

*The magazine of Museums Australia Inc.*

# MUSEUM NATIONAL

**VOL 4 • NO 3  
FEBRUARY 96**

For all of us in Museums Australia the culmination of 1995 was the national conference 'Communicating Cultures', held in Brisbane in November. This was a huge success. Over 430 people attended what was generally thought to be a lively, informed and thoroughly enjoyable event that symbolised Museums Australia's coming of age and its place in Australia's heritage and cultural life.

The event was efficiently and imaginatively organised by the national conference committee and generously hosted by the Queensland Branch of Museums Australia. The conference was managed by Carillon, a Brisbane-based conference management firm – many thanks and appreciation to them. Special thanks also go to Chris Saines, chair of the national conference committee, and to Libby Quinn, executive officer of Museums Australia, Queensland, who both worked extremely hard for many months to ensure that a marvellous event occurred.

The papers were of a very high standard and provided new insights into museum practice and concerns. The respondents too were well prepared, entertaining and provocative.

The night of the conference dinner was very special. The planning committee had put much time and thought into arranging a wonderfully varied program that included lively indigenous entertainment and speakers who were witty and informed. The dinner represented cross-cultural collegiality and pride in Museums Australia's achievements so far, and was enjoyed enormously by all who were there.

We are now looking forward to 'Power and Empowerment' in Sydney in 1996.

As an integral part of the conference the national office of Museums Australia developed the *Trade Directory 1996-97*, which was launched on Thursday 23 November. This is a comprehensive

guide to museum service providers and forms an important part of our growing library of professional publications.

Thanks to Warwick Reeder and Chris Saines for their commitment to developing the directory to such a high standard, and to Miriam Cannell whose task it was to manage the project.

Our second annual Publication Design Awards, sponsored by Click Systems Pty Ltd and supported by *The View* magazine, were announced by Margaret Coaldrake, director of the National Museum of Australia, during the conference. The awards promote the best in museum publication design in various categories including invitations, posters and catalogues. The awards are open to all kinds and sizes of museums and pay tribute to excellence in design on very modest budgets and more substantial ones.

Our membership continues to grow, reflecting the increasing importance of Museums Australia in the community. However, we are still far from reaching maximum numbers. The national office will be coordinating a membership campaign that asks branches for help in developing the membership, particularly at institutions where numbers are not commensurate with staff levels. I would like to ask that all Museums Australia's members help to support the various membership programs throughout the year. We must continually strive to grow as an organisation. We have much to be proud of and I urge you to advocate on the association's behalf. This is vital to our identity as a professional association and we are all responsible.

I feel sure that 1996 will be a year of growth and consolidation for Museums Australia. I would like to thank all those who have played a part in helping the organisation to grow to this point and ask for your continued dedication and support.

**Des Griffin**  
President, Museums Australia

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MUSEUM NATIONAL is the quarterly publication of Museums Australia Inc. This project has been assisted by the Commonwealth Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body, and the Department for Communication and the Arts.

Print Post Publication No:  
332582/00001  
ISSN 1038-1694

#### Contributions and correspondence

*Museum National* welcomes unsolicited letters, articles and photographs for consideration. Articles should include brief biographical information about the author and photographs should be clearly captioned and credited. *Museum National* reserves the right to edit, abridge, alter or reject any material.

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All correspondence to:  
The Editor, *Museum National*  
24 Queens Parade  
North Fitzroy Vic 3068  
Telephone: (03) 9486 3399  
International: + 61 3 9486 3399  
Facsimile: (03) 9486 3788

#### Copy deadlines for 1996

25 March – May issue; 24 June – Aug issue; 17 Sept – Nov issue.

#### Editorial Committee

Gina Drummond, Rose Lang, Ian Watts, Kenneth Park, Linda Richardson, Margaret Birtley (Chair), David Demant, Linda Young.

#### Production

Editor: Linda Richardson

#### Subscriptions

Subscription to *Museum National* is a membership service of Museums Australia Inc. Single issues are also available.

#### Printed by:

Publications Department, WA  
Museum  
1 Francis Street, Perth, 6000.  
Tel: (09) 427 2779  
Fax: (09) 227 9989

Original cover design:  
Tony Mammoliti

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Front Cover:

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*Museum National* aims to present news and opinions and to encourage debate on issues of museum practice within art, history and science museums, including the business of the association as appropriate. It seeks to represent the diverse functions and interests of the many institutions and individuals who comprise Australia's museum community.

*Museum National* is published quarterly by Museums Australia Inc., and provides a major link between the association and its membership. Policy and content are directed by an editorial committee. Contributions from those involved or interested in museums and galleries are welcome.

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# Mapping Time: Museums, Festivals and Celebrations

*by Professor Tony Bennett*

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With the Olympics, the end of the millennium, and the Centenary of Federation beckoning on the horizon, the next few years will prove testing for museums. In punctuating and symbolising the passage of time, events like these present museums with creative opportunities regarding their own role in marking time and its relevance to human affairs. Yet those opportunities can just as easily turn into pitfalls.

The flyer for Museums Australia's forum 'Museums and Cultural Mapping', held in Sydney in May 1995, was clearly alert to the positive possibilities afforded by Australia's *fin de siècle* celebratory and events calendar: 'Despite the national grooming which is inevitably associated with such orchestrated celebrations,' it said, 'the Olympic Games will be accompanied by a re-evaluation of who we are and how the world perceives us.' The flyer goes on to suggest that museums have a significant role to play in meeting this challenge in view of their fluency in cultural values and symbols. Yet there is always the risk that this opportunity for a critical stocktaking of our inherited inventory of cultural values and identities will be sacrificed in favour of congratulatory national self-portraits.

There are many perspectives from which such issues need to be approached. I want to look at the ways in which the values and identities proposed by museums are often closely tied up with and dependent on the maps of time – that is, the socially codified ways of envisaging time – which museums propose. The degree to which Australian museums will creatively exploit the opportunities provided by the imminent rush of national and international events and celebrations, rather than be taken over by them, will depend on the position they take in relation to the mappings of time which such events and celebrations form a part of and which, invariably, they bring with them. The challenge facing museums is that of organising a productive articulation of the times which such events and celebrations represent and of the ways in which time is organised and socially represented in the museum. However, this is only likely to happen if those events are approached warily. For they are, so to speak, strewn with time-bombs that have been booby-trapped to blow the flat-footed into unhelpful controversy. If approached circumspectly, however, those time-bombs can be

productively detonated in a planned and instructive manner.

## The risks

Let me first look at the risk that museums might allow themselves to get caught up in inherited but now outmoded ways of mapping time, rather than succeed in charting a course in relation to those time maps that will help pose new and productive questions for an increasingly diverse and pluralised Australian citizenry. Let me also be a little clearer about the ways in which museums might be said to map time.

Throughout most of its history, the modern public museum has constructed a temporally organised, artefactual environment and then plotted the visitor's route through that environment in the form of a journey through time. Typically, the narratives that have fashioned those journeys have been evolutionary and developmental, telling the story of nature, of human life, of peoples, nations and civilisations in the form of a related set of developmental sequences. The times the museum has drawn on for these purposes and which, in turn, it has helped construct, have included the political time of the nation, ticking to the clock of a distinctive national culture or spirit, and the international time of modernity governed by ideas of progress. These have, in turn, been connected to imperial or colonial times as a consequence of the ways in which peoples geographically distant from Europe were slotted into a unilinear Western time in being made to stand for Europe's 'primitive' prehistory.

Over the past 20 years these maps of time have increasingly been called into question within museums as a result of the various critiques to which they have been subjected: postcolonial, multicultural, indigenous, feminist, black, and Jewish. However, this has not resulted in their replacement with any clear alternative. Rather, contemporary innovative museum practices are more likely to give rise to a tension within displays as a result of attempts to make visible the assumptions of traditional display practices, thereby halting the visitor in their tracks by calling attention to the assumptions underlying those displays, or through experimenting with a range of possible alternatives. As a consequence, many museum displays now give rise to a productive

tension between conflicting maps of time (old and new) and the kinds of values and identities these imply.

The main risk associated with cultural events like the Olympics, international exhibitions and centenaries is that, to varying degrees, they almost cannot help but reactivate the triumphal, progressive time of modernity or that of national advancement. Accordingly, they tend to create a context in which the temporal maps which have been questioned in contemporary museum practice are reinstated and accorded a public value and status they should no longer enjoy.

The bicentennial celebrations of 1988 offered a number of examples of the failure to adequately negotiate the temporal horizons which those celebrations reactivated. This was especially true of Expo '88, which drew on the progressive modernism of the exhibition form in ways that were often deeply problematic. The contrast between the hi-tech, super-advanced times of the Japanese, American and European pavilions and the slow, straw-hut, romanticised simplicity of the Pacific lagoon was a case in point, offering an uncomfortable reminder of the colonial villages which had formed a regular feature of late nineteenth- and early 20th-century exhibitions. The Rainbow Serpent – a high-tech rendition of the Dreamtime – also occasioned a good deal of disquiet within Brisbane's Aboriginal community in view of its similarities with earlier museum and exhibition forms for the display of Aboriginal peoples and cultures. For it was, in truth, nothing so much as an animated diorama combining aspects of the traditional diorama form with the ethnological sideshows of the nineteenth-century world's fairs.

The Travelling Exhibition of 1988 was fraught with similar difficulties. These resulted mainly from its uneasy attempt to bring together the time of the nation and the new temporal maps of postmodernism. The consequence was a retreat from really trying to say anything definite about the nation in favour of a postmodernist collage which made the exhibition a place of no statements. Peter Cochrane and David Goodman interpreted this as a response to what they called the 'tactical pluralism' of the Bicentennial Authority.<sup>(1)</sup> This warded off controversy through an all-embracing pluralism lacking any critical or interrogatory edge which might have moved debate about Australian identity onto a new set of coordinates. This was echoed in the exhibition's portrayal of Australia as a cheerful, already accomplished multicultural nation journeying from a wholly unproblematised and conflict-free present into a future which was simply 'more of the same'.

There is, however, no reason why the times which events and celebrations bring with them should hold us in their thrall: they can be bent back on themselves to open up new horizons and possibilities.

In one strategy, it is possible to go with the

temporality which such events propose while also opening them up and using them in new ways. They present opportunities, for example, for placing the culture and achievements of neglected or marginalised sections of the community onto the temporal maps of the cultural mainstream. One of the most significant examples of this strategy was the role of the Women's Building at the Chicago 1893 Columbian Exhibition. This took the universalist rhetorics of international exhibitions at their word and inserted women's achievements into those rhetorics. The Women's Building has been criticised for having limited its portrayal of women's lives too much to the domestic sphere, and there is some truth in this. Nonetheless, as Jeanne Weimann shows in convincing detail, the Women's Building played a crucial role in placing questions of gender on the political agendas of all future exhibitions; and the conferences on women's issues which accompanied the exhibition made it a landmark event in the early history of American feminism – an example that was followed by Afro-Americans in the positions they adopted in relation to later American international exhibitions.

A second strategy aims to detonate the dominant temporal schemes built into the conception of cultural events and to blow these up in a manner calculated to reveal their dated and partial nature. I have in mind here exhibition strategies which have a double edge built into them. The old display conventions remain, but as ones which are now worked on – thrust into the spotlight so that the visitor, in having them drawn to their attention, is able to appreciate their contingent and now outmoded nature. In such cases, displays deploy an aesthetic strategy of defamiliarisation, resulting in a text that is double-edged: its movement consists in the interplay between new practices, which render old ones strange, and old practices which remain but which are now foregrounded as an issue for the visitor to think about, rather than functioning as a natural, taken-for-granted horizon.

Displays of this kind have a major role to play in helping visitors detach themselves from the problematic time maps of earlier museum displays. A good example is offered by the Biological Anthropological Gallery at the Musée de l'Homme in Paris. About half way through this, a display depicts the evolution of the crania of homo sapiens over the past 100,000 years. At the end of this display, in the space where the visitor expects to find a cranium representing the most evolved type of the species, there is, instead, a television monitor. As visitors look closer they find that the monitor contains a picture of an exhibition plinth on which their own image now rests as the crowning glory of the evolutionary sequence that has just been reviewed. The display nicely parodies traditional evolutionary displays. The organising principles of such displays are retained in this exhibit but, at the same time, those principles are turned inside out as the terminal position of human evolution is made openly and freely available to

everyone irrespective of race, gender or ethnicity. In this way, the display criticises and calls attention to earlier display practices which reserved the occupancy of this position exclusively for white, European males.

There is a similar example at the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago where a parallel stratigraphical display of two middens – one of a tribal people, the other of a Western city – traces the development of arrowhead designs side-by-side with the development of home lighting, from kerosene and gas lamps to electric light. The calculated juxtaposition of these two developmental series makes explicit the ideological values inherent in earlier universal stratigraphies, and so also helps the visitor move on from these to a new and more pluralist set of temporal coordinates.

A third strategy is that used by the Jewish Museum in New York. Here, the organisation of the visitor's route is in the form of a self-questioning narrative about the unity and identity of a transnational diasporic community. It serves as a model of a museum which seeks to supply its Jewish visitors with a resource for raising questions about identity – rather than trying to inscribe them into a fixed and singular identity – while also, for non-Jewish visitors, radically relativising the nation-centred time maps of most Western museums.

### Conclusions

There are, then, at least three strategies that might be drawn on to creatively exploit the opportunities afforded by Australia's forthcoming exhibitionary calendar. The first consists in choosing exhibition themes, which, in working along with the maps of time proposed by celebratory events and festivals, seeks to install new constituencies and histories within those temporal frameworks and, in so doing, to bend those frameworks to new social purposes. The second seeks rather to disrupt conventionalised maps of time through the use of estranging techniques which call attention to, and question, their assumptions. In the third strategy, the dominant times that are associated with cultural events might be problematised by drawing on alternative ways of organising time.

The challenge in applying these strategies (or combinations of them) in the contemporary Australian context concerns how to organise the relations between the politically sensitive times of indigenous, multicultural and gendered Australia, and the larger international times which events like the Olympics, a new century and a new millennium bring with them.

My sense is that this challenge will best be met by museum practices which work on the edges of these different times and the relations between them. This is to suggest that museums should take the times of the Olympics, Federation, and the millennium and plot a course in relation to them that will provide for a degree of tension within and between these different time maps. I say this not because of some general

commitment to an avant-garde program of deconstructing the inherited representational frameworks of museums as a value in and for itself. It is not difficult to imagine times and circumstances in which one would want to argue in favour of museums installing particular and singular maps of time. It's just that this is not true of our present historical moment, and especially not in Australia where the role that museums have to play in forming a hybrid citizenry in a postcolonial and multicultural society requires a certain looseness – a pliability and strategic movability – in the social mappings of time that they propose. Only in this way will they both allow and assist us to rehearse the options which – as a people and nation – lay before us.

Tony Bennett

Professor of Cultural Studies  
Director, Key Centre for Cultural and Media  
Policy, Griffith University

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# Successful Collaboration and Progress on National Programs – The Work of the Heritage Collections Committee

*by Duncan Marshall*

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*In the November 1995 issue of Museum National, new chair of the Heritage Collections Committee, Dawn Casey, from the Commonwealth Department of Communications and the Arts, provided an overview of the committee's work. This report offers more detail on the committee's projects and achievements and some thoughts about its value.*

## Goals of the Heritage Collections Committee

The Heritage Collections Committee was formed in 1993, following the report of the Heritage Collections Working Group, *Heritage Collections in Australia* (Cultural Ministers Council 1993). The report made recommendations about two strategic issues relating to preservation and access to the Distributed National Collection, issues which are the core work of the committee. Access included a national database and touring of collections and while the touring component has not been explicitly acted upon, it is addressed to some extent through the Commonwealth's Visions of Australia program.

## Committee Structure and Resources

The HCC has a life of three years. It reports to the Cultural Ministers Council and includes representatives from Commonwealth and state governments together with the museum, library and archive sectors. There are several Museums Australia members on the committee including the current president, Des Griffin.

It is responsible for two strategic national programs, which build upon the Heritage Collections Working Group report, and has formed two working parties to assist with this work:

\* National Conservation Program (implemented by the Conservation Working Party) concerns the preservation and protection of Australia's cultural heritage for present and future generations of Australians.

\* National Database Program (implemented by the Database Working Party) concerns the development of a collaborative national database of heritage items of cultural, historical and scientific interest, addressing such issues as nomenclature and technological implications.

It was recognised at the outset that while the

committee's three-year life would see the start of the programs and resolve some of the big-picture matters, it would not necessarily see their completion or the resolution of all details.

A formula for funding its activities has been agreed by governments and major state museums. Excluding \$220,000 for administrative support, the committee has \$1.5m over three years to support the two programs – major state museums are funding \$600,000, the Commonwealth Government \$750,000, and the state and territory government art ministries \$150,000.

## Projects

Much of the committee's initial work has focused on strategic issues.

**National Conservation and Preservation Policy for Movable Cultural Heritage** – the committee identified the need for a clear statement of principles about the conservation and preservation of movable cultural heritage in order to provide a sound framework for its programs. The national policy, which cost \$5000 to develop, was launched in October 1995 following widespread consultation. It has been endorsed by the Cultural Ministers Council, meaning it is also supported by all state and mainland territory governments, the Commonwealth and local governments.

**Conservation Training Workshops** – conservation skills development and training in the community are key concerns of the committee. The National Preservation Office of the National Library sought input from about 3000 organisations and individuals to identify needs. In response, strategies and activities were developed to address these needs, raise community awareness and promote support for conservation.

The major outcome was a series of Australia-wide conservation training workshops in 1994–95, often conducted in regional areas. The series involved committee funding of \$70,000 and an overall expenditure by the community and government organisations who ran the workshops of about \$108,000.

These workshops succeeded in raising community awareness and understanding about preventive

conservation, although future workshops could take more account of the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage collections and collections from non-English speaking backgrounds.

**Information Resources Kit** – the committee is providing \$100,000 for the development of a national package of conservation training and resource materials to address the specific conservation needs of different regions and the diversity of collections in Australia. The kit is being prepared by Conservation Training Australia, a consortium of cultural heritage organisations and is due for completion by February 1996.

**Internship Program** – a program of eight, six-month conservation internships is being supported to address the specific needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-English speaking people. Support is also being provided to enhance an existing education program with similar aims. The committee is providing \$58,000 to the program, which will be delivered in partnership with the National Centre for Cultural Heritage Science Studies of the University of Canberra during 1996.

**Regional Pilot Projects** – limited access to conservators and the effects of remoteness on cultural heritage collections is also a concern. Two regional pilot projects are being supported to address these effects, one in north Queensland in partnership with the Queensland Museum, the other in northwest Tasmania in partnership with the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery. These locations were selected in light of the 1991 *Anderson Report*. Funding of \$70,000 is being provided and the projects will be completed by April 1996.

**Community Promotion Strategy** – an insert targeted at children interested in science will be included in the CSIRO's *Helix* magazine in February 1996 at a cost of \$10,000.

**National Database – Australian Museums Information System (AMIS)** – the National Database Program aims to develop a national database for heritage items of cultural, historic and scientific interest. A distributed database network model is proposed to link existing museum databases as a collaborative distributed network. It will be developed in three stages and will be accessible through the Internet to provide information about museum exhibitions, visitor programs, facilities and collections.

The initial consultation and basic planning for stage one has been completed. The next phase involves the establishment of a

coordination unit to develop the technological capability for the database. This will be undertaken by the National Museum of Australia in association with the Computer Sciences Corporation. A pilot phase should be operating by March 1996 and participating museums should come on-line progressively after that time. Funding of \$135,000 has been provided for the unit in stages one and two.

A museum survey to gather information for inclusion in the on-line directory and to determine the potential of existing databases for participation in the national database has funding of \$20,000 and is due for completion in March 1996.

A collection documentation project to investigate and report on museum documentation systems and their applicability to the national database has funding of \$10,000 and is due for completion in April 1996.

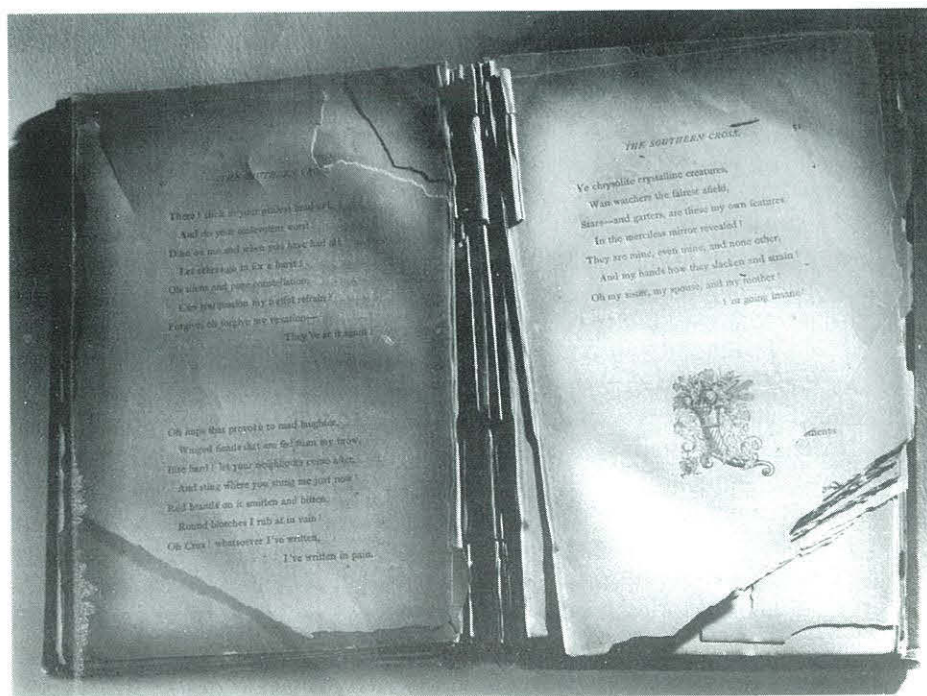
Stage one will also involve the establishment of a World Wide Web site, initially comprising a directory of Australian museums, to help develop an Internet culture within the institutions.

In stage two, software will be developed to link the national database with museum collection databases. A pilot phase, due for completion in 1996, will involve a range of museums and will help clarify management issues including the levels of support, training and resources needed for participation.

Funding for stage three will be decided in 1996. This stage includes the phased implementation of the distributed network of databases across Australia and will commence in 1996.

A pre-release demonstration version of the AMIS

*Miscellaneous Poems*, by J. Brunton Stephens, Brisbane, 1880. This copy is autographed by the author. Considered a significant item, the book was recently donated to the National Preservation Office. It demonstrates the effects of an inadequate storage environment and the need for conservation skills within the community. The HCC's conservation training workshops have been developed to raise community awareness and promote support for conservation.





national database, available at <http://www.nma.gov.au/AMIS/> will provide feedback to the development process.

## Collaboration

The committee has succeeded in engendering collaboration in a diverse and complex industry. This has been a feature from the outset and the common tension that seems to exist in Commonwealth/state relations has been set aside in this case. The collaboration is reflected in the development of the funding formula for the committee's programs and in the additional contributions made by organisations to the conservation training workshops.

This consensual national approach, rather than a centrally planned and enforced approach requires time and effort. Short-term achievements may be slow in coming and modest in scale, however, such achievements are strengthened by the climate of consensus and long-term objectives are better founded. Perhaps the structure of the exercise could be reviewed to see if a simpler structure can be found which maintains the positive aspects of the current approach.

## Planned Goals for 1996

Perhaps the major task for the committee in its final year of operation is planning for the third phase to carry work beyond 1996 to 2001. To some extent this will rely on evaluation of the current programs during the year. The nature of the third phase is currently being developed and Museums Australia has an opportunity to be involved through its members on the committee. The proposal for the next phase will be completed and widely circulated in the museum sector for comment in January 1996.

The third phase is likely to see an evolution rather than simply a continuation of the existing structure and activities. It will present opportunities to build upon the work of the committee as well as forge new directions. Some possible or likely activities include: translating the national policy into a national conservation strategy; distributing the information resource kit; further developing the national database and considering issues related to interpretation as well as social history and anthropological collections; providing conservation programs for social history collections and programs for non-metropolitan areas; developing the ability to monitor state collections; considering resourcing the Distributed National Collection and determining priorities and problems faced by small museums; using the Distributed National Collection as a resource for the Centenary of Federation; developing links between Australia's Distributed National Collection and the wider international context; and considering opportunities presented by the Commonwealth's Innovation Statement.

## Evaluation

Given the efforts and resources involved, it is

appropriate to consider the value of the committee and its work. Questions concerning how realistic and relevant the committee's goals are, whether it represents value for money, and what the committee can offer compared to state or territory programs will no doubt be part of the formal evaluation process that is to take place in 1996. The results will influence the level of support, if any, given to the proposed third phase of the initiative.

A concern has also been raised that the museum sector is not sufficiently aware of the committee or its work. The committee's initial work focused on strategic matters rather than products which would help achieve a wider profile. However, in its later work such products are being completed or undertaken and this may help improve the committee's profile.

It is not possible in this brief article to answer these questions or undertake an adequate review of the committee. However, a few preliminary observations seem appropriate.

The chair of the committee, Dawn Casey, has written of: '...tangible progress on initiatives which will have a significant benefit for the [museum] sector and the community.' By the end of 1996 this progress will include a national policy, a series of conservation workshops, an information resource kit, an intern program, regional projects examining the effects of remoteness, a magazine insert, and the national database including an on-line directory of museums. The committee's work also highlights a strong measure of collaboration. Finally, the committee intends to develop a plan for the third phase of the initiative to carry the work forward to the year 2001.

This progress seems substantial. The committee's relevance depends on an understanding of needs, and its value for money includes the question of whether a national approach is more effective than increasing support to state and territory programs. However, if the concept of the Distributed National Collection is accepted then some form of national program seems essential.

Perhaps the major evaluation issue is the scale of the committee's work compared to the extent of the need to understand, preserve, conserve and provide access to Australia's movable cultural heritage. The gap between the committee's work and the extent of these needs seems likely to be very large and this probably contributes to some frustration or despair on the part of those who care for this heritage. Maybe hope can be found in a better understanding of this issue at all levels and especially at the national level.

**Duncan Marshall**  
Private Heritage Consultant

*For information on the HCC contact Damian Stevens, Secretary, Heritage Collections Committee, Department of Communications and the Arts, GPO Box 2154, Canberra ACT 2601.*

**(The assistance of Dawn Casey, Des Griffin, Andrew Reeves and Damian Stevens in preparing this article is gratefully acknowledged.)**

# Local Government Restructuring and Competitive Compulsory Tendering

Many issues have arisen because of local government restructuring and the introduction of Competitive Compulsory Tendering (CCT) in Victoria. Museums Australia (Vic) and the Public Galleries Association of Victoria (PGAV) are currently developing possible working models for public galleries and museums to use when dealing with local government on these issues. At the Public Gallery Association of Victoria's December 1995 conference *Local Government, Restructuring, CCT and Public Galleries*, Giacomina Pradolini, executive director of Museums Australia (Vic), outlined some of the issues concerning CCT and museums and galleries. Several case studies were also delivered outlining the experiences regional galleries have had with the CCT process. This is an abridged version of Giacomina Pradolini's paper and two case studies, one from Warrnambool City Gallery, which is currently being market-tested, and Bendigo Art Gallery, where the local council has decided not to market-test.

*'We should consider what the trend towards treating virtually all things in life as commodities means, and what might be lost in this process. Overwhelmed by the success of the market economies...we are in the process, in some cases in the last stages, of commodifying much of life.'*(1)

We are all familiar with the rhetoric: 'audiences' become 'consumers' and 'clients', we conduct 'focus groups' in the hope of producing a better 'product', attendance figures are used as a measure of success for an exhibition, a competitive framework based on a production-consumption model is set up in order to not only justify our role in society, but also to define it.

Many believe museums and galleries function differently to other educational and civic institutions. They are places where objects of value and visual interest are kept, displayed and interpreted. They are not small businesses aiming to make a profit. I am not concerned with the fact that 90 percent of arts activity is identified as commercial by the Bureau of Statistics: public galleries and other organisations making up the remaining ten percent are also an integral part of the community. So why do we subject these institutions to a process such as CCT?

It is worth noting here that CCT is largely a product of the former Thatcher Government's policies of the 1980s, whereby the services of construction and maintenance of buildings and highways were tendered out. In the UK experience, human services

were only included in the CCT agenda some ten years after it was first introduced. In Victoria, however, we are facing a situation whereby CCT is being forced upon galleries and other public services within four years of its introduction.

## A public gallery is not a shop

There are a number of problems which arise when applying CCT to public galleries and museums. In fact I would ask why galleries are being included in a process based upon competition and deregulation – terms and principles I don't believe apply to the mission of a public gallery.

These issues concern: the threat of loss of control over what many see as a community service; low quality outcomes if there is a failure to adopt any 'meaningful' benchmarking or strategic approach to the tendering process; declining pay and conditions if a competitive edge is being sought by a private company applying for the tender (and this industry is already undervalued); and a questionable future for volunteers and friends groups if gallery services are privatised.

## Simple Definitions

Good management is essential to an organisation – it allows the organisation to identify and follow its mission. Sound management practices and standards are essential for the preservation of our collections; they enable excellence to flourish and community support to be engendered. Establishing essential criteria for good management involves benchmarking, the establishment of a mark which is then used as a point of reference. It involves the comparison between one established mark and another.

There are three basic concepts: the comparison between an organisation and other superior performing organisations; a systematic process which is continuous in its application; and a method which analyses processes and practices as well as performance measures. It is about the evaluation of our products (exhibitions), our services (such as publications and education programs), our processes (collection management, conservation practice, personnel management etc.). All these are measured against recognised best practice.

Benchmarking is not a generic process and organisations differ in their use of it. There are four types:

**Internal** – functions common to different divisions within an organisation may be compared, or various regions with common operations may be compared.

**External (competitive)** – comparisons are made

with companies in the same markets with competing products or services.

**External (industry)** – comparison is made between an organisation with similar products or services but which does not compete in the same markets.

**External (generic/process)** – comparison is made with an organisation in a different industry which carries out a similar function or process.

Yet how are we to apply these to public galleries and museums if we do not consider ourselves to be in a competitive market? And who decides what is best practice for galleries? I would suggest organisations such as Museums Australia, in consultation with bodies such as the PGAV, have a role to play here.

Another solution is to set measures against accepted industry standards such as those articulated by the Museum Accreditation Program (MAP), which establishes a system of continual quality improvement and identifies minimum industry standards and essential criteria for galleries and museums. It is a method of articulating these standards for the cultural heritage sector and provides a possible tool to assist local government in establishing benchmarks for best practice.

MAP is a two-tiered process involving registration (completion of a written questionnaire setting out basic criteria and establishing a commitment to accreditation), and then the final process of accreditation (comprising the completion of a questionnaire followed by an on-site visit to assess whether the level of activity is appropriate to the

nature and size of the museum). It equips museums with an assessment of their own activities and sets essential criteria for the full gamut of activity in the industry. It is a program which involves a gallery's continuous improvement, but it is also responsive to the sector.

Galleries must be proactive in using MAP as a tool to assist the establishment of benchmarks for the sector and informing local government of industry accepted standards. Arts Victoria has recognised the key role MAP plays in the industry because it ensures a structure is in place which can be used by local government and public galleries. Essential criteria is outlined and benchmarking can then be established through the program.

Essential criteria need to be established with fulfilment of the institutional mission uppermost in local government and management's mind. Benchmarking should be seen as a method by which an organisation can improve its operations through a continuous, systematic evaluation of its exhibitions, public programs and management procedures through recognised levels of best practice. MAP can be used as a tool by local government in recognising best practice.

**Giacomina Pradolini**

**Executive Director, Museums Australia (Vic)**

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(The author would like to thank Bruce Whyte for background information on benchmarking.)

# The Warrnambool Art Gallery and CCT: a case study still in progress

I believe the complexities and costs associated with the CCT process were not, and probably still are not, fully understood by the Government. I do support the market-testing of services, providing the process is based on outcomes that deliver equal or better service to the community. The process is not just about cutting costs. I was opposed to the art gallery being put to tender and believe that community enterprises such as the gallery should be exempted from CCT. I am still concerned that community and corporate support for the gallery will diminish because too many people are confused with the CCT concept. They equate it with privatisation, whereas this is not the case.

The gallery's advisory board was established in 1971 and is recognised by council as competent and effective. Since 1991 it has maintained a three year strategic plan in response to the goals set in the City Corporate Plan, and it has a great deal of freedom and responsibility to direct the program and business

of the gallery. Council has also recognised the gallery as a community and regional asset, and has funded the budget shortfall and provided funding on an annual basis for new acquisitions.

In 1994, the commissioners decided the gallery would be market-tested during 1996–97. Following the director's resignation in early 1995, the position was advertised but because the city could not guarantee the position for the advertised contract period, an acting director was appointed and it was decided to market-test in 1995.

Some members of the board are philosophically opposed to CCT and some remain concerned about the process, particularly with regard to the future attitude that may be adopted by volunteer groups. However, they have worked hard to ensure the best outcomes from the process and have ensured that the community retains a major role in directing the gallery's future through the board.

The first steps in the CCT process were to rewrite

the role/delegation the board would have under contract management, develop contract specifications to recognise its role, and ensure that the board be involved in all stages of the process.

Under the new agreement, the board acts as contract supervisor for the management and operation of the Warrnambool Art Gallery, but is not involved in any contract payments or financial details of the contract. It has an important role to play in ensuring that outcomes are favourable. Other councils are adopting similar arrangements.

As contract supervisor, specific functions previously delegated to the board are maintained but the board must report to the council in the event of non-performance of the contractor and must ensure that policies are maintained and developed as required. The board must also ensure the gallery responds to the annual strategic planning process of the city, and must encourage and assist the contractor in securing funding.

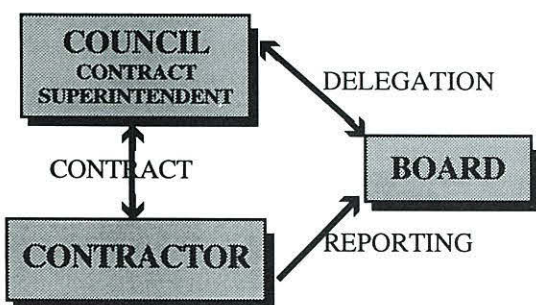
Further, the board must ensure that: works of art are acquired in accordance with policy; admission charges are in accordance with the contract; affiliated groups remain involved and motivated; and the development of 'special' long-term programs, prizes, surveys, etc., are maintained.

When writing a contract specification, there are many issues to be resolved. The Warrnambool specifications include: defining the client/provider split and the board's role as 'client'; setting performance requirements; defining evaluation criteria, usage targets and financial commitments required of the contractor; defining staffing responsibilities, management presence required and minimum staff qualifications; defining gallery



Albert Tucker, *Portrait of Jack McCarthy*, 1944. Warrnambool Art Gallery Collection. Established in 1886, the gallery is Victoria's third oldest public gallery.

## Organisational Relationships



THE CONTRACT IS BETWEEN THE COUNCIL AND THE CONTRACTOR; THE GALLERY BOARD IS THERE TO ADVISE THE COUNCIL; THE CONTRACTOR WILL HAVE TO RELATE TO THE NEEDS OF THE BOARD IN TERMS OF INFORMATION ETC; THE BOARD WILL NOT HAVE ANY AUTHORITY OVER THE CONTRACTOR EXCEPT THROUGH THE COUNCIL OFFICER.

operational requirements; defining contractor's responsibility re. licences, permits and certificates, and the processes to deal with capital works; and maintaining asset integrity, reporting requirements and relationships with the board.

### The In-House Tender

Murray Bowes, currently the acting director, led a team which submitted a successful in-house tender. Tenders were evaluated by an appointed panel, which included an external person with expertise relevant to the tender.

Warrnambool City Council has developed a clear set of aims and objectives, a tendering timetable, an appropriate organisational structure and policies to cope with the demands of the CCT process. The process has been time consuming but means that senior management have a real understanding of the process.

In future, council will always involve boards such as the gallery's in the specification and evaluation process, and will also ensure that representatives of the board are involved in the selection and appointment of the new gallery director. Council recognises that it did not involve the board

sufficiently in developing and weighting the criteria, partly to protect the board from criticism, but this will be corrected in future. We believe these arrangements will work, but accept that more detailed specifications of the process are needed to ensure the

relationship between the three parties works to the benefit of the community.

**David Jones**  
**Commissioner, Warrnambool City Council,**  
**Board Member, Warrnambool Art Gallery**

## The Bendigo Art Gallery Experience

Prior to municipal amalgamation in April 1994, the arts in Bendigo did not receive a great deal of support from local government. However, the new municipality recognised the importance of Bendigo's arts facilities to the community.

The Bendigo Art Gallery's collection is one of the most significant in regional Australia, and is thus a rich cultural and economic asset to the community. It was viewed by council and the gallery board as an underperforming asset, however, and while the board was keen to address this, it simply didn't have the funds.

Total municipal recurrent contributions to the gallery prior to amalgamation were approximately \$40,000 (with no commitments made towards the funding of any capital redevelopment of the gallery). Post-amalgamation, the gallery presented council with a detailed plan of what it wanted to achieve on a strategic basis, and while the initial proposal was not attractive to council, a deal was subsequently negotiated that proved attractive and beneficial to both parties.

Under this agreement, council has increased its recurrent contribution to the gallery to \$190,000 and has recently announced a \$4.2 million redevelopment to the gallery. This has involved a substantial degree of negotiation between gallery and council concerning issues of control and responsibility.

An auditor general's report to the city at the time of amalgamation recommended that where an entity was in effect controlled by council, due to its reliance on council funding, council should be in a position to exercise control over that asset or entity. In cases where council provides substantial funding to any group or party, a service agreement must be in place. In developing the service agreement, council was mindful of creating a scenario whereby any future council would not be able to sell off family assets. Both parties were mindful of establishing the necessary safeguards to protect both parties' interests.

Under the service agreement there is: transfer of the physical assets of the gallery (buildings, artworks etc.) to council ownership; provision for the gallery board to retain control over the artistic components of the gallery's operations; provision for the gallery to be totally responsible for the acquisition and de-accessioning of all artworks; provision for the gallery to advise council on all policy or budgetary matters affecting the gallery and fine arts matters generally; adoption of the gallery board as a statutory committee of council; provision of surety for council funding of gallery operations into the future on a

recurrent basis; allowance for greater efficiencies in the operation of the gallery (eg. sales tax exemptions). However, council believed it was important to retain the role of the art gallery board in these negotiations as a public body to independently administer bequests for the gallery's benefit.

With the agreement in place, council can ensure a return to a strong and vibrant art gallery with strong, independent management. It can also ensure development of a significant tourist and educational facility, further development of council's strategy of redeveloping the historic View St Rosalind Park precinct, protection of a substantial part of Bendigo's cultural heritage, and provision of greater efficiencies and utilisation of funding and community assets.

One of the major questions in this arrangement has been the issue of CCT and why council agreed not to market-test the activities of the gallery. While the gallery would not have entered into the arrangement with council had it decided to tender the operations of the gallery, there are several other reasons why council chose not to market-test: at \$190,000 the gallery did not fit into the council's policy of going for the 'big hit' in terms of benefit to council and the community; council could see little scope for efficiencies in tendering the operations; nor were the gallery's activities seen as sufficiently commercial to make it attractive to the market in terms of contestability.

Further, the gallery did not believe that its management and operation were easily quantifiable – the benefits of doing so were minor and the risks were far too high. Council will, however, be seeking to gain some competitive advantage through the operations of the gallery, albeit minor ones, such as tendering or testing inputs into gallery operations, such as cleaning, security etc.

We believe that the dual management of the gallery by council and the gallery board will be harmonious. Although there will undoubtedly be disagreement over future issues, we believe that with a strong agreement and goodwill from both parties we will run a strong, trouble-free operation.

**Andrew Paul**  
**Director, City of Greater Bendigo**

*(Museums Australia's Visual Arts/Craft Special Interest Group met at the association's recent annual conference in Brisbane and identified CCT as an important issue needing to be addressed. For information contact Giacomina Pradolin on (03) 9416 1945. MN will report back on CCT in future issues.)*

**Taking Precautions: The Story of Contraception**

*Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, showing until 1997*

How does a museum of science and society address the still somewhat iffy topic of contraception? It's obviously a worthy, socially relevant issue; it contains a hint of sexy spice, but also for that reason could offend some visitors – and museums have educational responsibilities and public standards to observe. A museum presentation on contraception would have to be scientific, historical and 'balanced' – in other words, safe.

In the event, curators Megan Hicks and Linda Adair follow the first three precepts, but abandon the last for humour. It's just right: humour mediates embarrassment and opens a path for visitors to talk about the topic. The conventional institutional vehicles for addressing contraception education – sex education films – make an appearance in an hilarious compilation of upright 1950s father and son discussions, fuzzy 1970s closeups of flowers and bees (truly), and 1990s condom practice on a carrot. After that, you're in the mood for the absurd side of sex, and you get it, in displays such as a sequence of historic condoms and

artworks composed of pills.

But there is also plenty of solid substance. The ancient history and folklore of contraception is remarkable, for instance, the ancient Greek city-state, Cyrene, based its economy on an abortifacient herb, sylphium. The display moves on to show that herbal traditions survived the professionalisation of medicine, but only just. It discusses the late nineteenth- early 20th-century campaigns for improved, legal contraception, which were countered in Australia by the rhetoric of populate-or-perish, and reminds us that the central issue of the control of fertility has always been a function of the political power of women. The consequences of powerlessness are presented in a tall case filled with coathangers: instrument and metaphor for backyard abortion.

I was surprised to find myself touched by a red rubber/black bakelite douche in a cardboard box. It is accompanied by a woman's account which retrospectively interprets her mother's contraceptive practice in pre-pill days, and oh, it sounds messy and risky. But though things are more convenient these days, risks do persist. Contraception is an issue that's still far from resolved.

To my mind, 'Taking Precautions' addresses a profoundly important issue in contemporary Australian life. Yet while I'm both fascinated and amused, I have to acknowledge I'm a bit taken aback by aspects of its upfront style. This makes me wonder how the exhibition would be perceived by someone who feels deeply that the technology of sexuality is not an appropriate subject for a museum show. Are there any limits to the acceptability of all manifestations of human culture as the subject of exhibition?

In an article in

*History News*, an American museum director recently recounted the issues he considered in collecting a kind of box in which a child had been incarcerated by abusive parents. He concluded that though he wouldn't display the object now or perhaps for many years, it constituted evidence of a social phenomenon that shouldn't be hidden from posterity. By comparison, contraception is not a shocking topic at all – but it was, not so long ago, and it might still be, to some. Museums seeking to engage with topics that touch on unagreed social values must exercise special consideration, but it shouldn't stop them from pursuing considered professional ends.

'Taking Precautions' employs the basic armamentarium of exhibition technique: designed with panache by Judy Hungerford Design, it follows a conventional storyboard tracing ancient history, folklore and modern history with objects, labels, artworks and videos. Thence it moves smoothly into the material and practices of here and now, and this, I think, is the crucial point of the show's power. By displaying current material – probably things that visitors know and do – it speaks directly to present experience.

Adelaide's Migration Museum is the only Australian museum to do this regularly, as at present in 'Chops and Changes: Food, Immigration and Culture', and it is the source of that museum's lively relevance. The historical and cultural context established by displays of specimens and relics produce a formal legitimacy that opens up the topic to discussion. It's not that topics such as contraception or food preferences need the imprimatur of the museum. They are already realised practice, lived culture. The novelty is that traditional bastions of authoritative high culture should engage with popular action. Museums which manage to transit this gap are changing the nature of institutional grandeur.

'Taking Precautions' is an exhibition to see and chuckle over. Make sure you send your teenagers too.

**Linda Young**  
Cultural Heritage Management,  
University of Canberra

Bought recently in Nepal, this yak bone necklace is supposed to prevent the wearer from becoming pregnant. From 'Taking Precautions: The Story of Contraception', Powerhouse Museum. Photo: Andrew Frolows.



## Sight/Seeing Views Tourists Souvenirs,

(*Seeing Double in a Postcolonial Post Gallery*)

Postmaster Gallery, National Philatelic Centre, Melbourne, 22 September – 26 November 1995

**'The more one is able to leave one's cultural home, the more easily is one able to judge it, and the whole world as well, with the spiritual detachment and generosity necessary for true vision. The more easily, too, does one assess oneself and alien cultures with the same combination of intimacy and distance.'** Edward Said.

### *Orientalism*

'In the nineteenth century Australian exhibitions were about contextualising ourselves in the world,' states Paul Fox. 'Australians don't see enough of the world; our exhibition programs dwell too much on what's in Australia and don't seem to reach out to investigate other cultures.' Over the last two years, Paul Fox, curator at the Postmaster Gallery in the National Philatelic Centre, Melbourne, has set out to change this. When Fox first took over the gallery, its displays were dominated by postal memorabilia. His mission has been to deflect the focus on 'the stamp' as a curious utilitarian object, and to highlight it as an object whose images can be read as pertinent signs of the culture and times that produced it. When we consider the massive number of stamps that have been produced over the last 150 years, we begin to understand the part these little 'icons' may have played in building up national identities. But be warned: stamps are only a point of departure for Fox's wider interests.

His recent exhibition, 'Sight/Seeing' played wittily on the idea of 'double vision'. Focusing attention on a multiple reading of similar material, Fox displayed images in pairs: stamp against photograph; decorative object against postcard; book against painting, and comic against souvenir. Much of the material compiled was from regional art galleries, state museums and private collections.

An aim of the exhibition was to reveal the process of 'icon' production in the colonies of New Zealand, the Middle East, Africa, New Guinea and Australia. Fox's clever juxtaposition of images highlighted specific landscape sites showing how they were selected by colonial photographers, designers and artists and, over time, they have become powerful signifiers of the country's abundance. Photographs and stamps, for instance, of New Zealand's Mitre Peak produced in the nineteenth century look uncannily reminiscent of the Swiss Alps, a favoured 'health resort' for the European gentleman. Even the contemporary tourist is enticed to believe that New Zealand is a 'healthy' place to visit! One thesis proposed by the exhibition seemed to be that displaced colonials viewed 'the new' through eyes that longed for the old and familiar. Although colonial 'tourists' may never have visited the European original, one imagines it was easier to confront the trials of relocation by holding a European site as an equivalent in the mind's eye. An image strangely similar to Mitre Peak was proposed

for the first Australian stamp to celebrate the new Commonwealth, presumably to make the Europeans feel at home. The desire for the security of the familiar, even today, prefigures the viewer/tourist's response to a landscape or foreign site.

Other images selected by Fox focused on the representation of indigenous complicity promulgated to suit the colonial agenda. On a nineteenth century postcard, *Scenes in Maoriland*, a strange inversion of the expected is depicted. A 'Maori maid' takes a photograph of a European family at the side of New Zealand's Winchester River. In this context, the Maori maid is at the service of the Europeans. It is her job to record the European family at leisure so that recipients of the postcard outside the country may note the graciousness of the lifestyle and the Maori position of servitude. In the exhibition essay, Fox suggests a double interpretation of the image whereby the Maori becomes a tourist in her own country but only as long as she agrees not to protest. He raises the question of who sees who? This message is further

supported by a selection of woodcuts and photographs of Sophia, the 'famous' Maori guide, who appeared in guidebooks of the 1880s. She is recorded as being 'able to speak English better than many English women', which must have reassured the European visitor that she was a European/Maori willing to interpret the secrets of Maori culture in a way they could understand. But how far was she prepared to go? Fox makes the point that the Maori had the ability to limit the tourists' penetration of their culture. In the 1880s, for example, the Maori of the Rotorua area demanded that a Pakeha (non-Maori) seek permission before drawing or photographing them.

On one level, the objects and images in 'Sight/Seeing' were 'souvenirs' available to the viewer/tourist for the duration of their visit. A postcard of Lake Taupo suspended so the viewer could see both its front and back, was a simple but

Muir and Moodie, *Sophia. The Famous Guide at Whakarewarewa*. Collection Gold Museum, Ballarat.



revealing installation concept. The card face depicted an idealised, Arcadian image of the lake complete with grass huts, fishermen, still waters, exotic plants and a smoking volcano. Is this a glimpse of Eden before the fall? On the back there is only space for the recipient's address, the rest of the card depicts a carved Maori 'corvo' motif, another image of the lake flanked by palm trees, the official crest of New Zealand and a postage stamp. The viewer is drawn irresistibly to the stamp which reveals a 'native' in the shade of a palm tree, watching an international aeroplane landing with the airmail. As witnessed from other objects displayed in the exhibition, Fox is fascinated by the aeroplane image probably because it supports his notion of double readings. This aeroplane stamp is a simultaneous signifier of the tourist escaping from the excesses of Western modernity, and the arriving tourist who will bring in the money to help the government's accounts. Who's seeing double now? Fox's postcard presents an ideological vision of place, smothering indigenous viewings of their place. This mass image promotes a *site* and a *sight* for European eyes.

'Sight/Seeing' takes its cue from a question posted by the nineteenth-century philosopher, John Locke, who asked how a blind man would see if he were to suddenly gain his sight. Fox uses the blind man as a metaphor for the blindness of any settler society: it takes a long time for the blindness to go away. 'Sight/Seeing' answers Locke's question by raising others: what causes us to see the world in the way we do? 'Sight/Seeing' juxtaposed popular and obscure images to examine the connection between personal and mass sightings. It encouraged the viewer to see cracks in the visual; to question the celebration of a 'correct' cultural vision and to understand that looking is always culturally conditioned. Fox's intelligent display of historical and cultural material made a single reading of the visual past impossible. His insight has powerful implications for all museum and gallery displays.

Adrian Montana  
Education Officer,  
Geelong Art Gallery

**The Marketing Mix:  
promoting museums,  
galleries and exhibitions,**

by Dr Sharron Dickman, published  
Museums Australia Inc. (Vic), 1995,  
rrp \$24.95.

Anyone who has ever been involved in presenting an exhibition knows how much work is involved: first the concept development, then the research, design and presentation. As the day of reckoning approaches, while you know that you can rely on a dedicated group of loyal supporters, you can't help but wonder whether anyone else will care.

Getting visitors through the door is an ongoing, crucial issue facing every cultural organisation. This is especially so in an era of increased competition from other artistic enterprises, sporting events and seven-day-a-week shopping. Quite simply, a prolonged lack of public interest must eventually result in your museum's closure. So, while it is obviously important to aim for the best possible exhibition, at least equal attention must be devoted to understanding potential audiences and finding ways to maximise their attendance.

This issue is further complicated by marketing having become highly specialised and skilled. Yet most cultural bodies, particularly the smaller ones whose existence is always precarious, simply cannot afford to hire professional marketing experts. Thus, this vital task will often be added to the list of duties of an already overworked director, or delegated to enthusiastic but inexperienced volunteers. Consequently, any 'do it yourself' literature, particularly when geared to the local industry, is potentially of great benefit to Australia's cultural institutions.

Dr Sharron Dickman is a prominent marketing consultant to the museum and tourism industries. In addition to lecturing in museum studies at a number of tertiary institutions, she has provided consultancy services to a variety of organisations including the Royal Melbourne Zoological Gardens, the National Wool Museum and Swan Hill Pioneer Settlement. Dr Dickman's understanding of the marketing issues peculiar to the

museum industry is readily apparent in *The Marketing Mix*.

*The Marketing Mix* is essentially a manual offering a comprehensive nuts and bolts approach. It is suitable for either professional or amateur marketing and public relations practitioners in the museum industry. Its early chapters discuss the basic elements of marketing, fostering a sound understanding of what it is all about and its relevance to one's museum or gallery. The book continues with a framework for undertaking an analysis of one's organisation, while further sections examine diverse promotional aspects of marketing.

The remainder of *The Marketing Mix* is devoted to publicity and public relations, two specialist areas of museum marketing (merchandising and developing coordinated marketing projects for special exhibitions), the fundamental matter of finance, market research and the importance of collecting statistical data.

An extremely positive feature of *The Marketing Mix* is its layout. The various subject areas are easily accessible via clear subject headings. Most of the main points are framed as questions and emphasised in red in the margins. Further, some chapters include practical exercises. She also includes 'marketing in action' segments which explain how marketing principles are applied in local and interstate galleries and museums. These examples are both interesting and useful as potential strategies.

There are two slight criticisms. Firstly, the book would have benefited from the inclusion of an index. Secondly, it is clearly a work which will be referred to often and, as such, it would have been better produced in hardcover, or perhaps even loose-leaf manual to enable removal of sections for easy reference or training purposes.

These minor matters aside, Dr Dickman should be congratulated for presenting this essential subject in a comprehensive handbook which is both eminently readable and of great practical worth. I highly recommend *The Marketing Mix* to all museum and gallery personnel because, as the author puts it: '...Marketing is the bridge between what we do - and the visitors who



come to see, to learn, and to experience our vision.'

**Louise Zygier**  
**Manager, Jewish Museum**  
**of Australia**

*The Jewish Museum of Australia is exhibiting 'The Wandering Jew: Myth and Metaphor' until the end of February.*

### **Looking After Heritage Places: The Basics of Heritage Planning for Managers, Landowners and Administrators.**

*Michael Pearson and Sharon Sullivan*  
 384pp, illus, bibliog, index, paperback.  
 Published Melbourne University Press,  
 1995.

First, this book is a 'must-read' for anybody interested in heritage planning in Australia. Sharon Sullivan, executive director of the Australian Heritage Commission and Michael Pearson, private heritage consultant, offer an informed and stimulating discussion of the intricacies of heritage planning. Second, for museum practitioners the book raises some important questions: where and how do museums fit in the heritage scene?

The structure of the book follows the processes outlined in *The Burra Charter*, the essential document guiding the conservation of heritage places in Australia. (1) After an excellent introduction to the whole topic, successive chapters unravel the legislative and administrative framework, discuss documentation and the cultural complexities of the assessment of significance, then deal with management planning and implementation, finishing with visitor management and interpretation.

Each section describes contemporary practice and elements of policy and ethics. Pearson and Sullivan believe that orderly planning allows for the exploration of complexity and value as well as the negotiation of contested issues. In their final chapter they canvass current issues and future concerns, such as the critique of *The Burra Charter* as over-emphasising the physical fabric at the cost of social value, the inclusion of Aboriginal spirituality, the cost benefits of heritage and 'the minority heritage –

immigrant, ethnic, Aboriginal, woman' (!)

Liberal use of real-life examples anchor the text in planning realities whilst showing how others have solved their problems. Key planning documents and useful graphic models of planning processes are provided.

The authors not only preach an inclusive agenda for planning, but practise it. Aboriginal issues are integrated throughout the book, rather than treated as separate and special cases, except where warranted. Pearson and Sullivan also insist on the interconnectedness of the many expertises and specialisations necessary to understand fully the meaning and significance of a site. This includes the necessity for genuine and respectful consultation with local community groups, and their involvement in management and the development of interpretation.

Intended as a handbook to be referred to for guidance, it is nonetheless very dense. In this respect the publishers should have developed a more creative, imaginative design to allow for easy reference.

The illustrations represent another missed opportunity. Bunched in the middle, they do not function as illustrators of ideas in the text nor advance the argument in a visual way. This is disappointing in a book which is at once practical and inspirational. Although there is a separate list of the illustrations, these are inadequately identified and few are dated. Perhaps it was a matter of money, but well-chosen illustrations (and more attentive editing) would have improved the discussion and quality of the book.

Five appendices include an interesting draft list of heritage themes developed by the Centre for Western Australian History for the Heritage Commission. *The Burra Charter* is also reproduced, albeit in its shortest form. Museum people should have a copy of *The Illustrated Burra Charter* which makes the document much more accessible. A list of useful heritage contacts in each state provides insight into which agencies are included in 'heritage'. Listed are The National Trust, national parks, archives and libraries, associations and societies,

but not museums. Museums are hardly mentioned in this book, so where do they fit in this heritage world?

A two-page section entitled 'Artefact Curation' offers general advice on the conservation and care of objects, but mentions nothing of provenance or context. The conservation of many heritage places may not yet include a serious commitment to the movable heritage. This is a disappointment to those who might wish for better collections management from national parks and other heritage sites.

The innovative Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales, in running its house museums, employs professional collections managers, while the National Trust of Victoria is also moving to recognise that its collections require as much conservation and care as its houses.

Heritage is, of course, highly political. Not only the small politics of which bit of heritage will be recognised, but the big politics of Commonwealth support and patronage. The Australian Heritage Commission has been a marvellous organisation for heritage places. It has provided the institutional link between Australia's international cultural obligations under UNESCO, ICOMOS and IUCN, and state bodies such as the Victorian Heritage Council (formerly The Historic Buildings Council). Intellectual leadership through a stream of reports and publications, conferences on pertinent topics, and quantities of money have done Australian heritage places proud.

Think what it might have been like for the museum world to be serviced by an Australian Museums Council, an independent statutory authority right under the nose of the Commonwealth. Of all the branches of the arts, museums have missed out most. They didn't get a board of the Australia Council, despite an early promise, and they have not enjoyed imaginative support from Canberra, as the dismal story of the National Museum of Australia illustrates.

But now along comes *Creative Nation*, which describes heritage as comprising 'the natural and cultural landscapes that we inhabit, the

artefacts and objects created by Australians – the stories of our past – our history? *The Commonwealth recognises that our cultural landscape, moveable cultural heritage and intangible cultural heritage are linked to each other and therefore require an integrated policy and management approach.* (2)

This is a promising direction, along with the proposals for funding outlined in the section on movable heritage. What are the implications for museums and for the managers who look after heritage places? What kind of organisation can make this happen? We have come to realise that a heritage place can hardly be understood without the objects which people made and used in that context. And the building fabric and the tangible objects together reveal the meaning and significance of the intangible heritage. *Looking After Heritage Places* reminds us that there is much work yet to be done.

**Rachel Faggetter**  
**Environmental and Heritage**  
**Interpretation, Deakin University**

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**Australian Pottery: The First 100 Years,**

*by Geoff Ford, published Salt Glaze Press. 416pp. \$145 plus \$10 postage. PO Box 928, Wodonga 3689, Ph/fax: (060) 563 152.*

Because pottery has been made in so many parts of the world, and used for so many purposes until the very recent age of plastics, it is just about everywhere in museums. It forms the roof or floor or wall cladding of many historic buildings, it constitutes a large fraction of the archaeologist's finds, in art museums it appears as plaque or medallion or painted tile or studio ceramic, and reveals its functional and decorative aspects in regional museums and recreated interiors.

In recent years Australian pottery has become popular with private collectors and now accounts for a

steady flow of enquiries to museums. Unfortunately, much Australian pottery is unmarked – possibly because neither its brand nor its Australian manufacture were selling points when it was made – and can be hard to identify. As a result, many examples in museums are inadequately or inaccurately identified or catalogued.

Every historic house museum, regional museum and social history collection needs a comprehensive tome on Australian pottery on its reference shelf. There have been important regional studies, like Noris Ioannou's for South Australia, and thorough histories of individual enterprises, like Paul Scholes' on Bendigo, but Geoff Ford's is the widest-ranging, best-illustrated general reference book on Australian pottery.

It covers much more than the 100 years its subtitle claims. Ford documents the variety of Australian pottery from almost the first years of European settlement until World War One, and also the later years of those established firms which continued production after that conflict.

The statistics give an idea of the value of this book as a reference for curators, cataloguers and collectors: the stories of 78 pottery companies, with over 800 pieces illustrated in colour, hundreds more illustrations from old catalogues and advertisements depicting literally thousands of examples, plus over 300 pottery stamps and marks for identification and dating.

If the book has a shortcoming it is in the lack of a developed frame for all this detail. The reader wanting a broad social or economic context will have to research elsewhere. The text is organised in terms of histories of individual enterprises, state by state, in chronological order within each state. After a one-page foreword by John McPhee of the National Gallery of Victoria, and a one-page introduction by author Ford, we plunge straight into the first pottery history. After the last instalment we go to a useful glossary of terms, bibliography and index – no summation: you draw your own conclusions.

However, to be fair, it must be said that the individual pottery histories are well placed in their

times, with extensive quotations from original sources and the human dimension supplied by portraits, anecdotes and biographical material.

*Australian Pottery: The First 100 Years* does not list every single ceramic enterprise, but it does list all the major ones, and, more importantly, perhaps, many minor ones including a lot which have rarely, if ever, been documented in accessible published form before. By concentrating on the more prolific potteries from various parts of Australia, Geoff Ford has produced a volume more useful than any other to the collector of old Australian pottery.

If a collector or a small museum is only going to buy one book on old Australian pottery, this ought to be it.

**Professor David Dolan**  
**Director, Centre for Cultural**  
**Heritage Studies,**  
**Curtin University**

**The Barossa Folk, Germanic Furniture and Craft Traditions in Australia,**

*by Noris Ioannou, published Craftsman House. 368pp, hardcover, \$125, illus.*

The Barossa Valley, claims Noris Ioannou, is pre-eminent as a microcosm of colonial and ethnic crafting traditions in Australia. In *The Barossa Folk* he provides a detailed analysis of the material culture of the Barossa that opens a window on the cultural history of the region.

The book focuses on the arrival of German-speaking Lutherans in South Australia in 1838, to the years between the Depression and World War Two, which marked the final decline of a continuous tradition of craft production characteristic to the Barossa community. The book is divided into four parts. The first three outline major categories of Barossa material culture: cabinet-making and woodcraft (the major part of the text), potting and woven arts, folk art and craftwork. In the third part the location shifts from the workshops of the craftsman to the domain of the *hausfrau*, focusing on needlework traditions and the meaning and uses of decorative textiles. A fourth part deals with the revival of craftwork in the Barossa region in recent years, and explores

the points of contact between the German folk tradition and the new craft movement. Here, the author makes some interesting points about the recovery of concepts such as authenticity, tradition and community.

Ioannou uses the term 'folk' to describe a distinctive vernacular tradition, one where art is inextricably linked to function. He identifies the sources and elements of the Barossa tradition by outlining the cultural values of the Prussian communities from which most of the Barossa Germans came, and comparing the Barossa settlements with German-speaking communities elsewhere in Australia and North America.

In the Barossa, the tradition was built through a distinctive pattern of migration and settlement to that region, the determination of the community to maintain its cultural traditions, and the physical remoteness of the Barossa region. Migrants from the German states came to Australia for broadly religious and economic reasons. Many who settled in South Australia came out as part of a community group, whereas the Germans who settled on the eastern seaboard of Australia were more likely to migrate as individuals or family groups. The South Australian Germans, along with their counterparts elsewhere, brought with them a tradition of *wanderschaft*, the journeyman-artisan, a strong ethnic identity, respect for tradition, and values of

piety, thrift and restraint. Once arrived, Ioannou argues, they developed a dislike for raw colonial society and sought to re-establish their familiar patterns of life in isolation from the broader community.

Ioannou makes the general point that craftsmen in pre-industrial societies carry the 'cultural blueprints' of those societies. In the patriarchal and religious community of the Barossa, the craftsmen were central to cultural maintenance as well as economic survival. This extended beyond the supply of material goods to provide for a particular way of life: cultural values were expressed through a design vocabulary which favoured restraint, order and simplicity.

Cultural values favoured tradition and continuity, but economic survival meant adaptability. The German artisans and craftsmen rarely found sufficient demand for their skills to practise them full-time. Many cabinetmakers, for example, combined their craft with activities such as farming, house-building, coffin-making and undertaking. The story of the Barossa folk tradition is in one sense the struggle of handcrafted work against the forces of industrialisation.

As a piece of historical research, *The Barossa Folk* is both broad in scope and meticulously detailed. In the absence of substantial written or photographic documentation in some areas, Ioannou has made good use of oral and archaeological

evidence. Above all, though, the artefacts themselves are the principal forms of evidence, and his analysis of them is careful and insightful.

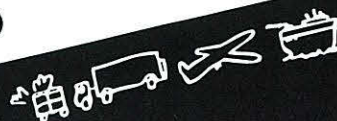
The written text at times reflects the stylistic and structural conventions of the thesis on which this is based, and might have benefited from a more vigorous editing to remove some repetition of the author's central arguments. However, this is a minor quibble; it is an expensive but substantial work. The design and production of the book is quite superb; it is an artefact in its own right. The publishers have considered how a book of such large proportions will be read and used, and have tailored the design accordingly. For example, the outside margins of pages are used for illustrations of objects described in the text, which makes for easy cross-referencing of text with illustration. The placement of the illustrations and their extended captioning makes it possible to browse the book as one would a catalogue.

*The Barossa Folk* makes a significant contribution to material culture studies in Australia, not simply for its analysis of German-Australian folk craft traditions, but for the light it shines on larger questions about migration, cultural maintenance, tradition and change.

Ian McShane  
Senior Curator, Australian  
Society and History  
National Museum of Australia

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