bursts of acquisition followed by periods of reflection and consolidation. Sometimes the particular emphasis within a collection shifts which leads to the culling or de-accession of works. These artworks are then released into the market place through auction houses or through private sales. In Australia there are several auction houses that specialise in selling art such as Christies, Sotheby's and Lawson's etc. Commercial art galleries are also used for this function.

ART SCHOOLS are the seedbed of the art world. Most major regional centres and cities have art teaching facilities. In the arc from Newcastle to Wollongong there are approximately 10 major art teaching institutions. These institutions provide intense "hands on" training and intellectual input to students aiming to provide a solid platform of skills and inspiration for the aspiring artist. Different art schools have different expertise to offer. It is not unusual for an art student to shop around or to move from one institution to another to gain skills. Because of the manner of teaching some art schools develop what is known as a recognisable house style which prospective art dealers and collectors can tap into, encourage and develop. Graduating or final year exhibitions are a showcase for both the student and institution alike.

The artist/producer makes, and then usually displays their work in gallery spaces. There are COMMERCIAL AND NON-COMMERCIAL ART GALLERIES.

COMMERCIAL ART GALLERIES are display spaces are organised by a gallerist/art dealer. Commercial gallery spaces regularly exhibit a range of art for sale or consumption by the art

audience. (Gallerist is a European title for the art dealer that is gaining more acceptances in the art world of Australia.) The gallerist organises the presentation of work to prospective collectors as well as the opening of the exhibition and any associated publicity. The art dealer also might invite critics and writers as well as other artists to view the work. The art dealer is part social secretary or social facilitator, part sales person and part counsellor/adviser to artists and clients alike. For their activities in promotion and sales the dealer takes a commission on any sales or publicity anywhere between 30-60%. The oldest commercial gallery in Sydney is Watters in East Sydney. Sometimes the commercial gallery also promotes the work of the artist on an interstate and international level. For example Roslyn Oxley Gallery in Sydney is agent for Tracey Moffat, arguably Australia's most successful international artist to date.

The NON-COMMERCIAL GALLERY SPACE exhibits works that do not necessarily have a clear economic imperative. Consequently the director of a non-commercial space has a different set of priorities. These spaces foster new and emerging artists whose work might be viewed as either youthful and unformed or too "edgy" or radical for consumption and display in commercial galleries. These non-commercial gallery spaces are sometimes organised and funded by an artist collective but more often are autonomous government supported institutions. For example, Artspace and First Draft in Sydney and 200 Gertrude Street Gallery in Melbourne are well known galleries of this type. Many art schools also run galleries as an adjunct to the teaching of studio practices.

Artist run or semi-independent galleries are a vital component in the art world. Because of the premium on real estate in most Australian cities, these spaces have a relatively short life. These spaces are hothouses or breeding grounds for new ideas and concepts. They are an important training ground for younger artists who quickly become exposed to both the protocols and "nuts and bolts" activities of the art world. For example, the hanging and layout of an exhibition requires time and energy, as does the sending out invitations, doing publicity, staging a successful opening night and maintaining public interest over the duration of the show. Maybe there are sales of work, so then there are accounting and tax issues that the artist may deal with and so on.

Most artists have their first exhibiting experience in an artist run or semi-independent gallery. Often after exhibiting at these spaces an artist gains commercial representation. Private collectors also view these spaces looking to add to their collections and to be made aware of developing trends or themes in the art-world. Generally the exhibition time for displays in both the commercial and independent space is 3 weeks.

Since the 1960s the phenomenon of the large-scale INTERNATIONAL ART EXHIBITION has become increasingly common. Deals are made between various institutions to allow for works to tour around the world. For example the National Gallery of Australia in Canberra allowed Pollock's *Blue Poles* to be part of a major retrospective in New York. As a trade-off or contra deal, the MOMA allowed the release of Monet's *Waterlilies* to be in the current exhibition at the National Gallery of Australia, *Monet and Japan*.

BIENNALES: The Biennale of Sydney is a different type of INTERNATIONAL ART EXHIBITION. It was founded in 1973 as an autonomous largely privately funded organisation devoted to the exhibition of contemporary art. Over the last thirty years the Biennale of Sydney has been the vehicle to introduce Australian audiences to the work of over one thousand international and Australian artists. There were 200,000 visitors to the Biennale of Sydney 2000 from Australia and international locations making this exhibition one of the most successful art exhibitions of recent times.

The Biennale of Sydney is now one of 36 Biennales around the world. From Kathmandu to Havana and Santa Fe; from Kwang-ju to Lyon and Berlin; from Shanghai to Johannesburg, Dakar and Liverpool, these festivals are partly about underlining ideas of national prestige through the exhibition of local artists with international works. The proliferation of these events has promoted what is the emergence of what is known as "biennale art" - that is, the same names seem to appear again and again in each of these international art festivals. Perhaps

this is another effect of Global Culture. Generally these events are non-commercial exhibitions of recent international and local artists.

In contrast the ART FAIR has a clear trading function. There are many art fairs around the world specialising in certain media, cultures or chronologies. Art Basel, the most famous and presently the most highly regarded art fair is now in its 32nd year. These fairs are gatherings of commercial galleries. The location of these events is usually in large anonymous halls. Each gallery is allotted a stand with a set amount of space. This has a levelling effect, giving a strangely democratic market situation that is often lacking from the isolated and pristine spaces of the single commercial gallery. Art Fairs are not just for buying and selling but also function as important sites for networking for establishing contacts across national borders.

T.E.F.A.F. (The European Fine Art Fair) at Maastricht in the Netherlands is a gathering of dealers in antiques, old and new masters to the early 1970s.

A.R.C.O., another rival art fair in Madrid, has developed a reputation in recent years for highlighting the contemporary cultural product of a designated country for each event. In 2002 Australia is the themed nation so many Australian commercial galleries will be represented there. The Melbourne Art fair is a biennial event where gallerists are invited to participate showing works made from 1960 onwards. In Sydney there is the specialised niche of the International Works on Paper Fair. In 2001 it will be held at the Byron Kennedy Hall at Fox Studios in July. This art fair showcases the enormous range of art works completed on paper—that is from prints to watercolours to photography and digital prints.

CULTURAL FUNDING BODIES are a key element of the art world in most countries. The Australia Council was founded in 1969. In Australia, state and federal governments offer assistance to artists either through grants or scholarships. Although the situation has slightly improved of late, Australia, unlike other nations, does not have a tradition of art patronage so bodies like The Visual Arts and Crafts Board of the Australia Council play a vital role in the fostering of a range of art practices. Across many programs artists have been encouraged to continue working in their chosen medium. There are targeted programs designed to encourage specific art practices, there are one off special project grants and so on. On another level of funding there are studios in New York, Los Angeles, London, Bangkok, and Berlin available to artists that are administered by the VACF. However, as usual, such money and support is limited so there is much competition for these funds.

Some artists are lucky to be awarded recognition and publicity in the form of the ART PRIZE. Art Prizes in Australia have a chequered history. The oldest and possibly most famous art prize in Australia is the Archibald Prize for portraiture staged annually at the Art Gallery of New South Wales. This competition has been in existence for over 70 years and is held in association with the Wynne, Sulman and Dobell prizes. The Blake Prize is also a long-standing art competition for art with religious or spiritual themes. During the 1980s and 90s the Moet and Chandon prize became an important event in the Australian art world calendar. This exhibition of young artists was toured around Australia thus exposing the work to a much wider audience. In the 1990s there was the brief flickering of the Contemporanea Prize from Melbourne that offered a \$100,000 award to a contemporary artist of stature. Fiona Hall won this prize while the last recipient was the model maker Ricky Swallow. In the late 1990s the Lempriere awards for Sculpture and emerging artists from NSW was established. The Helen Lempriere Prize for emerging artists is now the continuation of the NSW Travelling Art Scholarship that was begun in 1899 with George Lambert as the first winner.

The Biennale of Sydney actually emerges out of the philanthropic efforts of Franco Belgiorno Netti who in the 1960s instituted the Transfield Prize for Contemporary Art. By the early 1970s Belgiorno Netti began to believe that maybe there were more effective models to create interest in contemporary art than an art prize and so looked to the Venice Biennale as an inspiration for the international art festival that became the Biennale of Sydney.

An often overlooked but equally important area of the art world is the role of MERCHANDISING AND PUBLICITY. Merchandising can include the use of an artist's work in mass production. There is of course the ubiquitous employment of Van Gogh's *Irises* or *Starry*

Night on tea towels, bedspreads, posters, chocolate boxes etc. Inevitably with any major exhibition there is some element of merchandising. This is called "on selling". Catalogue, postcards, posters, tablemats etc are all forms of merchandising. Possibly the best museum for this type of sales is the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. Here the marketing managers have cleverly repackaged their collection to make a delectable range of what are essentially expensive souvenirs. There are some artists who are commissioned to make knick-knacks to accompany their exhibition. For example Yayoi Kusama at the Biennale of Sydney 2000 supplied key rings that were also funky toy viewers that replicated her obsession with dots. Merchandising could also be seen to include the activities of contemporary artists such as Susan Cohn, an Australian artist/designer/jeweller who works for the Italian production house Alessi. Marc Newson another Australian, has gained a high profile working across a range of interior design forms that are not only eminently saleable but also eminently collectable

Related to merchandising is the copyright expert who monitors the reproduction of the artwork. Any reproduction theoretically now needs formal permission or copyright clearance from the artist or the artists' agent.

Many artists now employ publicists to promote their work in the media this can either be in the art journal or the lifestyle youth culture journal

The ART MAGAZINE is an information exchange and news service. Art magazines reveal much about the local or international cultural climate. More specifically art magazines give form shape and direction of the sheer mass of activity of artists in a given location. In feature articles, reviews and advertisements the reader can construct a geography or map of the art world of the time. Writings about art can make other not so closely involved in production and display people "see". Art magazines are not influential in themselves but by the selection and editing processes they can reflect and promote artist's reputation. Exposure in a journal takes the artwork out of the limited audience for a two to three week exhibition in a gallery space.

Art magazines used to have a limited life. In the nineteenth and early twentieth century magazines grew up and declined around small groups of people, for example *Blast*, *The Blau Reiter*, *The Yellow Book* or *De Stijl*.

In 2001 there has been a blurring of what was the traditional function of the art magazine and other popular culture journals. This is perhaps best illustrated by the sponsorship of the recent Museum of Contemporary Art exhibition *Rock Pop and Techno* by *Revolver* magazine, a rock music journal. One of the reasons for these changes in audiences and sponsorship is the development of information technologies that afford greater access. Another reason is the demographic of what constitutes the art audience is constantly changing.

There are "industry journals" such as *Art Monthly* or on an international level *The Art Newspaper*. Directed to museum and art professionals and so generally more technical and dry in tone, these industry journals provide a brief overview of sales, funding regimes, exhibitions and government policy directed to the arts.

Deliberately and comparatively more accessible are *Art & Australia* and *Australian Art Collector*. These are at present the only two art magazines in Australia that are funded solely by advertising and sales. All other Australian art journals receive some form of state or federal government support.

In the 1970s and '80s partly in response to the strength of Biennale of Sydney and the perceived absence of new information about Australian artists, collectives were formed to publish such journals as *Lip* and *Art Network*. These journals not only promoted local artists but also fostered a new generation of writers about art and culture. However, it is strange that in the year of the centenary of Federation that each state feels the need to publish a number of art journals. These local publications give a voice and focus to art practitioners who tend to feel isolated. Sometimes they are medium or theory specific such as *Object*. For example, from Adelaide is *Broadsheet* and *Artlink*, from Queensland *Eyeline*.

Probably the most important and influential art magazine published in Australia was *Art & Text* founded in 1981 in Melbourne under Paul Taylor. This journal introduced Australian audiences to post structuralism. *Art & Text* has now moved to Los Angeles.

Art journals from overseas play an important role in inspiring the artist as well as providing further contexts for their production. Most notable art journals today are *frieze*, *Artforum*, *Artnews* and *Art in America*. Also very influential are *Parkett* and *October*. More famous again is *Flash Art International* which begun publication in 1967. The editor, Achille Bonito Oliva has a deliberately global scope or view for this magazine. He sees the role of his art magazine as more interventionist and pro active in much the same way as the manifestoes of the surrealists dadaists and futurists activated and defined contemporary art as well as the art audience. His journal named and defined the styles Arte Povera and the Italian Trans Avant Garde (both Italian in origin!)

There is not only the proliferation of art journals in hard copy but also e journals on the web. These provide up to the minute information about contemporary art. Another area of publishing is the preparation of monographs on individual artists, styles, themes and periods. These publications require researchers, writers, graphic designers, publicists and editors. However, it is well to remember that to produce a monograph it usually takes from initial commissioning to final publication and distribution, anywhere up to two to five years.

Many artists also work as writers, graphic designers, stylists and photographers as well as maintaining their own practices. Another location for information about art and style are lifestyle and youth culture magazines. These publications often have feature articles on up and coming artists or interesting and newsworthy exhibitions.

Overlooking all of these complex relationships is the CRITIC OR CULTURAL COMMENTATOR. An art critic is a person who writes about art. In writing their opinions, critics formalise their encounter with the art object and in doing so attempt to unravel or understand the particular qualities of that encounter.

The art critic can be freelance or be employed by a radio or television station but more usually a newspaper or journal.

As the term suggests the art critic is a person who makes public their measured opinions. Put another way, the art critic makes judgements about artworks. These judgements create a focus for dialogue or a movement of ideas that the general public can discuss, then accept or reject.

The very fact that the critic chooses to write about a particular exhibition or artwork proclaims that a level of interest has been generated in that viewer.

In many ways the art critic is a publicist by default, sometimes by design. Quite often if the journal or newspaper has a sponsorship arrangement then it is expected that the critic will write about that exhibition in a favourable light.

Art criticism is related to an important area of art, that of connoisseurship. The connoisseur is a person who has gained a broad but intimate knowledge of an area of cultural practice. A constant and intense close looking and research can gain this specialist knowledge on a given area. Quite often this activity is augmented with collecting items from that research base. Another word for connoisseur is an expert. For example there are people who have expert knowledge of the development of Aboriginal painting from the Western Desert. Or there are experts on early Australian colonial architecture or contemporary Australian Art.

Ideally the art critic is writing and talking from a position of wide knowledge of the local and international art scenes. In an ideal world the art critic would also have an understanding of the histories of art and the philosophising that has attended art over time since the 1300s.

Again ideally, the art critic should actually like and or be intrigued with the broad range and possibilities of art. Whether it be the expanding fields of contemporary art or art from other

historical epochs. These interests or knowledges are then mixed with the personal taste of the writer. Personal tastes change but are the product of life experiences, learning and education, travel and so on.

There some people who hold that a critic should not be partisan. John Coplans, an important American portrait photographer and art critic said:

*The task of the critic is not to say which work is good or bad or best: his task is to ask what is there and what is the nature of. Only then, if he wishes, can the critic venture an opinion of its value. In fact simply to describe this experience is to in some way evaluate the experience.*¹

Coplans is calling for a purer form of art criticism than what presently exists. Much contemporary art criticism is closely involved with a clear statement of the writer's perception of the ideological, socio economic and gender positions that emerge or revolve around the artwork.

In the latter part of the twentieth century art writers roundly rejected the dream of empiricism that underpinned much art criticism.

Part of the charm of art criticism as a genre of writing is to attempt to unravel these elements of personal taste, possible political allegiances and knowledge bases. Another charm of art criticism as a genre of writing is to discern the development of the writer's tastes. Sometimes this does not occur. There are some writers about art that have a particular axe to grind about say the role and function of art in society (John Macdonald, Benjamin Gennochio, Giles Autey, Bruce James, Courtney Kidd). There are some critics who make a point of popularising one artist or art style over another. While there are other art critics who attempt to extend the genre by developing different structural devices or embracing a purely personal and poetic frame of reference to respond to the artwork.

The art critic is not necessarily the artist's enemy. Good criticism is usually constructive, presenting different ways or contexts to view the work. Some critics are friends of artists. Some critics are also philosophers breaking new intellectual ground in their descriptions, analyses and justification of artwork.

Many consider the critic to be a necessary evil. They are someone who sets and maintains standards within the art world. However it is important to remember that it is the artwork that always comes first then the commentary and context.

This is just a bare outline of some of the interconnections in what is known as the art world. This text has not concentrated on detailing the activities of artists their worlds and their friends but rather has taken a more general overview of this part of culture.

ENDNOTE

1. Brian O'Dougherty Provocations: Writings by John Coplans (Book Review) *Artforum*, February 1998