



# VCE STUDIO ARTS

## Unit 4, Area of study 3 Arts Industry Contexts

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### INTRODUCTION

**When institutions collect and artists display, there is an engagement between the artist, arts institutions and the public. Through this engagement, arts professionals such as directors, curators, education officers, conservators, historians and art critics shape the way the public perceive the art and the institutions that support it.**

**A number of industry issues arise in the collection and display of artworks. These include conservation, display and presentation, promotion, copyright, accessibility, audience and stakeholder expectations, resources and ethics. Every institutions will respond differently to these issues depending on their role, mission and function in the art world.**

**This visit explores ‘behind the scenes’ at The Dax Centre. Students will learn about:**

- **The role and structure of The Dax Centre as an arts institution;**
- **Address arts industry issues as they relate to The Dax Centre;**
- **Hear and see its collection of artworks called the Cunningham Dax Collection.**

### INDUSTRY CONTEXT

#### **Mission**

**The Dax Centre promotes mental health and wellbeing by fostering a greater understanding of the mind, mental illness and trauma through art and creativity.**

#### **Models of Institutions**

The Dax Centre manages and exhibits a collection of artworks called the Cunningham Dax Collection. With over 15,000 artworks, the Cunningham Dax Collection is a unique collection of drawings, paintings, textiles, sculptures, mixed media and digital works made by people with an experience of mental illness and/or psychological trauma. The Dax

Centre uses this collection as the basis for its onsite and touring exhibitions as well as for research, education programs, public programs and professional development programs.

The Dax Centre is made up of 5 Units.

These are: the Collection Management Unit, the Exhibition Management Unit, the Education Unit, the Public Programs and Professional Development Unit, the Administration Unit and the Development and Communication Unit.

Staff who work at The Dax Centre come from a range of backgrounds, with a strong focus on curatorial experience and qualifications and clinical or mental health experience and qualifications.

The type or model of The Dax Centre, along with its funding, professional mix, mission and specific type of artworks collected and displayed, determines the way in which the arts industry issues of exhibition presentation and display, ethics and conservation are addressed.

There are many different types of institutions in the art world.

These include: public galleries and public museums (owned and operated on behalf of the public and generally government funded); commercial galleries (privately owned and operated as a business for profit); artist-run spaces (owned by a collective of artists to exhibit and/or sell emerging artist's works); and many more.

So what model of institute is The Dax Centre?

The Dax Centre is of a public gallery/museum model. It is owned and operated on behalf of the public and managed by a Board of Management. It is funded by the state government and also receives additional funding from the arts, health and philanthropic organisations.

In order to become financially sustainable, organisations and public galleries / museums are also encouraged to generate their own income through admission fees or subscriptions. To keep it accessible to all The Dax Centre does not charge for admission but encourages a voluntary small entry donation where possible. It also generates additional income through the education and professional development programs, publication sales and audio-guide hire fees.

## **EXHIBITION PRESENTATION AND DISPLAY**

Due to the nature of the artworks in the Cunningham Dax Collection, the methods of display and presentation at The Dax Centre take into consideration issues of ethics, privacy and copyright, along with general exhibition design issues. The Dax Centre is committed to maintaining artist's rights. This means that every effort is made to exhibit and reproduce works with integrity, sensitivity and respect.

### **Historic Artworks**

The Cunningham Dax Collection was founded by Dr Eric Cunningham Dax, a psychiatrist who began collecting artworks created by patients in the 1940s in institutions in England where he was working at the time. Dr Dax continued collecting artworks from hospitals and institutions when he came to Australia up until the 1980s. Many of these artworks were 'rescued' from institutions that were discarding out-dated patient files.

These clinical historic works make up approximately two thirds of the Cunningham Dax Collection. Many of the artworks from this period were collected without the consent of the creators and there is little or no information regarding the intention of the artist when creating the artwork. This raises issues in relation to attribution and display. The majority of these artworks are also not long-lasting in nature as they were not created using artist quality materials. This causes issues in their display and conservation.

After considerable deliberation, an ethical approach has been taken by The Dax Centre whereby these historic artworks can be exhibited despite the lack of consent from the creators. It is believed that the good of exhibiting the artworks for education in an attempt to reduce stigma and create awareness of mental health issues in the community outweighed the potential harm to the individual.

### **Donated Artworks**

Currently all new acquisitions to the Cunningham Dax Collection are by donation, either by the artist and/or donor ie family, carer etc. The donated works come from a variety of contexts including the artist's professional practice, art therapy sessions, hospitals or mental health facilities, or from general members of the public. All have an experience of mental illness and/or psychological trauma. In these cases consent, artist information and the intention of the artworks are sought from the artists and/or donors. All legal and moral rights are explained by the Dax centre staff to the artists also.

### **Attribution of the Artworks**

#### Clinical historic artworks:

These are artworks created by artists who have not given consent for their artworks to be acquired. In such cases, The Dax Centre withholds attribution when exhibiting these artworks. In the gallery this appears as "Name of Artist withheld" on the exhibition label next to the artwork. This approach ensures that the artist's privacy is maintained. It is also because the artworks have the status of a health record having formed part of their clinical records or patient files. Health records are protected by the *Health Records Act (Vic) 2001* and the *Privacy Act 1988 (C'th)*.

#### Direct donations

These are Artists and/or donors who directly donate artworks to The Dax Centre. In these cases artist and/or donor have the choice of either being attributed or not. If they chose not to be attributed, they can remain anonymous to protect their privacy – thus a pseudonym, 'Anonymous' or 'Artist name withheld' is documented on the exhibition labels and text.

Whilst one of The Dax Centre's main aims is to reduce the stigma of mental illness, it recognises that stigma exists within the community and respects that artists should have the choice of publicly identifying themselves or not when displaying their artworks.

Lack of public identification of the artist has a significant effect on the framing of the artworks too as any visible signatures on the artworks must be covered. While this can cause visual distractions, compromising the visual integrity of the artworks, privacy is paramount.

When 'Artist name withheld' or 'Anonymous' is used on exhibition labels and text, difficulty can arise when distinguishing if an artwork was made by the same or different artists. One method used to combat this is the close spacing of artworks on the wall.

## **Interpretation**

Exhibitions at The Dax Centre are developed and curated by members of the Exhibition or Collection Management Units. They have the curatorial experience and expertise. However, as our exhibitions have a strong educational focus, exhibitions are also developed in collaboration with staff members or consultants who have a clinical or mental health background. They assist in the research and development of the exhibitions.

This partnership has a strong impact on the development of themes and text in exhibitions. It fosters a multidimensional approach and an exploration of the artworks from a psychological, artistic, historical, social and cultural perspective.

The artworks of the Cunningham Dax Collection have been created by people with an experience of mental illness and/or psychological trauma. As a community often marginalised and disempowered, giving artists voice and visibility within exhibitions is particularly important.

The Dax Centre, where possible, collaborates or consults with artists and/or donors when deciding on how to exhibit their artworks and what information is provided to the public. Through artist statements and text accompanying the exhibition labels, artists explain their experiences and artwork in their own words.

## **Display**

The Cunningham Dax Collection has over 15,000 artworks. This is stored onsite at The Dax Centre. In order to reduce the amount of space artworks occupy in storage, it uses temporary, back-loading frames when exhibiting works allowing us to de-frame works at the end of exhibitions.

Whilst many of the artworks in the Cunningham Dax Collection were not created by professional artists, or intended for display, The Dax Centre mounts and frames all artworks to a professional standard. Although this ensures the artworks are visually displayed to a high standard and are protected from damage, it can cause misinterpretations about the intentions of the artists or the context of the artworks' creation. (Many of the historical clinical artworks were not created for public display. Rather they were created as a form of therapy - art therapy, as part of their psychiatric treatment in hospital.)

Students are encouraged to read more about art therapy and think it may or maynot be different from mainstream art.

The Dax Centre uses glass display cabinets, temporary walls and a variety of hanging methods. The gallery space also includes a multimedia gallery for the display of digital artworks and films.

Students are encouraged to consider how the exhibition display methods effect a viewer's interpretation of an artwork or exhibition.

## **Publicity and Promotion**

When developing exhibitions, the Curator liaises with the Communications Officer to develop a range of publicity and promotional materials including a catalogue, flyer, invitations, media releases, and advertising. The Dax Centre does not have a large

advertising budget but places advertisements with “Artshub”, “Art Almanac”, “Art Guide” and relies on media releases to generate publicity.

Due to the personal and highly sensitive nature of the artworks, there is need for caution when using confronting or challenging artworks for promotional purposes and artworks placed in a public context for promotion must be selected very carefully.

### **Copyright**

As many of the historic clinical artworks were collected without the creator’s consent, The Dax Centre does not have copyright for many of the artworks in its collection. This has significant ramifications for publicity and promotion as it is unable to use these artworks for invitations, catalogues, press releases etc.

Copyright is the exclusive legal rights of the copyright owner (usually the artist/creator) in relation to the use of their copyright material (the artwork), despite its ownership by other parties. This includes the rights to permit or prohibit the use of their works for reproduction, communication and publication. It also includes the moral rights which is the right of attribution (identification of the artist) and the right of integrity to ensure their artworks are not subjected to ‘derogatory treatment’.

It is a good idea for students to familiarise themselves with the copyright act. More information on the copyright act can be found at the Arts Law Centre of Australia website ([www.artslaw.com.au](http://www.artslaw.com.au)).

The Dax Centre actively observes governing legislations; *Copyright Act 1968 (C’th)*, *Privacy Act 1988 (C’th)*, *Mental Health (Amendment) Act (Vic) 2000* and the *Health Records Act (Vic) 2001*.

Where possible, The Dax Centre seeks a “non-exclusive licence” from the copyright holder to reproduce artworks for uses that are either free to the public or produced within the context of the collection’s work as a not-for-profit institution. The Centre only reproduces works where this licence has been agreed to.

The Dax Centre is also committed to maintaining artist’s rights. Artworks are always faithfully reproduced unless prior consent is sought. Artists will also be attributed to their artworks wherever possible and reasonable, however in the case of historic works and where artists have chosen to remain anonymous, The Dax Centre utilises the defence of “reasonableness” in relation to the moral rights infringement of attribution under the *Copyright Act 1968 (C’th)*, due to the nature and circumstances surrounding the artworks, their acquisition and the context of display.

## ETHICAL ISSUES

As can be seen when considering the collection, exhibition presentation and display of artworks at The Dax Centre, many ethical issues are raised.

These pertain to the research, acquisition, informed consent, copyright, display, censorship and promotion of sensitive artworks.

While some are easy to address as there are laws and legislation in place to guide The Dax Centre's approach, others are more complex. In order to make informed decisions about these issues, The Dax Centre staff consults its Ethics Committee. This committee is made up of ethicists, philosophers, consumers and professionals in the arts and mental health industries. In collaboration with the Ethics Committee, The Dax Centre has developed a set of *Ethical Guiding Principles*, which govern how it responds to ethical issues. These principles are available on request.

The Dax Centre also actively observes the International Council of Museums Code of Ethics (<http://icom.museum/>) and the Museums Australia Code of Ethics for Art History and Science Museums ([www.museumsaustralia.org.au](http://www.museumsaustralia.org.au)).

### Some ethical questions for students to consider:

- **Should artworks be exhibited without the consent of the artist?**  
*The greater good (of education and community awareness) versus intention of the artist.*
- **What is the status of the artworks?**  
*Creative works vs clinical records vs historical documents.*
- **How much information should be supplied about the artist?**  
*Context vs privacy/possible identification.*
- **Is it ethical to try to contact artists of the historic, clinical artworks?**  
*Clarity of intention vs personal privacy and the possibility of re-igniting trauma.*
- **Should the historic clinical artworks be reproduced given they have not been consented to?**  
*The greater good vs individual privacy.*
- **Is it appropriate that the artworks be framed?**  
*Safety and conservation vs possible intention of works as 'non-art'.*
- **If identity is to be protected, does the covering of signature/identifying marks detract from the integrity of the work?**  
*Visual integrity vs protection of the artist's identity.*
- **Does the level of information provided in text panels and labels detract from the aesthetic experience of the artworks?**  
*Education and the visibility of the artist's voice vs aesthetic experience.*
- **Should the moral right of attribution of artists be denied?**  
*Right of attribution vs privacy and governing legislation.*

- **Should the artworks be censored because of their potential challenging or disturbing nature?**

*Institutional responsibilities to the public vs providing a platform for marginalised individuals to display their artworks.*

## **CONSERVATION**

All materials that make up artworks are inherently unstable and are therefore prone to deterioration. Conservation is the ongoing practice of preserving and maintaining artworks for the future. Unfortunately no conservation action is ever able to completely prevent deterioration, however through conservation practices and techniques, we are able to prolong the life of each artwork.

As caretakers of the Cunningham Dax Collection, it is important to ensure that the artworks within the collection are preserved for the use of future generations for research, exhibition and other projects while also providing access to the collection in the present. In order to achieve this, The Dax Centre practices preventive and active conservation by controlling the environment in which artworks are stored and displayed, by monitoring artworks, cleaning artworks, reducing risk of damage when handling artworks and consulting with professional conservators when active intervention is required. The conservation of the Cunningham Dax Collection is managed by the Collection Manager and the Collection Management Unit.

Environmental factors which influence the rate of deterioration of objects include: temperature and relative humidity; lighting; pests, dusts and pollutants and storage and exhibition materials.

Different materials have differing optimal environmental conditions to reduce deterioration. As a general rule it is best to always cater to the most vulnerable materials in a collection when controlling environmental conditions. These are usually works on paper, textiles, organic materials and photographs. The Dax Centre maintains environmental conditions to recognised conservation standards.

### **Temperature and relative humidity**

When the temperature and relative humidity or RH (amount of moisture in the air) fluctuate, damage to artworks can be severe. This causes materials to absorb and release moisture at different rates causing cracking, flaking and cleavage of medium, splitting in wooden sculptures and warping of stretched canvases and cockling of works on paper. High temperature and RH can encourage mould growth, rust and insect activity. Low temperature and RH can cause embrittlement and desiccation of natural fibres. The Dax Centre keeps its storage and gallery spaces at 20°C +/- 2°C and at 50% RH +/- 10%. The temperature and relative humidity are controlled using air-conditioning.

### **Lighting**

Light contains three damaging elements which cause deterioration to artworks: lux (visible light), UV (ultraviolet light) and infrared (heat). The effects of heat are discussed above and it is therefore important to ensure light sources are placed at a sufficient distance from artworks to minimise the effects of infrared. Damage caused by lux and UV is unpreventable, accumulative and irreversible. To reduce damage caused by light, both the level and length of exposure to light should be limited. Lighting levels for more vulnerable artworks such as works on paper should be limited to 50 lux and 30 UV with these artworks only exposed to light for 3 months of each year. As the majority of the

artworks in the Cunningham Dax Collection are older and already light damaged works on paper, The Dax Centre attempts to adhere to these conditions very strictly.

### **Pests and Pollutants**

Pollutants (both particulate or dust and gaseous) can cause and increase the speed of deterioration of objects. Gaseous pollutants are generally acidic and dusts can adhere to surfaces of artworks and cause abrasion. They are also attractive to pests. Pollutants are controlled at The Dax Centre through the air-conditioning system, which filters the air and by keeping gallery and storage spaces clean and uncluttered.

Pests in gallery and storage areas are things like insects: silverfish, moths, cockroaches, spiders etc. mould and bacterial or fungal activity and small animals such as mice. Pests are most damaging to artworks when consuming their materials as a food source, but can also be damaging by leaving their materials on the artworks such as spores, webs and cocoons which can also cause severe damage. The Dax Centre takes preventative measures by making the environment in gallery and storage areas unattractive to pests. We ensure that no food or drink is left around, spaces and artworks are clean and free of dust, temperature is kept low and pest traps are set.

### **Storage and Exhibition Materials**

When using materials to store and display artworks such as mounts, frames, display cabinets, boxes, tissue paper etc. it is important to ensure that these materials will not cause damage to artworks. Damage through storage and exhibition materials is most commonly caused by using acidic materials causing damage through contact or by using materials which emit harmful gasses when deteriorating themselves. The Dax Centre ensures all exhibition and storage materials are acid-free and sealed to prevent off-gassing. When framing, mounts are acid free and wooden frames are varnished, preventing off-gassing. Display cabinets are also sealed to prevent off-gassing. All storage materials such as boxes, tissue and plastic sleeves are also acid-free.

### **Handling**

Artworks are most at risk to damage when being moved through impact of dropping, scratching, bumping tearing etc. To minimise the risk of damage, The Dax Centre uses handling procedures, which are strictly adhered to. These procedures include things such as: using gloves when handling artworks; using trolleys and ensuring the path of travel is clear and free of obstacles; using padding when placing artworks onto a surface and ensuring jewellery and other clothing items which may catch on artworks are removed before handling.

### **Digital Media**

As the Dax Centre has started to collect more new media and digital media artworks, we have had to think about the conservation risks and needs of this new medium. Digital artworks can be the most vulnerable to damage if they are not migrated to new formats as old technologies become outdated. Artworks created on CD-ROMs for example are today largely inaccessible as the software required to run the programs are no longer available. The Dax Centre ensures all digital artworks are monitored and migrated to new formats when required.

For more information on conservation see the AICCM website: [www.aiccm.org.au](http://www.aiccm.org.au) and the CAN, reCollections publication online: [http://www.collectionsaustralia.net/sector\\_info\\_item/3](http://www.collectionsaustralia.net/sector_info_item/3)