agmanz news

quarterly of the Art Galleries and Museums Association of New Zealand

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March 1981

Editorial

It is with pleasure that I take over as editor from Margaret Gibson Smith who has done a marvellous job for the last seven years.

The lateness of the issue is due to the fact that I decided to coincide the delivery of Agmanz News with the conference in Auckland, I do hope this has not inconvenienced anyone.

Needless to say with a new editor some changes must ensue. I would like to introduce a thematic approach to the magazine with each issue devoted predominantly to a major topic in addition to the usual contributions. This year is 'International Year of the Handicapped'. I would like to explore this for the next issue — the deadline unfortunately will have to be April 15th. The following issue will cover conservation, the Stolow report; contributions please by July 15th.

Jan Bieringa

'Five years enough,' decides Dowse boss

RUNNING the Dowse Art Gallery is a job which is demanding on creative talents and personal time, says director Jim Barr, who is resigning.

Mr Barr, who has worked at the gallery for five years, said after that length of time it was a good thing to leave.

"After five years you have done a lot and things start to get a bit stale," he said.

He intends to go back into publishing — an area he is familiar with. Before starting at the Dowse Mr Barr was the art director for A H and A W Reed educational books.

Together with his wife he has written a book on contemporary New Zealand painting. The second volume is coming out later in the year. He is now writing a third book and will also do some work for Alistair Taylor, who he describes as the leading art book publisher in New Zealand.

"Work at the Dowse meant converting quite complicated information in terms of fine art and making it accessible and acceptable to the public. The same skills are required in publishing," he said.

He has set out, he said, to break down suspicions people had about going into an art gallery without breaking down the standards of work shown. Last year 75,000 people viewed exhibitions there.

"I tend to look at work in terms of a year rather than one exhibition, and last year was just a cracker.

"A lot of institutions under-estimate people and show them rubbish, but if you show people the best they will come.

"It is insulting to people to show them second-grade material."

The gallery has built up its own good collection. Quite a bit of the work had been put on show, but not all of it.

"In terms of contemporary New Zealand work, there is a very good collection; in terms of New Zealand drawings there is one of the best collections in the country.

He praised highly the support of the Lower Hutt City Council which he said had always funded the gallery properly.

Mr Barr leaves the gallery on March 31. The job of director is being advertised.

Evening Post, Thursday January 22, 1981

The Dowse: sights on only the best

TIME AND TALENT. That's what goes into making an art gallery more than just a place in which to hang pictures.

Lower Hutt's Dowse Art Gallery is a case in point. Director Jim Barr has given freely of his creative talents and personal time and, after five years, he has decided to quit rather than become stale. He will, as our Thursday story indicated, leave the gallery at the end of March.

He will do so knowing that the Dowse is in good shape — thanks in no small measure to his energetic and creative management.

The promotion of art and artistic appreciation is largely individual. In Mr Barr's case, it has meant weathering controversy and constantly widening the Dowse's appeal as a people's art gallery.

It was Jim Barr who said at the outset of his appointment, 1976: "I don't want a gallery where people stop talking when they walk through the doors."

Earlier, the gallery's first director, Mr David Millar, laid the foundation for participation when he said soon after the Dowse's opening in June, 1971: "We are intent upon making this new and attractive gallery community-centred in its activities. Any thought that the Dowse will become a dignified but aloof, temple of culture, remote from the market place, is contrary to our intentions."

The Dowse is today one of the country's leading smaller galleries. But its physical size belies the enthusiasm for art it has been able to generate and sustain over a brief span of years.

The Lower Hutt City Council caught the thrust of Mr Millar's initial expression of intent and, to its credit, has allowed the gallery to develop along exciting lines. This Mr Barr readily acknowledges. Also, the faithful Friends of the Dowse, especially its hard-working .executive, has provided the back-up needed to exploit totally the gallery's considerable potential.

The Dowse has had its share of controversy, which is good for any gallery. There were the controversial Diane Arbus photographs, the Werry wars, and the fearless promotion of contemporary art. Consistently, the Dowse has managed to stimulate as well as educate.

Interest in weaving grew as a result of Dowse exposure. Similarly, the words of McCahon and others are now better understood because they have shown to advantage in the Dowse. Young people, too, feel at home there and music also has its avid following.

"If you show people the best they will come," Mr Barr says. And he has the attendance figures to prove it. Young in years, the Dowse is mature in its outlook. There will be considerable interest in who next will be entrusted with its creative direction.

Evening Post Editorial, Saturday January 24, 1981

Jim Barr — Director Dowse Art Gallery — Come what may?

Seddon Bennington, Director, Wellington City Art Gallery

Wellington City Art Gallery

Wellington at last has its own city art gallery. In 1979 the Wellington City Council completed the first stage of conversion of an inner city commercial space into a public art gallery. In April 1980 I took up my position as first Director with an initial brief to establish a policy, staff structure and programme for this space. Work on Stage II, renovating the first floor to provide a flexible public performance/activity area, and gallery office/service area proceeded. The gallery opened in September 1980 with wide participation in a theme show, 'Opening', by invited artists working in Wellington. This show included a wide range of media, including a commissioned dance work resultijng from the collaboration of a choreographer, composer and visual artist. Performances of this jazz work, IMPRINTS, by four dancers and four musicians, and the hatching of unscheduled times, of 24 eggs, heralded the opening of the gallery. The show introduced two aspects of the gallery's policy: to provide a focus for vigorous dialogue between artists working in the region and the public, and to show the variety of what is happening in the arts today.

The inevitable criticism, "Why another gallery in Wellington?" had to be answered with a positive policy and a challenging programme contributing new dimensions to the arts in Wellington. The National Art Gallery, The Dowse Art Gallery nearby, and a variety of dealer galleries all have their strengths, and it is essential that the City gallery should complement rather than duplicate. A prime asset to exploit is the gallery's downtown accessibility.

The gallery is not involved in the sale or acquisition of works, and has no permanent collection. An initial non-collecting policy recognises the limitations of the gallery space and the demanding responsibilities involved in maintaining a collection of artworks. At the same time it is necessary to explore alternative ways by which the gallery can support the visual arts and contribute in a special way to the acquisition policies of other New Zealand art galleries. The advantage of not being concerned with a collection in storage is that all the resources can be concentrated into activity in gallery space and direct participation in the art making process through community arts projects and resident artist programmes.

The exhibition programme for 1981 includes: 'Pulp' works in paper; 'Works 80' Andrew Drummond; 'The Bowl' a national selected show of bowls in all media organised with the Crafts Council of New Zealand; a survey of work by Robert McLeod, Rob Taylor and Greer Twiss; a socio-architectural survey of the implications of current inner city building demolition — replacement in Wellington; a search for appropriate contemporary uses of traditional language in art, craft, architecture and social structure in a Pacific nation.

The concept of each show is important. It provides a context for thinking, for confronting ideas, for feeling and looking at art. The gallery has to avoid the tempting trap of didactic explanations, of confining the audiences' mind to suggested equivalents. At the same time of prime necessity are well-researched introductions and reviews, and critical documentation. The gallery must present its informed opinions in a thorough way and contribute to an ongoing search for those elements which distinguish art from what is merely healthy activity. It is a challenge which faces all galleries, to facilitate dialogue between artist and public, to represent what is substantial and profound. The opening of this new gallery must be the beginning of this City's commitment to expanding the community consciousness of the challenges and pleasures of an enriched perception of the visual world.

Gallery Specifications

The gallery has a frontage onto Victoria Street, which is within the central business area of Wellington, and close to other cultural facilities such as the Town Hall and Public Library.

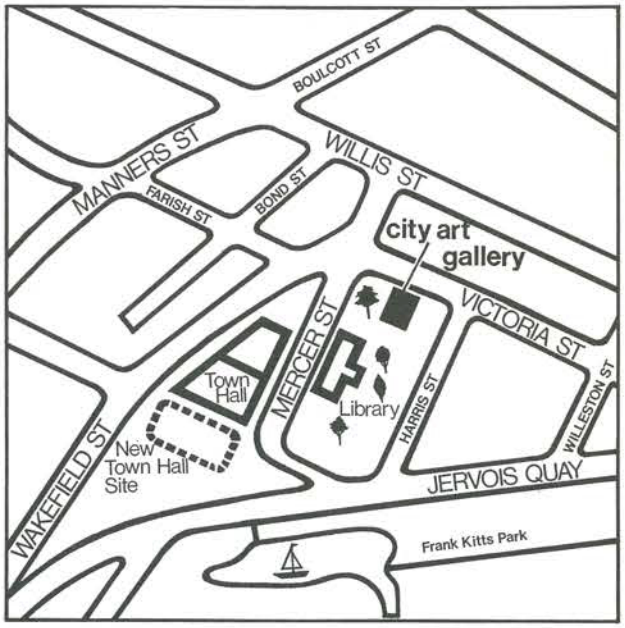
The exhibition space comprises the following areas:

Ground floor — no natural lighting; air conditioning system; sprinkler system.

1. Main area
   Area floor space 100 square metres
   Running wall for hanging 47 metres
   Height 3 metres
   Floor covering — dark brown carpet
   Colours — white walls, red ceiling grid
   Lighting — light track with movable spots
2. Two side bays
   Area floor space 65 square metres
   Running wall for hanging 35 metres
   Height 2.3 metres
   Floor covering — natural polished cork tiles
   Colours — cream linen walls, white ceiling
   Lighting — light track with movable spots

First floor — provision for natural lighting; sprinkler system.

Area floor space 100 square metres
Running wall for hanging 30 metres
Floor covering — grey carpet, removable in one area to provide black floor area for performance.
Colours — black walls, black ceiling
Lighting — spots, movable on a pipe grid. These spots are held in a theatre lighting fitting, with provision for filters and shaping of the light beam.



Wellington City Art Gallery location map

Wellington City Art Gallery, Victoria Street

There is no charge for gallery admission. Artists are invited to show work at the discretion of the gallery. Artists are not charged any fees. The gallery is responsible for the hanging of all work, and for the utilisation of gallery space. The gallery does not provide space for hire for the independent activities of individuals or groups.

ICOM — ICME Conference Report

The International Committee for Museums of Ethnology (ICME) is a subcommittee of ICOM and meets once every three years as part of the ICOM conference. ICME is one of the largest and most active committees and at the last conference of November 1980, in Mexico City, this was confirmed by the strong attendance numbers. The total number of ICME members is now 304.

But while ICME continues to grow and be active there has, at the same time, been a fall off in the participation of ICME's activities. Communication has been a major problem (isn't it always with such large groups?) and an effort is being made to prepare and circulate newsletters on a regular basis.

Two future meetings of ICME are planned.
1. Bangladesh 1981: the subjects to be discussed will be the documentation of collections, costumes and textiles.

2. 1982 — in an African country yet to be decided. Topics suggested are:-
Anthropological Museums in 'developing' countries; return and/or restitution of cultural property.

An interesting outcome of the conference was the idea that the Executive Committee study how to initiate and carry through cooperative field work such as "study of collections, publications and exhibitions involving as many of its corporate institutions as possible".

In the wider assembly of ICON, ICME was successful in having the following resolutions moved and accepted by the plenary session. These resolutions concerned National Heritage and were:-

1. **Taking into account** the growing national and international feeling that cultural heritage is an essential element of identity for a given community, for a nation, and for a people,
2. **Acknowledging** UNESCO's efforts in favour of the return of cultural property, requests all museum professionals to urge their governing bodies to consider the return of cultural objects to their places of origin,
3. **Recognising** the need to reinforce all measures for the protection of national heritage, particularly with a view to curbing illicit traffic in cultural objects,
4. **Urges** all museums to facilitate ICOM and UNESCO in the documentation of their acquisitions specially in cases of foreign origin,
5. **Requests,** in this respect, that all efforts be made at the governmental level to create and support professional training in the various museum fields, by means of setting up the appropriate structures, and developing courses, internships, and in-service training activities, and to this end calls on UNESCO to ensure the financial means as a necessary pre-condition for this work, particularly in developing countries,
6. **Endorses** policies of documentation of national heritage through inventorying and cataloguing of the collections existing in a given country and abroad, and finally
7. **Urges** all governments to effectively protect the national heritage by passing appropriate legislation, ratifying international conventions, and taking into account the relevant recommendations passed by UNESCO and, in particular, by establishing and permanently applying efficient measures at the technical, administrative, customs, and police levels.

Working Groups

While ICME has remained very active overall it was clear that one or two working groups had failed to be as active as other groups. The reason for this was said to be fall off in enthusiasm. People apparently left the 1977 ICME meetings fired with enthusiasm which did not last more than a few months.

This session, 10 working groups were formed. The groups covered an extremely wide range of topics **but** were very hampered by the programming of meetings which stopped people attending more than about two of the working groups. While members enjoyed the high level of hospitality given, many thought that more time and efficiency would have been given to allow a more flexible programme. The working groups were:-

1. **Cooperation between ethnological and technical museums**
Coordinator: H. Ganslmayr, (West Germany)
This group has as its basis the idea that "technical development can only be successful as long as it is orientated towards the real needs of society. Museums of ethnography are the storehouses of numerous, often forgotten or little-known techniques which grew out of the needs of a specific society in a particular environment and at a certain stage of development".

2. **Music in Ethographic Museums**
Coordinator, Jean Jenkins (England)
Their aim is to advance the presentation of music from non-western societies — museums wherever they may be. The group is currently compiling a list of museums of/or with musical instruments.

3. **Museology in Ethnographic Museums**
Coordinator: Mlle Huguette van Geluwe
Intends to publish sheets on:
(a) conservation and storage
(b) computerisation and automation of documentation
(c) development of standard loan form for temporary exhibitions
(d) lighting of displays
(e) security and safety procedures.

4. **Museums in Developing Countries**
Coordinator: Tibor Sekel, (Yugoslavia)
This group takes as its main theme "what kind of museum is needed in the 'developing' countries of the world?"

5. **Ethnographic Textiles**
Coordinator: Cherri Pancake (Guatemala)
The group plans to send out periodic bibliographies and worksheets relating to preservation and conservation of textiles.

6. **Return and/or Restitution of Cultural Property**
Coordinator: H. Ganslmay
This group is in the process of dealing with the ethical problems involved within the profession. ICOM will be asked to press UNESCO to intensify its public campaign in support for the return of cultural property.

7. **Aims of Ethnographic Museums**
Coordinator: R. Vossen (West Germany)
This group was formed out of the request for more open and frank discussion, judgement and criticism on ethnographical museum policies, exhibits, etc, among colleagues.

8. **Films and Photography**
Coordinator: N. Bogaart (Netherlands)
This group takes as its principle focus (!!) "the need to establish working guidelines regarding the human rights of photographic subjects and the ethical uses of ethnographic films and photographs by those who create, curate and eventually research and publish their materials.

9. **Fakes and Forgeries**
Coordinator: R. Watt (New Zealand)
The aims of this group are:-
(a) to establish what is meant by the word 'fake'
(b) to collect information about methods of analysis in identifying fakes and where these analyses can be done
(c) to publish information useful for the detection of fakes
(d) the encouragement of personal collection by ethnologists in the field with proper documentation, such documentation and collection could be subject for a joint international project.

10. **Folk Arts**
Coordinator: A. Fromm (U.S.A.)
This group is concerned with the collection and documentation of all kinds of folk art.

As can be seen ICME does cover a wide range of topics and many of these have a direct bearing on New Zealand museums. While it may not be possible to attend conferences overseas, there can be, nevertheless, sure benefits in taking part in ICME's activities. The international contracts alone are extremely worthwhile.

I will gladly supply any details about ICME, e.g. contact addresses, for working groups since this committee deserves all the support it can get.

Robin J. Watt
National Museum
Wellington

Gallery Assistants

A Pilot Volunteer Scheme
(An account of the Gallery Assistant Scheme, National Art Gallery)

Who they are:
If you happened to visit the National Art Gallery during the Thyssen-Bornemisza Exhibition between 11 and 12 o'clock on any morning, you may have wondered who was the woman leading a tour group. An education officer? an invited guest speaker? a knowledgeable, unusually assertive member of the public? If you had peered a little further, you might have caught the name on the badge: GALLERY ASSISTANT.

The Gallery Assistants are a small group of volunteers who over the last 18 months have been working for the National Art Gallery's Education Service. That is to say, they are organised, supervised and courted — by the Education Officer.

The Gallery Assistant Scheme was the brainchild of Ian Hunter, a past Education Officer and the Acting Director of the gallery at this time. His previous two year study of Gallery Education in the States, where the whole 'Docent' system enjoys enormous popularity, undoubtedly prompted the concept of such a scheme operating in New Zealand. As the term 'docent' is an unfamiliar one in this country, we decided to call each of our helpers, simply a 'Gallery Assistant'. It was clear that staffing at the National Art Gallery would continue to be a problem: the Education Service was entirely limited by the interests and energy of one officer. It was decided that the time involved in training a group of volunteers was, at best, a long term investment; and, at least, a self contained project in adult education.

Recruitment
The Gallery Assistant Scheme was launched in June 1979, through a small article in Wellington's local paper and through an interview with 2ZB's 'Doreen' on her afternoon programme. Volunteers were asked to apply for selection, enclosing a curriculum vitae.

Moira Johnson, education officer, National Art Gallery (1.) and Gallery Assistants.

We were surprised at the response, both in terms of the high number and quality of applicants. There was obviously a large and eager audience who for a variety of reasons were looking for this opportunity.

Selection was by interview, which followed almost immediately. This wasn't easy. We had to decide (1) what talents were ideally required for this gallery's education programme, (2) — and more difficult — which people were genuinely interested in working with the **gallery** itself, or committed to the idea of art education, rather than simply looking for any involvement, or a cause, for its own sake.

We looked for people with one or a combination of the following:
a background in teaching, from kindergarten through to adults;
with experience in working with children, however limited;
with administrative/organisational abilities;
with an engaging and enthusiastic personality
— any age, male or female.

Training

Training commenced in August. Our programme covered six months August — November; February — May, meeting once a week for 2½ hours. The morning was divided into two sections: the theoretical followed by the practical. A lecture programme devised to provide assistants with a basic grounding in the history of art, with the major emphasis on 19th and 20th century European, American and New Zealand art. The object was to provide a frame of reference in which to place the works in the gallery.

(The education programme at the National is not bound to the Department of Education in any way. It caters for all age groups and runs throughout the year).

In the end, we recruited 15 remarkably talented women, we had originally aimed at a number of 5 or 6 but further selection at this stage seemed impossible. For their part, the Assistants were asked to work up to 20 hours a month on average, and a tentative commitment to the scheme of two years was suggested.

The second part considered practical realities. Just what can you **DO** with a group of children up there in the gallery? Guidance and demonstrations were given with imaginary classes. Possible strategies, techniques and content were suggested in relation to that situation in the gallery, on that particular morning.

Towards the end of the training programme, we invited speakers to introduce topics on child development, and art education in N.Z. schools. The programme was peppered by visits to other galleries and to the studios of local artists.

Work Activities

The Assistants were already making practical contributions to the education work by the beginning of 1980. They were also asked to consider which area they wished to develop (workshop activities, public relations, etc). These covered both the on-going education work, and the shorter term projects.

For the record, the activities which were undertaken by the Assistants during 1980 were as follows:-

(1) Helping with the four educational exhibitions. (Collecting and returning material, making 'props', preparation of room, actual setting up). While the concept and general layout were controlled by the Education Officer, the Assistants were able to offer suggestions and criticisms which drew from their own experience and network of contacts. It was found, too, that these Assistants involved in these exhibitions had more confidence and insight in dealing later with visiting classes.

(2) Work with primary schools (Introductory talks, related practical workshops, showing films). These tended to be centred around the educational exhibitions, though not exclusively. The most obvious immediate advantage of extra assistance in this area is staff-child ratios. As most schools tend to bring whole groups — and often a bus load — it is possible to divide and organise into working numbers with, say, 3 assistants. A simple rotation of each group from introductory talk to workshop to films can then follow.

(3) Administrative/clerical. In particular, the organisation, collation and distribution of the 4 slide kits which the gallery produced in 1979-80.

(4) Work with adults. As 1980 saw the advent of two major exhibitions: Thyssen-Bornemisza and Ikon, with a guaranteed audience in the gallery, it seemed an appropriate time to suggest that the Assistants could offer public tours. They were at first extremely reluctant, with an understandable concern that they could not cope with their own peer group. However, those Assistants who did participate gained a great deal of confidence (and knowledge) through the experience.

(5) Public relations. One Assistant took the initiative of collating a 'public relations file' which acts as a very easy reference system for all gallery staff. It lists organisations, contact people, telephone numbers, time warning required.

(6) General. Helping distribute the educational newsletter, 'N.A.G. RAG', researching the loan material, assuming responsibility for the slide collection.

Future Programme

The importance of regular weekly contact has always been emphasised. Although the training programme has been completed for over 8 months, it is still crucial to provide stimulus and extension. Accordingly, the programme for this half year, reduced to 1½ hours weekly, combined lectures on forthcoming exhibitions, outside visits, acquaintance with work in other areas of the gallery and short seminars prepared by each assistant.

One of the dangers of using a volunteer scheme is that your programme becomes **over** dependent on that assistance. Expectations of a volunteer should not become confused with demands; there are no legal obligations and all, theoretically, could emigrate tomorrow.

Since the initial recruitment of 15, we now have a core of about 8 active assistants and can expect to lose more. The hardening economic situation, decisions to have further children, a move away from the district and shifting interests are all realities. I am trying to plan this year's programme, then, in such a way that it could operate, however dimly, in its own right. A situation where an assistant can initiate a self-contained project of her choice and assume part responsibility for its success, seems desirable. The officer must advise and monitor progress but otherwise is left to carry on with her own basic programme.

(An example might be the instigation of a special 'theme' day, or week, for primary schools, in relation to a particular exhibition, or the preparation of a guidebook for infants).

Problems/Demands

All voluntary schemes have implicit problems, some of which have been witnessed in our gallery here. The equation of value = status = money (reward) which exists in our society is central. A Gallery Assistant who has spent an exhausting session with a class is not too pleased to watch a (paid) temporary staff member drinking coffee and idly reading newspapers.

Let me quote from Carol MacDonnell's "Art Education in the Canadian Museum" (Canadian Museums Association, 1979).

"If title and salary confer professional status, what **is** the status of the volunteer docent? How are they rewarded for their contribution to gallery education? In some galleries the **intent** is to recognise the docents as "paraprofessionals", with a variety of benefits attached to their service, such as invita-

tions to previews, free catalogues, discounts in the cafeteria or gallery store, free parking, or, in a few galleries, payment of a token fee per tour, to defray transportation or babysitting costs. Frequently the other staff members in the gallery do **not** regard the docent as paraprofessionals; they regard them rather, as something of a nuisance, or even as a threat and the docents are aware of these attitudes where they exist. It is one of the more difficult problems of the whole question of using volunteers: these people, typically well-educated women in the mid-thirty to mid-forty age range, are given fairly rigorous training and expected to meet requirements of attendance, performance, attitude, and initiative equal to the requirements for professional staff; they are sometimes required to sign agreements as binding as any contract; they are subject to evaluation and to dismissal; and they receive little or no compensation beyond thanks for a valuable service. One educator questioned not only the justice, but also the morality of such a practice.

Museums will have to rethink their use of volunteers in the coming years, either moving towards abolishing the practice, or towards searching for alternative sources of volunteers, such as university students who would receive (university) credit for their work."

The cue is taken by Paul Johnson in his report on Art Gallery Education Services in N.Z., (Sarjeant Gallery, 1980). "Perhaps the docent training scheme can be broadened to provide the public with a Gallery Education Programme . . . In one education programme, this scheme could provide a group of properly trained docents, a thorough gallery orientation for school teachers, a credit course for secondary and tertiary students, and a community education service.

One other problem has already been mentioned — the fact that the number of assistants is subject to change and that a programme may become too dependant on that labour.

Another very real problem for New Zealand is that through an extended and enhanced public programme which the volunteers have made possible, the museum or gallery is **seen** to be active. The director's case for further permanent staff may then well be weakened.

A more subtle problem which can arise and certainly does in the States, is that the scheme becomes, simply, a prestige perk for social climbers — "an-awfully-nice-thing-to-be-seen--to-be-doing" situation. Possibly because the scheme is still in its infancy in New Zealand, this situation is less likely to arise, but certainly such attitudes should be closely tested at recruitment stage.

Apart from these specific problems, the Gallery Assistant Scheme does create demands on the gallery staff. The Education Officer has a continuing responsibility to supervise activities and to provide sufficient stimulus, while other members of staff may be asked to prepare a specialised talk or share their expertise.

Volunteers in other Museums and Galleries in New Zealand

The volunteer guide scheme is one phenomenon on the increase. It is well established in the States, and, in Australia the scheme has been running since the early seventies. An Association of Australian Gallery Guides now exists with its own annual conference. In Britain, the first volunteer guide scheme was set up at the Tate Gallery in 1976. It is reasonable to assume that with increasing leisure hours and higher unemployment figures in the 80s, the number of people in the community who could become potential recruits and who may require these services, is likely to increase.

In New Zealand, the Robert McDougall and the Manawatu galleries are already running limited schemes. There is no reason why such a project cannot be set up in other parts of New Zealand, perhaps in conjunction with the National Council for Adult Education, or Council for Recreation and Sport. (Let's get the Arts more active in these bodies).

However, from my own experience, I would offer two points of advice:-

(1) The gallery or museum must be prepared to spend time, knowledge and energy with the volunteers; and they must be aware of the continuing responsibilities after the initial training period.

(2) The institution should define beforehand its own particular needs and what it hopes to achieve through the scheme. This would dictate the type of person to be recruited and the content of the training programme. For example, clarification needs to be made on which age group is to be aimed at, whether the education programme is to be community or gallery based, whether the programme should complement work in the gallery or be self contained.

I have found that our Gallery Assistant Scheme has forced me to clarify my own objectives and philosophies in art education here, in order to be able to transmit practical help and guidance to others. If a volunteer subsequently emerges with her own particular philosophy (which could be, say, better to do a lot for a few, than conduct an all embracing programme) then I would consider the existing programme to be enriched and extended.

Finally, I think that the greatest contribution which an Assistant can make, is freshness and energy. What normal gallery staff really, honestly, feels like coping with crayons and paper, let alone paint and gluey messes, in great gusts of enthusiasm at 9.00 on a normal winters morning, when the newsletter is still to be written, the typist is sick and you've had a late night? Enter a bristling Gallery Assistant and you know that all will be well.

Moira Johnson
Education Officer
National Art Gallery
February 1981

How To Buy Works of Art for Your Walls

A reprint from Consumer Magazine Jan/Feb 1981.

What are the different types and how do you assess value for money?
You may have bought a work of art for your walls because you liked it or because it complemented the decor or design or room or because you wanted an investment. In either case, you may have paid too much for it. As well, investment in art is a tricky business that does not always return dividends.

To help you, we looked at the various ways of buying art works, some pitfalls to avoid, the types of art available, whether art is an investment, and how to look after it once you have bought it.

Because of the breadth of the field, we limited ourselves to what loosely could be called the fine arts: watercolours, oil paintings, photographs, original prints and reproductions of original works of art.

Door-to-door sales
The most direct way that art works come to you is by door-to-door selling and this raises the question: do you know exactly what you are getting?

Your chances of buying an original are probably slim from most door-to-door artists. Usually a number of basic designs are painted up, and then a team of "artists" copy by hand the necessary numbers of each design.

Various tricks may be employed, including modelling clay to simulate layers of oil paint, and the car-assembly-line approach where each of several painters produces a specific part of the painting.

They can truthfully be said to be hand-done or hand-painted, a statement that reassures door-to-door buyers that they are getting something original. Mostly, they sell for around $40 to $50, often including a cheap frame. While this seems cheap for an "original" work of art, it is no cheaper than a framed reproduction from a department store or picture-framing shop, and not much less than an original print or framing shop.

If you want to buy artwork at your doorstep, take time to think about it. Ask the seller to come back or get a phone number, so that you can ring back if still interested.

There are genuine door-to-door artists who are selling their own original work. However, the effort involved in telling the genuine from the ffalse is such that you are better advised to buy your art from some of the other more conventional outlets.

Department stores and picture framers
Most department stores stock a range of reproductions — old masters or the work of landscape and seascape painters. Prices range between $30 to $100 framed.

Imported 19th century engravings are available in some stores, as are some other original works, such as hand-coloured pen drawings of hiostorical or quaint buildings and the like. One store in Wellington is also selling oil paintings. Prices range from $80 to over $200. The subjects are mainly land or seascapes, and the firm, which buys its art works directly from a wholesaler, suspects that the signed oils are mass produced in some way.

A number of picture framers stock reproductions of works by famous and not-so-famous artists. These can be bought framed or unframed. Prices are normally in the department store range for reproductions.

Some picture framers also sell original prints, either by local artists or, occasionally, by overseas artists. Prices, framed, range up to $200, and over that for imported original prints.

Original prints must be hinged with thin paper hinges, not permanently glued down like reproductions, as the paper must be able to stretch and move according to temperature and atmospheric changes. The backing board to which the print is hinged should be made of acid-free card. If you buy an original print from whatever source and you care about is long term preservation, check that your framer uses acid-free materials, and that the print will not be permanently attached to the backing board.

The print should be protected by a sheet of clear glass with a mat (locally called a mount) of acid-free card to prevent the glass and the print surfaces from touching.

If your framer does not provide this type of service, go to one who does.

Private Art Galleries

Those people whose primary interest is in original art can patronise private art galleries.

In the main, dealer galleries deal with contemporary art, with some also dealing in historical work. There are also antique shops which sell "old" paintings, etc.

Whatever the style of art sold, all the private galleries regard themselves essentially as a bridge between buyer and artist. They normally sell on a commission basis and a part of the asking price (usually a third) goes to the gallery as commission on all sales.

Most private gallery directors believe they have an educational function, and want to attract as wide a cross-section of buyers as possible into the galleries. But most would also agree that while you can present work to help people decide, you cannot actually sell them a painting. People will not buy unless they have some kind of "gut feeling" about the work and can respond to it in some way.

There are real advantages in buying from a reputable private gallery. It has the time and expertise to make sure it is buying genuine work, and should be prepared to vouch for the authenticity of its paintings, even to the extent of refunding your money if it has inadvertently sold you a fake or a forgery, or a painting whose physical condition has seriously deteriorated through no fault of yours. As well, galleries can give technical information about looking after the work, recommend picture framers, and generally advise people about art and artists. Some galleries will value only the work of those artists in their stable, i.e., those whom they show; others will value all styles of New Zealand and European art.

Most galleries will buy works at auction for clients, and all will advise about the quality of works coming up at auction by artists they handle. Advice on works at auction by other artists will depend on whether the gallery director has a particular expertise about those artists.

Paintings can usually be paid off on time payment, or by some form of layby, although credit may not be offered to every customer. Cash within three months is the normal thing, although some like to have shorter payment periods. A reasonable down payment is usually required (a third or a half) and, if the work is in the lower price ranges, credit may not be offered. Gallery practice differs on whether you can take the work home while you are still paying it off.

The occasional gallery will also discount for cash with selected customers, reasoning that, if someone is buying steadily from it, what the gallery loses on this swing it will gain on a later roundabout.

The reason for these relatively generous financial arrangements is that most gallery directors believe many people may have only one opportunity to buy a particular work, and so the gallery should help as much as it can.

Probably the area in which the galleries differ the most is whether they will buy back or trade in works as part payment on another work. It is an area with wide room for personal negotiation. We believe that galleries should certainly consider accepting back the work of artists they handle, and probably at market value (less commission), if that can be fairly and independently established. However, that moment of first sale may be a critical one, and a painting, if taken back later, could prove hard to get rid of.

The dealer would probably be more receptive if you were going to buy another work from him.

Exhibitions are usually held once every two or three weeks, but, apart from whatever is on show at the current exhibition, some galleries also keep a stock room of works by their regular artists, which are available for inspection.

Prices for original prints at private galleries range from $40 up to $200 (unframed); watercolours, drawings and works on paper other than prints, between $200 and $600; and oils range between $200 and $5000, depending on the artist and the size of the painting. These prices are a general guide only. Individual items may well exceed them.

All galleries will encourage you to buy quality work, even if this means you buy less frequently. Galleries are trying to build up a long-term relationship with their customers, and this can only come about through the customers getting sound advice as well as ending up with works that they feel happy with. And if you are not satisfied with the service or business methods of one gallery, try another.

Photographic galleries

Photography is a newly developed art form in New Zealand, but there are three private galleries that specialise in selling photographs only — two in Auckland and one in Wellington. Exhibitions are held every two weeks and so a wide range of contemporary work can be sighted. Prices for photographs range from $20 through to $150, with the average for black and white prints around $40 and, for colour, $35 to $50. SX-70 Polaroid originals fetch around $100, but buyers should check whether they are getting the original or a duplicate copy.

Because of the lower price levels, long-term financing for photographs is not so necessary, but all galleries operate some form of layby.

The usual practice is for the buyer to pay at the time of receiving the print. Buyers do not necessarily get the print they saw at the exhibition, as the photographer may prefer to keep that one and, instead, develop another print from the negative. Gallery advice is available on a photographer's work and photography generally, as well as on technical matters.

So far there has not been much interest on the part of the buyers in "limited edition" photographs or "limited edition" portfolios. Limited editions in photography are something of an irrelevance in practice. Most photographers would be lucky to print off more than ten copies of a particular image during their lifetime. In New Zealand, it is probably less.

Public Art Galleries

Some public art galleries have exhibitions at which artists' work is on sale. This is a small part of a public gallery's function so there is not the same need to build up a relationship with a clientele. Nevertheless, the gallery should be able to advise you about the work on sale and any conservation requirement.

The Auction System

For buyers of historical art and photographs, both New Zealand and European, a well established alternative to buying from a dealer, is the auction room. But auctions are no place for unprepared amateurs; it truly is a case of buyer beware.

For a start, you must put in the research to make sure you do not pay too much for a particular work. Auction records can be consulted, but, in some cases, not all recorded "sales" are genuine. This means that auction records are not a completely reliable guide to earlier prices paid, either for the work on auction, or other works by the same artist. If necessary, consult a known art dealer for advice on whether a work is a good example of an artist's style, whether it is a major or minor work, whether it needs repair or restoration, how marketable it is and so on. Even name painters have work that is deficient or unpopular with buyers.

Apart from paying too much, the other major problem at an auction is making sure you are buying a genuine work. Strange signatures on art works at auction have been known to happen.

One piece of information you can get from the auctioneer is the "provenance of the work" you wish to bid for. This is the history of the painting and covers how the seller obtained it and from whom. If possible, provenance should trace ownership back to the artist's easel. You can also consult with an art dealer or some independent authority if you still have doubts.

All this checking should be done in the time for viewing before the auction. The catalogue for the auction should also mention whether the auctioneer doubts that a work is by a particular artist.

We have commented in the past (Consumer Review, 15, Winter 1977) that buyers have too short a time after the auction to prove that they have been sold a deliberate forgery. Under the terms and conditions of sale of the General Auctioneers' Association of New Zealand, the buyer has 21 days to prove the work is a forgery. Some auction firms give only 14 days, and not all are members of the Association. As a comparison, Sotheby's in London give five years for the buyer to prove that the work is a deliberate forgery. We believe that, at the very minimum, buyers should have one year to prove a work is a deliberate forgery.

Contemporary art auctions have recently begun in Auckland. At these, authenticity is probably a more straightforward matter, but finding the right price to pay for a contemporary artist is fraught with difficulty. This is particularly so if the work is from earlier periods in an artist's output, or the artist has not produced work for some years, or has recently died. Current art gallery prices for the artist's work may be of some help, otherwise a dealer in contemporary art should be able to give some guidance.

Art as an Investment

It is possible to pick artists both living and dead, whose work will become considerably more valuable over the years. But it is just as possible to pick artists whose works will not appreciate.

Quality is always a good investment; finding quality is what poses the problem. And it is such a problem that most art experts recommend you to buy work you like, even if you are mainly looking for an investment. After all, if you like it and it also increases in value, you receive a double pleasure, whereas, if it turns out to be a bad investment and you disliked it in the first place, it hangs on your wall as a constant reproach to both your business acumen and your taste.

The art market tends to go in cycles and, for historical work, it has been at the bottom of a trough for some time.

People who bought just any Goldie or Hoyte or Gully in the mid 1970s (on the strength of the name alone) as a status symbol, or because their friends or neighbours had one, might be lucky to get their money back in today's market conditions, much less make a profit. The market is now paying the real value of many works that are not top quality. There are good and bad works by all artists and it takes a fine eye, thorough research and sound advice to find the good ones. Recent auction prices suggest that the market may be on the way up.

Something of a market exists for 19th century photographs in New Zealand, although this area has not attracted much speculative interest as yet. Prices are still quite low and may rremain that way, since it is possible to get prints run off by the

National Museum from the original glass negatives of important colonial photographers such as the Burton Brothers.

The Contemporary Field

Artistic reputations for contemporary artists are still in a state of flux. Time may enhance them or bring them down. All sorts of factors are at work, often producing quite opposite and, therefore, unpredictable results.

Artists may stop working for extended periods or forever; they may change style, approach or medium in mid-career. As well, artistic fashions come and go and probably only a handful of current artists are going to have long-term significance.

Dealers in contemporary art report that most people buy for personal pleasure rather than for investment. They also say that their selling approach is based on the qualities of the work rather than its investment value. In other words, even the experts are cautious about making predictions though, undoubtedly, some will be prepared to.

Contemporary New Zealand photography is in an even more fluid state for the investor. The notion that there are photographers to collect in New Zealand photography, has not yet caught on. There are no safe buys and you have to exercise your personal taste.

The comparatively low prices, the uncertainty of future reputations, and the wide range of work available make contemporary photography probably the most exciting field in which to collect for pleasure.

Collectors, particularly if they have investment in mind, have to do their homework. Dealers and other experts can be consulted, art auction records are available, work can be viewed in public and private galleries, books are available on most aspects of art, a magazine such as *Art New Zealand* has articles on both contemporary and historical New Zealand artists, public art galleries can give advice, and the art departments of public libraries have various resource materials.

Being well informed has two spin-offs; you will probably make better buys; and you have the satisfaction of knowing much more about the art works you buy and collect.

Conclusion

The art market is no place to be if you seek security from your investments. For one thing, with inflation at 15 percent a year and the auctioneer taking 20 percent of any sale (although some have a downward sliding scale for more expensive works), any art work would have to increase by 100 percent in five years for you to stay ahead.

There is, however, the consolation that profits on the sale of an art work are not subject to tax unless you are a dealer.

Care and Conservation

For original prints it is important that a sheet of glass protects the surface of the print, with a mat (locally called a mount) of acid-free card around the outside of the image to make sure that print and glass do not touch. Space prevents us from detailing the many important niceties about mounting.

The mount and backing board should be made of acid-free materials and the print must be secured to the backing board by special paper hinges. Acid-free materials are expensive and very often are unavailable because of this. You may have to do a lot of phoning or leg work. Original prints should not be glued down, or attached with sellotape, or double sided tape.

Some original prints are framed with a large sheet of glass which is attached at the edges by clasps. This technique leaves gaps at the sides,. which allows insects, including paper-eating silverfish, to get in.

Original prints should be kept out of direct sunlight and away from damp. They should not be kept above radiators or fireplaces and rotating them around the house is a good idea, as most houses have uneven light sources. Inside walls are better to hand on than outside walls.

Direct sunlight and damp are also the biggest enemies of water-colours and oils. Even ultra-violet light from a clear blue sky can be very damaging. Watercolours and prints can develop brown spots from the activities of fungi. This is known as foxing and can be effectively arrested by a conservator.

A major cause of damage to oil paintings is untrained people cleaning them because they look a bit dirty. Cleaning often removes the oil paint as well as the dirt. Cleaning of oil paintings should only be carried out by a trained conservator.

If you buy your oil paintings from dealers, they should tell you whether there are likely to be any conservation problems with the work you have bought.

Conservation units are now located in the public art galleries in Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin. The New Zealand Art Gallery Directors' Council at PO Box 6040, Wellington, or the Art Gallery and Museums Association of New Zealand at PO Box 57-016, Auckland, can advise on the availability of trained conservators, as can the Conservation Commission.

Photographs are also sensitive to direct sunlight and damp, and, as most photographic images are made of silver, any fumes that tarnish silver cutlery, will attack photographs.

If properly processed, black-and-white photographs have a life span of 50 to 200 years, colour photographs, considerably less. Colour photographs are composed of dyes which eventually fade. With sensible use, the life span of a colour photograph is probably 20 to 30 years before serious fading occurs.

Photographs should be covered with a sheet of glass, with a mount or mat to separate the glass and the photographs. Acid-free materials should be used.

The preferred method of mounting a photograph is to hinge it to the backing, rather than the previous method of drymounting, which attached the photograph once and for all.

If you buy a photograph with a mount, ask whether it is acid-free. You can also find out if the photograph has been archivally processed. This is a process that ensures the final photographic print is chemically stable and free of any impurities that could destroy the photograph over a number of decades. Archival processing will prolong the life of the photograph.

Colour photographs in particular should be kept for periods in the dark if the fading process is to be slowed up.

One final point about black-and-white photographs. Resin-coated papers have been used quite extensively over the past five years, and there are some doubts about their eventual lasting qualities. If longevity is an important issue with you, it is worth finding out what type of photographic paper was used. We understand that Galerie paper — which possesses archival properties— is now being increasingly employed.

Original Prints and Reproductions

Considerable confusion has arisen over the difference between original prints and reproductions.

A print is literally any transference of an image from one object to another. An original print uses a variety of techniques including engraving, etching, screen printing, lithography, and photographic processes, sometimes mixing them together to produce a graphic image that could be produced in no other way. The printmaker conceives the print and will often carry out every stage of the process including the printing. Editions are usually limited because the technique will produce only so many prints of good quality and because printmakers do not want to spend too much time printing. Most original prints are in editions of less than 100, frequently in the 25-50 range. When all the edition has been printed, the metal plates or whatever material the artist worked on to create the image, are destroyed or cancelled in some way. Each print is signed and numbered by the artist.

Reproductions, on the other hand, are copies of other art forms such as oil paintings, watercolours, drawings and even original prints. A photo-mechanical process is used to produce the reproduction. An indefinite number of copies can then be run off on a mechanical printing press with no loss of quality. A reproduction is not original, it is just a photo-mechanical copy of an original work of art.

An artist can sign, and even number, a reproduction to show that the reproduction is up to the highest standards. But signing a reproduction does not mean that it has become in any way an original work.

Letters to the Editor

Dear Sir

On the 12th November 1980, Mr R.A. YOK of 147A Arney Road, Remuera reported a burglary of his home address. The only item taken is an original Goldie Oil Painting which is untitled and which features an elderly Maori female in a head and shoulders post ¾ facial.

The subject has a Moko on her chin and white hair. The frame is a stained, possibly mahogany, wood approximately 1½" to 2" wide. The overall measurement including the frame is approximately 11" x 11". The painting was painted in 1921.

Should this painting be offered for sale or should you have any information which could result in its recovery, I would be obliged if you would immediately contact the Police or the writer at telephone 544 195 Ext 86.

Yours faithfully

R.I. PARKER
Detective 3056

I am looking for a position as a general assistant in a Museum or Art Gallery. I am twenty and last year completed a B.A. in languages at Auckland, majoring in Spanish with two papers in Archaeology and a Stage Two Maori paper.

The last three months I have been working in the Gisborne Museum & Arts Centre; setting up displays and exhibitions, researching label material, some photographic work and general office work at the Arts Centre and Technology Museum.

I would welcome further experience in a larger museum or art gallery, am prepared to tackle any work given to me and would appreciate the opportunity.

Miss T.R. Gray,
285 Stout St.,
GISBORNE.

Dear Jan Bieringa

Miss Connie Lloyd, daughter of the late Trevor Lloyd, has a number of etched copper plates in her possession which have been cancelled by the artist on completion of printing. She has generously suggested that public art collections in New Zealand may be interested in acquiring a selection of these plates for archival and educational use. Miss Lloyd would expect no remuneration. Perhaps you may care to place a notice in the next issue of AGMANZ NEWS and advise interested parties to approach Miss Lloyd direct at her home (26 Clive Road, Epsom, Auckland 3).

Yours sincerely

Anne Kirker
Curator of Prints and Drawings

Dear Sir,

On behalf of the Manawatu Art Gallery, could you please place the following advertisement in the next issue of AGMANZ NEWS:

> *"The Manawatu Art Gallery is interested in purchasing for its library a copy of ART NEW ZEALAND, 1942, Volume 14, Number 4, or exchanging it for copies we have dating from 1929-1936. Please address enquiries to*
> *The Secretary*
> *Manawatu Art Gallery*
> *P.O. Box 565*
> *PALMERSTON NORTH"*

We will be most grateful if this is possible.
Thank you.

Yours faithfully

Elizabeth Rees
Gallery Librarian

THE ART GALLERIES AND MUSEUMS ASSOCIATION OF NEW ZEALAND

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