

On the CAS Tony McGillick.

In recent years the CAS has seemed close to total disintegration as an Organisation. Successive committees have failed to rehabilitate the dying body while the general membership remains indifferent to the imminent collapse of their society. The recent acquisition of a gallery has emphasised the terminal condition of the CAS. Never before has the CAS had such ideal facilities to project itself onto the art situation, to fulfill its potential as a sponsor for serious art activity. But nothing of the sort is happening, or even looks like happening. Rather, the new gallery facilities have highlighted the chronic apathy within the CAS. That which should have generated a renewed confidence for the CAS has become something more of a liability.

As it stands, the CAS is virtually irrelevant, worse it is disillusioning. As such it's symptomatic of the general malaise in art matters in Australia. If the art situation in this country were more vital, if other art institutions were seriously concerned with the realities of contemporary art, then the demise of the CAS may not matter, but the reverse is true. For the governmental institutions, art has become nothing more than the bureaucratic afterthought of passive individuals whose main concern is with the maintenance of a convenient and self serving status quo. For the dealer system, art has become little more than a diverting commercial activity.

In view of this depressing situation, the CAS remains the only alternative organisation with the potential for a serious (effective) sponsorship of contemporary art. The CAS has the facilities and some of the resources to provide an alternative, although apparently none of the energy.

Initially it should be decided whether this kind of organisation has any validity these days. That's open to argument and should be discussed thoroughly through the Broadsheet and with an informal meeting of members.

The point is, the issue of the CAS's relevance should be resolved deliberately by the members, not by apathetic default to the egocentric documents of infantile iconoclasts.

Assuming that there is a need for a revitalised CAS, this could only be achieved with a positive commitment to that end by everyone in the Society, especially the committee. There is probably a need to revise the structure and functions of the society to gear it more responsively to current issues, a need to define some priorities and ensure a continuing flexibility.

This is the second issue I suggest should be discussed thoroughly by members.

Another critical problem has been the serious lack of communication within the committee and with the committee and members. Ideas for the broadsheet, exhibitions and discussions almost never come from the members who on the other hand have little knowledge of proposals made to the committee. I feel members should become far more involved in this area and also that a report of relevant discussion in committee meetings should appear in the broadsheet for members information and comment.

Personally I would like to see the CAS adopt a more radical and opinionated position in art politics as well as exhibitions. The CAS should feel confident to remark on gallery appointments, government planning, publishing, aborigines, in fact anything which is seen to relate to our commitment.

I see no reason why the CAS should not mount politically oriented exhibitions or support radical activity which promotes an open interaction of ideas.

Even with all this discussion I am calling for, it is clear the CAS could not work entirely by consensus. The committee should be elected to express its own predilections as well as manage CAS affairs.

But a committee should draw all the criticism it deserves (perhaps more) as a critical membership will generate a vitality internally which will make for a vital CAS externally.

Source: CAS Broadsheet, Nov/Dec 1971