

## Collection Supporting Essay.

Peggy-Jane Keddy

Ever since I was five my mother has taken me to Muka Art Gallery to choose a print of artwork that I personally could relate to. Frans Baetens and Magda van Gils, a Dutch couple from Belgium moved to New Zealand in 1983 and started the printing of prints for the Muka Art Gallery. This then turned into Muka Youth Prints, where the pair would invite artists from all over the world to produce small prints (100mm by 200mm) but with a catch. The catch was only youth; children aged 5-18 could attend and purchase the prints. This discussion will focus on the importance of allowing children to express their knowledge and personal liking without any adult input. This allows children to connect and relate to art at a young age- and allows us as adults to see a massive input of personality from the child, without even knowing.

The rules of the Youth Prints are very personal to me. Frans and Magda created this area so that children can choose art and actually look at the prints, not the financial gain. The rules are, each child must be aged 5-18. Visitors can only buy a maximum of three prints and only for themselves. There was no camera's or any sort of photography allowed within the exhibit. The names of artists are covered while on show and only revealed once the work has been paid for and the last is that you can only enter the exhibit once a year. The idea is that "the best way to make young people acquainted with contemporary art is to get real works of art in their hands". This exhibit is a complete opposite from others I have attended. Usually the artist encourages you to read the work and the background behind the work they have created. Whereas the Muka Art Gallery wants you to base your purchase purely on the work, not the story or meaning behind it, allowing us to create our own assumptions. The costs of the prints vary for each country the exhibit is held. Based purely on the economy, Frans and Magda create a steady, even price to sell all prints so young children and families have a even chance of purchase. The prints usually sell for about \$40ea with artist and Muka stamped and labelled on the

back. The prints come in a sealed plastic bag full of information about the artist and print you have just purchased. This allowed me to then research the artist and their acknowledging works to the prints I have already gathered,

The Muka Art Gallery completed its sales in 2011, meaning it is no longer open to sell prints, although the prints are still on exhibit in Grey Lynn, Auckland. The exhibition created an adult free zone allowing only children (aged 5-18) to come in and view the artist's works. This encourages the child to select a print of artwork based purely on personal like and the emotional connection to the artwork itself. This is what my mum and I loved about this exhibit. Encouraging me to choose a print contently on my own without any adult in put or knowledge of who the artist could be. Although I started to attend when I was five years old (2001) I started to gather prints and form collections of my own from the same artists. This was clarified when we realised I'd selected two original prints from Nigel Brown and three from Hans Peter Adamski over 5 years. Every year when I came out of the exhibit my mother was astonished at what I had chosen, but this also showed her a insight to my very own creative and fast-growing mind and that I had a natural flare for picking up collective artworks. "Muka Youth Prints is about the love of art and the excitement of being able to own a work of your own. Some children go for animals, flowers and trees while others prefer abstract works. It's fascinating to see what they choose and also how the tastes of our return visitors change over the years," says Frans and Magda. Frans and Magda feel they develop close relationships to all the works but are open minded. When asked Magda said "I'll be just as happy if a child walked out and said there's nothing, or it's all crap".

The exhibit opened back up in Dec 2016 meaning children can come in and exhibit the works, but they are still not for sale. This was gutting. After stopping for years- the couple then re-opened after I had turned 19 meaning I could no longer attend the Youth section and enjoy the excitement that we didn't know who the

artists were. The works coming out at the time were contemporary as they were selected yearly, based on theme. But for me now, I believe they are historic. Although I still have a massive connection to the prints I have already brought, the whole experience of arriving at Muka Art Gallery in Wellington CBD have gone. Some of the artists have died, and I feel as though I have lost all personal connection to the exhibit itself. The excitement and adrenalin it expressed have submerged and now I cannot purchase prints without relating to just the work. One of the best feelings, was going in to the exhibit and selecting a print by number, then coming out to find out you've chosen an original Nigel Brown without realising.

From collecting these prints I have realised that I don't have a particular style in preferred art but a definite connection to every piece that I'd purchased. I now not only connect with a piece of work with the artist but am able to develop my own understanding of how this artwork/piece makes me feel. Muka Art Gallery allows us to have affordable access to art from over 200 artists from all over the world. In New Zealand, I feel as though this exhibit will be a educational, productive family outing that makes the children feel as though their creative input to this world is important. Which it is.

Mead, K. 2011, September 29. Art for Kids Sake.

<http://www.stuff.co.nz/sunday-star-times/features/5674591/Art-for-kids-sake>

Muka Art Gallery homepage. <http://www.muka.co.nz/youth-prints/concept.html>

Stock, N. 2011, Dec 19. Frans Baeten and Magda van Gils.

<http://architecturenow.co.nz/articles/frans-baetens-magda-van-gils/>