4A CENTRE FOR CONTEMPORARY ASIAN ART

Guests enjoying an after hours tour of a 4A exhibition
4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art (4A) is an authority on Asian-Australian contemporary art with world-wide networks and expertise.

Established in 1996, 4A was one of the first organisations in Australia to dedicate itself to fostering and documenting contemporary Asian-Australian art and to explore the culture and ideas unique to the context of Australia and the Asia and Pacific regions.

Our exhibitions, educational workshops, artists’ residencies and professional development initiatives position Australia as part of a critical discussion reflective of the many shifts towards Asia that are occurring throughout all levels of society. Our perspective is unique, it speaks globally about the cultural, economic and social transformations occurring in the region, whilst also considering Australia’s unique culture, history and social make-up that has occurred through migration.

4A creates awareness of Asian and Australian culture and is used by educators around the country as an important tool to facilitate cultural literacy. Importantly we create real opportunities and pathways for Australian art in the region. Our activities are constantly developing through the research and insight of a dedicated and knowledgeable board and staff.

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This list illustrates the geographical scope within which 4A has worked. 4A has long-term relationships with artists throughout the Asia-Pacific region. We are committed to understanding Asian art and culture from a broad geography and exploring its historical resonances through the experience of its diasporas. 4A’s perspective is unique within Australia’s cultural landscape.

We have developed projects with established and up-and-coming artists working on the international stage. 4A is well placed, as an organisation operating in a global context, to deliver projects of both local and international relevance.

Increasingly we are invited to present exhibitions of Australian art and culture at art fairs and major biennials, with recent projects in Singapore, Jakarta and Shanghai.
In 2013 4A partnered with Carriageworks to bring Song Dong’s Waste Not, an extraordinary work, to Australia by one of China’s most important contemporary artists.

First created in 2005, Waste Not has been described as one of Song Dong’s most powerful and poignant works, consisting of more than 10,000 domestic objects and family items collected by the artist’s mother over five decades, ranging from household pots and pans, to blankets, bottle tops, toothpaste and toys. Waste Not has had an international touring itinerary that includes MoMA, New York City and Barbican, London.

We developed a two-venue project with Song Dong which included a curated exhibition of photography, video and installation work from the last decade at 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art.
In 1990 the artist Shen Shaomin arrived in Australia from China. For a period of ten years he lived in Sydney, returning to Beijing in the early 2000s to set up a studio complex in the outskirts of the capital.

His expansive complex served as the site for contemplation and reflection on his cross-cultural experiences.

Shen is now keen to nurture creative experiences and new opportunities for Australian artists in his studio complex in Beijing. In 2013 he began working with 4A to develop our Beijing Residency Program to give younger Australian artists access to new cultural networks as well as establishing productive connections between China and Australia.

Image: Shen Shaomin with his installation ‘The Day After Tomorrow’ 2011. Photo: Zan Wimberley
ACCESSING 4A’S LEGACY

4A ARCHIVE
Since 1996, 4A has been documenting and collecting information about contemporary artists and Australia’s evolving cultural relationships in the Asian region.

4A occupies a unique position in the cultural landscape of Australia, and in the contemporary art discourse of the Asia-Pacific region. Our position is based on a long-term focus on living Asian cultures; support of Asian-Australian artists and curatorial innovation that leads the national discussion of the Asian-Australian context.

4A houses an important archive of material that the organisation has collected through its own activities over almost two decades. We continue to document in the form of video interviews with artists and curators, extensive photo documentation and curatorial and project development documents.

Our video resources are used by educators throughout Australia, and increasingly by researchers overseas. We believe this material is important as it illustrates the ways that culture documents the broader shifts occurring in society in the context of Australia’s relationship with Asia.

Videos and documents in the 4A Archive
In 2012 4A was invited to participate in the 9th Shanghai Biennale in their inaugural Inter-City Pavilions Project. 4A developed The Floating Eye - an exhibition in a disused building near the Bund. The project involved new artwork commissions, and gave young Sydney artists from the Bababa International collective the opportunity to make new work at our residency in Beijing. In addition we assisted many of the artists to travel to China.

We had the support of individual donors, family foundations and government funding bodies who supported different elements of the project. For example, the Keir Foundation supported three new commissioned artworks; Asialink supported the award-winning publication; Re: (part of the M&C SAATCHI Group) provided services for all of the project’s art direction and design.

This project presented Australia’s unique culture including its Aboriginal and migrant histories to more than 54,000 visitors.
In 2013 we developed ‘Vertical Villages’, a project with the Indonesian collective Ruangrupa Artlab and Australian artist Keg de Souza and international tertiary students in Sydney and communities in Jakarta. Vertical Villages was supported by the Australia Council for the Arts through their Creative Partnerships with Asia initiative; the Australian Government through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade’s Australia International Cultural Council and Australia-Indonesia Institute; City of Sydney through their Cultural Grants and Sponsorships Program.

Vertical Villages explored the relationship between global mobility and local communities. Comprising community-engaged workshops in Sydney and Jakarta; two exhibitions of new works in Sydney at 4A and Jakarta as part of the 15th Jakarta Biennale; a series of public programs; a digital engagement platform; and a publication, Vertical Villages involved a deep level of community engagement to creatively look at how increased migration, communication and urban development has affected the ways in which ideas and perceptions of public and private living have shifted in Sydney and Jakarta.

This project was very well received with over 40,000 people in Sydney and Jakarta experiencing the exhibition.
Chair of the Board
Edmund Capon AM, OBE

Edmund Capon is a former Director of the Art Gallery of New South Wales, holding this position from 1978 - 2011. He is a Visiting Professor in the School of Languages and Linguistics, Faculty of Arts and Sciences, University of New South Wales; is on the Board of the St James Ethics Committee; has written extensively on the arts of China; written and presented a 3-part ABC TV-China Central Television co-produced documentary entitled Meishu: Travels in Chinese Art which has been distributed worldwide; developed the AGNSW as a centre for Asian art display and education; created the Gallery's highly successful Foundation, a Capital fund, to acquire works for the Collection; has curated exhibitions encompassing Asian, European and Australian art; has written extensively on Chinese art & archaeology and on the work of artists such as Jeffrey Smart, Caravaggio and Giacometti.

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Director, 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art
Aaron Seeto

Aaron Seeto is a curator of contemporary Asian and Asian-Australian art. Aaron Seeto’s curatorial work revolves around the Asia-Pacific region and the impact and experience of migration and globalisation on contemporary art practice. He has developed significant projects and exhibitions with some of the key Asian artists working in Australia and internationally.

He has also curated some large-scale projects for other cultural institutions (as co-curator) – Edge of Elsewhere (2010) at Campbelltown Arts Centre and 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art; News from Islands (2007) an Asia-Pacific survey exhibition at Campbelltown Arts Centre; and Primavera (2006), Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney.

He sits on the Executive Committee of the Haymarket Chamber of Commerce and sits on the Advisory Panel for the City of Sydney Chinese New Year Festival. In 2010 he was appointed Curator for the City of Sydney Chinatown Public Art Plan.
4A is an initiative of the Asian Australian Artists Association Inc. We gratefully acknowledge the assistance of the Commonwealth Government through the Australia Council, its funding and advisory body; the NSW Government through Arts NSW and the City of Sydney.

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