

# CITY OF ART



FROM INDIGENOUS ART TO AN EXCITING SCREEN-BASED PROGRAMME OF EVENTS, CONTEMPORARY SCULPTURES TO PHOTOGRAPHIC EXHIBITIONS, THE MELBOURNE ART FAIR CAN LEAVE YOU FEELING RATHER GIDDY.

WORDS | JANE O'NEILL

Over the past 10 years we have witnessed the rise of the art fair, with the calendar divided by major shows in Basel, Hong Kong, London and New York. They have emerged as crucial vehicles for galleries seeking to expand audiences and to network with industry peers. Increasingly, galleries are abandoning permanent premises in favour of a model which materialises online and at fairs.

Established in 1990, the Melbourne Art Fair was founded by the Australian Commercial Galleries Association to present Australian and international contemporary art. Now presented under the umbrella of the not-for-profit Melbourne Art Foundation, the 2014 Melbourne Art Fair, taking place from 13 – 17 August, promises to host the most expansive programme of events to date. Indeed, the term "fair" does not adequately describe the range of forums, programmes, workshops, public art works, commissions and tours associated with the event.

The headquarters for the Melbourne Art Fair is the Royal Exhibition Building where 70 galleries display their wares across two levels. The participating galleries are predominantly based in Australia and New Zealand and in this way offer an excellent overview of contemporary art from the region, including a strong selection of Indigenous art. The elaborate Victorian hall is situated five minutes' walk from the CBD in the heritage-listed Carlton Gardens. The park features an ornamental lake, an elaborate fountain and mature European trees – an ideal respite from the serious business of the plastic arts.

Anna Pappas, chairman and loyal participant of the Art Foundation, asserts that the 2014 fair will push conceptual boundaries. Scheduled for the Anna Pappas Gallery in Prahran is a survey exhibition of work by mercurial Brisbane artist Luke Roberts. The exhibition includes photography, painting, video and sculpture as well as *wunderkammern* [cabinets of wonder]

crammed with all manner of objects relating to the artist's ongoing exploration of identity. At the opening night of the art fair, Roberts will engage his persona of Pope Alice to "bless" the crowds.

Meanwhile, Lisa Fehly will host work by dynamic collaborative duo Ken and Julia Yonetani across two venues. The artists, who hail from Japan and Australia, represented Australia at the 2009 Venice Biennale with a confectionery version of the Great Barrier Reef. The *Last Suppermarket* is a new project conceived especially for the Melbourne Art Fair where all the goods displayed are made entirely from white salt. At Fehly Contemporary in Collingwood, the same artists will display *Crystal Palace*, a bewitching suite of chandeliers crafted from uranium glass. In each instance, the Yonetanis create alluring tableaux that allude to the repercussions of environmental destruction.

Michael Eather from Fireworks Gallery in Brisbane is a key contributor to the profile of contemporary Indigenous art in Australia. At the fair, Eather will be promoting works by the Queensland artist Rosella Namok, whose distinctive modernist tendencies merge with the artist's immediate natural environment. At the Alcaston Gallery stand, Beverley Knight will showcase photographs by Samoan artist Greg Samu. Samu's work combines conflicting historical and cultural references to explore the theme of displacement.

For collectors of art from the Asia-Pacific region, there is a strong representation of galleries from Hong Kong, Singapore, Japan and China. Pearl Lam, director of galleries based throughout the region, will deliver the keynote speech for the fair. Lam's gallery, which has bases in Hong Kong, Shanghai and Singapore, will exhibit a range of works including the calligraphic explosions of Lan Zhenghu and Wang Dongling.

Another highlight will be the bulbous sculptures by Erwin Wurm, represented by

Melbourne dealer Anna Schwartz. Shown in Melbourne for the first time, Wurm is known for his absurdist meditations on the relationship between obesity and consumer culture. At the Anna Schwartz Gallery in Flinders Lane we can look forward to an exhibition of new sculptures by Daniel Crooks.

The introduction of a screen-based programme of events demonstrates the increasing viability of video art as a collectible object. MAF Video is a newly conceived programme to be staged across venues including the Royal Exhibition Building, Federation Square and Chin Chin restaurant in Flinders Lane. Throughout their tenure as directors of the Melbourne gallery Screenspace, curators Simone Hine and Kyle Weise have introduced leading screen artists to Melbourne.

It's easy to see how an art fair in Melbourne, a city well-versed in the use of unexpected venues for art, might manifest in a great number of locales. Melbourne is home to more than 200 galleries, including a vast number of experimental spaces in vacant retail areas. There is also a strong tendency towards the site-specific engagement with buildings, laneways and parks. It's not unusual, for example, to find a sleek neon-lit sculpture in a laneway otherwise populated by bins.

A surprising addition to the schedule this year is an exhibition to be staged in the retail space of Aesop's flagship store on Collins Street. Curated by fair ambassador Theodore Wohng the exhibition features varied, delicate works by artists including Katherine Huang and Madeline Kidd. Here, visitors are encouraged to curate their own version by playing with the placement of the works in the distinctive plywood boxes which normally house Aesop products.

In a grand new departure for 20 cutting-edge galleries, a new fair will be staged at the iconic Windsor hotel, just five minutes' walk

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Erwin Wurm's *Jogging Trousers* sculpture; Jess MacNeil's *Mabley Green*; Melbourne Art Fair at the Royal Exhibition Building; networking with industry peers; Tomokazu Matsuyama's *Barber Shop Affairs*; Ken and Julia Yonetani's calligraphic artist Wang Dongling; interior of the Royal Exhibition Building, Melbourne Art Fair.

from the Royal Exhibition Building. In a nod to the tradition of the Grammercy Park Hotel fair in New York, this invitation-only fair aims to unite group of galleries with sympathetic aesthetic interests. There will be an emphasis on minimal and conceptual art by galleries from New York, New Zealand and Australia.

The nature of the refined yet decorative backdrop of the hotel rooms will no doubt make for some surprising contrasts. Galleries represented in Spring 1883 include Sarah Cottier and David Pestorius, dealers who both maintain strong representation of well-regarded minimal artists from Europe such as Gerold Miller, Andreas Exner and Jan van der Ploeg.

In a coup for Melbourne gallery Neon Parc, Geoff Newton will be hosting an exhibition of posters and associated ephemera by the late German grandfather of grunge, Martin Kippenberger. Much-revered, but rarely seen in Australia, Kippenberger's *Mut zum Druck* [courage to print] represents an increasing tendency for commercial galleries to stage exhibitions of a standard normally seen in the public museum sector.

During a trip to Florence in 1817, the French author Stendhal wrote of feeling utterly overwhelmed by the spoils of the Renaissance. Since then, Stendhal syndrome has come to characterise the dizziness and confusion caused by exposure to masterpieces. The moral is clear: if you're visiting Melbourne during this time, it's important to be systematic about allocating set times for visiting the various events so as not to experience frustration at missing out. It's also important to factor in breaks so as to avoid any symptoms of Stendhal's curious condition. ☺

