

PROJECT 2

Harald Szeemann

1971

I want to leave a nice well-done child here

29 April – 13 May 1971

Bonython Gallery, Sydney

4 June – 4 July 1971

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

BIOGRAPHY

Harald Szeemann proposed the notion of the independent curator, radically altering the future of curatorial practice. Szeemann developed the idea of the 'great exhibition' in which works were brought together by a central cross-disciplinary theme. This is perhaps best exemplified by his work as the curator of Documenta 5 (1972) where he established the current notion of the international biennale. Szeemann saw his ground-breaking new style of curating as creating 'poems in space'.

FACTS

- Harald Szeemann was curator of the Kunsthalle Bern in Switzerland from 1961 to 1969.
- His iconic exhibition *Live in your head: when attitudes become form* was staged at the Kunsthalle in 1969 and pioneered the exhibition of conceptual art in Europe.
- In late 1969, Szeemann left the Kunsthalle and became known as the world's first independent curator.
- *I want to leave a nice well-done child here* involved 22 Australian artists and was the largest presentation of conceptual art that had ever been staged in an Australian museum at the time.
- LIST OF EXHIBITING ARTISTS
John Armstrong; Tony Bishop; Robert Boynes; Mike Brown; Gunter Christmann; Tony Coleing; Aleks Danko; Margaret Dodd; Neil Evans; Ross Grounds; Dale Hickey; Tim Johnson; Peter Kennedy; Warren Knight; Nigel Lendon; Ian Milliss; Ti Parks; Mike Parr; William Pidgeon; Brett Whiteley; Tony Woods; Guy Stuart; Alec Tzannes
- SELECTED WORKS
- Ian Milliss' *Circle Game* was a ring of knotted white cloth became a circular, interactive tug-of-war.
- Alec Tzannes' *Contact* featured 221 circular perspex units that could be moved across the floor by gallery visitors.
- Mike Parr's invitation to the exhibition was a questionnaire for the visitor asking whether the show was a) material b) immaterial c) neither.

PROJECT 2

Harald Szeemann

1971

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Works were chosen because of their pictorial and plastic qualities or their intensity of method, concept, intention, obsession.

– Harald Szeemann

Harald Szeemann was the most celebrated and influential curator of the late 20th century. With a career spanning almost 50 years, he invented the modern idea of exhibition making; pioneered the display of conceptual art and performance; created some of the first cross-disciplinary, non-chronological exhibitions; and experimented with non-museum spaces. For Project 2 in 1971, at the launching point of Szeemann's long career as he prepared for the Documenta 5 exhibition in Kassel, John Kaldor invited him to visit Australia and curate an exhibition of the latest contemporary Australian art. The exhibition, *I want to leave a nice well-done child here*, was shown in Sydney and Melbourne and was the first major exhibition of conceptual art in an Australian museum.

Between 14 April and 27 April 1971, Szeemann travelled to Sydney, Adelaide and Melbourne to view the work of 70 artists, visiting studios, galleries, museums and private collections. When asked about his plans for the exhibition, Szeemann said, "It will be my view of you from the outside. I am open to all forms of expression." The result was a dynamic exhibition of works by 22 young artists in Sydney's Bonython Gallery interior and courtyard and, later, including an additional artist, for Melbourne's National Gallery of Victoria.

The atmosphere of the exhibition was lively and engaging, with works ranging from painting and sculpture to installation and performance. The artists included were John Armstrong; Tony Bishop; Robert Boynes; Gunter Christmann; Tony Coleing; Aleks Danko; Margaret Dodd; Neil Evans; Ross Grounds; Dale Hickey; Tim Johnson; Peter Kennedy; Warren Knight; Nigel Lendon; Ian Milliss; Ti Parks; Mike Parr; William Pidgeon, Brett Whiteley and Tony Woods (in collaboration); Guy Stuart and Alec Tzannes. A number of new works were created specifically for the exhibition at the National Gallery of Victoria and artist Mike Brown was added with a large mixed-media installation. The gallery's press release declared, "In many ways it is the most extreme exhibition of work ever seen in Melbourne."

In this review for the *Sun*, critic James Gleeson explained the importance of the exhibition for conceptual art in Australia:

It presents the conceptual artist's point of view as decisively and with as much impact as the now famous Field exhibition's presentation of abstract minimalism in 1968 ... The Szeemann selection isn't the exhibition for the eye – it is intended for the mind. One must approach it without prejudices and with one's sensory equipment stretched to the utmost in an effort to reach the purpose deep within the unfamiliar forms.

– James Gleeson, 'New forms give us food for thought', *Sun*, 5 May 1971, p47

Harald Szeemann
on his visit to
Australia between
14 and 27 April
1971

Photo: Brian Adams



Kaldor Public Art
Project 2: Harald
Szeemann,
exhibition view, *I
want to leave a nice
well-done child here*,
National Gallery of
Victoria, Melbourne,
4 June - 4 July
1971

Image courtesy of
Kaldor Public Art
Projects

