

Curating The Exhibition

Year 10, 11, 12 Art & Design

Research Guide 2

This guide explores the role of the curator in the preparation of the exhibition. Grace Cochrane is the guest curator for the exhibition. Grace worked together with other professionals and was asked to personally describe her role.

Meet the Curator

Grace Cochrane

Many curators like me started in other fields such as being an artist, craftsperson or designer following a course at art school, a teacher, or an art historian in a specialist field. Then they fell into work in galleries through their research interest. These days there are special courses in museum studies and gallery management that help this process along. I started as a teacher in New Zealand, then moved to Tasmania to make audio-visual materials in the Education Department there. I became tangled up in the emerging crafts movement, and eventually went to art school myself, then wrote a book about the history of the crafts movement in Australia. For nearly 20 years I was a curator at the Powerhouse Museum, in Sydney, specialising in the lives and work of contemporary craftspeople and designers. This involved researching and acquiring works for the collection, developing exhibitions and writing about the collection and the people themselves. Now I do this kind of work from home as a freelance curator.



Curator Grace Cochrane at the installation of the exhibition. Photo Julia Bambach.

Curating *White gums and ramoxes*

Collaboration

Exhibitions are developed as a team effort. Team members have their own professional interests, but also know they need to work together to share ideas and information, and respect one another's roles.

Concept development

My first task was to look at the Bundanon Trust collection and work out a concept or story for the exhibition based on the strength of the ceramics collection, which would be of interest to a range of audiences. I decided to focus on the relationship between Arthur Boyd and his father Merric Boyd. I thought the two groups of ceramics had their own—and related—stories, but were supported in very interesting ways by paintings, drawings and sculpture. Merric often referred to his family, including Arthur, in his work and Arthur made many paintings and prints that referred directly to his father.

The rationale for the exhibition then had to be translated into a proposal for Bundanon Trust's approval. Then it was used as a basis for grant applications, the development of briefs for designers and others, the catalogue essay and the story labels for the exhibition. I have also been able to make connections with some potential venues for touring.

Exhibition development

Research: I already knew a good deal about the story of the Boyds, but it was important to understand as much as possible about the family, the work of Merric and Arthur Boyd, and the contexts in which they worked. I read all the books I could find. I had to research facts and opinions thoroughly. I checked with other specialists in the field and many other sources to check facts.

Selection of objects: I grouped the ceramics in themes that not only told the unfolding story, but in groups that the designer could fit into cases. Drawings were grouped to be framed; paintings and prints selected that could be grouped in a number of different sized and shaped galleries—but always in a way that elaborated on the story.



Selecting the ceramics objects at Bundanon. Photo Jennifer Thompson.

Documentation: As research proceeded, there needed to be considerable collaboration with the Bundanon Collections and Exhibitions staff, to expand on descriptions of objects, dates, and supplementary information. They, meanwhile, had all the works photographed, conserved and condition checked. The photographs were important to the research, the catalogue and the audio visual.

Labels: The longer catalogue story had to be redrafted into brief exhibition text: introductory banners, theme panels, and object labels. These were coded to match the showcases being designed, and the groupings of works on walls.

Exhibition design: The exhibition designer needed to consider the story that was to be told, the possible relationships between groups, the vulnerability of the objects themselves and the constraints of freight. She also needed to work with the graphic designers to determine the colours, materials, and location of labels.



Curator Grace Cochrane working with Collections and Exhibitions Manager Jennifer Thompson from Bundanon Trust to install the exhibition at the Drill Hall Gallery, Canberra. Photo Julia Bambach.

Catalogue: In the essay, I tried to tell an interweaving story between the two artists, in the context of their times. I wanted to use their 'voices' where I could, and those of other scholars. I needed to do considerable research to check names, dates and technical information and follow up a few 'mysteries'. Working with the Bundanon collections staff and the graphic designers, we selected images that complemented the text. Usually there is a sub-editor or proof-reader, but the Collection manager and I did this one ourselves. Once the catalogue went to the graphic designers there needed to be constant liaison as the text and images were formatted. Copyright follow up was identified for the Collection managers to work on.

Audio-visual: By the time we were ready to draft the outline of the AV we had both the images and the storyline. The Collection manager also had old films digitised.

Education and public programs: The essay and label text and images could now be adapted for education kits, press releases and invitations. I have also developed a talk with images that can be adapted and used for floor-talks and lectures at different venues, if it is needed.