

CI 1029 Museum of Contemporary Art



MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART

Response to the ALRC national classification review by the Museum of Contemporary Art Sydney

Circular Quay West Sydney Australia
PO Box R1286 Royal Exchange NSW 1223 Australia
ABN 15 003 765 517
Telephone 61 2 9245 2400
Facsimile 61 2 9252 4361
www.mca.com.au

1. The MCA is the only museum in Australia dedicated to the presentation, collection and interpretation of contemporary art. It therefore plays a leadership role in matters relating to presenting the work of living artists to broad audiences.
2. The MCA's response to the review focuses only on the classification of works of art, both in the gallery and online.
3. Between February 2010 and June 2011, the MCA presented over 1000 works of art. Of these, only a handful required consideration as regards content which might be considered offensive. The Museum's monitoring of complaints reveals that there are occasional complaints about content which a visitor may feel is inappropriate but these are relatively few given the large number of visitors to the Museum. (580,000 in 2010.) The proposal that all works of art might require classification seems to be both unnecessary and an extraordinarily onerous and expensive administrative burden.
4. With regard to those works that have required special consideration, the MCA has in place a procedure and a number of strategies. The Museum starts from the premise that a significant number of its visitors may be first time visitors and that it has a responsibility to ensure that people are made aware of content issues so that they can make the decision whether to view the works in question or not.
5. The curator working on each show reviews works for contentious content, such as violence, sexual references, themes involving children and religious references as well as other difficult or inaccessible features. All concerns regarding the content of artwork are signalled at a Project team meeting, at which the Director and Senior members of staff are present, as well as representatives from the MCA Education team. The work is discussed and an appropriate strategy agreed upon. This might involve the following:
 - a. Works which have content that might be of concern presented in galleries where warning signs that alert the visitor to the nature of the content can be prominently displayed.
 - b. A member of staff stationed by the entrance to prevent access by minors.
 - c. A warning sign placed at the front desk.
 - d. On two occasions, the MCA decided to charge entry to ensure that people were well aware of the content before entering.
 - e. All front of house staff fully briefed about difficult content

- f. Pre visit by the local police to inform them about contentious content (There have been complaints to the police on two occasions in the past twelve years, one concerning young people involved in sexual activity and the other a work about racism. In neither case did the police believe that action should be taken).
 - g. All action discussed with the artists concerned
6. The MCA also has a complaints procedure. All complaints are answered in writing by the Director. The number of complaints about content is low, which indicates that the current self regulation is working.
7. With regard to online and advertising material, the MCA does not use contentious material in this context. However, in putting its collections online, there is a need for a new policy, which the Museum is currently working on. The issue of warnings on the site is impractical as people will be able to bypass this when using a search engine. Contentious material in the collection is not being put online until the Museum has resolved the issues and devised a policy.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Elizabeth Ann Macgregor', with a long, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

Elizabeth Ann Macgregor
Director