



*The magazine of Museums Australia Inc.*

# MUSEUM NATIONAL

VOL 3 • NO 3  
FEBRUARY 95

The last three months of 1994 have been a hectic period for Museums Australia. The long awaited cultural statement 'Creative Nation', 'Arts 21' in Victoria and 'Future Directions for Regional and Community Museums in NSW' have all been launched and their impacts are beginning to be felt throughout the country. Museums Australia has held its first annual conference in Fremantle WA and our new Council has been elected.

## Annual Elections

The following Council members were announced recently. President: Des Griffin; Vice President: Sue-Anne Wallace; Treasurer: Genevieve Fahey; Secretary: Margaret Anderson; Julia Clarke (Women and Museums SIG); Karen Coote (Conservation SIG); Max Dingle (Membership SIG); Frances Lindsay (Visual Arts SIG); Zoe McKenzie Smith; Bernice Murphy (President International Committee (ICOM)); Warwick Reeder (Registrars Committee of MA); Robert Swieca (Education SIG); Linda Young. State Presidents on national Council include: Peter Cahalan (SA); Dr John Coe (Interim NT); Moya McFadzean (Vic); Richard Mulvaney (NSW); Brian Shepherd (WA); Chris Tassell (Tas); John Thompson (ACT); Qld currently vacant.

## Publication Awards

This year some 200 entries were submitted from 60 different institutions. Twenty-nine awards were announced. A full list is available on request and it will be published in the next issue of *Museum National*.

## Professional Development Grants

John Barrett-Lennard, Chair of the Visual Arts / Crafts Professional Development Committee, announced the awards at the conference. These were: **Senior Fellowship** - Denise Robinson to take up a four-month residency at INIVA, London, to investigate current curatorial practices and develop subsequent projects in Australia. \$15,000. **International Exchange Program**, in partnership with the British Council - Amanda Daly to participate in a three month professional exchange between Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery, University of Western Australia and Mead Gallery, Warwick Arts Centre, University of Warwick, England. \$6,000. **Self Directed Program** - Nicholas Baume to take up a two-month residency at New York University's Grey Art Gallery to work on the formulation of an integrated program of exhibitions, special events, seminars and publications and to observe the range of innovative public programs. \$7,500; Janet Hughes, National Capital Planning Authority, to investigate conservation techniques for contemporary outdoor sculpture in the USA and Canada with such organisations as SOS (Save Outdoor

Sculpture). \$2,800; Stephanie Lindquist to investigate dedicated children's spaces and programs within three American museums - the Art Institute of Chicago, The Children's Museum of Indianapolis and The Metropolitan Museum of Art \$6,200; Gael Newton, National Gallery of Australia, to investigate the practices of individuals and organisations at the forefront of digital imaging in Europe and America. \$5,000; Jane Scott to take up an internship within the Art Institute of Chicago and the Museum of Modern Art in Los Angeles in the area of community participation in art museums \$7,500. **National Placements (Internship Program)** Kirsten Fitzpatrick, National Gallery of Australia, to work at the Queensland Art Gallery\* on an exhibition of contemporary Australian craft titled 'Material Pleasures', \$6,000; Damian Kelly, Queensland Art Gallery to develop a program within the National Gallery of Australia's\* Education and Cultural Action Department that aims to increase accessibility by contextualising works in terms of popular culture and social history, \$6,000. (\* These galleries are co-funding the internship programs with Museums Australia.)

## ICOM General Assembly

John Button, former Minister for Industry and Trade has agreed to chair the special board being jointly established by ICOM Australia and Museums Australia. A preliminary theme of 'Museums, Diversity and Ownership' was also decided upon at the Conference.

## Creative Nation Launched

Cultural policies have been in the news lately especially with the high profile launch of Creative Nation, the Commonwealth Cultural Policy. Many museum professionals will be disappointed with elements of the policy - the cultural heritage area is not well represented and the continuing uncertainty about the level of support for the National Museum does not inspire confidence. However the policy does strengthen the Australia Council's role and by placing the Foundation within its operation may finally get it off the ground. The Executive of Museums Australia is currently considering a response.

## 1995 and beyond

1995 is the Australian Tourism Commission Year of Arts and Culture. I hope this augers well for museums and museum professionals across Australia.

Greg Marginson  
Executive Director

This issue of *Museum National* is shorter than usual due to the inclusion of our annual report.

This issue features an article by Cam Gray, who looks at the gap between

what the museum intends to be seen professionally - the building's image, its internal spaces and its exhibitions - and how these are actually seen by the visitor... 'The strategies of marketing, of circulating the visitor, of announcing and qualifying the exhibition are loaded with ideologies that condition thought and perception. Unless the visitor can focus completely upon the object of the message, blocking out the contextual detail, the museum speaks too loudly to be ignored.'

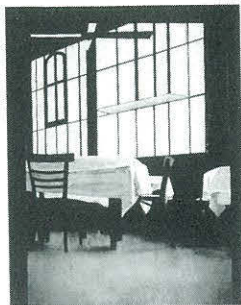
Gordon Metz, keynote speaker at the 1994 Museums Australia Conference, gave an inspirational paper on museums in South Africa: the current debates concerning South Africa's museum profession and the formidable financial, physical and ideological constraints under which they operate. An abstract of his paper is published in this issue.

Marianne Wallace-Crabbe, Publications Officer (Arts), recently interviewed John Barrett-Lennard for *Museum National*. In the visual arts segment they investigate the display and collection of installation works in Australia.

There are two important inclusions in this issue's extended Noticeboard: the resolutions of the 1994 Museums Australia Conference, and an abridged version of Museums Australia's Gay and Lesbian Policy, which is being distributed in *Museum National* to allow for members' comments. For those who would like the full text of the policy before commenting, copies are available from the national office. During the next year we will be endeavouring to include more news about Museums Australia's committees and special interest groups. The national body, comprising many previously separate museum organisations, is now just over a year old. It is important that the membership is kept informed of policy initiatives if Museums Australia is to work effectively and cohesively, and *Museum National* has an important role to play in this respect. The conference resolutions and the Gay and Lesbian Policy are not just important documents in themselves, they also provide useful insight into Museums Australia - the kind of organisation it is, its objectives, and how it works on behalf of all museum personnel across Australia to raise standards of professional practice. Likewise, if readers of *Museum National* would like to see particular issues covered or feel their professional concerns are not being addressed, please contact the editor.

The highly successful conference in Perth last November was testament to just how effective an organisation like Museums Australia can be in uniting the museum profession. *Museum National* hopes to continue this process during 1995.

Linda Richardson  
Editor



Front cover

'Restaurant' (detail), by Kate Daw, 1993. Oil on canvas, 86cm x 61cm. Represented by William Mora Galleries. Photographer: Paul Gleeson. (Kate Daw is one of the recipients of this year's Anne and Gordon Samstag International Visual Arts Scholarships.)

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### Museums Australia Inc. is formed by the amalgamation of:

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- Council of Australian Museums Association (CAMA)
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# Change in the Face of the Museum's Apparent Obduracy

*by Campbell Gray*

To those of us who either work in or research museums and museum practice, the thought that anyone could accuse the museum of being fixed, static, obdurate, irrelevant to, and inviable within a complex and changing society, is quite appalling. And the idea that this accusation has been sustained almost without variation within mainstream theoretical discourse over the past 25 years is outrageous.(1) Nonetheless, the accusation and its longevity are fact.

In a recent essay entitled, 'The Magic Kingdom of the Museum', American theorist, Donald Kuspit, again worked over some of the salient elements of this critique, of which the fundamental principles are valid to all museums.(2)

Kuspit begins his essay: 'To say that an artwork has been shown or bought by a museum still affords it enormous cachet, despite the fact that the museum has been discredited as a mausoleum'.(3)

He adopts Theodor Adorno's metaphor of the museum as a mausoleum (4) and encapsulates a continuing theme of the museum as a place of death or, to paraphrase Daniel Buren, the museum as a cemetery in which objects are aligned and labeled like gravestones.(5) This death describes a condition in which objects are dislocated from their original (and therefore vital) context (where their meanings and values are integral to their setting), and brought into the museum to be 'neutralized and reified by being given the imprimatur of the museum's authority'.(6)

By isolating the object in this unnatural place, where ostensibly unnecessary contextual detail is removed, the museum ensures the audience can establish an intense and focussed relationship with the object (or the institutionalised message). In this state, the object and the message become artificial without natural function, a focus point only for inspection and sociologically unchallengeable. In this sense the museum has not shifted its position since the beginning of the century, and it stands obdurate against the volatility of its external social context.

But Kuspit also describes the museum as 'the Madonna of the second birth' in which the object '...may, in fact, be reprocessed by the institution, be born again as a spiritual phenomenon superior to its mere material existence in its pre-museum life'.(7)

This condition is one in which the object, neutralised in the museum, is rescued from complete annihilation by becoming a thing of fetish, a

commodity of value and authority. The object stands as exemplar or archetype, thereby signifying much more than mere incidental existence within a genre - 'a perfect thing in an imperfect world'.(8) But this other meaning is not one that the object carries naturally. It is one that is imposed upon it by the political, social and cultural program of the museum and the systems to which it accounts. Thus, the individual object and the institutionalised message embodied in each exhibition is hostage to systems of power and their culturally pervasive program.

An event that occurred in Canberra in October graphically describes this condition. The front page of *The Sydney Morning Herald* on Wednesday 19 October displays a bizarre photograph, largely occupied by the shadow of the Prime Minister, Paul Keating, at a lectern. The Prime Minister's monumental shadow predominates over what appears to be a segmented abstract painting, and overpowers his actual image which is reduced in the bottom right-hand corner. Clearly, this is not just a documentary image of the Prime Minister, but one that also symbolises the nature of the event.

The image represents the Prime Minister's presentation of the Government's Policy on the Arts, *Creative Nation*, at the National Gallery of Australia the previous day. In that socially prominent and physically independent institution, the figure of the Prime Minister is dwarfed, much like any other visitor within the museum would be. But the political message, symbolised by his shadow, becomes enlarged and predominant due to the imprimatur of the museum's socially inscribed cultural authority - a perfect policy in an imperfect world. Indeed, even the largest of artworks is overshadowed and appropriated to legitimise the message. His policy is not directed towards the philosophical integrity of artistic activity, but the artistic activity in the museum is hostage to his message which 'concerns identity - the identity of a nation, community, individuals'.(9) Justin MacDonnell editorialised: 'Never before in Australia has cultural activity been so overtly hitched to a nationalist cause. Never before has art been so self-consciously appropriated to a national image-building for foreign, as well as domestic, consumption'.(10)

In leaving the parliament and entering the museum to present his message, Keating underscores the belief that the museum is a socially secure place, motivated

by grand principles, outlasting the objects and the visitors it contains. It is a place of authority and legitimacy. The museum is also thought to be a place of the past possessing a life more stable than contemporary society's - it is a place of reassurance. In that sense it lives according to an agenda that has little relationship with the volatility of its context. It is locked in an outdated mode, isolated from the reality of life beyond its walls, unyielding in the face of frenetic change and social dissolution, and only interested in the grander political and national meanings that it embodies. Regardless of the kind of subversion that is attempted by politically astute curators and artists, the museum inevitably neutralises and normalises the elements that constitute the exhibition. 'And, in the end,' Kuspit asks by quoting Paul Gauguin, 'doesn't the revolutionary's work become official, once the State takes it over?'(11)

However, some artists and curators since the early 70s have attempted to harness that normalising authority and use it as a vehicle from which their subversive message is projected. This strategy, named by Joshua Decker as 'critical complicity/complicit

criticality'(12) - is where artists (and curators) are dependent upon the museum's collaboration in order to be critical of that same system that publishes their work. But inevitably this criticality is also absorbed, neutralised and made official by the museum.

But in spite of this seemingly hopeless inevitability and the accusation that museums are fixed and unresponsive, they do change with alarming speed and many of those changes, notionally, are in direct response to political and social exigencies. Indeed, the overriding condition for the architectural design of the museum is that it must facilitate change - moving or vanishing walls, flexible systems of lighting and power to facilitate any option, the architectural envelope simply functioning as an enclosure for a constant cycle of spatial reconstruction and demolition - the enshrined concept of the temporary exhibition. But even the envelope alters regularly. Architectural additions and redefinitions of substantial scale occur with surprising frequency and new museums are constantly emerging.

Moreover, as rapidly as government and social policies are redirected, the museum responds. Multiculturalism, Aboriginal rights, particularly with respect to material culture, the rights of the silent and the oppressed to participate equally in society, health issues, environmental exigencies, and many other key social and political concerns become central to curatorial and managerial policy in museums. Museological structures are established as 'rapid response' mechanisms in order to represent and interpret these issues which impact socially with greater frequency and speed than the normal three to five year museum programming cycle can accommodate. Even the nature of museological activity itself is constantly modified.

The museum can be seen as a fragile, ephemeral form which self consciously attempts to reconstruct itself regularly according to political and professional imperatives. The professional agenda is one of constant change, of redefinition, and its financial life depends upon its notional responsiveness. But this condition does not have any effect necessarily upon the meanings and identities that the individual museum visitor or society itself obtains from the museum, its displays and its objects. What is professionally intended and what is socially or individually received remain theoretically unrelated and are often confused and even opposed. It could be argued that under these conditions, museum professionals and their output are hostage to cultural and political programs that are much more potent than the particular scholarly focus of their work. What is motivated from within is different to what is seen from without.

Perhaps this is the key. Those who write the critique are museum visitors who observe and receive the museological message. They see the 'work' (the object, the exhibition, the institutionalised meaning) in relation to a context. They proceed to the work having moved from the external social context,

Italy 1400-1500. Victoria & Albert Museum, London, 1993. Regardless of the exhibition's declared discourse, curatorial methodology and the architectural space are primary influencing factors in the reception of exhibitions.



through the often imposing entrance and the various transitional spaces coded carefully with authority and behavioural imperatives. By the time they have reached the space of display, they are psychologically conditioned to receive what appears to be a predetermined message from a context of institutional politics, isolated from a volatile external society. Indeed, the strategies of marketing, of circulating the visitor, of announcing and qualifying the exhibition are loaded with ideologies that condition thought and perception. Unless the visitor can focus completely upon the object of the message, blocking out the contextual detail in true modernist mode, the museum speaks too loudly to be ignored.

On the other hand, museum professionals are within the museum, isolated from their external society for long periods of time, and focused psychologically and intellectually upon their work. They are residents of the museum, not visitors. The museum as context of the work is forgotten through familiarity - only the work is new and challenging. Professional outcomes are often determined according to imperatives that are independent from the social and spatial contexts of their reception. To the museum professional, the museum becomes ideologically invisible - a mere container.

The distinction, therefore, is between what is professionally *intended* to be seen - the building's image, the internal spaces and the exhibitions - and how it is seen from a social context. The professional activity of the museum appears to be hostage to the grander and more potent agendas that have been brought forward from the previous century and embodied within the museum as a social and ideological form. But in that form, and in spite of the disjunction with that which occurs inside, the museum is a vital emblem that functions dialectically in relation to its society. It is the place to which society looks for assurance of its cultural character and sophistication. Attention upon it continues to increase and its social viability does not appear to be threatened. If society is highly volatile and the museum's value is steadily increasing, it could be argued that society's changes incorporate the museum. In other words, the museum remains viable regardless of social dissolutions and reconstructions - it is in fact, an integral element of that society.

The answer is not in the museum's ruins, as Douglas Crimp would have us believe (13), but in an open and dialectical relationship between the museum, its sociological context, and its internal professional activity. For the ideology of the museum and the value of its contexts to remain invisible in the outcomes of museological activity is theoretically indefensible. It is to declare that it is the professional activity inside that remains in modernist mode, isolated and internally related. Museum professionals must become visitors, open to the political and ideological programs of the museum, sensitive to the psychological conditioning that occurs throughout the visitor's processional movement through the museum,

in tune with the specific dialectics that operate between the museum and its particular contexts, empathic with the various potential receptions of the museum by its visitors, and integrated in the cultural lives of their communities. The museum's political, ideological, sociological and cultural programs must be constantly integrated with every aspect of museology and discussed dialectically with every professional outcome.

Campbell Gray

Senior Lecturer, University of Western Sydney  
Nepean

## References

- (1) Sherman, D.J. 1994, 'Quatrèmere/Benjamin/Marx: Art Museums, Aura, and Commodity Fetishism', *Museum Culture: Histories Discourses Spectacles*, Sherman, D.J. and Rogoff, I. (eds), University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, pp. 123-143. (Sherman argues that some of the principles of the critical discourse can be found in the writings of the French theorist Quatremere de Quincy in the early 1800s. However, the general political climate of the late 60s and early 70s which motivated various disobedient art practices, the writings of Theodor Adorno, Daniel Buren, Hans Haacke, together with the editorial commitment of John Coplans and Lawrence Alloway of *Artforum*, have helped bring the debate into mainstream theory.)
- (2) Kuspit, D. 1992, 'The Magic Kingdom of the Museum', *Artforum*, April, pp. 58-63
- (3) Kuspit, op. cit.
- (4) Adorno, T. 1981, 'Valéry Proust Museum', *Prisms*, Adorno, T. (Weber, S. & S. tr), MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, pp. 173-185
- (5) Buren, D. 1979, 'The Function of the Studio', *October*, 10, Fall, pp. 51-58
- (6) Kuspit, op. cit., p. 58
- (7) Kuspit, loc. cit.
- (8) Kuspit, loc. cit.
- (9) *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 1994, 'Culture part of our common heritage', Wednesday October 19, p.11 (extract from the Prime Minister's cultural statement).
- (10) MacDonnell, J. 1994, 'A comprehensive scheme that has been hitched to a nationalist cause', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Wednesday October 19, p. 9
- (11) Kuspit, loc. cit.
- (12) Decter, J. 1990, 'De-coding the Museum', *Flash Art*, pp. 140-142
- (13) See Crimp, D., 1980, 'On the Museum's Ruins', *October*, 13, Summer MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, pp. 41-57; and Crimp, D., 1987, 'The Postmodern Museum', *Parachute*, No 46, March - May, Toronto, Canada, pp. 61-69

# Museums in a Democratic South Africa: Building on a Heritage of Struggle

*by Gordon Metz*

*Gordon Metz was keynote speaker at Museums Australia's inaugural conference in Perth last November. In his paper he outlined the current debates in South Africa's museum world and identified the continuing and formidable financial, physical and ideological constraints under which they work. He also discussed current pioneering initiatives and assessed the future of museums in a democratic South Africa. This is an abstract of Gordon Metz's paper. The full text, which includes a detailed case study of the policies and programs of the Mayibuye Centre for History and Culture in South Africa, is published as part of the conference papers.*

On 27 April 1994 South Africa became a formal democracy for the first time. That this transformation was achieved through a negotiated settlement, in a country with seemingly irreconcilable interests and identities rooted in a violent history, has been hailed by the world as nothing short of a miracle. But the old establishment institutions mostly remain intact and intense debates rage as to how these can be changed to consolidate democracy, and contribute to the achievement of lasting peace and socio-economic stability.

South African museums are at the centre of these debates. Whereas these institutions have in the past negated and distorted the history and culture of the majority of South Africans, all now agree that they have

to change and play a role in the process of nation-building that lies ahead. This provides South African museums with a unique opportunity to shape a new direction. It also presents enormous creative and intellectual challenges to South African museologists. If museums are to contribute to the process of nation-building they will need to change their own deep-rooted identity shaped by colonialism and apartheid.

## **Historical Background - Museums and Past Identities**

As a recent issue of *Museums Journal* emphasised, South African museums not only emerged from, but also reflected and celebrated the colonial and apartheid systems.(1)

There are over 500 museums in South Africa. In 1987 there were 18 so-called 'national' museums directly funded by central government.(2) They treated black and white history separately, with black history invariably being dealt with in anthropological and ethnographic displays, graphically illustrating that "anthropology" has meant the story of conquered peoples, as told by the conquerors, while "history" has traditionally been the story of conquering peoples - again as told by themselves'.(3) In South Africa, whites have decided which aspects of black culture are to feature and how these are to be displayed. The number of African

curators or museologists in positions of management nationwide, could easily be counted on one hand (with three amputated fingers).

Under apartheid, the black majority was effectively written out of history. In the words of South African historian, C. Bundy, these official Eurocentric representations were 'to education what the black hole is to matter: a kind of anti-knowledge'. To walk into a South African museum is to enter a place suspended in time and space. No wonder then that black South Africans generally perceive museums to be alien spaces.

In the current debate on what to do with the monuments and symbols of the apartheid era, some argue that they are an insult to the present and should be torn down or put away from the public gaze. Others argue for their retention and re-contextualisation to keep us vigilant to

The Mayibuye Centre for History and Culture in South Africa was launched in 1991 at the University of the Western Cape. Focussing on apartheid, resistance, social life and culture, the centre helps to recover neglected aspects of South African history, and to create a space for cultural expression to help the processes of reconstruction and change. It comprises: a documentary archive, a library, a film unit, an art collection, and a publication unit. From the Mayibuye Centre's Robben Island Archive - the 'Apple Box' archive - so called because released prisoners inevitably left the island carrying their possessions in cardboard apple boxes, many of which have now been donated to the centre.



injustice. The same arguments are being used for many museums - perhaps they should be put in a museum!

South African art museums have also been guilty of skewed representations in their collections and exhibitions.<sup>(5)</sup> Gerard Sekoto's painting, *Yellow Houses*, acquired by the Johannesburg Art Gallery in 1940, remained the sole work by a black artist in any public collection until the 1960s.

Ironically, the most vibrant and dynamic expression of South African culture - the culture of resistance - never found its way into South African museums. Museums and galleries abroad were the institutions that gave a platform to this culture during apartheid's darkest days.

### **Apartheid, Change and Personal Identity**

When we look at the history of apartheid, we need always to look beyond the formal history of institutions, laws and 'politics' to what it meant for people as people. We need to look to the level of everyday human existence to fully comprehend the intellectual and cultural impoverishment - the waste - that has been the real tragedy of apartheid.

Identity for South Africans is much more than a theoretical notion in postmodernist intellectual discourse. Identity for us is physical - so real, so tangible you can almost see it, taste it, touch it. It is an identity that has been shaped by a life and death struggle against an imposed identity; a struggle for self-determination that has at once an individual, a collective, and a national character.

Identity is person-centred: it is complex and multi-layered, always changing, dynamic, organic, never static; it is not genetically determined, but shaped and moulded by a range of factors. Identity is as much of the heart as of the head - it is as much felt as it is thought of. This is important for museums.

### **Constructing New Identities - Towards a New Museums' Strategy for South Africa**

Given the history of apartheid, how are we to create a new identity for museums in South Africa? How are we to overcome the suffocating structural gridlock and conservative mind-set to affect transformation? Is it possible to disengage from the past?

I propose a strategy broadly informed by the theory and practice of the liberation struggle in South Africa. It assumes that museums and cultural institutions will have to be restructured to bring them in line with the new non-discriminatory constitution and to enable them to contribute to the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), the new Government's guiding program for creating peace and socio-economic stability in the country. It contends further that for museums in South Africa to be revitalised they need to go beyond formal 'political' change to new ways of thinking and acting.

I believe three other areas also need to be addressed urgently.

#### **(a) The need for new definitions for museums:**

Museums in South Africa (because of their history) often lack the conceptual and intellectual capacity needed

to turn themselves into places of creativity, learning, education and healing, responding directly to the changes around them. Having excluded black South Africans in the past, they have themselves become cut off from the main forces and sources of change and creativity in the country, leading to a climate of intellectual sterility and insecurity.<sup>(6)</sup> This has been further compounded by South Africa's isolation from museum discourse and development in other parts of the world.

A starting point for change, therefore, should be an examination of the definition of a museum that most South African museums ascribe to: 'Museums exist to interpret the cultural and natural world to the public through the use of real objects'.<sup>(7)</sup>

I believe this definition has severe limitations. I want to offer a new definition for museums in South Africa: 'Museums are dynamic, democratic and representative public institutions that both shape and manifest the consciousness, identities and understanding of communities and individuals in relation to their historical, cultural and natural ecology. They do this through the values they attach to the things (both material and intangible) they choose to collect, document, research, preserve and make accessible. In the process, priority is given to community participation and education.' This is a much more complicated definition of museums, but then museums inhabit a complex space in society. This definition establishes an identity for museums as exciting, popular and relevant institutions with an inherent capacity to impact meaningfully on society. Most importantly, it underlines the primacy and centrality of education within all museum functions.

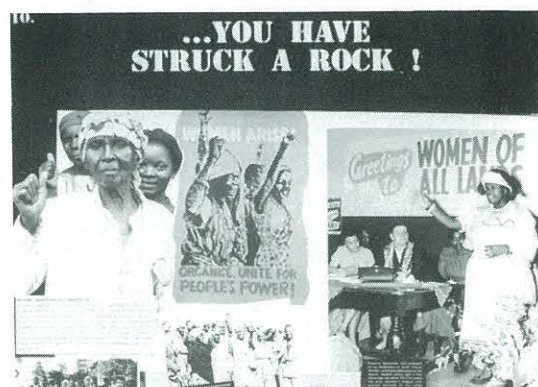
#### **(b) Museums must be people-centred, not object-centred:**

The essential difference between the proposed new paradigm and the old is that the emphasis is now on a 'people-centred' approach, which demands a conceptual and structural re-orientation for museums.

It relies upon a tested strategy for its application: the self-conscious construction of new individual and collective identities through ongoing struggles for self-determination and political, economic, cultural and psychological liberation. This strategy was used in the mid 1980s by the South African liberation movement to mobilise

ordinary men and women in a collective effort - a 'people's war' - which effectively forced the apartheid regime to the negotiating table. It also finds expression in one of the six basic principles underpinning the RDP, namely, that 'it is

*You Have Struck A Rock!* (detail), from the Mayibuye Centre's exhibition 'Apartheid and Resistance', currently touring South Africa as part of the Anne Frank International Travelling Exhibition.





people driven, emphasising development through the involvement and empowerment of all'.(8)

The development of individual and collective consciousness and empowerment is the essence of the liberation ideologies and struggles witnessed throughout the process of decolonisation in Africa. As the leader of the liberation struggle in Mozambique, Samora Machel said: '...We wanted to liberate our people, and we found that people have to liberate themselves if the thing is to be real. We found that people could not liberate themselves unless they were active participants in the process of liberation.'(9) With grassroots participation people learn to develop an understanding of their 'general situation' out of their 'particular situation'.

This broad political strategy has shaped the present political and cultural ecology of South Africa - and it has an immediate application for the transformation of museums today.

Linked to this person-centred approach in museums is the need to develop displays and activities which concern the human condition. They offer museums in South Africa the greatest opportunity to bring people together, to engender an empathy, a solidarity and understanding amongst ordinary human beings. If museums can convince us that despite all our differences we share essential commonalities which bind us to a common past and a shared destiny, that we have shaped this past and therefore have the power to shape our destiny, then they can help lay the foundations on which a culture of tolerance and understanding can be built in our country.

This subjective component of identity is much more complex and problematic than the intellectual component, and demands compassion and sensitivity on the part of the museologist in South Africa. It challenges the validity of museums, it questions their imposed Eurocentric model, and it brings to the surface inevitable and uncomfortable contradictions. For example, the largest proportion of South Africa's people are without adequate housing, have no electricity in their homes, are subject to the most terrible violence and insecurity, and have no access to adequate health care. Many are poorly fed, unemployed, illiterate. Yet, when they enter a museum, they see themselves displayed in dioramas situated in sumptuous colonial buildings, safe and secure in glass cases policed by attendants, well lit, well dressed, well fed, and in good health. They are better off as museum objects than they are as human beings.

#### (c) **Creating a new kind of museologist:**

If the mobilisation and empowerment of ordinary people to effect change has been the strategy of the liberation struggles and the new reconstruction process in South Africa, then the deployment of politically conscious and committed individuals to catalyse the process is crucial. In a war they are called guerillas. In a broad political struggle they are called activists, and they include cultural activists.

I am not suggesting that museologists should don camouflage and attack their own institutions. Rather, that museums and museologists should make provision for more dynamic structures in order to encourage meaningful change. These 'transformation units' can be

autonomous groups with flexibility within institutions, or the institution itself can commit itself to an aggressive change strategy. I believe this provides a practical way in which South African museums can shift towards a new relevance. It will be difficult to turn these fully laden super oil tankers around in mid-ocean, but it can be done if we go beyond mere bureaucratic adaption to the new order. And if we have a few tugboats to nudge them in the right direction, we may just succeed.

### **The Way Ahead for Museums in South Africa**

The Reconstruction and Development Programme describes the arts and culture as crucial to the development of South Africa's human resources, and makes the point that culture must be firmly linked to areas of national priority such as education, health, housing and tourism to ensure that it is entrenched as a fundamental component of future development.

South African museums must become organic to the greater South African community until they reflect in every way the composition, history and cultural diversity of all our people. If the collective heritage of struggle and all that makes us South Africans finally finds its way into our museums, we are destined to have the most wonderful museums in the world. And if the people are empowered to do it themselves, the thing will be real.

**Gordon Metz**

**Mayibuye Centre for History and Culture in  
South Africa**

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*Museums Australia's Conference Proceedings 'Identity, Icons and Artefacts', will be available from Museums Australia (WA) in early 1995. Cost: \$25 inc p&tp. Please make cheques to WA Museum, Museums Australia Conference.*

# A Morbid Fear of Installations . . .

*Marianne Wallace-Crabbe interviews John Barrett-Lennard*

*How much collecting of installation work was done by art museums and public galleries in the 60s and 70s?*

I don't think a great deal was done then, nor is a great deal being collected today. However, there was some interest by particular curators in what was happening. People like Bernice Murphy, or from another position Daniel Thomas, were aware of and vitally interested in much of what was happening in the 70s.

For a number of artists operating at the time the art museums were not relevant, they were seen as unresponsive and inappropriate in some ways. On the other hand there were a series of large temporary events, such as the Mildura Sculpture Triennials, where artists were starting to experiment with various facets of installation work.

*I suppose the question really falls into two quite separate categories: that of the artists and what their intentions were, and then the institutions and whether they were or weren't collecting. So, perhaps we should look at the artist's role. There were, according to Juliana Engberg, artists' decisions at that time to make work of an ephemeral nature. Some of this work was based on Marxist principles, one corollary of which was to make work that would be difficult to collect. What's your comment on that?*

There were definitely attempts by people to avoid institutionalisation, to do things that precluded the kinds of mechanisms of control, ownership, aesthetic hierarchy etc, that they saw art museums, public galleries and the art market as employing. Works were ephemeral, made from materials that were simple or impermanent, they were done quickly, and done in other sites. There was a desire to do work of the moment that could respond to a particular dynamic and discard or challenge the mechanisms of history. A dialogue about site specific work surfaced in Australia, and artworks which were specific to a particular location, to its history, social or formal qualities could not be easily relocated or duplicated in another setting. And then the question arises, of course, what happens when this work is displaced to the art museum? Can it be adequately relocated? You had the big-name Americans doing their large land-art pieces, people like Robert Smithson and Michael Hiezer and Walter Di Maria - things which could only ever pass through the museum's walls as documentation. (The museum or collector could,

however, purchase a site on which one of these works was located for permanent exhibition.)

There are also issues about artists becoming increasingly concerned with their viewer's embodiment. The fact that you have a body - that the viewer can never be entirely abstract or remote - that you may enter into an artwork was connected with a strong sense of physicality and in some cases with an increased interest in the psychological dimensions of the artwork. Again, some of those things don't easily translate into the spaces of the traditional art museum.

*On the subject of artists' intentions, the work of people like Barry Humphries and Ti Parks come to mind. For instance, work produced by Barry Humphries in the 50s was recently displayed in a satellite exhibition that accompanied the Surrealism exhibition at the National Gallery of Australia. I believe that some of Humphries' work had to be reconstructed because it hadn't survived in its original form. I wondered whether this is, in fact, historicising what was meant to be a thing of the moment.*

It depends on the work and the circumstances. You get into a complex territory between the artists' intentions and the desire of the museum to conserve and preserve in order to make available the prior

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Pus in Boots. 1953, reconstructed 1993, Courtesy of the artist and National Gallery of Australia.



moment, and to enable some understanding of that moment. Artists' intentions shift too: installations may have been seen as ephemeral but then later the artist felt that there was some value in displaying it again. Certainly there can be a process of historicising work and dislocating it both in time, as you're referring to, and spatially when you place a work that was deliberately messy in a very tidy, high modernist art museum setting.

*Is this an example of art practice and the curatorial role parting company?*

It's an example of a fairly deliberate challenge to the structures of art museums to say what are they doing, why are they doing it, and to be clear on how they respond to changes in the way artists are thinking and working. The obvious early 20th century example is Duchamp, with his challenges to structures of exhibition and display at that point.

There can also be a more deliberate, almost archival approach to representing prior installation works. While the group of artists around the Inhibodress Gallery in Sydney in the early 70s, Mike Parr, Tim Johnson and Peter Kennedy, were by no means always working with installation, their works were conceptual and ephemeral in nature. Much of this work was seen again a few years ago in an exhibition curated by Sue Cramer, which toured nationally. Much of it came out of the artists' personal archives, and a group of major Australian artists of that period have had long-term interests in the archive, in a place where they can record their own work - perhaps as a substitute for, or challenge to, art museums and critical structures which were seen as inadequate or hostile. The work from Inhibodress remained located in a certain moment, even as it was represented. The danger of historicising something is to displace it from any moment, to suggest that it is universal, and that it is not located in a particular context and time.

*When institutions acquire this kind of work do they generally negotiate the terms of display with the artist?*

It is important for both museum and artist that the structure of the work and the requirements for display be understood, be well documented and be agreed to as part of the process of acquisition.

*Does an artist have copyright of the actual manner in which a work is installed?*

The artist has a moral right to have their work displayed in a form that is not altered significantly or damaged. For a lot of installation work, conditions of display are fundamental to the work. Altering those in any significant sense can be argued reasonably by the

artist as fundamentally distorting the work - and at that point major battles can begin.

*Just recently, I think it was at the National Gallery of Victoria, Maria Kozic's work *Birds*, was to be part of a new exhibition. This work needs to be suspended at eye level, which is, of course, quite difficult if you've got people moving through the exhibition. As the artist could not agree to the birds being suspended at a higher level, the work was not included in the exhibition. Is this a common example of what can happen to works when the public is put in some kind of physical risk?*

I'm not familiar with details of the case between Maria Kozic and the NGV. There are a number of cases where something similar could easily happen, particularly where the work requires the viewer to move within it. Installations are not sculptural objects that can be displayed on a wall or on a floor, even without a plinth. Raising the birds above one's head is going to alter, in fairly significant ways, the viewer's reaction to it. There's a longstanding tradition of artists making works that have some degree of peril attached to them, in engendering some kind of visceral reaction. This has happened, notably, in performance with people like Stelarc but there have been parallel installation projects where a sense of displacement, threat or uncertainty was integral to the work - where, in theory at least, the distance between viewer and object or experience is diminished or alternatively made more visible. In general, art museums have been reluctant to deal with this work when their structures tend to be set up on the basis that a distance between viewer and object is always to be resolutely maintained.

*Some curators have raised the problem of the allocation of space for these works because they often require a lot of floor or wall space. One curator said that space is not the real issue for not showing these works - it's rather the view of value for money. That is, institutions have a morbid fear of audience reaction and rejection and therefore showing these works is often a risky proposition that an audience might find difficult to understand.*

I can relate to the value for money proposition. Questions about the perceived value of any challenging, contemporary artwork (and particularly ones which are not painting, and thus may not be as readily seen as a strange but still ultimately comprehensible continuation of an existing craft tradition) continue to be at issue for public institutions. It is not just the supposedly philistine media or anonymous public which may question the value or importance of collecting installation work, but also sections of their boards or other museum staff.

There are also some arguments made about space

for installation works. When rehanging a collection, putting a substantial installation work on display may require a space that could otherwise be used for ten or twenty other works. It's rare for art museums to display a really substantial installation work as part of their collection. It happens, too, that where works have installation components or components involving technology as part of them, the videotape or whatever technology is used is rapidly removed because it may wear out, or it's noisy, or the attendants tend to react against it, or the video monitor is needed elsewhere. This can be interpreted as a critical reaction to this work but may also be as much an uninformed and even petty kind of response to the demands of the work.

Conservation also needs to be discussed in this context. I'm conscious of the ephemeral nature of some technology that is increasingly used in a large number of installation works. What happens to work from the 60s and 70s when eight-track tapes and tape-players, which various people used then, are no longer available? What happens to work from the 80s when the slide tape-recorders some artists used then are no longer available? Museums need to look at acquiring the technology as well as the ability to repair the technology. Translating the specific components of the work across to new technology that becomes available is also an option but most conservators (and many curators) are unfamiliar with these issues and are not used to thinking about these matters.

One work I'm looking at now would involve a transfer from early VHS videotape, (ie. ten or twelve year old videotape) to CD ROM, which would make it more available now and less vulnerable, though in turn it, too, is likely to be superseded in another ten or fifteen years.

We touched on the long-term display of some of

these works, but there have been artists interested in establishing spaces where an installation work or a major work can go on display for a number of years or permanently, (to the extent that anything can be permanent). You can visit the Louvre and see a whole series of paintings that you know will be there year after year. There has been interest by people working as curators and artists in setting up similar situations in which you would be able to see a major installation by a contemporary artist now and still be able to see the same work in twenty years, or even longer. There have been moves in this direction in both Europe and the USA over the last decade. In an Australian context, in a paper for the 1989 AMAA Conference, Peter Tyndall (1) called for this kind of space, for a site that can be dedicated to a single artist or work, a space which then becomes a particular type of museum, one where new contemporary art would become part of an ongoing and developing heritage rather than disappearing. What the conceptual or philosophical implications would be of this have not been widely debated (perhaps because it seems so unlikely to happen). I think, though, that if art museums are to build contemporary relevance, or if structures like a re-modelled museum are to develop which can keep pace with the contemporary, then more effort and commitment will be necessary to address installation along with a range of similar, difficult and often transient practices.

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*John Barrett-Lennard is a Perth-based independent curator and writer.*



## MUSEUM STUDIES

- PhD in Museum Studies:  
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- Master of Museum Studies:  
1-2 years (or 2-4 years part time).
- Graduate Diploma of Museum Studies:  
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- Graduate Certificate of Museum Studies  
1 semester (or 1 year part time)
- Associate Diploma of Museum Studies:  
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Most courses are offered both on-campus and also off-campus through the University Centre for Open Learning.

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## Women and War

*Through Women's Eyes. Australian Women Artists and War 1914-1994. Australian War Memorial, to June 1995*

The theme of women and war conjures up a number of stereotypes gleaned largely from British and American war movies, where women are represented in a variety of support professions: nurses at the front; cooks in canteens; and munitions workers in factories. Women were in support roles. Artist Vida Lahey, for example, was sent by her family from Queensland to London to establish a base for her brothers and cousins when they were on leave. The importance of this exhibition is that it does not simply record the female stereotype during wartime as, for example, Hilda Rix Nicholas's powerful, universal image *A Mother of France*, (1914), representing a well-proportioned peasant woman sitting in her kitchen waiting resignedly for the son who may never return. This exhibition provides not only a view of the services rendered by women artists during the wars, but of women in general.

Striking images include *Transport Driver* (1945), by Norah Heysen, which reveals a hefty woman at the

wheel of an army truck. The driver is unsentimental and unheroic, unlike so many of the heroes portrayed by male war artists, such as George Lambert, during WWI. Stella Bowen's group portrait of the Australian air crew of a Lancaster Bomber began in a series of pencil sketches from which the painting was completed after the whole crew but one had died during an unsuccessful mission. The image of the crew is to my mind the most powerful image painted by Stella Bowen. They are seen as if shrouded by their flying gear, their leather caps are labelled with their names while their badges at the base of the painting are held up by wings reminiscent of early Renaissance angels who hover over scenes of the Deposition. This painting carries heavy emblematic content and the artist has instilled the image with her own feelings about war and death.

'Through Women's Eyes' successfully suggests different women's perspectives and views on war. Most works are small and contain non-heroic content. Women tended to describe everyday events and personalities, such as Norah Heysen's *WAAF Cook* (1945), a large woman presiding over a sink with an egg whisk perched on the bench top. Stella Bowen's

watercolour *Remains of a Fly Bomb* (1944) records her own desire to paint a small detail of wartime experience and to turn it literally into a *nature morte*.

The exhibition charts the two world wars, the Korean War and the Vietnam War. Ros Evans' photomontage *All the Fine Young Men* (1992), offers a procession of collage photos, medals, and newspaper cuttings. War memorabilia and the printed image call for our attention. *War is Peace: Peace is War* (1991), is an installation envisaging a not-so-new Orwellian world where war toys play a prominent part in the baby's world: the baby's cot has camouflage bedding, the walls are covered by *Apocalypse Now*-type imagery with helicopters jostling with smiling politicians and a bomber serves as a mobile over the cot. In the 1970s posters by Pam Debenham, Toni Robertson and Chips Mackinolty we have a similar narrative of the popular portrayal of war as imaged in the popular Hawaiian shirt with its brilliant icons of mushroom clouds where Tahitian paradises had once been.

It could be said that what is revealed in this exhibition is the conscience of civilisation and its frailty. Away from the rostrums of smiling politicians and ministries of war where old treaties are broken so new ones can be made, away from the clichés of war zones and male glorification of war, we have the less heroic view of shattered streets and houses painted by Dora Meeson in London during WWI, and the bits and pieces left in the wake of war. During the war, many of these artists also worked in voluntary capacities as nurses, drivers, police volunteers and munitions workers.

The low profile of women artists during the war, their lack of official status and general subsidiary presence is reflected in the space allocated to this exhibition. It is in the bowels of the Australian War Memorial discreetly stowed away in a back room behind the larger, more bombastic displays which document the bunkers, the combat zones and machinery of male soldiers and the male artists who depicted them.

Nora Heysen. *Transport driver* (Aircraftswoman Florence Miles) 1945. Oil on canvas. 66.6 x 81.8 cm. Australian War Memorial.



Despite the low-profile character of this presentation and the small, room sheet catalogue which has been allocated to it the work selected is extremely interesting. Curator, Lola Wilkins, has made a selection which is both challenging and memorable. An exhibition such as this really deserves a more ambitious catalogue and more documentation about the artists and their artistic and extra-artistic production.

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**Museums, Objects and Collections**

*Museums, Objects and Collections: A Cultural Study*, by Susan Pearce. Leicester University Press, London 1992. \$32.95, Distributed D.A. Information Services.

'Collections... will always be, and should always be, at the heart of the museum operation', writes Susan Pearce, Professor of Museum Studies at Leicester University. They are unfashionable words in these days of visitor consciousness and access primacy. Indeed, collections and curators are sometimes dismissed as the epitome, or even the cause of the musty-dusty images that museums long to throw off. The shift to accord attention to visitors is timely, for it had been arrogantly denied by the authoritarian museum of the past, but it is counter-productive to condemn the essential characteristic that distinguishes museums from department stores and schools.

Collections - even if largely invisible in storage - are what museums are about. Preserving them as the material archive of culture and the physical record of nature must be the first priority of museum managers. The second imperative in our business is to exhibit and interpret. The purpose of Pearce's book is to review theories of meaning by which collections may be interpreted.

To some degree then, *Museums, Objects and Collections* is a primer of cultural theory. But Pearce also delves into the complex of historical ideas that still inform today's

concept of the museum. She analyses the construction of the museum object and of collecting. The crucial idea is of selection, based on an array of criteria ranging from the mad to the acceptable, but always containing cultural (if sometimes idiosyncratic) value. The history of what is deemed culturally valuable makes a wry account of fashions in human thinking and museum presentation.

As products of European modernism, museums contain a core ambivalence of that culture: the contest between impure materialism and materialist success, which endows a peculiar dynamic of meanings contained in objects. Yet the very materiality of objects also gives them special characters which comment on human life and history. They are markers and enablers of social life; they carry the past into the present by being 'real'; and in being possessable, they amount to a source of exchange value. Politics is the relation that mediates between these characters, and museums thus constitute the reference collections of social intercourse.

And this is just the introduction to the topic! Pearce moves on to explore explanations of the phenomenon of collecting, from fetishism to play, from organising the world to objectifying the self. She roams the arena of the creation of meaning out of objects, loping through functionalism, structuralism, historicism, Marxism, semiology and post-modernism. Not all of these have yet been made to apply to cultural institutions, let alone material cultural analysis, so Pearce's steps are often original and challenging. She concludes with a thoughtful discussion of the Popperian theory of objective knowledge, presented as an antidote to nihilistic post-modernism. Out of this she can write: 'The past and present of the museum is the past, present and future of us all', and that is a heartening thought for museum workers who cherish their craft.

The book includes a useful appendix of six models for artefact analysis, more or less based on the theoretical fields discussed in the chapters. In my experience some are more useful than others, but they

offer a substantial resource for students and curators to develop new understandings of their objects and collections.

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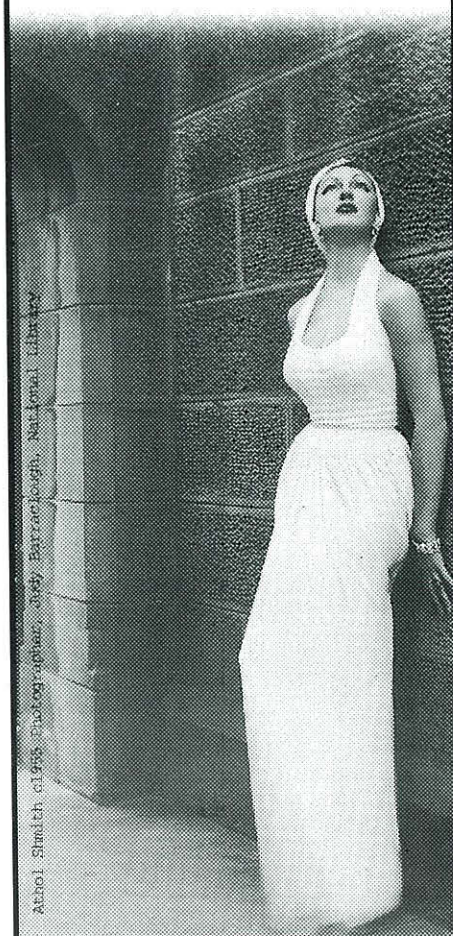
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## Setting Standards in Britain and Victoria: an overview of museum accreditation

**The Victorian Museum Accreditation Program (MAP) was launched in August last year. MAP is loosely modelled on the UK's Registration Scheme for Museums and Galleries and in 1994 Kirsten Freeman, the program's coordinator, visited the UK to look at their scheme. This report highlights some of the similarities and differences of both programs.**

MAP was initiated by the Victorian Museums Advisory Board (MAB), an advisory committee to the Minister for the Arts, and is jointly managed by Museums Australia (Vic) and Arts Victoria, ensuring an effective balance between industry and government is maintained.

It is a two-tiered program aiming to be inclusive and relevant to the broad range of organisations defined as museums. Applicants apply for initial registration, which involves a written questionnaire concentrating mainly on policy issues, and then the more rigorous process of accreditation. This stage may take up to three years to achieve during which the provision of training, personal assistance and support is important. This stage was launched at the end of 1994.

Staffed, volunteer-managed and privately owned organisations are eligible to apply, and 29 museums are now registered under the program.

With the MAP office located in Melbourne and more than 480 museums operating in Victoria, it is becoming increasingly necessary to co-opt other service providers throughout the state and to establish links with organisations beyond the museum sector.

This is one area in which the UK's Museums and Galleries Commission has been particularly successful, due partly to the 'sensitive' manner in which it has been managed and the basic minimum standards required. Their scheme, which they have managed since 1988, now has over 1500 museums participating and has been effectively promoted to other museum service organisations. Their support has been essential in its management. The MGC has also made a concerted effort to secure the participation of the large national museums, viewing their involvement as essential to the scheme's credibility. Eight national museums are now registered including the British Museum, the Victoria and Albert Museum, and the Tate Gallery.

In Victoria, MAP's program managers will be actively seeking broader publicity and representation of the program during the next year. The current database of registered and accredited museums is being expanded to provide potential sponsors, publishers and tourism agencies with information on museums in the program. Recipients are also being encouraged to promote their accredited status to other funding/sponsorship bodies. An informal partnership with the Victorian Tourism Operators' Association (VTOA), which manages an accreditation scheme for its members, has also been established.

As part of its overall programs of assistance, Arts Victoria is also seeking to facilitate networks and partnerships amongst Victorian museums. Since 1993, its Museums Unit has funded regional curators to work intensively with groups of museums on a temporary basis. These curators will assist in identifying and assisting museums in their local area to apply.

My recent review of the MGC's Registration Scheme for Museums and Galleries in the UK has highlighted the need for MAP to continually evolve and to reflect emerging issues. In the UK, registration has to date focussed on 'behind the scenes' work, particularly documentation, and while the scheme has been successful in dealing with the very real backlogs in this area, it fails to reflect the current challenges facing museums. This traditional approach has come about for several reasons. When registration was launched in the late 1980s, the museum profession was generally cautious about being seen as a 'business operation' and as a result, the scheme places little emphasis on business planning. Also, the accreditation program launched by the Museums Association in the late 1970s ultimately failed,

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The iron clipper *Loch Ard* was wrecked near Warrambool, Victoria on 1 June 1878 with the loss of 52 lives. Two days after the wreck, this life-size Minton earthenware peacock was washed into Loch Ard Gorge in its large packing case. The peacock was put in the care of the captain and was destined for display at Melbourne's International Exhibition of 1880. The Loch Ard Peacock is permanently displayed at Flagstaff Hill Maritime Museum, Warrambool. The museum is co-hosting the exhibition, 'Mary Rose Life and Death on Henry VIII's Lost Warship' from December 1994 - 26 February 1995. Flagstaff Hill Maritime Museum is a MAP registered museum.



disenfranchising some of the museum community. It was criticised at the time for being too demanding and consequently, the MGC takes a more inclusive approach. In its current form, the British scheme does not adequately address changes occurring at local authority level, including internal audit processes and competitive tendering. A second phase of registration is to be introduced in 1996 to address some of these issues.

In Victoria, MAP is entering an exciting stage in its development where the real benefits of the program will begin to appear. In 1995, promotion will increase with information sessions being directed towards specific geographic areas or types of museums which have not yet been applied. The continuing challenge is to maintain a

system which is relevant to participant museums, service providers, funding bodies and ultimately the visiting public.

**Kirsten Freeman**  
MAP Coordinator

Contact Kirsten Freeman at Museums Australia (Victoria), c/- Arts Victoria, Private Bag No. 1, City Road Post Office, Vic 3205. Ph: (03) 684 8888, Fax: (03) 686 6186.

*Kirsten Freeman's visit to the UK was made possible through a grant from the Australia-Britain Society's 1994 Menzies Scholarship. Her employer, Museums Australia (Victoria), supported her visit in recognising it as a professional development opportunity.*

## The Gallery Museum: a house for self-narrative, self-actualisation and butterfly art: observations on the Regional Galleries Association of Queensland's (RGAQ) 1994 Conference 'Cultural Linkages'.

**Life is very nice, but it has no shape.  
The object of (the) art (museum) is actually to give it some  
and to do it by every artifice possible...  
truer than the truth. (1)**

The RGAQ presents conferences on an annual basis to address the needs and concerns of public art galleries throughout Queensland. 'Cultural Linkages' was the main professional development initiative for this association in 1994.

The August conference in Townsville attracted a diverse audience. Throughout this two-day event ten presenters embraced and articulated notions of difference, diversity, narration, self-actualisation, ethnicity and marginalisation.

'Cultural Linkages' was timely in that it gave both speakers and audience an opportunity to once again consider the roles and functions of the museum/gallery. More importantly, it clearly identified the art museum as a site where, for individuals and communities, self-narration and actualisation can occur.

Narration is *telling* rendered through storytelling and inquiry. Annals, chronicles, histories, depictions and representations are the processes employed by the museum/gallery to produce 'a truth' (an exhibition), a story for all to see and experience.

The development of self (as artist, cultural worker, advocate, or community) is promoted through the reflective reconstruction of experience.(2) Reflective reconstruction is what the museum/gallery is best at: considering, constructing and realising the human condition through the *storytelling* mechanism of exhibitions. The exhibition process and product clearly supports self-actualisation: *concreteness, the here and now, the reality of existence*. Perceived 'truths' or 'realities' are part of the museum/gallery's lexicon.

Today, as never before, the museum/gallery has to develop, through well informed and articulated policies and programs, a firm commitment to the *here and now*. This means embracing diversity and change. Regional galleries have to be able to respond quickly and effectively to their communities' diverse and changing cultural and social conditions.

The papers presented at 'Cultural Linkages' reflected this call. Topics such as protocols and indigenous culture, New Internationalism, Queer Art as parable and diversity, policy-making for a multicultural society, regionalism, the exploration through self-narrative of ethnicity, difference and marginalisation, all spoke of new stories to be told by the museum/galleries of the 1990s and beyond.

Living in a post-colonial world is to bring into focus the belated yet relevant postmodern agenda of deconstruction and poeticised French philosophy. The modernist meta-narratives of rationality, emancipation, autonomy and progress (3) implied by Colleen Wall in her paper on Aboriginal protocols, also explored the notion of 'antithesis'. Our museum/galleries with their Eurocentric lineage have yet to understand not only cultural difference, but also oppositional difference. They can do this by first becoming map-makers and discovering the new, and at times threatening terrain of homelessness or dispossession so often identified by aboriginal peoples. Secondly, these gallery/museums have to become tourists, then travellers, and finally guides giving their respective publics opportunities to fully explore what it means to be *other* and *aboriginal*.

Ian McLean, in his paper 'Pallawah Renaissance: Indigenous Cultures and the New Internationalism', used the pretext of an exhibition of Victorian Koori paintings organised for Arthouse in 1990, to explore the historical and theoretical frames of exhibiting Aboriginal art today.



Interested in exploring 'the historians, theorists, critics and curator's invented models which exceed the colonialist binary of nativism and imperialism which we have inherited... (McLean) clearly identifies the colonisers oppression of indigenous groups, along with their legitimisation of indigeneity for a home'.(4) He believes that museum/galleries can play a part in this reconciliation process (finding a *home* for the oppressor and the oppressed) by curators actively relinquishing their own curatorial power and negotiating with Aboriginal artists to set their own agendas.

To negotiate as a curator is to acknowledge the 'other' as a source of storytelling. A curator's stories are invariably other people's, reconsidered and reinterpreted. In this post-colonial world, they all consider displacement as an ongoing theme.

'Seeing Diversity: A Gay Perspective', a paper delivered by Simeon Kronenberg, reinforced the '(an)other' (gays and lesbians) as marginalised and displaced, but insisted that it is problematic to talk about gay as a label of difference, 'as there are conflicting and disparate agendas within this broad descriptor'.(5) Through an examination of selected contemporary Australian Queer-themed exhibitions, and a succinct overview of the draft GLAMA (an acronym for Gays, Lesbians and Museums Australia) document circulating for comment throughout museums at the moment, Kronenberg identified the struggle curators and artists have in compromising their principles and/or their exhibitions in light of individual, institutional, and societal pressures and attitudes towards gays and lesbians. Gay and lesbian artforms offer challenges to the museum. Kronenberg states that museums should not be afraid to represent difference.

Mary Dimech, program manager with the Australia Council, spoke with conviction about the arts for a multicultural Australia in regional galleries. She questioned the dominant paradigm in museum/galleries that supports the exclusivity of Western 'universal aesthetics' at the exclusion of works by non-english speaking artists. The Australian Government's policy on multiculturalism at the level of rhetoric, links the idea of difference to social justice, as well as economic efficiency. It suggests that all Australians must be able to contribute to the nation's cultural and economic development. How this commitment is translated into the practices of state cultural institutions is debatable. Multiculturalism has become synonymous with 'migrant' and migrant translates to 'other'.

Linda Carroll considered 'otherness' in her paper 'Outer Limits, Inner Space - Diversity, Difference and Regionalism' as inequality, as indicator of how disadvantage is qualified. 'Otherness' is misunderstood to mean a single voice, instead of a multitude of ethnicities with a number of voices. Carroll suggested that un-identity is the issue, that in the agglomerative construction of 'otherness', people from non-english speaking backgrounds have been identified through the one official multicultural voice. The policy of multiculturalism, structured and paradynamic, is in sharp contrast 'to the social reality of cultural diversity which is

decentred and unfixed'.(6) This representation of diversity is a challenge to galleries to engage with complexity, diversity and difference.

The last presenters at 'Cultural Linkages' were William Yang and Lindy Lee. Using a self-narrative approach both explored difference, ethnicity and marginalisation. The complexity of the human condition, that is 'the shifting components in a number of shifting components in this aggregate which is me' were articulated with conviction and pride by both Yang and Lee.(7) Being Chinese/Australian their art and success (however that can be measured) has occurred and been enriched, perversely, because of their cultural and social duality.

The curator, cultural worker, advocate and artist in considering difference, diversity, ethnicity and marginalisation, and how they are best represented within the construct of the gallery/museum, should consider themselves as butterfly hunters. '(When) aesthetic bliss soars (they) alight on the chance beauty of unexpected correspondence(s) and release (them)'.(8) That chance beauty *is the complexity of cultural and social diversity and difference*, that can be explored with compassion, and displayed with sensitivity in our galleries and museums.

Life has no shape, but the gallery museum can help to give it some.

Craig C. Douglas  
Lecturer, Queensland College of Art  
Griffith University

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*With thanks to Professor C.T.P. Diamond, University of Toronto, for providing me with his forthcoming paper, 'Self-Narrative: The Butterfly Art'.*

*Not all papers are discussed in this report but the RGAQ will be publishing conference papers. Contact RGAQ, PO Box 3366, Sth Brisbane Q 4101. Ph: (07) 846 5300, Fax: (07) 846 5255*

## Visions of Australia

Taking important services out to where people actually live is an honoured tradition in Australia. It is a tradition that continues in the museum world with the development of an increasing number of touring exhibitions.

The Federal Government's Visions of Australia initiative, a \$6 million grants program stretching over four years, aims to encourage this touring trend.

Visions was developed to increase access to a broad range of cultural exhibitions in Australia and provides grants for touring exhibitions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, Australian heritage, natural and applied science and technology, multimedia, arts and crafts. It promotes involvement of venues and local communities in the development of exhibitions, and the formation of partnerships between organisations.

Current tours receiving grants include 'Antarctica: Secrets of the Frozen World', a joint exhibition developed by the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery and the Museum of Victoria; and Fairfield Community Arts Network's 'Discoveries' which explores the migrant experience with several migrant communities around Australia.

The Museums and Art Galleries of the Northern Territory has received a grant for 'Bardayal-Kubarkku: Two Artists of the Stone Country'; the Ephemera Society is touring with 'Search for the Golden Wombat: Australian Comic Books'; and the Regional Galleries Association of Queensland has received a grant for a children's exhibition about migrants and the Australian identity entitled 'Work it Out', organised by the Museum of Migration in Adelaide.

Fifty-eight grants were allocated in the first round (38 for touring and 20 for development) for exhibitions touring in every state and territory to around 350 venues, over half of them to regional areas.

Exhibitions currently being developed include: four museum-in-a-box exhibitions by the Australian War Memorial; the Tandanya National Aboriginal Cultural Institute's 'The Mabo Exhibition'; the Lillydale Museum's 'Melba: A Sentimental Journey'; 'Wool in the Australian Imagination' by the Historic Houses Trust of NSW; 'Albany, a Maritime Story' by the Albany Maritime Heritage Association; and 'Still Here' by Melbourne's Living Museum of the West.



ACE – the Australian Comic book Exhibition, funded by the Visions of Australia program and the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation for the National Heart Foundation. ACE will be seen in thirty venues over the next two years.

Organisations eligible to apply for touring grants include funded museums and art museums, volunteer-run museums, libraries, science centres, universities and other research organisations, zoos, botanical gardens, heritage cemeteries, historical societies, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander keeping places, and community groups. Commercial organisations and individuals are ineligible, nor should exhibitions be for sale.

Visions has also offered a special allocation to Museums Australia's national office to fund a national touring resource officer position for 12 months. The officer will coordinate information and develop a database on venues/institutions interested in developing or receiving exhibits, transport arrangements, and a mechanism to support collaborative proposals between local and community organisations for the development and touring of exhibitions.

David Hogan

Department of Communication and the Arts

Contact Visions of Australia, Department of Communications and the Arts, GPO Box 2154, Canberra City, 2601. Ph: (008) 819 461/(06) 279 1000.

## 'Living Cultures, Living Traditions'

The Western Museums Association Annual Conference, 'Living Cultures, Living Traditions', was held in Hawaii in September. The association is a grouping of museums from the western States of the USA. Planned with a strong Pacific Island cultural component, the conference included museum professionals and cultural representatives from throughout the Pacific region participating either as

speakers or delegates. While some twelve Australians attended the conference and with an even larger contingent from New Zealand, it was noticeable that delegates from some key Pacific Island institutions were absent. While most of the Pacific Island visitors were sponsored by the East West Center it was disappointing that there were no delegates from Papua New Guinea, Fiji, greater Polynesia or the Torres Strait Islands.

The conference commenced with a traditional ceremonial welcoming by the Hawaiian women's group, Halau O Kekuhi, performing a Hawaiian greeting to the visiting delegates. In one of those rare but touching moments in multicultural gatherings, a New Zealand Maori delegate responded to the greeting in his own language and custom. This gesture, totally spontaneous and unrehearsed, helped to reinforce the theme of the conference.

Keynote speaker, W. Richard West Jr, director of the National Museum of the American Indian, spoke about the Smithsonian's role in fostering new relationships between the NMAI and native communities. West raised issues such as repatriation of cultural material and the role of museums as agents for social and cultural change and political reconciliation. For some Australians and New Zealanders, this was nothing particularly new or revolutionary.

While the spontaneous nature of the opening underscored the whole value of the gathering, it was apparent that more opportunities could have been taken to foster a greater sense of engagement and an imaginative exploration of cultural difference. Surely the purpose of such conferences is to privilege the position of indigenous people to take a more central place in cultural forums and assemblies. The general sense of disappointment voiced by some of the visiting Australian delegates about the conference structure and content related to these core issues. Planned with an ambitious cross-cultural agenda, I sensed the initial planning could have been more inclusive to allow native Hawaiian and other minority groups opportunities to develop more of the conference content. While it provided a great opportunity to meet and network with professional peers from throughout the wider US and Pacific region, the conference lacked cohesion and a certain critical focus.

From a practical point of view, the content was somewhat overloaded which made it difficult to follow particular issues and strands throughout the three days. With over 40 different sessions available and up to four concurrent presentations, there was too much to choose from. While individual sessions were to be conducted in open dialogue format, most speakers were unused to this style of presentation and proceeded to deliver lengthy papers, effectively eliminating the possibility of dialogue with other speakers and the delegates. There was also some disappointment in the way in which Pacific Island people were deployed throughout the sessions. Instead of being placed central to the conference agenda so they could speak about their experiences in mainstream museum issues, they were placed in the margins to address issues peculiar only to them.

Putting aside these shortcomings, the event provided a rare opportunity to meet museum professionals and cultural representatives from the Pacific Islands. Seldom are Pacific Islanders invited to forums and symposia such as the Asia-Pacific Triennial and Museums Australia conferences. Few Australians are involved in developing linkages with Pacific Island communities and there have been few attempts at international exchange exhibitions or collaborations within the region.

The conference provided important opportunities to gain a better understanding of the cultural milieu and protocols involved in establishing and expanding links with the Pacific region. Australia stands to gain if exhibitions and cultural forums are expanded to include representation from Pacific Islanders. My first priority was to develop stronger links with institutions based in Hawaii, given my institution's unique brief to collect the art and material culture of the tropics of Australia, and as our collection develops and we pursue more specialised projects and exhibitions, Perc Tucker Gallery will develop an important niche within the museum community in Australia. The conference provided a unique opportunity to develop initial links with institutions located in Hawaii and others in the wider region.

**Ross Searle**  
Director, Perc Tucker Gallery

*Ross Searle's attendance at the Western Museums Association Conference was assisted by Museums Australia's Professional Development Program for Visual Arts and Crafts, the Australia Council, the Federal Government's arts funding and advisory body, and sponsored by the Queensland Office of Arts and Cultural Development.*

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# National Roundup

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Arts Queensland has announced a Community Museums Assessment to establish a strategy for the development of community and regional museums in the state. The assessment will clarify the relationship between regional and community museums and the major institutions, associations, government departments and local authorities which support them. The terms of reference include identifying and defining the range and scope of community and regional museums in Queensland; identifying the level of services provided by the State Government to the sector and the relationship between them; identifying the nature and extent of community benefit achieved by the sector; assessing current and future needs of regional and community museums and identifying strategies for improvement; addressing current and future needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in relation to community museums and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander keeping places, and strategies for improvement of service delivery; and addressing whether Arts Queensland has a role in meeting the needs of the sector through the development of an appropriate policy framework. The assessment report will be available through Arts Queensland by April 1995.

The recently released report *Future Directions for Regional and Community Museums* in NSW lists recommendations made by the NSW Museums Advisory Council. Major recommendations are: that in partnership with local government a number of regional museums should be developed to a higher standard of operation and for them to provide professional services to the public and other museums in their region; increasing the capacity of Museums Australia (NSW) to deliver outreach services to regional, community and theme-based museums so as to improve standards and communication within the sector; enhancing the grants program to allow more museums to achieve higher standards of practice and a more complementary mix of assistance for their development; creation of a separate Museums Program within the Ministry for the Arts grants program; and to seek from the State Government a significant initial increase in the allocation of funds to the Ministry's Museums Program while also seeking greater commitment from local government.

Following the review, Museums Australia (NSW) has had its 1995 grant from the NSW Ministry for the Arts increased to \$280,000, allowing the employment of two new outreach officers, administrative support and an increase in outreach services as part of the state wide initiatives to increase access to professional advice and assistance. In response to the new guidelines there has been an increase of \$200,000 for the Ministry for the Arts 1995 Museums Program.

Craft Victoria has received Australia Council funding and sponsorship from the Gordon Darling Foundation to produce a pilot for a national craft journal *Contemporary Craft Review*. Due for publication in July 1995, the journal will be published twice a year.

Nine women were among the eleven artists who received this year's Anne and Gordon Samstag International Visual Art Scholarships, which can be worth up to \$75,000 each depending on the destination and the tenure of scholarship. The scholarships enable artists to undertake further studies in the visual arts at institutions overseas commencing in 1995. This year's successful applicants are: Mehmet Adil, Ruth Fazakerley, Marika Borlase, Kate Brennan, Kate Daw, Susan Fereday, Matthys Gerber, Marcia Lochhead, Sue Saxon, Lucy Turner, Megan Walch.

Seventy-eight artists and craftspeople were awarded grants by the VA/CB through their recent Professional Development of Artists and Craftspeople program. The 1994 round saw a 30% increase in applicants. Of the successful applicants, eleven will travel overseas, five were group initiatives, four were for studio-based traineeships, thirteen were Fellowships, and 45 were for grants in the \$5000, \$10,000 and \$15,000 categories. The \$35,000 Fellowship recipients were: Susan Cohn, Dale Frank, Peter Kennedy, Maria Kozic, Warren Langley, Darani Lewers, Sara Lindsay, Fiona McDonald, Simone Mangos, Bill Samuels, Sandra Taylor. Recipients of Multi-year Fellowships of \$20,000 per year for three and two years respectively were Stelarc, and Catherine Truman.

The University Museums and Collections Review Committee (reported in the last issue of MN), is urgently seeking input on a number of issues concerning the place of museums and collections in Australian university life: Differences between university museums and collections; Definitions; Functions; Status; Governance; Funding; Management standards; Conservation standards; Performance indicators; Staffing; Volunteers; Disposal of university-owned collections? Restitution of cultural property; Museum studies programs and the role of university museums and collections. Contact Dr P.J. Stanbury, Secretary, University Museums Review Committee, c/o Vice-Chancellor's Unit, Macquarie University, NSW 2109 by end of January.

Arts Training Australia has published the National Museums Competency Standards, which represent a synthesis of information collected from a large number of industry practitioners and groups, and from a range of museum organisations. The standards were endorsed by the National Training Board in September. Cost \$50 (inc. p&cp) from Arts Training Australia, PO Box 138, Kings Cross 2011. Ph: (02) 356 4797, Fax: 356 4736.