



SUPERPOSITION

Equilibrium & Engagement

16 March – 11 June, 2018

21st Biennale of Sydney

Exhibition practice

All cultural spaces have conventions that structure how they contain, display, disseminate and circulate artworks and their meanings.

These conventions are physical, intellectual and ideological: they are an interconnected web of invisible assumptions enacted by the conventions of art, museums and heritage culture that constrain what can and can't be made, exhibited, discussed and accessed. Different historical approaches have shaped these spaces and meanings, and artists work both with and against the physical and cultural information contained within, and communicated by, buildings, galleries, institutions, and their shared formal language.

Both the physical spaces and the formal language we use for art construct or critique the dominant meaning of these places, works, ideas and even the audience for contemporary art. We must always ask ourselves: Who can and who can't participate? With a shift in focus, we see that spaces have been designed to exclude – whether physically, culturally, financially, intellectually or through the combined effects of these systems.

Exclusivity can be shaped by how art is discussed: jargon or discourse can seem exclusive on the basis of education, and inaccessible because it describes the

artwork using complex terminology, and privileges one meaning or interpretation over others.

Exclusivity can also be shaped by systems of display: the 'white cube' space of exhibiting can seem alienating because it appears to shut out the outside or 'real' world; gallery spaces can be imposing and unfamiliar or very formal, and often there are no windows or furniture.

Exclusivity is also shaped physically, on a really practical level. Some spaces are not available, for example, to someone using a wheelchair, someone with limited or no vision, or someone with dementia.

These conventions can construct an environment that is rarefied: cultural spaces may feel like they are inaccessible because of the cost to enter, the difficulty of entering, or the idea of the value of the objects they contain; at the same time, the way spaces are policed by signs or security attendants ('don't touch', 'no photography', 'do not enter', et cetera), as well as the imposition of quiet or silence, can be barriers to participation. This is something that most museums are now working to overcome.

As viewers, we might ask ourselves, how does this context for the work contribute to its meaning? And, would it mean the same thing to a visitor whose life experience is different to our own?