

“MELBOURNE ART FAIR WAS THE FIRST
COMMERCIAL FAIR OF THE ASIA PACIFIC TO
ESTABLISH AN INTERNATIONAL NETWORK FOR
COLLECTORS TO CONNECT AND ENGAGE WITH
THE AUSTRALIAN ART MARKET.”

MAREE DI PASQUALE



ON THE COUCH: MAREE DI PASQUALE

Beatrice Spence talks to the recently appointed CEO and director of Melbourne Art Fair. Photography by Zan Wimberley.

The announcement of Melbourne Art Fair (MAF) being cancelled in 2016 was met with widespread dismay, and intensive questioning from the arts community. What do you think the rebirth of MAF has taken from the dialogue around the MAF non-event of 2016?

We took a rare opportunity to stop and take stock; to correct our strategy to better respond to the needs of a rapidly evolving industry. We adjusted our business plan and developed a platform that competes on the global stage to drive increased critical and commercial opportunities for galleries and their artists.

The refreshed Melbourne Art Fair has directly responded to the industry's demands for the return of a quality, commercial exhibition platform in Victoria. Showcasing 40-50 galleries from Australia, New Zealand and the region, Melbourne Art Fair returns with a highly curated selection of some of the newest and most respected names in contemporary art.

The fair will provide collectors with an intimate yet vibrant art fair experience.

What are the major changes we can expect?

Audiences can expect a renewed focus on quality content, with a highly selective gallery offering from Australasia and the region. They can expect a critically diverse program that takes place across multiple venues, and embraces Victoria's creative organisations under the returning Melbourne Art Week umbrella.

This strategy is supported by a bold new venue. Melbourne Art Fair takes place within the multidisciplinary Southbank Arts Precinct and alongside one of city's best-loved architectural icons.

There is a new board after the resignation of key members such as gallerist William Nuttall who has been involved since the first fair. Who is the new chairperson?

The Melbourne Art Foundation is chaired by Charles Justin, a founder of architecture giant SJB and past president of the Jewish Museum for five years. Charles leads a refreshed and energetic board with a diverse skill set spanning government, commerce and the creative industries.

Is the fair still publicly funded? If yes, how much are the grants worth? What are the obligations of the fair expected by the government bodies who grant the funds?

Melbourne Art Foundation is funded under the

Australia Council 2016-2019 Visual Arts and Craft Strategy (VACS) for National Leadership Organisations. The obligations for Melbourne Art Foundation remain to support living Australian artists across the trajectories of their careers, through the delivery of critical and commercial opportunities that grow the market for Australian contemporary art both here and overseas.

In 2018 Sydney Contemporary will be annual for the first time since beginning in 2013, and there is also chatter around Auckland Art Fair becoming annual. With MAF in August there will be three art fairs in the region. Do you think there is the audience to support three fairs in such close vicinity?

The market can sustain a biennial Melbourne Art Fair, irrespective of what happens interstate or internationally. Melbourne Art Fair was the first commercial fair of the Asia Pacific to establish an international network for collectors to connect and engage with the Australian art market. It attracts a strong and active collector base, supported by a discerning, arts-interested public that galleries want to access.

What sets MAF apart from the aforementioned fairs?

The venue and location of Melbourne Art Fair is itself unique, located next to two national flagship institutions; a university rearing the next generation of artistic talent; a private collection; a university museum, as well as the city's major performing arts venues. Southbank Arts Precinct is the perfect home for the new Melbourne Art Fair. The venue also provides an intimacy and manageability which is difficult to achieve in larger fairs. It's this size in conjunction with an independent curatorial committee that will help to maintain the Fair's high standard of exhibition. The non-profit ownership structure provides a point of difference to other fairs. Our ambitious commercial objectives are in aim of reinvesting into our commercial platforms and initiatives, for the benefit of the arts community, not for corporate gain.

Are dates and location confirmed?

Melbourne Art Fair runs from 2-5 August 2018 at the Southbank Arts Precinct alongside ACCA, 111 Sturt Street Southbank VIC.

What will be unique to the fair to attract collectors?

The Melbourne Art Fair collector network is engaged through an exclusive concierge service and a 4-day VIP Program to ensure a first-class cultural experience. The program includes invitation only dinners, studio visits, corporate and private collection tours, exhibition openings and private events that showcase the city's art scene.

A truly global city, Melbourne is enriched by people from more than 200 countries and this influences the VIP Program's creative and cultural offering. Host city to 48 private museums, world-class institutions and galleries including ACCA, Ian Potter Museum of Art, Heide Museum of Modern Art and the National Gallery of Victoria (ranked 19th most popular gallery in the world), as well as one of the largest concentration of commercial galleries in the country, the unique 'Victorian experience' is a highlight of the 2018 program.

Will MAF be positioning itself as an international fair?

Whilst we welcome participation from our closest Asian and Oceanic neighbours, Melbourne Art Fair returns as the region's most significant platform for leading Australasian contemporary art.

What will you bring to the table with your previous experience as director of Art Central Hong Kong and at other fairs?

Melbourne Art Fair is in a new exciting stage of re-launch, with a new vision, new venue and new focus, and I am a launch director. I was integral to the launch and positioning of Sydney Contemporary and Art Central, and key to the delivery of Abu Dhabi Art in its foundation years.

What will be some of the highlights of the forthcoming fair?

Showcasing no more than 50 galleries from Australia, New Zealand and the region, Melbourne Art Fair returns with a curated selection of some of the newest and most respected names in contemporary art. Emerging and established galleries will present a diverse range of artists and themes with a focus on solo shows and curated exhibitions.

There will also be a spotlight on Indigenous contemporary art with the introduction of a curated project soon to be announced.

Are galleries confirmed? What is the application and selection process?

Gallery applications open July 2017. Applications will be reviewed in two stages with the first vetting in November 2017. There is limited capacity due to the size of the venue, so galleries are encouraged to apply prior to this November deadline.