



INSIDE THE GALLERY PODCAST – SERIES 3 EPISODE 2 (Late Jan 2021)

Transcript of interview:

KATRINA SEDGEWICK OAM

Director/CEO

ACMI (Australian Centre for the Moving Image)

RE-OPENING PREVIEW

Tim Stackpool:

Katrina, she's joining us on the phone just for a quick chat. But first of all, thanks for joining us on Inside the Gallery.

Katrina Sedgewick OAM:

Thank you for having me.

Tim Stackpool:

It's been a long time coming. You guys have been in refurbishment for, it seems forever. You must be so pleased to now have an opening date. A few challenges along the way though, I expect?

Katrina Sedgewick OAM:

We've been slowed down a bit, it has to be said, by the pandemic, particularly with the lockdown in Melbourne and the second wave. But we are just working through the process at the moment, finalising what is a very complex and multilayered build that we're navigating through an evolving situation in relation to the pandemic restrictions.

Tim Stackpool:

Yeah, it's been so tough throughout the whole year to actually nail down any firm plans, of course, because you never know when you may be put under restrictions again and in Melbourne certainly. Had a character-building couple of months, I think we could describe it that way. And in terms of what you've had to do in the meantime, we've seen some tremendous online experiences evolve over this period and particularly as well with your museum. Did you always have plans for that, or has it intensified over this year because of COVID?

Katrina Sedgewick OAM:

Look, I think it's intensified. We, as part of what we're calling our renewal project, which is a \$40 million transformation, we've invested a lot of imagination into how we could seize the digital tools available to us to extend how visitors engage with our museum. So they would come, they would have a very interactive and immersive experience in the museum, but then they would be able to go home and explore it much further.

Katrina Sedgewick OAM:

And so we've invested a lot of time and money in that. And when lockdown came, we were already shut. So we were running a few programs, some talks, some industry-focused workshops, education programs, and we pivoted them and put them online. And we were fascinated to see the take-up of those programs and how deeply people were engaging with really complex conversations and ideas. And it felt like the audience had almost caught up with what the potential is for digital to extend what a physical museum can be into the digital space.

Katrina Sedgewick OAM:

So we've created digital accompaniment to our permanent exhibition, which we've called The Story of the Moving Image. The physical exhibition will open with our building. But we've taken the ideas in that

and selected a number of strands which we've created as a sort of Story of the Moving Image experience, where you can go online and explore a whole lot of stories, pieces of media, clips, images.

Katrina Sedgewick OAM:

And it's almost like a magazine, a digital magazine that accompanies a physical visit. And it's really rich, and it's almost choose your own adventure in how you wander through. And the team has brought with that a lot of really rich curatorial materials. So there's fantastic articles and wonderful video compiles and one of the juxtapositions, if you like, between the content that we are exploring.`

Katrina Sedgewick OAM:

We are Australia's only museum of screen culture. And when we talk about screen culture, we talk about film, television, video games, digital art, contemporary video art, and all of the other things that sit between that in the moving image that dominate our lives so much. And I think our curators and programmers have really thought about connecting all of those different things in interesting ways.

Katrina Sedgewick OAM:

If you like, ACMI is creating its own human-driven algorithms, forget AI, our people who are connecting and making recommendations for you. So it's very rich. And because we are ACMI, the Australian Centre for the Moving Image, at the moment, it has a very Australian focus as well.

Tim Stackpool:

Yeah. And the other thing is, too, in talking to so many curators over the last few years on the podcast is that there's always things that they just don't have the space to include, or the concepts that they can't necessarily hang on the walls when it comes to visual arts, for instance. But then being able to extend into the digital world, into the internet on the web, it lends itself to a whole new expansion of actually curating and getting the message across to people.

Katrina Sedgewick OAM:

You're absolutely right. And that's exactly what it's meant for us. When you're making a physical exhibition, it's an incredible discipline about what you don't include. It has to be very tight. It has to be very succinct. And it's exactly as you say, how you kind of create this physical experience for somebody means that there are things that you can't riff off. There are rabbit holes that you just can't go down. There are tangents you can't explore. As soon as you go online, suddenly that really frees you up. I think you still have to bring a discipline to it, but it's a different kind of way of creating an exhibition experience for visitors.

Katrina Sedgewick OAM:

And at the same time as launching this Story of the Moving Image experience, we've also announced that we're creating two new spaces for ACMI. We've got beautiful permanent and temporary galleries and beautiful cinemas. We've now launched cinema three, which is an entirely video on demand, curated digital cinema that will be ongoing as part of our offer. So we have three cinema spaces now, two in situ and one online.

Katrina Sedgewick OAM:

And then we have four different gallery spaces in the building. We now have a gallery five. And interesting, when you talk about visual art, what's really exciting about creating an entirely digital space for contemporary visual artists, we can then house and show exhibitions about those visual artists who are practicing exclusively in the digital space. And that opens up a lot of really exciting opportunities, again, for how we curate our programs.

Tim Stackpool:

Yeah. So you started talking about the things that we can expect when you do get to reopen. Specifically, what sort of exhibitions do you have scheduled to kick your opening off?

Katrina Sedgewick OAM:

Well, the main exhibition is the new permanent exhibition. And so ACMI really had a big shift in 2009 when it opened its first permanent exhibition. We are an interesting museum because we do have a collection. It's the state film archive. It has about 250,000 objects in it, mainly moving image, both films, videos, and digital works, but it's not something that you can tell a whole story that is about a very global picture of the past and present of the moving image, which is 120 years old and has so many fascinating aspects.

Katrina Sedgewick OAM:

So in 2009, the museum created its first permanent exhibition called Screen Worlds. And when we closed it in April 2019, it had been operating for nearly 10 years. It had billions of people's through it. It just really resonated with people of all ages. The main visitors were in their 20s and 30s, interestingly. But when it opened, the iPhone 3 had just arrived in Australia. So a lot has changed since then.

Tim Stackpool:

It seems a long time ago, doesn't it?

Katrina Sedgewick OAM:

It really does. You think of how that's transformed how we engage with the image. We are now all consumers, creators and distributors in our pockets, and it's just fascinating. So this new permanent exhibition is larger than that. It's 1600 square meters. It tells the story, the pre-cinema through the arrival of the animated image right through to the present day and with a nudge towards what's next. But it's an exhibition that very importantly is designed to evolve, to reflect this rapidly changing environment. It's incredibly interactive.

Katrina Sedgewick OAM:

So there's a lot of stuff that you can play with, lots of different experiences. There's a real kind of theatricality to the exhibition. It embeds and juxtaposes all of those different forms I mentioned before next to each other in really interesting ways. So for example, contemporary art is throughout the exhibition.

Katrina Sedgewick OAM:

In terms of the technology, we've devised a thing that we're calling the lens, which is a recyclable cardboard, a little circle that is a take-home device. It has an NFC chip in it. It's been inspired by those old View-Master slides. And you can take that and go around and tap labels, whatever you're interested

in. If you've created something in one of the interactive experiences, you can tap and keep it. And then you can go home, and you'll find your own bespoke page, which has all of those things that you collected, and then you can dive deeper into a really rich extension of the visit that you had.

Katrina Sedgewick OAM:

I think really importantly, too, one of the big shifts that we've made is how we've engaged with First Nations people. So first of all, the way that we've worked with indigenous advisory group, which includes elders from the Bunurong and Wurundjeri peoples, whose land that our museum is on, and also leading indigenous practitioners or indigenous leaders to help guide us with how we tell and collaborate with First Nations practitioners and stories throughout the exhibition.

Katrina Sedgewick OAM:

And I think people will really be incredibly thrilled. I think they'll learn a lot. And I think it'll actually be quite revelatory for how the indigenous voice, the First Nations voice, really wraps itself around the stories that we're telling, which are very global. But we are a nation which has the longest continuing connection to its culture anywhere in the world, who've been using light and shadow and storytelling throughout all of that time. And I think that experience, that tradition, and then of course the contemporary practice, which is so incredibly vibrant, is really wonderful to have wrapped so deeply across the permanent exhibition and indeed in the building as a whole.

Tim Stackpool:

And you're obviously excited and anticipating the opening again and ready for it to go. Looking back though, you had plans to relaunch anyway prior to COVID, but how did your folks, your staff, how did you manage during COVID? How did you, I guess, maintain the culture that you'd built up within your team and carry that through the toughest of times that we've seen, particularly throughout Melbourne and Victoria?

Katrina Sedgewick OAM:

Yeah. Look, I think it's been so extraordinary and so challenging. When you look at what's happened to the arts, to the creative industries globally, it's just been devastating. And I suppose, in that context, we have been very lucky. We were already closed, and we'd spent years planning to be closed. We shut our doors in May 2019. So we didn't have that trauma of being mid-something and just having to stop.

Katrina Sedgewick OAM:

We had invested a lot. We've established an experienced team who have been working with our ICT team to really look at how we can work very flexibly and nimbly together using digital tools, which really helped when we had to separate and work from home. And we were in the middle of a building project. And construction has always been seen as an essential service, albeit at a slower rate, albeit in a COVID-safe way that has slowed us down. However, it's meant that we've been able to keep the momentum going.

Katrina Sedgewick OAM:

And then simultaneously, I think that that move to digital for everybody has been quite revealing. And for us, because we were already mid-project that had this digital investment, we were then able to, for example, The Story of the Moving Image experience, our team pulled that together in four months.

Tim Stackpool:

Amazing.

Katrina Sedgewick OAM:

We were already working with "Licorice". They're an amazing web design company who were making our websites. And so we said to them, "Can you build this for us?" And we were mid-conversation with them, so we could start at a gallop.

Katrina Sedgewick OAM:

So I'm not trying to insinuate that it hasn't been incredibly tough. And I think for all of our staff, it's been hard. And for all of us personally, it's been really difficult, but we've kept our jobs. We've got a really exciting project, and I think we felt the purpose of that project became even more important with COVID. We know that we're sitting on something that's wonderful.

Katrina Sedgewick OAM:

And when we open, we're going to be an important ingredient in the reanimation of our city, of attracting people to come and visit again from interstate and eventually internationally, but getting our community out amongst it. I think we really felt that that investment that was made by the government and also by some wonderful partners and donors has become almost all valuable strangely because of the advent of this pandemic.

Tim Stackpool:

Yes. Yes. It's been very interesting times, and certainly looking forward to that day when you can open the doors again, and we can all come to visit and enjoy the splendid panorama, the offer that you guys have there. And there's nothing else like it in Australia really. It's fantastic, Katrina, and I thank you so much for chatting with us on Inside the Gallery.

Katrina Sedgewick OAM:

Thank you.