

Introduction

Design Now. Quite a challenge. To think that one exhibition could cover the field of contemporary design. Where to start or finish? Web, computer game, software, graphic, architectural, urban or landscape design? Or design as aligned with the arts such as theatre, fashion, interior, furniture or ceramics? And is this 'design' the noun (a designed *something*) or the verb (designing *something*)? The modern era has found multiple uses for this one simple word. But its origins still hold the key to its essential meaning. The Latin word 'designare' described the act of 'marking out'. Signifying something. Making a sign. In the modern era this idea of design as something distinctive, as the product of creative thought, which impacts on the way we 'use' the world, persists. It's a privileged word in our society. So it should be. It has important work to do.

The modern design era of the first part of the 20th century thought it held all the answers with its enthusiasm for the machine aesthetic and the utopian promises of mass production. But the second half of the century saw design subsumed into the wider contexts of pop culture and mass consumerism. This was a context in which fashion and popular taste, driven by advertising, 'celebrity designers' and iconic labels overran the idea that 'good design' was something made only by product 'designers' for people who could afford it. Enter the world of 'designer-clothing', 'designer-furniture' and 'designer-food'. With the 'designer-store' IKEA now signifying membership of a global club, the democratization of design-for-living, looks complete. With the aid of on-line catalogues and computer graphics simulations you too can be an interior designer.

So where does that leave young artists who work hard to qualify and practice as designers and the agencies like universities, TAFE colleges and craft and design centres who support them? The answer lies in the market place and in community and individual life. **The world, communities and individuals want 'designare'. They want that sign, that signature object and the experience that goes with it because it spells 'unique'. An easily affordable retro-light fitting can brighten up that corner in your life. But market place demand continues to demonstrate a different level of need; for designed-mediated experiences that significantly enhance daily life. This enhancement may take the form of offering beauty, compelling thought, confirming values, triggering emotions, exciting imagination, amusing, making a distinctive statement, carrying a message or simply offering brilliant functionality. Enter the artist/designer.**

Anyone who has attempted to mend a piece of furniture let alone design and construct one from the bench top up; or wrestled with a lump of clay trying to turn it into a bowl appreciates the level of skill involved in making well-crafted objects that people will pay good money for. And if the market place also wants a high level of creativity to go with the fine crafting then the bar is that much higher. Creative, skilled designers deliver on this. But where do they come from and how do they develop skills in not only crafting materials but being innovative and being successful professionals? Enter JamFactory and its Associates program and *Design Now*.

The challenge in creating such an exhibition was to consider how regional audiences and young people in particular could be introduced to contemporary design in an engaging and informative way. This would mean not only showcasing works that captured the dynamism, creativity, technical flair and enterprise of

contemporary Australian design but also by offering insights into production and creative thinking processes.

Once the parameters and basic strategies of the project were defined, the studio-based Associates program of JamFactory Contemporary Craft and Design in Adelaide was the logical 'launch vehicle' for the *Design Now* project. In JamFactory's four Studios (Metal, Furniture, Glass and Ceramics) can be found a vibrant expression of the diversity of contemporary Australian design, not only in products but also the individual creative talents and ideas of emerging designers who have been attracted to the Associates program from across Australia and beyond. Its two-year studio-based Career Development Scheme provides emerging craftspeople and designer-makers with professional and creative development opportunities unavailable anywhere else in Australia. All works in this exhibition have been made by young artists participating in the

Associates program during the period 2006/2007.

Design Now celebrates and showcases excellence and the values of the handmade object. But is more than a 'beautiful objects' exhibition. Complementing design works are images, proto-types, sketches, interviews and statements that give rare insights into what it takes to be a distinctive and successful contemporary designer. As such *Design Now's* appeal and relevance extends beyond public audiences, to children and to young adults making life-career choices and who through arts-based studies and *Design Now's* Learning Connections program are engaging with the world of design and using design-based strategies as a way of shaping their world.

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