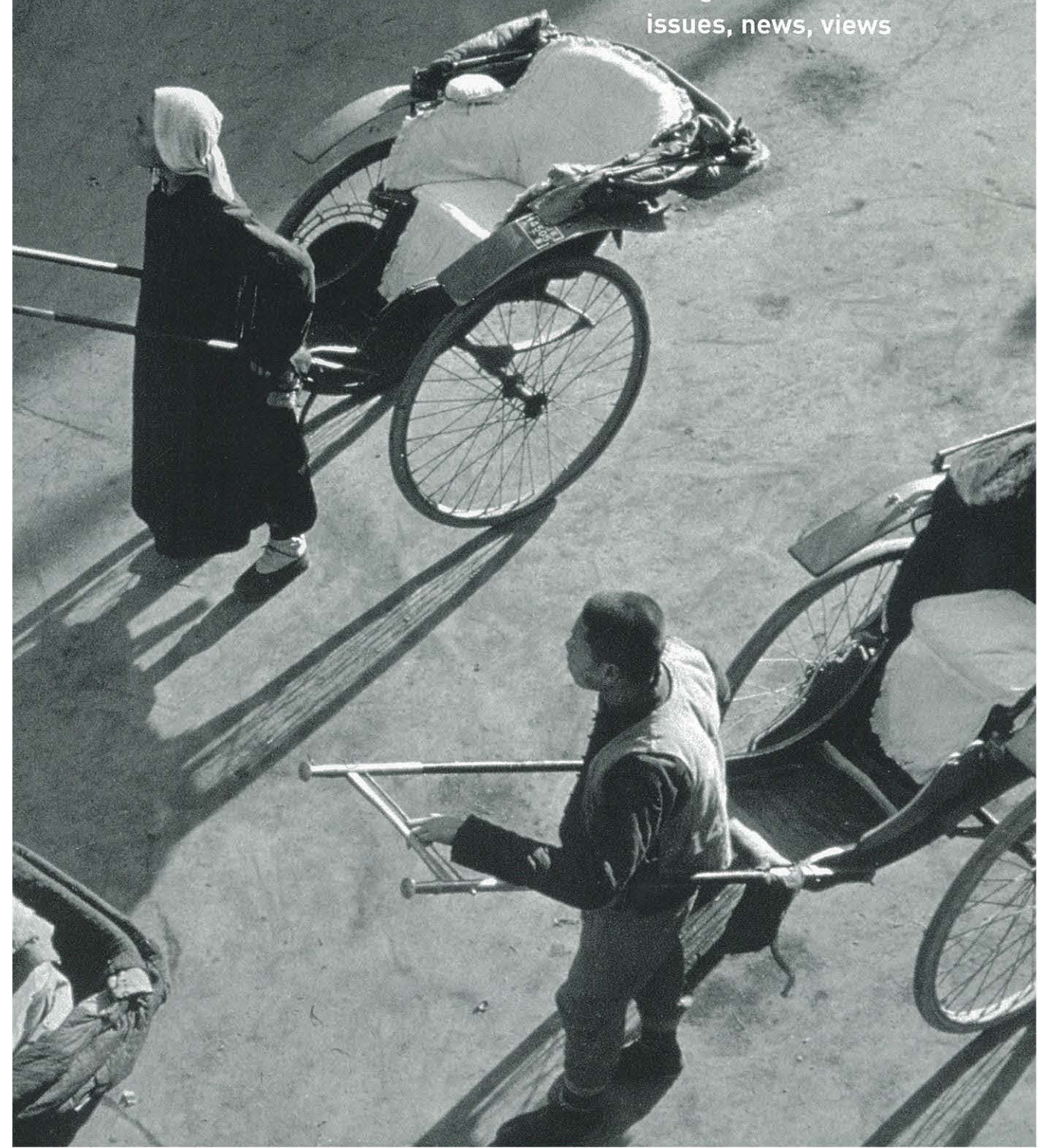


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Australian museums  
and galleries —  
issues, news, views





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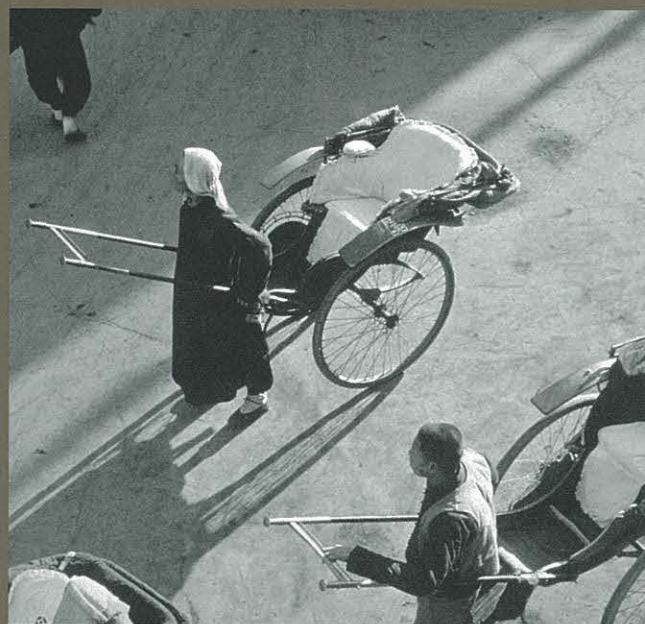
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*Museum National* is produced in magazine format, and does not carry refereed articles. Some articles are submitted to the magazine with references, and full versions of these can be made available to interested readers by emailing the Editor at [editor@museumsaustralia.org.au](mailto:editor@museumsaustralia.org.au). Their availability is indicated in a note at the end of the relevant articles.

Longer refereed articles on subjects of interest to the museum community can be found in the *Open Museum Journal*, which publishes scholarly and applied research and commentary on museums (see <http://amol.org.au/craft/omjournal/journal.index.asp>). Short bulletins on current issues and events are often publicised through an Internet discussion list, the *Australian Museums Forum* (see <http://amol.org.au/craft/amf/amf.index.asp>). *Open Museum Journal* and *Australian Museums Forum* are published by Australian Museums On Line (AMOL) and access is free.

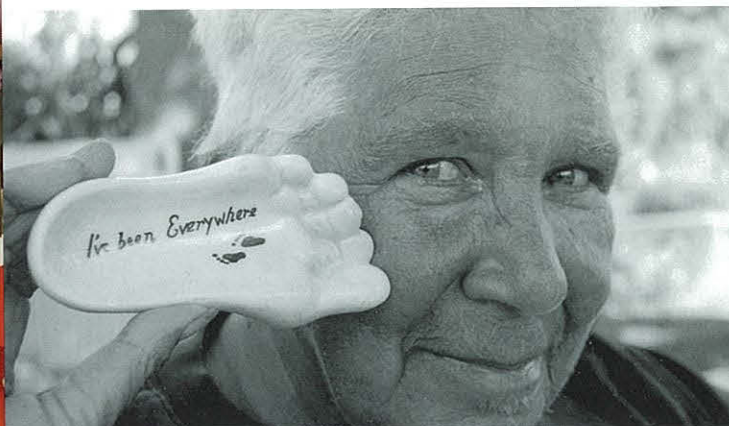


Cover:  
Hedda Morrison  
*Rickshaws, Peking*  
1933-46

Collection of the Powerhouse Museum  
Gift of Alastair Morrison, 1992  
Courtesy of the Powerhouse Museum



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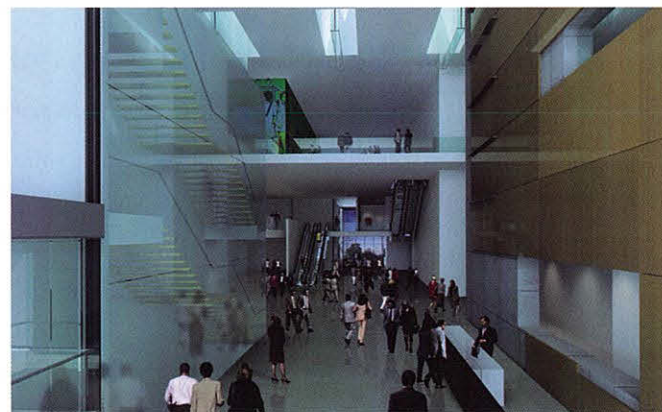


## QUEENSLAND GALLERY OF MODERN ART

The Queensland government has named the architects for the Queensland Gallery of Modern Art and the redevelopment of the State Library of Queensland. Australian consortium Architectus and Davenport Campbell and Partners won the commission to design the Gallery from a field of international competitors. There were 170 submissions from twenty-four countries competing for this prestigious project.

Queensland premier Peter Beattie, announcing the decision on 10 April, said that the Gallery of Modern Art 'will be the largest modern art gallery in Australia. It will have a floor area of 14,200 square metres, doubling the exhibition spaces for the state's collection of contemporary art, Indigenous art and art of the Asia-Pacific'.

As part of the Queensland Cultural Centre on the banks of



the Brisbane River, the Gallery will form a centrepiece for one of the most visible sites in the city. Construction will begin in early 2003, with completion due in 2005, as part of the Millennium Arts Project.

Architects' concept for Queensland Gallery of Modern Art foyer area  
Courtesy of the Ministry of Employment, Training, Youth & Arts, Queensland

Top: The new Queensland Gallery of Modern Art will be a strong presence on the Brisbane River  
Courtesy of the Ministry of Employment, Training, Youth & Arts, Queensland

## INDIGENOUS TRAINEES FOR NEW QUEENSLAND ART GALLERY EXHIBITION

Five Indigenous arts trainees have been appointed to the Queensland Art Gallery to assist in the research, development and implementation of a major new exhibition, *Indigenous Art of Cape York*. The exhibition will open at the Gallery in March 2003, and will introduce visitors to the cultural traditions of three regions in the Cape York Peninsula: West Cape, East Cape and the Rainforest.

The five trainees will be spread among departments of the Queensland Art Gallery, and the Cairns Regional Gallery, Tropical North Queensland TAFE and Hopevale Community Learning Centre.

The traineeships are the result of a partnership between the Queensland Art Gallery and the Queensland government, with substantial funding from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission.

## PACKHAM'S PLACE AT CENTENNIAL BAKERY

The Centennial Bakery Museum in Hurstville, NSW opened as a museum in 1994, after a useful life as a bakery shop and residence since 1888. One of the families associated with it, the Packhams, lived in the building from 1908 onwards.

Now a permanent pictorial exhibition, *Packham's Place*, tells the story of the building and the people who lived in it, and the production of bread in Hurstville from the early twentieth century. It uses historic photographs, memorabilia and artefacts to highlight the personalities associated with Hurstville's early commercial history.

You can visit the Centennial Bakery Museum from Tuesdays to Thursdays from 10am-4pm, and on the first Saturday of the month from 10am-3pm. The Museum also offers educational programs for schools. Email [cbmuseum@hurstville.nsw.gov.au](mailto:cbmuseum@hurstville.nsw.gov.au) or check the website [www.hurstville.org/museum](http://www.hurstville.org/museum)



Horse-drawn delivery vehicle, circa 1930s  
Courtesy of Centennial Bakery Museum



## MUSEUMS AUSTRALIA'S NEW DEFINITION OF 'MUSEUM'

After lengthy discussion amongst the museum community in Australia, Museums Australia has revised its definition of 'museum'. The new definition, through amendment of Article 5.3 of the MA Constitution, was formally adopted at the Annual General Meeting of Museums Australia on 22 March 2002. It now reads:

Museums Australia defines museum as an institution with the following characteristics:

A museum helps people understand the world by using objects and ideas to

interpret the past and present and explore the future. A museum preserves and researches collections, and makes objects and information accessible in actual and virtual environments. Museums are established in the public interest as permanent, not-for-profit organisations that contribute long-term value to communities.

Museums Australia recognises that museums of science, history and art may be designated by many other

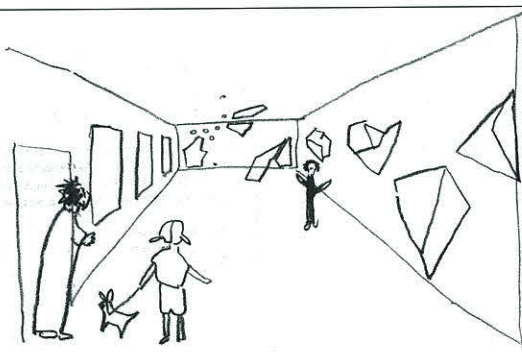
names (including gallery and Keeping Place). In addition, the following may qualify as museums for the purposes of this definition:

- a) natural, archaeological and ethnographic monuments and sites and historical monuments and sites of a museum nature that acquire, conserve and communicate material evidence of people and their environment;
  - b) institutions holding collections of and displaying specimens of plants and animals, such as botanical
- c) science centres;
  - d) cultural centres and other entities that facilitate the preservation, continuation and management of tangible or intangible heritage resources (living heritage and digital creative activity);
  - e) such other institutions as the Council considers as having some or all of the characteristics of a museum.

## DISCOVERNET ON AMOL

Australian Museums and Galleries Online (AMOL) now features Discovernet, an education gateway that provides quick and easy access to web-based education resources produced by Australian museums and galleries. Discovernet has been developed by AMOL in consultation with the Education Network of Australia (EdNA).

Visit Discovernet (<http://amol.org.au/discovernet>) to find fascinating Australian people in 'Australian tales'; use 'Study booster' to locate educational resources by age level, subject area, resource type or free text search; encourage students to be curators with 'Make your own exhibition'; and plan excursions and set research projects with 'Museum locator'.



Artist's impression of possible exhibition layout

Reproduced by permission of Nöel Skrzypczak

## 'FIRST IMPRESSIONS'

This little sketch, 'First Impressions', by Nöel Skrzypczak, will remind many people of the first tentative scribbles that mark the early stages of developing an exhibition. It was displayed at the Canberra Contemporary Art Space in November 2001, in an exhibition, *The Proposal: A Survey of Ideas* curated by Stephanie Jones.

## QUEENSLAND CURATOR IS YOUNG AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR

Assistant Curator of Palaeontology and Vertebrate Palaeontologist at the Queensland Museum, Scott Hocknull, is Young Australian of the Year for 2002.

At twenty-four years of age Scott is one of Australia's youngest curators in any area. He became what he calls a 'rock jock' at the age of eight, when his passion for dinosaurs and palaeontology began. At the age of sixteen he became one of Australia's youngest scientific authors, with a paper on a new species of freshwater bivalves published in an international journal. He has also won two BHP Science Awards for studies in palaeontology, and in 1992 on his first fossil dig he discovered a new site containing previously unknown specimens.

He graduated with first class honours in zoology in 2000 and is currently undertaking doctoral research at the University of New South

Wales, studying the changing climate of Australia over the last three to four hundred years, to assist in the conservation of Australia's living species.

AT TWENTY-FOUR YEARS OF AGE SCOTT IS ONE OF AUSTRALIA'S YOUNGEST CURATORS IN ANY AREA.

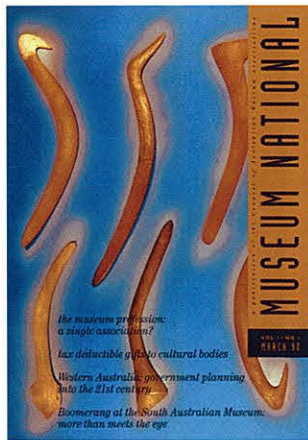
Scott, who is of Scottish and Indigenous heritage, was described at the time of the announcement of the Young Australian of the Year as 'an important role model for all Australians' for 'his passion, his tireless pursuit of excellence and his quest for understanding our past in the hope of preserving our future'.

Congratulations, Scott Hocknull.



## MUSEUM NATIONAL COMPLETES TENTH VOLUME

This issue of *Museum National* marks the completion of ten volumes of our membership magazine. Over its ten-year life *Museum National* has been compiled by a number of people who have taken editorial responsibility for bringing you news and views from the museums and galleries sector. They are (in order of their occupancy of the editorial chair): Sue Silberberg, Susan Faine, Greg Marginson, Linda Richardson, Marianne Wallace-Crabbe, Linda Richardson (for a second time), and Francesca Rendle-Short. The current editor of *Museum National*, Roslyn Russell, thanks all her



predecessors for their contributions towards making the magazine what it is today.

The first issue of *Museum National*, published in March 1992

## NEW EDITION OF MUSEUM METHODS

An essential tool for museums, *Museum Methods*, has been issued in a revised edition. The new *Museum Methods* was launched at the Museums Australia Annual Conference in Adelaide in March, and contains useful information on museum management, marketing and public relations, collection management, preventive conservation, exhibition development and touring, education and public programs, cultural diversity, archaeological collections, and interpretation and research. There are also two completely new sections on information technology, and evaluation and visitor research.

This new edition of *Museum Methods* is sponsored by the Commonwealth government through the Distributed National Collection program of the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts.

An order form is available from the Museums Australia national office, tel 02 6208 5044, fax 02 6208 5015.

## RELOCATING

The National Gallery of Victoria will leave its temporary gallery in Russell Street on 30 June 2002. In August it will open its new home in Federation Square in The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia.

## KEY NEEDS

Deakin University's study into the Key Needs of Collecting Institutions in the Heritage Sector is now published at [www.amol.org.au](http://www.amol.org.au)

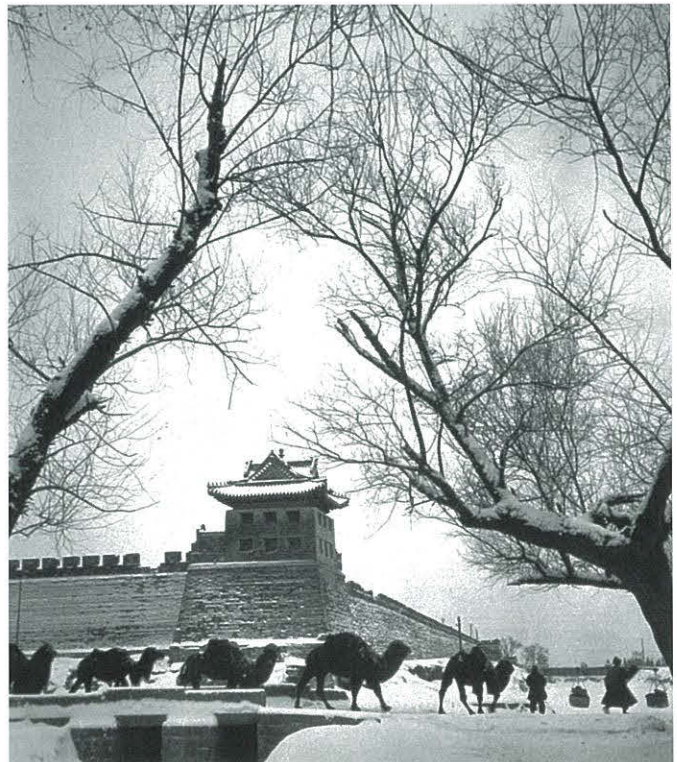
## ANNIVERSARY EXHIBITION FOR BEIJING

Eighty-five photographs by Australian photographer Hedda Morrison from the collection of the Powerhouse Museum will be on display at The Art Museum of the China Millennium Monument in Beijing between 10 May and 9 June 2002.

The exhibition marks the thirtieth anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Australia and China. It displays black and white photographs taken by Hedda Morrison (1908-1991) in Beijing between 1933 and 1946. Her subjects included buildings, parks, street vendors, entertainment, folk customs, traditional crafts and street scenes. The photographs capture the life of the city in the years before the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949.

Hedda Morrison was born Hedda Hammer in Stuttgart, Germany, in 1908. Wishing to escape the increasing violence of Hitler's Germany, the young graduate of the National Institute for Photography in Munich travelled to what was then called Peking in 1933 to manage a photographic studio. After her contract expired in 1938 she became a freelance photographer, and in 1946 married Australian Alastair Morrison. Hedda accompanied Alastair on his British Colonial Service posting to Sarawak, where she worked in the photographic section of the Information Office of the Sarawak government.

In 1967 Hedda and Alastair Morrison moved to Canberra, where she continued to photograph the Australian landscape. She died in Canberra in 1991 at the age of eighty-two. Alastair Morrison donated 400 of his late wife's photographic works to the Powerhouse Museum in 1992.

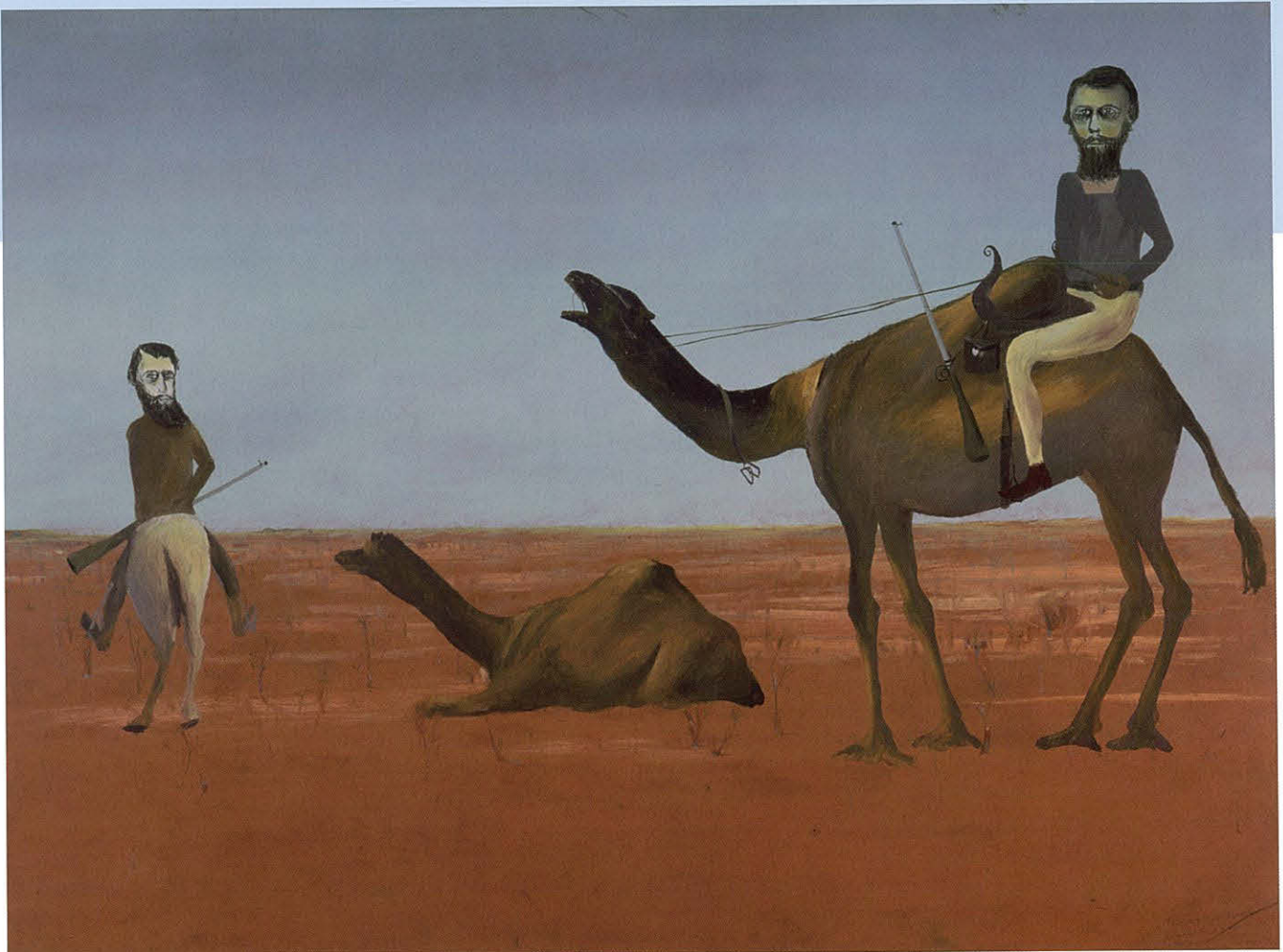


Hedda Morrison  
*Northwest corner tower of the outer city wall, Peking*  
1933-46

Collection of the Powerhouse Museum  
Gift of Alastair Morrison, 1992  
Courtesy of the Powerhouse Museum



## ONCE UPON OUR TIMES



The explorer myth captured by Sidney Nolan in his Burke and Wills series, part of the exhibition, *Burke and Wills: From Melbourne to Myth*, at the National Library of Australia until 2 June, then at the Art Gallery of South Australia, 21 June–18 August 2002, and State Library of Victoria, 13 September–24 November 2002  
 Sidney Nolan (1917–1992)  
*Burke and Wills Expedition 1948*  
 Nolan Gallery  
 Courtesy of the National Library of Australia

#### Key quotes from keynotes from the Museums Australia National Conference compiled by Roslyn Russell

The Museums Australia National Conference, 'Once Upon Our Times: exploring the role of cultural institutions in creating, perpetuating and selling social, political and national myths', held in Adelaide in March 2002, presented a wide range of speakers and a wonderful diversity of views. They were challenging and affirming, celebratory and critical, and they all stimulated debate and discussion of the issues that those who work in museums and galleries regularly confront.

Most keynote presentations did not lend themselves to abridgement, as they were presented as papers of half an hour or so — too lengthy to be reprinted here in full. Here are extracts



and precis from some of the keynote speakers, to give you the flavour of their presentations.

**Viv Szekeres**, Director of the Migration Museum, Adelaide, in her welcoming address, 'Setting the Scene', described the power museum workers can wield when they choose objects and ideas to represent, and thus set the social and political agenda:

'Carol Duncan suggests that "museums can be powerful identity-defining machines" and I would add powerful identity-confirming machines. She also suggests that "to control a Museum means precisely to control the representation of a community". Which brings me to the issue of the processes which underpin decisions about who we will represent and on behalf of whom. I would suggest that these processes are really very simple. They consist of the choices we make as cultural workers and managers about which ideas are represented in our institutions ... It is this power of control that I would call political. Not in any sense meaning party political, but meaning that our choices carry consequences that often have far-reaching implications. Through the choices we make every day, we decide whose voice will be heard and whose will be silenced. Whose stories are significant and whose are insignificant. We choose which ideas and works of art are of value.

'Now some people would argue that museum workers are given the right to make those decisions by virtue of the training we have undergone as scientists, anthropologists, historians or art critics. I would argue that, whatever the training, we still rely heavily on our own subjective assessment, and that our judgement is influenced by a whole range of social and cultural factors, including the myths that we imbibed in childhood.

'Why should any of this matter? If, as I have argued, we do have power by virtue of our position as cultural workers in the museum profession, then surely we also have some responsibility for the choices we make. If we are a powerful force in forming social attitudes, then what kind of a society are we helping to construct? How conscious are we of these processes in our work? And, realistically, to what extent can we — or should we — give voice in ways that go against the grain? I believe such questions need to be examined, and I am delighted that we have a brief opportunity to suspend the pressures of our daily work in order to focus on them collaboratively.'

**Professor Lowitja O'Donoghue AC, CBE**, a member of the Yankunjatjara people of north-west South Australia, is a Visiting Fellow at the Flinders University of South Australia, and was the inaugural chairperson of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission. Her paper's title, 'Living outside the Cage', picked up on a phrase used by Mick Dodson in 1994 when he wrote that Aboriginal people's rights 'must include the freedom to live outside the cage created by other people's image and projections'.

Events such as the opening ceremony of the Sydney Olympics allowed people to join in the fiction that reconciliation had been achieved, as the young white girl and the traditional Aboriginal man walked together into the future. Australia could present itself before the world as a progressive, inclusive nation. A consequence of this is that challenging this vision is seen as carping, and that Aboriginal people who complain that true reconciliation still has some way to go 'should have got over it'. We must move away from fictions such as the euphoric Sydney Olympics vision, and establish what is real by asking and listening to Aboriginal people.

Professor O'Donoghue argued that Aboriginal culture and identity had been 'packaged' by museums and other public interpreters of culture. A stereotypical image of Aboriginality was

the result, whereas it is important that Aboriginal culture be expressed as a living thing. Culture is often seen as all the same, yet it displays remarkable diversity. Lowitja herself is more at home in the coffee shops of Adelaide than camping under the stars in the desert. There is no one way of being Aboriginal and no one way of seeking justice.

**Dr Zahava D. Doering** of the Smithsonian Institution, Washington USA spoke about, 'Serving the Nation: Lessons from the Smithsonian', on national museums and their audiences:

'National museums, like all museums, are ideologically driven. They communicate in their values and messages a structure of power that seeks to maintain itself and they use exhibitions, and other promotional strategies, to get out the message. National museums also exist in order to socialise the citizenry into accepting the values and authority of the majority.

'As long as the subject matter of an exhibition does not challenge social norms or majority perspectives, or does not challenge the status quo, museums, and especially national museums, are on relatively safe ground. It is when national museums venture beyond being celebratory and affirmative and attempt to shift the ground rules that questions about their performance arise. National museums take great risks when they question existing paradigms. When history museums explore social history that includes difficult questions of race, ethnicity or class, or bring new evidence to bear on battles won or lost, or when art museums present artists whose work challenges community norms and expectations, risks increase. These include censure, criticism and — more pragmatically — loss of funding and sponsorship.

'American visitors, on average, want their national museums to support and uphold the national ideology. For example, an analysis of in-depth conversations with visitors at the National Museum of American History confirms that visitors want the museum to focus on the celebratory aspects of history and underscore and promote a set of acknowledged national values. Overall, the responses were focused on the continuous need to inspire American pride and patriotism...

'What should the Smithsonian, and perhaps other national museums, do to stretch the limitations of their roles? First, they need to acknowledge that museums, at least American museums, cannot dislodge frameworks, cannot play a role in the transformation of society.

'Most importantly ... the visitor — not the museum — is in control of the activity.'

**Graeme Davison**, Professor of History at Monash University, and an historical adviser to Museum Victoria and the National Museum of Australia, tackled the subject of 'Museums and National Identity':

'The [nineteenth-century] museum, together with the public library and the university, was the means by which colonial statesmen hoped to create an enlightened, virtuous and orderly society. So while the scientific role of the museum, as collecting and discovering institution, was international, its educational and moral code was essentially local or national. Museums were national institutions primarily in the sense that they tended to produce good citizens, *not* that they expressed distinctively national values or confined their collections to objects representative of the nation's fauna, flora, industrial or artistic achievements.

'A century and a half later, most museums retain this civilising, nation-building role ...



'For much of the past two decades the battle over national identity has been largely an internal one, the effort of the museum community and its public to settle accounts with formerly colonised people. The old national museums, which had been deeply implicated in the cultural politics of colonialism, were bound to become hot-spots in that process and ... that battle is not quite over.

'Even as it continues, however, our museums are increasingly caught up in another challenge to their national role — that posed by the external challenge of globalisation. At the threshold of the twenty-first century it's not just tourists that circulate around the globe, so do museum objects and museologists. The museum profession could be aptly described as an international fraternity of professional nationalists. These global exchanges of people, objects, information and know-how cannot continue without eventually chipping away at the myths of national identity to which the museums are supposedly devoted. Some of the most interesting exhibitions I've seen in recent years have been a product of such exchanges... Such shows are a direct response to the interest of visitors who are often looking for the similarities and differences between national cultures as well as within them.

## IT IS WHEN NATIONAL MUSEUMS VENTURE BEYOND BEING CELEBRATORY AND AFFIRMATIVE AND ATTEMPT TO SHIFT THE GROUND RULES THAT QUESTIONS ABOUT THEIR PERFORMANCE ARISE.

'Global change ... will not quickly dissolve national myths; and in some respects may even reinforce them, as it does other fundamentalisms. But it does radically change the terms on which those myths are reproduced and circulated. Museums are among the institutions best fitted to foster fresh thought and discussion about the nature of national identity. Over the past century, they have been seen, successively, as schools of civic virtue, as repositories of the nation's treasures, as custodians of national identity and as forums for national debate. Because they are national institutions of course they have to be all things to all people. Maybe, as the critics suggest, museums should not have to be the bearers of national myths. If they can't get out of the national identity business altogether, maybe they should do the next best thing and bring the material evidence of Australia's heroes, myths, pageants and beliefs into a mutually enriching relationship with the cultures of other nations and communities.'

**Professor Tim Bonyhady** of the Centre for Cross-Cultural Research at The Australian National University spoke about 'The wealth of Burke and Wills', as demonstrated in the National Library of Australia exhibition, *Burke and Wills: From Melbourne to Myth*, of which he is curator.

The general view of Burke and Wills was that they were failures, but the material remains of the expedition contradict that view. Its products include 475 botanical specimens collected by botanist Hermann Beckler, and more than eighty paintings

produced by the expedition's artist, Ludwig Becker, who was also the expedition's unofficial ethnographer. He painted Aboriginal subjects, recorded two pieces of Aboriginal music in the language of the informant (among the first pieces of Aboriginal music to be transcribed), and collected artefacts. Among the most evocative objects in the exhibition is a nardoo 'cake', the earliest surviving example of Aboriginal food.

The Burke and Wills expedition generated a large swag of relics: their bodies were recovered, but also bits and pieces from other elements of the expedition, including the jaw of Landa the camel and the hooves of Billy the horse. The provenance of some of these relics is a little dubious, but ultimately that doesn't matter: the mythic quality invested in them generates its own significance.

**Maria Victoria Herrera**, Assistant Professor in Museum Studies at the University of the Philippines, also took up the theme of the representation of heroes and the ways in which they are memorialised in museum display. She referred to the dangers inherent in one particular approach in her paper, 'Creating Histories and Identities: Issues in Managing Culture'. Professor Herrera described the Jose Rizal Shrine in Intramuros, Manila, which has been refurbished to a minimalist design that treats the objects on display as relics divorced from their social and political context, and wondered how foreign visitors would gain from looking at these 'curiosities' associated with the life of a hero of the Philippine Revolution. The problems of a minimalist approach go beyond possible visitor incomprehension:

'A shift in adopting alternative processes in exhibitions may not always be that simple or easy, especially when we are faced with the dilemma of dealing with dominant and marginalised stories of our past. By marginalised, I refer to those stories omitted that deal with the darker sides of our heroes and of ourselves. Fear of censorship and cutback in funding has limited us from exploring alternative narratives, or even approaches in telling history and recalling memory.

'In historic houses, especially those of our nation's heroes, we resort to ways and means that continue to emulate their myth — literally creating a shrine to the person, almost as a demigod. In the process, we ignore the struggles and conflicts that transpired in their lives. Would this lead to questions about their historical significance and heroism? Also, we tend to forget that they once lived ordinary lives, especially in their youth. Turning a historic house into a "shrine" even becomes more problematic. As the term suggests, the house becomes a hallowed ground and that its visitors should pay respects.

'The "reverence" accorded to heroes has led to a selective representation of our past. In cases where historic events question an individual's status as a "hero", shrines in the form of lifestyle museums are used to validate his or her position in the pantheon of greatness.'

**These few pages represent only a fraction of the wealth of ideas and debate that delegates encountered at the Adelaide Conference. You can read those you missed, or revisit others, as most of the papers referred to here, and other papers from the conference, will be placed on the Museums Australia website ([www.museumsaustralia.org.au](http://www.museumsaustralia.org.au)).**



## PARALLEL VISIONS AT THE ART GALLERY OF NEW SOUTH WALES



Elioth Gruner, *Summer morning* 1916 oil on canvas

Gift of Howard Hinton 1939. Courtesy of the Art Gallery of New South Wales

Top: E. Phillips Fox, *The ferry* c1910-1911 oil on canvas

Courtesy of Art Gallery of New South Wales

This exhibition, on show at the Art Gallery of New South Wales to January 2003, explores the visual alliances in the work of twenty-two Australian artists of the twentieth century, in groups of two or three 'fellow spirits' at a time. Curator Barry Pearce believes that 'if the story of Australian art is one of outstanding individuals, it is at the same time of visions in parallel journeys, sometimes converging towards each other in significant moments, then moving on. An alternative reading of the Australian collection thus emerges: not a suite of mini-retrospectives; nor a bearing down with an historical matrix; but somewhere in between, the intimate dynamic of dialogue, interplay, embracing a common interest of visual language and subject matter, and in most cases a personal relationship'.

Artists grouped together in *Parallel Visions: Affinities within the Australian Collection* include Hans Heysen — Elioth Gruner — Horace Trenerry, Rupert Bunny — Emanuel Phillips Fox, Rayner Hoff — Arthur Murch, Jeffrey Smart — John Brack, and Margaret Olley — Donald Friend.

JULIA CLARK

# MUSEUMS AND THE ACADEMY

Academic historians occasionally give papers at our annual meetings on history in museums, the doing and presenting of. Unfortunately, despite their CVs, they give every appearance of either never having actually worked in a museum or even having visited one in the last ten years. And I don't think I am alone in feeling just a teensy bit annoyed by this. I can remember my gorge rising over this topic at the last Brisbane conference, when two delegates from the local ivory tower came along to give us the benefit of their advice on this subject. I recall the group of museum historians with whom I was sitting seething quietly as we were ticked off and patronised; unfortunately, I have forgotten the exact nature of our transgressions but we were certainly tried and found wanting.

Since that experience, my risen gorge has approached boiling point on another couple of occasions. I attended a seminar in which, again, an academic historian poured scorn on museum historians as the rapists of an honourable discipline, which we dealt 'a bit of rougher than usual handling' by attempting to make it accessible to punters. Our history was by definition bad history, since it was shorn of the essential complex arguments, the ifs and buts and 'some opinions have it that but on the other hand that. . .'. Later I worked for a large national museum as a text editor and project manager. A panel of 'expert advisers' checked and rechecked every word. Frequently I was made to feel, as I struggled to encompass and reconcile the curator's intent, the designer's requirements and the expert adviser's expert advice, as though we and they came from different worlds, and that the museum world, again, was being tried and found wanting. And again, at the recent excellent Adelaide conference, we were given the kind of advice that inescapably calls to mind grandmothers in close encounters with eggs.

I would like to address this relationship through two metaphors, 'taking homework up to teacher' and the 'Uriah Heep school of history'.

### 'Taking homework up to teacher'

I support wholeheartedly the proposition that several heads are better than one, that no-one can be an expert in everything, that we always learn much from our academic colleagues who work with us etc, etc. But I also firmly believe that we do history in the same way, in terms of our scrutiny of sources, and our rigour and probity. What I resent is the way in which this relationship is managed. It seems to me that the way in which we enlist the 'expert' advice casts us as the factotum of the academy. Academics often simply don't understand why some of their criticisms are not helpful and are often somewhat put



out when we don't take them on board. And I am not surprised. Much of this seems due to the fact that they don't understand how museum communication differs from academic communication, that an exhibition is, perforce, different from a book. But we need to talk about it in different ways. And why should they understand that, if we don't tell them. And if we do tell them, we may save all of us time and frustration.

So how can we manage this relationship in a way that pays respect to both disciplines? I think that before anyone agrees to be an 'expert adviser', they should understand the context in which they are working. We should talk to them about museum communication, including the principles of exhibition design. Most importantly, they need to understand how we use some communication media that are very unfamiliar to them, like objects and images. These are not generally regarded as meaningful by academic historians and are rarely used in academic publications except, as the late lamented Kay Daniels once said, to break up blocks of text. Often when text is submitted to them they fail to appreciate how design, objects and images will be used to enhance and communicate, that everything doesn't have to be communicated in text. In other words, we should take control of the relationship, celebrate the difference between the museum and the university and restore a bit of dignity to museum history by insisting that the academics meet us halfway.

**'The Uriah Heep school of history'**

Expert advisers are said to offer us not only good historical advice but necessary protection in case controversy should erupt. While it is undoubtedly true that wheeling out a few big names as a protective shield can be helpful, to me it implies that the museum's own historians are seen to lack professional credibility, and that the process of doing history in museums is suspect at best, shoddy and biased at worst. I believe that if controversy erupts, the museum's historians should expect to be, and be seen to be, standing shoulder to shoulder with the 'expert advisers', equally capable of arguing their case. And when we don't, we reinforce the idea that we are not capable, or that we simply take our riding instructions from the 'experts'. And if we do require such instructions, then clearly we are not ourselves 'experts'.

And please, let us have no more academic historians, who have apparently never worked in museums or even spoken to a museum historian, hectoring us at conferences. Not unless we are invited to appear at their conferences to hector them about, for example, how they might make academic history accessible to lay audiences!

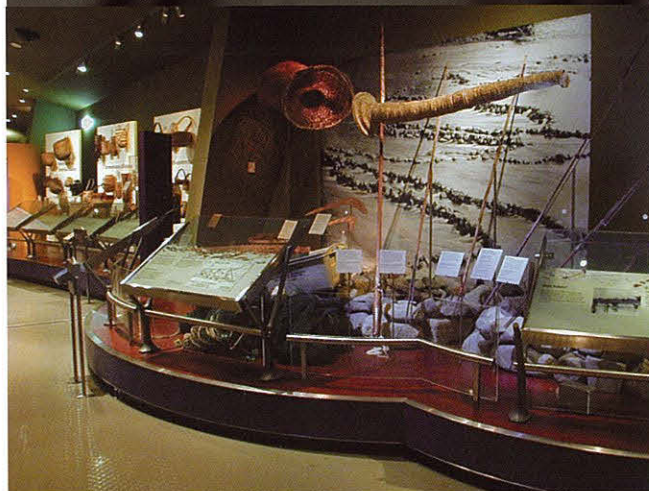
JULIA CLARK MANAGES INTERPRETATION AT PORT ARTHUR HISTORIC SITE, TASMANIA. THIS ARTICLE IS BASED ON A PRESENTATION TO THE HISTORIANS SIG AT THE MA NATIONAL CONFERENCE

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# SHARED HISTORIES, SHARED FUTURES?

## Victoria Haskins on representing interracial histories in the museum

'Inattention on such a scale cannot possibly be explained by absent-mindedness', said W. E. H. Stanner of the exclusion of Aboriginal-European relations from the Australian historical consciousness in his 1968 Boyer lecture. 'It is a structural matter, a view from a window which has been carefully placed to exclude a whole quadrant of the landscape. What may well have begun as a simple forgetting of other possible views turned over habit and over time into something like a cult of forgetfulness practised on a grand scale.' This amnesia has extended not only from the repression of painful memories of massacres and rape, but even to the more positive memories of interrelationships. At its core is an inability to acknowledge the existence of Indigenous people, both before 1788 but especially after the arrival of the British.

Australian social memory has long been dominated by a myth of 'the fatal impact', that Aboriginal peoples and cultures trapped in an eternal time-warp were made brittle by thousands of years of separation from the rest of the world, and hence could not withstand contact with modern peoples and cultures. It's a tenacious idea in settler nations like Australia, implying the

FOR MUSEUMS, AS RECEPTACLES OF SOCIAL MEMORY, THE SYSTEMATIC ERASURE, BY NON-ABORIGINAL PEOPLE, OF MEMORIES OF RELATIONSHIPS WITH ABORIGINAL PEOPLE HAS MEANT A GLARING ABSENCE OF SHARED HISTORIES AND CULTURES.

inevitability of white supremacy, and denying the more awkward reality of ongoing racial oppression, and negotiated coexistence between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people after the frontier. For museums, as receptacles of social memory, the systematic erasure, by non-Aboriginal people, of memories of relationships with Aboriginal people has meant a glaring absence of shared histories and cultures.

In contrast, the Aboriginal as 'other' has loomed large in museum exhibits since the earliest days of colonisation. The collecting of Aboriginal artefacts and physical human remains was a vital part of the process through which knowledge about Aboriginal people was accumulated and reproduced. Today, museums respond to public demands, curator Philip Jones reminds us, for uncomplicated images of 'traditional', 'authentic', and 'savage' Australia. Material culture bearing witness to cross-cultural encounters is either not collected or displayed, or displayed in such a way as to obscure that history.

These are more often problems in the perception of curators and museum managers, rather than in the attitudes of the supposedly uneducated public. Yes, indeed, Stanner pointed our attention to the 'cult of forgetfulness', but that was back in the 1960s. I was a year old when he gave that speech. I now teach students who were born in the 1980s. Two generations have grown to adulthood since that time, during which all manner of substantive political, economic, social and cultural changes have placed Aboriginal issues and race relations in the public spotlight for over thirty years. The Mabo decision of 1992 dealt a major blow to the fatal impact myth by fundamentally and unalterably rejecting the *terra nullius* concept. A multitude of smaller changes has accustomed rising generations of Australians to the assertion by Aboriginal people, 'We have survived'.

These changes have been associated with a dramatic growth of interest in Aboriginal issues and the Australian past by the non-Aboriginal Australian public. The general Australian community wants to acknowledge and understand the past, especially the causes of the continued and painfully visible rift between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people — and ideally, heal it. Revisionist historians have made race relations the focus of their research and writing, and their work has been built upon and reviewed and reworked since then. There is a vocal and conservative group of Australians who would apparently have these histories forgotten all over again. But these same people are more than keen to engage in public discussion, albeit uninformed, about the Australian past — indeed the deliberate inflammation by certain prominent politicians of what is called the 'race debate' can only be interpreted as a recognition of the significance of this history.

The overall result is that memories that were painfully repressed for so long have surfaced and been aired, and people expect — and demand — that museums do address this past. Nor can they justify displaying only objects that represent a



hermetically sealed native culture. The only major museum today to thus explicitly restrict itself, the South Australian Museum, is admired precisely for its antiquarianism: it is the museum as 'time capsule' and a snapshot of Adelaide anthropology at the turn of the twentieth century. Yet even this museum bows to public interest in the history of race relations, and in so doing highlights how we can all recognise the authenticity of our shared histories.

In 2001 the South Australian Museum put on display an Aboriginal club from the Sydney region, turned into a naval cat-o'-nine-tails by a Master Blackburn. Preserved in Blackburn's family for two centuries as a relic of Australia's convict past, it has only recently been recognised as one of few surviving material traces of Aboriginal/settler encounters. Even those relics that do survive have not been valued and kept, but rather, like the spear that transfixed the first Governor's shoulder, have disappeared into the hands of private and overseas collectors.

The apparent lack of objects bearing witness to cross-cultural and shared histories in ethnographic collections can be rectified simply by adjusting our thinking away from the fatal impact insistence that 'real' Aborigines are never historical, always frozen in time immemorial. Within all the major museums' galleries of Aboriginal artefacts are 'entangled objects'. Some are overtly so, but even the most 'pristine' ethnographic items have interracial histories embedded in the processes of their acquisition, whether they be stolen, 'discovered', given, sold, traded, borrowed, commissioned or otherwise expropriated and owned. Although traditionally the rationale behind their display — their authenticity — lies in the insistence that they were created, at least, by authentic Aborigines, the museums can try instead — or at least also — to highlight the histories of racial interaction that form the context for their creation, function and acquisition.

Museums are accustomed to displaying relics of white culture to highlight their historical context, and native relics to highlight their exotic primitivism, but hybrid items such as the club-whip can flummox them. The challenge is to read into all this material culture — white, Aboriginal, or cross-cultural — the context of our shared histories.

One of my museum studies students brought along to class a clutch of beautifully hand carved and turned wooden eggs. His great-aunt, a white woman, had been given them on the occasion of her marriage by some local Aboriginal women friends. So engaging were these beautiful things that his group decided to use them as a basis for their seminar exercise of drawing up a display proposal complete with label text. The label they produced documented the material the eggs were made of, and the name of the women's 'tribal' affiliation, and that these objects had a sacred context and were connected to women's business. The great-aunt was rendered invisible, as was the story of her obviously friendly and female-centred relationships with these local women, and with it any mention of Aboriginal-white contact and shared histories whatsoever.

Shared histories in the museum need to be emphasised, explained and contextualised for them to make an effective impact and give visitors an understanding of how we, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, got from then — the initial invasion — to now; an understanding of what the histories of our relationships have been. It amazes me that histories such as those of Aboriginal child removal, frontier massacres, land rights and civil rights movements, and the running of missions and

reserves, are consistently represented as Aboriginal history, as if there were no white actors involved and no implications or consequences for non-Aboriginal Australians. Museums need to show the connections between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal experiences to help non-Aboriginal Australians understand why what Henry Reynolds calls 'this whispering in our hearts' has grown to such a shout.

To do this adequately, museums must engage in a genuine dialogue with Aboriginal people and communities to develop cross-cultural exhibits. This will involve making substantial changes to museum practice. Exhibits should be developed jointly and collaboratively, in ways that enable respect for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal styles of doing things (especially telling histories), and allow Aboriginal communities a creative role in the development of original concepts as well as in the actual form of the display. Museums might start to look at processes through which they can generate a storyline that is mutually satisfying and agreed to by all involved parties, as they do with other exhibits.

And finally, and inseparably, museums must make an effort to show ways forward. Museum visitors can enjoy and learn from displays of our past that show alternatives to oppression and racial distrust, fear and hatred. Examples of successful collaboration and positive interactions, however uncommon such instances may be, should be represented as part of our history because they contain within them the seeds of hope for the future.

Local museums and heritage places, rather than state and national museums, may well lead the way in representing our shared histories, and providing a vision for our shared futures.

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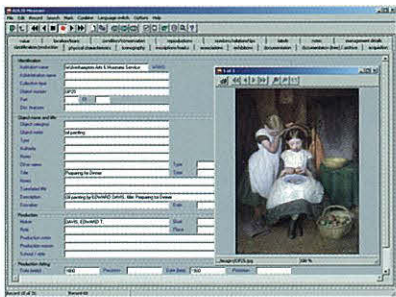
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Edward Davis, Preparing for Dinner, image courtesy of Wolverhampton Art Gallery

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Their direct connection to place provides the opportunity to read into the land and the people the complex and varied interactions between cultures and individuals over the past two hundred years. With connections to local communities that enable them to collect objects and stories relating to interracial histories, they can ensure that there is a continuing and active process of cross-cultural community discussion and dialogue. They can begin a process by which small circles of consensus within a community are generated on the history of that place. As these circles grow around the continent, they may converge in a larger circle of consensus that carries a much richer and meaningful awareness of our collective histories and heritages.

## MUSEUMS MUST ENGAGE IN A GENUINE DIALOGUE WITH ABORIGINAL PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES TO DEVELOP CROSS-CULTURAL EXHIBITS.

Museums' difficulty with displaying and representing shared interracial histories as integral to Australian histories both reflects and perpetuates the damaging notion that sharing the land equitably and fairly, and moving forward together, is simply too hard. Ultimately, our ability to tell shared histories in any museum is limited by our abilities to share justly and equitably in the wider society. As long as a gross imbalance in social, economic and political power exists between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, representing interracial histories in the museum will be an uphill struggle, fraught with political problems. Unless museums make the effort to show that the barriers between us are not insurmountable by any law of nature or God, but are purely a human creation, they can only add to the growing resentment and distrust so many people seem to feel. Instead, museums should be striving to encourage a sense of compassion for each other, a clear-eyed understanding of the sufferings of the past, and a sense of hope and constructiveness about our shared future.

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This article has been abridged from a keynote address delivered on the opening day of the Museums Australia National Conference in Adelaide, 18–22 March 2002. A fully referenced version of the paper is available from the *Museum National* editor at [editor@museumsaustralia.org.au](mailto:editor@museumsaustralia.org.au)



JONATHAN SWEET



The Victoria & Albert Museum, South Kensington, London, in earlier days

Postcard of c1915 courtesy of Jonathan Sweet

## SUFFOCATION OR LIBERATION?

### Jonathan Sweet on changing curatorial practice

One of the most puzzling references to the duties of the curator is from the diary of Royal Society foundation member, John Evelyn. In an entry from 1661, Evelyn relates that 'our curator continued for half an hour under water'. The curator was participating in a technological experiment, in which he was submerged in a lead-cast diving bell. We do not know whether or not this was a core duty of seventeenth-century curatorship, or whether, as some anthropologists have suggested, it was simply a rite of passage, like a museum studies intern diving into the murky waters of the art museum. It is clear from this diary reference, however, that from the profession's inception, the curator has been expendable.

Curators have diverse characters, and many are not suited to such an adventure. At Kenwood House on Hampstead Heath (where I went through my own rite of passage), the curator was a very large red-bearded bard with an interest in Gainsborough portraits and a taste for Yorkshire Bitter. He challenged my image of the curator, which was naively founded on the foppish and media savvy Patrick McCaughey. I assumed (and still more or less concur with the view) that, in the eyes of the public at least, the art museum curator is a connoisseur and role model, the official interpreter of artistic endeavour and material culture, an arbiter of ordained taste.

The curator at Kenwood may have been all this. He was also gritty and earthy, and a thoroughly accomplished political and business strategist. As a consequence, my initiation into the real world of curatorship was hardly more salubrious than that of my submariner precursor. It was over steak and kidney pies and always a

few too many pints of beer that I received very little instruction on Gainsborough's brush strokes, but lots of advice on strategic management, and pep talks about the importance of professional standards in the management, research and development of art, craft and design collections. For better or worse, boozy lunches on Hampstead Heath partly shaped my own curatorial identity.

I have since accepted that, like my Kenwood mentor, curators have complex personalities because foremost they are individuals living in a rarified world, trading on esoteric expertise. While they are often unconventional and creative on the one hand, they are often meticulous on the other. But, while these character traits may be customary, it has been suggested that the role or function of the curator has changed, creating a degree of anxiety about the alienation or devaluation of the curator's role in museum culture.

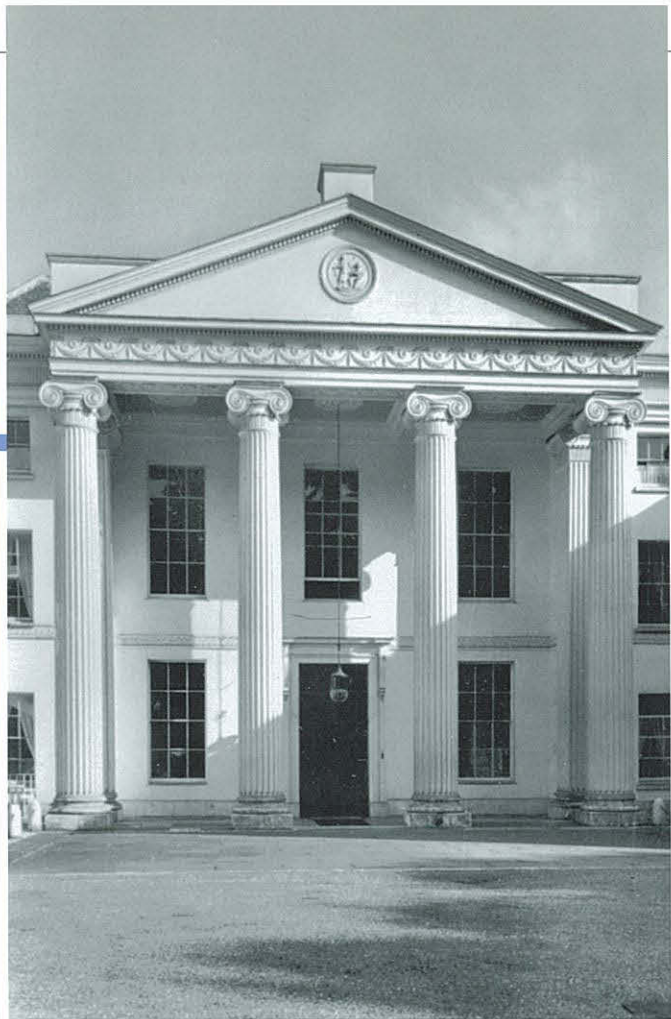
I would like to address this issue with a case study, drawing on a series of events that partially shaped the way I think about museum management and change, and which also had an impact across the globe. In 1989, I was working at the Victoria & Albert Museum (V&A) on a day I will never forget. In one morning, the Keepers (head curators) of eight departments were removed (sacked). My department head was one of the victims; he had worked in the museum for over twenty years.

That afternoon, inside dark rabbit holes around the museum, that action was seen as a direct assault on scholarship. Curators and others cursed Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. In the organisational restructuring that followed, two traditional curatorial functions were separated, collections management and research. We have come to respect this demarcation, in larger museums at least, but then it seemed to threaten the curators' right to exclusive and open access to the collections.

Simultaneously, the V&A demonstrated a new interest in popularisation and financial accountability. Strategic marketing included an advertising campaign devised by advertising agency



THE ROLE OR FUNCTION OF THE CURATOR HAS CHANGED, CREATING A DEGREE OF ANXIETY ABOUT THE ALIENATION OR DEVALUATION OF THE CURATOR'S ROLE IN MUSEUM CULTURE.



Kenwood House, Hampstead Heath, London

Saatchi and Saatchi with a suitably ironic slogan: the V&A had an 'Ace Caf with quite a nice museum attached'. It would be interesting to know whether, in the history of museum advertising, there has ever been a less subtle application of Maslow's 'hierarchy of needs' than this campaign; clearly, as we have now come to accept, audiences need more than art to nourish body and soul. Many viewed this crass commercialisation with distaste, and it shattered the intellectual credibility of the V&A. Even so, it was defended because it was risky, controversial, and therefore memorable.

So why did this assault on curators take place, and why were marketing and visitor service strategies (and staff) suddenly more valuable to museum operations than the traditional core curatorial business of preserving and researching the collections? I think we can guess. Money.

We need to see this climactic event in context. Warnings of the need for organisational change in a number of key areas had previously been ignored. As early as 1946 the *Visual Arts Enquiry* commissioned by the Department of Reconstruction had reported that: 'The staff of national art collections are civil servants, divided into normal civil service categories', and furthermore that:

'The method of appointment and the conditions of employment of staff...leave much to be desired. New officers are mostly recruited direct from one of the older universities, which give no training in the arts; though some preference has recently been shown to applicants who have studied at the Courtauld Institute, London University or who have travelled abroad. Once appointed, there is little choice but to remain in the same institution for life...'

That the report took a leftist view against an evident class-based appointment system is further reflected in its criticism of the lack of 'collaboration between museums and galleries'. This, the authors felt, prevented the circulation of art to provincial areas, the presentation of united exhibitions, and the satisfactory organisation of publicity and publications. The report noted that systemic divisions in both museums and galleries on the basis of class or discipline hindered community access and staff development.

So back to 1989, and as the dramatic events at the V&A unfolded, in another part of the museum a number of contributions to the manifesto *The New Museology* were being finalised. This book reflected and advocated a vision of broader accessibility and a shift to visitor-focused museum management, interpretation and scholarship. One contributor, Philip Wright, a long-standing visual arts curator and administrator, stated that, to the art museum world 'the quality of visitor experience appears not to be of major concern'; and he introduced the principles of interpretation, developed by Freeman Tilden of the US Parks and Wildlife Service, to the rarefied art world. More directly concerned with practice at the V&A, another contributor, the art and design

historian Dr Charles Saumarez Smith (currently Director of the National Gallery, previously Head of Research at the V&A) reminded readers that 'the museum was not established for the purposes of limited or restricted scholarship, let alone for the development of specialist connoisseurship in the field of the applied arts, but with a broad instrumental and utilitarian purpose...'

Saumarez Smith was at the vanguard of a new generation of British scholars confronting the narrow focus of curatorial practice, one largely based on taxonomic connoisseurship. But rather than simply slash and burn, he was concerned that any change was respectful of museum traditions, and he therefore sought to revitalise the museum's sense of purpose through a reflective process. He drew attention to a number of pertinent and defining museum characteristics, which had emerged in the nineteenth century, and which he implied had been to some extent forgotten:

1. Collections on display should in some way contribute to the advancement of knowledge through study of them [this requires interpretation];
  2. Collections should not be arbitrarily arranged, but should be organised according to some systematic and recognisable scheme of classification [fundamental to communication];
  3. They should not be owned and administered by a private individual, but by more than one person on behalf of the public [curatorial practice is for the public]; and
  4. They should be reasonably accessible to the public, if necessary by special arrangement and on payment of a fee [access].
- We now take these familiar characteristics, or similar ones, for granted; they are reflected in ICOM principles. However, in the



1980s intellectual rigidity and entrenched work practices blocked the popularist and economic rationalist agenda of the Conservative government, and also frustrated the application of new scholarly approaches to the interpretation of art museum objects. A powerful alliance was formed which led to the 'execution' of the Keepers. I think the second of these was a particularly important development for art museum scholarship; after all, as we have come to appreciate more and more, freedom from a narrow focus on connoisseurship leaves more space for creativity in curatorial practice.

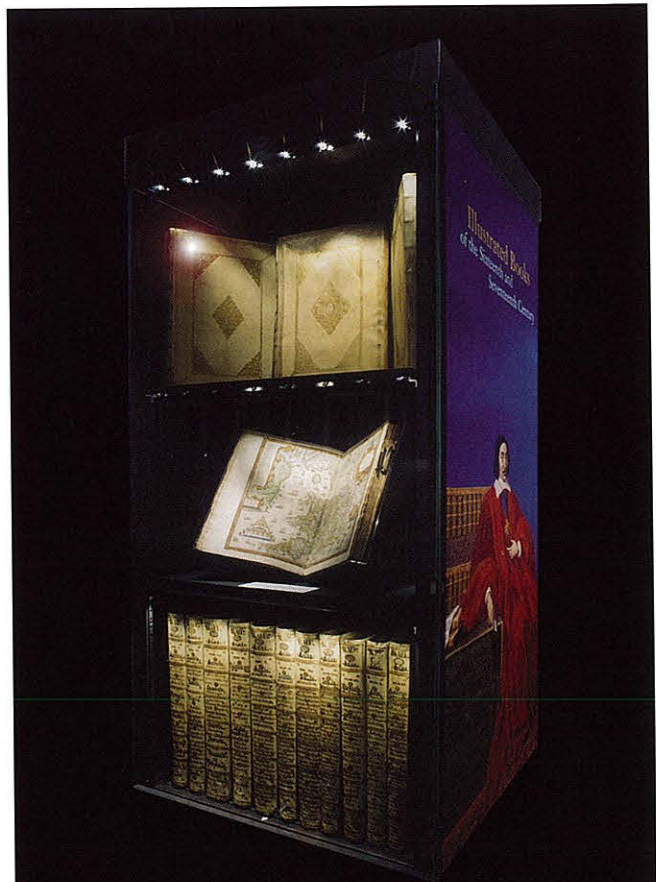
If curatorial practice has changed as a result of this kind of action and reflection, it is therefore probably for the better. One lesson we can learn from this series of V&A events is that museum curators ought to be reflexive enough to review, and sometimes change, their interpretive methodologies and work practices, and evaluate their practice according to evolving ideas. Another is that this evaluation is best undertaken continuously rather than induced under such dramatic circumstances. Revolutions are traumatic and painful, but in retrospect they remind us of the consequences of inertia.

Contemporary curatorial practice is situated more than ever in a matrix of negotiated relationships. Curators are precariously balanced between interpretive methodologies and commercial and intellectual interests, with more complex relationships to collections and disciplines; to other participants in an adversarial organisational framework; and to a range of diverse audiences. But this, I suggest, is for the better. Like Philip Wright, I would argue that curatorial practice is a suite of activities, which are all interactive and grounded in relationships with communities both inside and outside the art museum. Ultimately, more dynamic relationships ought to increase the potential for individual curators to form new alliances and to reach new audiences.

Reflecting on my own practice as a curator, it is easy to see how the values and considerations which flow from these characteristics can come second to self-interest or, as we may excuse ourselves, are casualties of prioritisation and a lack of resources. I hope that the goals of creating knowledge through preservation, research and interpretation, facilitating meaningful interpretation by others, maintaining proper systems of accountability, and demonstrating a positive attitude to accessibility are all central to the curator's role. The question of whether or not the definition of the curator is shifting is less important than maintaining and promoting these key values of curatorial practice.

In my experience, the most vigorous curators have drawn oxygen from society around them. The most persuasive curators have argued for significance and preservation in accordance with the needs of their institution and audiences; and the most accomplished curators have not unconsciously produced elitist or restrictive outcomes. Finally, the professional curator of the twenty-first century will thrive in a multi-faceted spectrum of scholarly and interpretive light, liberated from a suffocating diving bell once and for all, through reflectively participating in the evolution of curatorial practice.

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Museums and galleries are usually concerned with both rights — they use, reproduce, exhibit, display, publish and communicate manuscripts, artworks, photographs and many other original works created by artists.

The current debate in Australia between the museums and galleries and Viscopy, representing artists, is around the introduction of the *Copyright Act [Digital Agenda]* (CADA) that became law in March 2001.

Many myths about copyright abound. In particular, some museums are promoting the notion that the digitisation of a collection and its communication to the public means the same as their 'public access' charter. Secondly, they argue that museums' 'educational use'

should lead to a zero fee. The suggestion that educational establishments or libraries or museums that own the works can freely copy is inaccurate. Nevertheless this idea has acquired certain acceptance in the museum sector because these assumptions that are not founded in law have been embedded in our culture for centuries.

In Australia the library sector through Australian Council of Libraries and Information Services (ACLIS) has its Statement of the Principles of Copyright, acknowledging that 'digital and other information technologies present great opportunities for the dissemination of information and ideas in new and more efficient ways'. They recognise that a balance 'must be struck that reflects the need for copyright owners to receive reasonable returns for the creation and distribution of original works, and the need for copyright users to have a fair access to those works'. This balance, that already takes account of the arguments for 'public access', has been struck in the revised *Copyright Act 1968* that offers specific Fair Dealing exceptions, for example for 'private research and study, 'review and criticism' and 'reporting the news', as well as for internal administrative purposes such as conservation.

While the Act provides statutory licences for educational use, it is not fee exempt. The Australian Vice-Chancellor's Committee (AVCC) notes in its 'Position on Copyright' that 'The Copyright Act has made access to this material possible'; and so the 'agreements between the AVCC and the owners of

copyright material ensure that equitable remuneration is paid for its use'. Each tertiary institution and school pays an annual licence fee to collecting societies to distribute to copyright owners.

It is also incumbent on a museum to pay a reasonable and equitable price for the privilege of using artistic works — and to set a standard for others of good working practice. There are too many examples of museums asking artists to waive the fees that would normally apply to reproductions that accompany exhibitions - catalogues, posters, postcards and so on - because they cannot afford them. Yet mysteriously the cleaner can be paid, as can the printer of the catalogue, the curator and the rest of the museum staff. Surely exhibitions and shows are joint ventures — a mutual investment where any benefit can be shared?

Viscopy enjoys many good cooperative relationships with museums and galleries. In the late 1990s we worked with representatives of art museum educators to establish a special tariff for educational use within museums. It should be noted that Viscopy does acknowledge the importance and value of museum education because we have already implemented significantly reduced rates for non-commercial educational material. We can give our assurance that we will continue to implement a uniform schedule of rates for non-commercial education purposes for use throughout Australian museums and galleries in consultation with museum educators.

Recently we worked together with museums and

publishers such as the Queensland Art Gallery, Craftsman House and participating institutions to license touring shows such as the Lin Onus retrospective.

Since the introduction of CADA, together with the Art Gallery of New South Wales, we realised a new type of annual volume licence that has enabled them to place their digitised collection on the Internet, ensuring that all Viscopy members' works are licensed.

Our business is to ensure that artistic works in copyright are widely accessible on reasonable and equitable terms and to encourage the public dissemination or works of visual art.

In the future we expect to work with cultural organisations such as museums and galleries, to exchange ideas and information and find new and interesting ways of helping museums and galleries to licence their own resources so that they will be better able to preserve the cultural heritage of which they are guardians.

ANNA WARD IS EXECUTIVE OFFICER, VISCOPY WITH ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS TO RACHEL DUFFIELD. FOR A COPY OF VISCOPY'S TARIFF FOR MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES WITH EXPLANATORY NOTES ON 'FAIR DEALING' MATTERS OR ANY OTHER CORRESPONDENCE, PLEASE EMAIL ANNA.WARD@VISCOPY.COM



## SUZETTE WATKINS

I want to talk about the effects of Viscopy from the perspective of the small regional and remote gallery.

I fully support the requirement to pay artists a fee, at the point of commercial use.

The Araluen Galleries at the Alice Springs Cultural Precinct are government funded. We have four galleries, approximately twenty exhibitions annually and just two full-time staff to do all the work. We employ some casual staff as needed, but essentially that's it.

Our total operational budget for this is around \$45,000 per annum — of which about \$17,500 is spent on advertising and marketing. The rest is spent on collection management, exhibition fees and so on.

What sets us apart from other regional galleries is our unique sense of place. Our collection consists of contemporary Australian art from the last thirty years. We have under 1,000 works in the collection. Around ninety per cent of these relate to Central Australia — works by Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists in Central Australia, nationally and internationally renowned artists who have responded to or been inspired by this unique environment in a variety of ways.

After you have viewed the works, you can walk outside and be right in the source of that inspiration. I believe no other gallery has such an immense sense of place as we have.

Tourism is essential to our galleries. About 400,000 people visit Alice Springs

annually. About six per cent of these visit our galleries. If we are to attract more domestic and international visitors, we must be able to promote what we have.

We, like many other galleries, are considering an e-gallery for promotion, education, and research. Assuming that we wanted to display approximately a hundred works, we would be paying an intolerable percentage of our slim (one might say minute) advertising budget to Viscopy.

As a side issue, local government owns approximately fifty per cent of our collection. They are considering making a searchable database of that portion of the collection, available in the town library. An interesting problem, you'll agree.

If we are making money on the use of an artist's work, then it is only right and proper that the artist also be making money. It's where we wish to use an image in a non-commercial, educational or promotional sense that I believe we should not be paying this fee.

We are a public institution. We are funded by public monies, housing artworks that belong to the people. We are not funded to pay significant percentages of our budget to Viscopy.

There is also the issue of equity and fairness. If it becomes too difficult or too expensive to use the works of a particular artist, they might be passed over in favour of one who is more accessible and less expensive. Thus the full range of Central Australian artists might not be displayed.

I'm certainly in favour of using watermarks, or in the

case of the library example, thumbnail reproductions. I'm keen that artworks not be downloaded and printed willy-nilly.

I note, by the way, that Viscopy rates are not published on the website. Therefore it is difficult to make decisions based on real costs. I suspect that, like many other galleries, it has become easier just to deal with the artists you can get to and leave the rest alone. Is this ethical? Is it fair?

I support Brian Kennedy's call for a re-definition of the term 'education'. I also suggest that it might be possible for a peak body to broker an agreement with Viscopy, with regional and other small galleries taking advantage of bulk rates.

SUZETTE WATKINS IS  
DIRECTOR, ALICE SPRINGS  
CULTURAL PRECINCT, NORTHERN  
TERRITORY

## DINAH DYSART

Craftsman House has been honouring copyright obligations for more than twenty years. Books always include museologically correct accreditation of artworks, images are never cropped without permission and every effort is made to achieve colour fidelity.

When an author signs a contract to produce a Craftsman House book she/he undertakes to clear copyright. The standard arrangement is that the author will receive fifteen per cent of the publisher's net receipts.

If 2000 copies of an art book are produced to retail at \$80, then the author can expect to make about \$8000 in royalties

and with this must pay permission fees to reproduce works in public collections and for the loan of transparencies. Add to this the expense of copyright fees, and clearly the return is miserably small.

After discounts to the distributor and to the bookseller, a book retailing at \$80 will return about \$25.60 per book to the publisher. With this income the publisher must pay for editing, designing, colour separating, printing, freighting, and marketing the book, as well as author's royalties.

So that is why there are very few fine art publishers and no art writers who can make a living from their trade (or none that I am aware of). You don't need me to tell you that the content of a publication is influenced by these financial constraints and by copyright legislation.

If the writer has the subject's approval or the approval of the estate then almost certainly copyright fees will be waived. An author can write about an artist's life and work but, without approval, reproductions cannot be included.

It can be argued that copyright is a form of censorship. And we all know of instances where material has been withdrawn from publication because the artist won't give permission — in the case of unfavourable criticism, for example — for reproduction of their work. It is even more of a problem when the subject of the book includes references to a number of artists.

The Viscopy relationship can determine the content of the book as it is much easier, and cheaper, to select works for illustration by artists who



are not members of Viscopy.

If a book is to be satisfactorily promoted then images need to be reproduced in news media and advertising material. Reproduction for advertising purposes incurs an additional Viscopy fee.

The existence of Viscopy influences the kinds of publications a company can afford to contract. It is the comprehensive, scholarly work which is most likely to vanish from our bookshelves simply because it is too expensive to produce.

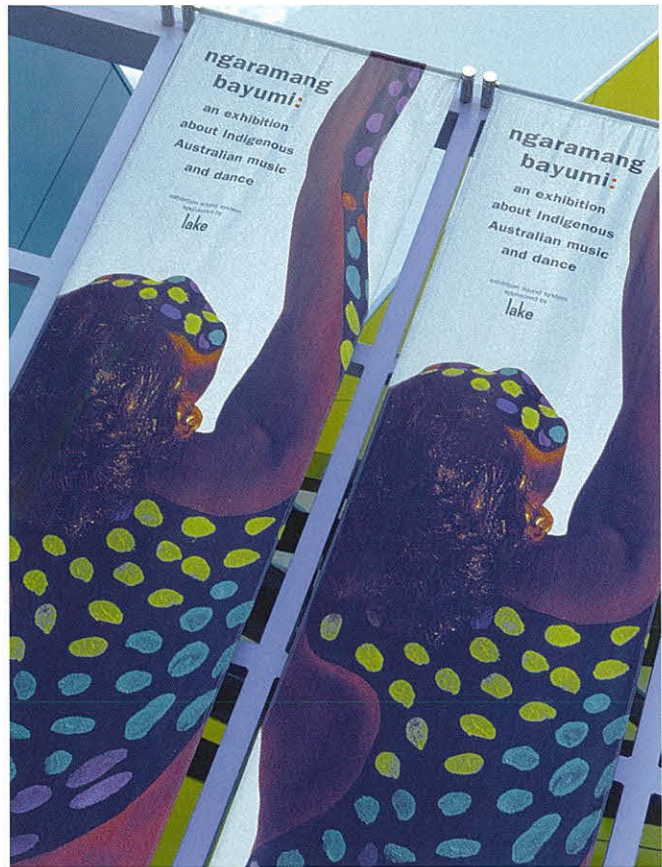
Viscopy has a vital role to play in ensuring that artists' work is not used by unscrupulous people in inappropriate ways, however it is a very different matter when publication directly enhances an artist's reputation and improves the value of the work.

DINAH DYSART IS  
PUBLISHING CONSULTANT,  
CRAFTSMAN HOUSE BOOKS

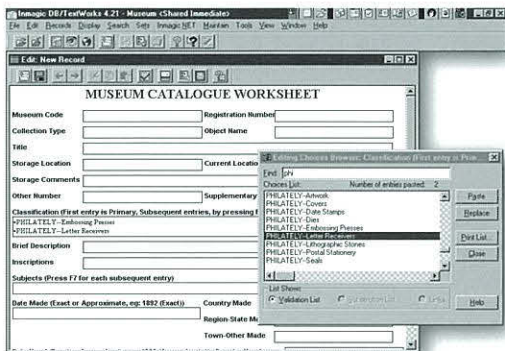
#### BRONWYN BANCROFT

An artist's voice is often a voice in the wilderness, and artists are often the last to be included in deliberations about their future.

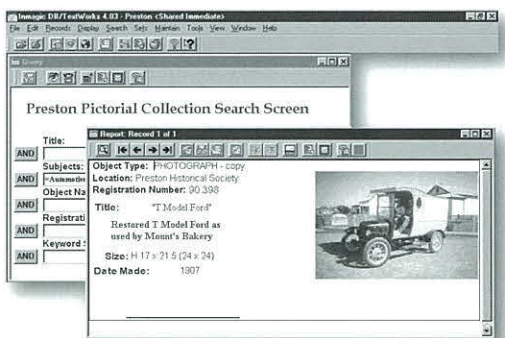
I can remember my five-year term as a Board member of the National Gallery of Australia. Jane Singleton and I were tenacious in our pursuit of a copyright policy for the Gallery. Many debates occurred where the predominant argument was 'the artist automatically assigns copyright in perpetuity, when they are collected'. It took five years and much chagrin to develop a one-page document, with two boxes at the bottom, allowing the artist the choice. To assign or not to assign, that was the question. We pay the plumber, doctor and dentist, but balk at giving artists anything. It reeks of hypocrisy.



Banner for *ngaramang bayumi: an exhibition about Indigenous Australians music and dance* for the Olympic Arts Festival. Body paint by Bronwyn Bancroft. Courtesy of Bronwyn Bancroft



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AN ARTIST'S VOICE IS OFTEN A VOICE IN THE WILDERNESS, AND ARTISTS ARE OFTEN THE LAST TO BE INCLUDED IN DELIBERATIONS ABOUT THEIR FUTURE.

What I found unbelievable was that it was accepted that all copyright would be assigned to the institution to do as they please — or should I state 'for educational purposes only' — never consulting the artist about what their rights were and are. It appears that the artist is vilified if — God forbid — they expect to be compensated for the reproduction of their work held in any institution.

The catch phrase often used is: 'They should be grateful to have been collected at all'. This attitude only serves to indicate the overwhelming precariousness of the individual artist and the lack of understanding that prevails when artists assert their rights.

As an Indigenous female artist and a breadwinner for three children, I know the hard yards of the art circuit. I know that if a curator — black or white — does not like you, then your work can be dropped from the state/national psyche. Again, it shows the delicate nature of an artist's journey, and how easily someone can be destroyed by personal politics.

Institutions such as Viscopy allow the artist security and retrieval of income. We need everything we can get from all sources. For instance, Educational Lending Right and Public Lending Right are now factored into my budget, and are really invaluable in

allowing me to plan to sustain myself and my family. Most artists are proud, and would prefer to live off their wits rather than accept the scraps that are offered.

The crux of my argument lies in the fact that artists generally are passionate about their lives/work/culture and, as such, do not need the added derision of their art environments because they would like to be compensated for their intellectual, moral and creative achievements. If you work in a museum or gallery, you could entertain the thought of having as much passion for the artist as they have passion for their art. Our joint pursuits would then thrive. It's not a case of us or them.

I am sure I have made lots of new friends and they will all be ringing up to say they want to collect my work. But on a serious note, don't be frightened of us. We can become a component of your budgets, and we really need your assistance and understanding to take our place in the world.

BRONWYN BANCROFT IS AN INDIGENOUS ARTIST, AND A FORMER BOARD MEMBER OF THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF AUSTRALIA

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CAROL SCOTT

### PRESIDENT'S REPORT MAY 2002

## OUR NATIONAL CONFERENCE

The recent Museums Australia conference in Adelaide attracted 363 people from Commonwealth, state and regional museums and galleries. More than 120 people registered for the Regional Rave workshop held on Friday 22 March as the culminating event of a very successful week. The Association's thanks go to the co-convenors, Viv Szekeres and Marie Boland, to their hard working and creative committee, and to Louise Carnell of Hartley Management Group who provided such excellent organisation. We also appreciated the warm hospitality provided by the many cultural institutions of South Australia and the opportunity to enjoy their collections and exhibitions. Finally, the conference is indebted to our major sponsors, the South Australian Ministry for the Arts and the Department of Information, Communication, Technology and the Arts and our supporting sponsors, the Department of Veterans' Affairs, the South Australian University, the Humanities Research Centre at The Australian National University, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and Kojo Group.

The Minister for the Arts and Sport, Senator Rod Kemp, opened the Conference with a speech that can be found on the DCITA website. My opening remarks as your President follow.

## MUSEUMS IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

### President's opening remarks

The growth of interest in museums is indicative of the fact that the museum at the end of the twentieth century is a focus around which many of our global and local preoccupations can coalesce. Museums demand attention to questions of how identity and difference are performed, and to how senses of continuity might be [maintained] in the face of the apparent acceleration of transnational movement and global transformation.

As befits the beginning of a new century, we are revisiting the role of museums in this millennium. And it would be safe to say that the position of museums today is one of challenge, change and revitalisation.

While change is occurring at a rapid, and we sometimes feel, unmanageable rate, the indication is that this change offers some important opportunities. Let's look briefly at some of these opportunities in terms of profile, economic revitalisation, diversification, presentation and access.

### Profile

On the one hand, we note that there is an increasing interest in museums and as evidence of this can be cited the frequency of news items, expanding academic literature and the increasing numbers of museums globally.

### Economic revitalisation

Museums have become economic engines in the form of attractions and tourist destinations that can contribute to a community's growth in jobs and income. Developers and local government view museums, cultural and entertainment districts as projects to stimulate economic revitalisation. Museum architecture as well as exhibitions and public programs are tourist attractions. We notice, more and more, the centrality of museum architecture as a feature of new urban tourism precincts.

### Diversification

Museums are diversifying in form and content and tackling controversial subjects — overseas, the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, the Museum of Famine in Ireland. And both here and abroad, exhibitions on colonialism, on warfare, on gender, sexuality, ethnicity and exhibitions of people's personal collections as well as the museum's academic collections.

### Presentation

Museums are presenting themes not only through displays of objects but also through drama, virtual reality, audio-visuals, interactive exhibits and innovative public programs.

### Access

It is possible to view a museum's collections through electronic means (CD-Roms, Internet, etc.) And outreach

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programs offered through professional partnerships between major institutions and travelling exhibitions are increasing.

While all of this would seem to point to a positive revitalisation of the idea of a museum, change also brings challenges. Two major challenges that our sector faces are:

- The need to maintain museums' integrity as distinctive collecting, conserving, research, exhibiting and education institutions while at the same time, making museums more popular and competitive; and
- The need for strategic planning and resource management commensurate with the increasing demands on museums to address multiple narratives.

I would say that the first issue is one of role and positioning and that the second confronts the complex balancing act of addressing multiple agendas and multiple narratives within the constraints of limited resources.

### Positioning

Museums know that it is necessary to expand and diversify audiences in order to achieve broader community support as well as increased income. But before we seek to expand audiences, we have first to identify the competition we face and distinguish our own important niche in relation to the population that we want to attract.

There is evidence that, in a post-modern world, the general trend is to leisure that is ephemeral, depthless and transient. What is needed are counterpoints to this current trend — experiences that allow people to reflect, think, experience wonder, touch authenticity and be grounded. And this is part of the unique experience that people receive from visiting museums.

Visitors, we know, seek celebrative experiences in which they connect with the past, encounter inspiring examples, understand their heritage and honour important events. They seek experiences where they can revel in the great achievements of art, culture, science and

innovation. They want to experience awe and enchantment and become inspired. And they do this through objects and the great visual and symbolic power that objects have. Museums are different and distinct and they need to position themselves in ways that celebrate and differentiate their uniqueness while promoting the engaging, entertaining and personalised ways in which they offer the experience of encountering information, stories and issues.

### Multiple narratives

Increasingly, museums are required to demonstrate that they are fulfilling the needs of the community as a whole as well as initiatives aimed at specific groups. Claims on resources are multiplying with the numbers of constituencies demanding more services.

Museums find themselves faced with competing demands to reach broader publics, preserve growing collections to appropriate standards while at the same time making the collection increasingly accessible in diverse ways,

provide a rapidly changing program of exhibitions, ensure a total 'experience' through the provision of related commercial and customer services, and be competitive.

I think that it is appropriate to question how feasible this is. Our challenge is to determine a realistic and commonly agreed set of goals and strategies and adequate resource planning that will not only meet these current demands but enable the sector to realise its full potential into the future.

We have important work to do and we need to do it together. 'We' is inclusive — it means the industry, the peak bodies including MA, CAMD, CAAMD, AICCM and Commonwealth, state and local governments. A new century offers the possibility of forging new relationships and partnerships among these stakeholders and we look forward to the exciting potential that this offers.

### MUSEUM NATIONAL EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

#### The current committee

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**Doreen Mellor** is an Indigenous Australian and the Project Manager for the Bringing Them Home oral history project at the National Library of Australia.  
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## SHADES OF EUCALYPTUS AT THE GARDENS

*Shades of Eucalyptus — colours for cloth from the forest*, an exhibition on display at the Australian National Botanic Gardens until August 2002, was developed by Adelaide textile artist India Flint from her research for a Masters degree.

The thesis, 'Arcadian alchemy: ecologically sustainable dyes for textiles from the eucalypt forest', embodied extensive research into eucalypts as dye sources. Flint tested over 250 samples sourced from the Currency Creek Arboretum, Mount Lofty

Botanic Garden and other sites, and developed a method she has named the 'eco-print technique' to quickly test the dye potential of eucalypt samples using small quantities of leaves and water and no harmful mordants.

Flint has used the technique to create seven enormous gowns of wool felt dyed with eucalyptus leaves, and sample fabric lengths, including silk panels that float gently in the air currents.

The gowns, called by Flint 'seven dresses for seven sisters', speak of her sense of



Giant wool felt gowns and eco-print samples in glass cases create an arresting display at the Australian National Botanic Gardens

Photograph by Barry Brown

Courtesy of Australian National Botanic Gardens



dislocation from her European background, but also of her connection to the Australian landscape:

'The large felted garments are in a sense the watchers on the shore, skirts kilted high against the lapping waves, their feet buried in the sand of their adopted homeland, their hearts dreaming of places far across the sea. Through the combination of wool felt, and the dyes of the eucalyptus, they acknowledge my footholds in Europe and Australia...

'The use of eucalyptus as the main dye source gives rise to the rich hues of the Australian landscape. The pungent aroma of the dye pots conjures up the living forest. Layers of dyes imprinting the surface of the cloth offer a metaphor for the lived experiences that influence memory. The work is as much a reinvestigation of a personal relationship with land, as an exploration of the mark-making qualities of land and herbage on cloth.

'The group of dresses shown together with the 250 eco-print samples from the Currency Creek Arboretum, and dye samples from seven selected eucalypts (*e.camuldulensis*, *e. cinerea*, *e. maculata*, *e.sideroxyton*, *e.conferruminata*, *e.citriodoro* and *e.globulus*) bring together story and sequence, chance and classification.'

Large glass and wood cases at the rear of the Australian National Botanic Gardens gallery display the 250 eco-print samples, and demonstrate the diversity of colours and tones that can be obtained from eucalypts using India Flint's environmentally-friendly dyeing process. Information panels about the key eucalypt species used as dye sources complement the artworks, in this unusual and visually intriguing exhibition.

## HOT TOPIC

### SPONSORSHIP AND THE SMITHSONIAN

Museums nowadays are keen to secure sponsorship for acquisitions, capital works, exhibitions and other public programs. But what happens when a sponsor takes the line that 'he who pays the piper calls the tune'?

The Smithsonian Institution found out in February this year when a \$US38 million grant was substantially retracted by the donor when Washington businesswoman Catherine B. Reynolds encountered resistance from Institution curators to the degree of control she wished to exercise over a permanent exhibition, *Spirit of America*, honouring notable American achievers.

Smithsonian director Lawrence B. Small had, according to the *Art Newspaper's* March issue, come 'under fire for accepting the gift in the first place, as it stipulated that Ms Reynolds be allowed a great deal of control' over the exhibition, in which she wished to feature celebrity figures such as Oprah Winfrey, Martha Stewart, Steven Spielberg and Michael Jordan. Her retraction of the sponsorship came after 'criticism of her planned exhibition, and irreconcilable differences between her philosophy of what should have been included in the exhibition, and that of Smithsonian scholars'. For their part, many curators 'saw her gift as a compromise of curatorial and scholarly integrity, and tantamount to an individual's ability to buy exhibition space in the institution'.

Critics of the Smithsonian's director's 'over-zealous' fund-raising claim that the Reynolds case is only one of several sponsorship arrangements made by the Institution that could, according to the *New York Times* of 24 April 2002, lead to the revered national museum complex becoming 'a kind of corporate-sponsored theme park'.

The controversy raises issues of curatorial independence versus the financial needs of the institution, as well as the broad question of who or what should be celebrated in a national museum.

*Museum National* is interested in hearing from readers who have a 'hot topic' they would like to discuss in the pages of the magazine. Contact the Editor by phone (02) 6208 5144 or by email, editor@museumsaustralia

### MOVING ON

**Brenda Croft** is now Senior Curator of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art at the National Gallery of Australia.

**Dr Patrick Greene**, the past President of the UK Museums Association, is the incoming Director of Museum Victoria. He will take up the position in August.

**Merryn Gates** has left Canberra School of Arts Gallery and has become a freelance curator.

**Philip Hall** is now Director of the National Indigenous Arts Advocacy Association.

**Jacqueline Healy** is the new Director of the Bundoora Homestead Federation Centre for the Arts, Melbourne.

**Bronwyn Larner** has been appointed as Director of Lismore Regional Gallery. She was formerly Curator at the University of Southern Queensland Gallery, Toowoomba.

**Stephen Mellor**, previously at the Art Gallery of Western Australia, has been appointed Exhibitions Manager at the Tate Modern, London.

**Andrew Moritz** has been appointed Director of The Workshops Rail Museum Queensland at Ipswich. He is the former Director of the

National Wool Museum in Geelong, and has been working as Project Manager, Museum Victoria, on the development and opening of Melbourne's new museum complex.

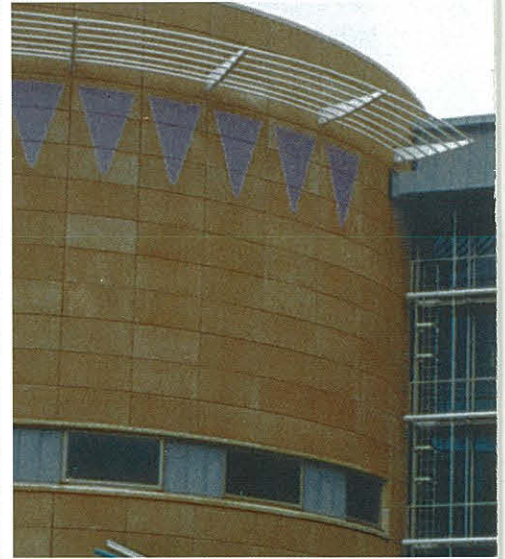
**Robert Morris** has left the Museums and Galleries Foundation of NSW and is now Head of Collections at the South Australian Museum.

**John Petersen** is now the Senior Curator at Hyde Park Barracks, Sydney.

**Louise Tegart** is Acting Director of the Shepparton Art Gallery.



# POSTSCRIPT ON TE PAPA



Front entrance of Te Papa Tongarewa/National Museum of New Zealand  
Courtesy of Anne Kirker

The May 2001 issue of *Museum National* (under the theme of 'Champions and Stakeholders') ran two opposing views on the newly established Te Papa Tongarewa/Museum of New Zealand. The first was written by Jenny Harper, a former curator and director of the National Art Gallery — now incorporated into the Te Papa complex — and the second by Ian Wedde, Concept Curator (Humanities) at the institution. Their respective ideological stances towards the treatment of displaying the visual arts in the new museum context was markedly at odds, making for stimulating reading. On one hand, art historian Harper asked whether 'this multifunctional, populist New Zealand-focussed Museum [was] simply the wrong place

for the display and care of the national art collections?'. Conversely, Wedde, a distinguished writer of fiction and former art critic, believed that the 'prospects of engaging audiences on a broad cultural front' was a paramount concern in organising the collection displays of Te Papa and hence the lowering of barriers 'between art and design, decorative art, textiles, and graphic material. While autonomous art projects are regularly found in Te Papa's programme, it now makes sense', Wedde says, 'to define its work with art within the terminology of visual culture'.

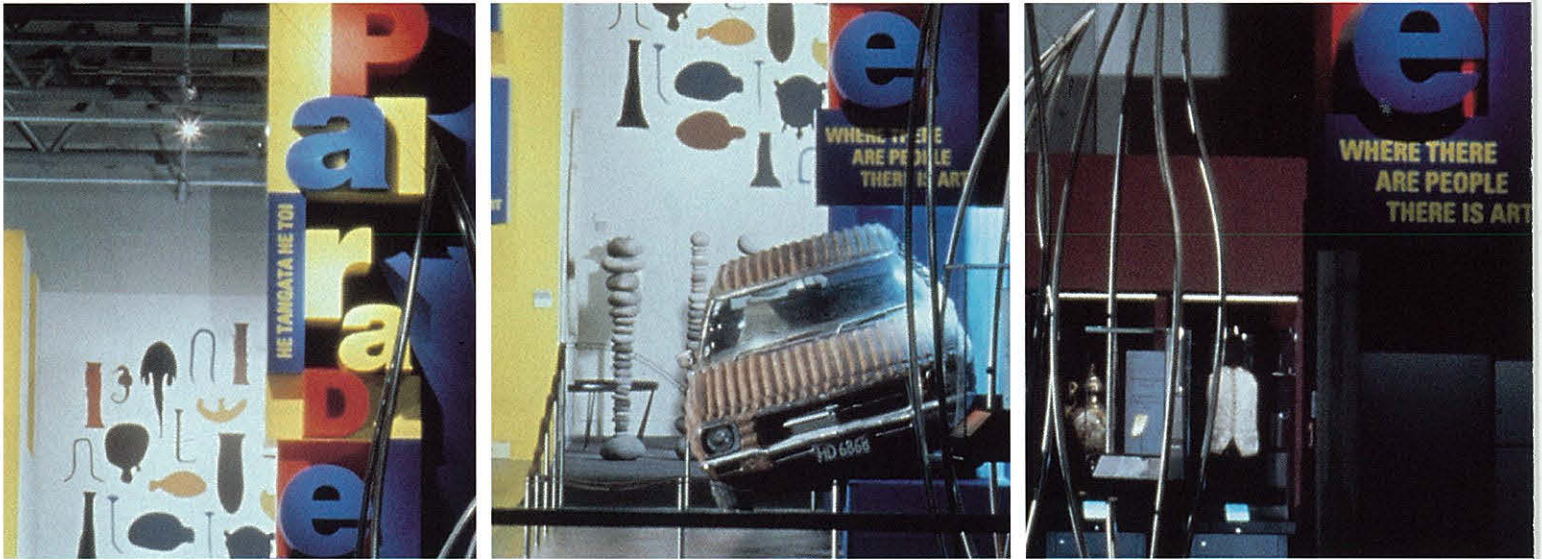
When I first visited Te Papa in Wellington, six months after it had opened in 1998, this vast enterprise was enjoying unprecedented popularity from

the general public. Attendance figures were four times the expected rate, with a high proportion of visitors being of Maori origin. Te Papa had been faced with an unenviable task, that of amalgamating the collections of the former National Museum (natural history, social history, Maori *taonga*, colonial and post-colonial artefacts) and the National Art Gallery's visual arts holdings.

Up until late 2001, there was a marked indifference to the discipline of art history and theory at Te Papa. The museum projected itself as 'Our Place', emphasising the bicultural experience of being a New Zealander and therefore treating individual 'aesthetic' objects as part of a social history jigsaw. Indeed the



UP UNTIL LATE 2001, THERE WAS A MARKED INDIFFERENCE TO THE DISCIPLINE OF ART HISTORY AND THEORY AT TE PAPA. THE MUSEUM PROJECTED ITSELF AS 'OUR PLACE', EMPHASISING THE BICULTURAL EXPERIENCE OF BEING A NEW ZEALANDER AND THEREFORE TREATING INDIVIDUAL 'AESTHETIC' OBJECTS AS PART OF A SOCIAL HISTORY JIGSAW.



museum was a wonderfully vibrant, culturally instructive experience and as a previous employee of the National Art Gallery, I was heartened to see this. However, knowing the riches of the visual arts holdings, I was appalled at how wilfully dismissive and simplistic the hang was of the opening art collection display (called 'Parade'). Many readers will know of the installation of a painting by Colin McCahon next door to a refrigerator — apparently for no other reason than they were both produced in the same year!

Wellington's daily newspaper, *The Dominion*, ran an editorial on Friday 7 July 2000, which acknowledged that Te Papa was receiving severe criticism from a number of quarters for the way it 'treats

the national art collection [and that] it is belatedly showing signs of rectifying the mix'. Prime Minister Helen Clark ordered a review to focus the museum on its shortcomings in this regard and by 2001, the Government had provided \$4.7million (NZ) to fund Te Papa's new art display spaces.

When I made a return visit to Wellington in January 2002, the change was marked. There were specially dedicated spaces for the visual arts, lit expressly for the display of such exhibits and accompanied by minimal, yet informative texts. Themes such as 'Sightlines' and 'Masquerade' organised the historical and contemporary art exhibits. Furthermore, there appeared to be visitors as engrossed with the experience of this

material as with 'The Time Warp' and 'Nature' displays downstairs.

Te Papa is a controversial experiment in plurality of experience within the museum world; it is an example of radical heterogeneity. Under a single 'umbrella', it has had to combine several historically distinct institutions or disciplines, and to my mind, with these recent adjustments, it has mightily succeeded.

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HEAD OF INTERNATIONAL ART,  
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'Parade', the former art collection display at Te Papa critiqued in the May 2001 issue of *Museum National*  
Courtesy of Jenny Harper



## PARENTAL RECOLLECTIONS OF CHILDHOOD MUSEUM VISITS

Museums all over the world are becoming increasingly aware of young children and the need to reconceptualise exhibitions and programs to meet this visitor group's needs and interests. In January 2000, we began to investigate the nature and character of young children's learning in museum settings. Our investigation was stimulated by the notable absence of research that has examined young children's perspectives, behaviours and emergent learning from museum experiences. We have focused our research on several factors affecting children's learning. Since parents are the dominant influence on young children's learning and life experiences, it is important to understand parental visiting patterns and conceptions of museums.

### The QUT Museums Collaborative Study

Several social researchers — Falk & Dierking, Kelly, Kindler and Darras — have indicated that the past museum experience of parents, both positive and negative, influence their young children's likelihood of visitation. In our study, parents were surveyed about their past visitation patterns and recollections of museums experience as children. They were the parents of the ninety-four children in our main study of four- and five-year-old children in south-east Queensland. The sample was essentially random and likely to be indicative of the wider population of parents in south-east Queensland.

A specially developed protocol, called the Parent Focused Questionnaire (PFQ) comprising eleven structured



These children's memories of their museum visits influence their attitudes to museums today  
Courtesy of David Anderson

and open-ended questions, was given to all parents in early 2001. A total of seventy-five parents completed and returned the PFQ. This represents a response rate of eighty per cent, which for voluntary completion of questionnaires is an outstanding result. We report on results of one specific open-ended question, 'What were your recollections of field trips to museums when you were at school?'

### Parents' childhood memories of museums

Parents were asked to describe their experiences and salient memories of museum field trips when they were at school. All responses were examined and several identifiable categories emerged. The table details the categories and distribution of parents' responses.

In examining the overall picture, there appeared to be

### Parents' memories of their museum visits

	Count	%
Interesting/ Enjoyable/ Fun/ Amazing	32	46%
Didn't go to a museum when at school	15	21%
Vague memories/ Unmemorable experience	12	17%
Rules/ Completing teacher-directed tasks	12	17%
Dull/ Lack of engagement/ Uninteresting	10	14%
Too Rushed/ Crowded	8	11%
Seeing things	7	10%
The trip/ Going to the museum	5	7%
Made connections	4	6%
Scary	4	6%

\*Multiple responses responsible for percentages →100%

an equal distribution of parents who described their school-based museum experiences in positive ways compared to negative or neutral descriptions. The most frequently emergent theme of parents' childhood museums experiences was that they were Interesting/ Enjoyable/Fun/Amazing events. Sentiments are exemplified by the following quotes:

### Interesting/Enjoyable/Fun/ Amazing

*The Queensland Museum: I found it very interesting and a lot of fun, almost as if I was an explorer myself, making my own discoveries.*

*I always thoroughly enjoyed them [museum visits] and enjoyed writing about the visit afterwards and reflecting on what I'd seen.*



Approximately one in five parents in the sample (twenty-one per cent) claimed that they did not visit museum settings during their childhoods. A similar proportion (seventeen per cent) claimed that they had only vague memories/unmemorable experiences of museums in these years. Statements that typified these types of museum recollections included:

*Early primary school visit to the old museum. My memory is very vague. I just remember being there.*

Seventeen per cent of parents (one in six) had salient recollections of their school-based museum experiences in terms of rules or teacher directed tasks:

#### **Completing Teacher Directed Tasks/Rules**

*I recall visiting the old Queensland Museum near the exhibition grounds and remember the 'Southern Cross' (I think) which hung from the ceiling. Teachers would hand out worksheets relating to the displays and require us to complete them. We were constantly told not to touch anything or talk loudly. As a result we rebelled and made fun of all the art instead of appreciating it. It was not very enjoyable and I don't really know why we went.*

*When I was a child I went to museums and drew pictures like animals, fishes, and so on. I was busy to finish my work and didn't have enough time to enjoy them [the museum experiences].*

Examination of these responses suggests that parents recalled tasks as an imposed agenda, and not in keeping with their interests or desire to explore the museum.

About one in seven (fourteen per cent) parents

recalled their museum experiences as being boring, lacking engagement or uninteresting. A key to parents' complaints in this category was the notion that museums were all about seeing and listening, but deficient in 'doing' kinds of experiences.

#### **Boring/ Lack of engagement/ Uninteresting**

*When I was at school, museum trips were rather boring because there was a lot of walking and looking and listening and not very much doing.*

About one in nine (eleven per cent) parents recalled their childhood museum experiences as being too rushed or too crowded.

#### **Rushed/Too crowded**

*I always thought they were fun, but at the same time too much information was given in such a short period of time.*

*Going to the old Brisbane Museum, which was always too crowded and very uninteresting.*

*Hurried, organized, and busy.*

The survey of this sample of parents from south-east Queensland provides some interesting glimpses into parent's childhood memories of field trips to museums. It is clear that, on the basis of the data, many of the parents had very enjoyable childhood museum experiences. However, when we consider some of our recent QUTMC data about children's perception of their museum visits, we hear many of these same cries of dissatisfaction. These cries are also affirmed by a recent study by Carole Henry, who suggests that the negative experiential issues for student visitors to museums centre on the fast pace of their

visits, overcrowded galleries, adherence or enforcement of museum rules, and a feeling of not being empowered to enact their personal agendas. How might we take heed of a few important messages from parents?

Firstly, children's agendas and interests could form a more integral part of the development of museum-based programmatic and experiential visit scripts. Few of us would agree that it is a desirable outcome for visitors' salient memories of museums to centre on 'adherence to the rules of the museum or having to complete teacher-directed tasks'. Part of the solution lies in providing some opportunities for children to decide their own agendas as part of their museum field trips. Our experience in examining children's behaviours and the impact of museum visits within the QUTMC project suggests that such approaches can provide a sense of ownership of the visit, enriched and enjoyable experiences, and better informed museum staff.

Secondly, an increased sensitivity among museum educators and teachers concerning the pace at which museum experiences are delivered might enrich and improve field trip visits for young audiences. The need for attention to this issue is not only based on the one in nine parents in this study who recalled the fast pace of museum visits as their prime memory, but also affirmed in a separate study of young children's perspectives of museums. Here, seventy-seven four- to six-year-old children were interviewed about their experiences of visiting museums, including their views about the pace of their past museum experiences. Analysis of the data indicated that twenty-five per cent of children regarded their visits to museums as

either 'too rushed' or 'sometimes rushed'.

Thirdly, museum educators might reflect on their current programmatic experiences and museum visit scripts to incorporate a diversity of experiences, and identify ways to involve young audiences in active participation or 'doing'-type activities. Once again, our supporting data from the QUTMC project provides strong evidence that children have a preference for learning in kinaesthetic and tactile modalities.

When we compare the views of a generation past to the current generation of young museum visitors, it is fascinating to see the same kinds of issues emerging. At least on the basis of data we have gathered to date, programmatic experiences that address young visitor's personal agendas, active participation, and a slower pace of delivery might enrich and improve their overall experiences. Perhaps as a result of considered reflection and innovative program design, more of today's children in their adult years will have overwhelmingly positive memories of their field trip visits to museums.

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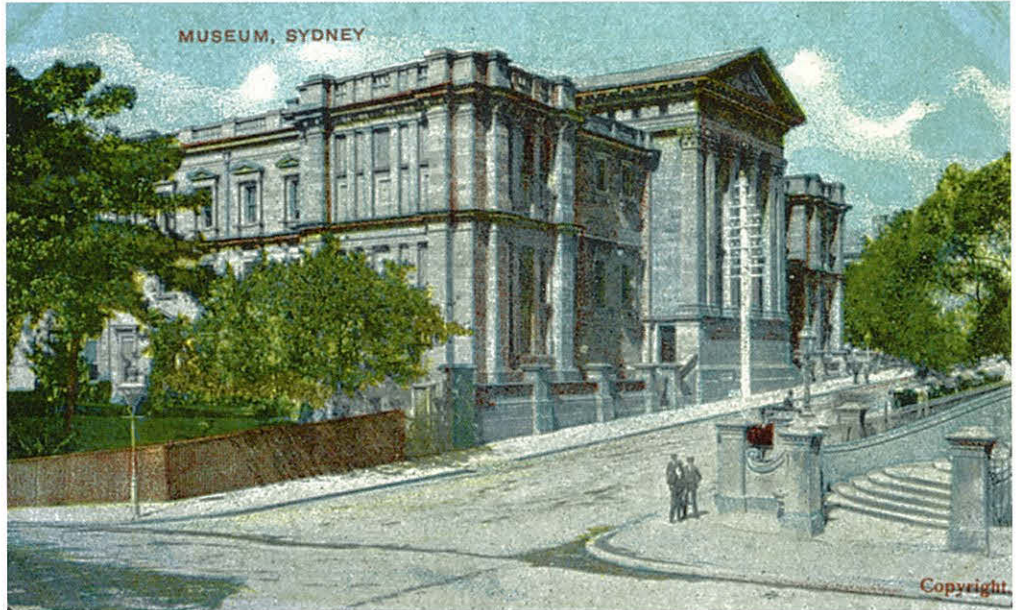
**A fully referenced version of the paper is available from the *Museum National* editor at [editor@museumsaustralia.org.au](mailto:editor@museumsaustralia.org.au)**



## MUSEUM BIRTHDAYS

Australia's oldest and newest major museums celebrated significant birthdays in March this year.

The Australian Museum in Sydney looks back 175 years, to 30 March 1827, when Earl Bathurst, Secretary of State for the Colonies, authorised the sum of two hundred pounds to be spent 'towards the foundation of a Publick Museum at New South Wales where it is stated that many rare and curious specimens of Natural History are to be procured'. A zoologist was to be appointed, and in 1829 William Holmes began work as Superintendent. *The Sydney Gazette* reported in 1830 that 'a beautiful Collection of Australian curiosities, the property of the Government, is deposited in the Old Post Office', and that Mr Holmes 'between the hours of one and



three, politely shows the same to any respectable individuals who may think fit to call'.

The Australian Museum opened its doors at its permanent site on the corner of William and College Streets,

Sydney, in 1857. It has been extended a number of times since then. Australia's oldest museum is not, however, a 'musty, dusty' relic of previous museological eras, but has won a reputation for innovative

displays as well as maintaining its long-term prestige in scientific and cultural research.

The Australian Museum, Sydney, around the first decade of the twentieth century  
Private collection

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Beleura-The Tallis Foundation







The National Museum of Australia on 11 March, in Director Dawn Casey's words, marked the first year of 'celebrating what it was to be Australian'. A giant cake was cut by Dawn Casey, National Museum chairman Tony Staley and Minister for Arts and Sport, Rod Kemp.

The Director, reported in the *Canberra Times* on the day of the anniversary, admitted that the National Museum's first year had been 'exceptional', 'exhilarating on the one hand, but on the other hand a bit frightening as well'.

In a National Press Club two days after the birthday event, Dawn Casey tackled the Museum's critics, including the 'outraged traditionalist' and the 'perceived bias' detectives:

'people convinced that museums should be dignified classical structures, temples if you like, inside which Truth with a capital T is handed down

to the people. They are upset by what they see as our eccentric and contemporary architecture — and even more by our inclusive approach to history.

'What bothers them most is that the museum refuses to provide a "master narrative" — a strong, authoritative voice with a simple chronology of civilisation and progress. But, as most of us accept, the truth is never simple, and Australian history has no one valid viewpoint.

'The national story we attempt to tell is complex and emerges not from a neat time line, nor from a list of simple facts, but from the interplay of many stories and points of view.

'These can range from the profoundly tragic, through the ironic or quirky, to the absurd or the joyful. They are the sum of us.'

'Perceived bias' critics tended to complain about the lack of 'heroic explorers and pioneers' or remark that 'There's far too much about Aborigines'. Dawn Casey quoted Professors Geoffrey Blainey and John Mulvaney who, in the original Pigott report that gave rise to the National Museum said 'The argument for a major display of Aboriginal history is overwhelming', and that in the chronology of the human occupation of Australia the time of white occupation would only occupy the last three or four minutes 'if the human history of Australia were to be marked on a 12-hour clock face'.

The National Museum does not take a chronological approach, 'but we took the point that Indigenous people must have a substantial place in the museum. The Indigenous narrative is blended in with the other great

Cutting the cake at the National Museum of Australia's first birthday, left to right: The Hon. Tony Staley (Chairperson of Council), Dawn Casey (Director), and Senator Rod Kemp (Minister for the Arts and Sport) Photograph by George Serras, National Museum of Australia, 2002

Australian stories. You will find it not just in the Aboriginal gallery but in amongst the stories of settlement and exploration and our evolving relationship with the land. Most importantly, many of these stories are told from the Indigenous perspective'.

Dawn Casey challenged visitors to the National Museum who 'find material in our exhibitions which startles or disturbs them', to 'Discuss, perhaps reject, perhaps even take on board as part of a broader perspective'.



DES GRIFFIN

## VISITOR LEARNING

*Learning from Museums: Visitor Experiences and the Making of Meaning.* By John H. Falk and Lynn D. Dierking. Walnut Creek CA, Altamira, 2000. ISBN: 0 7425 0295 3

When it comes to describing their public programming museum practitioners and executives these days often talk about entertainment; sometimes they use the word 'edutainment' or 'infotainment'. Boards and governments talk of numbers of visitors, not quality of visiting experience. Here we have a failure of action and understanding.

Little attention is paid to numerous conversations with visitors undertaken in the last forty years as part of the burgeoning research on learning. Instead, passive concepts like education and entertainment are cobbled together. 'Dumbing down' is asserted by critics to be the dominant paradigm of contemporary museum practice and the inevitable consequence of giving visitors what (museums think) they want: the clamour is that museums must lead, not follow.

These are propositions repeated in recent commentary and polemic about exhibitions at New York's Guggenheim, New Zealand's Te Papa, the new Melbourne Museum and the National Museum of Australia. But in fact the most popular exhibitions in London, New York and Chicago and Australia in the last twenty years have not been simplistic or content-free: much of the criticism is of extreme elitism,

or an attempt to rewrite history by those who accuse museums of doing just that.

John Falk and Lynn Dierking have been talking to museum visitors and conducting research on the visiting experience for over twenty years. In the past museums have based their exhibition process on the notion that, through their content and form, they can determine the visitor's knowledge. However, what people know is constructed through free-choice learning experiences. This is the constructivist principle that personal knowledge is created by people within their own minds and is most influenced by previous experience: learning involves on-going reworking of the meanings of experiences. People do not come to the museum without knowledge. But it is understanding, not knowledge of many facts, that is vitally important. People do learn from museum visits, indeed what is learned lasts well into the future. But to know what they learn requires understanding of *how* learning occurs.

Successful learning is advanced most by control over our own learning journey. How dramatically the end result is influenced by past understandings is demonstrated by a story which sets the scene for this important book about a visit to the same museum at the same time by two friends from the same cultural and economic background. All learning is contextual. The three contexts — personal, sociocultural and physical — interact *over time* and comprise eight key factors: motivation and expectations, prior knowledge, choice and control, sociocultural mediation

within the group, facilitation by others, advance organisers and orientation, design, and reinforcing events and experiences elsewhere. What is the role for the curator?

What we now know about visitors so challenges the way museums have managed their public programming that, unless the most senior people in museums understand what the research means and develop a shared view about it, vast sums of money will go on being wasted. That qualitative research, the basis of visitor studies, is now an established and valid research methodology is something that the scientists among us must recognise.

*Learning from Museums* traverses each of the three contexts and then elaborates topics such as museums and

the individual, communities of learners, documenting learning, improving the visitor experience, museums in society and the future of museums. Visits are both learning and fun, choice of what and when to learn is intrinsic to the museum experience, conversation is a primary mechanism of knowledge construction and meaning making, good design is critical, and meaning is elaborated by subsequent experiences. There is a growing gap between learning 'haves' and 'have-nots'. Each chapter finishes with conclusions, key points and very extensive references: very accessible stuff!

Museums are, Falk and Dierking conclude, popular, respected and well-loved. But

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they generally suffer from a parochial and narrow view of their place within the educational infrastructure. At a major US conference on science education in 2001, several museums revealed that their outreach programs were having difficulty getting into schools because pupils were busy preparing for the tests which have ignorantly become the driving force for educational standards in that country. Worse, many museums admitted they were simply asking how they could help the schools with their test-dominated agenda! As much as anything this demonstrates the low position that museums feel they occupy in the education agenda.

If criticism of museums genuinely seeking to understand the visitor experience in developing their exhibitions continues to be grounded merely in theory, then the needed reforms in many other museums will not occur. When museums take advantage of visitor research they do not lose control of their future, but acknowledge the importance of good communication. The message of *Learning from Museums* must be understood by all concerned with that fundamental aim of museums: the increase and diffusion of understanding.

DES GRIFFIN, AM, IS GERARD KREFFT MEMORIAL FELLOW AT THE AUSTRALIAN MUSEUM, SYDNEY

SONIA PUTTOCK

## COLLECTING

*The Collector's Voice: Critical Readings in the Practice of Collecting*. Vol.1: *Ancient Voices*. Edited by Susan Pearce and Alexandra Bounia.

Aldershot, Ashgate, 2000. ISBN: 1 85928 417 5

*Ancient Voices*, the first in a series of four sourcebooks on the history of collecting, is a collation of mainly contemporary writings from the Bronze Age through to the fifteenth century, primarily focused on the Mediterranean and European worlds. The other three volumes are *Early Voices* (sixteenth to eighteenth century); *Imperial Voices* (nineteenth to twentieth century to 1960); and the last forty years are covered in *Contemporary Voices*.

*Ancient Voices* deals with the most extensive period and as a result is divided into five chronological and cultural areas. The first chapter, 'Voices from the distant past', covers the prehistoric period and discusses such issues as deposition of artefacts in Bronze Age burials and their subsequent retrieval, as well as the complex issue of gift exchange within the heroic Homeric tradition and the divine association of early artefacts. The second and third chapters, 'Greek voices' and 'Roman voices', illuminate the periods which provide the basis of many of the great museums of the world. Such astute, knowledgeable and entertaining writers as Plato, Pliny, Plutarch, Petronius, Cicero and Martial are quoted, and the irony and similarities to modern opinions will not be wasted on today's reader.

'Early medieval voices' and 'Voices from the twelfth to the fifteenth centuries' highlight moral and social aspects of collecting, making interesting connections between pagan and Christian beliefs. For example, the perceived power of the treasure that was buried with Beowulf cannot be separated from the overwhelming faith of medieval Christians in saintly

relics. Yet the art of collecting was not always calculating. Filarete describes the pleasure and enjoyment in his collection of Piero il Gottoso of the great Medici family, especially in the beauty of the smaller items, the intaglios and the coins. Such sentiments are familiar to the visitor to a modern collection.

Each excerpt is introduced with enough information to understand and appreciate the original work. These introductions lift the volume from a plain sourcebook to a work which can be used as a secondary source in its own right.

The absence of evidence during certain periods is cleverly dealt with by using the accounts of antiquarians who described or excavated archaeological sites and hoards. The first quote in the book is an example: Sir Richard Colt Hoare's *The Ancient History of Wiltshire* is based on his 1808 excavations of a Bronze Age burial mound. His account helps to break down the idea that past archaeologists were mainly interested in rich plunder. Although Colt Hoare mentions plenty of gold artefacts, he also discusses a buried stone, suggesting that it may have been one of the objects referred to as the 'Druid's Egg' mentioned by Roman writer Pliny the Elder (*Natural History* 29:52-4). This object, probably a stone mace-head with a wooden handle and bone rings, exemplifies the nineteenth century fascination for both the pre-Roman and Roman people in Britain and for the Druids.

The quotes are chosen with great care to highlight aspects of collectors and collections in the ancient world. Occasionally a secondary source is used when it succinctly sums up an aspect, or when a primary source is not available. Thus

an excerpt from Runciman's *History of the Crusades* (1903) discusses the great esteem in which Byzantine relics were held. Likewise the reappraisal of the Thetford Treasure by Dorothy Watts (1995): evidence for the reasons for the deposition of this wonderful cache of jewellery, silverplate and coins comes from a variety of sources, so the editors, not surprisingly, chose a modern writer who collates it all.

The Thetford Treasure presents me with a problem. Pearce and Bournia place its discussion in a very long Early Medieval period, from the fourth to the twelfth century. But the hoard itself belongs to the period when Britain was still part of the Roman Empire (even though the last legion was then being recalled), and the coins are of Roman date. As a Romanist, I regard the fourth century as part of the Roman period, and would prefer to see the reference to the Thetford Treasure in the preceding chapter.

As a source book, *Ancient Voices* is invaluable to the student of ancient art and architecture, of archaeology and of museum studies. Yet this very fact also reveals a problem: sometimes the source is given as an anthology or a translator, rather than the original reference; this could be confusing. Still, the value of *The Collector's Voice* to the growing area of studies of cultural practice is very important. The criticisms are minor by comparison with the benefits of the book, and I, for one, will be recommending this work.

DR SONIA PUTTOCK IS CURATOR OF THE ANTIQUITIES MUSEUM AT THE UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND





KARIN VESK

## DECORATIVE ARTS

*Old Collections, New Audiences: Decorative Arts and Visitor Experience for the 21st Century.* Edited by Donna R. Braden and Gretchen W. Overhiser. Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village, Dearborn, Michigan, USA, 2000. ISBN 0-933728-04-02

These symposium papers offer a candid look at how some American museums have sought to make their decorative arts collections more interesting to visitors. Although the emphasis is on decorative arts, the papers are relevant to all exhibition topics. The book is divided into 'Introductory essays', 'From theory to practice', 'Transforming experiences through visitor studies', 'A fresh look at historic houses', and 'Entering the 21st century: responses to the essays'. As with many such compilations the quality is uneven, but there is much of value in the first and final sections and the case studies.

Most of the exhibition and program strategies presented

are audience-focused and represent a genuine attempt to bridge the gap between the connoisseurship of decorative arts and the educational and design philosophies encouraged by contemporary visitor studies. In my experience, both as a regular museumgoer and as an editor in a large state museum, we are well advanced in this area in Australia. But there is always more to learn, and these papers present some valuable insights and practical suggestions, particularly on the issues of organising galleries, presenting label text and strategies for expanding audience reach.

While all of the projects outlined were well intentioned, worthwhile and constructively self-critical, some of the papers would have benefited from more emphasis on results. *I did* question, as I ploughed through some of the methodologies and painstakingly collated figures, whether formal visitor evaluation is sometimes used irrespective of its suitability to an institution. Sample sizes of sixteen and interviews of six people, for example, aren't particularly persuasive and, as Beverly Serrell points out in

the conclusion, 'convincing, systematic summative evaluations were mostly missing'.

An issue raised by some of the papers was that of how to develop a more interactive exchange with visitors, and here too I had some misgivings. It's become fashionable lately to decry the role of the expert. The otherwise informative paper, 'Connecting with the visitor at the Victoria and Albert Museum', illustrates this trend in concluding that 'It could be that the democratic and anarchic nature of the Web will be the factor that undermines the power of an institution like the V&A and places the visitor's voice firmly in the galleries in the role of expert'. Surely this is a questionable aim?

Ensuring that museums communicate in a lively and accessible manner with their visitors pretty much goes without saying these days. Museums' very existence is predicated on their expertise and it is self-defeating to suggest otherwise. Effective communication and pedagogy are not mutually exclusive and one of the reasons people visit museums is to seek

Exhibition view, *Visions of a republic: the work of Lucien Henry*, shown at the Powerhouse Museum from April to October 2001

Photograph by Jean-François Lanzarone, reproduced courtesy of the Powerhouse Museum, Sydney

information. Yet the notion prevails in some quarters that specialist knowledge is slightly suspect and better subsumed in some sort of equal partnership with visitors. I think we're all savvy enough to understand that museums are no longer regarded as repositories of 'truth', but neither should simplistic community forums replace scholarly exhibitions.

In some instances, of course, the shift in emphasis from the expert to the audience is positive. In one of the best papers, 'Making a new home for the decorative arts in Newark', the authors talk of needing 'to get away from the omnipresent "museum voice", and to arrive at some way to create a range of voices that would present a more varied reality. Not only voices of the curator, but of the object's maker, owner, inheritor and even caretaker'. Their solution is simple: present the viewpoints of different people



at the time of the object's creation, including objects from minority families so that people were able to find glimpses of themselves in the galleries — providing 'a key way to open them up to understanding the bigger thematic issues'. But as they conclude, this kind of interpretation effected a significant institutional change in collecting policy.

Compared with ten or fifteen years ago there is now an industry of literature on museums. Some is disappointing — replete with feel-good mission-statement language, received wisdoms (that museums need to be 'demystified' is a favourite) and generalisations. By contrast, compilations such as *Old Collections: New Audiences* provide genuinely useful information. The goals of the symposium — to address issues of learning and visitor experience in the decorative arts, to focus on how learning theories have been applied to practice in the field, and to communicate best practices — have, on the whole, been well realised in the book.

KARIN VESK IS AN EDITOR AT THE POWERHOUSE MUSEUM IN SYDNEY, WORKING MAINLY ON DECORATIVE ARTS AND SOCIAL HISTORY EXHIBITIONS

LINDA YOUNG

## TREASURES

*Treasures from the World's Great Libraries*. National Library of Australia. December 2001 to February 2002

Somewhat to its surprise, the National Library of Australia celebrated its centenary (it was founded as the Parliamentary Library in 1901) with a smash hit: *Treasures from the World's*

### *Great Libraries*.

Treasures, it proved, are exactly what the public wants to see. The pre-Christmas weeks were brisk enough, but the summer holiday season witnessed overnight queues for the quota of daily admission tickets, issued at 8.30am. Canberra has never seen anything like it, let alone the Library!

So what is a treasure? Medieval sacred books embellished with miniature paintings and gold leaf are clearly precious. But what gives treasure quality to the manuscript of a scientific formula, a word list of an obscure African language, a 1939 phone directory? The answers are more in the mind than inherent in the material.

It's easy to say that a treasure is something valuable, but we measure value with many criteria. The almighty dollar is a handy unit of value, yet not all treasures have a commercial value and some are beyond it. Rarity often defines treasures, expressed in originality, primacy and antiquity. Rarity can also be expressed in connection with a person, event or place.

Yet constructing such a system of classification fails to produce a viable checklist of treasure status. In fact, it demonstrates again that the ascription of 'treasure' depends on someone articulating why the object is significant in a certain context.

All this is to say that individuals each decide what is a treasure. We may share some decisions, and wonder at others. In this field, *Treasures from the World's Great Libraries* surely satisfied, but probably also provoked. Either way, it certainly exercised visitors' ideas about the significance of things.

Janeites quietly adored the small pages of Miss Austen's manuscript of *Persuasion*. Almost every Australian visitor



quivered over the pages of Ned Kelly's 'Jerilderie Letter'. Anyone with a musical bone in their body was thrilled by music written in the hand of Beethoven.

The emotional quality of these responses suggests how personal is the idea of a treasure. People I spoke to nominated as their special buzz a second century fragment of the *Iliad*, a handwritten report by the doctor who attended the death of Abraham Lincoln, and a thirteenth century Arabic translation of a treatise by Euclid. What a variety!

And so the exhibition went on, wonderful item upon item. It was living proof of the power of the Real Thing, the root of why societies sustain heritage collections. To be in the presence of these things connected each visitor to the places, times and events that shaped the history of human culture.

That's talking big themes, and in fact, the exhibition was so diverse that amazing objects overwhelm any sense of purpose or unity among them. One damn treasure after

People queued patiently through the night to see *Treasures from the World's Great Libraries*. Photograph by Louis Seselja. Courtesy of National Library of Australia

another, as Groucho Marx (who has a letter in the show) might have said.

It was almost a supermarket display of treasures. Yet this apparently dubious character could explain the great strength of *Treasures from the World's Great Libraries*.

In this scenario, libraries (and museums) are the warehouses of ideas where people browse for the raw materials to build dreams and more earthly products — the hardware shops of do-it-yourself intellectual bricolage. The beautiful, the ingenious, the bizarre, can be understood in their own contexts, or can be deconstructed for recycling into unexpected solutions.

It's impossible to foretell how visitors, now and in the future, will put the stock of ideas to use. But it is certain



that both library researchers and museum strollers had 'Eureka!' moments as a consequence of their contact with items displayed in *Treasures*.

That is why it's so important for societies to continue to maintain and develop repositories of cultural heritage, even if they don't seem to be generating revenue or covering their own costs. If the Library had charged admission, it could have made a motza, but at the price of unprecedented exposure as a freely accessible public resource.

In practice, the Library managed its visitors with admirable and friendly efficiency. The big queue was first accommodated on chairs, with catalogues to browse, plus tables and drawing materials to occupy littlies. A somewhat oppressive waiting room atmosphere took over the entrance hall, until management introduced ticket bookings for hourly sessions. Still the queue persisted, so the Library increased opening hours, eventually from 7am to 5am — twenty-two hours a day. Every other exhibition should dream!

*Treasures from the World's Great Libraries* represents the tip of the iceberg of visual, literary, scientific and fantastic resources that humanity has crafted over thousands of years. It was a graceful tribute to the centenary of the National Library by its fellow institutions, a feast for its visitors and an inspiration to us all.

LINDA YOUNG TEACHES CULTURAL HERITAGE MANAGEMENT AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CANBERRA

BRIAN ALLISON

## GOLD

*Gold: Forgotten Histories and Lost Objects of Australia*. Edited by Iain McCalman, Alexander Cook and Andrew Reeves. Cambridge, CUP, 2001. ISBN: 0 5280595 3

It is not an excessive generalisation to consider that popular contemporary perceptions of the Australian gold rushes rest firmly around the story of the alluvial gold seeker and the tent culture of the 1850s. Sovereign Hill in Ballarat and recent re-enactments commemorating the discovery of gold, such as the 'Off to the Diggings' walk last October, reinforce a jolly, Wild West notion of diggers pitting their strength and ingenuity against a harsh landscape and unsympathetic authorities.

As a nation, we predominantly trace our ethos of mateship and a fair go to this period, as well as our irreverent view of authority and 'make-do' attitude in the face of adversity. However, experiences in the same era generated less admirable traits such as the customs and immigration laws that prefigured the infamous White Australia Policy, lawlessness and subsistence living that contributed to a gun culture, and the diggers' general disregard for the natural landscape. The latter most certainly set precedents for future environmental depredation.

*Gold: Forgotten Histories and Lost Objects of Australia* does not set out to dismantle the grand narratives of the gold era, but instead offers multiple and diverse additional narratives, referred to as 'micro histories' by the editors. The book coincided with the National Museum's *Gold and*

*Civilisation* exhibition in 2001, with essays by many of the contributors to the exhibition. Though not specifically connected to the show, the book adds a scholarly dimension to the spectacular event and its catalogue.

The volume's twenty essays are divided into five sections: gold and the development of the Australian colonies; gold and multiculturalism; gold and Indigenous Australians; domestic culture during the gold rushes; and the contribution of gold mining to Australia's developing decorative arts and fine arts.

Susan Lawrence reconstructs an image of the domestic landscape of miners' homes on the Moorabool goldfields by literally piecing together detritus dug from the soil. Margaret Anderson poses the question, 'of what did the women dream?' She views the periphery of the celebrated 'masculine landscape', away from the mechanics of gold seeking, and traces the stories of women struggling for recognition and survival.

Erosion, altered water courses and deforestation are the destructive by-products of mining, and Barry McGowan's essay reveals the voracious gold-seeking technologies that cumulatively changed swathes of Australia's topography.

Tanami Desert gold mining projects eroded meaning that had overlaid the desert landscape for countless generations of the Walpiri people. Derek Elias traces the confusion and dislocation of the Walpiri who gave the 1930s Halls Creek/Alice Springs Road the delightfully ironic name of the 'white man's dreaming track'.

Indigenous perceptions of gold seekers and their impact on Australia's original inhabitants are given very direct expression in the pencil drawings by 'Oscar of Cooktown' in the 1890s. The

authors, McKenzie and Cooper, infer that his drawings are micro-histories in themselves, telling stories of real events and the often violent clash of cultures.

David Goodman refers to the gold rushes as 'dangerous edgy events' and his essay adds elements of disquiet to the positive notions of 'Gold, the nation builder'. He indicates that very real fears and anxieties accompanied the discovery of gold from the beginning: fear of moral decay, fear of the working class rising above their station, and fear of general disorder.

Fear would have been common and palpable on the male-dominated diggings. Tom Griffiths and Alan Platt write of the diarist, artist and engineer, Edward Snell, listening to 1500 gun shots during one apparently sleepless night.

Perhaps the most enviable enterprise on the Australian goldfields was that of the goldsmith, an occupation fed by the positive and celebratory aspects of the gold-seeking experience. In 'Cinderella's Jewellery', Dorothy Erickson cites specific brooch designs fabricated by itinerant goldsmiths working the Western Australian diggings as defining an identifiable regional genre in jewellery.

*Gold: Forgotten Histories and Lost Objects of Australia*, is an accessible series of essays that stimulate the reader to question assumptions about Australia's identity as it is derived from gold culture.

BRIAN ALLISON IS CURATOR OF THE GRAINGER MUSEUM, UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE. IN 1998, HE WAS ONE OF THE CURATORS WHO DEVELOPED THE *BUILT ON GOLD* EXHIBITION FOR MELBOURNE'S GOLD TREASURY MUSEUM



## OBITUARY — NEIL ROBERTS 1954–2002

Neil Roberts was a truly visionary artist. His work has challenged and delighted not only those for whom art is a daily passion, but passers-by and visitors to public venues. His projects often brought together people from diverse fields of industry in a series of problem-solving activities. Neil learned from their expertise, and they realised unexpected ways in which their knowledge could be applied.

After training as a glassblower at the Jam Factory Workshops in Adelaide from 1978 to 1980, his interests took him in 1981 to the Orrefors Glass School in Sweden. His knowledge, and his experimental approach to the possibilities of glass and his general philosophy of the making of art, were influential when as a teacher at the Canberra School of Art in 1983 he assisted Klaus Moje in establishing the Glass Workshop.

Between 1982 and 1990 Neil taught intermittently at both the Sydney College of the Arts and the Canberra School of Art. Although from 1990 he did not teach formally, his bond with the Canberra School of Art remained strong, and he was always happy to lecture or to run workshops and seminars. In May 2001, as part of the Metis project highlighting National Science Week, a major survey of Roberts' work graced the Canberra School of Art Gallery.

Neil received a number of awards and grants in recognition of his talent. These included Australia Council residencies at the Green Street studio, New York, in 1989, and



Neil Roberts (right) and installers at the Canberra School of Art Gallery, 2001

Courtesy of Merryn Gates

at ART-LAB, Manila, in 1991. In 1995 he was awarded the inaugural ACT Creative Arts Fellowship (for Visual Arts), and in 2000 the CAPO (Capital Arts Patrons Organisation) Fellowship.

Neil effected many public projects and commissions. In 1999 with friend and fellow artist David Wright, Neil completed *Ruach*, a quiet garden installation at Cabrini Hospital, a hospice in Melbourne. In Canberra there is *House Proud*, 1998, his neon text that runs around the barrel of the Canberra Playhouse Theatre, and *The Fourth Pillar*, 1997, a neon installation in the ACT Magistrates Court.

Exhibiting consistently as a solo artist, Neil also participated in many group exhibitions. His work has been represented in major national and international sculpture triennials, and most recently in the National Sculpture Prize and Exhibition at the National Gallery of Australia. He particularly enjoyed working with other artists, and was excited and inspired by their ideas. Galerie Constantinople, an art space maintained by Neil at his Queanbeyan home, has been the venue for many

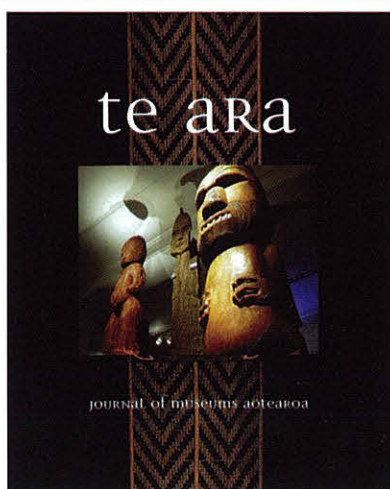
terrific exhibitions and performances.

Neil was a clear thinker, a tireless worker and a superb organiser. One major project coordinated by Neil was the 1995 National Sculpture Forum. As a member of a vibrant arts community Neil had a strong sense of responsibility, generously giving his time to work on arts committees and groups that often require voluntary expertise. He was an active member of the Canberra Contemporary Art Space.

To each part of his rich life, in his relationships and his work, Neil gave inspiration, love, commitment, compassion, laughter, comfort and boundless energy. To be in his orbit was a joy. Neil

Roberts was a person we could not afford to lose. His death in March, when he was hit by a train while trying to save his dog, Siddah, will leave a gap which many of us will experience acutely.

THE AUTHOR, HELEN MAXWELL, IS THE MANAGING DIRECTOR OF HELEN MAXWELL GALLERY, BRADDON, ACT. SHE IS THE PREVIOUS OWNER OF AGOG (AUSTRALIAN GIRLS' OWN GALLERY), KINGSTON, ACT. THIS OBITUARY IS ABRIDGED FROM A LONGER VERSION WHICH APPEARED IN THE *CANBERRA TIMES*



### TE ARA - NEW MUSEUMS JOURNAL FOR NEW ZEALAND

Congratulations to Museums Aotearoa on the first issue of its relaunched museums journal, *Te Ara - Journal of Museums Aotearoa*. Formerly the *New Zealand Museums Journal*, *Te Ara*, edited by Jane Legget, will be

issued twice a year. Dr Paul Tapsell, Chair of the Editorial Board, said that the goal of the Journal's relaunch is 'to capture the vibrant spirit and distinctive voice of our sector, while remaining meaningful and viable'.

Cover of the first issue of *Te Ara - Journal of Museums Aotearoa*  
Courtesy of Museums Aotearoa



## SITUATION VACANT

**Executive Officer to the  
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**\$55,000 pa, pro rata.**

**This is a 0.8 position, based  
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Museums Australia seeks a person with a sound knowledge of the museum sector, a track record of excellence in administration and the ability to facilitate team-work. Prior experience at middle to senior management level in a cultural or not-for-profit membership organisation is required.

For a position description, selection criteria and instructions on how to apply, please ring (02) 6208 5044 or email [ma@museumsaustralia.org.au](mailto:ma@museumsaustralia.org.au)

Closing date for applications is 22 May 2002. Interviews of shortlisted applicants are expected to be held in Canberra on Thursday 20 June.

Enquiries to the President, Ms Carol Scott, (02) 9217 0448.

Museums Australia is committed to Equal Employment Opportunity. The national office is a non-smoking workplace.  
<http://www.museumsaustralia.org.au>



Aunty Nance, Image detail: Nance de Vries, Mervyn Bishop photograph 2001

## AUNTY NANCE AT LIVERPOOL

Since March 2002 Liverpool Regional Museum has been showing *Aunty Nance*, an exhibition curated by Fiona Nicoll on the life of Nance de Vries, a prominent Indigenous elder in New South Wales and a member of the Stolen Generations.

Nance was removed from her mother in the early 1930s and endured foster homes, missions and institutions before escaping from the system. In 1996 Nance delivered a message to the state parliament from the Aboriginal people of New South Wales on the evils of child removal policies.

Photographer Mervyn Bishop, the first Aboriginal cadet to be employed by the *Sydney Morning Herald*, took photos of significant places in Nance's life, and these, along with other documents such as an excerpt from her speech in parliament, make up the bulk of the exhibit.

## COMING IN MUSEUM NATIONAL

### AUGUST 2002:

Natural heritage and museums,  
and special section on volunteers  
guest edited by Friends and  
Volunteers SIG

### NOVEMBER 2002:

Children and museums

## HISTORIC TUG TO BE REPAIRED

Australia's last working steam tug boat has developed a leak in her hull and needs urgent repairs. *SS Forceful* attracts 25,000 visitors a year, and is owned by the Queensland Maritime Museum Association. The boat was constructed in Scotland in 1925 and, apart from a wartime stint in Darwin, operated in the Port of Brisbane until 1970. Usually moored in the Brisbane River near South Bank as a static display, twenty times a year *SS Forceful* casts off for trips to Moreton Island, taking a hundred passengers at a time.

To make sure that *SS Forceful* keeps on steaming, Arts Queensland have given the Queensland Maritime Museum Association a grant of \$30,000 so that these urgent repairs can be carried out and the boat maintained.



## NOTICEBOARD

### **Islands of Vanishment conference**, Port Arthur Historic Site, Tasmania, 7–10 June 2002.

The theme of the conference will be the exploration, conservation and interpretation of historic places which commemorate painful or ambivalent themes in the history of our societies. The conference should not only appeal to owners, managers, conservators, researchers and interpreters of these places, but also to the visitors and communities that connect with them. The conference is hosted by the Port Arthur Historic Site, in conjunction with the University of Tasmania, the Tasman Institute of Conservation and Convict Studies, and Australia ICOMOS. For more information see [www.arts.utas.edu.au/islands/](http://www.arts.utas.edu.au/islands/)

### **Past caring? What does society expect of archivists?**

**Australian Society of Archivists annual conference**, Manly Pacific Hotel, Sydney, 13–17 August 2002. The conference will look outside the boundaries of the profession, at the relationships that other groups in society have with records, and their expectations of archivists and other recordkeepers. For more information contact Australian Society of Archivists Inc Sydney 2002 Conference PO Box A952 Sydney South NSW 1235 Email: [mstevens@cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au](mailto:mstevens@cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au)

**Traditions in the midst of change: communities, cultures and the Strehlow legacy in Central Australia**, Araluen Centre, Alice Springs, NT, 18–20 September 2002. A forum for the discussion of:

- Central Australian identities, Indigenous and non-Indigenous
- Narratives of collecting and their impact on the present
- The changing role of museums and the mediation of culture
- Addressing the secret and the sacred today
- Moral rights, image ethics and cultural property
- The Strehlows in the context of British and German ethnologies
- The Strehlow Collection: new research

Contact the Strehlow Research Centre by email at: [brett.galt-smith@nt.gov.au](mailto:brett.galt-smith@nt.gov.au) or [vicki.heresy@nt.gov.au](mailto:vicki.heresy@nt.gov.au), or phone 08 8951 1101

**Connecting with plants — lessons for life**. BGCi Fifth International Congress on Education in Botanic Gardens, Royal Botanic Gardens, Sydney, 29 September–4 October 2002.

The congress will provide a forum for people working in plant-based education to discuss techniques, skills and the knowledge used for engaging people with plants and raising awareness of the importance of sustainable living.

For information contact Janelle Hatherly Royal Botanic Gardens Sydney Mrs Macquaries Road Sydney NSW 2000 Tel: 02 9231 8111 Fax: 02 9251 4403 Email: [Janelle.Hatherly@rbgsyd.nsw.gov.au](mailto:Janelle.Hatherly@rbgsyd.nsw.gov.au)

**Groundswell: regional arts surging forward, Regional Arts Australia national conference**, Albury–Wodonga, 10–13 October 2002. The biennial Regional Arts Australia national conference

will be the focus for the diverse, active, creative and geographically separated regional arts sector.

*Groundswell* aims to bring together arts, cultural and heritage workers; volunteers and members of community-based arts and cultural organisations; artists; Indigenous and development organisations; non-English-speaking background cultural and community groups; local government representatives and officers; state and federal government personnel. Earlybird deadline 31 July. Registrations close 20 September 2002 or when conference limit (450) is reached. For more information contact

*Groundswell* Conference Managers  
Regional Arts NSW  
Pier 5, Hickson Road  
Millers Point NSW 2000  
Tel: 02 9247 8577  
Fax: 02 9247 7829  
Email: [groundswell@regionalartsnsw.com.au](mailto:groundswell@regionalartsnsw.com.au)  
Website: [www.regionalartsnsw.com.au](http://www.regionalartsnsw.com.au)

**Art of Dissent, Melbourne Festival 2002**, Storey Hall, RMIT University, 14–16 October 2002.

This is the second part of a national symposium spanning two arts festivals (the first session was held in conjunction with the Adelaide Festival in March). A national conference for artists and community activists working at the frontier of social and cultural change. The program will explore the dilemmas and ethics of contemporary art practice created from artists' deep engagement with communities in diverse social contexts. To indicate an interest in presenting a paper

or workshop, or to register for the conference contact Art of Dissent Conference Secretariat

Tel: 02 9787 6762  
Preferred option: Register and/or submit your presentation proposal on line at [www.ArtOfDissent.com](http://www.ArtOfDissent.com)

## MESSAGE FROM CANADA

Dear colleagues,  
I have noticed quite a few job announcements on AMOL. May I suggest you consider posting any job announcements on the Canadian Museum Careers site which is a free service. Simply go to [www.museums.ca](http://www.museums.ca) and check out the Careers Section. It is also a good site for you to find out about museum jobs in Canada and other parts.

There are so many similarities between Australian and Canadian museums that this kind of cooperation seems very practical. The Canadian Museums Association offers an international internship program for graduate students with placements up to six months. We have received many excellent applications thanks to an earlier announcement on AMOL, and we hope that we can make many of these come true in the near future.

Congratulations Australia on your gold medals at the Winter Olympics. You are a great country, with terrific museums, and we are very glad you do not play [ice] hockey!!!

John G. McAvity  
Executive Director  
Canadian Museums Association



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systems

## Gallery 20 Travelling Exhibition Showcase - NEW

All glass demountable showcase system – ideal for travelling and semi-permanent exhibitions.



Images:

**Transparent Things — Expressions in Glass** A National Gallery of Australia Travelling Exhibition in collaboration with Wagga Wagga Regional Art Gallery and the Thomas Foundation and **Matthew Flinders Hat** at the State Library of Victoria.

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f +61 3 9482 1277 e [click@bigpond.net.au](mailto:click@bigpond.net.au) 5 entry listing [www.selector.com](http://www.selector.com) ABN 50 005 306 203