Cram Notes Unit 4

These Cram Notes summarise key concepts and content for Studio Arts Unit 4, following the requirements of Area of Study 4 in the VCAA Study Design. Use them to help you revise your knowledge and understanding of what will be tested in the external exam.

Unit 4: Studio production and art industry contexts

Studio Arts Unit 4 is made up of three areas of study:

- Area of Study 1: Folio of artworks
- Area of Study 2: Focus, reflection and evaluation
- Area of Study 3: Art industry contexts.

In the Studio Arts end-of-year exam, you will be tested on Area of Study 3: Art industry contexts. Area of Study 1 and Area of Study 2 make up SAT 2 (Student Assessment Task 2), which is completed in class.

The following notes will assist you in revising Unit 4 for the end-of-year exam, which will test your knowledge of material from Studio Arts Units 3 & 4 and will contribute 30 per cent to your study score.

Area of Study 3: Art industry contexts

Outcome 3

On completion of this unit the student should be able to examine and explain the preparation and presentation of artworks in at least two different exhibition spaces, and discuss the various roles, processes and methods involved in the exhibition of artworks.

Study Design checklist

The Study Design states that to achieve this outcome, a student will need to draw on knowledge and related skills outlined in Area of Study 3. The tables below state the key knowledge and skills you will need to have acquired throughout the unit of study.

Use the tables as a checklist by placing a tick in the appropriate space to ensure that you are familiar with the key knowledge and key skills.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key knowledge includes:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• the role of public galleries, commercial galleries and other art spaces</td>
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<td>• curatorial, exhibition design and promotional methods and considerations involved in preparing and presenting an exhibition and displaying artworks in current exhibitions</td>
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<tr>
<td>• methods and considerations involved in the conservation and presentation of artworks including materials, lighting, temperature, storage, presentation and artist intention</td>
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<tr>
<td>• processes associated with production, presentation, promotion and marketing of art</td>
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<tr>
<td>• particular characteristics of types of exhibition spaces</td>
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<td>• art language and terminology appropriate to the task.</td>
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Key skills include the ability to:

- describe and compare the roles of public galleries, commercial galleries and other art spaces
- discuss curatorial, exhibition design and promotional methods and considerations involved in preparing and presenting an exhibition and/or displaying artworks
- identify and discuss methods and considerations involved in the conservation of artworks
- employ appropriate language and terminology.


Practical hint

Use the key questions in the Cram Notes to guide your revision and exam preparation. These questions are designed to get you thinking about the different aims and roles of galleries, artists and art professionals in preparing, presenting and/or marketing artworks.

Public galleries, commercial galleries and other art spaces

Key knowledge

The role of public galleries, commercial galleries and other art spaces

Key terms

*Public art galleries:* galleries, cultural institutions funded, owned and established by the government

*Commercial art galleries:* galleries that are privately owned and operated as businesses

*Alternative art spaces:* non-traditional art spaces such as cafés, bars, restaurants, public spaces, laneways, building facades, virtual art spaces, etc.

Practical hint

Ensure that you visit at least two different exhibitions in two different art exhibitions in two different art spaces during the year as you will need to be prepared to write about current exhibitions. Use the table on page 117 to assist you in organising your information to maximise each visit.

Public art galleries

Aim

The aim of a public gallery is to educate and/or inform the general public along with schools and universities, and to collect and promote art. Public galleries are not operated to generate a profit and are therefore devoted to collecting, conserving and presenting to the public an array of Australian and international artworks. These may include various art forms such as
sculpture, painting, ceramics and new media. In order to be exhibited in a public art gallery, an artist needs to be very well established with an excellent reputation in the art world and the public domain.

Examples: Bendigo Art Gallery, Geelong Art Gallery and the National Gallery of Victoria International

**Funding**
Public art galleries are funded, owned and established by the government. They do not rely on the sale of artworks as they receive funding from state, federal and/or local government bodies as well as corporate and private sponsors. Public art galleries may also receive bequests and donations from individuals, couples, groups, businesses, philanthropists and other collectors. To receive tax deductions, artists may select works to donate to public gallery collections.

**Marketing and promotion**
Public art galleries use funding from large company sponsorship to promote exhibitions along with money from an allocated budget. The galleries also rely on monies raised through ‘friends’ of the gallery, whose purpose is to support the gallery through fundraising, social events and activities.

Marketing and promotional avenues include:
- print media—newspapers (e.g. the Age), specialist magazines and journals (e.g. *Art Australia*, *Art Almanac*) and billboards
- electronic media—gallery websites, television and radio
- direct marketing.

A database is also used when establishing mailing lists to forward pamphlets and invitations to openings.

**Education**
Public galleries run education programs for schools, universities and the public. They offer professional development programs for primary school, secondary school and university educators along with offering guided tours of exhibitions to the public. Most public galleries employ a full-time or part-time educational officer.

**Conservation and preservation of artworks**
The preservation and conservation of artworks is a high priority for public art galleries as they house valuable artworks that are either on loan from another gallery or form part of a gallery’s permanent collection. A permanent collection contributes to the cultural wealth of the state and country and the collection may develop an international reputation.

**Commercial art galleries**

**Aim**
The aim of a commercial art gallery is to make money through selling and/or lending contemporary and historical artworks to art collectors and/or the public. Commercial art galleries operate as businesses to make a profit for the owners of the business.

Example: MARS  Melbourne Art Rooms, Port Melbourne, Victoria
Funding
Funds are generated from commissions charged by the gallery on the sales of artworks. The commissions may range from fifteen to thirty per cent of the sale price, depending on the particular gallery. Funds are also generated by hiring out the gallery space and charging general exhibiting fees, as commercial galleries require the artist to contribute to costs involved in an exhibition such as advertising, printing invitations and catering costs for the opening.

Marketing and promotion
Commercial art galleries have a database of collectors who buy work from them on a regular basis. This database is also used to create a mailing list. As with public galleries, commercial galleries also use print media and electronic outlets to market and promote exhibitions. Through regular newsletters, the gallery’s website and advertising in specialist magazines such as Artlink and their website, the gallery is able to promote current exhibitions and acquisitions.

Commercial galleries promote and market the artist. If an artist wishes to exhibit their work in a commercial art gallery, the artist needs to submit to the gallery a CV outlining previous exhibitions, qualifications and experience in making and exhibiting art. If successful, the artist will be asked to come into the gallery for a meeting with the directors (the owners) to discuss marketing strategies for the artist’s work. To sustain a viable business, the commercial gallery owner relies primarily on income from the sales of artworks. By necessity, directors must be very selective in their choices regarding the stable of artists they represent, as their artworks need to sell for the gallery to make money and stay in business.

Education
Commercial galleries generally do not offer any education programs. The services that they offer include advice concerning framing and organisation of transport once a purchase has been made. Some commercial galleries may educate their clients about art and art collection to enhance their business. They may also opt to provide students with access to their exhibitions for educational purposes. Educational visits should always be pre-arranged for courtesy, security and occupational health and safety reasons.

Conservation and preservation
Commercial galleries are generally responsible for more short-term aspects of conservation while the artwork is being exhibited and stored in the stockroom.

Alternative art spaces
An alternative art space is generally a physical or virtual space other than a traditional gallery space, where artworks may be presented to an audience. These sites can sometimes be quite unconventional and democratic in that they may not be limited in content and inclusion by the usual parameters of traditional gallery practice. However, many public and commercial galleries are increasingly presenting curated online exhibitions and interactive online art performances and projects as an integral part of their practice. Some examples of alternative art spaces may include cafés, restaurants and shop fronts. In spaces such as these, an artist may pay little or no commission on sales of works, as they are usually responsible for hanging and promoting the display themselves. This arrangement is often mutually suitable as the proprietor of the space may enjoy changing the visual appearance of the restaurant or café on a regular basis without the concern of an additional monetary outlay. An example of an alternative art space is Platform, an artist-run subway exhibition space in Flinders Street train station, Melbourne. See www.platform.org.au

Another alternative art space is Alice Euphoria (a clothing shop), Flinders Lane, Melbourne.
Alternative art spaces offer unique ways of exposing artwork to audiences that may not necessarily visit traditional or conventional gallery spaces. They also may be seen to democratise the presentation of artworks by enabling a wider variety of arts practitioners to test and present their artwork in the public domain. Some alternative art spaces may allow artists of all standards and abilities (beginners through to experienced) to exhibit. There are often no specific requirements regarding the artist's education and experience in the art industry preventing involvement at some level.

Some artists also like to challenge definitions about what constitutes an art space or site of art presentation. An artwork which provokes such discussion and debate is Simon Starling's 2005 Turner Prize winning 'Shedboatshed' (Mobile Architecture no. 2).

Starling took apart a shed and rebuilt it as a boat. He loaded the leftover pieces of the shed onto the boat and proceeded to sail to a German Gallery. After unloading the boat he dismantled it and reconstructed the shed inside the gallery space.

Starling's artistic process of transformation in 'Shedboatshed' raises some interesting questions:

Does a site of artistic presentation automatically become an art space?
What was the artwork? Was it the boat, the shed and/or the performance/process of deconstruction and reconstruction?

Was the boat or shed an art space? Was the shed inside the gallery an art space within an art space?

The definition of what may be considered an alternative art space can also vary according to ethical, cultural and historical factors.

Cyberspace may also be perceived as a legitimate alternative art space. The Internet consists of numerous sites which frequently invite artists to present and distribute their artworks online. In some cases there are no fees or charges for artists exhibiting their artwork in alternative online art spaces, as there would be in a commercial gallery context. Such sites will often allow any artist to upload images of their work, so in such cases, the sheer volume and varying quality of works may prevent these sites from being as thoughtfully designed and meaningfully curated as other online gallery sites.

Refer to the VCAA link to locate some suitable curated art spaces to visit. Check with your teacher to ensure that your selection is appropriate.

**Funding**

As alternative art spaces are not necessarily galleries, funding may not always be required. In some cases there may be little or no rent or commission charged, depending on the contract or agreement made between the artist and the owner/manager. An artist may, however, obtain specific funding from an arts organisation or an independent source to present an exhibition in an alternative art space.

**Marketing and promotion**

Exhibiting artists will generally promote and market their own exhibitions in alternative art spaces, unless the space has existing procedures and methods in place to do this. Artists may use the local press, friends, community contacts and online networks to publicise their event. Artist-run spaces may also have a database of clients and communication networks. The artist is often responsible for the costs associated with the promotion and marketing of their work in an alternative art space, although this is not always the case.

**Education**

Alternative art spaces do not generally offer any formal education programs, however, exceptions may exist in this diverse category.
Conservation and preservation of artworks

Works in an alternative workspace are most probably on temporary display only. As the space may not necessarily be purpose built for the exhibition of artworks, formal approaches to conservation and preservation may not always be adhered to. In terms of general handling, the artist may be responsible for delivering, installing and dismantling the artwork. Throughout the duration of the exhibition, general care may be taken to minimise inappropriate treatment and handling, damage or theft.

Exam preparation

Reminder: Unit 4: Outcome 3 states that you should be able to examine and explain the preparation and presentation of artworks in at least two different exhibition spaces, and discuss the various roles, processes and methods involved in the exhibition of artworks.

**Exam tip**

If you select an exhibition in a commercial gallery or alternative art space you must check with your teacher to ensure that it has been purposefully curated, designed or created to present the artwork in an aesthetically pleasing, meaningful manner. The VCAA website provides a comprehensive list of art spaces for your information.

**General comparison table: Exhibition spaces**

When comparing types of art galleries, you can use the following table to assist with laying out your information in systematic order when studying for the end-of-year exam. Break down your information into easy-to-learn point form for easy revision.

A blank version of this table is provided in the tear-out section of this study guide (page 117).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of galleries</th>
<th>Aims</th>
<th>Examples</th>
<th>Funding</th>
<th>Marketing and promotion</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Conservation and preservation</th>
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<td>Public art galleries</td>
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<td>Commercial art galleries</td>
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<td>Alternative art spaces</td>
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The following information includes some key points regarding each type of gallery.

**Public art galleries**

1. The aim of public art galleries is to educate the public and promote art.
2. Non-profit based. Public art galleries are funded, owned and established by the government.
3. They do not rely on the sale of artworks to finance the gallery as they receive funding from state, federal and/or local governments and corporate and private sponsors.
4. They are devoted to collecting, conserving and presenting to the public an array of Australian and international works of art.
Commercial art galleries
1 The aim of commercial art galleries is to sell and, at times, lend or lease contemporary and historical artworks to art collectors and the public.
2 Profit based. Commercial art galleries operate as businesses to make a profit for the owners of the business. Money is generated from the commissions charged on sales of artworks and the exhibition hire fees charged by the gallery.
3 Commercial art galleries promote and market a number of artists and offer ongoing support and promotion for artists whose artworks sell and make money for the gallery.

Alternative art spaces
1 Alternative art spaces may not look like more conventional exhibition spaces. The definition of an alternative art space is constantly evolving. Curated online exhibitions and exhibitions in innovative and unusual physical contexts are becoming more prevalent.
2 Some examples of alternative art spaces include cafés, bars and restaurants and site-specific presentations conducted at nightclubs, street sites, buildings, beaches, etc.
3 Cyberspace may be viewed as an alternative art space.
4 Any artist may be able to exhibit work in particular alternative art spaces as there may be fewer restrictions placed on the presentation of artworks. The cost of exhibiting in an alternative art space may be considerably less than those associated with exhibiting in commercial gallery contexts.
5 There are alternative art spaces which present to the viewing public or specific audiences, exceptionally well designed, curated exhibitions of an exceptionally high quality.
6 Alternative art spaces may attract different audiences that may not generally attend art exhibitions at conventional art galleries/art spaces.

Key questions
1 What are three differences between public and commercial art galleries?
2 What are three differences between a commercial gallery and an alternative art space?
3 What are the aims of a commercial gallery? How do these differ from the key aims of an alternative art space?
4 How do public galleries and alternative art spaces differ from each other in presenting works to an audience?

Preparing and presenting an exhibition: gallery staff

Key knowledge
Curatorial, exhibition design and promotional methods and considerations involved in preparing and presenting an exhibition and displaying artworks in current exhibitions

Key terms
Curator: manages a gallery’s permanent collection and is responsible for planning, coordinating and researching exhibitions and writing catalogues
Exhibition designer: responsible for the organisation of the gallery space and the layout and presentation of artworks within the exhibition space
The Leading Edge – VCE Studio Arts

**Director:** responsible for financial decisions and the general running of the gallery

**Sponsor:** donates money and services for gallery acquisitions and other costs involved in putting together and running an exhibition. In return, the sponsor receives publicity and advertising

**Marketing/publicity officer:** responsible for promoting and marketing exhibitions and enticing sponsorship

**Education officer:** aims to expand the public’s understanding of art

When writing about the job descriptions involved in a gallery environment, it is important to refer to at least two exhibitions that you have viewed during your year of study. This will provide you with detailed, specific information and examples of the tasks relating to roles in preparing and presenting exhibits that the examiner may ask you to refer to.

**Curator**

Curators manage the gallery’s permanent collection. Curators are responsible for planning, coordinating and researching current and future exhibitions. Their position may also require them to give lectures and assist with education programs (see also education officer). Curators are responsible for cataloguing works of art and researching artists and artworks that the gallery is planning to acquire or exhibit. Curators maintain/collate detailed records of the gallery’s permanent collection and artworks on loan. Curators liaise with artists when working on exhibitions and have an awareness of conservation and preservation factors in the gallery environment. They may also contribute to the writing of catalogues or other print material relating to exhibitions or collections.

The role, specialities and scope of a curator will vary depending on the gallery context.

**Public art gallery**

A large public art gallery like the National Gallery of Victoria has a team of specialist curators devoted to particular art movements and/or artforms, e.g. Australian/international photography. Regional galleries may only have one general curator due to size and budget.

**Commercial art gallery**

The owner of the commercial art gallery will generally take on the curatorial role. Commercial art galleries are mostly owned and run by one or two people.

**Alternative art spaces**

A curator may not necessarily be involved in putting together an exhibition in an alternative art space. If required, a freelance curator may be employed or a contact person from the alternative art space will liaise with the artist to discuss points of relevance regarding the presentation of the artwork. In some cases, it may be entirely up to the artist to undertake all of the tasks associated with presenting the exhibition in the art space.

**Exhibition designer**

Exhibition designers are responsible for the organisation of the gallery space and the layout of artworks in exhibitions. Exhibition designers put together layouts and floor plans for exhibitions, which sometimes includes creating a three-dimensional scale model or mock-up of the exhibition space. Models may include details such as movable wall placement, plinth and projector sites, seating, placement of artwork, etc. The exhibition designer will take care of additional details such as the colour selection and painting of walls and the printing of
information in the gallery space. Exhibition designers offer advice on framing, mounting and the general presentation of artworks. They work with and assist curators to determine the placement of artworks within the space. Decisions that need to be made include choices regarding the level at which artworks will be hung, the distance between artworks and the placement and direction of free-standing installation pieces. An exhibition designer will also collaborate with the team to determine the physical flow and overall aesthetic of the exhibition.

The role of an exhibition designer varies depending on the type of gallery.

Public art gallery
A large public gallery will have a team of exhibition designers who work on a number of different exhibitions simultaneously. Permanent exhibition spaces will also be re-designed by the team when required. In smaller public galleries, a curator may also act as an exhibition designer.

Commercial art gallery
The director and/or gallery manager will, in collaboration with the exhibiting artist(s), generally be involved in the design and presentation of the exhibition. Sessional staff may also be employed to hang/install work.

Alternative art space
In some cases a freelance exhibition designer may be employed to design an exhibition in an alternative art space. For example an exhibition designer may be involved in the digital design of an online exhibition. In other cases the artist and the proprietor will make design decisions regarding the presentation of the work.

The artist as curator/exhibition designer/collaborator
In a larger public gallery context there will be a team of professionals who will work together to present particular exhibitions. A living artist may have a particular vision or intention to present and will collaborate with various gallery professionals to plan and present their work in a gallery context. The artist may at times be required to compromise their original vision due to various considerations and constraints that may exist, such as cost, available resources or occupational health and safety requirements, etc. Sometimes an artist may be commissioned to create an artwork for a specific exhibition context or may be given complete freedom to respond to a particular space and/or idea. In a smaller gallery context, an artist may work closely with other artists, the owner, director or gallery manager to develop and present an exhibition. Sometimes commercial galleries will employ sessional curators and designers to develop and install particular artworks and exhibitions. Artists themselves, in groups or as individuals, may also devise and curate exhibitions for particular art spaces.

Director
The role of director is the lead role in an art gallery. Directors are responsible for financial decisions, the acquisition of artworks, the development of marketing strategies and the allocation of gallery staffing roles and resources. Directors must also create a long-term vision for the ongoing development of a gallery’s collection. Directors work collaboratively with all gallery staff, particularly the curators.

The role of a director varies significantly depending on the type of gallery.

Public art galleries
A public art gallery will have a director who works with senior gallery staff and a specialised, nominated board. Larger public galleries may have an artistic director and an administrative director who both facilitate final decisions.
Commercial art gallery

The owner(s) of the gallery generally take on directional roles, although there may be exceptions.

Alternative art space

The role of director in an alternative art space may be undertaken by the owner or a person nominated by the owner, particularly if the work is to be displayed in a café or bar. This person would not necessarily be an official director, but would most likely be a liaison person between the artist and those associated with the alternative art space. Other alternative exhibition spaces may have a contact person or organiser who will communicate directly with the artist.

Sponsors

Sponsors donate money and services to help with the costs of gallery acquisitions and the development and presentation of exhibitions. Government, corporate, philanthropic and support sponsors gift or provide these services and materials so their logos are associated with the exhibition and the gallery.

Next time you visit an exhibition at a public art gallery or collect a program outlining what is coming up at the gallery, look for the names of well-known businesses. These businesses are likely to have sponsored the exhibition for marketing purposes. A business logo in a gallery catalogue may suggest that the product being marketed is prestigious and tasteful.

The role of a sponsor varies depending on the type of gallery.

Public art galleries

Public art galleries rely heavily on sponsors to support exhibitions and gallery programs with monetary donations which are generally tax deductible. Some exhibitions may also be supported by grants from government-based organisations or cultural institutions.

Commercial art galleries

Commercial galleries may sometimes have sponsors for certain exhibitions. These may include small local businesses and organisations. An artist may also receive a grant to conduct an exhibition in a commercial gallery context.

Alternative art spaces

Alternative art spaces may not necessarily attract sponsorship. Depending on the type of space, they may have support sponsors such as wine companies which provide wine at an opening, or they may receive local government assistance, such as a cultural grant. Local businesses may also choose to sponsor small shows in cafés, bars, or shop fronts, etc. Virtual galleries may attract sponsors who advertise on the website itself.

Marketing/publicity officer

Marketing/publicity officers are in charge of promoting an exhibition. The aim of a publicity officer is to promote the gallery and its programs and exhibitions to increase the number of visitors who attend each year. In order to do this, marketing/publicity officers need to make sure that current exhibitions are advertised in publications such as the following:

- *Art Almanac* (booklet that features galleries and exhibitions throughout Australia)
- gallery websites
- specialist art magazines such as *Art Monthly Australia*
- the *Age* newspaper’s ‘EG’ supplement
- radio and television promotions and discussions, particularly arts programs
- specific local media sites/publications.
Marketing/publicity officers take care of mailing lists, publish newsletters featuring support activities and exhibitions, organise invitations for the opening night and arrange press releases. For big-budget blockbuster exhibitions they may organise larger advertising campaigns which include signs and posters that are placed in high-profile contexts and may also network with other organisations to promote exhibitions. Sponsors, patrons and art industry professionals, including art critics, will be invited to previews, openings and promotional events. After the exhibition preview, critics and art journalists will usually write reviews that will feature in art magazines and newspapers.

The role and scope of a marketing/publicity officer varies depending on the type of gallery.

**Public art galleries**

Publicity officers have a large budget, particularly to promote blockbuster international exhibitions that are likely to attract large audiences from interstate, and possibly overseas.

**Commercial art galleries**

The gallery owner or director/manager generally acts as publicity officer unless they employ an assistant to perform this role. Commercial galleries need great publicity to increase gallery attendance and to stimulate the sale of artworks. They generally build a database of clients who receive regular updates, invitations and promotional materials via email or in hard-copy format. Additional publicity is gained through targeted advertising and editorials.

**Alternative art spaces**

An artist will generally act as a marketing/publicity officer unless a specific arrangement has been made with the proprietor or director of the art space.

**Education officer**

The aim of an education officer is to expand the public's understanding and appreciation of art. Education officers develop programs about current exhibitions and a gallery's permanent collection for students (primary, secondary and higher education) and the general public.

The role of an education officer varies depending on the type of gallery.

**Public art galleries**

Education officers develop and conduct a number of education programs for students and the wider public. These include professional development classes for educators to inform them about current exhibitions and developments in art and art education.

**Commercial art galleries**

Educational officers are generally not employed at commercial galleries; however, through prior arrangement educational tours may be conducted. Selected commercial galleries may have a desire to educate future art consumers and collectors and may therefore conduct information sessions or artists’ talks for the general public.

**Alternative arts spaces**

An education officer is generally not involved in an alternative art space; however, exceptions may exist, depending on the context.

**Exam preparation**

For the purposes of your exam preparation, you must compare and summarise the key factors which characterise each type of gallery or art space. You must also apply these points to your personal experience of viewing at least two exhibitions in two different types of galleries this year. Included is also a useful table to use in comparing two exhibitions in two different exhibition spaces (pages 122–124).
Comparison table: Specific exhibition spaces

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<td>Roles of industry professionals</td>
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<td>Personal response</td>
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Practical hint
Try to remember at least three critical points for each type of gallery or art space.

Key questions

1. The preparation and presentation of artworks to the public depends on many people. Describe the roles of a curator and an exhibition designer in a public gallery.

2. Describe and compare the roles of the curator and the education officer in relation to two exhibitions you have seen this year.

3. Compare a commercial gallery and an alternative art space. Discuss three main differences.

4. Discuss the preparation and presentation of artworks in two different exhibitions you viewed this year in two different art spaces.

5. Explain the roles of three gallery professionals in preparing and presenting an exhibition you have viewed this year.

Art conservation and preservation

Key knowledge
Methods and considerations involved in the conservation and presentation of artworks, including materials, lighting, temperature, storage, presentation and artist intention

Key terms

Conservator: a gallery professional trained to maintain and restore artworks
Conservation: the preservation and restoration of artworks and precious objects
Preservation: the practice of keeping artworks safe and free from decay
**Solander box:** a box designed to safely store flat, unframed works on paper, such as drawings and photographs. Solander boxes are shallow with a hinged lid and are made in a number of different sizes to accommodate different sized artworks. The boxes provide excellent protection from bugs, pests, dust and light. They restrict oxygen, provide stable humidity and temperature and enclose works on paper in an acid-free environment

**Thermohydrograph:** a tool to measure humidity with stretched horse hair and temperature through the expansion of metal

**The role of a conservator**

Conservators are responsible for maintaining and caring for artworks. The role of the conservator is labour-intensive and can be very expensive. Conservators repair damage, stabilise the deterioration process and ensure the preservation and survival of artworks. Conservators require professional training at an academic level and they are constantly conducting research to understand new, innovative techniques. When conserving an artwork they maintain detailed records of processes and treatments administered for future reference. A conservator’s role may also include the mounting and framing of artworks to ensure that they are protected from the natural elements. All conservation work aims to transform the artwork back to its original condition. Conservators show great respect for the integrity of the original materials of the artwork and only use materials and processes that are well researched, stable and will not compromise original material.

Conservators use an amalgamation of old and new techniques and technologies. Equipment used by conservators in the conservation and preservation of artworks may include:

- very small brushes
- hand tools
- fine scalpels
- X-ray machines
- lasers (for cleaning artworks)
- spray guns
- varnish brushes
- cotton swabs
- high-powered microscopes
- fixed pieces of machinery
- computers and selected software programs.

John Payne, Senior Conservator at the National Gallery of Victoria, sees his role in the following way:

‘Our responsibility is to the artists and makers and to the particular artwork in front of us at the time. With a public collection our responsibility extends to the public and the trust they have placed in us to care for our collected heritage.’

**Large public galleries**

Large public galleries such as the National Gallery of Victoria have a team of conservators caring for their artworks. The conservators ensure that artworks on loan do not change or deteriorate while they are on show at the gallery. A detailed condition report is compiled for every artwork entering or leaving a public gallery. This enables conservators to identify any need for maintenance and/or restoration. Smaller public galleries may outsource their conservation to organisations such as the University of Melbourne Conservation Service or to private freelance specialist conservators.
Commercial art gallery

Owners of commercial art galleries may employ a freelance conservator on occasions to ensure that the artworks in their care are stored and exhibited appropriately. If damage occurs, the gallery owner will be required to outsource the restoration process to a freelance conservator. Work in a commercial gallery or stockroom may be turned over (sold) so long-term restorative conservation practices are generally not as relevant, particularly for contemporary works. Exceptions do however exist.

Alternative art spaces

In alternative art spaces, artists may be solely responsible for the conservation of their own artworks. When presenting work in the alternative art space, artists will take into account relevant conservation issues including the safe transportation of the work. The conservation and preservation of new media and Internet-based works is an area which continues to undergo considerable research and development.

Lighting: controlling light exposure

Both natural and artificial light can be damaging to particular works of art. When observing galleries and museum surroundings you may notice that specific sections are designed to minimise and control natural light. These sections are generally areas that house very old or delicate works, such as photographs, works on paper and ancient art objects, paintings and artefacts. Lighting causes the bleaching, fading, yellowing and the discolouration of colours (pigments). Lighting can also weaken paper and natural fibres resulting in severe ageing of particular artworks. To counteract the damage caused by natural light, galleries use artificial light controlled at a range of intensities. The light energy is measured by a lux meter and low wattage is achieved by using tungsten bulbs. Different art forms are shown under different lighting conditions. Some galleries such as the Geelong Art Gallery are fitted with light fittings that filter out ultraviolet (UV) and infra-red (IR) light. Both UV and IR cannot be seen and are not needed when viewing artworks. They are, however, particularly damaging to certain artworks. The following table presents the different art forms together with the amount of lux they should be exhibited under.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High sensitivity</th>
<th>Exhibited at 50 lux</th>
<th>All works on paper and textile items</th>
<th>Photographs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Moderate sensitivity</td>
<td>Exhibited at 150 to 200 lux</td>
<td>Paintings: oil and acrylic</td>
<td>Some plastic items, some mixed-media works</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low sensitivity</td>
<td>Exhibited at 800 lux, or no set limit</td>
<td>Metal, marble sculptures</td>
<td>Wood sculpture, furniture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Glass objects</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Stone ceramics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is more common for public art galleries to use a lux metre to measure light levels as they hold a range of past and contemporary artworks in their collections. Commercial galleries tend to use halogen lights on track systems. In alternative art galleries such as a shop or café, conventional globes, fluorescent and natural light sources may be used as these spaces are not necessarily set up as purpose-built exhibition spaces.

Protecting artworks from light does not just occur when exhibiting work. Lighting is also taken into consideration when storing artworks. Sensitive artworks on paper are generally stored in darkened areas inside solander boxes (refer to the key terms on pages 40–41 for definition). Often artworks exhibited in galleries are exposed to light at the ratio of 1:3. This means that work on show for one month will remain in storage for three months after being exhibited.
Pest control

Pests and rodents are a major concern to art galleries which aim to conserve and preserve their artworks. Examples of pests and rodents include white ants, rats, mice, moths, wood beetles and silverfish. Insects and rodents feed on artworks, and their droppings stain and corrode surfaces of specific artworks. Pests and rodents are attracted to musty, dirty environments with high relative humidity. Galleries deal with the control of pests and rodents by keeping storage areas clean. Other techniques include: fumigation, vacuuming and setting traps. Storage areas in art galleries are regularly and closely monitored and all information regarding the types of insects and rodents found is reported and documented. All new artworks that come into the gallery are checked for insects. Some galleries even have specialised doors that help prevent insects, rodents, dust, dirt and pollution entering the art gallery. The Geelong Art Gallery has an air-lock front door which inhibits dust and insects from entering the building.

Controlling damage caused by humans

As art galleries are places to be enjoyed by society, they attract many people. Walking through particular galleries such as the National Gallery of Victoria International you may notice security guards patrolling the artworks. This is to prevent vandalism and physical contact. Some galleries use alarms that sense physical presence and are set off when someone is in dangerous range of the work. Both visitors and gallery staff are controlled and observed when dealing with priceless artworks.

Storage

The standard of storage areas in art galleries is an important factor in the conservation and preservation of artworks. Good preparation for storage is the key to good preservation. Damage to artworks in the vast majority of cases happens during storage and transportation.

The following table outlines the different storage procedures for various art forms.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Art form</th>
<th>Storage procedures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paintings</td>
<td>Metal racks, Steel cases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sculptures and ceramics</td>
<td>Shelving, Cabinets, Specialised vaults</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Works on paper</td>
<td>Solander boxes, Mounting artworks in acid-free mount board and wrapping them in acid-free tissue paper</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All artworks are stored above floor level in case flooding occurs. Security systems, video monitoring and security guards are used to protect artworks from the public and criminals. Artworks in storage receive regular condition examinations by conservators and other gallery staff. Detailed condition reports are fastidiously maintained to prevent deterioration and to identify restoration needs and requirements. When handling artworks in storage, staff wear cotton gloves to avoid contact with surfaces. Hands contain harmful acids that may damage certain artworks or corrode the surfaces of some metal objects.

Temperature and humidity

Artworks are very vulnerable to changes in the temperature and humidity (the amount of moisture in the air). Temperature and humidity in art galleries can affect artworks in a number of ways depending on the type of material(s) the artwork is made of. The recommended
The temperature of an art gallery is 20–22°C. The gallery environment should be between 55–65 per cent relative humidity. Mould is all around the gallery; however, it begins to grow when it’s above 67 per cent humidity. Galleries use a device called a thermohydrograph to monitor the temperature and humidity. Sophisticated air conditioning systems keep the temperature and humidity consistent.

Artworks are made from:

- **organic materials**, including paper, feathers, wool, leather, cotton
- **inorganic materials**, including non-living things, stone, plastic, metals.

Depending on a gallery’s temperature and relative humidity, the effects on these materials vary, as shown in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>High humidity</th>
<th>Low humidity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organic</strong></td>
<td>Object swells</td>
<td>Objects become brittle and dry out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mould growth</td>
<td>Shrinkage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Staining</td>
<td>Distortion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Distortion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Inorganic</strong></td>
<td>Object may swell and melt</td>
<td>Shrinkage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Distortion/cracking</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**New media art preservation/conservation**

In past societies, culturally significant museum and art objects were generally constructed from materials such as clay, stone, fibre, paper, wood or metal as these were essentially the materials and related technologies that artists and artisans had available to them. Much is therefore known about the conservation and preservation of these materials.

However, the rapidly changing face of technological development in the late 20th and first decade of the 21st century has led to the development of the emerging field of new media preservation and conservation.

Areas of ongoing research and specialisation in this new field include the conservation/preservation of polyester film, magnetic media including video cassettes, hard drives, audio cassette tapes and culturally valuable digital forms such as social networking sites and blogs, online photo albums, websites and email, etc. Web content changes regularly and much information pertinent to art, history and culture may easily be lost forever if strategic approaches to conservation and preservation are not appropriately established.

Whilst new media forms may be easy to access, utilise and modify, they are also subject to the challenge of ongoing obsolescence as technologies are replaced at an unprecedented pace. Whilst material forms such as fabrics and paper may provide identifiable indicators of deterioration, digital data can deteriorate rapidly without warning, and once this process begins, data is irretrievably lost.

Other pertinent issues include digital obsolescence and digital sustainability. Technological developments are occurring so rapidly that devices are constantly being superseded by new and improved ones which may render previous documents irretrievable. Considerable research is being conducted by libraries, museums and galleries to address issues associated with the challenging field of new media conservation.

**Artists’ intentions about the permanence of the artwork**

The ongoing preservation of their original artwork is not a prime concern to some artists, such as Andy Goldsworthy. Many contemporary artists may wish to present work to an audience in an unconventional way. Artists may question the traditional perception of artworks as enduring, precious objects, with alternative ideas about the permanence of artwork. For example, the works of Christo and Jeanne-Claude critique the idea of the permanent art
object, as their works only exist for a brief period of time. Once the alteration to the landscape has been dismantled, only drawings, plans and photographs remain. Proceeds from selling and exhibiting the plans and photographs are used to fund future projects and many people consider these plans and photographs to be artworks in their own right. Questions remain about what it is that constitutes an artwork and whether an artwork needs to be permanent. You may wish to investigate the work of Andy Goldsworthy who presents artworks which are ephemeral in nature, challenging more conventional ideas about the permanence and value of the art object. In such cases, conservation and preservation may not be of relevance to the original art object. The transient, often cyclic existence of such works may be documented and ‘conserved’ photographically.

**Key questions**

1. Why is the conservation of artworks generally of importance? Identify and discuss two methods that are used to ensure the conservation and preservation of artworks.

2. Explain the effects that natural light and pests may have on particular artforms, e.g. textile-based artworks.

3. What is the recommended temperature in a gallery? How is temperature controlled and monitored in a gallery space and why?

4. How are artworks on paper stored to ensure that they are protected from environmental factors?

5. Discuss some of the issues associated with new media art preservation/conservation.

6. Discuss conservation and preservation practices of relevance to the art form(s) you are working in this year.