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COVER IMAGE:

These glass and ceramic points from the Kimberley are some of the treasures of Museum Victoria, which celebrates its 150th anniversary this year.

The points demonstrate the resourcefulness of Aboriginal people in appropriating and using new materials introduced by Europeans.

Photograph by Rodney Start

Courtesy of Museum Victoria



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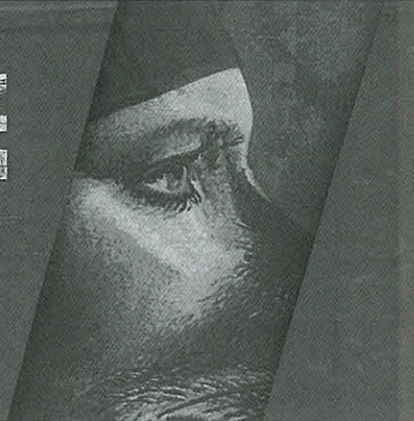
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ROSLYN RUSSELL, EDITOR

MEREDITH HINCHLIFFE

IN THIS ISSUE...

**FOOD FOR THOUGHT:
Museums & Galleries: Feast & Famine**

Over 400 delegates gathered in Melbourne for the Museums Australia National Conference from 16 to 21 May this year to gather 'food for thought' on 'social value and sustainability within a globalised framework'.

Audience development, collection building and rationalisation, forging links with communities, and enhancing the financial viability of museums and galleries were all on the menu, as international and local speakers shared their experiences and insights.

Our themed section, between pages 12–23, brings you some of the conference highlights and images from MA's week in Melbourne. It includes MA President Carol Scott's opening remarks, Jonathan Sweet's speech setting the scene for the conference, a summary of many of the papers presented by keynote speakers and other presenters, and John Cross's provocative paper on the challenge of making art

museums relevant to the wider Australian public.

This year's very successful MAPDA awards are also featured, with a selection of the winning entries on pages 18–21. The conference coverage is continued outside the themed section, with Anne Kirker's review of the exhibition critique session dealing with the NGV International's Schaeffer Gallery (p28).

Outside the themed section there is more 'food for thought', including Helen Arnoldi's informative article on volunteer management, while MA's retiring Executive Officer, Meredith Hinchliffe, outlines some research she has undertaken on internships. I hope this issue of *Museums Australia Magazine* will be a 'feast' of information for members who could not attend the conference, and a source of memories and renewed inspiration for those of us who did.

**INTERNSHIPS IN AUSTRALIA:
SOME RESEARCH**

The Museums Studies Special Interest Group of Museums Australia requested National Council to 'investigate the capacity of Australian museums to support the hosting of work placements and internships for students in the post-secondary education sector and prepare a paper outlining the sustainability and capability of museums to undertake and facilitate effective internships'.

This request arose out of concerns of some members of the SIG about the diversity of structure, content and implementation of internships and placements, and their value (perceived and actual) as part of the processes of professional development and training for the museum sector. Several issues were identified by the SIG and some of these have been addressed in the research I undertook in 2003 and 2004.

This paper is written from the cultural institutions' perspective and I thank Brian Shepherd and Margaret Birtley for their assistance.

I developed a brief questionnaire which I conducted by phone with twenty institutions — large and small — around the country. I asked about the value the museum sector places upon internships as an experience for the intern, and as a component of training and education offered to those

entering the museum sector. What are the needs and expectations of museums? What are the benefits for the host institutions and the staff directly involved? What difficulties do they face in hosting internships and placements?

The overwhelming conclusion is that all the cultural institutions contacted through the questionnaire interviews are strongly committed to 'the value of internships as essential aspects of professional development'.

While the SIG is mainly interested in VET and tertiary interns, it is important to acknowledge that cultural institutions are also very active in offering work experience placements to secondary students. Although these have different requirements, they are a call on the institutions' resources and are seen by them as part of their outreach and audience development.

Internships combine theoretical knowledge and practical skills in a working environment. Museums Studies courses in Australia have a range of differing requirements for internships. In addition, students from other courses frequently approach cultural institutions to undertake practical work experience.

In 1993 Marianne Wallace-Crabbe wrote *Guidelines for*



Anna Fairclough, Jenny Horder and Philip Thompson at the Melbourne General Cemetery for the 'Medicos and Misadventures' Conference tour
Courtesy of Sue Scheiffers

THE OVERWHELMING CONCLUSION IS THAT CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS ARE STRONGLY COMMITTED TO 'THE VALUE OF INTERNSHIPS AS ESSENTIAL ASPECTS OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT'.

Internships, published by the Art Museums Association of Australia Inc (a predecessor organisation to Museums Australia). The intellectual approach to the book is sound, although some references and the Further Reading list could be updated. Members of the SIG believe 'that the book may need to be revisited in terms of current practice. In particular, this publication may not have fully considered issues relating to internships which were intended for academic credit.'

Findings from the research

The situation in Australian cultural institutions is currently an *ad hoc* one. Very few institutions have internship coordinators. Some internships are arranged through the education areas of institutions; others are coordinated through personnel and HR; and a limited number are arranged at the individual level. Institutions that are trying to introduce more formal arrangements find that some are still arranged at the individual level. Placements vary in length of time. In addition, students from other courses — for example, tourism, management, IT and marketing — frequently approach cultural institutions to undertake practical work experience. Many practitioners have identified the need for short-term professional development placements/visits and/or exchange programs to be negotiated. At present these are largely set up by individuals drawing on their own networks

of contacts in the industry.

All cultural institutions questioned are deeply committed to offering practical experience at all levels — secondary, VET and tertiary. However, the numbers offered each year by any one institution depend on a range of issues. Many host institutions are developing formal processes to handle the approaches and are taking a more active role in selecting interns.

Each host institution emphasised the importance of a successful outcome for all three parties.

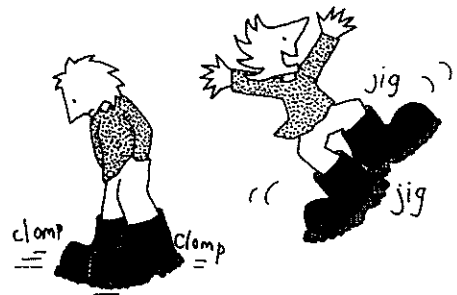
It is clear from the questionnaire responses that both learning and host institutions need to be clear as to what is expected of the other. This may best be done through a formal written and signed agreement between the learning institution, the cultural host and the intern.

While there is a strong commitment to internship placements, museums and galleries are becoming more aware of the costs to the cultural host and its staff, and the requirement to ensure that their needs are being met.

Currently, host institutions are not quantifying the costs of hosting internship placements. The work that most are undertaking in reviewing programs and streamlining processes indicates that they are becoming more aware of the costs. Without more detailed information, it is difficult to draw conclusions about any increased capacity to

YOUR CAREER Part 39

The career ladder is of primary importance. But career gumboots must not be overlooked. These are essential for both clomping about in despair & joyous jiggling.



Do not even consider a career that does not allow career gumboots.

horacek

Judy Horacek cartoon specially drawn for *Guidelines for Internships*
Courtesy of Judy Horacek

host more placements.

Learning institutions and hosts are using several management models for internships, and more research into these would be valuable in assisting those institutions whose processes are currently *ad hoc*.

An 'open day' where hosts are given the opportunity to speak directly to students seems a sensible way of creating discussion among all three parties. All those to whom this activity was mentioned thought it seemed an excellent idea. For example, the Australian War Memorial could speak about its art collection, and explain that an intern does not necessarily need expertise in military history; and the National Portrait Gallery could explain its commitment to using the collection and the gallery as a site for learning for students. In this way students are given information to assist them make a decision about

where they would like a placement. An 'open day' could make the processes more efficient for all parties.

In general, the research suggests that cultural and learning institutions are accommodating of each other's diversity, and neither sector is placing unrealistic or irresponsible demands on the other.

Guidelines for Internships is offered at the special price of \$6 for members and \$9 for non-members, including postage and packing. The book offers suggestions for the development of a proposal from the perspective of the institution, ideas to assist the intern's planning, and a checklist for both parties. It also includes case studies and examples of contracts and evaluation forms.

MEREDITH HINCHLIFFE IS THE RETIRING EXECUTIVE OFFICER OF MUSEUMS AUSTRALIA

SHARING THEIR LEGACY

A travelling wartime exhibition, and a little bit more...

BRIAN CROZIER



Princess Mary's Christmas Box, a brass box given to all service personnel in 1914 to mark the first Christmas of the war. It contained gifts such as chocolate, tobacco, cigarettes and matches, and some even had a signed photograph of Princess Mary

Courtesy of Hambleton/Edmonton RSL Club

As we're reminded every Anzac Day, military heritage holds a special place in Australia. The enthusiasm of the crowds at the marches is reflected by the commitment of the institutions that support the memory of Australia's military past. Most notable among these is the Australian War Memorial, but they also include the Department of Veterans Affairs and the various heritage programs supported by it. The scale of the enterprise is different in military heritage compared with other areas of social history. Compared with other areas of social history, military heritage is another country — they do things differently there, or at least on a larger scale.

As a program of the Department of Veterans Affairs, the *Sharing their legacy* project is designed to link into and promote the community's continuing fascination with our military past. *Sharing their legacy* is part of an ongoing focus by the Department on 'the identification, preservation and display of the memories and memorabilia of our veterans' (*Annual Report 2002*).

The project had its first expression in South Australia in 2002 through the History Trust of South Australia. It was Queensland's turn in 2004. The project in Queensland has been rather different in form from that in South Australia.

The key to the difference has been Queensland's unique network of regional Museum Development Officers, who offer continuing support to the museums in their regions. With this network in mind, *Sharing their legacy* in Queensland has been about training for local museums, and the development of long-term resources, as well as about commemorating the experience of Queenslanders in wartime.

The Queensland project aims to

- Establish a successful model for wartime material culture projects, and other similar projects in the community
- Form enduring partnerships between regional and local museums and other community groups such as ex-service organisations
- Focus popular attention on the material culture of wartime
- Develop a travelling exhibition drawing on local contribution
- Train regional museums in exhibition development
- Develop a growing database of wartime material culture
- Develop a contact list of holders of wartime material culture in order to
 - Assist with its preservation
 - Assist in making it available for interpretation
 - Spread awareness of

conservation principles for the care of home-based significant objects.

The core of the project is a backdrop display of wartime photos; an introductory panel; and two display cases for the display of objects sourced from the community; together with a table and book for the recording of wartime experiences, all designed to fit in the back of a stationwagon (they almost do...). However, the exhibition process is a little more involved than this suggests.

With the assistance of a substantial written guide, the exhibition process involves local advertising for objects expressing the wartime experience (both on the home front and overseas); borrowing and receipting these; recording them on a continuing online database hosted, initially at least, by the Queensland Museum; interviewing borrowers and developing an exhibition, including labels, based on the borrowed objects; and finally, returning the borrowed objects to their owners together with appropriate conservation advice (initially at least, this is the Department of Veterans Affairs' *Caring for your wartime memorabilia*).

The exhibition is therefore as much a training exercise as it is one for the presentation of a travelling exhibition. Queensland is well placed to

deliver such a project because of its unique network of Museum Development Officers, whose work the project supports. But the accompanying written guide is probably detailed enough for the project to be delivered without such expert support.

As well as a travelling exhibition, therefore, the project delivers more enduring benefits — not only the training of local museums in exhibition development, but also the development of an extended collection of wartime objects, accessible through the Web, and a growing, and potentially publishable, collection of stories based on the wartime experiences of individuals. Interestingly, many of these have been coming from the children and grandchildren of those who experienced them.

Sharing their legacy is curated by Brian Crozier and was designed by Diana Zivkovic. The online database is available at the Queensland Museum website (qmuseum.qld.gov.au). Enquiries about the nature and development of the exhibition should go to Brian at brianc@qm.qld.gov.au, and about bookings to Deborah Tranter at deborah@cobbandco.qld.gov.au.

BRIAN CROZIER
SENIOR CURATOR, CULTURES AND HISTORIES (SOCIAL HISTORY)
QUEENSLAND MUSEUM

NEWS ABOUT PEOPLE

New Director for National Museum of Australia

Craddock Morton, who has been acting Director of the National Museum of Australia since 15 December 2003, has been appointed Director for a three-year term. He was formerly Chief General Manager at Old Parliament House (2001–2003) and has been Chief General Manager, Corporate and Business, in the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts.

Mr Morton was heavily involved in the construction phase of the National Museum as Chief General Manager of the Acton Peninsula Project from 1999 to the Museum's opening in March 2001.

New Director for National Screen and Sound Archive

The new Director of the National Screen and Sound Archive [formerly ScreenSound], Paolo Cherchi Usai, is expected to bring an international perspective to the management of Australia's audiovisual heritage.

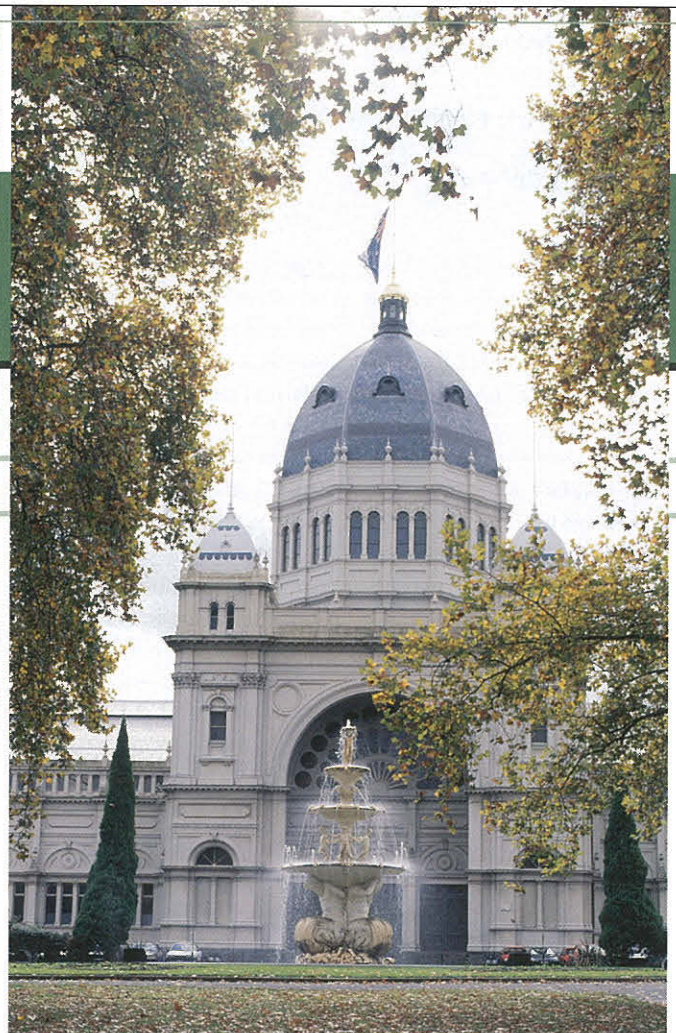
After an early career as a film critic and writer in his native Italy, Mr Cherchi Usai occupied management and academic positions in Europe before taking up his current position as Senior Curator of the Motion Picture Department at George Eastman House, a major United States moving image collection, in 1994.

Mr Cherchi Usai said of his new appointment to the National Screen and Sound Archive that 'The ongoing development and preservation of this very large and important collection will be a challenging task. However, making this collection available to present and future generations — both in Australia and abroad — will also be inspiring and rewarding. This national treasure and its talented staff have all the qualities necessary to be a powerhouse of Australia's culture, a source of creativity for the sound and filmmaking community.'

Mr Cherchi Usai will take up his appointment in September, which is also the twentieth anniversary of the Archive's establishment.

AWM curator recognised in Queen's Birthday Honours

Vicki Northey, ACT Branch President, has received a Public Service Medal in the Queen's Birthday Honours. Vicki received her medal for 'outstanding public service in the successful delivery of major development projects at the Australian War Memorial for the display of innovative museum exhibitions'.



Royal Exhibition Building, now on the World Heritage Register
Courtesy of Museum Victoria

ROYAL EXHIBITION BUILDING GAINS WORLD HERITAGE LISTING

In a coup for Museum Victoria — and Australia — Melbourne's Royal Exhibition Building has been listed on UNESCO's World Heritage Register.

This is Australia's first listing for a built heritage site, appropriately in the International Year of the Built Environment.

The Royal Exhibition Building at Carlton Gardens, adjoining the new Melbourne Museum, was the venue for the first session of the federal parliament of the new Commonwealth of Australia in May 1901.

It was built to house the 1880–1881 Melbourne International

Exhibition. Melbourne's is the sole survivor of the grand exhibition buildings constructed for the international exhibitions of the nineteenth century.

The Crystal Palace in London, which housed the initial Great Exhibition in 1851, Sydney's Garden Palace of 1879 and many of the buildings that housed the Chicago World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 burned down, and others were demolished.

The Royal Exhibition Building in Melbourne now stands as a symbol of the emergence of globalised trade and industry. Trade exhibitions are still held there.

TEN THINGS I KNOW ABOUT VOLUNTEER PROGRAM MANAGEMENT

HELEN ARNOLDI

Over the past three years I have been employed as the Volunteer Program Officer at the Ian Potter Museum of Art, the University of Melbourne. During this time certain truths have become apparent and while there may be more, I have limited this list to the 'ten things' that I keep returning to on a daily basis. Although each point is isolated for clarity, in reality they have fluid boundaries and are interrelated. In no particular order, the 'ten things' I know about volunteer program management are:

1 » The concept of 'professionalism' should underpin everything you do

The concept of 'professionalism' should be the foundation on which your volunteer program is built, from the establishment of infrastructure and the recruitment process through to the quality of projects created and evaluation systems. At the Potter, volunteers have thrived within this framework, consistently completing a high standard of work. This is not surprising, for it has been my experience that the quality of the work accomplished is directly proportional to the level of professionalism invested into the volunteer program.

2 » Feedback and evaluation systems are invaluable.

When managing a volunteer program, feedback and evaluation systems are two of the most powerful tools that you can have at your disposal. These systems allow your program to grow while ensuring it stays true to its original objectives. Some of the best ideas for

improvements to the Potter's Volunteer Program have surfaced as a direct result of feedback sessions. During these informal meetings, volunteers have the opportunity to discuss any ideas or concerns they may have. Further, the dedicated meeting time demonstrates to them the value of the volunteer role within the museum. However, *having* an evaluation and feedback system in place is only the first step — it is through *using* the generated data that your volunteer program moves forward. To be effective, the data collected from these meetings needs to be interpreted and incorporated into regular reviews of your program.

3 » You need to be flexible

The ability to incorporate feedback into your program is essential and to do this, flexibility must be built into your systems. Your volunteers will most likely come from varied backgrounds and bring with them a wealth of different experiences, and you need to be able to develop this potential. Flexibility should also inform your approach to projects, as I have found that some of our most successful projects, enriched by volunteer input, have developed far beyond their initial brief. If the Program had not been able to accommodate this feedback we may have missed out on opportunities. Further, your volunteers see that they can have a genuine influence on their project's direction.

4 » Volunteers are not free

This might sound strange, but it is important to understand the nature of volunteering. Just because volunteers give their

time freely does not mean that there is no cost involved in supporting them. Actually quite the opposite is true. For a volunteer to do their work properly, it is vital that the necessary infrastructure is in place. This may include material considerations such as dedicated volunteer workspace and supplies. And you must not forget the less obvious costs involved, for example, the time taken to devise quality projects and to provide comprehensive training and ongoing support. However, it should be remembered that any costs are significantly outweighed by the benefits of having volunteers properly integrated into your museum.

5 » You need a staff member whose primary responsibility is to oversee the program.

All of these 'things' are more readily achievable if a volunteer program manager is appointed to oversee the program. They have the time and expertise to ensure that volunteers are smoothly incorporated into the organisation and to facilitate the daily management of the program and any ongoing improvements. With this arrangement, volunteers are more likely to be satisfied with their projects and your museum.

6 » You need to understand each volunteer's motivation for volunteering

It is useful to be aware of a volunteer's motivation for working with you and this is why feedback is so essential. Reasons for volunteering vary, and may include seeking professional development/vocational experience, networking opportunities or

pursuit of an interest. If you understand what motivates your volunteers to give their time to your organisation, you can ensure that they are working on an appropriate project. Further, it is likely you will have a lower volunteer turnover, a significant point given the resources used to recruit and train new volunteers.

7 » The relationship between the museum and the volunteer must be mutually advantageous

I have already discussed the importance of understanding volunteer motivation, because if you understand this, you are in a much stronger position to ensure that a volunteer's experience is of benefit to them. To ensure that it is a mutually advantageous relationship, you need to make sure that your organisation's objectives are also being met. At the Potter, the art collections have benefited through volunteers supporting and expanding collection management projects while simultaneously, these volunteers have been able to satisfy their own goals.

8 » Volunteers need a defined 'space'

By 'space' I am not just referring to physical space, though of course this is a necessity. I am suggesting that volunteers are encouraged to have ownership over their specific projects. At the Potter this has been most successful with the Gerard Herbst Poster Collection, where volunteers have been instrumental in cataloguing, conservation, translation, research and interpretation of this significant collection of international posters. In fact,

VOLUNTEERS SHOULD
BE ENCOURAGED TO
HAVE OWNERSHIP
OVER THEIR
SPECIFIC PROJECTS.

their expertise in this area is so established that it is now unlikely for the posters to be discussed without volunteer input! Other intellectual 'space' may be claimed through articles in newsletters and journals, thus reinforcing the importance of the volunteer role within the consciousness of the museum.

9 » It is essential that the program has support from other staff

In order to achieve these nine other 'things', it is important to have support from staff across the museum. This contributes to an enriched volunteer experience as each volunteer is exposed to an increased

expertise and project base. Regularly scheduled 'appreciation' afternoon teas present excellent opportunities for museum staff and volunteers to meet informally. The value of the networking and mentor opportunities generated for the volunteers should not be underestimated. It also works the other way, as volunteers often bring enthusiasm and freshness to their projects that can be inspiring to other staff.

10 » A modest attrition rate for the right reasons is a good thing

Here I am referring to volunteers who leave the program because they have been successful in gaining employment in their chosen profession. This is a positive outcome, as it demonstrates that you have fulfilled your objectives and provided the volunteer with a professionally valid experience that has helped them gain entry into the museum sector. The 'typical' volunteer has changed significantly over the last couple of years. Today, what is often referred to as 'episodic volunteering' defines

the phenomenon where potential volunteers are seeking short-term quality experiences to help them in their career path. Once again the advantages in understanding volunteer motivation become apparent. In my experience, those volunteers who have moved on to other institutions after having such a positive experience at the Ian Potter Museum of Art have become great ambassadors for our museum in the wider community.

HELEN ARNOLDI IS VOLUNTEER PROGRAM OFFICER AT THE IAN POTTER MUSEUM OF ART, THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE

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The Department offers a wide range of learning opportunities to meet the requirements of individuals at all levels of their museum careers. Programmes are delivered both by distance learning (part-time) and through face-to-face, campus-based courses (full-time) enabling students to select a mode of learning to suit their needs and circumstances.

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- one year full-time (campus-based)
or two years part-time by distance learning (April and October start dates)
- **Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)** - available both campus-based or by distance learning

All programmes:

- are underpinned by the department's leading edge research and the work of RCMG (Research Centre for Museums and Galleries)
- reflect the department's commitment to student-centred learning and to meeting the needs of students from diverse backgrounds
- maintain an international perspective and reflect the department's collaborative approach to working within the sector

The Department has been awarded the highest possible score (24/24) for the quality of its teaching and student support by The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education and was graded 5 in the most recent Research Assessment Exercise.



University of
Leicester

VOICES CRYING TO BE HEARD

The Museum Theatre Showcase at the AAM Conference in New Orleans, 6–10 May 2004

ALANA VALENTINE

I was handed a green and purple feathered mask at the door, and then invited to eat sugar-dusted donuts called beignets. The American Association of Museums Conference in New Orleans was hosting a party for first time delegates and I was invited. As I moved through the room I met museum professionals from all over the United States and, indeed, the world, and I began to understand the vision and energy that this Conference was likely to generate.

My trip to New Orleans was funded by an Australia Council grant, a professional development project which acknowledged the important and growing movement that is Museum Theatre. Several sessions during the Conference about the form and a Special Event Museum Theatre Showcase for two days in the Expo Hall were a testament to the seriousness with which this form is being taken internationally.

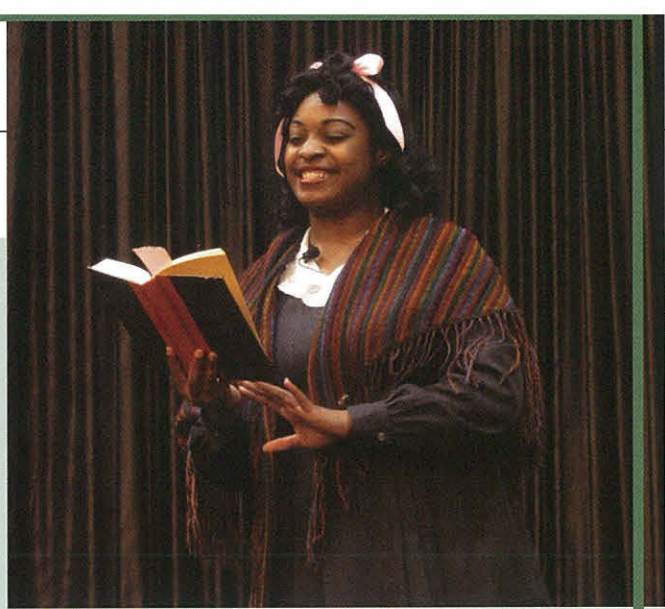
In a session entitled 'Past Histories/Present Conflicts' two theatre groups presented interpretive programs which were being used in their communities, they suggested, to engender conflict resolution. This was a bold claim: I was keen to understand how they might propose to go about unpicking the past to interrogate the misunderstandings and conflicts which had blossomed from it in the present.

The first presentation, from

the Plimoth Plantation, Plymouth, dramatised the struggle for religious freedom in America by presenting the story of a Puritan woman jailed for marrying a Quaker. At the end of the presentation — a deeply moving confrontation between an idealistic daughter and her suffering father — the players described how audiences were invited to 'take sides' and 'give advice' to the young woman about whether she should disavow her marriage and get out of jail, or stick to her principles and stay. The resultant discussion, they said, often became passionate in its advocacy of the importance of religious freedom and female independence.

The second presentation was from the Palace Stables Heritage Centre in Armagh, Ireland. Using actual transcripts from the Irish parliamentary debate of 1801 on union with Great Britain, two excellent performers re-enacted the fury and intensity with which two vehemently opposed Irish parliamentarians elucidated their positions. Before the performance took place, the audience was divided down the centre and assigned allegiances with one or other of the parliamentarians. During the 'debate' we were encouraged to shout out, as one would in such forums, 'Shame', 'Traitor', 'Quite so', 'Here Here' and so on. I must say that the audience took directions on this point particularly well and the resulting participation threatened to turn quite raucous! Afterwards the performers described their experience with audiences, particularly of school children, and spoke passionately about breaking 'stereotypes of allegiance' in relation to the question of Irish union.

Both presentations were stirring and involving, and it was



African-American actress Tiffany Shoemaker played Dora Jean in 'Life on the Avenue'

Courtesy of Alana Valentine

exciting to see the ways in which history might be brought alive, and made so contemporaneously relevant, through this method. Edya Kalev, from the Plimoth Plantation, argued that audiences might, through such theatrical presentations, move into the position of historical 'witnesses' and make connection with other people by 'walking a mile in their shoes'. In this way, argued Robert Forshaw from the Palace Stables Heritage Centre, 'we can approach conflict creatively, positively and constructively'.

It was a rally call to social responsibility from museum professionals that was echoed later in the day, at the Opening General Session of the Conference, where Louis Casagrande, the Executive Director of the AAM, urged all the museum delegates to make a priority of urging their visitors to register to vote. These American museum professionals are a bunch of social activists, I thought. Moments later, the keynote speaker, author and musician James McBride shouted out 'I'm opposed to this war' and half the room were on their feet applauding him. These museum professionals champion freedom of speech, I thought.

The Museum Theatre Showcase, presented by the

International Museum Theatre Alliance, was shown on a small stage in the Expo Hall. After delegates circulated around booths selling museum fittings, software and display aids, several of them were seduced into the seats put out in front of the small raised platform. There they were treated to 'Seahorse Magic' from the Monterey Bay Aquarium, where a man was encouraged to come forward from the audience and was transformed into a male seahorse. He then proceeded to give birth to hundreds of live seahorse young, much to the amusement and edification of the assembled crowd.

'Time Capsule in a Milk Can' from the US Holocaust Memorial Museum and the Smithsonian Associates' Discovery Theatre, was spellbindingly performed by Mark Spiegel. Describing the way in which Holocaust victims had recorded their last thoughts and placed them in large milkcans to be dug up by posterity, the actor then carried the writings into the audience and asked different members of the crowd to read them aloud. It was one of the most riveting and astonishing approaches to memorialising the dead that I have seen. In discussion afterwards, the actor described how this program had been used to 'animate' the actual

milkcans dug up and held by the Memorial. For years they had acted as a poignant display item, but in using the writings in performance the Museum had involved and made real the sufferings of these people in a way that was not possible by visitors simply reading them silently to themselves. This act of theatre was making public the legacies and implications of history, and its performance in public was a means of experiencing the loss collectively. It was an experience I will not soon forget, because I experienced these emotions and realisations with others, and they with me.

'Life on the Avenue', from the Indiana State Museum Legacy Theatre, was a stirring set of four monologues written and directed by Shari Lynn Hynes. The play looked at African-American history and the lives of four African-Americans in the 1930s, a renaissance in African-American life and culture. Through the stories of an older woman, a young girl, a baseball fan and a nightclub singer, the aspirations and experiences of African-American people were humorously and chillingly made real. Through the performance of 'Life on the Avenue' I heard the voice of a writer crying for her history and her experience to be made vivid to the world. I would have been interested too, to hear some of these characters speak to each other, in the way that live theatre can most entertainingly do. However, the form of the monologues made for a reflective and genuinely compelling engagement with this aspect of America's history.

There were several other sessions at the AAM dealing with the use of 'drama' to present ideas, and a particularly friendly and informative lunch hosted by the IMTAL

organization at which the assembled thirty or more diners stood individually and briefly described the ways in which their organisations were using the Museum Theatre Form. These speeches were from delegates from a diversity of institutions including the Manhattan Zoo, a yet-to-be-opened-American Army Museum, the Minnesota Historical Society and the National Constitutional Museum in Philadelphia. There was even a man who used to teach 'fancy gun handling' to movie stars but now worked in theatrical presentations in his specialist museum! It was a marvellous group of cultural advocates and innovative thinkers, and it was impressive to hear how many of the institutions were conscious of employing professionals in consultative positions and compensating them according to industry standards. The old habit of using amateurs from among the staff and volunteers still had its place, but the group seemed keen to engage with the possibilities of expanding these practices, with a diversity of professional presentations and programs now more widely favoured.

Deputy Governor Mitch Landau urged the delegates to get out into New Orleans. 'Everyone is obliged to gain five pounds during their stay in the Big Easy', he insisted. Inspired by the commitment of American museums to find new ways to engage and cohere their communities, with Museum Theatre merely one option among the many other new ideas that were discussed at the Conference, I was only too happy to go and oblige!

ALANA VALENTINE IS A WRITER AND DIRECTOR OF MUSEUM THEATRE
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Asian Bomb Wave, NGV International, Melbourne. Photography John Collins 2003

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REGIONAL ROUNDUP

COORDINATED BY MADELEINE McCLELLAND

INSPIRING STORYTELLING IN THE MUSEUM

Everyone loves a good story. Community museums draw in visitors to discover stories of the place and its people, and the museum keepers share this passion to find and to tell a good yarn. Techniques to reveal authentic tales and to write these for an audience are critical to the survival of collections and their value for the community.

Charlie Trindall (artist and storyteller) led the group in exercises to unlock creativity, to prepare for writing for self-expression and developing community understanding. Charlie emphasised 'it is important to identify the things in life that have significant creative meaning' and use all senses in storytelling.

Barbara Moritz (local historian) focused on methods and tools she utilises for researching the social history of her district. Barbara outlined the A-Z Registry she has created to record data in archives, oral histories and other sources. This data contributes to the development of displays, tours and publications for Lightning Ridge and region.

Linda Raymond (museum and interpretation consultant) boldly stated 'museums do not exist for any other purpose than to communicate stories; they exist as communications devices'. From here she discussed significance assessment as an essential tool for drawing out stories, demonstrating how every object can tell many stories if you ask it the right questions. Using objects carefully chosen from the local museum, workshop participants applied this questioning approach, and considered how their answers could be presented in museum displays.

Barbara Hickson (heritage adviser), Heather Nicholls (town planner and heritage consultant) and Ann McLachlan (librarian) outlined the production of a unique pocket-sized portable interpretive text,



Frank Walsh (Mid-State Shearing Shed — Nyngan), Jenny Zell and Jessica Camlin (Gilgandra Heritage Centre), Barbara Moritz (Lightning Ridge Historical Society) and Linda Raymond assessing significance to 'find the write stuff'. Photograph courtesy of Elizabeth Cutts, Barradine Progress Association

100 Lives in Bourke Cemetery. This research, writing, and photographic team discussed the conceptual process of structuring stories for an audience. Using this book as their model for presenting thematic histories, the team are producing similar publications for other regions of NSW.

A good time was had by all! Workshop participants were inspired by the variety of techniques presented and the opportunity to work alongside storytellers from different disciplines, such as journalists and schoolteachers, who attended. Nyngan's museums were also enjoyed in the program, illustrating how thematic displays highlight stories unique to the district and its identity.

This workshop is part of an ongoing series of workshops presented by the Museums & Galleries Foundation of NSW to promote the importance and use of significance assessment. Working in partnership with Regional Arts extended the profile of community museum activity and encouraged exchange of skills between arts, heritage and those who contribute to community cultural development.

PETER SCRIVENER
MUSEUMS & GALLERIES
FOUNDATION OF NSW

KICK OFF FOR COCA!

In late April this year nearly 500 performing and visual artists, dancers, arts workers, business people and local community members celebrated the opening of KickArts Contemporary Arts space in the new and beautiful Centre of Contemporary Arts (CoCA) in Cairns.

The CoCA building is the result of a \$2.7 million upgrade and redesign of an ex-government building in the centre of Cairns, funded under the Queensland Government's Millennium Arts Project. KickArts Contemporary Arts and Just Us Theatre Ensemble (JUTE) now benefit from a first class facility that includes a 248-seat theatre with retractable raked seating, dressing rooms and Green Room, two fully climate controlled galleries, a studio/workshop, gallery shop, Liquid Café and Bar, Board Room & administration offices. Stage 2 additions to CoCA will include rehearsal and multi purpose spaces.

KickArts' latest exhibition is the result of a partnership between KickArts and the Global Cultural Centre (GCC) of Japan. Each of the participating artists has created new work that addresses the theme of the natural world and the environmental heritage of their

MUSEUMS DO NOT EXIST
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In March this year a workshop presented by the Museums & Galleries Foundation of NSW, in partnership with Outback Arts, gathered writers, storytellers and those who document community heritage to creatively explore writing in the museum. Nyngan, located in the geographic centre of NSW, provided a welcoming place to explore what lies at the heart of museum practice and audience development.

Finding the Write Stuff; inspiring storytelling in the museum included speakers from a variety of backgrounds who use oral history, objects, collections and sites to tell true stories.

particular country of origin. This will be the eighth International Group Show and Artist Forum of its kind, with over thirty artists from many parts of the world converging in Cairns to share their artworks and experiences. Nine local artists are also represented in the exhibition, including Arone Meeks, Marina Meucke, Julie Poulson, Edward Koumans and Joey Laifoo.

Address: PO Box 6090
Cairns QLD 4870
Tel: 07 4050 9494
Fax: 07 4050 9499
kickarts@kickarts.org.au



Above:
Meenu Srivastava working on her ground painting in the new KickArts Galleries

Courtesy of Centre of Contemporary Arts, Cairns

Below:
A ball signed 'Eisenhower trophy, St Andrews. October 8th-11th 1958'
Courtesy of Australasian Golf Museum

TEE UP IN BOTHWELL

Hiding away in the quiet Tasmanian town of Bothwell is the Australasian Golf Museum (AGM). The AGM holds the largest and most comprehensive collection of golfing memorabilia in the Southern Hemisphere.

The collection is housed and exhibited within the township's original Gothic-style sandstone schoolhouse, next to the old Ratho Golf Course, making it the only publicly accessible display dedicated to golf in Australia and New Zealand. The Golf Museum is

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FOOD FOR THOUGHT

CAROL SCOTT REFLECTS ON THE SOCIAL VALUE OF MUSEUMS

Today we are beginning a week of discussion around the conference theme, *Food for Thought: imagining a sustainable future — social value within a globalised framework.*

My remarks begin with the subtext — the social value of museums. Twenty years ago, museums were considered a public good. Today their worth and value need champions. The ongoing sustainability of the sector, particularly with regard to public funding, is increasingly tied to notions of community value and the provision of evidence that their presence has positive social impacts.

I would like to share with you the outcomes of some research which I have been undertaking over the past two years regarding the impact and value of museums in Australia.

This research has two groups of respondents. The first group included professionals working in the museum sector at Commonwealth, state and local government levels as well as others whose work is associated with the museum sector. The second group engaged members of the general public. This group was recruited from people living in both regional and urban communities and included both museum visitors and those who do not visit museums.

The research has addressed the important question of what evidence we have that communities value museums. This is what the research has found.

The professional group generated ten indicators demonstrating that communities value museums.

- 1 In the first instance, they pointed to tangible evidence of participation and engagement through
 - the numbers of visits to museums in Australia which, since the low attendance figure of 19.9 percent of the population in 1999, has risen to 25 percent of the population in the most recent ABS figures (2002);
 - committed forms of engagement by friends, members and volunteers groups, which in Australia number well over 160,000 individuals;
 - the use of museums as signature educational and tourism destinations; and
 - the increasing number of session visits to museum websites.
- 2 Secondly, these respondents point to the fact that migrant groups and other sub-groups within society see museums as powerful mechanisms to confer cultural legitimacy and, therefore, seek a place within museums to achieve this.
- 3 Thirdly, the fact that communities value collections and the history and heritage that collections represent is indicated by their willingness to engage in political action for their preservation.
- 4 Fourthly, this respondent group pointed to evidence that even people who do not visit museums engage with the vigorous debates surrounding museums and their role in our society. The controversy surrounding both the Enola Gay and the recent review of the National Museum of Australia demonstrate that the community has ideas of what a museum should be and do.
- 5 A fifth indicator of how the community values museums is to be found when communities choose museums as the site for programs that build their sense of identity, celebrate place and provide a site for commemorative events. The Welcome Wall at the National Maritime Museum in Sydney, the Tribute Garden at the Immigration Museum in Melbourne and the Memorial Wall at the Migration Museum in Adelaide are some examples of this.
- 6 There is also a growing body of evidence, provided through audience research studies, of high levels of visitor satisfaction with museum visits and reports that visitors engage in learning as part of the museum experience.
- 7 We have statistics that confirm the extensive use of museums' professional expertise through the number of public enquiries answered each year and the use of museum professionals as an authoritative source of information.
- 8 Museums, moreover, have the capacity to attract funding and other forms of support from the commercial sector, from government and through bequests and donations from people who see museums as worthy repositories for their collections.



Museums Australia President, Carol Scott, with Peter Hiscock, eminent member of the former Council of Australian Museum Associations, celebrated the tenth anniversary of Museums Australia at a reception generously hosted by Australia Post at the Post Master Gallery, Melbourne, during the National Conference in May

Courtesy of Bruce Davidson

- 9 There is an increasing amount of media attention focused on museums, most media commentary about museums is favourable, and museums are frequently quoted in the media as authoritative sources of information or discovery.
- 10 And, finally, there are more museums now than ever before and, as one local government respondent to the research stated, *Whenever a community wants to make a statement about the value of an experience, or a place or an object, when they want to make a statement about themselves, about their identity — usually the demand is for the establishment of a museum.*

to all of us) and build important social and cultural capital (*Museums signal that the city/town has a history and a culture*) that translates into economic capital (*Museums add to the attraction of a city or town for tourists*).

When asked what they, individually and collectively, would lose if museums no longer existed, these respondents spoke of losing access to the experience of, the connection with, and the lessons learned from history. And they said things like...

... a people that knows no past has no future. So many good things are lost or forgotten without museums.

'IT WOULD BE AWFUL IF WE LOST THE MUSEUM, WHERE COULD I GO TO REFLECT...'

The general public were also involved in this study. This group included both those who visit museums and those who do not. Young adults, parents, seniors, adults without children, people living in cities and people living in regional areas all participated. They were asked what they thought about museums from two perspectives:

- 1 What the presence of a museum in their community meant to them; and
- 2 What would be lost if museums no longer existed from the perspective of both the individual and the community?

The public indicated that the presence of a museum in a community is important in providing significant learning opportunities for children as well as offering a special type of learning experience for adults — one which is mediated through objects, voluntary, reflective and which encourages personal perspective.

Museums offer a chance to view oneself within the fabric of time and space.

The general public also value the place that museums have as custodians of heritage (*Museums are a 'living' link to my history, where I came from, how I developed and how my city was formed*) and the role that they play in articulating community identity (*Museums are the place for a community to say to itself and visitors 'This is who we are and why we are here. This is what we have and this is what you can learn from us.'*)

Further, museums are valued because they provide leisure and community facilities (*A museum is a community place which belongs*

They referred to the loss of the unique experience of learning through objects.

It would be awful if we lost the museum, where could I go to reflect on species which no longer exist.

They emphasised the importance of experiencing a sense of belonging to, and sharing, a common history

How could I explain as fully to my children what was around in the earlier days. To me it would be losing part of our heritage, history and sense of belonging.

And they spoke of the role of museums in building social and cultural capital in communities.

I would lose a place to take my children to have fun as well as being educational

This study is a part of a growing body of evidence that museums and their collections are valued by the community. If that is the case, then our task is to collectively decide how we will ensure that these collections, housed in museums, galleries, archives and libraries, are sustained for the enjoyment of future generations.

That is the subject of this week's conference. We will discuss, debate and argue the 'how to', but I suspect that there will be little argument about the fundamental worth of what we are doing and our belief in the value of museums, objects and collections.

CAROL SCOTT
PRESIDENT, MUSEUMS AUSTRALIA



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IMAGINING A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE: SOCIAL VALUE AND SUSTAINABILITY WITHIN A GLOBALISED FRAMEWORK

JONATHAN SWEET

The creation of knowledge in museums and galleries has long been associated with the collection and comparison of things. Sometimes the quest has been fired by the search for universal principles. The British designer Owen Jones was in part the author of the mid-nineteenth century treatise *The Grammar of Ornament*. For this, amongst other sources, he made use of the collections at the South Kensington Museum. He collected examples of decoration and ornament from around the world and he organised these according to their cultural derivation, Egyptian, Greek, Turkish, Indian and Chinese; or emphasised their association with particular historical periods, Medieval, Renaissance, or Elizabethan.

Museums have often organised their collections and displays in similar categories. Jones' legacy however, was a spectacular volume of colourful lithographic plates, and although the nomenclature reflects a Eurocentric view, his research was nevertheless driven by the evident paradox in a mosaic of cultural heritages which showed elements of both distinction and commonality. As a result of his endeavour he asserted that, 'whenever any style of ornament commands universal admiration, it will always be found in accordance with the laws which regulate the distribution of form in nature'. He may have shared an environmentalist's respect for the natural world.

But whether or not we agree with his conclusion is of course a matter of debate; for instance, it isn't at all clear how he assessed 'universal admiration' — it was clearly not by vote at the United Nations — but what is interesting about Jones, and many other collectors and museum visitors for that matter, is that he was trying to understand the world in which he lived through comparing the similarities and difference between things. It is of course no coincidence that the National Museum of Victoria, the National Gallery of Victoria and the State Library were founded at this time, in this same spirit of enquiry.

Jones' crusade is also interesting because he recognised a threat to the purity of each ornamental design, which he desired to halt. He had seen eclecticism in abundance at the Great Exhibition in 1851. Alternatively, he believed that it was the 'peculiar circumstances [of an ornament's creation and use] which rendered it beautiful' — a quality we might recognise as authenticity — and that the inappropriate use of ornament, by what he derogatively called 'fashion interests', would strip an ornament of its true meaning. In essence then, we could say, Jones was a nineteenth-century intellect who recognised the increasing relevance of international cross-cultural issues. He recognised that the world in which he lived was changing rapidly through expanding global economic systems and new technologies; and that, in his case at least, the authenticity of ornament was increasingly vulnerable to market forces.

I think we can recognise related paradoxes which exist in the complex machinations of our world of museum and galleries. Universalist organisations such as UNESCO and ICOM aid disparate museums and galleries whilst also endeavouring to protect local

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cultural heritage traditions and practices. In the name of posterity and identity, museums engage in collecting regimes, building an ever-growing responsibility for the care of objects, which cannot be as easily managed as Jones' samples in a volume of lithographs; and contemporary museums and galleries are being shadowed by their own evil 'fashion interests'. Perhaps we can recast these as commercial realities, upon which there is an increasing dependence for the viability of public programmes, but which often seem to undervalue the historical roles and underlying operating principles (amongst them authenticity) of our museums and galleries.

Of course there are no easy answers; obstacles such as these require professional judgement to negotiate. In establishing the conference themes, the organising committee followed the lead (and challenges) set out in the document, 'Museums and Sustainability' published by Museums Australia in May last year, and asked speakers to frame their contributions around the key themes of sustainability and social value. According to these guidelines, if we are to achieve the sustainable future we might imagine, we need our museums and galleries to simultaneously meet environmental, economic and community needs. No easy task.

Nevertheless, from the start it was the Committee's intention and hope, like Jones', to collect a diverse range of views and experiences from museum practitioners and museologists from within Australia and abroad. We also wanted, unlike the Australian Museum's strict partition of Australian and Foreign Birds in its gallery scheme of the 1890s, to mix up the discussion in an interdisciplinary, colourful and engaging mosaic, which is, I think, much more representative of the contemporary global museum menagerie in which we are participating. Perhaps, like Jones, we can package up our diverse ideas and experiences into a sumptuous and lasting legacy.

JONATHAN SWEET LECTURES IN MUSEUM STUDIES AT
DEAKIN UNIVERSITY.

CROSSING THE MOAT: ART MUSEUMS AND LIFE-WIDE LEARNING

JOHN CROSS

In the community and public arts sectors market forces and market driven programming is often viewed as a bad thing.

And it is a bad thing if by the term 'market driven' we mean chasing profits. The brief of the community and public arts sectors is not to chase profits. But if 'market driven' is taken to mean listening to, and then responding to, the needs and desires of the end-users in an effort to serve more people better, then the market driven philosophy cannot be such a bad thing.

Our public art museums have a mass-market brief. If they do have to think about making money to cover costs then it is in their brief to do this, like McDonalds or Woolworth's, by increasing their consumer base, rather than restricting it to a wealthy market segment.

The mission of the National Gallery of Victoria is to 'bring people and art together'. The Vision of the Queensland Art Gallery is to help increase 'quality of life for all Queenslanders'. The Art Gallery of Western Australia talks about 'cultural enrichment of the people'. The purpose of the National Gallery of Australia is to 'serve the public'.

Nowhere in these statements of intent is a limitation on the

type of audiences these institutions exist to serve. Rather, there is an implicit or explicit intent to serve all the people, not just the people with money, high levels of formal education, or from certain age groups, and not just the people with an interest in art history or who are contemporary artists.

In recent years, most public art museums in Australia have made efforts to make physical access to the collections easier. This has included increased efforts to provide services to people with disabilities, to offer tours in different languages, to put more material on-line, and to reduce or remove entry fees to the general collection. These efforts are to be applauded, but they are not enough.

Letting down the drawbridge — removing the physical impediments to access — is the easy part. Getting people to want to cross the moat is the hard part.

The fact that art museum non-attendance is so clearly delineated by lower income, lower education levels, advanced age and non-Anglo ethnicity must be of great concern for us all. We must be concerned that the poorest people in our society

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DESPITE THE RHETORIC ABOUT REACHING
OUT TO THE MASSES, ART MUSEUMS HAVE
NOT BEEN ABLE TO SHAKE OFF THE TRAPPINGS
OF WEALTH, CLASS, AND BREEDING.

apparently prefer to pay money to visit a zoo rather than visit a public art museum for free.

Why are significant sections of our society staying away from art museums in droves? I think there are two answers. The first is that art museum culture is closed and intimidating. Despite the rhetoric about reaching out to the masses, art museums have not been able to shake off the trappings of wealth, class, and breeding. The art museum comes across as a place of right and wrong answers; of jargon; of esoteric discussions; of being inside — or outside — the club. In short, the Australian art museum is imbued with all the characteristics that, in an adult learning context, are fundamental no-nos.

The second reason why substantial audiences are not interested in crossing the moat is the issue of usefulness. In their marketing, and in the programs they deliver, art museums on the whole have failed to demonstrate to the public how what the art museum is offering is relevant to the everyday world. In short, there is a failure on the part of the art museum to assist people in a profound or useful way.

Don't get me wrong; art museums *are* trying to be useful. It's just that the services they provide are of value only to a small proportion of society — notably those sitting comfortably at the top of Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

According to ACNielsen survey work, the issues that are troubling most Australians include concerns about the worsening of the economy, employment, health, terrorism, and crime. Try as I might, I could not find concerns about the origins of Modernism anywhere on the list of things keeping Australians awake at night.

The Business Council of Australia conducted a survey of people aged thirty and under asking them about their concerns. The things of greatest concern for this cohort included housing affordability, financial security and the prospect of being unemployed. Again, I was unable to find any evidence to suggest that a lack of knowledge of art history was an issue for Australia's youth.

In Australia, it is estimated that around forty-five percent of the adult population does not have sufficient levels of literacy to cope with the everyday demands of life and work on our complex advanced society. Approximately twenty percent — or one in five — Australian adults do not have what may be termed 'basic' literacy, that is, the ability to read medicine bottles, consult timetables, and work out the change they might expect from a transaction.

While people with low levels of literacy potentially may find visual art collections tremendously rewarding, the language of the art museum, the jargon of art history, indeed the focus on art history, is a definite turn off.

Around 800,000 Australian adults live with depression each year. Depression is currently the leading cause of non-fatal disability in Australia and in the year 2025 it will be second only to heart disease as the leading cause of death and disability. Depression costs the Australian community millions dollars of each year.

Again, while visual art collections may present enormous possibilities for sufferers of depression, programs that focus obsessively on questions of taste, classification and technique are at best irrelevant, and at worst a smorgasbord of opportunities for people to feel inadequate and stupid.

What is keeping Australia awake at night? Health, jobs, crime, the environment. What is stopping Australia reaching its potential? Poor literacy skills and depression, to name but two. What contributions are Australia's public art museums making to help address these issues?

One might argue that the art museum's greatest contribution

is in providing an escape, a sanctuary, where people can hide from the anxiety of the everyday world. However, calm is a rare commodity in the modern art museum. Amongst the public program activities, the zealous volunteer guides, the boisterous school group and the clatter of cash registers, calm does not appear to be a primary focus.

Most art museums are focused on stimulating and supporting discussions around art history. This is a useful function because there are few other spaces within our society where one might engage in such discussions. However, this function is a somewhat rarefied one, not one that intersects with most of our lives in any meaningful way.

To become a valuable resource for the lifelong and life-wide needs of all types of Australians, our public art museums must change. What I am suggesting is simple. Rather than trying to assimilate various audiences to art museum culture, the art museum must make efforts to accommodate and respond to the needs of potential audiences. The programming and promotion of the art museum must be fundamentally and explicitly relevant to the contemporary needs and concerns of the wider public.

In such a formulation depression, health, crime, war, and the environment serve as starting points for the art museum's public interface work. Art can be used to help deal with contemporary issues; the issues that keep us awake at night. Through art, the community can learn how others who have gone before, or from elsewhere, have experienced or dealt with challenges similar to those that concern us. Individual objects in the collection and curated exhibitions are used to give insight to concerns and experiences for which there are no words.

There is no reason to abandon the promotion of art history — if art history can be shown to be useful then it can stay. However, a shift in recruitment strategies is required to ensure that the public interface staff represent the diversity of the wider community, not just those with an interest in art history.

In short, the art museum should promote itself as a visual library of human experience; a resource bank of insights; a rich catalyst for creativity and innovation — a place of substance, not style.

This conception of usefulness isn't too far from the current Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts statement about why the Australian Government spends public money to support public collections. It says:

'Cultural and heritage material held in public collections throughout Australia provide insight into our past, shape our sense of identity, stimulate innovation and creativity, and provide the knowledge to make informed choices on our future directions.'

But how might this work in practice? Art museums might use the experience of depression, alcoholism or racism as the catalyst for an exhibition or public program. Such a program or exhibition would provide an environment in which a form of art therapy might take place; using existing art as a catalyst for self-expression, problem solving and initiating stimulating conversation among people who may or may not have first-hand experience of the issue at hand.

How might the art museum help people gain and maintain employment? Competency-based training is good at helping people develop manual skills, but it is floundering in the area of helping people develop the generic skills that are so often the key to employment and progression in work. The skills that employers are impressed by include interpersonal skills, creativity, innovation, flexibility, and the ability to cope with change and challenge. The art museum is filled with resources that can assist people develop and hone these skills. In fact, few other spaces in contemporary society offer such a wealth of opportunities to help people develop innovative thinking or practice communicating difficult ideas.

Innovations such as these are within easy reach of the art museum. In fact many are already happening — thematic exhibitions are nothing new.

A shift is going to occur, due in no small part to our ageing population. As more public funds are poured into health, aged care and pensions — not to mention the development of alternative energy sources, the securing of fresh water, and the Orwellian fight against terrorism — the survival of Australia's public art museums will rely upon their demonstrated value to the whole of society.

It is time now to listen to the massive number of Australian adults for whom the art museum appears to have no relevance. As David Anderson from the Victorian and Albert Museum argued recently, the key too is to invest as many resources in the study of audiences as is invested in researching the objects in the collection. The key here is for the art museum to listen — not promote — but to listen.

Where might one go to meet these audiences? Neighbourhood houses would be a good place to start. Neighbourhood houses are

at the coalface of the disengaged. People with poor literacy, people from cultural minorities, people living in isolation, and people with no money will often find their way to a neighbourhood house. The people at neighbourhood houses are not interested in art history, but they are interested in learning the skills — such as literacy and communication — that will help them get ahead. Art collections potentially provide fertile resources for stimulating and honing these life skills.

Human Resource departments might be another place to go. Here you will find people desperately trying to foster flexibility, innovation, creativity and good communication amongst their employees. Again our art collections and our art museums might offer a valuable resource to assist meeting these needs.

Counselling services, such as those conducted by Anglicare, would be a good place to go to hear about the needs of people recovering from depression, addiction or social exclusion.

Conferences — other people's conferences — offer a valuable window into other people's worlds; their issues, needs and concerns. Over the past year I have attended conferences about adult and community education, families, vocational education, the future of work, professional education, and community welfare. Rarely, if ever, do I meet anyone from an art museum at these conferences.

People are easy to find. Listening to them and responding to their needs, on their terms, that's the hard bit. But that is the bit public art museums must do if they want more people to cross the moat and if they want to continue to claim public funds.

JOHN CROSS, RESEARCH MANAGER, ADULT LEARNING AUSTRALIA

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2004 MUSEUMS AUSTRALIA PUBLICATION DESIGN AWARDS

CATEGORY WINNERS (AND JUDGES' COMMENTS)

This year 365 diverse publications were entered by 112 organisations. Following their assessment by an expert panel of design judges, these worthy entrants were recognised as MAPDA category winners in each classification level corresponding to the size of the organisation. The classification levels are linked to the represented organisation (not the size of the design group), they are:

- 'A' organisations employ up to 5 staff or have all volunteers,
- 'B' organisations employing between 6 and 40 staff and
- 'C' those who employ over 41 staff members.

BEST IN SHOW

OVERALL AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE

WINNER: INDIVIDUAL PUBLICATION

Rockhampton Art Gallery

Diversity Along the Line — A Collaborative portfolio by Capricorn Artists **1**

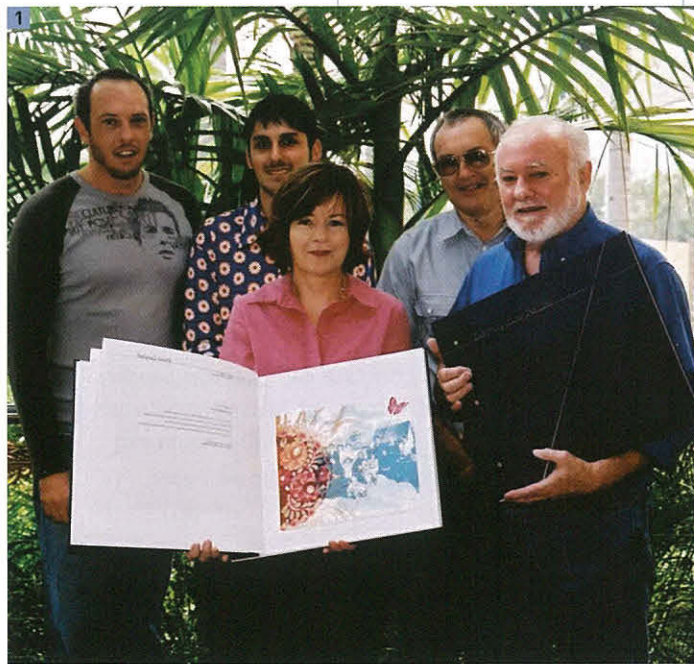
Designers: Max Lovell and Shane Fitzgerald

A 'standout' publication in terms of concept, realisation of design and excellent production values achieved locally by a regional gallery.

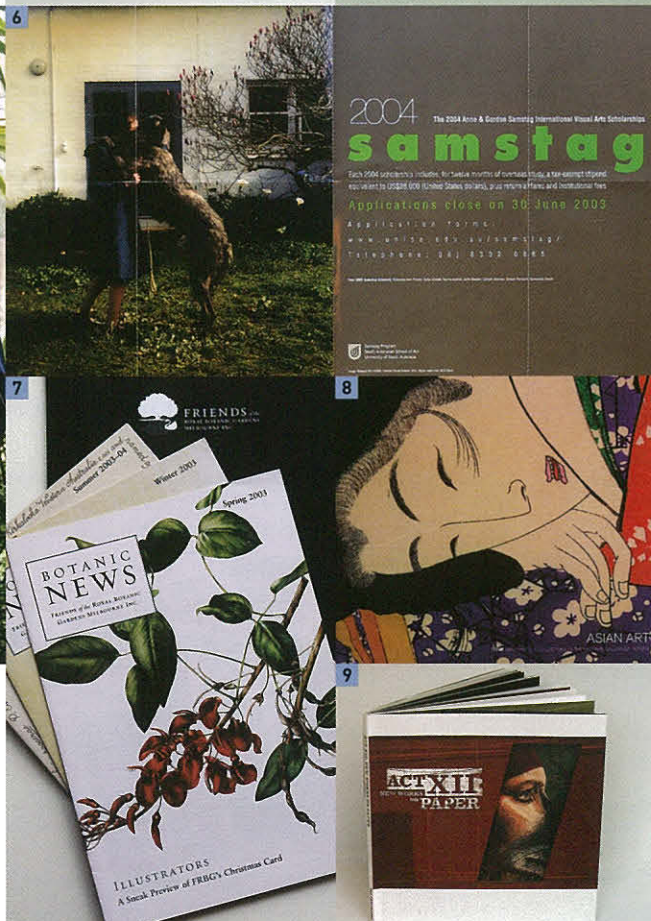
WINNER: PUBLICATIONS CONTRIBUTED BY AN ORGANISATION

Nyinkka Nyunyu Arts and Crafts Centre

Commended for the excellent publications entered across the multimedia, corporate, promotion categories. **2**



The winning team from the Rockhampton Art Gallery with their publication *Diversity Along the Line — A Collaborative portfolio by Capricorn Artists*



MAGAZINE & NEWSLETTER

WINNER: LEVEL A

Friends of The Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne Inc*Botanic News* **7**

Designer: Dianna Wells, Dianna Wells Design

This well packaged clean consistent design communicates clearly; it has a pleasing aesthetic balance between text and illustrations.

WINNER: LEVEL B

National Portrait Gallery*Portrait Magazine* **4**

Designer: Art Direction, Brett Wienke

Its striking cover, refreshingly uncluttered with contents and logos is followed by an excellent package of content. It is easy to read, demonstrates a good choices made in images and print production.

JOINT WINNER: LEVEL C

Christchurch Art Gallery — Te Puna O Waiwhetu*Bulletin of the Christchurch Art Gallery March — May 2003* **5**Designer: Strategy Advertising
An exceptional overall packaged series of publications with their own envelopes; it has variety in the use of imagery and type, and has achieved high production qualities on uncoated paper stock.

JOINT WINNER: LEVEL C

National Gallery of Victoria*ABV 42: Annual Journal of the National Gallery of Victoria*Designer: Cameron Midson
The journal has a scholarly feel to the design, yet is very readable, fresh and contemporary.

EXHIBITION & COLLECTION CATALOGUE

WINNER: LEVEL A

Plimsoll Gallery*Return to the Real:**Contemporary photo-media*

Designers: Mat Wearne & Sarah Hawson, Graphic Design Studio.

A creative concept in which complementary images sit well on a grey ground, a very slick design with easy to follow information.

WINNER: LEVEL B

The Arts Centre*Act XII New Works on Paper* **9**Designer: Erica Budman
*Unpredictable in its layout and cover, the publications successfully and clearly document the information.**A good typographic solution and use of colour in a well-bound catalogue.*

WINNER: LEVEL C

Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney*MCA UNPACKED 2* **3**Designer: Michael Donohue
An imaginative concept of a wood cover and cloth binding that extends the exhibition theme.

POSTER AND CALENDAR

WINNER: LEVEL A

Samstag Program*2004 Samstag**Scholarship Poster* **6**Designer: David Zhu, Fusion
A very classy package of design elements, does justice to the artists featured on well selected paper stock.

WINNER: LEVEL B

National Portrait Gallery*POL: Portrait of a Generation*

Designer: Brett Wienke, Art Direction

This poster works as a poster should. It's legible, eye-catching, has strong graphic appeal.

JOINT WINNERS: LEVEL C

Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney*Liquidsea Retail Poster*

Designer: Jan Ryves

Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney*Wim Wenders Retail Poster*Designer: Michael Donohue
Both posters' typography allows the images to speak. The choice of images draws in the eye, the information is very readable and the choice of substantial stock takes them beyond just promotional posters.

BOOK

WINNER: LEVEL A

Rockhampton Art Gallery*Diversity Along the Line —**A Collaborative portfolio**by Capricorn Artists*

Designers: Max Lovell and Shane Fitzgerald

This is a 'breathtaking' book; an exceptional locally produced large scale book of original hand-printed, hand-tipped prints complemented by the sensitive use of typography, format and mix of paper stock.

WINNER: LEVEL B

No award was made at this level

WINNER: LEVEL C

National Gallery of Victoria*Asian Art in the**International Collections* **8 detail**

Designer: Jackie Robinson

A very well laid-out book sets a good pace for the viewer, text is broken by single and double page spreads and the publication has high production values.**mental media**
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CORPORATE (ANNUAL REPORT, BROCHURE, STATIONERY)

WINNER: LEVEL A

Public Gallery Association of Victoria

Stationery **13**

Designer: Dianna Wells,
Dianna Wells Design
*A strong visual design solution
that extends to all elements and
an excellent use of colour.*

WINNER: LEVEL B

Object — Australian Centre for Craft & Design

Object: *In Perspective*
Designer: Eric Steigerwalt
Winner *Nyinkka Art and Craft* –
*An excellent logo and type
solution the stationery has a
natural design mood, appropriate
to the organisation*

WINNER: LEVEL C

Queensland Museum

Foundation Booklet
Designer: Baden Phillips
*The strong concept 'living
knowledge images' is well
realized. An understated cover
leads to a surprising inside, page
by page the publication is rich and
engaging in design and images;
it's a great selling tool for the
Foundation.*

EDUCATION

WINNER: LEVEL A

George Hanna Memorial Museum

*A Guide to help identify the style
of your house*
Designers: Joanne Sippel, Maie
Barrow and Sarah Balfe
*Effective in achieving its purpose,
this efficient publication also can
be used by a number of different
audiences.*

JOINT WINNER: LEVEL B

Museum of Brisbane

*Bite the Blue Sky — Take your
own Tour* **12**
Designer: Jodi Edwards,
Creative Plantation
*An engaging format and use
of colour make it very attractive
to students. The responsible
use of recycled paper is also
commended.*

JOINT WINNER: LEVEL B

Nyinkka Nyunyu Art & Cultural Centre

*Nyinkka Nyunyu
Information Series*
Designer: Dianna Wells,
Dianna Wells Design
*The publication's layout has an
excellent drawn quality reflecting
the exhibition. It clearly conveys
information with an economy of
design that still feels like quality.*

WINNER: LEVEL C

Judges commented on the
diverse audiences these
publications seek to engage.
**The Art Gallery of New South
Wales**
Contemporary Education Kit
Designer: Analiese Cairis
*The very high level of production
incorporated quality visuals while
conveying substantial levels of
information, a great package.*

PROMOTION (INVITE, MEDIA KIT, MEMBERSHIP BROCHURE)

WINNER: LEVEL A

Samstag Program

*2004 Samstag
Catalogue/DVD/and animated
postcard*
Designer: David Zhu, Fusion
*This is an outstanding design
solution and package.*

WINNER: LEVEL B

National Portrait Gallery

Presence and Absence Invitation
11 detail
Designer: Art Direction,
Brett Wienke
*Engaging in concept and subtle in
the handling of transparent
printed stock; the publication
communicates well.*

WINNER: LEVEL C

The Art Gallery of New South Wales

*New Asian Galleries, This
Weekend The Opening Festival*
Designer: Analiese Cairis
*A complete package of
invitations, signage and cards
portray a real sense of
celebration and Asian restraint, a
beautifully tied together design.*

WEBSITE

Judges said, the bar is up
across the board this year and
the overall standard is high —
even given the differences in
budgets.

WINNER: LEVEL A

Brisbane's Living Heritage Network

www.brisbanelivingheritage.org
10

Designer: Toadshow
*The site's layers of information
are not just info driven, there is
an excellent use of icons, its
information rich but uncluttered,
loads quickly, and has good
design and construction. They
have thought about the user, it
goes further than documentation
— it encourages visitation.*

WINNER: LEVEL B

Global Arts Link

www.bunya.gal.org.au
Designers: Rick Caskey and
Rob Toadshow
*With appeal to all age groups,
the site's fresh use of audio, its
multi-stranded design, links,
multi-screens and variety in the
materials introduced results in
the subject matter being
creatively expressed.*

JOINT WINNER: LEVEL C

Judges commented on the
high-level loading, content and
navigation of entries at this level
**Australian Centre for the
Moving Image**

www.acmi.net.au/transfigure
Designer: Mitchell Harris
*Good use of flash technology in a
beautiful total design solution
really compliments the
exhibition. It's 'spot on' for the
target audience.*

JOINT WINNER: LEVEL C

Museum Victoria

museum.vic.gov.au/pharlap
Designer: Online Publishing
*This site has terrific content and
is compelling, motivating the
viewer to explore it extensively.*

MULTIMEDIA

Judges were particularly
mindful in this category that
entrant's information must be
in a form able to be produced
and accessed by different levels
of technical equipment and
expertise.

WINNER: LEVEL A

Artback Northern Territory Punttu Family

Designer: Nadine Jones,
Nova Graphics
*This video, a medium accessible
to all viewers, is easy to use.
It has compelling content and
a sympathetic and personal
delivery style that imparts
information with refreshing
clarity.*

WINNER: LEVEL B

Shear Outback: Australian Hall of Fame

Teachers Tool Kit
Designer: Jenny Molloy
*A creative design appropriate
to its purpose, the CD has lots
of graphic design appeal for
kids, and for audiences across
all levels.*

JOINT WINNER: LEVEL C

Both publications really
sold the experience to the
potential visitor

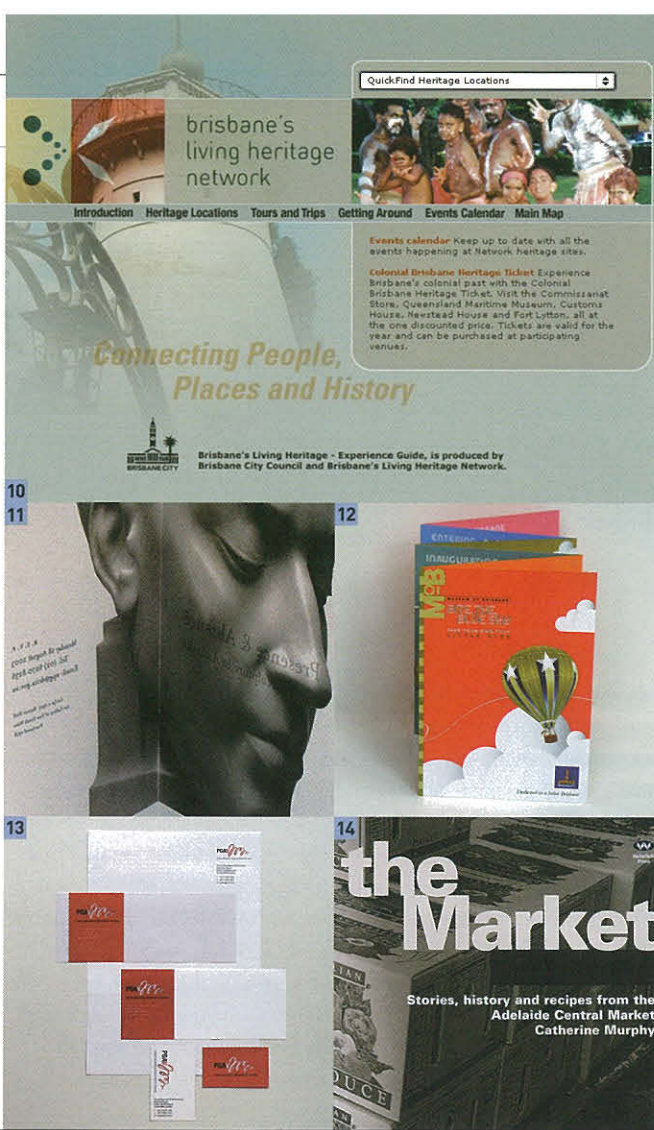
Museum Victoria

The Virtual Room
Designers: VROOM Inc,
Melbourne
*A promotion that reflects the
extension of the boundaries in
museum exhibits challenging the
designer to come up with ways to
convey new concepts.*

JOINT WINNER: LEVEL C

The Sovereign Hill Museum

*Sovereign Hill Promotional
CD-Rom*
Designer: John Zulic
*This promotional film is a
sophisticated production,
beautifully photographed.*



FOOD FOR THOUGHT SPECIAL CONFERENCE AWARD

JOINT WINNER
State Library of Victoria
Light the Dome — Dinner Menu
 Designer: Tracy Merchant
A seductively simple and disciplined design for a beautiful dinner menu, the embossed reading room dome has a tactile quality and its graphic treatment stimulates thoughts of a plate of food.

JOINT WINNER
Wakefield Press
The Market **14 detail**
 Designer: Liz Nicholson, design bite
A strong concept realised as a compelling and readable book with great photos.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

The highly prized Publication Design Awards are presented annually by Museums Australia. For further information, contact the 2004 MAPDA awards committee chairperson: Ian Watts on (03) 9651 2233 or by email at iwatts@oldtreasurymuseum.org.au

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FOOD FOR THOUGHT

SOME INSIGHTS FROM THE CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

ROSLYN RUSSELL

How do you capture the diversity and range of a conference such as 'Food for Thought'? Like the range of food now available in Australia that reflects both the cultural diversity of our nation and the provision possible in a globalised world, MA National Conference delegates could sample a wide 'menu' of presentations sourced from other countries and across Australia.

On the Regional and Remote day Jim Geddes, from Gore District Council in New Zealand, demonstrated that, with inspired leadership, community museums could be forged into a self-sustaining collectivity that contributes to economic development in the region.

Celebrity chef Stefano da Piero from Mildura, setting out the 'ingredients' of the conference at the first plenary session, identified the loss of a sense of place as a major casualty of prevailing tendencies to centralisation and homogenisation. Communities in the Riverland district, he said, are coming to rely on refugees to maintain their local economies: 'Our regions would not survive without the refugees to pick the grapes. Communities are being formed on the basis of temporary immigration visas.' Stefano's plea for a return to a focus on community and enhancing local identity was echoed by many other presenters throughout the conference.

Sara Selwood, from the University of Westminster in the United Kingdom, shared her concerns at the prescriptive nature of the UK government's social inclusion agenda as applied to museums (see also the May issue of *Museums Australia Magazine*). Funding there is closely tied to achieving social inclusivity targets, and this has brought some problems in its wake. Should the financial sustainability of museums and galleries depend upon the government's assumption that cultural provision can transform society, and on the measurement of this outcome? As Sara said, 'Believing that cultural provision is instrumental in social inclusion is one thing — proving it is another. We have to find a language for describing its worth.' Should an emphasis on collections be replaced by one on people — and on particular categories of people? Does over-regulation stifle creativity in museums?

Sara posed a number of questions: 'What would it mean to Australian museums to prioritise their activities?' 'How do we manage the expectations of government?' and 'What are reasonable claims about what museums can achieve?' All food for thought indeed.

Patrick Greene, Chief Executive Officer of Museum Victoria, looked back over his institution's 150-year history, and concluded that the debate that flourished in the nineteenth century on the role of museums — were they for amusement or instruction? — exercises us today. With sixteen million objects held by Museum

Victoria, 'collections are the bedrock of what the Museum still does'. As the former Director of the Museum of Science and Industry in Manchester, Patrick has 'always believed that museums have a social purpose, and that having to account for what we do is not unreasonable. The far greater danger comes from risk averse accounting against almost impossible measures over small sums of money — this makes creativity all the harder.'

Wim van der Wieden, General Director of Naturalis, the National Museum of Natural History, Leiden, Netherlands, and Chairman of the European Museum Forum, addressed both the issues of deaccessioning and developing museums as venues for lifelong learning, and stated that 'All possible means should be used to make leisure learners [the latest name for the energetic retired



Display at the Ballarat Gold Museum, one of the venues visited by delegates on the Conference tour day

Courtesy of Sue Scheiffers



Museum Development Officers Fiona Mohr, Vicki Warden, Zöe Scott, Lyndsay Bedogni and Maria Friend

Courtesy of Vicki Warden

Elizabeth Triarico spoke about the resurgence of the Geoffrey Kaye Museum of Anaesthetic History at the Conference

Mariea Fisher, Lorraine Fitzpatrick and Sara Sellwood at Sovereign Hill, Ballarat

Courtesy of Sue Scheiffers

group] aware of the possibilities of museums'. Wim's full paper can be found on the Museums Australia website.

Lynda Kelly of the Australian Museum's Audience Research Centre used the enigmatic graphics of MC Escher to illuminate her question: What does learning mean for adult museum visitors? She discussed the social and the sensory aspects of learning, and the need to take people beyond their experiences. We must raise questions, not just give answers — learning should involve meaning making, and allow people to see things from a different perspective. Learning should involve a degree of personal growth. Lynda noted that 'We focus too often on the delivery mechanism rather than the message'.

Alan Emery, Director of KIVU Nature Inc, and a co-founder of the Centre for Traditional Knowledge in Canada, also addressed the

question of meaning, in this case of objects. Meaning can be enhanced by involving communities, bridging the gaps between the museum's knowledge systems and those embedded particularly in Indigenous communities. He challenged museums to conduct what he called a 'guided conversation' with communities to bring them into the museum and allow them to provide the context for museum displays.

These are just a few of the insights gleaned from the banquet of presentations in Melbourne. Visit the Museums Australia website — www.museumsaustralia.org.au — and follow the link to the National Conference 2004 to access more 'food for thought' by conference presenters.

ROSLYN RUSSELL, EDITOR, *MUSEUMS AUSTRALIA MAGAZINE*

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A PALACE FOR THOROUGHLY MODERN MILLIONAIRES

ANNETTE WELKAMP



The Dining Room, Eltham Palace.
English Heritage Photographic Library

Smaller museums are always of more interest to me if the people who created them are evident in every nook and cranny. Sir John Soane's Museum is one such place, and Eltham Palace, also in London is another.

Whilst having been a home for many Kings and Queens of England over time, the most substantial presence felt nowadays is that of Stephen and Virginia Courtauld, its last private residents.

The earliest mention of a dwelling on the site is from the Domesday survey of 1086 when it was recorded as being owned by one Odo, Bishop of Bayeaux. Edward III and Henry VIII also spent much of their childhood here and notable visitors included Chaucer (who was twice set upon by thieves en route) and Erasmus (who once rose to the challenge set by a young Prince Henry of writing him a poem whilst on a visit).

Only the Great Hall survives from mediaeval times, the rest is a gorgeous, sophisticated and truly modern home in the Art Deco style. Eltham Palace as it stands today is a superior example of 1930s architecture and design at its very best. The Courtaulds were a wealthy and influential couple (he established Ealing Studios) who embraced the spirit of their times and all of the mod-cons it had to offer. The house boasts the then-new centralised

The Entrance Hall, Eltham Palace
English Heritage Photographic Library



vacuum cleaner hidden in the skirting boards and also a very discreet sound system throughout the downstairs rooms which allowed their record collection to be played and heard throughout.

The Palace was clearly both a stage for entertaining and a home for living. The public areas downstairs are sleek and sophisticated. The oval-shaped entrance hall, with its Australian blackbean veneer walls, glass-domed roof and sleek white modern furniture would impress any visitor. A tray is still set for cocktails, with martini glasses and shaker at the ready. This palace appeals very much to our modern sensibilities.

Many of the walls throughout the building are lined with wood, which gives a warm and homely feel to an otherwise large house. The dining room is in bird's eye maple (even the picture frames), Stephen's bedroom in aspen and his

library in Indian mahogany. The ceilings are dramatically moulded and lit. In the dining room, the recessed central portion is entirely covered in aluminium leaf on a blue background, which results in a shimmering effect at night when the lights are turned on. And in Ginnie's boudoir, the ceiling is ribbed, coved and mirrored for a stylish and subtle contrast with the pale walls.

The covetable library appears oddly sparse at first, the cupboards for all the books and papers discretely acting as closed pillars. Between each though is a series of recessed alcoves, to house amongst others Stephen's collection of fourteen JMW Turner watercolours. To protect them from the damaging effects of light, they were ingeniously protected by vertically sliding shutters, which slipped down in front of them when he was not using the room. The surface was then simultaneously used

THE PALACE WAS CLEARLY BOTH A STAGE FOR ENTERTAINING AND A HOME FOR LIVING. THE PUBLIC AREAS DOWNSTAIRS ARE SLEEK AND SOPHISTICATED. THE OVAL-SHAPED ENTRANCE HALL, WITH ITS AUSTRALIAN BLACKBEAN VENEER WALLS, GLASS-DOMED ROOF AND SLEEK WHITE MODERN FURNITURE WOULD IMPRESS ANY VISITOR. THIS PALACE APPEALS VERY MUCH TO OUR MODERN SENSIBILITIES.

to hang his collection of woodcuts and engravings by Dürer and Turner. Stephen was a serious art collector; most of the works now hang in museums around the world — including one Turner watercolour he gifted to The University of Melbourne in 1947.

The built-in furniture, such as Virginia's boudoir sofa with its shelves for books, a wireless and telephone, and the beds and bedroom features, all survive. The freestanding pieces have been carefully reproduced from old photographs, and perfectly complete a very evocative picture of the sophisticated lifestyle of the

Courtaulds and their guests.

The littlest room in the house provides an altogether different glimpse of the owners. In the upstairs corridor is a small alcove for the sleeping quarters of the Courtauld's pet ring-tailed lemur, Mah-Jongg. Bought at Harrods in 1923, he lived a life of luxury roaming through the house at will, also accompanying them on their travels abroad. When tired of a day's scampering around at Eltham, he was free to retire to this small caged room complete with window, central heating, escape ladder and walls decorated with a bamboo forest scene.

Eltham Palace is wonderfully quiet to visit, somehow slipping through the usual tourist net and avoiding the mass invasions typical of other palaces near London. It is managed by English Heritage, located on Court Road, Eltham and only twenty minutes by train from London Bridge. As is usual for northern European heritage properties, it is open at varying hours depending on the time of year. For details check www.english-heritage.org.uk. There is an entrance fee, a pleasant tearoom and a good store for take-home treats.

ANNETTE WELKAMP
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CAROL SCOTT

PRESIDENT'S REPORT AUGUST 2004

Ensuring the financial viability of the Association has been a key issue for the National Council since late 2000. This report outlines some of the factors which the Council has addressed, measures which have been adopted and strategies for the future.

History

The current Association was formed in 1993 from an amalgamation of several separate organisations. One organisation which joined the new MA was the Art Museums Association of Australia (AMAA) which brought into the new entity a substantial professional development grant from the Australia Council. This grant represented approximately twenty-seven percent of the total working budget of the new Association. In 2000, that grant came to an end with a resultant impact on the Association's budget and programs.

Strategy

Over the last four years, the Council and the National Office have implemented a financial plan based on four key strategies. These strategies are (a) seeking grants; (b) negotiating in-kind support; (c) building the membership base; and (d) developing other self-generated income.

Grants

In the current economic environment, available grants for non-government organisations are increasingly

limited. The Association has applied for, and been the successful recipient of, a yearly grant for administrative expenses (\$24,300) from Environment Australia under its Voluntary Environment and Heritage Organisations Program.

The Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts has also generously provided project funds for (1) the update and publication of *Museum Methods* and (2) the Remote and Regional Stream of the National Conference. The National Museum of Australia has provided \$10,000 per year for bursaries from remote and regional areas to attend the National Conference.

In-kind support

The National Museum of Australia provided accommodation, essential services and teleconference costs for the National Office from 1999–2004.

Further in-kind support for the National Association has been negotiated with *Museum Victoria* which hosts the Association's website and the *Powerhouse Museum* which has funded the President's travel costs. In 2000, the President approached the Council of Australian Museum Directors to seek their support for funding travel, accommodation and time to participate in Museums Australia Council meetings for employees elected to the Museums Australia Council.

IT IS INCUMBENT ON
EVERY MEMBER TO
RENEW THEIR INDIVIDUAL
MEMBERSHIPS AND TO
ENCOURAGE COLLEAGUES
TO JOIN THE ASSOCIATION.

Membership

An Association is as strong as its membership. Though membership has remained stable since 2000 at approximately 1900 *memberships* (equating to 8000 members), building the membership base translates into increased revenue, which enables the Association to undertake new programs and provide a greater critical mass for the purposes of advocacy.

In addition, research undertaken on behalf of the Council by the Membership Manager, Debbie Milsom, has revealed that membership fees for the Association are modest compared to other professional associations. Membership fees were increased across the board in 2001 and again for individuals in 2003.

Self generated income

Professional conference planners have consistently provided advice that the registration fees for Association's national conference are also modest given the quality of the program. From 2000, small increases in registration fees have generated income to build reserves.

These reserves have been called upon recently to fund the move, set-up costs and rental

for new accommodation at Old Parliament House, following the termination of a generous four year in-kind sponsorship with the National Museum of Australia which provided premises for the National Office.

Summary

It has been the adoption and implementation of a strategic approach to financial sustainability which has enabled the Association to progress work on behalf of its membership in challenging circumstances.

This four-pronged approach of seeking grants, negotiating in-kind sponsorships, increasing the membership base and building reserves will continue. In addition, the position description for the Executive Officer has been revised to include more focus on seeking grants, negotiating sponsorships and in-kind support. Future national conferences will be budgeted to continue to build much-needed reserves.

Finally, however, it is the membership base which contributes to the bulk of the funding for the on-going work of the Association. It is incumbent on each and every one of our members to renew their individual memberships and to encourage colleagues to join the Association. In this way, we can progress and develop the work of the Association to build a healthy museums and gallery sector for the future.

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AGM RESOLUTIONS

At the AGM of Museums Australia in Melbourne (21 May), several resolutions were passed.

1. That Council investigate the feasibility of updating the directory of museum and gallery venues.

Proposed: Annette Welkamp, **seconded,** Janice Kelly, **Carried.**

2. A resolution of congratulation to the organising committee of the 2004 National Conference was warmly endorsed by the meeting, and presentations were made to the members of the conference committee.

3. Based on the President's report regarding the need for future funding to support the association's activities, it is proposed that:

In the lead up to this next federal election a letter be written to the Federal Minister for the Arts requesting his support for the Association, noting the current number of museums and their visitor numbers with attachments showing the distribution of museums by electorate.

This be copied to all other relevant parties.

A *pro forma* letter requesting support for Museums Australia be prepared and distributed to all members prior to the election for them to use in relation to their own parliamentary members and others contesting the election.

Proposed: Janice Lally, **seconded** Anne Brake, **Carried.**

4. That Council investigate updating and republishing the *Cataloguing Manual for Small Museums*, which is an extremely valuable resource for all collecting groups.

Proposed: Ruth McLean, **seconded** Jim McCann. **Carried.**



Courtesy of Debbie Milsom

MEREDITH HINCHLIFFE

Many of you who attended the AGM of Museums Australia on 21 May during the Conference in Melbourne heard that our Executive Officer, Meredith Hinchliffe, had tendered her resignation for personal reasons. At our AGM I spoke of Meredith's contribution to the Association — her work furthering the Regional Cultural Alliance, her support for the Standing Committees, her negotiation of the new by-laws with the branches and the SIGs and, especially, her wonderful effort in moving the National Office to Old Parliament House in February this year. I know that you will join me in thanking Meredith for all the work that she has undertaken for the Association and wish her the very best for the future.

CAROL SCOTT
PRESIDENT,
MUSEUMS AUSTRALIA

ABS MUSEUMS SURVEY UPDATE

The Australian Bureau of Statistics survey of Australian museums, initiated by Museums Australia, the National Trust and the Federation of Australian Historical Societies, and assisted by the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, is progressing to schedule.

The survey will include museums that were open to the general public over the period 2003-04, and own a museum or artwork collection.

Survey forms will be sent to respondents in August. Museums Australia encourages all those who receive the survey form to complete it and return it to ABS, to create an accurate statistical record of the museum sector.

Any further enquiries regarding the 2003-04 Museums Survey should be directed to:

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COMING IN MUSEUMS AUSTRALIA MAGAZINE



NOVEMBER 2004

Alliances and Synergies

FEBRUARY 2005

Living museum 'treasures'

ANNE KIRKER

Critiquing the NGV International, John Schaeffer Gallery: Session at 'Food for Thought', Museums Australia National Conference, Melbourne, 21 May 2004.

Mid-afternoon is generally the time when the body's sugar levels need boosting. Hence it was with foresight that this year's conference organisers scheduled the 'critique' event at this very point on the second to last day of 'Food for Thought'. The session was packed, a testament to the interest that has been widely generated since the National Gallery of Victoria's refurbishment, of which Rachel Faggetter gave an overview in the May 2004 issue of this journal. Rather than attempt an obvious debate topic, namely that of the pros and cons of Mario Bellini's architectural and design incursions into the Roy Grounds building, the conference critique focused on an aspect of the permanent collection. It specifically addressed the hang of nineteenth century French and British paintings and sculpture. This collection has been installed at the southern end of level 2 in the newly named John Schaeffer Gallery and its attendant spaces.

To commence the critique, three NGV staff members gave well-practised individual presentations from the perspective of curatorship, design and public programs. Dr Ted Gott, Senior Curator of International Art, and Daryl Westmore, Head of Design, had no doubt delivered variations of the same positive justifications in-house before the Gallery reopened after five years, passionately defending their stance on how this European collection should be installed.

Most of the audience had already seen it first-hand: the grand central arrangement (which I shall refer to as the 'Salon'), flanked on either side by only slightly less grand display rooms. In the Salon, paintings are hung two or three high with bronze sculptures placed at intervals on rectangular black bases. The drama of this hang is matched by the entrance portals, again in black, and the deep blue-green toned walls which wrap up into the white ceiling. Although not as frenzied as the popular Victorian salons of Paris and London, this twenty-first century interpretation does create the impression of an abundance of visual interest to cater for a variety of tastes. Clearly the NGV was after a contemporary revivalist feeling.

The orthodox sequence for installing paintings at eye-level, evenly spaced apart, was adopted by the galleries on either side of the Salon and it was here that the NGV's masterworks were displayed. The first such room (depending on which side you enter) is heralded by the enormous trio of Puvis de Chavannes cartoons for the Panthéon that used to hang in the Great Hall and by significant Pre-Raphaelite oils such as John Everett Millais' *The Rescue*. If you enter from the other direction, JMW Turner's famous *Val d'Aosta* and John Constable's *Study of a boat passing a lock* stand out for attention in a room devoted to early English landscapes. These companion rooms to the Salon are more spaciouly hung and accompanied by lively written commentaries. In all, about a hundred European works are currently featured throughout the three rooms. Given that these spaces were available to the staff for out-fitting and installation only from



Photograph by John Gollings
Courtesy of National Gallery of Victoria

September for the opening in December 2003, any criticism was bound to be like water off a duck's back.

The critique respondents to the NGV presentations included two with art museum backgrounds: Jude Savage, formerly of the National Gallery of Australia and now managing Travelling Exhibitions at the Australian War Memorial, and Susan Herbert, who heads Education and Public Programs at the NGA. They were joined by a scientist, Dr Nurin Veis from Museum Victoria, an inspired choice with her non-specialist art background. There was indeed praise, especially for the Puvis and Turner rooms, leavened by the inevitable micro-criticisms. However, it was the Salon that became the focus of the session; a model that repays much further discussion and considered evaluation.

Criticisms against it included the fact that works hung high up could not be adequately viewed, even more so when some of the paintings were glazed and caught the light. It was too busy for one respondent and not 'over the top' enough for another. The sculptures were seen to impede the possibility of accommodating large groups (such as school children) in the space. For those on the panel who were trained as art

historians, the hang became problematic as to how and where to start evaluating individual images. They raised the issue of how specialist information is best communicated to a broad general public — where was the explanatory text introducing the public to the Salon, for example, or the informative video, the electronic site for accessing further details on works displayed?

On the defence, the NGV's mission statement was voiced: 'Bringing Art and People Together'. Apparently large numbers have gravitated to the Salon and lingered in the display since it opened. Maybe visitors feel more comfortable in a room where they can randomly select which pictures or sculpture to pause in front of, without the pressure of having to know something about individual works? Doubtless there are a number of reasons why the public has responded favourably to the energy of a tight and varied hang where major and minor works are installed without curatorial differentiation; where once again, Jehan Vibert's small oil of *French artists in a Spanish posada* is given the time of day.

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IAN McSHANE

**Treasures of the Museum.
An exhibition, website and
book by and about Museum
Victoria, Melbourne.**

Treasures of the Museum is the Museum of Victoria's major project to mark its sesquicentenary in 2004. The centrepiece of the project is a handsome publication featuring a wide range of MoV's most notable collections, selected by Museum staff with supplementary entries by several invited contributors. The project also includes a Treasures website and a self-guided exhibition trail at MoV's Carlton Gardens campus.

The book is structured around MoV's three organizing themes: Australian history and technology, Indigenous cultures, and sciences. Thankfully, the text foregoes an extended use of the treasures metaphor, which barely makes it through the book's introduction, although it does

extend to a generous description of museum staff as treasures. Rather, reference in the introduction to the featured collections as *moments* in the history of the museum seems a more appropriate metaphor, capable of sustaining the strongly historicised style of the project. The signature design imagery of the project includes a famous photograph of animal specimens atop a dray being relocated from the University of Melbourne to the National Museum of Victoria's Swanston Street site in 1899. This scene is recreated as a tableau in the foyer of the Carlton Gardens building. The main exhibition graphic reproduces a crude pin and card mounting system used by John Curtis for his insect collection, acquired by the museum in 1863. The use of this motif seems at odds with the book's suggestion that 'previous perceptions of museums might have been of grimy and dusty specimens, reeking of mothballs and packed to the rafters in dark and musty

vaults. This is a far cry from what we see today.' (p.5)

However, the contrast of old and new achieved through the placement of selected objects in the foyer of Carlton Gardens seems a calculated strategy to reassure visitors that collections are at the heart of the enterprise.

The strength of the book, for me, is not only its focus on some remarkable collections, but its outline of the complex international and colonial networks through which collections were acquired, and the intellectual and political contexts in which they were displayed. In the financially strained circumstances that most museums find themselves today, it is difficult to imagine the scale of collecting and research undertaken by the museum in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The book reinforces the importance of fieldwork as a distinctive and intellectually enriching museum methodology,

generally repaying the museum's investment many times over. The importance of Australia's tradition of amateur science and amateur collecting, and the contribution of each to the museum, is also recognised. Today, MoV's position in the production and circulation of museum-based knowledge differs in many ways from that of its antecedent institutions, but the fundamentals of collecting and research endure, and the book's claim that MoV's collections are of international significance is easily sustained. Viewed as an intervention in current policy discussion over museum collections, the book demonstrates very well the long-term value of collections and collections research.

Museums, of course, are wonderful places for intrigue, and this book has its share. It retells the wonderful story of the museum's first zoologist, William Blandowski, who attempted to name fish specimens he collected in an 1856 expedition to the Murray and Darling rivers after council members of the Philosophical Institute. *Cernua eadseii*, named after Dr Eades, was described as a 'fish easily recognised by its low forehead, big belly and sharp spine'. The ensuing scandal made the editorial page of the *Age*, saw publication of Blandowski's work stopped, and Blandowski return to his native Hamburg protesting unfair treatment.

The book sustains the reader's interest throughout and the text is remarkably consistent, given the eclecticism of the subject. There is an occasional tendency of writers to indicate that collection x provides insights to high-level themes such as manufacturing or domestic work, without providing an



McCoy Hall exhibition cabinets, Natural History Museum
Courtesy of Museum Victoria

example to illustrate the point. However, at around 200 words per collection, the exercise has all the limitations and frustrations of exhibition label writing. The contributions of the guest authors are less successful in my view. Several of the guests contribute personal reminiscences of collections, which sit somewhat uncomfortably alongside the learned contributions of other guest authors and museum staff. Any value added here is to the marketing of the project rather than our knowledge of the museum and its collections. The wordy biography of one guest author, admittedly a living treasure, is not far short of several brief collection entries.

The Treasures website (www.museum.vic.gov.au/treasures) guides visitors through a set of thematic pathways to the featured collections. This is a quite different intellectual structure to the book, better suited to the multi-media environment. I found the exhibition trail less successful than the book or the website. Notwithstanding my hesitation about the use of the treasures theme in an exhibition format, finding featured objects, even via the guide, can be a challenge. The display of several individual 'treasures' is supplemented with a copy of the book — a rather egregious piece of marketing in my view. Still, as MoV CEO Dr Patrick Greene suggests in his foreword to the book, perhaps it is the experience of the visit that is to be treasured rather than the individual objects.

The Treasures exhibition trail and website will be displayed until 31 December 2004. The book deserves a place in MoV's publication stable for some time beyond.

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PETER HAYNES

Monash University Collection: Four Decades of Collecting.
Edited by Jenepher Duncan and Linda Michael. Clayton Vic, Monash University, 2002.
ISBN: 0-9580828-39

This is a handsome publication, copiously illustrated with well-reproduced images in both colour and black-and-white. Apart from a Foreword by the Vice-Chancellor and a personal 'Recollection' by Patrick McCaughey, Foundation Professor of Visual Arts at the University, there are eight essays dealing with the history of the Collection (Jenepher Duncan); Australian art 1940s to 1970s (Kelly Gellatly); portraiture (Vivien Gaston); post-1960s Australian abstraction (Carolyn Barnes); contemporary Australian art (Ewen McDonald); prints (Cathy Leahy); photography (Stuart Koop) and sculpture (Max Delany).

Accompanying the colour plates is a number of short essays by a distinguished group of art writers. A list of artists represented (but not the works) in the Collection from 1961 to 2002, along with a list of donors and Committee Chairmen (I think they are all Chairmen?) are also included. Sounds and looks pretty impressive, and it is!

Jenepher Duncan's essay, 'Monash University Collection: shaping spirits', points out that the Collection 'spans the development in Australian art from modernism to postmodernism and it includes the establishment of federal and state government arts funding agencies.' It is, she continues, 'a distillation of our larger cultural history, offering an occasion to review afresh the development of contemporary Australian art.'

Unlike other university collections, the Monash Collection is characterised by

its very contemporary focus on works by emerging and established artists, much of it collected soon after it is produced. The establishment of the Monash University Gallery (now the Monash University of Art) in 1987 and its program, looking particularly at contemporary art, provided an important impetus to the thrust of the University's collecting habits and commitment to contemporary art.

The other essays each provide a succinct and focused profile of the topic, with useful parallels and contextual sources in broader Australian art history. Essays on individual works or groups offer short and (for the most part) sharply incisive discussions that deal with the work *as work*, ie the relationship to the Collection does not obstruct critical dialogue. The texts are placed adjacent to the image(s) discussed, enabling the writer's arguments to be cleanly absorbed.

All the above points to the quality of this book and its importance in supplying a single source on the Monash University Collection. What it doesn't do, and probably did not set out to do, is to give the reader some idea how the works in the Collection are dispersed across the University buildings and grounds. The texts and some of the images offer intimatory suggestions. We know that works are used for exhibitions both at the Monash University Museum of Art and elsewhere, the latter through a program of touring exhibitions and loans to other institutions.

We also know that this Collection of some 1200 works by 330 artists is one of which the University is justifiably proud. We don't know where or why works are placed, nor the reactions of those who use the buildings and the spaces populated by the art from the Collection. Does this matter and

is it possible to include this in a publication such as the present one?

The question of why universities collect is surely moot. *Monash University Collection: Four Decades of Collecting* addresses it in a perfunctory manner, with the implication that of course universities should collect. Patrick McCaughey's essay speaks of 'a commitment to the independence of the artist — the sheer exciting spectacle of contemporary art — (that) can be maintained within the walls of the academy.' These are noble sentiments, happily espoused on campuses across Australia. McCaughey writes that 'artists... are reminders of a (different) life of the mind: of the imagination, of vision, of instinctual awareness', and that is why he (and many others) assert the importance of the presence of the products of the artistic imagination within the realms of the academy. It is a salutary antidote to the dollar-driven policies pulling our universities down, to think that objects can move us away from the everyday... Or do they?

PETER HAYNES IS DIRECTOR OF CANBERRA MUSEUM AND GALLERY AND THE NOLAN GALLERY, CANBERRA.

KATHERINE RUSSELL

Liberating Culture: Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Museums, Curation and Heritage Preservation.
By Christina F. Kreps. London, Routledge, 2003.
ISBN: 0-415-25026-9

This book opens with a quote from the Provincial Museum of Central Kalimantan visitors' book, which equates that museum, 'Bagus! [very good]', with its colonial forebear, the

Royal Tropical Museum in Amsterdam. This positive endorsement stands in stark contrast to the visitor 'comments' I witnessed on a recent visit to a national museum in Southeast Asia. A sign on the door read: 'Apologise, on Saturday–Sunday we close the museum for election the fifth delegates.' [sic] Some kind person had defaced the sign with the response 'On this way you kill the tourism'. Someone else added the rejoinder, 'Tourism is already dead. This place sucks.'

With that in mind, as well as my own and other colleagues' sometimes frustrating museum experiences in the developing world, I was eager to read Kreps' findings on the state of and the potential for 'museum-mindedness' in these places. Not since Moira Simpson's 1996 *Making Representations* (frequently cited in this book), has there been a contribution to museological literature that comprehensively addresses the issues concerning the placement of the cultural products of 'the other' in western museums and the myriad implications of this practice. Whereas Simpson's focus was on 'museums in the European tradition... located in culturally diverse nations', *Liberating Culture* concentrates on museum and cultural preservation efforts in more homogeneous, traditional societies.

It is generally understood that museums in developing countries in the post-colonial era face an uphill battle in their attempts to mould themselves in the image of European museums. Indeed, whether this should be their goal has always been questionable. In her Indonesian case studies, Kreps does not tackle the challenges faced by large national museums like that in Jakarta. Instead, she offers some alternatives to the 'hegemony of



Hmong women demonstrating firearms, photo in Lao National Museum
Courtesy of Christine Pearson

Eurocentric museology' practised by provincial and community museums, keeping places and the like, in their efforts to preserve both material and, in some cases, intangible cultural heritage. Whether these methods are a comfortable fit with the policies and guidelines laid down by Indonesia's Directorate of Museums (*Direktorat Permuseuman*) is considered in the second chapter, 'The Eurocentric Museum Model'.

The detailed 'museum' models presented in Ch. 3 [positioned firmly within the intellectual schema of collecting as a universal practice] are not merely pale imitations of western curatorial and conservation approaches transplanted to another setting. Rather, they derive from traditional methods used within communities. The example of the preservation of heirloom property (*pusaka*) in Central Kalimantan province on the island of Borneo is a perfect illustration. Despite her endorsement of a 'people's museography' Kreps inserts a coda, warning that 'it would be shortsighted to suggest,

for example, that professional conservation techniques are categorically unsuitable for the protection of non-western cultural materials... The point is to give credence to bodies of knowledge and practices that have been historically overlooked, or devalued.' (4) The majority of examples of indigenous 'curation' (a term I'm not comfortable with, but which is becoming more prevalent) are derived from Indonesia, where Kreps conducted her fieldwork. These are contextualised by additional references to indigenous heritage preservation practices from other cultures: Native North America, Micronesia, Papua New Guinea, Aotearoa New Zealand, Nigeria, Mali and Aboriginal Australia — an exercise which proves to be an exemplar of comparative museology.

The other major theme of the book is cultural repatriation, where Kreps once again intersects with Simpson, though the former extends the topic by bringing readers up to date with developments in the United States. She demonstrates how major

museums have altered their practices and adopted more culturally inclusive approaches in the wake of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA). The response of Native North American groups, community leaders and museum professionals to the NAGPRA process is recorded here with sensitivity and insight. The situation in Aotearoa New Zealand is discussed too, in the context of the presentation of Te Papa Tongarewa as a bicultural institution.

The titles published so far in Routledge's 'Museum Meanings' series are proving to be cornerstones in the ever-expanding scholarly literature on museums, and this book is certainly a worthy addition. Through the presentation of a varied sample of indigenous museological modes, Kreps has achieved the task of bringing the methods and philosophies of 'the other' to prominence. Indigenous interpretations of museum-mindedness are contrasted with the methodologies of the Eurocentric museum profession, interspersed throughout with the edicts and

guidelines set down by ICOM, UNESCO and other museum bodies. What this book meticulously reveals is that 'the liberation of culture allows for the emergence of a new museological discourse in which points of reference are no longer solely determined and defined by the west' (145). And that can only be a good thing.

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LINDA YOUNG

Australians and the Past.
Edited by Paula Hamilton and Paul Ashton. Special issue of *Australian Cultural History* no.22, 2003. Available from University of Queensland Press, PO Box 42, St Lucia Q 4067.

Australian history became a topic of contention rather than congratulation in the wake of the Mabo decision and the Stolen Generations inquiry, which, in the 1990s, exposed mainstream attention to another side of the story of British settlement. Academic historians had researched Aboriginal history for twenty years and school teachers and heritage managers had incorporated bilateral perspectives in curricula and interpretation for at least ten years, when white Australia's black past shot into politics. Professional historians were delighted to find that history mattered deeply in the public sphere, though shocked by fundamentalist interpretation — or rather, anti-interpretation. It was Australia's first taste of what had been named in the USA the 'history wars'.

Meanwhile throughout the

previous decades, another dimension of history had been growing in Australia, in the form of private interest in genealogy; oral, family and local history; and the remains of the past conserved as homes and heritage sites. Museums, libraries and heritage agencies reaped the fruit of such enthusiasm, servicing another constituency to whom the past mattered a great deal. Yet at the same time, history studies in schools and universities faltered, dogged by the age-old charge of being boring and irrelevant.

How can we understand the range of expression and engagement which these conditions encompass?

Australians and the Past offers some substantial evidence on this question, plus the reflections of a variety of academic and professional historians. Most importantly, the volume reports the findings of a survey undertaken by historians at the University of Technology Sydney, which was essentially an Australian version of the ground-breaking US study by Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (1998).

Aiming to explore the influence of formal and informal histories in Australians' minds, the project team chose the term 'the past' for their subject, and found a tremendous range of sites and practices whereby people do it. Eighty-five to eighty-eight percent of respondents reported that they looked at old photos and watched historically-themed movies, demonstrating how central is visual culture today. Sixty-nine to seventy-five percent 'made history' in the form of saving heirlooms and researching family trees. Around fifty-five percent visited museums and historic sites and attended reunions, and forty percent went to public anniversaries or

commemorations. About a third engaged in historically-oriented hobbies or collecting. For history museums and heritage sites these numbers demonstrate a *b-i-g* catchment of energy and attention.

There's even better news for museums in views about the trustworthiness of history sources. Museums were ranked by fifty-six percent of respondents to be the *most* trustworthy, by thirty-six percent as *very* trustworthy and by zero percent as untrustworthy (the complete opposite of politicians, as Hamilton notes in her summary). This echoes the finding that objects (fifty-three percent of respondents) and then places (forty-five percent) are by far the most convincing media of historical narrative. Museum and heritage people should feel honoured by the public conviction that we preserve and present important truths.

Numerous further enticing topics, which museum historians and educators will want to know, are analysed and commented on by eminent and elegant writers. Let just one more be discussed here: the Powerhouse Museum's contribution to the project, a study of attitudes towards the past by regional NSW museum workers, largely volunteers.

This revealed powerful commitment to preserving the past via museums, making connections between past and present, connecting the young with the past, and experiencing the past through real objects and the devices of 'living history'. Professional historians will note with alarm the tendency to expect facts that support singular truths, and the lack of distinction between the past and the reconstructed past. It is clearly a function of the gap between academically-trained and self-taught historians, which points to a silence in the overall study.

'Academic history' is one mode of 'using the past'. So, acknowledges *Australians and the Past*, are commemoration, valuing relics, genealogical research and re-enacting events. Yet for all the recognition of such forms of popular history, it is the academic version which has authority. The following is scary ground to tread, and its exploration probably won't come from academe, but museums are rare interfaces between amateurs and academics, and the social mandate of museums requires us to acknowledge the values that inform the span of communities. The much-vaunted multiplicity of contemporary perspectives in museums now needs to recognise the kinds of history that drive non-professionals. That's the *really* liminal territory between Australians and the past.

LINDA YOUNG TEACHES ASPECTS OF CULTURAL HERITAGE MANAGEMENT AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CANBERRA.

MEREDITH HINCHLIFFE

Museums in Laos

In January this year I travelled to Laos with a group of textile enthusiasts. We viewed private and public collections and visited workshops and showrooms, museums, temples and other cultural sites. This review aims to survey the character and condition of museums in Laos.

We began in Luang Phrabang, the site of the first Lao kingdom, visiting the Museum of Luang Phrabang. It is housed in the former royal palace, at the foot of Phu Si, a hill that dominates the landscape. The palace was built



Viewing exhibits in Lao Textile Museum
Courtesy of Christine Pearson

1904–09 in a mixture of French and Lao styles, extensively adapted to Lao tradition. In 1970–75 it was refurbished and the museum opened in 1976.

A museum booklet claims the government is working to restore, maintain and increase the collection housed there. However, we were not convinced of its commitment, as there is only one hard-working curator and a director with no experience of museums. The Swedish, Japanese, US and Australian governments have sent conservators and curatorial experts to develop displays and help with conservation. The goal is to restore items to their original state using traditional materials and workmanship.

The Throne Hall, once used for important national ceremonies, is an imposing room, enhanced by mosaic wall decoration. Created by Lao artists, the 1970s mosaic depicts folk tales and scenes of the culture and history of the people of Luang Phrabang.

Showcases around the walls display Buddhist and historic objects, though in some cases their significance seemed tenuous. Interpretation is poor and tourist-unfriendly, with little in English.

In Vientiane, capital of Laos, we visited the Lao National Museum. Australian conservator Marion Ravenscroft, who has worked on the Museum, had sent me a report which made depressing reading, but did not prepare me for the dreadful reality.

The building is a typical French colonial site, one of few to survive in Vientiane, but it is in a parlous state. Unglazed windows let in wind, dust, and rain; water seeps into display boards, in some cases are placed against windows; exposed electrical wiring looks dangerous; a bird's nest was built in open brickwork in a stairway; and the building is being consumed from the inside out by termites.

However, the staff persevere, and the museum is a

tourist attraction for Lao people and international visitors. The building houses a fairly traditional range of objects, photographs and text panels.

We met Bronwyn Campbell, who has been working at the museum under the Australian Volunteers Abroad program for the last few years. An ANU-trained curator, Bronwyn took the position in Laos to pursue her interest in Asian art and has become an avid devotee of Lao textile art. She is gradually improving standards of exhibition and interpretation, with both Lao and English captions.

Bronwyn was finalising a new exhibition called *Many Peoples, One Nation: Ethnic Diversity in the Lao People's Democratic Republic*. The Lao PDR has considerable cultural diversity, and each of the ethnic groups contributes unique traditions in fashioning domestic items, clothing and ritual objects. Supported by the Australian Government through the Australian Development

Assistance Direct Aid Program, the exhibition explores the lifestyles and traditions of some of these groups through their costumes, farming techniques, housing and beliefs. This small display stood out for its contemporary western museological practices.

In Vientiane, we visited the Lao Textile Museum, owned by the Hansana Sisane family. It was established to collect antique fabrics, which are being taken out of Lao *en masse* by international collectors.

Mr Sisane heard his elders tell that antique items are precious, bringing good luck and happiness. They are reminders of ancestors, as his great grandmother said: 'look at these antique items, and you will see the faces of your ancestors.'

The Museum is housed in a typical Lao building, one large room with high timber-lined ceilings, timber walls, polished wooden floors and a wide verandah. The collection is rolled and stored in cupboards and chests, with some on view in specially designed glass-topped showcases. Mr Sisane claims to have hundreds of antique silk fabrics, which will serve as 'documents' for future researchers.

Museums as known and understood by Westerners are relatively new in Laos. The climate is harsh and the country is poor — a difficult environment in which to sustain museums as we know them. The Lao government is only just beginning to understand that traditional culture attracts tourism, and that it should invest in infrastructure to reap the benefits. Meanwhile it is a challenging, but wonderful, place to visit.

MEREDITH HINCHLIFFE IS A FREELANCE ARTS WRITER. SHE RECENTLY STEPPED DOWN AS EXECUTIVE OFFICER OF MUSEUMS AUSTRALIA.



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