Species enhancement by international gene pool

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Abstract
The idea for Wild Thang: post pop from the MCA emerged from my experience of viewing permanent collections in regional art galleries. Most of these collections began in the late 1960s and early 1970s with a major cash injection and after the initial flush of funds and public interest many of them languished. Consequently regional galleries in New South Wales (and Victoria and Queensland) have large bodies of work from a time period and aesthetic framework that are often considered difficult at best and unfashionable at worst. Most Directors and Curators I spoke to, looked in despair at the mass of third and fourth generation large, brightly coloured, vaguely sculptural and architectonic hard edge abstract works as well as similar numbers of pop-inspired and photo-realist figuration. Such seminal purchases and acquisitions were now regarded as the dinosaurs of those respective collections.

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The idea for *Wild Thang: post pop from the MCA* emerged from my experience of viewing permanent collections in regional art galleries. Most of these collections began in the late 1960s and early 1970s with a major cash injection and after the initial flush of funds and public interest many of them languished. Consequently regional galleries in New South Wales (and Victoria and Queensland) have large bodies of work from a time period and aesthetic framework that are often considered difficult at best and unfashionable at worst.

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However it is in this period (c.1965-1980) that Australian contemporary art begins. Australian artists started to look away from French and British models to experiment more confidently across a range of practices. The wider availability of high production art journals provided more visual information to artists. Significant international art exhibitions toured – the MOMA exhibition *Two Decades of American Art* (1967), *Art of the Space Age* (1968) and *Recent British Painting* (1971) to great acclaim.

Locally, the Power Collection became a vital focus for Australian artists from 1968 through the 1980s. Here was a selection of recent work, some of which was acquired from around the world to motivate, inspire and puzzle Australian artists. For many it was their first contact with radical formal and conceptual experimentation.

*Wild Thang*, which comprised paintings, drawings, prints and sculpture, aimed to give an international context for the rapid adoption of the languages of contemporary art that occurred in Australia c.1970-1980 to take the viewer from heady invention and interpretation to self-conscious critique.

Key works from the Power Collection (now the permanent collection of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney) were chosen to form a core around which works from regional gallery permanent collections were added.

I wanted regional galleries to proudly display their now not so extinct and hopefully alive dinosaurs! As each collection had slightly different emphases, the exhibition took remarkably different forms at each venue – Bathurst, Armidale, Gold Coast, Albury (hence the title *Wild Thang*). There was a unique ‘look and feel’ at each location. Different stories of influences and points of departure emerged around the juxtapositions of international and Australian versions of Super Realism, Geometric Abstraction, European and USA inspired Pop Art, Kinetic Art, Post-Painterly Abstraction, Feminist Art and Neo Dada Conceptualism.

While I was generally pleased with the results, there are several things that I learnt once again from this exhibition experience. Firstly, imagining a show is different to the reality. I only realised when the show was on tour, that the Power Collection (curator Elwyn Lynn) is quite dark and sombre in tone and content. I did not realise how hard it was going to be to bring such a disparate range of work (media and of variable qualities) successfully together. Secondly, you never really know what works will look like until they are unpacked and in the given space. The actual physicality of the venue does influence the final readings and experience of the works. Third is the importance of a good team. Thank you everyone but most particularly thank you Katy Dyer!

*Wild Thang: post pop from the MCA* began at Bathurst Regional Art Gallery in 2004 and toured until 2006.

Craig Judd is the new Director of Wollongong City Gallery. Previous appointments include the Tasmanian Museum & Gallery and the Biennale of Sydney.