

Arts

Fair-go-round Marketplaces for the modern collector

With art fairs proliferating around the globe, some wonder when saturation point will arrive. Not just yet, says ArtHK founder Tim Etchells, who is set to launch an upmarket event in Sydney. **Katrina Strickland** reports.

Sydney is to finally get its own high-end art fair, with the man who launched ArtHK and most recently Art13 London, Tim Etchells, launching Sydney Contemporary next April with a view to making it a biennial event.

His plans, first flagged in *The Australian Financial Review* last year and now locked in for April 12 to 14 at the Hordern Pavilion and Royal Hall of Industries at Moore Park, come as the Melbourne Art Fair prepares for its first event under new leadership in August.

Collector and tax accountant Ken Fehily has replaced Niagara Galleries owner Bill Nuttall as chairman of the Melbourne Art Foundation, which runs the Melbourne fair. This year's fair will be the first under Laetitia Prunetti and Emily-Rose Davis, who took over as co-directors following the retirement of Bronwyn Johnson last year after 16 years at the helm.

Etchells expects to spend upwards of \$500,000 to get Sydney Contemporary up and running and, as with ArtHK, thinks it will take three years to become profitable. He hopes for attendances of about 15,000 in the first year.

"There is a pretty good collector base in Sydney, and a huge number of wealthy individuals who like buying contemporary art but don't deem themselves serious enough collectors to travel to all the different art fairs around the globe. They might buy one or two pieces a year, they'll go to some gallery openings, but not all. They are the collectors I'm targeting," he says.

Francesca Valmorbidia has been appointed director of Sydney Contemporary, which Etchells envisages will have between 60 and 80 participating galleries, ideally about 10 to 15 of which will come from overseas, selling art ranging in price from \$3000 up to about \$300,000. Valmorbidia has previously worked with Artbank, John Kaldor Art Projects and the Sydney and Melbourne festivals.

The establishment of Sydney Contemporary is likely to ensure that Melbourne's dream of moving from a biennial to an annual event remains on ice, and will put pressure on that fair to up the ante in servicing its galleries and visitors.

Melbourne's plans to become annual were announced in 2008, in part to stave off chatter about the need for a Sydney event in its off year. They were quickly shelved, however, in light of the global



Sign of the times ... art fairs have sprung up around the world to cater for cash-rich, time-poor consumers.

financial crisis, and concern among gallery owners that Australia could not sustain a top-end fair every year. Many gallery owners said at the time they would prefer to show elsewhere in the region than return to the same limited local collector pool year in, year out.

Art fairs have been proliferating worldwide in recent years. They are in some ways the epitome of the times, perfect for the cash-rich, time-poor consumer who can see art from dozens of galleries and hundreds of artists in the one spot at the one time and, if so inclined, partake of artist talks, champagne and a spot of retail therapy.

In the Asia-Pacific region, new fairs have been set up in Hong Kong, Singapore, New Delhi and Dubai over the past five years, while in the northern hemisphere London's Frieze has just held its inaugural fair in New York, taking on the long-standing Armory Show.

Etchells, meanwhile, is taking on Frieze in its home town, with Art13 London to premiere next March.

Last year Etchells sold 60 per cent of ArtHK to the people who run the grand dame of them all, Art Basel. They have the option of buying the remaining 40 per cent in 2014, and have just announced that from next year ArtHK will be rebranded Art Basel in Asia. ArtHK director Magnus Renfrew will remain in



Tim Etchells ... confident for Sydney.

charge, and will join Art Basel's executive board.

"The world is full of art fairs and it will be interesting to see the winners and losers," Etchells concedes. "Galleries will certainly be more discerning and selective about the ones they do."

That said, he is confident the market in Australia is big enough for a biennial Sydney fair, and says he plans to work in collaboration rather than competition with Melbourne. The Melbourne fair is a not-for-profit, partly government sponsored event; by contrast, Sydney Contemporary will be a profit-driven fair run by a new company set up and owned by Etchells, Art Fairs Australia.

A London-based Brit, Etchells has been operating affordable art fairs in Australia for a decade, first as the

Affordable Art Fair and more recently as Art Sydney and Art Melbourne. The latter is scheduled for May 24 to 27, but Etchells ditched Art Sydney after the 2010 event in a bid to create some "clean air" ahead of launching this high-end contemporary fair.

"The [Sydney affordable] product had become confused. It had become slightly more upmarket without being fully upmarket," he says. "We wanted to have a clear run at the new Sydney fair. Once that is up and established we will look at what we can do at the other end of the market, but our priority now is Sydney Contemporary."

Those affordable fairs were run by a different Etchells company, Single Market Events, in a joint venture with Will Ramsay, who founded the affordable fair concept in London 12 years ago and has now taken it to 14 countries.

As to why art fairs are mushrooming at a time of economic uncertainty, when many galleries are struggling in their home towns, Etchells suggests it's marketing as much as anything. "Art fairs create a marketplace for galleries, they put a focus on the art scene when they happen, they get a lot of publicity and attract a slightly different audience that is broader than just collectors. It's a way some people like doing business."

Edited by: kstrickland@afr.com.au

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About town May 10 to 17

Sydney

Hazellhurst Regional Gallery: Ingeborg Tyssen may not be as well known as Max Dupain or David Moore but her photographs are arguably just as compelling.

This gallery, about a 40-minute drive from Sydney's CBD, is celebrating Tyssen's career with a survey that is running in tandem with one on Sue Ford, another female photographer born in the 1940s who helped pave the way for more women to enter the field. Both shows are part of the HeadOn Photo Festival, which involves more than 200 events and shows at 100-plus venues around town. Festival ends June 2; Tyssen and Ford shows end June 24.



Melbourne

Scott Livesey Galleries: Jason Benjamin is well known for his atmospheric oil on linen landscape paintings, which typically feature big, cloudy skies and sparse trees on blonde plains. Less well known are Benjamin's pencil and watercolour drawings of animals – a bunny, an owl, a cockatoo – done from museum specimens. Both types of work are featured in his first show in Melbourne for three years. It is also his first with this Armadale gallery owned and run by Scott Livesey, who moonlights on occasion as an auctioneer for Deutscher & Hackett. Drawings are from \$1400 to \$3300, and the oil paintings range from \$18,000 to \$50,000. Ends June 2.

Adelaide

State Theatre Company of South Australia: Outgoing artistic director Adam Cook

chose Tennessee Williams' American classic *The Glass Menagerie* as his final directorial act before leaving the flagship company for a freelance life in Sydney. A play about obligation, family, hope and memory, Cook's production of *Glass* features recent drama school graduates Kate Chee and Nic English, described by the local daily paper as "rising stars" of the South Australian art scene. Taking over from Cook is Geordie Brookman, who has shoe-horned in his father, the veteran arts producer Rob Brookman, as his general manager. Dunstan Playhouse, ends May 26.



Pertth
West Australian Ballet: It is this company's 60th anniversary year, so it's apt that its mixed bill is called *Diamonds*. (Sixty years, diamond anniversary, get it?) The dancers will perform the Australian premiere of John Cranko's *Poème de l'Extase*, which was originally created for Margot Fonteyn, along with Cranko's quirky *Jeu de cartes*, which has not been seen in Australia for decades. A work by former WAB artistic director Barry Moreland will also feature, *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*, set to Debussy's famous score. Also being revived is Petr Zuska's *Maria's Dream*, which was performed to great acclaim in 2008. His Majesty's Theatre, with West Australian Symphony, May 11 to 26.



Arts companies' solid performances

Katrina Strickland

Sydney's Belvoir St Theatre is the latest in a string of subsidised arts companies reporting solid results for 2011 despite the tricky economic climate.

Belvoir reported this week a surplus of \$302,630 for calendar 2011, the first year programmed by new artistic director Ralph Myers.

The 31-year-old set designer was a risky appointment to succeed Neil Armfield, but one which has paid off, with subscribers rising from 7583 in 2010 to a record 8414 last year, and box office, sponsorship and donations all up on the previous year.

Sydney Dance, Sydney Symphony and the Australian Chamber Orchestra all also posted surpluses for 2011. Sydney Symphony recorded a

\$1 million operating surplus on the back of record ticket sales and an average occupancy rate across the year of 86.5 per cent. Net profit rose to \$1.5 million after the inclusion of an anonymous \$500,000 donation to its instrument fund.

The ACO also benefited from a donation to its instruments fund, this a \$1 million gift from Peter Weiss. That gift pushed its consolidated sur-

plus to \$2.8 million. Its \$1.5 million operating surplus reflected strong ticket sales and some cost cuts.

Sydney Dance Company reported an operating surplus of \$506,612, after a 47 per cent rise in paid attendees plus growth in private income.

The exception was Sydney Theatre Company, which recorded a small \$9000 loss on a box office fall from \$19.9 million to \$18.2 million.