

40 YEARS: KALDOR PUBLIC ART PROJECTS 1969–2009

Peer2peer interview with John Kaldor

Iskra Zafirovska: Welcome to peer2peer. I'm Iskra Zafirovska from North Sydney Girls High School and today I'm interviewing John Kaldor. Hi John, how are you?

John Kaldor: Good, thank you. 'Morning, nice to meet you.

IZ: Can you tell us a bit about your background and ... your life, growing up as a child and what interested you in art?

JK: I was born in Hungary. I came to Australia when I was thirteen, went to high school here, and lived in Australia ever since. I got interested in art as a twelve-and-a-half-years-old when we were in Paris for about 4 months, stateless, after escaping from Hungary, waiting for a country to take us in, and Australia was the first country to give us permission; but in the meantime we were stranded in Paris. And rather than going to school, my parents decided to show me all the famous museums of Paris, so that I should have a bit of education. So that's when I got interested in art.

IZ: After your art interest you began an interest in textiles and you founded Kaldor Textiles company. What ... sparked you to do that and how did you go about it?

JK: Well, my parents were in the textile business and I worked with them for about eight years and then I worked for a large, public company; and, after a while, I decided I would like to start my own business. It was also the time of the Christo project and I thought if I can organise a wrapping of a coastline I can probably run a small business of my own.

IZ: After that first project you've worked with countless numbers of ... very famous artists, very important in the art world. What sort of relationship did you have with them and why did you choose to bring those artists to Australia?

JK: I want to bring to Australia artists that represent highlights of the latest developments of contemporary art, so that the Australian public can see what is happening. Also, most of the projects happened in a location, like if we go back [to] Gregor Schneider on Bondi Beach, Bill Viola in a beautiful old church in Redfern, Urs Fischer on Cockatoo Island... by doing them on very typical Australian sites, the work becomes part of our heritage, becomes part of Australia, and when these artists show their work internationally, Australia is then also featured.

IZ: So, with your role with the art projects you said you were neither a curator nor a critic, so what would you describe your role [as] in Australia's art world?

JK: I want to help artists realise exciting projects. I want to bring exciting, important art events to the Australian public, young and old. Recently we started an art education program for schools, which I believe your school has been part of.

IZ: How do you think your projects have ... changed the way contemporary art is perceived in Australia?

JK: Certainly, early projects, and even more recent ones, have become, I think, part of Australian art history, have influenced a lot of young people. One of the good examples is Imants Tillers, who today is one of Australia's best known artists. He came to help Christo as a student, as an architecture student; and, after helping Christo, he decided he doesn't want to do architecture, he wants to become an artist.

IZ: A big turning point in ... the public perception of contemporary art was *Puppy*, Jeff Koons' sculpture in front of the MCA. What did you think about that work? Did you think it was ... a big ... thing for contemporary art in Australia?

JK: Jeff Koons is probably the most important mid-career artist working today, but it was also a very happy sculpture – people walked past and they smiled – which is a great combination; and, I mean, art doesn't have to always make you happy. It has to wake you up. Art can be strong. Art can be aggressive. Art can be questioning. It can be all *those things*. But the *Puppy* was a... happy puppy.

IZ: Recently, you decided to donate your entire personal collection, that you've ... collected over the past fifty years. What made you decide ... to give it away and why did you give it away to the Art Gallery of New South Wales?

JK: The Art Gallery has the means to take care of it, the means to show it. They are building a new, if you like, a new wing to house it, which is wonderful. I think the collection, in a way, is very much part of me and I've been collecting since fifty years, and I didn't want to split it up.

IZ: What do you believe this exhibition is for?

JK: I think very few people realise that all these works were done by our organisation. I want them to understand our history, the role it played – and plays – in Australian art. But, more than anything, I want to emphasise that this is not a retrospective; it's only, if you like, a 'mid-career'. The future's very much ahead and we want to do many more projects, with great artists. We want to do more of art education. We want to involve the public, and I believe we have a very exciting future.

IZ: Well, thank you very much for your time, John.

JK: A pleasure.

IZ: ... and a pleasure to talk to you.

JK: Good luck for your exams.

IZ: Thank you [laughs].

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