



Age
Wednesday 18/07/2012
Page: 15
Section: Metro
Region: Melbourne, AU
Circulation: 165061
Type: Capital City Daily
Size: 475.61 sq.cms.



slice
CUT STRAIGHT TO YOUR NEWS

press clip

Establishing art bazaars is fair game

By **DYLAN RAINFORTH**
and **GINA McCOLL**

CALL it a case of “if you can’t beat ‘em join ‘em”. “When you look at all the art fairs that are emerging around the world — and particularly in the Asia-Pacific [region] — they’re dynamic, they’re growing, they’re competitive and, whether we like it or not, they’re taking our ground,” says Melbourne Art Foundation chairman Ken Fehily.

Enter Tim Etchells. Fehily and his MAF board are teaming up with Etchells in a bid to gain the Melbourne Art Fair, which opens in two weeks, the international profile that it has struggled to achieve.

From 2013, Australia will have art fairs alternating annually between Sydney and Melbourne. The man behind the northern city’s new venture, Sydney Contemporary, Etchells will also manage and operate the Melbourne Art Fair from 2014 to 2032.

Etchells has serious international reach. His British-based company Single Market Events is the founder of the highly successful ART HK (the Hong Kong International Art Fair), of which Etchells recently sold the majority stake to Art Basel (the world’s single most prestigious fair, it now forms a global brand comprising its Switzerland, Hong Kong and Miami Beach events).

In February, Etchells and ART HK co-founder Sandy Angus will launch Art13 London, a direct competitor to the Frieze Art Fair.

Not everything Etchells touches turns to gold: Single Market Events also owns Art Melbourne (the Affordable Art Fair), a bazaar still struggling to find the right mix between credibility and marketability; its Sydney equivalent, SME’s Art Sydney was nixed entirely this year.

But the key players hope the Sydney-Melbourne relationship will pay dividends. “It gives it a more cohesive strategy for the high-end art fairs in Australia, with Sydney and Melbourne

alternating,” Etchells says. “We envisage both being slightly different, as Melbourne has 26 years of tradition and heritage, and we’d like to make sure that’s maintained and help build that, and Sydney is a brand-new fair.”

They believe there are efficiencies and opportunities to be exploited. “We can utilise the overheads in the year the team aren’t running the Melbourne fair [to] run the Sydney fair,” Etchells says. “We can also offer sponsors the opportunity to sponsor both fairs and get Melbourne and Sydney exposure. And [there are] synergies with ART HK: we’ve got global VIP databases and Asian collector databases we can promote to come down to Australia.”

Globally, art fairs have become a significant part of the business of selling art. And it is a part that doesn’t come cheap. Stands at the Melbourne Art Fair range between \$16,000 and \$22,000, Fehily says. The prices match those of their international counterparts. In March, international art-news website ARTINFO spoke to a small, anonymous sample of galleries attending fairs during Armory Week in New York: stand prices ranged between \$14,000 and \$30,000. But factor in production costs (more and more, the expectation is for new work by a single star artist from each gallery), travel, freight and staffing and total costs can easily top \$50,000. Major international galleries are now showing at multiple similarly expensive fairs each year.

Of course, as Etchells points out, “some of those prices are relative to the prices sold for art — the prices achieved can be higher at some fairs”. The most recent 2010 Melbourne Art Fair achieved sales of \$11 million. Etchells says ART HK was “in the region of \$100-\$200 million”.

Australian galleries selling the work of living artists (MAF is a non-profit organisation with a charter requirement that participating galleries represent living artists) are unlikely to be selling works with the astronom-

ical sticker prices of the international fairs. While the top echelon of the international art market has been seemingly impervious to the global financial crisis this is not true of the middle tier that characterises the majority of contemporary Australian work. At the 2010 Melbourne fair, most works sold were in the sub-\$10,000 category. “What we found was that there were more transactions for the same turnover,” Fehily says.

With overheads — but not potential returns — approaching their overseas equivalents, can Australian galleries afford an annual fair alternating between Sydney and Melbourne?

“Are art fairs expensive?”

Absolutely, it does cost a lot of money. However, so does running a gallery,” Fehily says. “And to be quite honest I think it’s part of the obligation . . . you’ve got to find ways to establish public presence, to establish gravitas.”

The expense means that some will choose to go their own way. This year not only sees the return of Not Fair, which shows work by emerging and unrepresented artists, but also the inauguration of the New Fair by Vasili Kaliman and Jarrod Rawlins, which will show six galleries in the pair’s South Yarra gallery.

Even Nellie Castan Gallery, a member of the Australian Commercial Galleries Association that founded the Melbourne fair in 1988, has decided not to participate this year in order to concentrate on international art fairs. “We feel we’ve already got a space in Melbourne, we’ve got clients in Melbourne, it’s a bit like you’re preaching to the converted,” says gallery manager Shanley McBurney.

Etchells and Fehily believe there is a social aspect to art fairs that will see them continue to proliferate. “It’s the excitement, it’s the event, part of it is actually about being alive,” Fehily says. “It’s not going shopping, it’s going with like-minded people, and if they get something they go out and celebrate, they go out and have dinner.”

Age
Wednesday 18/07/2012
Page: 15
Section: Metro
Region: Melbourne, AU
Circulation: 165061
Type: Capital City Daily
Size: 475.61 sq.cms.



slice
CUT STRAIGHT TO YOUR NEWS

press clip



Tim Etchells at ART HK in Hong Kong



MAF chairman Ken Fehily.