

MODERATOR LEE WENG CHOY: Caroline Turner can't join us today so Helen Grace from Chinese University will be channelling Caroline for the presentation.

PROFESSOR HELEN GRACE:

Okay. So I am speaking for Caroline here.

"Thank you to all the organisers for inviting me to speak at this important conference. It's a very timely event and the theme addresses issues of great significance to all of us who work in art and museums. I would particularly like to thank Oscar and Irene for all their hard work in putting this program together.

I shall focus in my present on very specific studies which I hope will provide a platform for discussion of the issues of cross-cultural exhibition projects. I apologise that because of illness I cannot be with you in person and that the images have had to be removed from this paper ..."

In fact, we are going to show images. We have tracked them down and loaded them up.

"... I am beginning my discussion today by referring to a major art installation called 'Other Histories' which is on display at The Powerhouse Museum in Sydney. The Powerhouse Museum is a museum of technology designed decorative arts and social history. For this project they have invited a contemporary Australian artist, Guan Wei, to create an imaginary work of history.

Guan Wei was born in China and came to Australia as an immigrant in 1990. He has since become one of Australia's most highly respected artists. In recent years he's begun creating works about Australian history and in this case he's inspired by what the museum calls one of their most mysterious objects, a small carved figure of the Chinese God of Longevity found in 1879 in Northern Australia.

Over the years many people have suggested that because the figure seems to date from the period before European settlement it could be evidence of the arrival in Australia of a Chinese ship from the voyage of the great Admiral Zheng He in the early 15th century. This would mean that the Chinese actually discovered Australia over 350 years before the British seafarer, Captain James Cooke, or any of the early European explorers, including the Dutch, who discovered the west coast of the great south land long before Cooke chartered the east coast.

There is admittedly no other evidence of early Chinese discovery but it remains a most intriguing possibility, and Guan Wei has combined the figure of the God of Longevity and other items from the museum's collection with his mural paintings to propose such an alternative history.

The large murals that form his installation are full of images of fantastic sea creatures, ships, maps and other illusions to voyaging over the seas. I know that distinguished Hong Kong artist and curator, Oscar Ho, created an exhibition with a similar imagined history for Hong Kong in the 1990s. The idea of inviting contemporary artists to bring their creativity and imagination into museums has fascinating potential for connecting with audiences and raising serious ideas and issues. I use this work by Guan Wei as an example of how contemporary artists can enrich the museum. The museum functions here, in his words, as 'a floating poetic corridor in which history and memory, fact and fiction, are blurred'. Of course this imaginary work is not history but it inspires people to think about history in a different way and in a way that is non-European and gives a different perspective to our world.

The artist has said that he hopes visitors are feel a sense of satisfaction that a history can be created where there may be no history, or that a short history can become a longer and richer history. But Guan Wei wishes to go further than this and the marvellous artwork is also called 'A Fable For a Contemporary World'.

Guan Wei has said, 'Today we live in a world in which it is impossible to escape from nervous tension, feelings of anxiety, lack of security and the threat of terrorism.' I hope that the exhibition will inspire visitors to remember all that is wondrous about life and encourage them to reflect on shared experiences. The world is full of beauty and of things that hold a strange fascination. We who come from different cultural backgrounds need to better understand one another, connect with one another and seek friendships with one another. It's imperative that we find a shared set of values to ensure our survival.

Guan Wei has also produced a very interesting series of artworks about the history of Australia related to Europeans coming to and taking possession of a continent inhabited by Aboriginal people. This series opens up questions of how Australians can reconcile this past which contains many injustices to Aboriginal people and at present.

He also created a series of paintings related to immigration over the centuries and to contemporary waves of refugees. His painting, Dow Island, was shown in my Art and Human Rights Exhibition at the Australian National University in 2003 and was later bought by the National Gallery of Australia.

The painting is about epic stories of migration by sea in every time and place. It was also inspired by the true story of the 450 refugees -- men, women and children -- mostly from Middle Eastern countries, who were picked up from their sinking boat near Indonesia by a Norwegian freighter, the Tampa, in Australia in 2001, but the Australian Government refused the ship entry to Australian waters. Prime Minister John Howard, in the lead-up to an election, declared boat people from the Tampa would never set foot on Australian soil. This lack of compassion for refugees from Australian official sources concerns many Australians deeply. An analysis of the Tampa story by one of Australia's leading human rights lawyers, Julian Burnside QC, can be found on the web.

Guan Wei's artwork is about the past and the present and it's also about the future because he explores the possibility of defining

new shared values for our world. It also suggests some of the ways in which art is important. While art cannot necessarily change the world, artists create beauty, celebrate life and help us to see our world and humanity in different ways.

The work of creative artists explored ideas critical to the definition of humanity: happiness, fear, love, hate, justice, injustice. The immense significance of art lies in the fact that it can speak in ways universally understood, often where no other form of speech is possible. As French artist, Christian Boltanski, has said, 'Art is to do with our relation to the time in which we live', so if we want to understand society we should look at society's artists, past, present, future.

I am going to focus on how museums and cultural spaces meet the needs of their communities through three themes suggested by Guan Wei's thought provoking artwork and also the three themes of the conferences I convened for the Asia-Pacific Triennial exhibitions in 1993, 1996 and 1999: 'Tradition and Change', 'Present Encounters', 'Beyond the Future'.

I do not see past, present, future as a linear development. That is true because for many people, especially for indigenous cultures, their past, keeping alive their tradition and heritage, is also the future.

The past. Museums, of course, have a key role in preserving the past for future generations but they cannot do only this. The Shanghai Museum represents for me a museum which combines a collection related to the past with strong focus on the present and future. In fact, it's become one of the leading museums for discussions about new and future directions for museology, especially in this region.

I have just forwarded this work and I hope it will cue to the appropriate moment in the presentation but I don't have the entry points of the images in this version of the paper.

I first went to China and encountered the great traditions of Chinese art in the mid-1980s, over 20 years ago. It was a transforming

experience for me and resulted in my curating and working on many Asian exhibitions including with the Shanghai Museum and also with art institutions in many other countries in Asia.

At the same time as Head of International Programs at the Queensland Art Gallery I was also working on exhibitions from Europe and North America. The visit of our cultural delegation to the Shanghai Museum in 1984 was a very special one, although, of course, the magnificent building in which the museum is now housed was not yet constructed - it would open 10 years later.

The museum was then in a very rundown structure, however the passionate concerns of the director, Dr Ma, and staff for the preservation of the art, and thus the history of China, was very evident. The museum's collections give a possibility of examining this history in the context of 4,000 years.

I was honoured to work on an exhibition from those collections with staff of the Shanghai Museum for Australia in 1990, negotiating and working through the curatorial processes for this exhibition and experiencing the intensity of scholarship, scientific conservation and research, including archeological digs over 27 sites which thrive, collecting display and educational programs at the Shanghai Museum. That was an extraordinary experience.

Many of our staff at the Queensland Art Gallery shared this experience because the Shanghai curators spent several months with us helping develop our staff's knowledge of Chinese art. The Shanghai Museum has been extremely open to exchanges and building networks with other museums around the world over the last 20 years.

I was also a delegate at a major ICOM conference at the Shanghai Museum in 2002, led by the current director, Dr Chen. ICOM China has been taking a leading role on the subject of intangible heritage, meaning how to introduce to museums the lives, customs, traditions, values and histories of the people who made objects, including the living histories of those who are the inheritors of that history and how to approach issues of different cultures including cultural diversity within societies and minority cultures in a museum context.

The workshop dealt with both tangible and intangible heritage resources and considered museums as key vehicles for documentation and preservation of these resources. The result of this conference was the Shanghai Charter which can be found on the ICOM website. The URL is in the printed version of the paper that you have.

My point here is that museums of all kinds must be open to the present and future as well as to the past. No longer can museums be seen only as treasure houses of the past or as temples to history; they need to engage with issues critical to present and to future generations. The new inclusiveness in many museums related to the culture of minorities, especially indigenous groups and the presentation of multiple perspectives in museums offer new directions for the future.

Present encounters. I am currently working on two major research projects at the Humanities Research Centre at the Australian National University which involves a study of the role of museums in contemporary society. The first on art and human rights which is about the role artists and institutions can play in shaping our hopes for a culturally tolerant and diverse future. The second on Asian cities and cultural change is a project with Professors Meaghan Morris and Stephen Chan at Lingnan University in Hong Kong also involving distinguished Hong Kong curator and artist, Oscar Ho, and funded by an Australian Research Council grant. The project looks at the way that the cutting edge of change is now found in new cosmopolitan societies as in Shanghai, Mumbai, Tokyo, Hong Kong, Seoul and Singapore and examines proposition that the creation of a new imagined urban space is a major site of constructing identities, negotiating ways of living together and both defining and staging community.

I have been looking at the role museums, in particular art museums, can play in response to the needs of present communities. This has included such issues as cultural inclusion of the art of indigenous and minority cultures within museums as well as issues of multiculturalism within our societies. An example is the Museum of Ethnology (Minpaku) in Osaka, Japan. Ethnology museums, especially in the west, have been among the museums most criticised

from an anthropological focus. Minpaku, however, very early recognised the Ainu people, the Ainu people, the indigenous people of Hokkaido who were colonised by Japan in the 19th century as the owners of the Ainu objects in their collections and as living separate culture many years before the Japanese Government recognised the Ainu in this way.

The curators of this museum have a continuing program to invite contemporary Ainu practitioners to create new objects for the museum as well as helping to establish Ainu museums in Hokkaido run by and for Ainu people which focus on revival of culture.

Museums are important but so are the initiatives of artists who have often in Asia been the most active focus for change and for cross-cultural understanding.

Many artists in Asia are deeply committed to their communities and to on exploring ways of helping those societies and humanity as a whole. Just as important as the role of museums, in my experience, is the commitment of artists. After all, it's artists who create art. Artists run spaces, so often the real sites of experiment and creativity.

An example is Cemeti Art House in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, founded in 1988 by artists Mella Jaarsma and Nindityo Adipurnomo. Many of the artists associated with Cemeti Art House took very significant risks during the Suharto period in Indonesia by producing work about social injustices in Indonesia. Cemeti has also always been concerned with issues faced by the local community such as the recent natural disaster of the 2005 earthquake. In response, the artists worked to set up relief stations and ran workshops for traumatised children. Cemeti has been involved in many projects throughout Asia and Europe to create opportunities for artists to exchange ideas. The work they do is vital in a country like Indonesia where there is inadequate government supported infrastructure for art and artists.

The subtitle of my lecture is 'Building New Models For Cross-Cultural Exhibitions. How We Can Build New Models For Dialogue Through Cross-Cultural Art Exhibitions?' The key

principle, I believe, is that such projects should be built on mutual respect. Mutual respect for different cultures and the world that is different from our own.

The Biennale phenomenon. One of the most interesting cross-cultural phenomena in recent years is the growth in Asia of many international exhibitions such as Biennales and Triennales, meaning large scale international exhibitions held every two or three years which focus on many contemporary art from many countries and cultures. The first of these, of course, was the Venice Biennale which emerged in the late 19th century. Most of the Biennale exhibitions are not museum-based but they do have an impact on art museums by providing a panoramic overview of new art. Museums and cultural spaces as well as universities, I believe, need to collaborate with such events to extend their intellectual and artistic reach within a locality.

Many of the Biennales that have arisen in Asia in the last decade provide new opportunities for debate, dialogue and networking among artists, museum and art professionals which give rise to possibilities for a new language of art to develop. Examples are the Biennales from Shanghai, Guangju, Yokohama and Singapore, all of which are extremely significant events. The new internationalising of art also means that many contemporary artists from Asia are now seen in world exhibitions such as the Venice Biennale or 'documenta'. This, of course, is a relatively recent phenomenon; a community of art has emerged, one that does much more to include artists from every continent, although more needs to be done. Of course, such events as Biennales can be highly politicised and can be resented by local museums for absorbing a large amount of funding in one event. However, we need to be realistic and realise such events can be opportunities for collaboration or for collaborative approaches to introducing contemporary art to audiences and allowing experimentation which might not be possible in a local museum.

Every exhibition has its politics but I believe the Biennale phenomenon is an important development for Asia. Some Biennales like Shanghai are museum-based. At the Shanghai art museum the



system is in with the Shanghai Museum but others such as Guangju have a strong community base and a city project. Guangju, as we know, is a focal centre for Korean democracy and I have long been an admirer of the Guangju Biennale as one of the key centres for consideration of contemporary art in Asia, although it also includes art from all over the world.

In Australia, one of the most significant exhibitions for connecting with the world and preventing isolation has, since the early 1970s, been the Sydney Biennale which in 2005 under the artistic direction of my colleague, Charles Merewether, was a particularly strong exhibition -- 2006, in fact -- with a focus through its theme, 'Zones of Contact on World Issues', such as the conflict then raging in Lebanon. This Biennale was held in 16 locations throughout Sydney to try to include more people who never go to contemporary art galleries or spaces.

In the most recent Singapore Biennale under the artistic direction of Fumio Nanjo and three co-curators and with even more venues throughout the city of Singapore the placing of works in public spaces as well as museums and galleries and in particular in religious settings including churches, temples and a mosque were seen as a way of connecting the Biennale, a concept often thought to be elitist with ordinary citizens in places where they go as part of daily life. This exposed worshipers to works of contemporary art and was an imaginative way to attempt greater communication with a much wider public.

In our world, asking religious institutions to open their doors to nonbelievers and individuals to go into others' places of worship is a major test of tolerance. I congratulate Singapore and the institutions which opened their doors in undertaking this act of tolerance. It is a reminder that art exhibitions can be about more than the display of art.

Next section, cross-cultural exhibitions at museums, the Fukuoka Triennial and Asia-Pacific Triennial. The Fukuoka Triennial and the Asia-Pacific Triennial are two examples of how museums can provide a long term platform for fruitful artistic cross-cultural

exchanges and for education programs to help their communities understand different cultures. In the process, both projects have transformed their respective museums. Rather than the international content of most Biennales, both exhibitions focus on contemporary Asian art. In the case of Fukuoka, only Asian art and in the case of the Asia-Pacific Triennial contemporary Asian and Pacific art. Of course, this can be seen as less and less needed and 'It's important', as Hou Hanru once famously said, 'not to build a wall around the region', the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum in Fukuoka, Japan, is a purpose-built museum opened in 1999 as an offshoot of the Fukuoka Museum which had been undertaking major exhibitions of contemporary Asian art since 1979/1980. These Asian art shows were the first major exhibitions in any country in the world of contemporary Asian art, although the Indian and Bangladeshi Biennales have also shown Asian art over many years.

The new Fukuoka Asian Art Museum was constructed to house the parent museum's considerable contemporary Asian collections and be a site for the highly acclaimed Asian art shows, now called Fukuoka Triennales. The collection developed over more than 20 years is the finest collection of contemporary Asian art in the world.

The new purpose-built museum is part of the Hakata Riverain Complex, a magnificent new shopping centre in the up market and central downtown area of Kawabata known for its cinemas, bars, restaurants, and designer fashion boutiques. The museum has a very good connection with young audiences. The Asian Art Fair held in conjunction with the triennial generates a fun family image: for example, Pakistani craftsmen decorating mobile phones for young adults or children participating in the interactive displays created by artists.

Many of the programs arrange at community schools with young people. Research, artist exchanges and educational components are critical to the museum's mission. The museum works with many local volunteers and a strong focus is on residences for artists to go to Japan and work in schools and universities and mix with local citizens. The Asian art shows and the Triennales have always been chosen by Fukuoka curators working with artists and curators in

the different countries of Asia. A huge emphasis has gone towards in-depth and frequent country visits and research. Over the years they have built up a vast knowledge of developments in Asian art.

The Fukuoka exhibitions have also given many opportunities to artists from poorer countries such as Myanmar and Laos. The artist, Kham Tanh Tanh Saliangkham from Laos, for example, described his residency in Japan, his first visit outside his own country, as a long held dream. Fukuoka continues to include artists from poorer Asian countries. The APT has never had the reach of Fukuoka into countries such as Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar or Nepal. In recent years there's also been more focus on difficulty issues.

In the 2005 Fukuoka Triennial, for example, I stood transfixed by an artwork by the Korean team, Yang He Chung Heavy Industries describing in horrific detail the chilling scenario of a US preemptive strike against North Korea followed by a North nuclear attack on Seoul. The Fukuoka exhibitions encapsulate a mission to overcome Japan's traditional isolation from Asia and contested history when it did engage with Asia in a radical and culturally inclusive art program which has helped to change perceptions about Asia in Japan, the APT.

I now turn to the exhibition for which I was Project Director in the 1990s, the Asia-Pacific Triennials. I should stress I left the Queensland gallery in 2000 but the APT was a life-changing experience for me, as for many of our staff. The APT project with audiences of over 400,000 in four exhibitions became so popular with audiences that it's now a key focus for the Queensland Art Gallery programs. The site of the Triennials was the Queensland Art Gallery in business, Australia, part of a major cultural centre complex. A new building, the gallery of modern art, is now being constructed as part of the Queensland Art Gallery to house the Asian collections among other contemporary collections. It will open in December 2006 as will the fifth Asia-Pacific Triennial. This parallels the Fukuoka experience of opening a new specialised museum to house its Asian contemporary collections in 1989.

The Asia-Pacific Triennial was initiated by the Queensland Art Gallery in the early 1990s with the stated objective of informing Australians about the dynamic and changing societies of Asia and the Pacific, to initiate a dialogue among artists, scholars and artists in the region and to build bridges to Asian and Pacific cultures including within Australia's own multicultural society. Nothing could have been more logical than for Australians to attempt to learn more about the assets and cultures of our new neighbours and of the backgrounds of so many of our immigrants.

From the beginning we conceived the APT as more than an art exhibition. It was equally, as was the Fukuoka Art Museum, concerned with the education of audiences creating a network of contacts with artists and art institutions, building a research base for further exhibitions and a permanent collection and serving as a forum for discussion about the art of the region. It was always seen as a national project and while it changed and evolved over the decade of the 90s there were consistent elements to the first three exhibitions in 1993, 1996 and 1999 for which I was, when deputy director of the Queensland Art Gallery, privileged to be APT Project Director.

The APT was meant to be a platform for experiment and debate. A key facet of the first three exhibitions was the principle of co-curatorship with curators in the region, a concept developed to avoid closed curatorial viewpoints. This also included younger curators being mentored as part of curatorial teams. Writers from the region also wrote about the artists rather than western curators. A major component was the series of conferences held in the 1990s and developed in conjunction with universities and with scholars and artists from throughout the region. A critical emphasis has been on artists coming to Australia and engaging with local audiences in a program similar to the art exchange program at Fukuoka. The exhibition was always free to the public and this enabled it to be used widely for education purposes. The Asia-Pacific Triennial was, of course, unique in including Pacific islander artists and some excellent artists have been shown from countries whose artists have few opportunities.

In Australia for many years indigenous Aboriginal art has been accepted as contemporary art and indeed, Aboriginal artists are by far the most requested artists for overseas exhibitions. Indigenous art has been foregrounded at the APTs. In the 1990s there were more Australian indigenous artists in the exhibitions than Australian artists of all other cultural heritage. This was a deliberate decision to highlight the importance of indigenous Aboriginal art in Australian culture and to show this art to the world. This is critical in Australia where, I believe, reconciliation with the original owners of the land is the most significant issue facing our society.

A new component of the 1999 APT was the virtual APT with internet and web based art. This was a joint project with MAAP Multimedia Art Asia-Pacific Festival. MAAP is a totally independent organisation from the APT and continues to operate in many cities as a festival of new media and web art. It has, from the 1990s, developed a strong program of exhibitions in different cities in Asia and Australia, including residences. MAAP provides an excellent model for new networks of artists.

To return to the APT, the enthusiasm of school teachers to use the Triennial to create a positive understanding of our neighbours undoubtedly derived from a motivation to combat racist elements in Australian society. The exhibition was part of the school curriculum in Queensland for art and social studies in the 1990s. The Kids' APT, a component of the exhibition developed for 3-12 year old children, was my personal response to the polemics of Pauline Hanson who you may recall was a politician who criticised multicultural immigration policies. More than 30,000 children aged 3-12 participated in 1999 alone with many more involved through the online activities and school visits.

Chinese artist, Xu Bing, for example, produced an art installation, "Classroom", where the children copied what looked like Chinese calligraphic characters but these were Xu Bing's own invention of English written in special Chinese style characters, thus posed questions in relation to understanding other language and cultures.

The Asia-Pacific Triennial has always been a site for artists to treat very seriously issues. In an installation work produced for the 1999 Triennial by Dadang Christanto from Indonesia, life-sized paper sculptures of human beings were set on fire as part of a performance. This work was about the killings in Jakarta in 1998 and the conflict then raging in East Timor before UN troops went in to quell the actions of militias opposed to independence for the former Indonesian province of East Timor. Such works were and are very courageous in the context of the tensions of the day and remind us that artists can play a vital role in helping communities confront issues of violence and conflict.

Mella Jaarsma's work in the 1999 Asia-Pacific Triennial, 'Hi Inlander, Hello Native', provides an example of the way artists continue to confront issues of significance to humanity. Mella Jaarsma is referred to earlier in the paper, you will recall. The work consisted of hooded costumes covering the wearers, except for their eyes, and made from skins of chicken, kangaroos, frogs and fish. Those who wore the costumes were from different racial backgrounds and were thus invited to experience another skin. The artist has said, 'I really wanted to create a work which could open up discussions between different kinds of people and to get people interested in different cultures, different religions', and so on.

The APT in 1999 was called 'Beyond the Future'. In many ways the Asia-Pacific Triennial in the 1990s occupied the interstices of borders and time, encompassing the dreams, hopes, continuities and uncertainties of a world changing before our eyes. It was a revelation to curators like myself and to Australian audiences, as I believe the Fukuoka exhibitions have also been to Japanese audiences.

Conclusion. Beyond the future? The English biographer, Richard Holmes, has said, 'We are what we dream'. At the 2007 Istanbul Biennale artistic director, Hou Hanru, plans to have a 'House of Dreams'. Exhibitions such as I have described are all about dreams, as well as our hopes for our futures and for our children's

futures. I will end by describing work by Chinese artist Cai Guo Qiang from the 1999 Asia-Pacific Triennial.

This work was a 20 metre bamboo bridge across the central water mall at the Queensland Art Gallery, a bridge to the future and about crossings between cultures. When people crossed the bridge and met in the middle they were drenched with a shower of water that descended from above. Although cross-cultural meetings, as I suggest, are never easy, they must be attempted if our world is to survive."

That's it. I was tempted to intervene and add a few notes to Caroline's observations but I didn't want to distort what she said. But maybe later on I can talk. But this was Caroline's speech. Thank you.