

Revenue, relevance and reflecting community: Blockbusters at the Art Galley of NSW

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Abstract

Museums are judged not solely on the basis of their exhibition quality and collection care but, within a corporate model, they are also judged on quantitative measures such as audience numbers and, in turn, their financial viability. Programming has, therefore, become a major focus of forward planning and the basis for funding development. Blockbuster exhibitions, strategically placed throughout annual programs, have been a common way to increase audience numbers and sustain support. In more recent times, the blockbuster model has developed to address more complex measures of success beyond their quantifiable benefits. In addition to the aim of increasing visitor numbers, the blockbuster exhibition and its associated public and education programs, have been effectively utilized as a means of broadening and diversifying audiences. Such efforts help museums to meet expectations, often set by governments, to address and reflect the diverse demographic communities within which they are situated and to whom they serve.

The Art Gallery of New South Wales (AGNSW) in Australia provides one such example of a museum that is working creatively within the blockbuster model in order to present exhibitions that build on their collection strengths and existing programs, attract large audiences and engage diverse audiences by focusing on community building. This paper uses the AGNSW blockbuster exhibition *The First Emperor: China's Entombed Warriors*, to examine the role of this format in contemporary museums more broadly. We use this exhibition as a frame by which to analyse how the Gallery has modified the blockbuster model, and indeed built on it, in order to target geographically and culturally diverse audiences. We argue that this has been effectively achieved as a result of the Gallery building blockbusters around their curatorial and collection strengths, by working with external organizations and community groups and by offering a range of activities and opportunities for engagement both within the museum and outside of its boundaries. This exhibition proves that when blockbusters are used creatively to support museum wide efforts to engage culturally and linguistically diverse audiences they can achieve success that is both quantitative and qualitative.

Key words: Blockbuster, multiculturalism, Terracotta Warriors, social inclusion, public programs, community.

Introduction

Museums are judged not solely on the basis of their exhibition quality and collection care but, within a corporate model, they are also judged on quantitative measures such as audience numbers and, in turn, their financial viability. Programming has, therefore, become a major focus of forward planning and the basis for funding development. Blockbuster exhibitions, strategically placed throughout annual programs, have been a common way to increase

audience numbers and sustain support. In recent times, the blockbuster model has been developed to address more complex measures of success. In addition to the aim of increasing visitor numbers, blockbusters and their associated public and education programs have been effectively utilized as a means of broadening and diversifying audiences. Such efforts help museums to meet expectations, often set by government funders, to address and reflect the diverse communities within which they are situated and to whom they serve. This article will begin by defining the key traits of blockbuster exhibitions, paying particular attention to their importance within the Australian gallery sector. In doing so, it will consider the broader aims and benefits of working within this format and will also identify some of the negative aspects. It will then focus on the innovative use of the blockbuster exhibition as employed by the Art Gallery of New South Wales (AGNSW), in Sydney, analysing how they have developed the model in an attempt to meet more specific targets such as attracting culturally and linguistically diverse audiences. Finally, the paper will focus on an example from the Art Gallery, *The First Emperor: China's Entombed Warriors*, as a lens through which to analyse the strategies they have employed to widen the scope of the blockbuster and expand its appeal. We ultimately argue that while there have been some modifications to the format of the blockbuster, and indeed a broadening of the subject matter covered by these exhibitions, it is the complementary programs that have been most successfully utilized as a means of engaging and including communities of interest. In art museums like the AGNSW, this approach provides a means of retaining the authority of the institution – and the academic and aesthetically focused nature of their exhibitions – while simultaneously allowing for a relinquishing of their authority in other areas. While it is not necessarily the wholesale collaborative approach that has been championed by museologists (Golding and Modest 2013) in recent times, it does represent a shift in approach that has been integrated into the fabric of the institution and has become the foundation upon which future advances can be built.

On a cursory inspection, the *First Emperor* was a quintessential blockbuster exhibition held in the major temporary space at the Gallery. It was heavily promoted, received substantial corporate and government sponsorship and occurred over the traditional peak period for visitation, across summer 2010–2011. As is standard for blockbusters, the exhibit promised a close up glimpse of rare objects. It collaborated with 13 institutions in Shaanxi province to source a group of terracotta warriors and horses together with over 100 tomb relics and some of the most recent discoveries of life size bronze cranes and swans from the tombs at Xi'an (AGNSW 2011: 4). The exhibit was curated in-house by the Gallery's then director, Edmund Capon, and Dr Liu Yang, then senior curator of Chinese Art. It was designed by the architect Richard Johnson who established a dark and dramatic space with strong lighting stressing the rarity and beauty of the objects on show. However, when it is contextualized within the wider history of non-canonical blockbuster exhibitions at the AGNSW and its investment in the development of a strong Asian Art collection, it can be seen as one of a group of shows that have been presented within a modified blockbuster model in order to suit broader Gallery aims.

Defining Blockbusters and their ongoing relevance

The Australian art historian, Sasha Grishin (2009) has described blockbuster exhibitions as a 'drug of dependency for the major art galleries' and in Australia the format has been highly successful since the early 1970s (Turner 2011). Their addictive qualities have hinged on the revenue raising potential of such shows, as well as the increased exposure for the host museum. As Emma Barker has argued, they are 'a scholarly endeavour which serves to educate and entertain the public, bringing prestige and profit to the host institution' (Barker 1999: 127). While Barker indicates why museums might seek to stage blockbusters, Albert Elsen has provided another definition of blockbusters as being about attracting audiences, both new and large. He noted in 1984 that they are 'a large scale exhibition that people who normally don't go to museums will stand in line for hours to see' (Elsen 1984: 1). Shearer West has seen their appeal to a popular market, and as such their potential to attract new audiences, as one of the innate contradictions of the blockbuster model. Borrowing from Charles Jencks, West (1995: 74-5) argues that the blockbuster represents a form of 'double-coding' in which they are both sites of 'the exclusivity of high culture and the consumerist populism of heterogeneous culture.' This

paper argues that it is this very paradox of the blockbuster that enables them to remain relevant within an art museum context. For it enables the museum to engage in a populist dialogue that utilizes 'commercialization, hyperbole and sensationalism' (West 1995: 90) on the one hand but it does so within the comfortable realm of an existing academic model on the other. In order to generate this sensationalism, many blockbuster exhibitions rely on high profile artists and delicately negotiated loans – from either private or other public collections – that provide the hook for marketers to lure in potential visitors with the promise of never before, or rarely seen objects on show for a limited period of time. As Jim Berryman (2013) has also noted, this marketing opportunity is another vital characteristic of the blockbuster exhibition. He states that these shows are 'Professionally presented and accompanied with glossy catalogues and merchandise... heavily sponsored, aggressively promoted' (Berryman 2013: 159).

When considered in this manner, the blockbuster exhibition is, in essence, a commercial venture. They present opportunities for income generation by capitalizing on audience appeal. In the most immediate sense, this is realized through the sale of tickets, merchandise and memberships but opportunities for income generation are varied. In Australia, institutions can take advantage of the enthusiasm of governments to fund cultural activities that will benefit the local economy, particularly by attracting a significant tourist component. The Sydney International Art Series is a partnership between the AGNSW, the Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA) and the New South Wales state government that commenced in 2010 and was designed specifically to bring large-scale blockbuster exhibitions to Sydney. In that year, they bought the *First Emperor* to the AGNSW and a retrospective exhibition of Annie Leibovitz to the MCA. This partnership has since its inception generated 'more than \$80 million in new money... for the State.' Blockbusters are undeniably big business and such government partnerships are in line with broader debates about the economic benefits of staging such events in terms of 'real growth effects' (Skinner 2006). One of the most significant potentials for growth can be found in their ability to draw first time visitors to these institutions. The *First Emperor* and the *Annie Leibovitz* exhibition were both very successful in this respect with both exhibits attracting around a quarter of first time visitors to their venues. This helps such exhibitions to fit within the corporate mission and objectives of their host institution to fulfil goals for long-term audience development.

This ability to draw in a substantial crowd also translates into an opportunity to present current scholarship to a large number of visitors. By presenting this scholarship in an accessible format, that is, in a way that people who don't usually visit museums will appreciate, the blockbuster can help to fulfil the educational purpose of that institution by providing opportunities for free will learning. In this way, blockbusters can enable museums to extend their educational capacity beyond their loyal supporters to reach a broader audience who is often not attracted by regular, collections-based, shows. This educative potential is further reinforced by the fact that almost all blockbuster exhibitions are accompanied by a lengthy catalogue, which can position the subject matter of the show within a more scholarly context. Moreover, visitors buy these catalogues. The AGNSW sold 15,000 catalogues for its *First Emperor* exhibition, which equated to the entire print run (AGNSW 2011: 16). As Barker has argued, museums can produce these tomes in large numbers to meet demand and in turn they are 'often much more affordable than other well-illustrated art books' (Barker 1999: 133). They, therefore, represent an important extension of the educative function of the exhibition sitting somewhere between the academic realm and that of popular culture through their combination of numerous high quality images, object entries and scholarly debate. In addition, there is ample opportunity to generate education and public programs to support blockbuster exhibitions which can further extend the content presented in the exhibition and can go some way to converting first time visitors into loyal museum followers. While West (1995: 75) argues that these exhibitions take an academic approach which can 'alienate the majority of the population', when seen in relation to the entire suite of exhibition collateral and programs that run alongside blockbusters, this exclusive academic platform is considerably eroded.

Finally, blockbusters facilitate cross-institutional exchange, allowing host institutions to showcase objects beyond the scope of their own collection. This is crucial in Australia where the format helps to address the geographical isolation and relative youth of many

Australian collections. The significance of these linkages is twofold. First, relationships with other institutions enable museums to host exclusive exhibitions in order to attract the large audiences (and economic potential) discussed above. Secondly, such partnerships help to establish the reputation of Australian institutions globally and in turn promote their own collections, staff expertise and standards of practice. Beyond this, blockbusters have the potential to facilitate relationships outside of the cultural sector and in Australia they have played an important diplomatic role. Berryman (2013) has argued that when such exhibitions emerged in Australia in the 1970s they were used to advance national political interests. Berryman writes convincingly of a movement in Australia that used the blockbuster as a space for soft political power, with the national government actively providing insurance, financial and policy support. Importantly, from the very early times there has been an emphasis on developing ties with close neighbours in the Asia Pacific region including China. They have, therefore, always had an emphasis on facilitating partnerships in addition to being purely academic and educative projects. It has only been in more recent years in Australia (Berryman suggests from the 1990s onwards) that the focus has shifted to include ambitions for domestic tourism and local audience development. We will go on to show that the emphasis on the relationship building potential of blockbuster exhibitions has resulted in a merging of diplomatic and economic goals alongside the development of relationships with local communities of interest within the AGNSW's staging of the First Emperor exhibition. There, the blockbuster format was used to foster stronger diplomatic links in addition to addressing a local audience by reflecting the demographics that now characterize the city of Sydney.

Against the positives opportunities of blockbuster exhibitions outlined so far there are, of course, significant risks or negative aspects of the format (Bradburne 2001). Globally, these tend to be centred on cost and resourcing issues which have long been identified as aspects which could lead to the death of the blockbuster (Barker 1999: 128). The increasing cost of transport, insurance, and risk management is problematic and potentially unsustainable. Enthusiasm for the format is also now tempered by a growing awareness of their environmental footprint (Lambert and Henderson 2011). Another aspect of ongoing debate relates to the challenges of balancing ambitions for scholarly work against the realities and pressures of generating strong audience numbers and being a successful competitor in the leisure market. This element in particular has led to a virtual standardization of types of blockbusters with a few key themes often repeated. West (1995: 90) has argued that art blockbusters have been limited to a handful of canonical western art stars providing an opportunity for visitors to 'worship at the shrine of great art.' Across museums more broadly, the subject matter includes rare treasures of ancient civilizations and has expanded in recent years to include celebrations of popular culture focused on movies or pop stars. This high turnover of crowd pleasing shows can mean that visitors often only attend museums, as Bradburne (2001) has argued, when 'something's on', which can draw attention away from their everyday work. Cultural institutions must, therefore, balance the resources needed to stage blockbusters against the resources they devote to collection-based shows, research and in turn collection care and conservation. This, coupled with the substantial costs of blockbusters, means that even with extensive reliance on sponsorship, they are by no means a guaranteed positive return and can be detrimental to an institution's overall budget (Bradburne 2001; Skinner 2006; Boland 2010).

A final negative, which must not be underestimated, is the actual physical experience of the visitors when viewing objects within this large-scale, often crowded, format. The consequences here, as Barker (1999: 140) has suggested, are considerable. First, due to the large scale nature of these exhibitions the visitor is often fatigued which has a detrimental effect on their experience of the exhibition and the narrative it attempts to establish. Secondly, because of their high volume of visitors it is difficult to have an intimate and concentrated experience with the objects on show. As West (1995: 90) has eloquently put it, 'the overwhelming spectacle of crowds, queues and commodities prevent them from engaging meaningfully with the works on display.' Such negative physical experiences could have a harmful impact on overall visitor perceptions and could reduce repeat visitation, particularly by new audience segments that institutions are so keen to retain.

Expanding the field: Blockbusters at the Art Gallery of New South Wales

Despite these challenges in Australia, as elsewhere, blockbusters remain central to the work of museums and galleries. The AGNSW has been a vanguard subscriber to this exhibition format, being a host venue for some of the first exhibitions of this type in Australia. In 1975, it was part of the touring program for Modern masters: Manet to Matisse, and in 1977 it hosted The Chinese exhibition: a selection of recent archaeological finds of The People's Republic of China. The latter exhibition attracted a considerable audience of 227,080 people making it the most successful exhibition held at the Gallery during the 1970s (AGNSW 2009: 10). It was closely followed by the, then, director Edmund Capon's own special project Qin Shihuang: Terracotta Warriors and Horses in 1983, which was remarkably the first ever exhibition of the terracotta warriors outside of China. Unlike The Chinese Exhibition of 1977, Qin Shihuang was curated and organized in-house by the AGNSW in collaboration with Chinese officials. In Sydney, it attracted a substantial 202,583 visitors before it successfully toured around Australia (AGNSW 2009: 10). The exhibition also represented a broader political symbolism as it marked ten years since the establishment of diplomatic relations between Australia and China (Capon 1982: 4). As a counterpoint to West's claims about the limited subject matter of blockbusters, the AGNSW can be seen as an early innovator through their presentation of exhibitions from outside of the canon of western modern art. In doing so, the Gallery also attempted to demonstrate their cultural literacy and speak to the growing multicultural population of Sydney. This has continued and is now in line with government policy with the AGNSW bound to adhere to the principles of multiculturalism stated in the 'Community Relations Commission and principles of Multiculturalism Act of 2000'. These principles recognize and value the cultural and linguistic diversity of the local population and seek to facilitate participation by all members of the community in an inclusive fashion. Adherence to these principles can be seen at all levels of the Gallery's activities – through collection development, exhibitions and programs. As Capon identified in the Gallery's Corporate Plan, it was their aim to 'share' the work of the Gallery and indeed 'engage' an 'increasingly broad and diverse community' (AGNSW 2010). The foundation upon which this engagement was based was their strong collection of Asian art and curatorial expertise.

The AGNSW's collection of Asian art dates back to the years of its foundation when objects were gifted in 1879 by the Japanese government. In 1972, a dedicated space was opened to show the expanding collection and an Asian curatorial department was established in 1979 (Guy 1981). This coincided with the appointment of Capon, a passionate scholar of Asian art, as Director of the Gallery. He prioritized the collection and exhibition of Asian art as a core part of the institution's identity stressing its importance to the future of the Gallery:

It is wholly appropriate that Sydney, and indeed Australia, should become increasingly aware of her Asian neighbours. An appreciation of those countries' histories and cultures is fundamental to the establishment of a rapport and understanding from which we all shall benefit. (Capon 1979: 3)

Capon's statement and the expansion of the Gallery in this direction, reflects shifts in Australian identity and its political and cultural agenda.

This was reinforced in their exhibition program which, based on their curatorial expertise, meant that they were well placed to use the blockbuster format to develop new audiences for Asian art. They have been leaders in this area since the 1980s. Caroline Turner noted that it was then that the:

AGNSW took a major lead in presenting Asian exhibitions. The NGV [National Gallery of Victoria] at the time had the more important collection of Asian art, but it was the AGNSW that began to present an array of exciting Asian historical exhibitions, including from China, Japan and India. (Turner 2011)

Prioritizing art outside of the canon can be seen as a way of celebrating difference and community diversity, countering what Sandell (2002: 8) has described as 'the museum's part in excluding stereotyping or silencing difference through the selection, arrangement and public display of objects.'

Asian art and cultural themes have been a regular feature of the blockbuster schedule at the AGNSW. This demonstrates their sustained desire to engage with diverse communities while the accompanying public programs provide an opportunity to build more meaningful relationships with multicultural audiences. This trend starts with *The Chinese Exhibition* and *Qin Shihuang* discussed earlier, and is then evident in a number of large-scale exhibitions including *Dancing to the Flute: Music and Dance in Indian Art* (1997). This was followed by *BUDDHA: Radiant Awakening* (2001–2002), which was the first blockbuster supported by VisAsia, the Gallery's dedicated sponsorship group whose aim is to promote the appreciation of Asian visual arts and culture through exhibitions, events and education. Other shows that could be grouped in this series include *Goddess Divine Energy* (2006–2007), the externally curated *Arts of Islam: The Nasser D Khalili Collection* (2007) and the most recent *The First Emperor: China's Entombed Warriors*. As a group of exhibits, they demonstrate the serious investment that the Gallery has made in this curatorial area. They also demonstrate their eagerness to engage new audiences by generating an accessible and attractive space for cultural communities. As Capon remarked to Ien Ang in an interview in 2001, it still remains an important challenge:

Our problem is very clear, that we don't get the Chinese community in here. We don't get the Indian community in here. We don't get the Vietnamese community in here; we just don't do it. Somehow, you see, we're perceived to be a kind of European cultural institution. (Ang 2005: 315)

To combat this, each exhibition specifically targeted a segment of the community underrepresented in the Gallery's standard audience but who are well established in the community. For example, these shows were aimed at some of the major migrant groups in the greater Sydney region which, in the 2011 census, included people from China, India and Vietnam amongst its top five. The marketing and development of public programs and events involved community participants and were used as a platform to focus on community harmony understanding and encouraging access. There is an extensive body of literature about social inclusion in museums (Sandell 2002; Watson 2007; Crooke 2008; Golding and Modest 2013) and the AGNSW allows us to consider what museums are actually doing in this area and more importantly how are they incorporating these principles into their everyday practice.

Experimentation within the Blockbuster

This sequence of blockbuster exhibitions were firmly integrated within the identity of the Gallery – borrowing all of the traditional language and forms deployed for their more customary, canonical, counterparts. In this sense the exhibits, like any large scale exhibition at the Gallery, became an 'experience' that offered a full calendar of associated events and programs aimed at providing physical and intellectual access to the widest possible audience. Furthermore, in colonizing the mainstream blockbuster spaces, they symbolically and literally shifted the Gallery's identity, as reflected in their programming, and in turn set new ambitions to become more inclusive. *The First Emperor* benefited from the Gallery's experience with the blockbuster format generally and the innovation that has occurred in relation to Asian themed blockbusters more particularly.

One of these exhibitions, *BUDDHA: Radiant Awakening*, demonstrates a number of these important innovations. The Gallery used it as a forum to advance understandings of Buddhist art and Buddhism more generally in addition to expanding audience diversity. Key experimentations included the incorporation of a community space, a program of community guiding in first language and opening the Gallery outside of traditional hours.

BUDDHA was the first blockbuster to incorporate a community space within the main exhibition gallery. This 'Wisdom room' was set aside for Buddhist community associations to inhabit and engage with visitors sharing their own knowledge and experience of Buddhism. According to Ang, this tactic was particularly successful in making the exhibit more inclusive as it brought these communities inside the space of the dominant culture and showcased the diversity of Buddhist practice in the Sydney region (Ang 2005: 314). Ang (2005) praised its efforts to break down some of the barriers that can discourage attendance and celebrated

its capacity to offer a more meaningful engagement with the subject matter of the exhibition. Thus, shifting the focus away from the authority of the Gallery and towards a more participatory model in which the dissemination of information was not always regulated.

The exhibition was also a forum for their first experimentation with the use of volunteers to offer community language led tours. Importantly, they were designed to help encourage 'new visitors across the threshold' (MacArthur 2005). For its champion at the Gallery, Ann MacArthur, it has become an exercise in 'stimulating cultural citizenship' (MacArthur 2005), a perspective which is in line with Sandell's ideas of the museum's capacity to engender 'engendering 'a sense of place and belonging' (2002: 3). The tours were extremely successful and quickly incorporated into the Gallery's regular offerings under the banner of the 'Community Ambassadors program'. From 2003 to 2014 this program has been responsible for introducing 12,000 new visitors to the Gallery (Community Ambassadors at Ten, 2014: 26). Perhaps more importantly, the Community Ambassadors program has helped to develop a sustained relationship with non-English speaking audiences who comprise a significant proportion of the community. Currently tours are offered in Cantonese, Mandarin, Japanese and Korean with plans to expand the program further. By speaking to communities in their own language, this program can offer a highly personalized experience, facilitated by the committed volunteers who are strong advocates for the Gallery. As one participant commented: 'I can't believe I am hearing someone talk to me about art in my own language' (Sykes 2004: 10). The Gallery's commitment in this area reflects international trends in museums, which are increasingly recognizing that language is a considerable barrier to access and participation. Nightingale's research reinforces this by highlighting the value of working with dedicated community members as well as the use of community languages in facilitating access for culturally and linguistically diverse audiences. (Nightingale 2006)

The final innovation to come out of the *BUDDHA* exhibition was the commencement of the 'Art After Hours' program. This consisted of opening the Gallery outside of usual business hours to present a program of celebrity lectures exploring 'new and diverse ways Buddhism has impacted on Western society'. The event was highly successful attracting 4,500 visitors (AGNSW 2002: 20). It has now become a stalwart of their programming and has expanded to include a variety of points of access such as film programs, music, performances, celebrity lectures, art appreciation lectures and food – all thematically aligned with the main exhibition. Staff at the Gallery credit its success to more than 'Simply keeping the gallery open after 5pm... You really have to peg it to something that's social but also makes the art relevant.' This focus on demonstrating the relevance of their exhibitions within such social settings provides another example of how the Gallery has relinquished some of its authority. It has become a more inclusive place in which space is given over to the expression of a diversity of perspectives through a range of contributors. This type of experience, as Andrea Witcomb (2006: 360) has argued, involves the museum clearly considering the needs of their audience and the benefit of interacting with them. She suggests that it signals 'a willingness to recognize differences in values and claims to knowledge, and a desire to develop partnerships between the museum as an institution and the audiences which use it' (Witcomb 2006: 360). This is further reinforced when, as was the case with the *BUDDHA* exhibition, previously underrepresented communities are invited to control how their perspective is represented on the public stage that is the museum.

The First Emperor and Community Engagement

With this understanding of the Gallery's attempts to become more accessible through non-canonical blockbuster exhibitions and their associated programs it is possible to position the *First Emperor* as more than simply a populist show with an exclusively economic imperative. Rather, it can be seen as a continuation of the Gallery's strategy, as established above, to use blockbuster exhibitions to reach out to new audience segments and broaden participation. It did this by employing a variety of modes of address within their marketing, programming, exhibition design and collateral.

The first indication that the Gallery was seeking to attract diverse communities was seen in the marketing of the exhibition and its associated events. The range of visitor experiences available – and in turn the inclusivity of those events – was reinforced throughout the marketing

campaign, which sought to entice a broad audience. In doing so, it included traditional forms of publicity like advertising and editorial in major newspapers. The Gallery also capitalized on community-based media outlets and events in order to develop an awareness of the exhibition beyond their usual networks and establish a relationship with potential visitors before they entered the space. Within this campaign, Chinese-speaking audiences were explicitly targeted. The Gallery advertised the show nationally in the Australian Chinese Daily and Sing Tao Daily – currently the largest circulating Chinese language daily newspapers in Australia. According to the Gallery's Media Relations Manager they were also able to extend their advertising coverage to other media outlets including a substantial radio component through the support of Events New South Wales. This saw the show promoted on Chinese language radio stations including 2CRN China Radio Network, SBS Radio-Cantonese, SBS Radio-Mandarin and 2AC (Mandarin and Cantonese). As a result of this investment, the show also received a considerable amount of editorial attention beyond the mainstream media. For example, it was featured in an extensive front page piece in the Australian New Express Daily which also included an article on the show itself and a full page profile on the Gallery's Senior Curator of Chinese Art, Yang (2010). The exhibit also featured in other Chinese popular press including Oriental BQ Magazine (2010) and Vie Lifestyle Magazine (2011). This attempt to literally speak the language of the targeted audience was further built upon in the physical design of the exhibition itself. The didactic panels in the show included the use of bilingual elements, as did the exhibition catalogue. As a recent study on bilingual exhibitions has noted:

[Language] signifies cultural identity, prestige, and power, defining social boundaries that include and exclude... Bilingual exhibits don't just make content accessible to wider audiences, [they] carry symbolic value conveying who belongs in our learning institutions.' (Renner et.al. 2012: 14)

Such inclusions are rare in exhibitions in Australia and, as such, demonstrate the investment that the Gallery made in seeking to change their mode of address and thus present themselves as more inclusive of Chinese speaking audiences.

Another strategy for the expansion of audience can be seen in the engagement of community groups in the delivery of public programs. Like the Community Ambassadors discussed above, the people engaged to deliver those programs can be transformed into advocates of both the exhibition and the Gallery, again serving to minimize the barriers to access through familiarity at the point of access. The desire to develop programs that 'extend existing audiences and build new audiences, particularly in under-represented groups' (AGNSW 2010) was a strategic priority of the Gallery identified in their corporate plan. This strategy was evident in the adaptation of existing programs but also in the formulation of new events specifically for this exhibition. Art After Hours was one of the existing program formats that was adapted to the themes of the exhibition. These evenings were unified by a thematic focus on China and its heritage, as evident in Australian culture, with a particular emphasis on the experience of being Chinese-Australian. The aim of these events was to locate the themes of the warrior exhibition within a local and contemporary context. Thus, the main hall of the Gallery became the venue for a series of 'special celebrity talks' offering a personal reflection on the exhibition themes and contemporary Chinese identity, which involved community leaders and well-known identities. The cafe was transformed into the Shanghai Nights Bar where visitors could extend their cultural experience into a culinary adventure through the contemporary dim sum menu. The cafe space also became a venue for performances by musicians like master bamboo flute player Chai Chang Ning. Finally, a free film series was presented that interrogated cinematic representations of Chinese history. By offering a range of activities; cultural, culinary, entertainment and education, the Gallery reflects shifts in the provision of leisure services in which, as Falk (2009: 43) has argued, 'we engage in a blending of goals and activities through a kind of consumptive multitasking.' Working within this existing event timeslot meant that regular gallery goers could still expect a comparable experience and the Gallery thus ensured that they would not exclude their loyal visitor base. But these events also included specific community groups in their delivery and were marketed to those groups in an attempt to develop new audiences.

This strategy of community involvement was most clearly implemented during one of the

unique programming opportunities for the exhibition – a full weekend of activities associated with Lunar New Year. The Gallery recognized that this was a core part of the community's calendar and they framed this weekend as a major highlight of the First Emperor exhibition. Over the weekend, they hosted a large number of activities including performances, demonstrations, workshops and tours. Many of these programs, such as the fan dancing workshop, depended on the participation of invited community groups to lead performances and participatory workshops. These groups were often based in the outer suburbs of Sydney – well outside of the Gallery's traditional visitor catchment area. Such events are noteworthy because not only did they provide an opportunity for the performers to familiarize themselves with the Gallery (and perhaps invite friends and family), they also provided an opportunity for the Gallery's regular loyal audience to actively participate in these programs. These events, therefore, created a 'cross-cultural contact zone of sorts, a space where encounters between groups with very unequal sources of power and disparate cultural identities could take place' (Ang 2005: 314). The importance of this strategy is first, to get new visitors into the space in an effort to become a more accessible institution and secondly, to encourage community harmony and cultural understanding through the shared experience of each program. As Serena Iervolino (2013: 121) has argued, in relation to a similar program of community engagement, such a process is ultimately empowering because it transforms the performers from having a passive relationship with the museum and instead positions them in an active role in which they are crucial to the 'shaping and sharing [of] knowledge.' Moreover, through the broad reaching platform of the museum, this participatory model enables community members to address not just 'members of their communities or families but rather the entire society' (Iervolino 2013: 121).

The crowds that were expected for the Lunar New Year weekend event (and to see the exhibition generally) meant that conducting programs within the actual exhibition space was difficult and deemed too high a risk to the objects. This, however, also represented an opportunity for the Gallery to present themselves as a more accessible place by allowing the whole building to be populated, and co-opted into the service of public programs beginning at the front steps and permeating all of the main halls of the Gallery. The result was a festive atmosphere in which the performers and participants literally colonized the building, transforming it from the quiet, contemplative space that we usually associate with art galleries into a much more vibrant, social, fun and welcoming environment. Such efforts to create a welcoming social space correlate with the desires of non-museum visitors, as identified by Falk, who indicated a preference for 'feeling comfortable and at ease in one's surroundings, doing something worthwhile, and being with people' (Falk 2009: 49). By offering a range of group-based social activities within this festive environment the Gallery can be seen to be addressing the desires of this desired audience segment.

At the conclusion of events on Sunday, visitors were encouraged to leave the Gallery and head to the Sydney Town Hall for the commencement of the city's Twilight Parade. This is a key part of Sydney's Chinese New Year Festival, which is widely recognized as the largest of its kind outside of Asia (City of Sydney 2010: 3). Here, the Gallery literally took the First Emperor exhibition to the streets with a dedicated float featuring their own Entombed Warrior and a complement of Gallery representatives. Their participation marketed the exhibition to another audience and highlighted its relevance to Chinese communities and those interested in Chinese culture more generally. In linking with this event, the Gallery was actively positioned within the wider cultural landscape of the city and thus their reach was expanded.

Hosting this weekend represented a huge commitment in terms of resources and staff but it resulted in spectacular success attracting 13,000 participants (AGNSW 2011: 25). There is a strong claim to be made for the packaging of public program events within a festival context as a means of attempting to overcome social exclusion and attract visitors from underrepresented regions. The traditional audience for the Gallery has come from the more affluent Eastern and Northern suburbs of Sydney with people from Western Sydney being an identified underrepresented audience segment (AGNSW 2011: 20). Western Sydney is known to be a particularly diverse region of the city with migrants representing one third of its overall population and 'half of the world's nations... represented among its residents.' A recent study authored by Multicultural Marketing and Management (MMM) for Arts NSW, geographically focused on Western Sydney, surveyed people who had been designated as non-attendees –

those who do not regularly attend museums or cultural activities more broadly. The study found that these non-attendees would be more willing to attend festivals than other cultural events. It concluded that more than two thirds of non-attendees (66.8 per cent) would be likely to attend a festival in the next 12 months compared with only a quarter (26.6 per cent) of respondents likely to attend an art gallery (MMM 2009: 41). Promoting festival based programs within a gallery can, therefore, be seen as a strategic effort to attract non-attendees. It is also in line with current trends in the leisure industry in which 'experiences are being packaged in ways that enable us to bundle leisure together with "cultural and intellectual enrichment"' (Falk 2009: 43). If one of the goals of the exhibition was to appeal to a diverse audience, presenting programs in an attractive festival setting and including performers from underrepresented regions can be seen as a clear strategy for diversification.

Innovation alongside the blockbuster

While events on a grand scale can attract large audiences, there is little scope to generate intimate and individual experiences when presenting such activities. This was addressed by the Gallery in what can be seen as the last innovation of the First Emperor exhibition. This was not a feature of the exhibition itself but rather a decision by the Gallery to host a concurrent show on a related theme within the Asian Gallery's temporary exhibition space. This show, *Homage to the Ancestors Ritual art from the Chu Kingdom*, was a smaller, more specialist scholarly exhibition which ran from February to late April 2011. Here, outside of the blockbuster space, they were able to create a more intimate setting in which to experience Chinese art that was closely aimed at attracting a Chinese speaking audience. This is evidenced by the promotion of a regular program of weekly Community Ambassador led tours which were well attended and provided an opportunity for participation that was simply not possible in the larger First Emperor show. Because of the close relationship between the two exhibitions, many of these public programs were marketed as being relevant to both shows. This meant that the smaller scale public programs with a specialist interest, such as the Community Ambassador tours, could still serve to familiarize new audiences with the Gallery spaces in the hope of encouraging repeat visitation in future. This exhibition was also the host of the annual *VisAsia Hing Yiu Mok* Mandarin language lecture, which was given by Wan Quanwen, the Deputy Director of the Hubei Provincial Museum as part of the Chinese New Year celebrations at the Gallery. Not only did this lecture appeal to Mandarin speakers and the academic community but it also served to firm up the relationship between the Gallery, Sydney City Council and the Chinese province of Hubei, who were partners in both the exhibition and the city-wide New Year festival.

The wider lessons from the approach taken at the Art Gallery of New South Wales

From these examples, it is clear that blockbuster exhibitions can fulfil a number of important functions for museums and galleries and, although the case is presented from an Australian perspective, the lessons are by no means confined to this context. As institutions in Australia and internationally are increasingly forced to generate their own revenue – and do so in a manner that reflects their mission, collection and communities – the AGNSW provides a model for building on established income generating opportunities, like the blockbuster exhibition, in order to make them more relevant to missions and markets while exploiting institutional knowledge and collection strengths. Such exhibitions provide vital opportunities for museums to attract large audiences and can generate revenue in the face of diminishing government support but, as we have seen, they can also fulfil objectives around appealing to new, diverse and previously underrepresented audience segments.

Statistics from the AGNSW confirm that this exhibition did attract an expanded audience beyond their standard demographic profile. In fact, the number of visitors from Western Sydney equalled the number of visitors from their usual geographical stalwarts (AGNSW 2011: 20). Moreover, 54 per cent of visitors came from outside of the Sydney Metropolitan area and 33 per cent were visiting the Gallery for the first time, specifically to see the *Warriors* exhibition (AGNSW 2011: 19). Although it did attract a wider segment of the population, the test for the Gallery in the longer term is whether they can retain the relationship with these new visitors, transforming them into loyal followers. It is in this regard that the promotion of their permanent

collection, as a key centre for Asian art, their investment in Community Ambassadors and their ongoing range of smaller temporary exhibitions will take on even more importance in maintaining relationships with communities.

The innovations implemented to attract this diverse audience have been incremental, sustained and integrated into the corporate structure of the Gallery. They may be seen as conservative, and certainly do not constitute a wholesale relinquishing of the authority of the museum. It is arguable, however, that their approach has the potential to be more sustainable as is woven into the fabric of the institution. This has been further reinforced in the new Director's vision for the Gallery. Under the Direction of Michael Brand, who was appointed in mid-2012, it is hoped that the Gallery will expand to enable increased space for major national and international exhibitions as well as the permanent collection. In addition, they have identified a desire for further innovation in the areas of community engagement through education as well as new forms of participation – all goals that we have seen developed around *The First Emperor: China's Entombed Warriors*. It will be vital for the Gallery to ensure that in the coming years they continue to build on their incremental approach in order to further develop meaningful engagements with communities. Without such continued effort, these early advances may be dismissed in future as simply paying lip service to engagement strategies or, in the words of Lynch and Alberti, 'participation-lite' (2010: 17).

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