MONASH UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF INFORMATION MANAGEMENT AND SYSTEMS

IMS1501: Studio 1
Case Study Functions
Semester 1, 2005

MonArt Gallery
Description of Operations

Introduction

The MonArt Gallery has been running exhibitions of contemporary art for a number of years. The gallery has become very successful and the owner, Mr. Monty, has found the task of maintaining the present paper-based record keeping tasks very time-consuming. He feels that a computer-based system may be able to help, and as a result, he has called you in to provide one. As a good analyst you have insisted on first establishing a clear description of how the organisation operates at present. As you point out to the gallery owner: “If you computerise a system which is mess, you will just finish up with a computerised mess.” Mr. Monty agrees, but before he hires you, he would like you to see your work on one of the gallery’s business functions, as he has been disappointed by work done in the past by a previous Systems Analyst. To this end he provides you with information about the “XXX” function.

Overview of Operations

The gallery runs exhibitions of art works which usually last from 1 to 3 weeks and can consist of up to 100 items. The gallery mounts approximately 20 exhibitions per year and none of them run in parallel. Each exhibition can consist of one or more artists’ work. The gallery maintains details of various artists, with their work being classified under various categories such as the type of art (sculpture, watercolour painting, etchings, etc), the content (landscapes, portraits, etc), the style (Impressionist, cubist, surrealist, etc), and so on. New entries are made whenever an artist approaches the gallery or the gallery approaches artists with a view to exhibiting their work. Overall there are several hundred artists whose work appears in the system; some artists appear in several categories.

The gallery has a management group which meets once a month to plan and review exhibitions.

You will review the following function:

Function 1: Maintain Artists’ Histories

The job of maintaining the gallery’s records of artists and the use of their work in exhibitions is done by Sean Vermeer. He keeps a set of folders detailing all this information, sorted into alphabetical order by artist’s name. In these folders he records the artist’s background and personal details, the categories into which their work usually falls, the details of all the work which they have exhibited through the gallery, and the sales which have been made of work which they have exhibited at the gallery.
In order to maintain these records Sean uses a number of sources. He uses the artists themselves to keep up-to-date the personal information. Every year he sends out a standard form to all artists on the system asking them to up-date their records about themselves and their work. Usually he gets a very good response rate because the artists are aware of the value which the gallery’s publicity about them can offer. Many of them also use his system as the source for their own personal references. Sean regularly responds to requests from the artists to send them a copy of the information he has kept about them in order that they can use it to help prepare their portfolios. The gallery regards this as a useful service to the artistic community.

Freda Rembrandt supplies Sean with information about the use of each artist’s work in exhibitions. As soon as the details of an upcoming exhibition have been finalised, Freda sends Sean her lists of works to be exhibited so he can up-date the folders of the relevant artists. When her list includes a new artist who is not already on the system, Sean sends them a form on which to fill out their details, and creates a new folder for them. Freda also uses the information in Sean’s folders when she is selecting suitable works for use in up-coming exhibitions, and to assist her with preparing the exhibition catalogues.

Kenneth Chang from the Sales section keeps Sean informed about the sales of any work which was exhibited through the gallery. As well as recording the details of any sales in the artists’ folders, Sean also collates them every three months, and sends notification of them to the publishers of an art industry journal produced by Sothebys. This journal is widely read in the art community and provides valuable publicity for artists by showing the popularity of their work.

Sean also reads the journal carefully each time it is produced (on a quarterly basis) and takes down any information about the sales recorded through other art galleries of work done by artists in his system. In this way his file on each artist in his system has expanded to give a very detailed record of their career. As a result, Sean is frequently contacted by other galleries and asked to provide information about them and their work. He is happy to provide this information, because even though it does not offer any direct financial benefit to the gallery, it enhances its image and reputation in the art community.

**Function 2: Arrange Exhibitions**

Freda Rembrandt is responsible for preparing and maintaining details of all exhibitions run by the gallery. She organises all new exhibitions and maintains the historical records of all exhibitions ever run by the gallery. This information is used by the gallery management when planning exhibitions.

The decision to run a particular exhibition is made by the gallery’s management group. They meet each month and advise Freda of the type of exhibitions which they want her to prepare. The theme of each exhibition is usually based on the work of a particular artist or group of artists, or on one or a combination of aspects of the art work (examples of themes might be watercolour paintings of Australian landscapes, portraits done in oil paints, sculptures, etc).

After receiving the management group’s list of proposed exhibitions, Freda checks the list of exhibitions already planned for the gallery and picks suitable dates for the new ones. She goes through the artists’ history folders maintained by Sean Vermeer, selects suitable works for each
exhibition, and prepares a draft list of the works to be included in each. She usually makes sure
she chooses more works than is necessary, because some will be rejected at a later stage.

Once Freda has selected the works which are to be exhibited, she sends the artists a notice of the
proposed exhibition and a consent form asking for their permission to use their work. This is
usually just a formality, because the artists are keen to have their work displayed. However it is a
legal requirement and the work cannot be displayed unless the form is filled in and signed
correctly. Sometimes an artist's work is unavailable because the artist has already agreed to show
it at another exhibition running elsewhere at the same time. Often the artists regard the forms as
trivial and fail to complete them or to send them in. Freda has to send reminders to make sure it
is done; if the artist fails to respond after two reminders their work is removed from the
exhibition.

When all the completed consent forms have been submitted, Freda forwards the list of works to
be exhibited to the Management group for their final approval. They may reject a few of them as
inappropriate to the exhibition theme, but generally these changes are relatively minor.

When the list has been finalised, Freda prepares a folder containing the details of the exhibition,
the list of works to be exhibited and some background information about the artists (which she
gets from Sean Vermeer). In return she gives Sean the information he needs to update his artists’
history folders. She sends a copy of this folder to the printers for preparation of the exhibition
catalogue and keeps a copy for her own records. Finally she sends notification to Vince in the
delivery section to arrange for the chosen works to be picked up and brought to the gallery in time
to be set up on display for the exhibition.

Function 3: Sell Exhibits

Most of the works put on exhibition are available for sale. The exhibition catalogue lists for each
work whether or not it is available for sale and for what price. The catalogue also indicates that
the artists reserve the right to decide not to sell, even if the buyer offers the asking price.

Most requests to purchase works are made by people who are viewing the exhibition, though
sometimes prospective purchasers ring through a request to buy a work which they have heard
about from a friend. Sometimes they offer to pay the purchase price listed in the catalogue, but
sometimes they will offer less.

All requests to purchase are dealt with by Kenneth Chang. He records the details of the work for
which an offer has been made, the catalogue price and the price which is being offered. He also
takes down the details of the prospective buyer and includes them in the mailing list which the
gallery keeps for marketing and advertising purposes.

After the exhibition is over, Kenneth notifies each artist of the details of any offers which have
been made to buy their work, and asks whether they are prepared to accept any of them.
Sometimes the artist may decide to withdraw the work from sale, even though there is a buyer
who is offering the price which was listed in the catalogue.

If the artist approves a sale, the prospective buyer is notified and asked to sign a contract
confirming the sale and providing details of the proposed method of payment. This is an
important issue because many of the works cost tens of thousands of dollars, and the gallery must ensure that the deal can be financed. When the buyer has confirmed their willingness to go ahead with the purchase, and their ability to pay has been verified, the contract and sale details are filed and copies sent to the artist and to Dennis Moore in Sales Payments and to Vince van Gogh in the Delivery section.

The final stage in the sales process is to distribute the proceeds of the sale to the artist. The artist receives a certain percentage of the purchase price, based on a formula which takes into account the length of time for which they have been contributing work to the gallery's exhibitions, and the number of times their work has been exhibited. Kenneth gets the necessary information from Sean Vermeer's artist's history files to enable him to calculate the artist's entitlement, and advises them accordingly. He then notifies the Finance Branch so that payment can be organised.

Kenneth also sends details of all sales to Sean Vermeer to use for the up-dating of his folders about each artist's work history. Sean uses this information to notify industry journals of the sales of work exhibited through the gallery.

**Function 4: Arrange Deliveries**

Vince van Gogh looks after the task of arranging delivery of art works to the gallery for exhibitions, and for their return when the exhibition is over.

As the details for upcoming exhibitions are finalised, Freda Rembrandt provides Vince with a copy of the details of the works which will be required and where they must be brought from. The works may have to be collected from anywhere in Australia from the far north-west of Western Australia to the south east coast of Tasmania. Freda's list also includes any special delivery problems or requirements, such as very heavy or fragile pieces for which special arrangements may have to be made.

Vince has a filing cabinet in which he keeps details of delivery services of all types covering all parts of the country. The courier and delivery industry is a rapidly growing and changing one, and Vince regularly up-dates his file with information from the courier companies about new services, cheap special rates and so on.

When Freda's list arrives, he goes through it carefully and prepares what he calls his 'pick-up list' in which he records each item, where it is to be collected from, when it is needed, when it will be returned, and any special delivery requirements. To this he adds the name of the most suitable delivery service for each item.

Each week he faxes a copy of the new additions to the list to Renaissance Insurance Services who provide insurance cover for the gallery. They send back details of the cost of insurance which covers all damage to the art works in transit to or from the gallery. Their cover note gives a claim identification number to each item, and specifies the period for which it is covered and the cost. Vince stores these in chronological order in his filing cabinet.

At the beginning of every month Vince goes through his 'pick-up' list and identifies all the items for which delivery must be arranged during that month. He contacts the selected courier service for each item, negotiates a price, and arranges a delivery time suitable to both himself and the
courier service. These details he records on a monthly schedule sheet. This then becomes the basis for planning each day's work during that month.

If an item is bought during the exhibition, there will be no need to return it to its previous owner. When Kenneth Chang sells an item he sends copies of the sale contracts to Vince, so he can update his monthly schedule sheet and advise the relevant courier service of the change.

At the start of each day Vince contacts the courier services which are supposed to be delivering that day to confirm that the goods will be arriving on schedule, and prepares his daily schedule sheet on which he notes what will be arriving and when. As the goods arrive during the day he checks them off against the daily schedule. The courier services provide invoices with each item on delivery; Vince checks to see that they match the quote which he has recorded on his monthly schedule, and sends them off to the Finance section so they can arrange for payment.