

AUSTRALIAN

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## MELBOURNE ART FAIR

SPECIAL ISSUE

ARE ART FAIRS THE  
NEW MUSEUMS?

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## A NEW ART FAIR LAUNCHES IN SYDNEY

RUMOURS ARE FLYING ABOUT THE NEW HIGH-END ART FAIR BEING LAUNCHED IN SYDNEY IN 2013. AMANDA WOODARD TALKS TO FOUNDER TIM ETCHELLS ABOUT WHAT HE'S GOT PLANNED.

The increasing popularity of high-end art fairs among buyers has led to a proliferation of new events around the globe. Now it's Sydney's turn with the launch next April of Sydney Contemporary as a biennial event. The man behind the new venture is **Tim Etchells**, a British art entrepreneur who was involved in founding the Art HK Hong Kong International Art Fair.

At the same time, Etchells has also announced that his company Single Market Events and its associated Australian business Art Fairs Australia will be assisting in the planning and management of the Melbourne Art Fair from 2014.

Does he believe there is room for two high-end art fairs in Australia? "Absolutely. They will be like two members of the same family but with different characters." The Melbourne Art Fair, approaching its 15th year, has a distinguished pedigree but "Sydney will be of the same high quality but probably a bit edgier," says Etchells. "It's a great international

city that people like to visit and it seems logical to me to have a fair there."

Etchells makes a distinction about the kind of buyers that Sydney Contemporary might attract. "Art fairs are not just about collectors, they are about art buyers who want to become more serious collectors. It's a very different experience to going to a gallery. People love art fairs; I've never seen a grumpy face at an art fair."

He suspects that many potential collectors in New South Wales don't want to make the trip to Melbourne to buy art. "I think there is a huge market in New South Wales and Sydney of people who haven't been to an art fair for years but would like to. For people who are cash rich and time poor, art fairs enable them to see the work of a lot of galleries in one market place."

Far from being in competition with each other, Etchells says that running both fairs enables a cohesive strategy for the high-end art market in Australia. "Although each

fair will maintain a separate identity, they will benefit from one overall director. There are obvious synergies: we can share VIP databases, for example. I can talk to sponsors and collectors around the world about both fairs and the artists represented."

Sydney Contemporary is to operate as a purely commercial fair while MAF will continue to be run as a not-for-profit event with any surplus ploughed back into the Melbourne Art Foundation says Etchells. With set up costs in excess of \$500,000, Etchells aims to attract between 60 and 80 galleries to the Sydney fair in its first year, with 15 to 20 per cent coming from outside of Australia (an ambitious gambit given the struggles MAF has had in attracting international gallery participation).

He observes that Australian art collectors are becoming more visible at overseas fairs, which could have a knock-on effect for homegrown art fairs. "Increasingly you see a number of Australian collectors coming out to buy at the Frieze Art Fair [in London and New York] and in Hong Kong which means international galleries are taking them more seriously. That's great for us because then one or two international galleries will say they will come down to show at art fairs in Australia."

Certainly MAF is keen to widen its appeal beyond Australia with chairman **Ken Fehily** commenting: "With Art Fairs Australia's assistance, MAF will provide Australian artists and galleries with broader international exposure and an opportunity to exhibit alongside their overseas peers."

In Sydney, this will be Etchells's second foray into the art fair market after Single Market Events' affordable art fair, Art Sydney, closed in 2010. The problem on that occasion he says was attracting the right galleries. "We never had problems getting attendance, but there is a particular stigma in Australia around the word affordable and certain galleries didn't want to be linked to that term." Having said that, Etchells says that once Sydney Contemporary is established, he would like to return to the affordable art fair idea again. \*



Tim Etchells.