



INSIDE THE GALLERY PODCAST SEPT 2019

Transcript of interviews:

Barry Keldoulis – *Sydney Contemporary*

Lisa Fehily – *Finkelstein Gallery*

BARRY KELDOULIS – SYDNEY CONTEMPORARY

- Tim Stackpool: Okay. Firstly to Sydney Contemporary, that celebration of artwork from so many galleries all in the one place. And it's a celebration and festival of sorts, being the country's largest and most diverse gathering of local and international galleries, showcasing the work of over 400 leading and emerging artists from more than 12 countries. It's open for four days from September 12, and Barry Keldoulis is the director of Sydney Contemporary. He has more than three decades experience in contemporary art, stretching across the world actually, and Barry, thanks for joining us on the podcast at this really busy time for you.
- Barry Keldoulis: My pleasure.
- Tim Stackpool: This is really an exciting event on the local arts calendar, but Sydney Contemporary, it does have quite the history, doesn't it?
- Barry Keldoulis: Yeah, it started in 2013 initially as a biannual fair, so 13, 15, 17, and then we've gone annual, so 17, 18 and now 19. From the beginning I thought that it should be annual, however, we wanted to wait until the galleries themselves were ready for it, and it was really at their impetus that we went annual. And that very much happened after those first three fairs, they asked us to go annual and we agreed. I think it's partly because fairs have become an integral part of a gallery's presentation schedule over the year, and certainly a wonderful injection of funds for both the artist and the galleries.
- Tim Stackpool: It certainly has grown over the years. You've now got something like 80 galleries or so exhibiting.
- Barry Keldoulis: Yeah, so about, we say about 90 exhibitors because we have a section called Paper Contemporary which is for printworks, so master printers and sometimes galleries that show mainly works on paper. It's a distinct area within the fair and has a real marketplace feel about it. Some of them aren't galleries, so we say 90 exhibitors, which is a really good number actually. It sounds like a lot, but some of the bigger fairs around the world can be up to 260 galleries, and that's just too much. It's a sort of sensory overload. You can almost get a visual and mental shutdown after a while.
- Tim Stackpool: Given that number of galleries, Barry, do you think that four days of the fair is too short, or is one day long enough to see everything?
- Barry Keldoulis: I always recommend that people come twice because, you can get around the fair, as I said, it's not that big a fair that you can't get around it in a number of hours. But usually, it's after that first initial run around that the works that stand out to you and that you remember that night are the ones that have really caught your attention, and then you can go back and have a look and really concentrate on the work that stood out for you.

Tim Stackpool: Thinking about all those various galleries and the amount of work that they do to pull all that artwork together and to bring it to Sydney Contemporary, is there any talk of them wanting to extend the fair to say, perhaps a week?

Barry Keldoulis: No, a week is too long. It's too exhausting for the gallerists. When I had my gallery I did a fair in Korea and I think that was about six days, I think it went through to the Monday. And usually by the Sunday afternoon, you're sort of trippy.

Tim Stackpool: Yeah.

Barry Keldoulis: Because you're talking, you're on your feet the whole time. So, it gets to the point where it's too much. And also, I remember when I first went to India, and we have a history here of exhibitions in galleries being four, maybe now five weeks long, and my friend in India, their condition was two weeks. I said "Two weeks is not enough," and he said "If they're interested, they'll get there."

Barry Keldoulis: And so, no, I think it's about the right length. Some fairs are only, even shorter, and some others are longer, but no, I think it's the fairly standard length and that usually gives people enough time to go around it and then come back and concentrate on the works that really caught their attention.

Tim Stackpool: Yeah. Now, the core of this is the art that's hanging, but actually, there's so much more that takes place at Sydney Contemporary, doesn't it?

Barry Keldoulis: Yes. Well, we have an extraordinary program of hundreds of events over the period of the week, of the five days, which includes a talks program, and there's a wide variety of topics. Topics that are of current interest in the art world and also beyond, over the weekend we move to discussion of creativity in general and often have people like architects and fashion designers, and people in those fields who have worked with artists, to talk about creativity in general and what it is that makes a creative person tick.

Tim Stackpool: So I wonder, do you see this as an industry professional development opportunity as well as being a showpiece?

Barry Keldoulis: There is that aspect to it. We have art students from some of the Sydney art schools that come and volunteer, and it's a wonderful opportunity for them to see a whole lot of contemporary art from around the world. One of the sponsors of the talks program is Copyright Agency, and they have used the Friday very much as a sort of professional development aspect for artists and art industry workers. So there is very much that aspect to it, but some of those questions are also of a wider interest to people in the general public, so issues of copyright and how those things are changing don't just appeal to artists and people in the creative industries, but I think it's a general interest question, the way these things have changed with for example, the introduction of social media.

Barry Keldoulis: So usually there's something for everyone across the talks program, and then we have performance art, which I think is actually quite unusual for an art fair. We have a extensive program of performance art because we think, it's an aspect of the visual art world that's had something of a resurgence from the heydays of the 70s and 80s, and it's a really engaging form of art that people, general public rarely get to see. It's usually the province of people in the art world and people who attend galleries and some of the more experimental art spaces. But here, they get an opportunity to see it firsthand and close up.

Tim Stackpool: Yeah, that opening night, it's always quite quite striking to experience in that respect.

Barry Keldoulis: Yeah, it's a great night.

Tim Stackpool: Now, you have something like 13 new galleries joining this year. No, actually, sorry, 17 new galleries joining you this year. How much bigger can Sydney Contemporary get? How much bigger do you want it to get?

Barry Keldoulis: Well, we can't grow enormously. Partly because the more successful the fair becomes for the galleries and artists, we have the phenomenon of galleries taking more space. They may start out with a small space to test the waters and then they build confidence, and we have a number of galleries taking very large spaces. And given that we already take over the whole, we're the only event I think takes over the entire footprint of Carriageworks. There's very little space for us to grow. Those 17 new galleries, some of them are coming in to replace galleries that may have closed in the last year or so, galleries that perhaps are curtailing their engagement with fairs, or ones that really only want to come every second year or so. So, it's not a matter of growing, but maintaining the quality over the entire floor space of Carriageworks.

Tim Stackpool: Okay. Now, if I might just digress for a moment, considering your experience in New York and Europe over so many years. In terms of art in general in Australia, what do you think we lack here in Australia? Do you see a restriction or perhaps a philosophical or cultural restraint that needs to be addressed?

Barry Keldoulis: Yeah, I think if you're in Germany or France for example, your local car mechanic will have an opinion on contemporary art. And here we have this sort of, we really have to shed this idea that art is elitist. It's an idea that I think propagated perhaps by some of the press. There are a number of galleries out there who like to maintain a sort of exclusive feel to it, but most galleries are actually engaged in expanding the audience for contemporary art. My theory is, because my gallery was very open to the streets and very, well, I tried to make it very welcoming for people.

Barry Keldoulis: And so, my theory is that people fear that they don't know enough. And really, for me, it's about, I think the fair is also a very good way of doing this, of helping people to get over their intimidation, of being too intimidated by the idea they

don't know enough to go into a gallery space. The fair being open with directors there and often the artists there, it's a much less intimidating atmosphere to engage with the art and the artists. And really, you don't need to be an academic to appreciate art. In fact, anybody's opinion or art is as valid as anyone else's.

Tim Stackpool: Well, it is going to be exciting to see Barry, Sydney Contemporary. It's coming up fast. You do a great job in putting it together, and I thank you so much for your time on the podcast.

Barry Keldoulis: My pleasure. And I'll see you there.

Tim Stackpool: That's Barry Keldoulis, the director of Sydney Contemporary, launching on September 12 at Carriageworks in Sydney. Very exciting. And if you want to see and learn a little bit more, please visit www.sydneycontemporary.com.au.

LISA FEHILY – FINKELSTEIN GALLERY

- Tim Stackpool: Australia's only contemporary art gallery dedicated to women artists has opened in Melbourne, with its inaugural group exhibition titled, Finkelstein Gallery Presents. It's running from now until the 28th of September and it's founded by popular art consultant and advocate Lisa Fehily. The gallery presents works from some of Australia's emerging and established female artists, with a couple of international artists thrown in as well.
- Tim Stackpool: Women artists, they are under-represented when it comes to exhibitions. In Australia, commercial gallery figures show that 40% of the work is by female artists, and state museums show 34% female artists. Lisa Fehily hopes to change that and I was fortunate to catch up with Lisa for a face-to-face in Melbourne, and I began by asking her about the inspiration for her new gallery.
- Lisa Fehily: Well, you know I've been thinking for a long while about the change in how we view women in society now. And what I've observed is, feminism has really come a long way. And what I'm seeing now is that we're being valued and that we're being valued for who we are. We're not trying to be equal to men. Women are trying to... We're setting our position in just being strong women, very much with a very different perspective to men and very different kinds of work, as seen in the art world. And so for me the timing was absolutely right to open this gallery.
- Lisa Fehily: I'd been witness in my career of working with artists, to artists being overlooked for large institutional shows, overlooked for collection, both in corporate and institutions. And I thought it was time to rectify that.
- Lisa Fehily: I'd done a lot of research since having come across the National Museum for Women in the Visual Arts in Washington, and a wonderful program they started back in 2016 called Name Five Women Artists. And actually it was this program that also inspired our national gallery in Canberra to launch their program, Know My Name, this year.
- Lisa Fehily: And it was just really inspirational to watch that program grow and develop. And in fact this program, they're partnering this year with the Tate. So it's really spreading. And I think for me, why open this gallery and why open it now? is because I think we're part of a worldwide, a global movement. You know, as can be seen with the Sydney Contemporary, with the Guerrilla Girls coming out, as can be seen with the wonderful Know My Name initiative with the National Gallery. It's time to make these artists household names.

Tim Stackpool: It is disappointing to think though, that it has taken this long for this to happen. I mean, does that still disturb you in a way? Does it still upset you or are you just exuberant that finally you've been able to pull this off?

Lisa Fehily: Well exuberant that I've been able to pull it off and I think it's just, it's part of society. It's part of understanding the journey, you know? And it was so exciting and interesting. One of our artists came in today and started explaining one of her works. And we had just got the work and it was called *Between Intimacy and Trespass*. And I didn't really know the subject or the content and she started talking and she was saying that the work is about... She's a mother. She's had a young... Her child's now four. And what the work is about is the technical notes that she made for her practice and that real understanding that her child needed her, from being born to the age of four, and the stresses that that puts on a woman.

Lisa Fehily: And I think that I'm exuberant now because now we can value that. We can look at the fact that yes, sometimes women run homes and they bring up the children predominantly. Although times are changing, I note with glee. Absolutely. But I think it's time we value that and I think having the opportunity to open this gallery will allow that to be valued more and appreciated.

Tim Stackpool: You have this new gallery, the first exhibition exclusively women artists. What sort of pressure are you under and how did you choose the artists that you've got hanging on the wall?

Lisa Fehily: Oh wow. So that comes to always a discussion about representation. And for me, number one, the artists you choose, you have to be totally passionate about. You have to love their work aesthetically and really be excited and interested about where you can take them as artists, because your relationship as a gallerist with artists is such a close and personal relationship. Always a professional one. So for me it was about really being excited and passionate about their work and then having something I can do for them.

Lisa Fehily: So all of these 10 artists are at different stages of their career. So we'll make a strategic plan and work towards achieving their goals and ambitions.

Tim Stackpool: Not all of the artists you've got hanging, and there are sculptures here as well, I should point out, but not all of them are Australian artists. How did you pick which international artists you're going to include, and is there a particular reason why you've thrown a few international artists in here?

Lisa Fehily: Absolutely. Well, I came across Sonal Kantaria, who's actually from London, about eight years ago when she came to do some work in Western Australia. Now I was introduced to her by the Murdoch University and she's done some incredible works in WA and is now working with indigenous communities. We kept in touch over the years and it was just important to allow her work to be

seen in Australia given what she has been doing over here. So it was a wonderful opportunity to be able to do that through the gallery.

Lisa Fehily: And I think it's possibly worth mentioning at this point, is that this gallery is only ever going to consist of 10 Australian artists. So for me, that's about, you know... And the artists we exhibit, I'll have to work closely with them to achieve what I need to and even closer than one would normally do, having a gallery and representing artists, and that's really, really important. So we'll be in contact every week, or depending on what the artist is up to. And that's something you can't really do when you represent 20 to 30 artists in a gallery.

Lisa Fehily: So that concentration on the Australian artists is really important. So to do something for two international artists to extend their visibility in Australia, is a very different focus. It's really just being more of a venue for them over here and just in assisting them with their reach institutionally and for private collection. So it's not really shaping their career as such. It's a little bit different.

Lisa Fehily: So for me that was really important for those two artists that I had met a number of years ago and that in the gallery I'll have the opportunity to do that for them. So it wasn't so much of something that I sought to do. These were really opportunities with two artists that I felt passionate about and I really felt, "Gee, I can do something for these two."

Tim Stackpool: You certainly couldn't overlook them.

Lisa Fehily: No. Not at all.

Tim Stackpool: You talked about the under-representation of women. Does any of the artwork actually reflect the under-representation of women in society directly? Not just in art, but overall in terms of that gender prejudice, which may take place.

Lisa Fehily: Indeed. We have two artists that are really quite staunch feminists and focus on that. And one you might be well familiar with is Deborah Kelly. So Deborah, being a wonderful artist from Sydney, a senior artist that really seeks to rewrite history as it were, both from looking at mythology, religious iconography, and really giving back that power to women through her work. And that's a such a privilege to represent.

Lisa Fehily: And also Cigdem Aydemir, another Sydney artist actually, a young artist, young performance artist, who is also staunch feminist looking at cultural issues and doing performance works, often quite endurance works, in order to get this across. So a great privilege to represent both of them.

Lisa Fehily: And I might say at this point, for us in our opening week, the first sale that we've made for our gallery is to sell our wonderfully talented artist Deborah Kelly's work to the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney. So a great way to start. So quite thrilled.

Tim Stackpool: Over the years that you've been associated with art, do you think there actually has been an overt prejudice against women artists? Is that part of the motivation that you've had for opening this gallery?

Lisa Fehily: Definitely. As we've unfortunately read all the statistics. You know our art gallery in Canberra has 25% of their Australian art holdings are by women artists. So we've got a lot of work to do and I'd say that their statistics are really representative of most of Australia. And indeed internationally I heard some alarming statistics as well. And you've got many international institutions really coming on board and trying to rectify that. I read recently that the Museum of Baltimore will be dedicating 2020 to all-female exhibitions, and are also trying to pull up their collection and really increase their holdings of women artists.

Tim Stackpool: You'd kind of hope that the art world is free of that sort of prejudice, but I just wonder if it's not overt, whether it's just a underlying...

Lisa Fehily: I don't think so. I don't think that represents. And also I think that... Somebody was talking to me again today about, if you meet a female and they say they're an artist, you're inclined to say, "Well, Oh, it's a hobby, or it might be something you might do, you know, just here and there." Whereas if you meet a male and he says, "I'm an artist," then it's "Oh, you're an artist. That's a serious pursuit," you know? So it's interesting I think, and I think it comes back to what you just said, it's underlying. That's not necessarily overt, but I do think that still exists really to quite a large amount. Unfortunately, that that still happens a lot.

Tim Stackpool: How's the rest of the art community reacted to you opening an exclusive women-artist gallery?

Lisa Fehily: As far as I can tell really positively, but they don't tell you the negative. So no, we've been really well supported and we had many messages of congratulations and that's really wonderful. It's really validates what we're doing, so.

Tim Stackpool: Economically, this is considered a difficult time worldwide, in fact. Would you consider this a difficult time to open a gallery? Is this the right time to open yet another gallery?

Lisa Fehily: I think it's extremely important to open a gallery right now. I'm sure you've seen all the issues we're having with funding, noticeably the Australia Council. I was delighted to hear that Creative Arts Vic are really trying to be a little bit imaginative as to what funding and what they can do, and developing quite a strategy.

Lisa Fehily: But it becomes harder and harder for artists to get funding. And I think that commercial galleries have a part to play in that. So, you know, even though economically times are a little bit tough, I think it's a really important time to open a gallery and we need to create new collectors who will come on board and become our philanthropic donors for the future. And I think we definitely

have a role to play in that. And it's essential to assist, assist the industry in general.

Tim Stackpool: Will, this gallery only ever hang female artists?

Lisa Fehily: No. Absolutely not. We would like to say that we're open. So we're definitely not closed to men. We have a male intern, plenty of male visitors and support and for artists, we'll have to wait and see. At this stage, it's really important to be exclusively women artists, but we're definitely not shut. We don't want to be seen... We're not a victim gallery. We're a gallery of very strong, talented artists and we intend to stay that way.

Tim Stackpool: Well Lisa, congratulations. It's all coming together. It's your first exhibition here and I hope it goes well.

Lisa Fehily: Thank you so much. Thank you for taking the time. Wonderful.

Tim Stackpool: That's Lisa Fehily talking about her new gallery in Melbourne. Currently with a show dedicated exclusively to work by female artists, until the end of September. I've had a look around. The work is exceptional as you would expect and worth a visit. And for more details, head to www.finkelsteingallery.com.