

# ArtsHub

## There's a fair in there: our guide to Melbourne Art Week

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**CATHERINE ASQUITH**

A sense of community spirit and collaboration sees Melbourne's visual arts community step up to fill the void left by the collapse of Melbourne Art Fair.



*Image: Louise Paramor, Jam Session #6, 2016, found plastics, 30 x 30 x 60cm, Courtesy: the artist and Karen Woodbury Gallery. Showing @ SPRING 1883.*

Exactly two decades ago I bought my first artwork, from an art fair held in Melbourne: the Australian Contemporary Art Fair or ACAF (later to become of course, the Melbourne Art Fair). This was its fifth edition, and my visit was a very tentative initiation into the art world. Were it not for the clearly, good cheer of the gallerist at the time – I asked for shock-horror, “lay-by” – together with a palpable celebratory atmosphere, I may well have never bought the work, and perhaps not ventured into the gallery circuit quite as promptly thereafter.

For the uninitiated, the art fair model or art event, these occasional 'pop-ups' scattered throughout the calendar year, may be viewed as a type of user-friendly adjunct to the more formal gallery infrastructure, and perhaps in a way, yield to the public sensibility of 'browsing'. Less obvious maybe is the aspect of 'audience participation' at these types of events; one's attendance actually constitutes a conscious decision to engage with the visual arts. It's certainly a step in the right direction to unravelling the sometimes complex or challenging nuances of the contemporary art scene.

The 2016 Melbourne Art Fair was cancelled earlier this year after after several galleries withdrew their applications to participate.

**Read: Melbourne Art Fair cancelled in shock announcement**  
**(<http://http://visual.artshub.com.au/news-article/news/visual-arts/gina-fairley/melbourne-art-fair-cancelled-in-shock-announcement-250564>)**

But, in what can only be described as an extremely positive manifestation of 'community spirit', some enterprising individuals and collectives from the Melbourne visual arts sector have initiated and will be hosting a virtual plethora of art and art-related events in the third week of August this year, at the time the big fair had been scheduled to occur

Satellite fairs, art events and artist talks, forums and panel discussions, a street party, an "arts-speed-dating" event curated exhibitions and even an arts-related, "progressive tasting degustation", will be happening. What's not to like?

## **602**

602 (<http://www.602melbourne.com.au/>) (17 – 21 August) is the culmination of a small group of commercial galleries from both Melbourne and Sydney, opening up a dialogue on "doing something" and "keeping something alive" during this period. Described as "a spontaneous, creative, joyous coming together", 602 will host 9 commercial art galleries, showcasing the work of approximately 40 contemporary artists.

The usual parameters of a gallery's participation in an art fair, will be left by the wayside, allowing for a new freedom on what the galleries choose to exhibit, even accommodating a re-hang mid-way through the event. Harnessing a Berliner's approach to creative collaborations, 602 will house the gallerists' event in a re-purposed electricity substation located at the western end of the CBD. All very *neu* or *frisch* (German for "fresh, new, crisp, cool, green, bright).

## **FLAIR MELBOURNE**

A similar type of collegiality underscores FLAIR Melbourne (<http://www.flairmelbourne.com/>) (18 – 21 August). According to Donald Williams, Director of Global Art Projects (GAP), this new event "all happened very quickly" but nevertheless with a great deal of dexterity; ensuing dialogue amongst the art affiliates at the top end of Flinders Lane on how best to 'fill the gap', allowed a

*revised* focus on marketing the arts. As Jane Scott, Director of Craft notes, “it’s nice to collaborate with one’s colleagues” as such opportunities are quite rare. Flair Melbourne is an amalgam of artists, galleries, restaurateurs and musicians, and has been curated by ARC ONE Gallery, Arts Project Australia (supported by NKN Gallery), Craft, fortyfivedownstairs and Sofitel Melbourne on Collins.

### **SPRING 1883**

This theme of *revision* of the arts scene, was part of the impetus behind the now established SPRING 1883 (<http://spring1883.com/>) (17 – 21 August), a hotel-based art fair that draws on the traditions of the Gramercy Park Fair of New York. Now in its third iteration, SPRING 1883 has always sought to provide an alternative to the traditional art fair, utilising a boutique site, and thereby allowing for a more intimate engagement between artist, collector and gallerist. Fundamental to this initiative has been an appreciation by its participants of “shared conceptual engagements”. Exhibitors for this year number 27, and comprise mostly Australian galleries, in addition to several from New Zealand, and 3 international galleries (Grey Noise of Dubai, Southard Reid of London and KANSAS of New York) due to cross the equator.

### **MARS @ THE MELBOURNE SUPPER CLUB**

Less arduous and only crossing the Yarra River will be Andy Dinan’s Windsor-based MARS Gallery to present an installation of several gallery artists at a “favourite, iconic city venue”, The Melbourne Supper Club. Indeed, over the years, many an après art event ‘drink’ has been quaffed at this Melbourne institution. MARS @ The Melbourne Supper Club (<http://marsgallery.com.au/>) (17 – 21 August) will literally, illuminate the usually subdued club-like lighting of the space with a projection of video works, light works and stereoscopic photography in addition to some delightfully engaging cardboard sculptures.

### **NOTFAIR**

In like form, seeking out new opportunities was at the forefront of three ‘disruptors’, artists, Tony Lloyd and Sam Leach, and arts writer, Ashley Crawford back in 2010. NotFair (<http://www.notfair.com.au/>) (16 – 21 August) was conceived as an alternative satellite event to what they believed was the “gallery-centric Melbourne Art Fair”. At its heart was a curated exhibition of emerging, unrepresented and independent artists whose work would not normally be entitled to be exhibited within the more traditional fair model.

Now under the careful stewardship of Gina Lee, this ‘outsider’ art fair has matured into an established event, and has seen its business model adopt a more formal demeanour albeit still retaining its edge. Incorporating a no doubt unruly street party on opening night, NotFair Art Fair will also include 3 different types of art tours to the other fairs and events in its immediate vicinity; a “three-way speed dating” event (sounds a bit risqué) for artists, writers and curators; in addition to an exhibitions program entitled “Sign O’ The Times” and curated by Kirsten Rann.

Speaking with Gina Lee, her position is certainly, 'of the moment'; as she terms it, "there's room for collaboration" and a much "greater cohesiveness within the visual arts community".

So...get your walking shoes on, grab an umbrella, dress in layers (this is Melbourne), join the community, and challenge your senses, as a veritable visual feast awaits you.

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### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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