

REBECCA COATES

## The curator/patron: Foundations and contemporary art

### Abstract

This article addresses the role of private foundations in commissioning site-specific ephemeral art works: contemporary art projects of a temporary nature that are realised outside of public institutions. Though small in number, I argue that the private individuals creating and managing private foundations of this nature demonstrate a new form of patronage, creating in the process a new role of 'curator/patron'. Equally, this process of realisation reflects the changing needs of contemporary art practice. Work of this scale and ambition would increasingly not be possible without the vision, perseverance and funding of these kinds of foundation. In Australia, this trend is demonstrated by two foundations: Kaldor Art Projects, and their commissioning of works by artists such as Christo and Jeanne-Claude, Gilbert & George and Jeff Koons; and the more recently formed Sherman Contemporary Art Foundation, whose first project was with Chinese artist Ai Weiwei. In this article, these examples are placed within the broader international context of foundation models such as Artangel, UK, Fondazione Nicola Trussardi, Milan, and The Public Art Fund, New York.

### The birth of Kaldor Art Projects

In 1969, collector, entrepreneur and art patron John Kaldor invited internationally acclaimed contemporary artists Christo and Jeanne-Claude to wrap a section of the New South Wales coast. *Wrapped Coast – One Million Square Feet, Little Bay, Sydney, Australia, 1969*, was the culmination of many hours of planning, organisation and work. *Wrapped Coast* was installed by the artists together with a daily workforce of around 120 people, including professional mountain climber, labourers, students from the University of Sydney and East Sydney Technical College, and a number of Australian artists and teachers. The project brought cutting edge contemporary international art to an Australian audience. It also brought Australia to a wider international consciousness: as a location and nation capable of commissioning and realising this sort of ambitious and hugely demanding project. *Wrapped Coast* was the first major landscape project by Christo and Jeanne-Claude, and was acclaimed at the time as the largest sculpture in the world.<sup>1</sup>

Australia, in the late 1960s and early '70s, had seen its fair share of the dramatic changes and innovations in art practice that were occurring elsewhere in the world. These changes were reflected in political and social shifts. In America, this period was marked by the assassinations of Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy; a music counter-culture of peace and love over war epitomised by the Woodstock Music Festival; and the first man on the Moon. Similar sexual, social and political change was being experienced in Europe and England, with the Paris student riots of May '68, also taking place in other major European cities, or such political and sexual scandals as the English Profumo Affair in 1963.<sup>2</sup> These international events set the scene for

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<sup>1</sup> Baume, 1995, p. 14. For further accounts of the project, see Baume, 1990, and Green, 2001.

<sup>2</sup> Student riots occurred in a number of cities throughout Europe as well as Paris, such as Milan and Rome in Italy. However, the Paris riots of 3 May 1968 were perhaps those that had the most far-reaching social and cultural impact at the time. The Profumo Affair, as it became known, was named after John Profumo, the UK Secretary of State for War. In 1963, he had a brief affair with a showgirl named Christine Keeler, who allegedly was also the mistress of a

popular rejection of Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War, expressed in rolling anti-conscription protests across the country. This sense of dramatic social change could not help but also be reflected in contemporary art practice, as ideas of protest, collaboration, experimentation and alternative solutions were explored. Art practice became increasingly process based, ephemeral and outside the established art market system. Artist collectives and alternatively run commercial art spaces developed, such as Pinacotheca in Melbourne, and Inhibodress in Sydney.<sup>3</sup> In August 1968, the National Gallery of Victoria staged its groundbreaking exhibition, *The Field*, which represented changes in Australian and international art. Exhibitions such as *The Field*, and the broader shifts in contemporary art practice, questioned and challenged established systems from both within and beyond the gallery walls. When Christo and Jeanne-Claude wrapped the New South Wales coast at Little Bay, Australian audiences witnessed the first major landscape installation commissioned by an individual. Art had moved outside the gallery walls, to spaces that could equally be urban or located within the landscape itself.



Christo and Jeanne-Claude, *Wrapped Coast – One Million Square Feet*, Little Bay, Sydney, Australia, 1969.  
© Christo 1969.  
Photo: Wolfgang Wolz.  
Courtesy of Kaldor Art Projects.

In order to realise these new sorts of contemporary art practices, new funding mechanisms and production methods were required. When, in 1969, John Kaldor commissioned Christo and Jeanne-Claude's *Wrapped Coast*, financial support for contemporary art in Australia was limited. The Power Bequest, which ultimately enabled the opening of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, in 1991, was yet to reach its full potential; the Biennale of Sydney did not exist; the

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Russian spy. He then lied about the affair to the House of Commons, severely damaging the reputation of Prime Minister Harold Macmillan's government.

<sup>3</sup> Pinacotheca was a commercial gallery space founded by director Bruce Pollard. His approach to the gallery was non-commercial, and the gallery took on the role fulfilled by alternative art spaces elsewhere. It also briefly operated as an artists' collective while Bruce Pollard was overseas for a year. Artists Mike Parr and Peter Kennedy were behind the Sydney gallery Inhibodress. See Lindsay, 2002, p. 8.

National Gallery of Australia was yet to open; and Federal Government funding was scarce. The Australia Council, as a major source of government support for artists and cultural institutions, was not established until 1973 and even after this time many Australian projects seemed to rely largely on the goodwill of artists. Early Kaldor projects make no mention of any artist's fee being paid.<sup>4</sup> However, as art practices changed, so too did funding models. In the 1970s and 1980s, Government funding for the arts increased, and Charlotte Moorman's 1976 Art Project was the first to receive financial support from the newly established Visual Arts Board of the Australia Council.



Christo and Jeanne-Claude, *Wrapped Coast – One Million Square Feet, Little Bay, Sydney, Australia*, 1969. © Christo 1969. Photo: Wolfgang Wolz. Courtesy of Kaldor Art Projects.

It was partly because of the lack of government funding that Kaldor was inspired to investigate the possibilities of private patronage. Kaldor had originally invited Christo to come to Australia to give a lecture on his work. Christo proposed a wrapped project instead.<sup>5</sup> This shift in focus, and the project's subsequent critical artistic success, crystallised Kaldor's desire to conceive, commission and initiate hugely ambitious contemporary art projects on a scale not previously seen in Australia. At the time that Kaldor approached Christo, he was working as Marketing

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<sup>4</sup> No mention of an artists' fee is made in archival material on projects by Christo and Jeanne-Claude, Szeemann, and Gilbert & George. Kaldor Art Projects Archive. Referred 16.7.08.

<sup>5</sup> Correspondence between the artist and John Kaldor, Kaldor Art Projects Archive. Sydney, 12 February, 1969.

Manager for Universal Textiles, Sydney. He had some experience of Australian institutions, and had also begun his own private art collection of international contemporary artists.<sup>6</sup> Christo and Jeanne-Claude had been invited to Australia under the terms of the textile company Alcorso-Sekers' Travelling Scholarship for Sculpture, which covered the artists' airfares and accommodation.<sup>7</sup> Costs for the project itself had to be covered and Kaldor convinced his directors to contribute some funding to the Christo project he proposed. The directors were less than enthusiastic, insisting that the artist sign an indemnity for the costs of the project, and eventually deciding not to be associated with it further.<sup>8</sup> The bulk of the project costs such as materials and labour were paid for by the artists themselves, who funded the project through the sale of drawings and sculptures relating to the proposed work. This has become the model for each of Christo and Jeanne-Claude's projects, ensuring that absolute artistic integrity is maintained, and that finances and commerce do not limit the artistic vision of the work.<sup>9</sup> As well as initiating the project, Kaldor is also credited as project coordinator.<sup>10</sup> Kaldor's experience enabled him to set up his own textile business, and commence his series of contemporary art projects that later became known as Kaldor Art Projects. There is no doubt that the experience of financial, bureaucratic and artistic complexity, coupled with the success of the first project and the widespread interest it attracted, played a significant part in his ongoing role as financially independent curator/patron.

Over the forty years that Kaldor Art Projects has developed, and like the artworks it has commissioned, its financial, legal and methodological infrastructures have altered dramatically. At the outset, Kaldor worked as an individual. In 2003, Kaldor Art Projects was granted charitable status in recognition of its long-term contribution to the cultural life of Australia, becoming a Prescribed Private Fund. The significance of this change was that the foundation could attract tax-deductible donations from other individuals and foundations, 'enabling the transition from the personal endeavour of John Kaldor to an organisation with the ability to grow and take on major projects on a regular basis.'<sup>11</sup> Part of this change incurred the establishment of an advisory board, whose make-up is listed on the Foundation's website. I will discuss some of these changes to foundations, and the role that they play later in the paper. What has not changed

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<sup>6</sup> Kaldor had been involved in setting up the Alcorso-Sekers Travelling Scholarship for Sculpture, a \$2,000 travel and exhibition grant.

<sup>7</sup> Baume, 1990, p. 38.

<sup>8</sup> Kaldor recalls the directors of the company as stating: 'This is your baby, you're mad to have gotten us into this.' Angly, 1976, p. 10. Along with the reluctance of Kaldor's fellow directors to contribute funds to the project, Kaldor also had great difficulty in finding a site for the project. Christo had given particular specifications that it should be close to people, rather than an isolated section of the coastline. Nicholas Baume has stated that 'Virtually every approach was refused point-blank until Jack Clancy, then director of Sydney's Prince Henry Hospital, gave permission to use Little Bay, a part of the Hospital grounds, fourteen and a half kilometers from the centre of Sydney.' Baume, 1990, p. 37.

<sup>9</sup> At the time of the Sydney project, Christo was known only by his first name, although he worked with his wife and collaborator, Jeanne-Claude. Retrospectively, her involvement in the projects has been acknowledged and they have henceforth been known as Christo and Jeanne-Claude.

<sup>10</sup> Baume, 1990, p. 38. See also Kaldor Art Projects website, URL: <http://www.kaldorartprojects.org.au/>, accessed 30.10.08.

<sup>11</sup> Kaldor Art Projects, URL: <http://www.kaldorartprojects.org.au/>, accessed 17.8.08 and Kaldor Art Projects publication, *BreakingGround*, undated.

for Kaldor Art Projects is the role that John Kaldor plays: as an initiator, rather than a solely financial supporter, who has final say in which artists and projects are chosen in the distinctive role of curator-patron.<sup>12</sup> It is this role as individual, and as curator-patron, that I wish to explore further in this article.

Much work has been done on grant-making private foundations involved in acquisitions for public institutions, both from an historical perspective and with respect to philanthropic gift-giving.<sup>13</sup> Foundations associated with private museums have also been well documented, particularly in the United States of America.<sup>14</sup> What appears to be less well understood, and absent from any sort of scholarly or theoretical analysis, is the relationship between the rise of a new sort of private philanthropy, or patronage, alongside the more traditional focus on grant-making; the role that these foundations play in relation to public institutions and the agency of the patron/curator within these processes. Equally, the time for these independent curator/patrons has got to be right, and it is impossible to understand their motivations and methods without an understanding of the time in which they are created. Private foundations also tend to have complex relationships with other, sometimes public, art organisations such as biennales and art fairs, and consequently these relationships are beyond the scope of this article.

### **International Foundations**

Whilst Kaldor Art Projects was the first Australian contemporary arts organisation to focus on realising site-specific, ephemeral projects both outside and in collaboration with public institutions, it needs to be understood within a broader international and historical context of similarly structured private foundations. Foundations such as Artangel, UK, established in 1985, and Public Art Projects, US, created in 1977, are frequently cited as models for the increasingly large number of private foundations in operation today. Both Artangel and Public Art Projects have facilitated a series of internationally acclaimed projects of significant local and international impact.<sup>15</sup>

Artangel, La Fondazione Trussardi, Milan, Italy and the Public Art Fund, New York, have consciously chosen to work outside gallery spaces, creating a series of projects that exist in and around a variety of local, or regional sites. Foundations frequently morph from one type to another: thus, La Fondazione Trussardi was first set up with a permanent gallery space and

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<sup>12</sup> Nicholas Baume coined this phrase to describe John Kaldor in his essay 'John Kaldor; Public patron/Private Collector', Baume, 1995.

<sup>13</sup> For details of gift-making private foundations, and specifically for the relationship of the Felton Bequest to the National Gallery of Victoria, Australia, see Poynter, 2003. See also Ebury, 2008.

<sup>14</sup> For examples of private museums initiated by individuals (whose common model of operation in the USA is through a private foundation), see Newhouse, 2006, for an architectural analysis of the museums within a museological framework. Individual private museums frequently publish their own histories. Notable examples include The Chinati Foundation, conceived of by Donald Judd in Marfa, Texas; the Menil Collection, Houston, Texas; or the J. Paul Getty Museum; Los Angeles, California. The UK and Europe also have notable examples of the private art museum, such as Charles Saatchi's first private gallery, The Saatchi Collection, Boundary Road, London. For a broader analysis of foundations and philanthropy, see Anheier and Leat, 2006.

<sup>15</sup> La Fondazione Nicola Trussardi, URL: <http://www.fondazionenicolatrussardi.com/>, accessed 14.8.08; Sherman in Smith, 2007, p. 79.

subsequently redefined its aims and objectives, doing away with a permanent site and only creating projects in and around the city of Milan. Conversely, the Dia Art Foundation, which was conceived as a series of site-specific projects, eventually established a permanent gallery space, Dia: Beacon in 2003, in which to house work and show new commissions alongside the site-specific projects it manages.<sup>16</sup>

Often cited as a leading example for more recently created private foundations, Artangel, UK has been presenting commissions since the early 1990s.<sup>17</sup> The organisation proclaims a 'commitment to the production of powerful new ideas by exceptional artists' and positions itself 'at the forefront of changing attitudes and growing expectations amongst both artists and audiences.' Not only has it become 'part of the public debate, both in the UK and abroad' but Artangel suggests that the organisation has become a 'pathfinder in the process of achieving a deeper understanding of the world.'<sup>18</sup> The frequency with which newer foundations cite Artangel as an exemplary model seems to strongly support the organisation's own claims.

Artangel was founded by Roger Took in 1985 as a privately funded initiative to commission and supporting new public art works that were to be placed within unusual locations. The aim of Artangel in this first phase of projects was to 'provide a professional platform for and to realise projects with artists who do not necessarily produce work within the regular exhibition venues'.<sup>19</sup> In the spring of 1991, James Lingwood and Michael Morris were appointed part-time co-directors of Artangel: their appointment ushered in what is known as the 'second phase' of Artangel projects. Artangel's principal activity is the production and promotion of ambitious and innovative contemporary art projects and events across a wide range of media. Collaboration is the primary motivator – between the artist and place, place and audience, artists from different disciplines and cultural backgrounds, and between the artist and the producer. Artangel has commissioned, funded, and produced projects by artists from around the world such as Andy Goldsworthy, Lawrence Weiner, Barbara Kruger, Jenny Holzer, Juan Muñoz, Helen Chadwick, Matthew Barney, Tatsuo Miyajima, Ilya and Emilia Kabakov, Richard Billingham, Douglas Gordon, Janet Cardiff, Susan Hiller, Tony Oursler, Michael Landy, Jeremy Deller, Steve McQueen, Gregor Schneider, Francis Alÿs, Kutlug Ataman, and Roni Horn. All these artists now have significant careers: they are frequently the subject of significant contemporary art exhibitions, are included in biennales, triennials and art fairs, as well as being commissioned by other private foundations.

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<sup>16</sup> Dia Art Foundation is a non-profit institution founded in 1974. The foundation commissions and maintains a number of long-term site-specific projects. In 1986, Dia: Chelsea was initiated in Manhattan. It featured a number of new projects and significant exhibitions by individual artists, with the works remaining in situ for up to a year to allow for extended viewing. Curated by Lynne Cooke since 1991, Dia: Chelsea closed for renovation in January 2004.

<sup>17</sup> See for example curator Massimiliano Gioni's comments about inception of the Fondazione Trussardi: <http://www.fondazionenicolatrussardi.com/>, accessed 14.8.08; and Dr. Gene Sherman on the models and inspirations behind the Sherman Contemporary Art Foundation in Sherman, 2007.

<sup>18</sup> Artangel, URL: <http://www.artangel.org.uk/pages.aboutus.html>, accessed 14.8.08.

<sup>19</sup> Van Noord, 2002, p. 220.

Artangel's commissioning funds is made up of core contributions from government sources (the Arts Council), private individuals who make up an annual donation called the Company of Angels, and specific project funding raised from a number of private and public sources – grants from public funding bodies, trusts and foundations, sponsorship and private donations. Projects are selected and curated by Lingwood and Morris, who describe themselves and Artangel's role as 'producers' rather than primarily as patrons.<sup>20</sup> Whilst Artangel may have started out along the lines of Kaldor Art Projects, its very size and scale has meant that its form, structure and funding sources have had to alter to encompass its growth and success. Their commission of Rachel Whiteread's *House* (1993-4), for example, resulted in one of the most powerful and controversial public sculptures ever seen in England.<sup>21</sup> James Lingwood has related the success of the organisation to changes in the broader cultural landscape. Developments such as the opening of the Saatchi Gallery in the late 1980s, 'shocking in its scale and confidence', or Glasgow rebranding itself as the City of Culture in 1990, meant that Artangel could operate 'alongside the mainstream institutions ... and could offer alternative means of production and presentation, another way of working closely with artists.'<sup>22</sup>



Roni Horn, *Vatnasafn / Library of Water*, 2007. Exterior view, Stykkishólmur, Iceland. Commissioned and produced by Artangel, 2007. Courtesy of Artangel.

<sup>20</sup> Conversation between Michael Craig-Martin, Lisa Jardine, James Lingwood and Michael Morris in Van Noord, 2002, p. 14.

<sup>21</sup> Rachel Whiteread's *House* was a concrete cast of the last remaining house in what had once been a Victorian terrace in Bow, East London. Approached by Artangel to make a work, Whiteread suggested making this work, which then took three years of planning and constructing before it was exhibited for three months. For a public sculpture, the work attracted a great deal of public debate and press, and even suggestions that the house should be saved and kept in perpetuity. For further details, see Van Noord, 2002, pp. 78-83.

<sup>22</sup> Van Noord, 2002, p. 10.

Roni Horn's *Vatnasafn / Library of Water*, 2007, realised in Stykkishólmur, Iceland – approximately two hours drive from Reykjavik – was the first project commissioned by Artangel outside of the United Kingdom. At a cost of more than £500,000, funding was sourced from both private and public sectors. Despite the cost, the remote location of the project precludes large numbers of visitors actually seeing the work. Vast numbers will only see it via the web, through documentary images, and printed material. Co-director of Artangel James Lingwood suggests that though visitor numbers are frequently used as a measure of success, the success and value of a project such as Horn's lies elsewhere.<sup>23</sup> Independence, both financial and public accountability, means that neither cost, nor attendance figures are insuperable obstacles to the realisation of a project. Quite possibly, the hard-to reach destination ensures a new way of engaging with projects of this kind, enabled by the ever-expanding possibilities of new technologies.



Roni Horn, *Vatnasafn / Library of Water*, 2007. Interior view. Commissioned and produced by Artangel, 2007. Courtesy of Artangel.

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<sup>23</sup> James Lingwood, as cited in Sooke, 2008.

In America, one of the leading commissioning funds, or foundations, is the Public Art Fund, New York. Created by Doris C. Freedman in 1977, The Public Art Fund is a consolidation of two organisations: City Walls, founded in 1969, and the Public Arts Council, founded in 1971. It is a non-profit arts organisation, supported in part by public funds (or government funding), and through contributions from individuals, foundations and corporations. The Public Art Fund is New York's leading presenter of artists' projects, new commissions, and exhibitions in public spaces. It works with emerging and established artists to produce exhibitions of contemporary art in spaces outside the traditional context of museums and galleries. Its aim is to 'bring artists' ideas to the forefront while establishing contemporary art as a vital component of New York City's urban landscape.'<sup>24</sup> Since 1977, the Public Art Fund has presented more than five hundred art projects throughout New York.<sup>25</sup> This makes the Public Art Fund one of the longest running organisations of this sort, after Kaldor Art Projects. Arguably, they have also produced the greatest number of projects of this sort during this period: Kaldor Art Projects produced seventeen projects in forty years, and Artangel around eighty-eight.

Fondazione Nicola Trussardi, Milan, is another non-profit institution set up 'for the promotion of contemporary art and culture'.<sup>26</sup> Similar to Artangel and Public Art Fund, it describes itself as 'neither a museum nor a collection, the Trussardi Foundation acts as an agency for the production and the diffusion of contemporary art in a wide variety of contexts and channels'.<sup>27</sup> Importantly, the Foundation sees itself as a 'production centre for the diffusion of contemporary art'.<sup>28</sup> After many years of showing work in the exhibition spaces of Palazzo Marino alla Scala, in 2003 the Nicola Trussardi Foundation began concentrating its resources on the realisation of contemporary art events in the public spaces of the city of Milan. The Foundation is headed by Beatrice Trussardi, and the program is under the artistic direction of Massimiliano Gioni. Some of the projects undertaken since 2003 have featured the work of artists Martin Creed, Anri Sala, Urs Fisher, John Bock, Maurizio Cattelan, Darren Almond, Michael Elmgreen & Ingar Dragset, Paola Pivi, Pawel Althamer and most recently Peter Fischli & David Weiss.

The Foundation also collaborates with national and international institutions. For Peter Fischli & David Weiss' exhibition *Altri Fiori e Altre Domande* at the Palazzo Litta in 2008, the Foundation collaborated with the Tate Modern, London and Kunsthaus Zürich, with the support of local, regional, and national government bodies. Whilst in some countries, such collaborations with public arts institutions may be motivated by taxation and legal implications, there is no doubt that a further motivation is the sharing of knowledge and scholarship, and the associated kudos of institutional status and position.

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<sup>24</sup> Public Art Fund, URL: [http://www.publicartfund.org/pafweb/about/about\\_paf.htm](http://www.publicartfund.org/pafweb/about/about_paf.htm), accessed 14.8.08.

<sup>25</sup> Public Art Fund, URL: [http://www.publicartfund.org/pafweb/about/about\\_paf.htm](http://www.publicartfund.org/pafweb/about/about_paf.htm), accessed 30.10.08.

<sup>26</sup> La Fondazione Nicola Trussardi, URL: [http://www.fondazionenicolatrussardi.com/testi\\_eng.html](http://www.fondazionenicolatrussardi.com/testi_eng.html), accessed 14.8.08.

<sup>27</sup> La Fondazione Nicola Trussardi, URL: [http://www.fondazionenicolatrussardi.com/movie\\_en.html](http://www.fondazionenicolatrussardi.com/movie_en.html), accessed 30.10.08.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

## Contemporaneity

The names of certain artists, chosen by private foundations to make site-specific temporary projects, come round with regular familiarity. UK artist Rachel Whiteread's first project with Artangel in 1993 led to a number of subsequent public and private commissions, both temporary and permanent: *Water Tower*, 1999, for the Public Art Fund and *Monument*, 2001, a temporary commission instigated by the Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (RSA) and now run by the Greater London Authority and the Unilever Series commission at the Tate Modern, 2005. Although neither Whiteread's *Monument* or her Tate Modern exhibition were commissioned by private foundations, her very inclusion in a public commission process denotes acceptance, endorsement, and reputation in the mainstream art world. A similar pattern appears in the commissioned works by UK artist Michael Landy. Landy's *Break Down* (2001) was presented by Artangel in a former C&A store on Oxford Street, London. Landy has visited Australia twice at the invitation of Kaldor Art Projects, with projects still in their development stage.<sup>29</sup> German artist Gregor Schneider, award-winner at the 2001 Venice Biennale, presented *Die Familie Schneider* (2001), consisting of two identical houses in an ordinary residential street in the East End of London, commissioned and produced by Artangel in 2004. In 2007, Schneider was subsequently commissioned by Kaldor Art Projects to present an installation on Bondi Beach, Sydney.

Other artists' names appear frequently on the lists of commissioning agencies' projects: Matthew Barney, Maurizio Cattelan, Martin Creed, Ilya and Emilia Kabakov, Richard Billingham, Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller, Tony Oursler, Steve McQueen, Francis Alÿs, Mike Nelson, Olafur Eliasson and Kutlug Ataman – the list is far from comprehensive. Their work requires the kind of funding, resources and timeframe for development of ideas that is now frequently incompatible with the infrastructure of public galleries. The commissioning foundation, or curator/patron must be equally aware that by inviting one of these international art-world 'superstars', they are not only commissioning an artist likely to produce a successful project, but they are also promoting their own reputation through association, in turn attracting future artists to work with the foundation. This in turn may take many years to come to fruition as complexities of site, concept, project management, and other commitments are all negotiated.

Not surprisingly, the relationships between foundations, institutions and commercial enterprises can overlap, and the importance of certain contemporary art collectors cannot be underestimated. The roles and responsibilities of curators and advisors are also occasionally interchangeable. Massimiliano Gioni, Artistic Director of the Fondazione Nicola Trussardi, has also held a number of curatorial roles within public organisations, international biennales and art fairs, a mix of public and private that is becoming increasingly more frequent. In 2006, he was co-artistic director of the 4<sup>th</sup> Berlin Biennial of Contemporary Art in 2006 with artist Maurizio Cattelan and Ali Subotnick, with whom he is also director of the Wrong Gallery, New York. Gioni is also a board member of Frieze Art Fair, and in 2006 was appointed as curator of special exhibitions at the New Museum, New York. In 2006, he was invited to present the Melbourne Art Fair lecture, an event supported by the Melbourne Art Fair Foundation. Public gallery curators are frequently

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<sup>29</sup> Kaldor, 2008.

found on private foundation boards, and may also be invited to speak at the related forums and discussions of commercially organised art enterprises such as the Melbourne, Basel and Frieze Art Fairs. The relationship between private and public in the contemporary art world is inextricably linked, and perhaps has always been so.

### **Intellectual impact**

Over the last forty years, through his intermittent Art Projects, John Kaldor has continued to ‘place Australian artists’ achievements in dialogue with an international context’, as directors of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, Leon Paroissien and Bernice Murphy suggest.<sup>30</sup> These Art Projects aim to generate and stimulate intellectual thought and debate in both the arts community and the broader public. Kaldor’s second Art Project in 1971, for example, brought Swiss curator Harald Szeemann to Australia. Szeeman’s curatorial pedigree was extensive: in 1969, he curated the highly influential exhibition ‘When Attitudes Become Form’ at the Kunsthalle Bern, which featured nearly seventy artists including Eva Hesse, Walter de Maria, Joseph Beuys, and Richard Serra; in 1970 he initiated the European tour of an exhibition documenting Christo’s *Wrapped Coast* and had, through his exhibition making, shown his clear



Installation view of Harald Szeemann’s exhibition, ‘I want to leave a nice well-done child here’, National Gallery of Victoria, Australia, June 1971. © National Gallery of Victoria 1971. Courtesy of Kaldor Art Projects.

commitment to art ‘beyond the collectible dimension’.<sup>31</sup> He was arguably an ‘artists’ curator’, focusing more on ‘exhibition making’ itself than on the ‘elaboration of art history or the connoisseurship of museum collections’.<sup>32</sup> During his brief fortnight in Australia, Szeemann

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<sup>30</sup> As cited in Kaldor Art Projects, URL: <http://www.kaldorartprojects.org.au/>, accessed 18.07.08.

<sup>31</sup> Baume, 1995, p. 25.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

visited artists' studios in Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide, meeting a number of Australian artists, galleries and critics, including Tim Johnson, Peter Kennedy, Mike Parr, Gunter Christman, Brett Whiteley, David Aspen, Watters Gallery, and Elwyn Lynn.<sup>33</sup> Szeeman's curatorial visits were used as the basis of two curated exhibitions called 'I want to leave a nice well-done child here', featuring the work of twenty-two Australian artists and held at the Bonython Art Gallery, Sydney, and the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, 1971. On his return to Europe, Szeeman took up the position of director of Documenta 5, in Kassel, Germany, widely considered to be one of the most significant art exhibitions in Europe. As with Szeemann's visit to Australia, many of the subsequent Kaldor Art Projects were as much about the ideas and intellectual debate surrounding contemporary art practice, as they were about the artists and the projects created in a specific Australian context.<sup>34</sup>

### **Historic impact – myth and memory**

The very nature of the artists chosen and exhibitions created – the fact that they are temporary art projects that are dismantled after the period of the exhibition – means that they become part of a collective cultural myth and memory. That these projects no longer exist following their exhibition may well assist the projects' continued significance in the cultural landscape. It enables, in a sense, the artist and curator – or in this case, the curator/patron – to write their own history. In the absence of the object, they become the primary source, along with documentary images and any written texts that were commissioned to support the work. Subsequent writers, artists, historians, or cultural theorists can only work with secondary texts: newspaper editorials, journal and magazine articles, and interviews with those involved or who have experienced the event or artwork. At no stage can they gain the same experience of the original work: its historical significance remains mediated by its makers. An object in absentia takes on added magnitude: it grows in size, stature, and significance. The project's absence contributes to its continued significance, as reality can never be checked against memory, nor memory sullied by the vagaries of taste and time.

Time, of course, tends to smooth over past differences. Christo's project in Australia was not always seen in such a positive light, even within the art community. At the same time that the project was taking shape, a retrospective of Australian artist Albert Tucker was being shown at the Bonython Art Gallery (where, incidentally, Harald Szeemann later held his 1971 Sydney exhibition). Critic Alan McCulloch, writing in the January 1970 edition of *Art International*, stated:

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<sup>33</sup> Harald Szeemann itinerary, in Kaldor Art Projects Archive: Sydney, Australia.

<sup>34</sup> In the photocopied exhibition catalogue, Szeemann wrote that 'the works were chosen because of their pictorial and plastic qualities or their intensity of method, concept, intention, obsession.' Szeemann, 1971. Unpaginated. Critic Donald Brook described the selection as 'among the most interesting and the most adventurous of recent art, made by somebody with more spontaneous sympathy for current ideas than dogma about proper form.' Brook, 1971, p. 16. This is possibly a reference to the dominance of colour-field painting in the late sixties, as seen in exhibitions such as *The Field*, National Gallery of Victoria, and later developments in art practice, described by American art historian Lucy Lippard as the 'dematerialization of art'. Certain works in the exhibition, such as Mike Parr's series of invitations that had to be returned to the exhibition for the work to be completed, reflected these current trends.

*Rebecca Coates, The curator/patron: Foundations and contemporary art*

The gallery has become a medieval castle from which anti-Christo expletives poured like bolts from a crossbow ... [Tucker] accepted the role as defender of the national innocence from attacks by 'the paranoiac out-riders of the extremist international fashions'.<sup>35</sup>

With the passage of only a short period of time, what was once seen as outrageously avant-garde by many has become generally accepted, and part of a mainstream cultural history.

The impact in Australia of Kaldor's first Art Project can in part be judged by a subsequent exhibition of the artists in Australia. Invited back in 1990 on the 21st anniversary of *Wrapped Coast* for a major retrospective at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Christo and Jeanne-Claude wrapped the Gallery's neo-classical vestibule in discarded painters' drop-sheets. This time, they were welcomed back with front-page newspaper coverage, and full celebrity treatment. Now with a significantly broader international reputation, the second Australian wrapping of 1990 confirms the significance of their first project to their artistic career. The success of the first Art Project meant that Kaldor also became part of a cultural history: the patron/curator who commissioned the first of the wrapped projects in Australia. This in turn enabled him to attract the interest of other significant contemporary international artists with whom he proposed making projects, in part because of the success of, and coverage attracted by, the first Art Project.



Gilbert & George, *Singing Sculpture*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, 1973.  
© Gilbert & George 1973. Photo credit: Paul Green. Courtesy of Kaldor Art Projects.

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<sup>35</sup> Alan McCulloch, as cited in Baume, 1995 p. 16.

There is no doubt that, as with curators, for patrons success leads to success. The knowledge that one artist has worked to critical acclaim will in no small part influence another. In 1973, Gilbert & George were invited to make a work that became Kaldor's third Art Project. Their agreement to come to Australia – given their increasing international profile and rapid success – was in part affected by the success of Christo's *Wrapped Coast*. Nigel Greenwood, who accompanied Gilbert & George to Australia, and had presented *Singing Sculpture* at his London gallery in 1970, said that when he met Kaldor in London 'He'd just done the Christo project in Sydney – the most daring thing Australia had yet seen. It was clear that although Australia was a long way away, this guy had his finger on the pulse.'<sup>36</sup> The Gilbert & George performance was accompanied by a publication, as with all of the artists' other projects.<sup>37</sup> The longevity and cultural significance of these sorts of exhibitions of works that are either performative, or site-specific and temporary, is closely related to the scope of their documentation and accompanying publications: without these, there is little trace. Photographic documentation, exhibition publications, and any other associated material thus take the place of the project that no longer exists after the event.



Gilbert & George, *Singing Sculpture*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, 1973.  
© Gilbert & George 1973. Photo credit: Paul Green. Courtesy of Kaldor Art Projects.

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<sup>36</sup> Baume, 1995, p. 29.

<sup>37</sup> See Kaldor, 1973. For a description of the project, see Green, 2001.

## Social impact

It cannot be accidental that Jeff Koons' ambitious project *Puppy* (1996) – another Kaldor Art Project – was situated facing and in the lee of two of Australia's internationally recognised public icons. Opposite the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney, and across the water of Circular Quay, is the once publicly reviled and now revered building that took sixteen years to complete: the Sydney Opera House, designed by Danish born Jørn Utzon. And adjacent to *Puppy*, another of Australia's symbols of modernity and national mythmaking: the Sydney Harbour Bridge.

Nicholas Baume suggests that Kaldor's early childhood experiences of war and totalitarian regimes (prior to his arrival in Australia as a Hungarian refugee at the age of thirteen), contributed significantly to Kaldor's 'unwavering commitment to individualism, and [his] intuitive sense of the implications for Australia of the globalisation of culture and communications'.<sup>38</sup> In a country so rooted in notions of nationhood, it is interesting that Kaldor has consistently chosen artists whose works and biographies transgress notions of border and country, and emphasise cultural and geographic fluidity. Christo is one such example, having escaped from communist Bulgaria in 1956. German artist Gregor Schneider's project *Bondi Beach / 21 Beach Cells* (2007) consisted of a series of wire fenced cages on Bondi Beach, complete with inflatable lilos, beach umbrellas and black plastic bin-liners. The chosen location was another internationally recognised Australian icon – Bondi – and the work featured archetypal signifiers of Australian beach culture. The subject, however, was international, even if it was implicitly critical of Australia's international credentials, and particularly the treatment of refugees at the Villawood Detention Centre and Nauru.<sup>39</sup>

## Sherman Contemporary Art Foundation

The contrast between the early days of Kaldor Art Projects and the more recently established Sherman Contemporary Art Foundation (SCAF), Sydney, illustrates the changing pressures on foundations. In the scantily funded 1970s, when projects such as Christo's were unlikely to be part of institutional exhibition planning, the first Kaldor Art Project was able to make a big impression on Australian contemporary art and the artist's career. In 2008, with more contemporary art funding available, greater support of these sorts of projects, increased accessibility of international artists' work through biennales, large-scale exhibitions and increased international travel, and generally a far greater interest in and awareness of contemporary art, it was much harder for SCAF's first project to make as significant an impact on contemporary art practice in Australia.

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<sup>38</sup> Baume, 1995, p. 10.

<sup>39</sup> Opened in 1976, The Villawood Immigration Detention Centre came to wider, and international, attention following the 'children overboard' or Tampa affair of October 2001, following which the Howard Government adopted a stricter border protection policy authorizing mandatory detention of asylum seekers. Detention centres were also set up on the South Pacific island of Nauru in 2001, and in 2002 at Port Augusta, South Australia (the Baxter Detention Centre).

Sherman Contemporary Art Foundation became operational in April 2008. It is a private foundation initiated by Brian and Gene Sherman, previously co-directors of Sherman Galleries, Sydney. The Foundation's focus is on contemporary art from the Asia-Pacific region, which according to Sherman provides 'a significant but not exclusive geographical framework.'<sup>40</sup> Working in a similar manner to Kaldor Art Projects, SCAF functions as a not-for-profit foundation: it was initially funded exclusively by the family (who also run a number of other philanthropic foundations) and has subsequently begun to investigate partnerships with government departments and universities.<sup>41</sup>

As with Kaldor Art Projects, documentation and publications are an important aspect of SCAF. In the lead-up to their first project, SCAF held two educational conferences on issues surrounding philanthropy and contemporary art. They published the first conference papers as an academic text in collaboration with the University of New South Wales Publishing.<sup>42</sup> In her introduction to the publication, Gene Sherman defined the Foundation's philosophy as 'a focus on the multiplicity of perspectives that define contemporary life – and the art that living artists produce in relation to their private concerns and public contexts – in order to best serve the growth of such art, and to promote understanding and appreciation of it within broader communities, both nationally and internationally.'<sup>43</sup> The first SCAF project was accompanied by a publication authored by Charles Merewether and published by University of New South Wales Press in association with Sherman Contemporary Art Foundation & Campbelltown Arts Centre. Papers from the first conference held by SCAF were also published in an edition entitled *Contemporary Art + Philanthropy*, edited by academic and contemporary art theoretician Terry Smith.<sup>44</sup>

In April 2008, the Foundation's first project was launched. It had two parts: an exhibition by internationally renowned Chinese artist Ai Weiwei curated by Charles Merewether, artistic director of the 2006 Biennale of Sydney, titled 'Ai Weiwei: Under Construction', shown in partnership with the Campbelltown Arts Centre; and a newly commissioned project shown at the refurbished Sherman Gallery space in Paddington, Sydney.<sup>45</sup> Ai Weiwei's work has been shown extensively in a range of prestigious international events: the Venice Biennale (1999), the Guangzhou Triennial (2002), the Biennale of Sydney and the 5<sup>th</sup> Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art (2006) and most recently Documenta XII (2007) in Kassel, Germany – arguably one of the world's most significant contemporary art events in an ever-expanding

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<sup>40</sup> Sherman, as cited in Smith, 2007, p. 6.

<sup>41</sup> Dunn, 2007, URL: <http://www.smh.com.au/news/arts/dealer-gives-up-profits-for-pure-art/2007/02/05/1170524029387.html>, accessed 14.8.07.

<sup>42</sup> Smith, 2007, p. 6.

<sup>43</sup> Sherman, as cited in Smith, 2007, p. 6.

<sup>44</sup> Smith, 2007, p. 6.

<sup>45</sup> Sherman Contemporary Art Foundation, URL: <http://sherman-scaf.org.au/>; Campbelltown Arts Centre, URL: <http://campbelltown.nsw.gov.au/aww>, accessed 12.3.08. Ai Weiwei's work was included in Merewether's Sydney Biennale, and Merewether also worked with Campbelltown Arts Centre as one of the non-inner city spaces used for the exhibition.

calendar of biennales, triennials, art fairs and exhibitions.<sup>46</sup> In collaboration with Swiss architects Herzog and de Meuron, Ai Weiwei also garnered mainstream prominence for his design of the 'Bird's Nest' Olympic stadium for the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games and subsequent architectural projects.<sup>47</sup>

For Documenta XII, Ai Weiwei invited 1001 Chinese guests to reside in a small town in North Hessen, creating their own storytelling and fiction (the town was famously the residence of the Brothers Grimm, and the location for some of their fairytales). He created a temporary travel agency, the FAKE team, to organise and co-ordinate the trip. The group was known as the *Fairytale* travel group, and was to include a mixture of 'farmers, teachers, students, artists or engineers of both sexes.'<sup>48</sup> For the second project at Documenta XII, Ai Weiwei shipped 1001 late Ming and Qing Dynasty chairs to Kassel to become 'stations of reflection' in and around the city and exhibition venues.

Ai Weiwei's *Fairytale* project for Documenta required a substantial budget: 3.1 million euros. It was raised on the initiative of Ai Weiwei's gallery owner, Urs Meile, Director of the Galerie Urs Meile, Beijing-Lucerne, through two Swiss Foundations: the Leister Foundation and the Erlenmeyer Foundation. The press release for this work quotes them as saying they 'see their engagement as an investment and (they) have produced a re-financing plan with both the gallery and the artist.'<sup>49</sup> With an overall exhibition budget for Documenta XII of 19 million euros (of which, according to the Documenta website, only two million was actually allocated to the exhibitions and projects), without this sort of private support, the high cost for a single artist commission would have been prohibitive.<sup>50</sup> Thus, for large-scale exhibitions such as Documenta, and international biennales and triennials, commissions of this scale can perhaps only be realised with the assistance of private foundations. Ai Weiwei's work has been included in numerous international biennales and triennales, and he has been the subject of a number of significant exhibitions in public galleries.<sup>51</sup> Has it become the case that only certain organisations of a particular size, financial, artistic and international position can afford to realise a project of this scale?

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<sup>46</sup> There is extensive referencing to this positioning in newspapers, art journals, and commentary. See for example Copeland, 2005, interview with Robert Storr (Curator Venice Biennale), Okui Enwezor (Curator, Documenta XI) and Heidwig Fejin, URL: <http://www.abc.net.au/rn/arts/sunmorn/stories/s1446988.htm>, accessed 12.3.08. 'And if Venice is still the big one, Documenta, held every five years ... is seen by the international art world as the most serious contemporary art survey.'

<sup>47</sup> Ai Weiwei's company, Fake Design, is involved in another architectural project with Herzog and de Meuron to build 100 luxury houses. Mr Ai's company invited the 100 teams of architects to Ordos, China, and requested a response to their email of invitation in ten days. The site plan for the neighborhood was designed by Mr. Ai. Bernstein, 2008, URL: [http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/01/garden/01mongolia.html?pagewanted=1&\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/01/garden/01mongolia.html?pagewanted=1&_r=1), accessed 8.5.08.

<sup>48</sup> Weiwei, 2007, Documenta press release, URL: <http://www.documenta12.de/1039.html?&L=1>, accessed 7.5.08.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Including the 48<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale, 1999; the Shanghai Biennale, 2000; 1st Chengdu Biennale, Chengdu Modern Art Museum, Chengdu, China, 2001; 'Guangzhou Triennale', Guangdong Museum of Art, Guangzhou, China, 2002; 15<sup>th</sup> Biennale of Sydney, Australia, 2006; 'We are the future', 2<sup>nd</sup> Moscow Biennale, Russia, 2007.

## **Funding**

Many foundations are extremely discreet about their level of support for projects, their organisational and financial structure, and even how they operate. This claim is reiterated in much of the literature on philanthropy, which frequently criticises foundations for their lack of transparency and accountability.<sup>52</sup>

For example, while there are public references to both the two Swiss foundations supporting Ai Weiwei's project for Documenta (the Leister and Erlenmeyer Foundations), and also to the arrangement of the funding by the artist's Swiss gallery, further information about the foundations themselves is harder to find. This lack of disclosure tends to support the suggestion that private foundations have been reluctant to advertise their work widely, although this trend appears to be changing.<sup>53</sup> The role of these foundations in Ai Weiwei's project is arguably more involved than simply that of grant-makers, given the nature of the financial arrangement they both made and their relationship with the artist's commercial gallery. This new model of financing, as a means of getting a project off the ground, is as much a reflection of the complicated process of realising large-scale conceptual art projects as it is a reflection of developments in the philanthropic sector and the wider contemporary art market.

Whether consciously articulated or not, many of the private foundations and trusts set up to commission and realise ephemeral site-specific projects, both in Australia and internationally, have a particular interest and area of specialisation. Kaldor Art Projects' exhibitions have predominantly had a European and American international contemporary art focus, whilst SCAF focuses on the Asia Pacific focus. Rather than acting as limitations, these focal points enable others to see what can be achieved in a specific area of contemporary art support, whilst demonstrating that there are further areas that can be explored to continue to make a richer, more diverse area of endeavour. These two Australian examples of private foundations, and their methodologies for supporting contemporary art, open up a number of interesting areas for discussion: how the particular artists are chosen by the foundation; what the foundation's relationships with partner (public) institutions are; what form of funding models the projects attract; and how the projects are judged – by the commissioning foundation, the artist, the broader local and international art world, and by the Australian public in general.

## **Conclusion**

Whilst private foundations have existed in various forms for a number of centuries, the rise of private foundations that commission, organise and produce contemporary art projects independently is a recent development. It has evolved in response to changes in contemporary art practice, as can be seen in the dramatic changes that occurred in Australian contemporary art in

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<sup>52</sup> See, for example, Anheier and Leat, 2006.

<sup>53</sup> Both Frumkin, 2006, p. 81, and Anheier and Leat, 2006, p. 253, discuss issues of transparency and accountability in relation to private foundations. Philanthropy Australia's website has only recently begun to list case studies and comments from a number of private foundations; URL: <http://ppf.philanthropy.org.au/case-studies/>, last accessed 17.11.08.

the late 1960s and early '70s. Responding to ideas of protest, collaboration, experimentation and finding alternative solutions, artists expressed these concerns through an increasingly process based, ephemeral art that existed increasingly outside the established art market system. Into this environment, Kaldor presented his first ephemeral art project, which appeared to be functioning outside of these established systems. As art has continued to become increasingly larger in scale, more complex and expensive to create, funding models have had to continue to modify and develop accordingly. Some of the foundations discussed in this article, such as Kaldor Art Projects, began with a curator/patron who provided much of the funding for early projects. However, often these foundations sourced financial contributions from other private individuals, public galleries and public funding bodies as these sources become available, and as their reputations grew. This broadening increases the potential scope of the foundations' activities, as well as legitimising their status. Ultimately, of course, broadening the funding base is essential if the foundation is to continue its life beyond the lifetime of its original curator/patron.

What then began as the vision of an individual, or curator/patron, became the private foundation, with its freedom from institutional constraints. The private foundation has had to continue to re-define itself to continue to offer an alternative model for funding and commissioning, becoming more of an organisation, rather than being directed by a single individual; setting up advisory boards; sourcing co-funding from public bodies; often benefiting from changes to legal and taxation policy to enable greater support of culture and the arts. Both the private foundation model and the role of curator/patron continue to develop and modify in response to changes in artistic practice as well as the socio-political contexts in which artists and their works develop.

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