

PROFILE

DANIEL PYETT PROJECTS SPECIALIST & ART INSTALLER EXTRAORDINAIRE



“The Thinker” (30th floor roof terrace, Kowloon)

After graduating from Queens University Belfast in Social Anthropology (Most unemployable degree ever and I think the subject is now extinct!) I worked for an established auction company that is a traditional family business of over 200 years and located opposite the Harrods in Knightsbridge. It was great fun, more like a continuation of college. The pay was laughable, but we managed to have a furious social life and learnt quite a lot about art and antiques. One of the highlights was the “Country house sales” where whole country estates were sold off in marquee tents in the gardens. We ran about the houses as if we owned them.

Almost ten years working at the Tate gallery was rather too long! I did come away with museum practices hammered into my subconscious and it made me comfortable in handling and working on priceless national treasures. Initially I was brought in to help pack and move multiple old storage facilities into a new super hi-tech store. This took four years (!) after which i worked on in the store for a couple of more years before going into the galleries and installing many major exhibitions. Finally, I ended up on the team which went out to the other museums and galleries, artists studios and houses to pack and collect, or deliver whole exhibitions.

My subsequent job at a major UK logistics company was in a much different role, that of coordinating their fleet of 15 trucks and 30-40 technicians, It was very stressful! The trucks went all over Europe, to museums and even palaces, and I had to plan routes, loading, and deal with the problems as they occurred. My boss sat directly behind me and monitored everything. He was a formidable character with an obsessive eye for detail. Dealing with the team of drivers and technicians was very troublesome, they constantly rang up with tricks or complaints about the planning. I can drive a big truck so I often went on the operational jobs, when there were staff shortages. I worked at many art fairs and commercial galleries, also prestigious jobs at institutions like the Royal Academy, British Museum, Victoria and Albert museum and the Royal residences.

A surreal moment for me, was arriving for a delivery in the wee hours and having to sleep in a truck outside a bleak ex-concentration camp called Majdanek, in Poland.

Since coming to Asia, and being lucky enough to meet Helutrans, I have been involved with some fantastic jobs and projects. I was fortunate to arrive as the Hong Kong art market and consequently, the Helutrans office started to grow rapidly. At Helutrans, I have been involved with the expansion of the operations and warehouse business and at the front-end customer servicing. I work regularly with the teams at the international galleries and museums, and often help out in Singapore, Beijing and Shanghai.

I hope to be described as a safe pair of hands, experienced enough to make the right decisions, and confident in communicating the reasons to our clients. Obviously having worked in museums, commercial galleries, private homes and public installations, I have background knowledge of what is appropriate and most importantly safe in a given situation.

My role can be very varied. There are many instructions from Customer Service, to check, and advise the packing/ crating of non-standard items. I attend site visits to check and provide solutions for difficult access situations. Other functions include artworks condition checks and working with galleries, auction houses and museums to ensure smooth exhibition change round.

The skills required in my role are mainly logical and analytical, but based on experience. They include supervision of unusual, difficult or high value deliveries and collections, planning/ method statement for complicated and involved installations, as well as analysis and redesign of internal and external operational system and process.

Each job is a balance of providing the safest solution given the physical and budgetary constraints. When an artwork is handled, there is always a small probability of damage. The aim is to reduce that factor to the absolute minimum.

I get the most satisfaction from project assignments, where planning and background knowledge pay dividends. There are many rewarding aspects to the job. Seeing an artwork packed to a high standard, is satisfying in itself. The more complex the project or exhibition, the greater the satisfaction and relief when it is successfully completed. It is very gratifying to see our team working quickly and efficiently, when on a difficult job within a tight deadline.

The most challenging role is to monitor and maintain the highest standards, when circumstances (due to deadline or timing) dictate otherwise.

The most impressive and stressful of our jobs I encountered, was the giant sculpture commissioned by a prominent bank to commemorate its 150 years of business. The bronze sculpture is 10 meters high and 13 tonnes. I was involved in meetings for nine months with other contractors and managers to coordinate the one night install. We had to close most of Queens Road Central and hired two cranes. If one detail had been overlooked, the job would have failed. To add to this, a Feng Shui master had designated a particularly suitable date! The relief when the base slid over the 48 bolts and rested level, was immense.

Who knows what will come next?

(The facts and opinions expressed in the article are solely that of Daniel Pyett.)