

WA: Heartney's modern art guide for all

By Andrea Hayward

PERTH, Feb 16 AAP - In Australia for the Perth International Arts Festival, New York art critic Eleanor Heartney is a world away from the artworld she calls home.

But she's no stranger to Australian art or Australians, many of whom have carved themselves a niche in the New York art scene.

"There's actually a lot of Australians and people who are in the artworld, not necessarily artists," she says.

"There's a number of people I know who are Australians well placed in the artworld so it's very interesting, it's not so quite isolated despite the distance."

After a short visit to Perth to give a keynote address today, Heartney was bound for Sydney where she will speak at the Museum of Contemporary Art on February 24 to coincide with the upcoming exhibition Kusama: Through the Looking Glass.

It's been 20 years since she made her first and only visit to Australia.

Last year, her book *Art & Today*, a survey of contemporary arts of the last 25 years was published after eight years of hard work.

A contributing editor to *Art in America* and *Artpress*, Heartney, has been entrenched in the New York art scene since moving there 25 years ago.

From the US midwest, she was schooled in Chicago and spent a short time in Minneapolis.

"I'm kind of an outsider even though I've been in New York for 25 years, my husband is a born and bred New Yorker and never ceases to remind me that there is a difference."

Publisher Phaidon approached her about eight years ago to update *Art & Today*, published 18 years ago.

"It presented a very interesting challenge because even in just the 18 years since the last version of this survey the artworld has changed tremendously," Heartney says.

"And one of the things that has happened is that it's become incredibly eclectic to the point where I was trying to think about how do you organise a book about contemporary art which is all over the place.

"I realised that you couldn't use any of the more kind of conventional things, it didn't make sense to talk about it in strict chronology because it's not like one thing follows another, you can talk about it in terms of movements, you can't talk about it in terms of media."

So Heartney set about devising a series of themes and topics including art and the object, and art and popular culture, including the so-called Warhol effect, using the works of about 18 artists to illuminate the issues and themes.

Art can be intimidating but Heartney hopes her book will appeal to everyone.

"I hope that the book is just not for specialists, I hope it has an outreach to people that are intelligent and want to know about art but don't necessarily have a deep background in it," she says.

"It's kind of a guidebook - well I hope it acts as one."

The future is certain to bring increasing diversity in art, Heartney says.

She admits she thought about writing in a chapter called *Art and the Future* but stopped short.

"I think that digital art and time-based art has already changed things a great deal..." she says.

"I thought about doing a chapter called *Art and the Future* but then I thought that's really asking for trouble - I mean you can't do that.

"I think that art will continue to be very eclectic, that's the one prediction I am willing to make."

Ecological science, the environment, the body and the ethics of science will also be big influences for art in the future, Heartney says.

"All these developments in science, artists will be thinking about the implications of them.

"We may be using those techniques but artists will really be asking questions about 'should we really be doing this'?"

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