



# So you want to be a curator

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Jane Raffan

Jane Raffan has curated, published and acted as consultant to independent and public institution projects with a focus on Aboriginal art, Australian art and photography, and has held high level managerial and specialist roles in the auction industry. She currently heads art advisory consultancy ArtiFacts Art Services.

## **How did you get your job?**

I launched ArtiFacts in 2009 after 20 years working in various roles in the public and commercial art sectors. I'm an accredited federal government valuer for their Cultural Gifts Program, a vetted member of the Australian Auctioneers & Valuers Association and an executive committee member of the Art Consulting Association of Australia. I also lecture and write on a broad range of issues affecting the art market, and this expertise and insight is brought to bear in ArtiFacts' speciality areas: collection management and valuation services.

## **What have you done before?**

I worked in the public sector (Art Gallery of New South Wales) in collection management, and in the private sector (fine art auction industry) in managerial and specialist roles. Both arenas provided invaluable opportunities for acquiring professional and practical skills in dealing with the art world. Along the way I also engaged in personal projects outside paid employment, such as freelance writing, curating and consulting in a number of inter-disciplinary fields.

## **What training do you have and did it help?**

I have a First Class Honours BA degree in Fine Arts and, more recently, a Grad.Dip in Environmental law, with a focus on matters arising from dealing in cultural heritage. After completing my undergraduate degree I wanted to explore the art world hands-on, so I decided

to volunteer at the Art Gallery of New South Wales instead of going on to do a PHD. And the rest is history, as they say. I undertook training in law while working in the auction industry as I wanted to reacquaint myself with academic rigour. During this time I also gained accreditation as a valuer.

**What did you imagine the job would be like and were you right?**

I had an initial five year plan for ArtiFacts, which I've achieved in four. At the height of the post GFC collapse I was convinced I had picked the worst time to launch the consultancy. Market conditions were terrible, certain sectors disappeared overnight and generally business was very slow. In retrospect that climate gave me the time to carefully consider how best to re-shape the direction of my consultancy and I planted a lot of seedlings, which I've been nurturing ever since.

**What do you wish someone had warned you about?**

Staying in one job for too long.

**What skills do you need to do this job?**

Resolve, resourcefulness and resilience. There's no place for complacency when you work for yourself. And expertise needs to be backed by practical versatility and business acumen. In my case that's a combination of market knowledge, professional skills, academic training and being able to write well.

**What personality suits this job?**

Patient, steadfast, confident and easy going. You can't be risk averse and you have to be incredibly self-motivated and like working alone.

**What advice would you give someone who wants your job?**

Stick to your guns. Follow your heart, and be ever mindful of the consequences of compromises along the way.

**What career achievement makes you proudest?**

Working with the Corrigan Collection, which has been a very enriching experience. I've just authored a book on the collection – *Power + Colour: New Painting from the Corrigan Collection of 21st Century Aboriginal Art* (published by Macmillan). It represents the coalescence of my academic training and writing practice, as well as the application of skills and expertise acquired throughout my career working in the arts. It was launched by former Prime Minister Rudd in February at Brisbane's Queensland Art Gallery of Modern Art.

**What's next?**

Working for oneself you never know! I've been producing and presenting documentary style shows for Arts Monday on Eastside Radio for nearly two years, which has been a lot of fun, so broadcasting has definite appeal. And I have a long-held fantasy about taking on the Australian arm of The Art Loss Register, tracking down stolen material around the world – my researcher/detective avatar would be an anti Tomb Raider character, with touches of Modesty Blaise. No matter what happens, whether through ArtiFacts, where I expect to continue researching, valuing, writing and getting up close and personal with more fabulous collections, or elsewhere, I will always have a life deeply engaged with art.

<http://au.artshub.com/au/news-article/careeradvice/arts/so-you-want-to-be-a-curator-194165>