The artist and the museum: contested histories and expanded narratives in Australian art and museology 1975-2002

Citations
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Date
2004-10
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Metadata
Show full item record
Document Type
PhD thesis
Citations
Access Status
Open Access
URI
http://hdl.handle.net/11343/38728
Description
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Abstract
This thesis explores the rich and provocative fields of interaction between Australian artists and museums from 1975 to 2002. Artists have investigated and engaged with museums of art, social history and natural science during this period. Despite the museum being a major source of exploration for the artist, the museum's role in the art world has been and is often contested. The concept of the artist and the museum is one of the most critical and important aspects of art-making and art appreciation. This thesis examines the relationship between artists and museums in Australia over this time period.

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This study acknowledges art museums’ attempts to mediate between their intrinsic contradictory dynamics, reshape their relationship with citizens and challenge views of their traditional power, however, it remains sceptical about their success on reformulating themselves as responsive ‘listeners’. Identify the overlap between audience research in museums and the current British cultural policy 3.b. Contemporary museology, or Museum Studies, not only acknowledges that the museum is not neutral, rather being an “invention” or “social technology” (Preziosi 1996) that delivers messages, makes arguments and packages culture for consumption, but also becomes responsible for deconstructing this packaging and what is implicit and explicit in it.

The study asserts that a general progression from oppositional critique in the seventies through to collaboration in the late nineties can be charted. It explores the work of three artists who have epitomised these approaches to the museum. Peter Cripps developed an oppositional critique of the museum and was intimately involved with the art museum politics in Melbourne during the mid-seventies. Fiona Hall figuratively represented the museum. Her approach documented and catalogued museum tropes of a bygone era. Narelle Jubelin’s work intervened with Australian museums. Her work has curatorial capacities and has had real effect within Australian museums. These differing artistic approaches to the museum have the effect of contesting history and expanding narrative within museums.

Curators collaborated with artists and used artistic methods to create exhibits in Australian museums during the 1990s. Artistic approaches are a major methodology of museums seeking to contest traditional modes of history and expand narrative in their exhibits. Contemporary art has played a vital, curatorial, role in the Hyde Park Barracks, Museum of Sydney, Melbourne Museum and Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia, amongst other museums. While in earlier years artists were well known for their resistive approach to the art museum, this thesis shows that artists have increasingly participated in new forms of representation within art, social history, and natural history museums. I argue that the role of contemporary art within “new” museums is emblematic of new approaches to history, space, narrative and design within the museum.

Keywords
museology; contemporary art; Australian art; Australian museums; curatorial practice; new museums; museum design; installation art; affect

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