

*The magazine of Museums Australia Inc.*

# MUSEUM NATIONAL

VOL 4 • NO 4  
MAY 96

We have a new Coalition Government intent on change, buoyed by its majority in the lower house and a 'reform' agenda.

It is interesting in this context to note that both the ALP and the Coalition expressed commitment to the arts during the federal election. This reflects the fact that the arts lobby has been very successful over the past few years and groups such as Museums Australia, the National Association for the Visual Arts, Arts Action, the National Campaign for the Arts and others have been listened to. This is hopefully a sign of increased commitment in the future – but budget cuts are looming and the arts are always vulnerable.

It is worth looking at a few examples where the emphasis might shift in terms of arts policies:

The Australia Council is to be retained with renewed commitment to arms length funding and principles of peer assessment. The Artists Creative Fellowships are to be replaced by a \$3 million emerging artists fund, which of course impacts on mid career artists for whom support appears to be minimal.

Regional Australia gets a boost with a \$7.5 million regional arts fund and an add-on of \$3 million for Playing Australia and Visions.

Film, television and multimedia investors are to get an additional tax incentive, and there is to be \$10 million over three years for hardware and software for cultural institutions. Importantly, a major focus of the Heritage Collections Committee (HCC) is the establishment and promotion of the national database – Australian Museums Information System (AMIS). This funding program is relevant here.

Indigenous arts – the Coalition is to emphasise the deficiencies in the existing copyright legislation and will 'monitor' present funding arrangements to Aboriginal arts and crafts centres. (This compares with a commitment from the ALP to set up

a variety of schemes to promote indigenous identity across music and drama, which included the staging of an indigenous youth music festival).

The Coalition has also promised \$15.5 million over three years for the establishment of a national museum. Clearly this is not enough and the Government hopes to encourage private sponsorship to boost available funds. The Government also intends to construct the Gallery of Aboriginal Australia as a separate museum.

In the visual arts the emphasis is to be on emerging artists with the establishment of Ausart to promote them. Ausart is not to be managed by the Australia Council.

The Australian Foundation for Culture and Humanities was set up by the Keating Government to foster links between the corporate sector and the broad area of culture and the humanities. The foundation has had its role somewhat restricted and will now concentrate on encouraging corporate benefaction to the arts. Given the shortage of funds available from the corporate sector this may mean, in the pre-Olympic period, a concentration of effort in an area that may well impact negatively on museums, especially smaller institutions.

These few examples indicate that the new Government is intent on change and while some of these are welcome others are more problematic. It is important that Museums Australia and other cultural lobby groups remain alert to the development of cultural policies and continue to assert a significant role in determining future directions. We, as the museums peak body, must be prepared to lobby energetically in order to secure for the museum industry an identity and role within the changing cultural framework. We look forward to working with Senator Alston, the new minister, in this important task.

**Des Griffin**  
President

## Museum National August issue...

We are compiling an overview of major research projects being undertaken in state, national and university museums to be carried as a supplement in the August issue of Museum National. Questionnaires are now being sent to relevant institutions, however, if there are appropriate research projects being undertaken in other institutions which should be included in this listing, please contact the editor on (03) 9486 3399.

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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### Copy deadlines for 1996

24 June – Aug issue;  
17 Sept – Nov issue.

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Editor: Linda Richardson

### Subscriptions

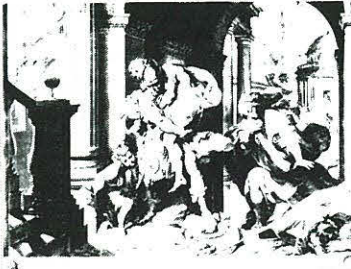
Subscription to *Museum National* is a membership service of Museums Australia Inc. Single issues are also available.

### 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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Cover image:

Agostino Carracci (1557 – 1602), *Aeneas and his Family Fleeing Troy* (detail), 1595, engraving, after Federico Barocci (ca. 1535 – 1612). As Barocci's version of this painting in the Galleria Borghese post-dates this engraving, it has been assumed that Agostino worked from another, now lost version, or well worked drawings and models by Barocci. This reinforces the collaborative nature between artist and printmaker. Regardless of the actual basis of the print, Agostino's depiction of the sheen of drapery and great control over the lights and darks shows him trying to depict in monochromatic terms the vibrancy of Barocci's painting. Courtesy of the Baillieu Library, The University of Melbourne. (See Laurie Benson's professional development case study p. 10).



DEPARTMENT OF  
COMMUNICATIONS  
AND THE ARTS

*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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# Professional Development – Engaging With the Core Issues of Practice

*by John Barrett-Lennard*

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The skills, knowledge and experience required for work in contemporary museum settings are many and various. The ways in which they can be learned, enhanced and developed are equally diverse. It would seem clear, though, that at some point in the careers of most museum professionals the opportunity to enlarge their vision of museums and professional practice within them, and to step outside the normal boundaries and gain new perspectives, becomes necessary to their continuing work and the contributions they make.

There are complex and important questions to be asked when considering the professional development needs of museum workers. What, for instance, does professional development mean in the current contexts of Australian museums, given their breadth and the vast range of people and professional specialisations required in any contemporary museum? What lies at the core of professional museum work, and how can or should this be developed further? Indeed, how can a museum profession be defined in a time of constant change when institutions are having to remake themselves in response to great political, cultural, social and technological shifts? Once that profession is identified, what should be done to further its interests and to increase opportunities for its expression?

These can be difficult questions to answer, not just for individuals but for museums and for professional associations, such as Museums Australia, which work to represent and support museums and museum workers. Such questions must also be addressed in a variety of forums and at differing levels. Individual museum workers must constantly address them; conferences or publications such as *Museum National* provide another forum in which to air and debate issues.

For individuals, professional development can involve a number of activities which extend one's own professional practice. In particular, those which provide an opportunity to step outside one's normal setting and allow for reflective and intense engagement with core issues of practice are desirable. The opportunity to work in a new situation, to examine how others work and to consider larger questions around one's work, or even around the role and potential of museums in contemporary society, can be invaluable and invigorating. The benefits of a

fresh perspective and new, informed comparisons can in turn flow from individuals to their colleagues and to their institutions.

Museums Australia's professional development program has a dual role of assisting individuals in their own development, and promoting development of the profession as a whole. Aid to individuals is available in the form of advice and information on relevant opportunities, assistance in accessing resources and a professional development grant program. Alongside these activities goes advocacy, publishing, research and policy development.

While other programs exist within Museums Australia's state branches, at a national level the program has come largely out of work on professional development issues initiated by the former Art Museums Association of Australia. To date, funding for the program has been limited to that inherited from the AMAA, and provided by the Visual Arts/Craft Fund of the Australia Council. As such, the grant program is restricted to those working in contemporary visual arts or craft areas, with its major emphasis on contemporary exhibition practice. Museums Australia's national council and its standing committee on professional development are committed to broadening the grants program to other areas of museum work via funding from other government or non-government agencies (although given current patterns of cultural funding in Australia, particularly in heritage areas, this is not an easy task).

The clear emphasis within Museums Australia's work on professional development has been on mid-career professionals and their particular needs, and through that on the development of, and support for, new visions of museum practice. The grants program is at present able to provide support for eight to ten people annually. Projects which receive support tend to be considered, focused and well thought out, they have the support of relevant institutions at both ends of the project, and often require travel (although the grand tour is definitely not supported). In the last two years a number of co-funded internships have also been supported, aimed at people working in entry level positions, in part to encourage museums to develop their own internship programs. While formal training or education can provide or enhance skills and knowledge, the professional development committee believes that such work is outside its

domain and resources, and is best left to tertiary education institutions.

In an important sense the professional development program, and particularly its grants program, can only serve as an indicator or demonstration of what is possible. In this sense, some of the examples provided by successful projects are expected to encourage institutions and individuals to consider what they may do, where they may be effective and the benefits that can flow to them.

A considerable range of other projects, beyond the grants program, have been developed by the professional development committee, often in collaboration with others. These include:

- A very successful workshop in Kuala Lumpur in 1995 on exhibition development and organisation. This was led by Australian museum professionals (from both art and 'non-art' museums), and was attended by people representing the full range of museum interests and from all ASEAN countries. This was intended, on our part, to encourage and assist contacts between individuals, institutions and organisations in Australia and South-East Asia with particular, though not exclusive, benefits to future professional development programs. (See page 14)
- Support for various Museums Australia publications, including *Independent Curators*, *Guidelines for Internships*, *The Money and the Means*, and *Careers in Museums*, all with application across the full spectrum of museums.
- The initiation of a program of internships for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in museums, galleries, keeping places etc., in collaboration with Museums Australia's standing committee on museums and indigenous peoples, and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Board of the Australia Council.
- Initiating a co-funded international exchange program with UK art museums (through the British Council and now part of its 'New Visions' program), and beginning discussions with colleagues in New Zealand about a similar scheme between Australia and New Zealand.
- Supporting international travel by Museums Australia's national director to further not just the professional development program and its exchange projects, but the full range of Museums Australia's work through contact with similar organisations and museums overseas.
- Initiating, in conjunction with

Asialink (as with the KL workshop), the development and formal accreditation of tertiary level museum courses for distance delivery in South-East Asia (and potentially in Australia), as one way in which Museums Australia can enter into greater dialogue with museum training providers in Australia about the content, direction and application of their courses.

- Research and evaluation on the professional development program as it has operated to date, with the expectation that this will not only allow the program to be refined, but will also assist considerably in seeking funds to broaden the reach of the grants program.

The program as it exists at present is very wide and the resources available are very limited. Through its grant fund the program has directly assisted more than 60 individuals from institutions large and small across Australia, as well as freelance practitioners, and from the broad spectrum of specialist professional areas within museums. Through a series of carefully targeted and strategic projects the impact has been considerable, with long-term benefits and increased opportunities for, and understanding of, professional museum practice in this country.

Museums and museum professionals must be constantly aware of the need to seek ongoing opportunities for renewal and growth, to review and maintain that which has been done well, to articulate clearly and critically what is being done at present, and to extend a vision of what can be achieved and how it may be both necessary and immensely rewarding. Professional development (whether through the support and assistance of bodies such as Museums Australia, or not) is both a professional responsibility and an enormously exciting, stimulating and vital activity.

**John Barrett-Lennard**  
Director, John Curtin Gallery, Curtin University  
of Technology and contemporary art curator and  
critic. John Barrett-Lennard is a member of  
Museums Australia's national council and is chair  
of its standing committee on professional  
development

MANAGEMENT, CURATORS, SERVICE PROFESSIONALS

MUSEUMS AUSTRALIA

**PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT  
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the Federal Government's arts, funding and advisory body.

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# Case Studies in Professional Development

The case studies presented here do not represent the definitive guide to professional development. They simply reflect the different approaches to career development taken by five museum professionals at different stages of their working life.

The summaries provided include examples of positive experiences in professional development along with some of the drawbacks. Overall, however, the rewards and benefits to the individual, the institutions and the sector as a whole seem unquestionable.

What does emerge is the clear need for careful planning by all participants, both individual and institutional. Indeed, the need for institutional support seems essential, not just in terms of formal policies to encourage staff to take up external professional development opportunities, but also guidelines to assist those undertaking internships within an institution.

Nicholas Baume reports that his successful 1995 internship at New York's Grey Gallery was helped, in part, by an institutional culture which understood and supported his needs at both a professional and personal level. Amanda Daly also highlights the support given by the galleries involved in her recent international exchange program as a major key to its success. On the other hand, Alison Duck's internship at Trinity College, Dublin, would perhaps have benefited if more formal structures and policies had been in place to support her internship.

While Karen Quinlan has not as yet undertaken a formal internship overseas, her case study highlights the value of volunteering and casual employment as a way of gaining entry level experience and of developing professional networks. Laurie Benson reports that while he had learnt techniques for handling precious objects and correct exhibiting practices from workshops and books, these did not become natural until he was putting them into practice on a day to day basis during his internship.

The following definitions may be helpful –  
*Internship*: a pre-arranged structured learning experience relevant to an intern's academic or professional goals and to the professional needs of the museum; a continuous period of museum work done under the supervision of a qualified individual or individuals, the goal of which is professional development. *Professional development*: the intensification and diversification of an individual's capacities for achievement in his or her chosen field by the acquiring of relevant knowledge. *Volunteer*: a person who offers to work in an institution for no remuneration; usually there is no contract and no obligation on the part of the institution to provide any professional training. (These definitions have been taken from *Guidelines for Internships*, by Marianne Wallace-Crabbe, published Art Museums Association of Australia, 1993)

Museums Australia maintains working reports on internships undertaken through its professional development grants program. Anyone planning an internship or a period of study overseas may benefit from reading through these reports which are available for research at Museums Australia's national office.

Editor

In 1995 Amanda Daly, assistant curator at the Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery, spent three months working as assistant curator at the Mead Gallery, Warwick Arts Centre, University of Warwick as part of Museums Australia's International Exchange Professional Development Grant program. As part of the exchange program, Victoria Pomeroy from the Mead Gallery, took up Amanda's position at the Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery.

The Mead Gallery is an integral part of the Warwick Arts Centre, one of the largest performance and visual arts complexes in the UK.

During my internship I was involved in the administration of the exhibition program and the development of forthcoming exhibition and education programs. I conducted school workshops, planned educational workshops in conjunction with the Warwick Arts Centre education liaison officer, assisted with the production of catalogues, wall texts, installations and public events for exhibitions, and curated an exhibition drawn from the Rugby Collection and the Kettering Borough Council Collection for spring 1996.

Working with marketing, sponsorship and administrative staff, I learnt much about arts marketing strategies.

In October 1995 the gallery hosted two major site-specific residencies by leading British sculptors David Kemp and Jo Stockham. The sculpture residency formed the major part of my project at the gallery and I was able to involve staff members from a number of the university's departments in the sculpture residency project. School groups and parents also became involved.

The exchange was successful for the individuals and the institutions involved. My involvement with a variety of educational programs and the opportunity to develop these within a university environment was one of the greatest gains. Adapting to the practices and systems of another university gallery and the arts centre was a valuable experience. Exposure to the diversity of curatorial and public programs was of immense benefit to my continuing professional development. Through my work at the Mead I was able to develop many valuable contacts which proved a great source of information, support and inspiration.

However, the exchange period could have been extended for a longer period. Three months was sufficient for the participants to become closely involved in their new gallery but too brief for projects

to be developed or other contacts and interests to be pursued. My primary projects at the Mead Gallery were to come to fruition in the six month period after my departure. For gallery staff, too, the period allowed them to just become settled with their new staff member before they again departed.

There is also a need to clearly communicate the expectations of all involved parties prior to the exchange and for participants and galleries to state their ambitions for the exchange very precisely. As participants in the program directly fill each other's position at their host gallery, it is important they feel their new role is commensurate with their capabilities and ambitions.

Both the Mead Gallery and the Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery went through staffing changes during the exchange. I welcomed the opportunities these events presented but was also reminded of the potential for change and disruption within any institution.

The nature and time of our exchange limited the amount of contact I was able to have with Victoria Pomeroy before and after the exchange. If possible, I would suggest future participants discuss their exchange experiences and their time at one another's institution in some detail.

The exchange depended on the commitment of both supporting institutions and each gallery was prepared to accommodate the level of disruption the exchange involved.

The Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery also benefited from Victoria Pomeroy's thorough professionalism and rigorous organisational skills. Working with the curator, Victoria was involved in the organisation of a range of exhibitions.

The grant was of enormous value to my professional development and enabled me to extend my skills and experience beyond my previous professional role within an international arena. It has provided me with a wealth of experiences and ideas that will continue to inform my professional development and my activities at the Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery. In turn, it also offered me the opportunity to contribute new ideas and stimulus to the Mead Gallery. I extended my experience of gallery education programs in a direct organisational capacity and was able to visit many different museums, galleries and arts agencies to learn about British practices in the development, display, public programs and touring of exhibitions. The many documents and catalogues given to me will also be a useful resource for other arts professionals in Perth. **Amanda Daly has since accepted a permanent position at the Mead Gallery.**

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**In 1995 Alison Duck, currently on temporary contract as a professional**

**officer in preservation services at Australian Archives in Canberra, undertook a conservation internship at Trinity College Library, Dublin, with assistance from the Getty Foundation of the Paul Getty Trust.**

During my year at Trinity College I learnt the basics of book conservation while also learning to appreciate the diversity of problems involved in the preservation of book collections. I was able to do this under the supervision of experienced staff in a working environment. I could have learnt many of the techniques in Australia, however, there is a wealth of information, technical expertise and experience amongst staff of the conservation workshop. The opportunity to work in a dedicated book conservation workshop such as Trinity, and to work in close proximity with such a wonderful collection, was not possible in Australia.

However, there were some disadvantages, such as the lack of formal policies or programs regarding interns in the conservation workshop.

There have been interns since the workshop was established but their work program is selected by the director according to current projects and the intern's experience. Unfortunately, the director was away when I arrived and the first few days were disjointed while it was determined what work I was to embark upon. A person is selected to supervise the work of the intern, but this supervisor still has their own quota of work to complete meaning they are often absent or busy. Questions and problems could not be directed to other staff members as all have their own personal methods and techniques, and discussion sometimes resulted in further problems. However, all staff were open in terms of questions regarding the work they were undertaking and expected results.

Although I had done some related reading before heading to Ireland, as with every conservation practice only direct experience and an understanding of the materials, technology and techniques can result in successful learning and achievement of a treatment. Unfortunately, the pattern of work in the Trinity workshop did not allow for this introduction period.

The profile of the conservation workshop within the library is not as high as desired. This lack of profile and the isolation of the laboratory within the library building means there is little interaction with any library staff on the day to day activities of the library as a functioning unit, of which the conservation workshop is a component. Often there is a lack of communication and understanding of conservation. This has not been the case in other institutions in which I have worked, for example, Australian Archives where preservation is considered a part of all staff duties. At Trinity, conservation staff are not consulted about conditions or suitability of objects for display, special handling conditions for travelling exhibitions, or environmental conditions.

The internship at Trinity has benefited my career and expanded my interests and knowledge. It has broadened my view and understanding of conservation issues on a global scale and the need for increased international communication to benefit the conservation profession. Many of the base problems and issues such as conservation awareness, education, environmental conditions, storage, transit of works of art etc. are concerns common to all major conservation laboratories. Communication between institutions and professionals broadens the sharing of specialised knowledge and allows for proper professional discussion on the ethics and implications of various techniques and ideas.

There is an important need for young Australian conservators to travel overseas for internships. Currently there is only one conservation degree course within Australia. Young conservators usually complete the degree course and find work in a laboratory with other professionals who undertook the same training. Overseas, for example the UK, there is a myriad of training options (perhaps too many) and the emphasis is different – students are post graduates and they specialise.

Exposure to professionals with a different background gives conservators a broader appreciation of new ideas and techniques, the chance to think laterally and adopt new methods, or to adapt them for Australian laboratories and share these ideas with other professionals when they return home. Interns also enrich the ideas of the host institution.

The personal benefits of my internship are in some ways immeasurable. Disappointingly, there are not

many dedicated professional book conservation workshops within Australia so in many ways I do not get to practise many of the techniques I have learnt. However, this is offset by the multiskilling expected today by employers and the understanding and maturity I have gained through my internship.

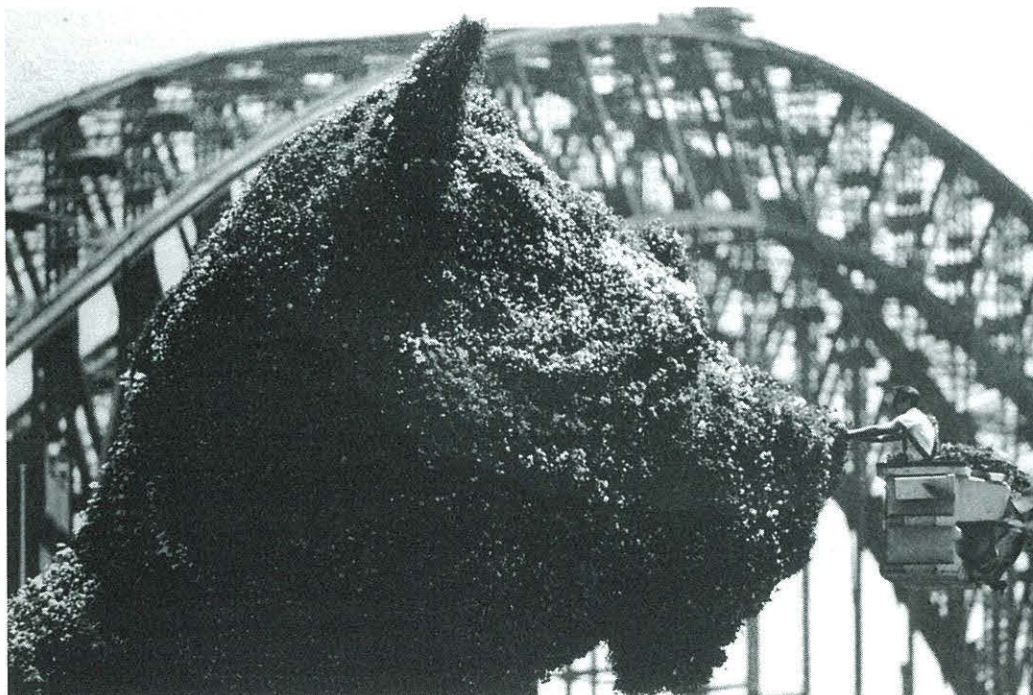
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**Nicholas Baume, curator of public programs at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney, undertook a two month residency at New York University's Grey Art Gallery and Study Centre in 1995 as part of Museums Australia's self-directed grant program.**

My arrival at the Grey Gallery coincided with the final preparations for an exhibition of new photographs by New York-based Anne Mandelbaum. I found it stimulating to participate in this intensive period of preparation which enabled me to see how the in-house production of the catalogue, the installation, and public discussions were coordinated.

During the residency I developed a proposal for a season of public programs to take place during a forthcoming closure of the gallery due to renovations. This involved extensive discussions with the gallery director and a busy schedule of visits to other public programs in New York.

The residency was successful in every respect. My host organisation, made up of a small, effective team of professionals, was very welcoming. Colleagues were never too busy to assist in my 'acclimatisation' to new working conditions or to involve me in their areas of responsibility. Several staff members had undertaken professional development projects of their own in other countries so immediately



Jeff Koons, *Puppy*, 1995, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney. During his internship at New York University's Grey Art Gallery Nicholas Baume was able to take advantage of every possible opportunity. This included meetings with Jeff Koons to facilitate his visit to Australia as part of the exhibition 'From Christo and Jeanne-Claude to Jeff Koons: John Kaldor Art Projects and Collections'. Photo: Brendan Read.



understood my situation, and the gallery is used to hosting visiting curators and other professionals working on collaborative projects within the gallery. In particular, director Tom Sokolowski's generosity in sharing his time, knowledge and experience ensured I was able to take advantage of every possible opportunity, with a firm base from which to operate.

Educationally, the residency was enormously stimulating in terms of the current contemporary art scene in New York and in new approaches to public programs, special events and exhibitions. Observing the activities of the gallery and of larger New York museums dedicated to contemporary art gave me an entirely new point of reference for the kind of programs I am involved in at the MCA. I was also able to focus on the different kinds of exhibition-related publications produced by museums including signage, extended labels, wall texts, brochures and catalogues. Comparisons between different New York institutions and my own experience in this area in Australia proved useful.

The many points of comparison and difference between the Grey Gallery and the MCA were instructive – both institutions have an historical and collection-based link with a major metropolitan university – and there is great potential to exploit these links, particularly in public programs.

I cannot overstate the benefits I have gained from my period of professional development. The opportunity to step back from the often all consuming day-to-day responsibilities of work at the MCA and focus on the larger questions of the role and potential of museums and their programs in contemporary life was an invigorating experience. In New York it is possible to study museums and contemporary art in its most concentrated form because of the dense layering of artists, galleries and museums.

I was able to compare the approach Australia has taken to issues of multiculturalism, access, public education and censorship with prevailing attitudes in the United States. I was able to learn from the professionalism of much of the museum culture in New York, and the excellent standard of presentation and publications in many institutions.

The contacts I was able to make have the potential to be lasting personal and professional associations which open possibilities of continuing future exchanges. Exciting programming ideas for the MCA have emerged from my professional development experience. The direction of MCA programs within education and exhibition areas until 2001 are currently under intensive discussion and the perspectives I have gained through the residency are particularly useful at this critical point in the development of long-term planning.

Nicholas Baume curated 'From Christo and Jeanne-Claude to Jeff Koons: John Kaldor Art Projects and Collections', recently shown at the MCA and on show at the Museum of Modern Art at Heide until 19 May.

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**Karen Quinlan graduated from the University of Melbourne with a major in fine arts and textile design in 1985. She then taught art and textiles at secondary level for five years, became coordinator of the department and then decided to change careers...**

In 1992 I started work at the National Gallery of Victoria's shop in a casual capacity. To supplement my earnings I worked as a textile, clothing designer managing a small business. In my spare time I worked as a volunteer with the NGV's curator Robyn Healy, within the department of fashion and textiles, assisting with cataloguing and preventive conservation.

The collection covers Australian and international works and comprises over 20,000 items from antiquity to the present. Costumes, accessories, embroidery, tapestry, lace, woven and printed fabric, carpets and rugs form the basis of this department which is considered the largest collection of textiles in the southern hemisphere.



Reorganising Bendigo Art Gallery's permanent display of nineteenth-century porcelain in preparation for the forthcoming building redevelopments. Experience gained at the National Gallery of Victoria has equipped Karen Quinlan (pictured) with the skills required for the safe movement and storage of collections. Photo: Paul Boromeo.

I was appointed temporary curatorial assistant with the responsibility of cataloguing part of the Australian fashion and textile collection and in 1994 became the department's first full-time assistant. In essence, my time at the NGV formed a type of apprenticeship. I was strongly supported by the institution and exposed to all facets of gallery administration. I developed a sound knowledge of collection management, assisted with exhibition development, installation, and travelling exhibitions and developed practical skills in preventive conservation.

I applied to the Courtauld Institute post-graduate diploma in textile conservation based at Hampton Court Palace. My application was successful, however, I was unable to secure funding and could not take up the position. During late 1995 I was employed by the National Exhibition Touring Support, based at the NGV. As a casual NETS officer I worked as administrative assistant to the executive officer.

I had planned to study museum studies at Deakin University with the hope of completing my masters during 1996–97, but in January 1996 I was appointed curator at the Bendigo Art Gallery.

This gallery has an extensive range of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Australian and international works including paintings, prints, drawings, decorative arts and textiles. The building redevelopment which is about to take place will require design of new storage areas and the safe movement of the collection. Experience gained at the NGV in this area has proven invaluable, as I assisted with the moving of the collection of fashion and textiles to its new storage area. My fine arts degree and teaching experience, combined with my knowledge of collection management and conservation provide the necessary skills for my present position at the Bendigo Art Gallery.

A regional gallery offers exposure to every facet of museum experience. The future of the Bendigo Art Gallery depends largely on its current staff and the redevelopment and upgrading of the gallery building. We are fortunate in that we have a dynamic team which is positive and contemporary in its approach. The practical issues associated with collection management are high on my list of priorities and I consider my current role within this gallery to be significant and timely in terms of my professional career.

**Karen Quinlan is curator, Bendigo Art Gallery**

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**In 1994 Laurie Benson undertook a twelve month internship in the print room of the University of Melbourne's Baillieu Library. The print room's collection consists of approximately eighteen**

**thousand Old Master prints dating to 1900. The internship is available to students who have completed the University's graduate diploma of art and curatorial studies. It is supported by the Miegunyah Trust, a University of Melbourne funding body which assists cultural activities and curatorial internships.**

The bulk of my time at the Baillieu Library was spent cataloguing sections of the print collection. My first task was to research the many unattributed prints in the hope of ascertaining an author. I was able to find artists for many of the previously anonymous works and was also able to authenticate some previously doubtful works, particularly works thought to be Rembrandt copies but which, after careful examination and comparison with reproductions, were found to be genuine works.

During the internship I catalogued approximately 3000 eighteenth- and nineteenth-century book illustrations gifted by Dr Orde Poynton, whose collection of prints and rare books helped establish the print room collection in 1959. I also assisted curator Geoffrey Down set up a range of exhibitions and assisted students and staff with enquiries. In addition, as one of the conditions of my internship, I prepared an exhibition 'European Reproductive Engraving 1550 – 1650'. Works exhibited showed how some Italian printmakers of the sixteenth and seventeenth century interpreted paintings by their contemporaries and earlier artists.

During the internship I was awarded the Harold Wright Scholarship to study prints at the Department of Prints and Drawings at the British Museum and I took up this position in February 1995. One of the terms of the scholarship is professional experience in the area of prints, and I would not have been awarded this unique opportunity to study in one of the world's best collections of prints and drawings had I not worked in the Baillieu. Nor can I think of a better preparation for working in the British Museum than my time spent at the Baillieu.

I gained much practical experience working in the print room which would be impossible to get in any other way than working in a museum or collection environment. Handling precious and delicate objects, and implementing correct exhibiting practices may be learned from a book and the occasional workshop, but it is not until these are put into practise every hour of the working day that they become natural. Simply performing the day to day tasks that cropped up during my internship at the Baillieu I believe thoroughly prepared me for future curatorial work.

I also hope I contributed something to the university in proportion to what I have gained. Laurie Benson is now working as a freelance writer and curator

# Professional Development for Indigenous Museum Workers

*by Gaye Sculthorpe*

**Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people first took up jobs in museums in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Since then, awareness of indigenous issues in museums has grown dramatically and the number of indigenous museum workers has increased. In spite of this, the areas of employment of indigenous people in museums are still narrow and there appears a shortage of qualified indigenous people to take up new positions. Why is this the case and what needs addressing?**

## History

The initial impetus for Aboriginal employment in museums came from two directions: the Aboriginal community wanted a say in the way cultural material was managed and exhibited as well as greater access to it; simultaneously, many museums began to realise that they could no longer ignore living people if they wished to continue to curate and research collections relating to them. The Aboriginal Arts Board under Robert Edwards played a key role in raising awareness of contemporary Aboriginal cultural issues amongst museums and the wider community. The *Report of the Planning Committee on the Gallery of Aboriginal Australia* in 1975 emphasised the need for training in conservation and other specialist museum fields, as well as museology. The 1978 UNESCO seminar 'Preserving Indigenous Cultures: A New Role for Museums' highlighted these issues again and made a number of recommendations regarding employment and training.<sup>(1)</sup> These included the appointment of advisory public education activities, training programs for staff in local cultural centres, increased employment of indigenous people in major museums and interchange of information between museums and traditional custodians, and the important role that indigenous cultural leaders play in selecting people for museum training. These issues are as relevant today as they were in 1978.

Many initial appointments in museums were as Aboriginal liaison officers and were designed to facilitate communication between professional museum staff and Aboriginal communities. Increased educational and training opportunities led to indigenous people being employed as curators, technical officers, conservators and education officers. In the last ten years, a number of tertiary institutions

have responded to the needs in this area and initiated courses in cultural heritage management with a focus on Aboriginal culture. The University of Canberra, through the efforts of Amar Galla, produced many graduates who have since taken up positions in the industry. Several museums have sought to develop training courses for indigenous community people using various sources of external funding. These have often been short-term, some poorly organised, and not always leading to permanent positions at the end of the funding period. Some institutions have taken the issues on board and actively recruited Aboriginal staff, however, many Aboriginal people are still disadvantaged due to limited education opportunities.

## Range of employment

In spite of these initiatives, the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people working in museums is still small and restricted to a few occupations. From my knowledge of indigenous staff in other institutions I believe there are approximately 33 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff currently employed in major Australian museums. The most significant numbers are at the larger institutions: the Australian Museum (5), National Museum of Australia (3), South Australian Museum (4), and Museum of Victoria (13). In art museums (where few institutions employ more than one Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person), appointments have been largely in curatorial positions relating to Aboriginal art. In other major museums dealing with history, natural sciences and anthropology, most Aboriginal employees are employed in curatorial or collection-related areas, in education, or in family history or heritage liaison positions. Few indigenous people are employed in administration, public relations, or design, and none to my knowledge in positions within natural science departments. Notably, while at least two indigenous people are qualified conservators, none are currently employed as such; they have chosen other fields of study or employment. Two museums currently employ trainees in conservation. My observation suggests that success with indigenous staffing requires commitment of core funds rather than reliance on ad hoc external sources, and secondly, the employment of at least several indigenous staff helps to increase the level of support, networking and job satisfaction.

## Future prospects and issues

There is an urgent need to broaden the occupational categories in which indigenous people are employed in major museums, to increase training opportunities for those working in local cultural centres and museums, and to provide ongoing professional development and support to indigenous staff in institutions. Changes are required to address these issues: marketing of museums as potential places of diverse forms of employment rather than solely in association with indigenous materials, support for existing staff in institutions to encourage them to stay, and sponsorship of longer-term formal courses of training. Staff in major institutions also need to become more aware of indigenous cultural issues to provide a sympathetic and supportive work environment.

Some recent initiatives taken this year are examples of ways to begin addressing these issues. Deakin University's graduate diploma in natural and cultural heritage interpretation, jointly managed with the Institute of Koorie Education, now incorporates Koorie knowledge in its museology components. Students must meet university entrance requirements as well as be selected by communities on the basis of appropriate knowledge. The course is arranged to

enable students to study in block mode in a dedicated supporting environment. Museums Australia is offering a professional development grants scheme, which for the first time will provide three internships for indigenous people.

While such initiatives are to be welcomed, there are still formidable hurdles to be overcome. It is not good enough that some museums are happy to employ indigenous staff only when another organisation provides the money. The culture, ethos and *modus operandi* for major museums are slow to change and often present an unfriendly, bureaucratic, and alien image to outsiders and newcomers. The challenge for indigenous museum workers is to cope with this while trying to devise more culturally sensitive ways of operating. This remains to be done.

Gaye Sculthorpe  
Head, Indigenous Studies Department,  
Museum of Victoria

## References

- (1) Edwards, R and Stewart, J (eds), 1980, *Preserving Indigenous Cultures: A New Role for Museums*. Australian National Commission for UNESCO, Aboriginal Arts Board for the Australia Council, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra.

## New technology, training and professional development issues for Aboriginal arts workers in remote areas

Peter Danaja first used a computer three years ago when, as a member of the Sunrize Band, he used computers to organise the band's tour itineraries. Now employed as the Aboriginal heritage officer at Maningrida Arts and Culture in Arnhem Land, he regularly uses computers as part of his day to day work. In this report he and his colleague, cultural research officer Margaret Carew, describe how technology is used within the centre, and how it is being used to address training needs for Aboriginal arts workers in this remote area.

Maningrida Arts and Culture (MAC) operates under the auspice of the Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation in Maningrida. One of the centre's programs involves selling art and craft work to people in Australia and overseas. Last year we set up an Internet connection (email and world wide web site, <http://www/peg/apc/org/~bawinanga/>) to help with this. The site provides information about the Maningrida area, the Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation, and the various programs and projects being run by the corporation and Maningrida.

It is also an avenue through which local artists

can be promoted at an international level and in future we hope to profile more artists through the site using accurate and comprehensive artists' biographies. Stories about the paintings are also stored on our database and given to buyers of Maningrida artworks. The new technology enables easy and fast access to a better quality of information for the Maningrida community, researchers, buyers and exhibitors of art and craftwork, such as museums and galleries.

We don't get many visitors in Maningrida and technology has become an indispensable tool for us. Upgrading databases and equipment is a continuing task. When we first started using the Internet, my colleague Margaret Carew helped me learn how to use email. I have learnt my computing skills by watching my colleagues and asking them questions – we work together and we learn from each other. They teach me about computers and in turn I teach them about my culture.

Peter Danaja  
Aboriginal Heritage Officer,  
Maningrida Arts and Culture

## Balancing the excitement of new possibilities with realistic expectations

**There is a certain amount of tension between the training demands of new technology and the level of technological knowhow of local arts workers in Maningrida.**

For the last year, I have been project manager for a new work opportunities arts worker training program at Maningrida Arts and Culture, sponsored by the Northern Land Council and funded through DEET. Having been involved in the introduction of new technology and Aboriginal arts worker training, I have thought quite hard about professional development issues.

Since May 1995 MAC and the Djomi Museum (Maningrida's keeping place) have been awarded two photographic archiving grants, one from the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, the other from the National Library. Maningrida's collection was set up in the 1970s and until recently was essentially administered by volunteers. Arts workers have been photographing the collection for ten years but there has been no formal system of archiving or documenting these photos. We applied for the grants to undertake photographic archiving for CD-ROM. The training component involves arts workers documenting the collection and using the archive for other training.

In many ways I have now pulled back from my initial enthusiasm for new technologies because I have realised my own expectations of what could be achieved within a year were too high. In fact we have had to focus on quite basic skills, brushing up on numeracy and literacy and basic cataloguing skills. While an awful lot has been achieved and learnt, in order to satisfy the terms of the grant we received to put our collection on CD-ROM I have had to a lot of the cataloguing of the photographic archive on my own. The project is flawed because the nature of the work is pitched towards a technological requirement currently out of reach of our arts worker trainees, making it a completely *balanda* (non-Aboriginal) thing and inconsistent with the charter of this organisation. I have since restructured the program, orienting it more towards straightforward cataloguing of the photographic collection so the trainees are at least involved in the establishment of a photographic archive and familiar with the material in it.

In an environment such as this, training modules and time frames must be sufficiently flexible to allow them to develop organically. This has in fact happened and the archiving project has been adopted on an ongoing basis and all new arts workers learn how to take photographs of

artworks. Previously they had no involvement in the fate of these photos but they are now put into polypropylene sleeves and a dust proof folder. This contextualises archiving training, extends a job they already know about and provides opportunities for further learning about museum practices along the way.

Peter Danaja is really the only Aboriginal person at the arts centre who uses the Internet for regular communications and who is computer literate. His level of expertise is not typical of the arts workers who work in the arts centre under the Community Development Employment Program (CDEP) and other new work opportunities programs. These people are interested in learning more about computers, prompted in part by their exposure to new technology at the centre. Our new Quicktake camera is providing a good learning context and while the downloading of pictures is still a little mysterious, each time they practise with someone else they learn more about the basic parameters of using computers.

During the archiving project, I and other staff at MAC have had to balance the excitement raised by the possibilities of CD-ROM with realistic expectations of what can be achieved based on current skill levels (as well as other contingencies such as interruptions due to ceremonies etc.). There is a great deal of interest from institutions outside Maningrida to sponsor programs involving the implementation of new technology, particularly multimedia and the Internet. However, funding bodies must also have a realistic understanding of these issues so new training programs are pitched at an appropriate level for Aboriginal people in remote areas.

The importance of sharing of information and knowledge as a way of learning at MAC cannot be over emphasised. Each person has something to contribute and is recognised for this. There is great support at the centre for arts worker trainees to undertake further training, however, this depends on funding. The opportunities are here at MAC to learn more from others, and people here understand this is a top priority – *balandas* often know about computers and technology, arts workers have cultural knowledge and practical skills essential to the centre's ongoing viability. Without this ethic I can't imagine any new training working at all.

Margaret Carew  
Cultural Research Officer,  
Maningrida Arts and Culture

# Australian Museum Skills in Asia

## The 1995 ASEAN Curators' Forum and Curators' Training Workshop

*by Grace Cochrane*

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In the May 1995 issue of *Museum National*, Simeon Kronenberg and Grace Cochrane overviewed a forthcoming curatorial training workshop program in Asia. One year later Grace Cochrane reports on the success of this program and looks at possible models for the future.

In April 1995, five Australian museum professionals ran a curators' training workshop in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, for delegates from the six ASEAN countries: Brunei, Darussalam, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. The workshop followed the ASEAN curators' forum, where delegates met to plan a proposed ASEAN contemporary arts festival for 1997. Both events were coordinated by the National Gallery of Malaysia.

The ASEAN countries are among those seeking their own expressions of identity and cultural independence through a range of activities that include the development of contemporary art exhibitions, and the establishment and development of museums for both traditional and contemporary works.

At the same time, it has been clear from various Australian experiences gained through exhibition touring, that many of the gallery and museum staff in these countries have expressed a need for training in management practices ranging from registration documentation to exhibition development, and in skills such as the handling and storage of objects. As well as exchange of artists and exhibitions between Australia and South-East Asia, there could be many other possibilities for professional museum exchange and collaboration. There is often more funding available in the region for the building of museums than for the employment and training of staff.

Australia is also interested in professional exchange and the cultural export of museum skills. There are a number of individuals and agencies already interested in working in this area, and there have already been some successful examples of workshops and consultancies.

### Curators Forum (4 - 7 April 1995)

Delegates to the forum were selected by their

countries, and comprised senior gallery and museum staff, artists and senior arts officials. In planning the proposed contemporary arts festival, the delegates addressed a number of issues, perhaps the main ones being the selection procedure they would use, the identification of themes and whether these should lead the exhibition or emerge from the works selected, the ways in which the display of works might be organised, and the idea of an exhibition within a wider arts festival.

Introductory summaries on art and art practices in each country identified differences and similarities in practices, expectations and themes. Delegates discussed themes such as sociopolitical issues, ethnicity, spirituality, ecology and environment, urban affairs, gender, popular art and contemporary art from traditional forms. They also discussed the range of artforms they wanted to represent, and what they might mean by 'the best of ASEAN'.

In the spirit of these themes and in the spirit of ASEAN (individuals not countries; commonality not boundaries) delegates decided they should look for works that best represent contemporary art in each country. At the same time selection has to take into account issues of controversy, for example religion and politics, as they may affect member countries and their audiences.

It was decided the general theme for the proposed festival will be: contemporary art from ASEAN: significant differences and different significances.

### Curators Training Workshop (8 - 11 April 1995)

The training workshop followed the forum and included about half the original participants plus a large new group of museum professionals.

Asialink was contacted to run the workshop by the National Gallery of Malaysia because Alison Carroll, manager of Asialink's visual arts program, had been discussing the idea of a workshop for some time. The gallery's invitation meant Asialink could raise the idea of training in this area to members of the six ASEAN countries during its planning meeting. It enlisted support from Museums Australia, through its

professional development committee, and sought funding from a number of sources. Close connections were also maintained with the Australian High Commission in Kuala Lumpur.

In December 1994, Grace Cochrane (Powerhouse Museum) and Julie Ewington (Museum of Contemporary Art) were asked to plan a program and, with their organising committee, recommend tutors. These were: Joe Devilee (senior exhibitions officer, Queensland Art Gallery); James Dexter (director, public programs, Museums and Art Galleries of the Northern Territory); Simon Elliott (associate registrar, Queensland Art Gallery). The institutions in which the tutors were working approved their involvement and to various degrees supported their participation.

Grace Cochrane then attended an ASEAN preliminary planning meeting for the forum in Kuala Lumpur to assess needs for the workshop. The workshop program was developed as a pilot program, based on running a contemporary arts festival, but also as a sample of a wider range of workshops that could be offered. It covered issues of curatorial selection, assessment of audience, exhibition planning and scheduling, providing information through publications and labels, planning public programs, issues of display and installation, and issues of documentation, freight, handling, contracts and agreements etc.

In mixed-country groups, delegates developed a hypothetical exhibition proposal according to a common pro forma. This allowed the subsequent selected topics to be seen in the context of all the tasks needed to develop an exhibition.

In assessing the project later, it was realised that, as was anticipated, students wanted management skills but also needed to learn, or know about, practical skills. Participants needed to learn to manage as well as to perform the necessary functions. There were strong requests for further opportunities for learning practical skills in a managerial context.

Most important for the team was the need to adapt Australian experiences and examples to ASEAN needs and situations. At the earlier forum, tutors had a good opportunity to assess the needs of different countries and to get an idea of the very wide range of experiences and roles of the participants. The sessions that worked best attempted to make links between Australian experiences and examples, and the needs and circumstances of the participants.

It was essential that the tutors were all practising professionals in their own institutions, and they realised they had to be multiskilled as well as specialists.

Between them they needed to be able to respond to questions about Australian arts policy and social, political, practical and ethical issues that required an experience far wider than a specialist professional one.

It was also important that there were already established links between the tutors and clients. Most tutors had already had contact with the countries, the participants and the art of the region through travel and research in the course of their work. It was also essential to have the continuity from the January planning session in Kuala Lumpur.

For the future, there does appear to be a great need and interest in the area of training in museum studies. ASEAN museum professionals are interested in courses that give both management theory and practical skills, and that do not take people away from their jobs to other countries for some years. A distance-education course tied into short workshops like this one, in the host country, combined with a return internship in a museum/gallery could be a useful model.

Professional museum training, in the form of small specific workshops associated with a particular exhibition, is also a possibility. These could deal with issues of selection, condition reporting, lighting and display, conservation, freight and packing, object handling, label writing and catalogue production, or public programs, and could be part of the activities associated with travelling exhibitions to Asian countries as well as the more usual discussions about art and artists. It would extend the professional museum network in each venue.

The tutors recommend that the committee moves with caution in planning follow-up workshops. In particular, they believe it is very important that Australia be seen to be responding to, rather than initiating, requests for training.

**Grace Cochrane**  
**Curator, Decorative Arts, Powerhouse Museum**



Julie Ewington, MCA, talks about issues of curatorial planning.

# Museum Management Training

## – a personal perspective

*by Louise Douglas*

Museum professionals are increasingly faced with improving their management skills as their own profession changes and demands new sets of skills, or as they opt for a career as a member of the management team. In reflecting on the most effective options for museum management training in the 1990s, I am in the fortunate position of being able to comment on three different management training experiences: the Museum Management Institute (MMI) in the USA, a graduate diploma in arts management offered by the University of Technology, Sydney, and the management course developed by the Mt Eliza Australian Management College for the Council of Australian Museum Directors.

Encouraged by my Powerhouse Museum colleague, Jennifer Sanders (who was a 1986 MMI graduate) I completed the MMI course in 1989. With an outstanding group of teachers and senior museum managers contributing to the course and a reputation as the leading museum management course in the

USA, MMI proved an invaluable training experience particularly as it provided an international perspective on museum issues. Using a similar model, Mt Eliza, which I completed in 1993, was specifically designed for Australian and New Zealand senior museum managers. This course ran each year from 1993 – 1995, but has regrettably been discontinued.

MMI and Mt Eliza had many similarities. Both courses:

- were structured as residential courses
- had only museum managers as the student body
- drew from the wider management field for teachers of the core elements
- used well respected museum professionals, specialists and managers to provide case studies and teaching support
- reflected contemporary management trends and applied them to museums eg. the widespread use of the team approach to programs and projects
- provided great opportunities for networking with

Course name	Course type	Content	Participants
Museum Management Institute, Berkeley, USA, 1989	1 month residential Lecturers non-museum professionals but with high level of museum knowledge	Management – leadership, interpersonal influences, skills, pluralistic approach to leadership, conceptual evaluation of leadership styles, the dynamics of intergroup relations, negotiating for authorisation and support. Accountability – museum services, financial management, management of legal issues, conflict resolution, building support and stakeholders. Public perspective – marketing, museums as charitable organisations, governance, ethics.	35 American museum professionals and 5 non-American
Senior Management Program for Museum Managers, Mt Eliza Australian Management College, 1993	2 x 1 week residential Lecturers primarily non-museum professionals Keynote speakers drawn from museum directors group Course methodology – a mix of lectures, syndicate group work, and role play and interactive sessions	Managerial functions – strategic planning, managing change, financial management, marketing, human resource management. Managerial skills – negotiation, presentation, organisational effectiveness, team skills, business simulation exercises. Personal development – personal leadership, action plans Environment of management – futures, economic trends	12 Australian museum professionals, 2 New Zealand museum professionals
Graduate Diploma in Arts Management, School of Business, Leisure and Tourism, University of Technology, Sydney, 1990 – 1991	2 years part-time Lecturers either university-based specialists with some industry specialists included Course methodology – contemporary university practice: lectures, team-based projects, individual research projects	The arts environment in Australia Marketing, financial management, law, organisational change, team-based project, plus two electives chosen from across the university.	20 professionals from the arts and cultural industries, including 3 museum professionals



museum peers and key figures in the museum profession

Although I began MMI with some fears about being an Australian in an American-based course these fears were mostly unfounded – the same issues and concerns preoccupy museums world wide. Financial management was the only significantly different area: the majority of American museums rely heavily on private donations which creates a vastly different set of financial and management problems.

Most lecturers at MMI had a long association with the course and had consequently developed a deep knowledge and understanding of the museum environment. This was a key difference between MMI and Mt Eliza, where many of the non-museum academics or specialists were facing a class of museum managers for the first time. Not surprisingly the familiarity the MMI faculty had with museums enabled them to quickly develop a rapport with the class and move confidently through, and often guide, discussions and debates.

The graduate diploma in arts management at the University of Technology, Sydney, was a very different professional development experience. Taken as a part-time course in 1990 and 1991, the course brought together professionals from a diverse range of arts backgrounds – theatre companies, symphony orchestras, art galleries.

I opted for this course rather than an MBA or business oriented course because, in my experience, the biggest challenges for museums were not about how to make themselves better businesses, but how to position themselves as more attractive, useful and desirable interpreters and presenters of culture. For exploring the cultural context of museums, the arts management course was excellent, and with its

academic orientation provided a good balance to the practical orientation of MMI and Mt Eliza. With a number of electives available, students chose units from across the university and my choices focused on an important context for many museums – the public service environment.

Great debate rages over the most appropriate type of training for museum managers. Based on my experience I offer the following comments:

- The best courses don't just deal with the internal practicalities of management – they look at the various frameworks and environments in which museums operate and within which museum managers must make difficult decisions.
- Great benefits are to be had from training with only museum managers obviously because everyone speaks the same museum language and understands the issues – this provides for a comfortable 'insulated' but intense learning experience.
- Equally, great benefits are to be had from training with professionals from the broad arts and cultural spectrum, primarily because of the perspective these professionals give to museums.

**Louise Douglas,  
General Manager, Product Development,  
National Museum of Australia**

**I would like to express my gratitude to past and present senior managers of the Powerhouse Museum who supported my attendance at MMI and Mt Eliza.**

*Current contact details for the above courses are:  
MMI: c/- The American Federation of the Arts, 41 East 65th Street, New York, NY 10021. Fax: (212) 861 2478  
Graduate Diploma in Arts Management: Course Coordinator, Deborah Stevenson, c/- UTS, PO Box 222, Lindfield NSW 2070*

## Staff Mobility Plan for the AWM – a strategic approach to staff development

*by Wendy Dodd*

The Australian War Memorial is a museum funded by the Commonwealth Government, within the Veterans Affairs portfolio. In 1992 the Memorial commenced a Middle Management Development Program (MMDP), during which participants formed groups to carry out a range of projects of their choice relevant to the Memorial. Wendy Dodd, senior textile curator, was part of a group comprising an archivist, an art curator and a

conservator, who decided to assess the feasibility of a mobility scheme for the Memorial and draft a philosophy for its implementation. In this case mobility refers to the temporary or permanent movement of staff between positions at the same level to gain new experience and skills and to bring fresh perspectives to work areas. Moves may be within the Memorial or to another institution in Australia or overseas.

Museums have small staff numbers divided into many specialised areas. At the Memorial, staff turnover and mobility have been relatively limited, particularly in specialist areas. Long-term occupancy of positions has been balanced by the commitment of officers to their professional areas and to the Memorial. When our project commenced in 1993 staff moves of over two months duration involved only ten to twenty percent of positions.

Our decision to explore the subject of mobility came at a time when contraction of the public service and government funding of cultural institutions made it highly desirable to seek alternatives to traditional career development through promotion. Museums, more than ever, are confronting questions of how staff can be stimulated and given career challenges to meet personal and institutional development needs.

### Project stages

The project began with a survey of personal and job profiles of staff, including their views on mobility, a literature survey on mobility, telephone enquiries to other institutions and interviews with the Department of Defence, the Australian Customs Service, the Public Service Commission and senior managers at the Memorial.

The subsequent report, presented to the Memorial's Corporate Management Group (CMG), stressed that mobility is just one element of a strategic approach to staff development and people management. It underscored the need for a mobility scheme to be available to all staff and that it should operate according to institutional priorities identified in the corporate plan. It should be presented to staff as a positive initiative to revitalise the culture of the Memorial through personal and organisational development, not as a means of solving localised staff problems. The need for visible support from senior management in order for it to succeed was also stressed.

The report proposed that a mobility committee be established to act as a broker of information and direction, matching people with positions and avenues for exchange. Further, the committee would be given training in counselling, interviewing and career planning. Staff returning from placements should be encouraged to join the committee for a set term. The Memorial's CMG would approve senior management candidates, but other decisions should be made by the mobility committee and candidates' supervisors. The committee would report regularly to the CMG and the personnel manager, who would notify the committee of all suitable job vacancies.

### The mobility scheme

Before the move the staff member and supervisor need to identify how or why mobility will meet their needs and whether an internal or external move is required. The goals of the proposed placement should be identified and a learning contract developed before contacting the mobility committee.

Before and during the move the receiving area

must identify the purpose of hosting a placement and the individual's expectations. A real job should exist and adequate time must be provided to accommodate the placement's learning curve. Setting performance indicators is important. These issues should be set out in an 'interview' with the person who is to be mobile to decide whether the placement will work. The host supervisor will need to know their role, as will the host staff. At negotiated times the placement should be evaluated. The selection of a mentor for the placed officer and continuity of supervision will help ensure the success of the placement. Mechanisms should also be in place to call the whole thing off if it is unsuccessful.

### After the move

To assess the value and effectiveness of the placement and to consolidate its benefits, each placement should be evaluated by the staff member, host and home areas. The staff member and home area also need to consider reintegration needs and to discuss the benefits and disadvantages of the placement, building on what has been learnt.

### Problems/Issues

Several issues need resolution before a mobility scheme can be successfully implemented at the Memorial. These include an acceptable and flexible level of placements at any one time, changing institutional and individual expectations because higher duties allowance may not be as freely available, alleviating staff concerns about being forced to go on a placement, and protecting the Memorial's investment in staff development. The mobility plan needs to be negotiated with unions, and senior managers must be convinced of the long-term benefits of mobility. Decisions must also be made on how/who will pay for placements outside the Memorial.

### Progress so far

The group's mobility report has been accepted by the CMG and a working group has considered its implementation. Focus group sessions have also been held to publicise the concept of mobility within the Memorial. Approval from the unions was slow in coming but mobility is now incorporated in the agency agreement being finalised between Memorial management and the unions.

While there has been an increase in staff movement in some areas (due perhaps to heightened awareness generated by the project) some areas remain static. The moves that have taken place both within and outside the Memorial would have accrued greater benefits for individuals and the Memorial had they been supported by the mobility procedures and framework set out in the report. It remains to be seen how the system will work when it is implemented as part of the agency agreement.

Wendy Dodd  
Senior Textile Conservator,  
Australian War Memorial

# Compulsory Competitive Tendering and the Notion of the Art Gallery

by *Daniel McOwan*

The introduction of CCT in Victoria has had a considerable impact on regional galleries. While it is perhaps still too early to know just how CCT will affect the professional development of staff, it is likely the process will affect long-term career development of this sector. In this report, Daniel McOwan overviews the impact of CCT on the regional gallery network.

There is considerable misinformation and even less informed debate about the introduction of CCT in Victoria. It is problematic that this legislation, which represents a major change in local government, did not receive the critical assessment it deserved before it was implemented.(1) Instead we will see its faults arise as a consequence of experiment and we will have

to live with the concomitant deconstruction that will accompany it.

CCT began in England as a means of tightening local government operations and was introduced here for similar reasons. I work in local government and would agree there has been room for trimmer, more responsive operations. Indeed the demand was only exceeded by the demand for a trimmer, tighter operation in state and federal government departments.

In England, CCT was intended to cover elements of local government operations that would be better handled by the private sector, such as garbage collection – operational areas that were easy to quantify and did not merit setting up a council workforce to complete. Similarly in New Zealand, the only other country to introduce CCT by legislation, local councils decided what went through the tendering process with the only proviso being that it was compulsory for federally funded operations. The prescription in both places was light but logical. Then cometh the social engineers of the State of Victoria!!

In Victoria the legislation prescribes that twenty percent of total expenditure in 1994/95 was to go through the CCT process, thirty percent in 1995/96 and fifty percent in 1996/97. It all sounds tolerable and achievable (all councils in Victoria, with the exception of Ballarat and three others, achieved the twenty percent target) except that the silent component of depreciation of assets was not mentioned as a cost that had to be allowed for. In asset rich areas, e.g. country shires, with thousands of miles of roads as an asset, this figure is substantive and actually lifts the non-discretionary figure to around eighty percent, leaving only twenty percent or so of the budget for discretionary, non-CCT expenditure. The pressure is on within local councils to have their budget included in this twenty percent except that this percentage has to include the governance process, management and other staff to monitor operation and implementation of contracts, or other legal responsibilities of local government. Local government minister Roger Hallam points out though that 'CCT is not about contracting out per se. It is a process of using the market to ensure that services are provided as cost effectively as possible. *Market testing* is the term we prefer to use.'(2)(author's emphasis)

CCT impacts specifically on regional galleries in

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Telephone (03) 9853 3148

Victoria as they are mostly local government owned and funded. Council budgets in regional areas tend to be comparatively small and there is little leeway to absorb extraneous costs, consequently most of their operations have to be put through CCT. Some councils (e.g. Bendigo) have been wise enough to put their gallery's budget in the governance cost, realising this was the only wise option because to contract-out a service there has to be mechanisms by which the quantity and quality of the operation can be measured.

Where quality is of prime importance, the monitoring of contracts becomes messy and subjective. In the past quality was achieved by employing a professional officer with professional standards and qualifications; trust was placed in their judgement. Combined with contractual employment, control mechanisms existed in case performance was perceived to be unacceptable.

So far, the only gallery to be tendered out in Victoria is Warrnambool Art Gallery. Its usage targets for successful operation were: numbers through the front door, number of 'major' exhibitions, number of 'special events', number of students, number of outward touring exhibitions and number of temporary exhibitions. Not one of these targets addressed the issue of quality, nor did the operating principles or the objectives contained within the tender specifications. This is not a criticism of Warrnambool, but emphasises the major practical problem of tendering out the operation of an art gallery.

For art galleries CCT unwittingly contains other destructive elements. Firstly, they become a fee for service operation which changes their relationship



*Carafe*, silver with gilt interior, designed by Angelo Mangiarotti for Rossi & Arrandi, Italy. Gift of the Friends of Hamilton Art Gallery, 1995. 'We are frequently given items for altruistic motives because we present an ideal, or because of the implied stability of the institution and its commitment to ongoing preservation of these gifts. When we become a fee for service operation our reputation will lose out.'

with the community. Galleries depend on the community for support, either for items for the collection or for money to purchase such items. Does CCT break this fundamental contract of understanding between the institution and the community? Why support an organisation whose main target is to make money, when its ideal contributes little to the soul of the community? We are frequently given items for altruistic motives because we present an ideal, or because of the implied stability of the institution and its commitment to ongoing preservation of these gifts. When we become a fee for service operation our reputation will loose out.

Secondly, CCT impacts on the development of the gallery profession and its dedication to improvement. Galleries share the qualities of educational institutions and entertainment operations. Those we share with educational institutions imply excellence and ongoing commitment to the improvement of the community and the profession. When tendering drives costs to a minimum, professional development of staff ceases to be a significant priority. The thrust will inevitably be for the lowest common denominator. If we are just running a fee for service operation, is there the financial or intellectual space for the profession's development? Further, are there available cuts within the very restricted budgets of regional galleries, or will this additional pressure cause the collapse of a network that is Victoria's great untapped success story?

How is creative freedom built into a specification? The arts are about creativity and history has shown that maximum creativity occurs in centres of economic wealth. Creativity is not necessarily a product of wealth, but a modicum of wealth does allow a freedom within which creativity can thrive.

While not decrying attempts to improve the efficiency with which community resources are used in local government, or elsewhere, CCT reflects a certain poverty of mind and the reduction of all human affairs to the basics of cost. State Opposition Leader Mr John Brumby has said 'Subjecting our cultural institutions to the process of CCT is akin to asking local government to tender out the soul of our community'.<sup>(3)</sup> Art develops through a commitment to reason, purpose and higher ideals. Money was and should remain the tool to achieve this, not the all controlling power we are letting it become in these times of 'rationalist' economics.

**Daniel McOwan**  
Culture and Leisure Services Manager, Shire of  
Southern Grampians and Director,  
Hamilton Art Gallery

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- (1) *Local Government (Competitive Tendering) Act* 1994 Victorian Act 40/1994
- (2) *The Australian Municipal Journal* vol 75, March 1996 p. 34
- (3) *Insite* March 1996 p. 2

**Alvar Aalto – Points of Contact. (Travelling exhibition from the Alvar Aalto Museum, Finland)**

*Powerhouse Museum installation reviewed. Exhibition schedule includes Plimsoll Gallery (Hobart) 13 June – 21 July, then to the Auckland City Art Gallery and the City Gallery (Wellington).*

The recent display of Alvar Aalto's work at the Powerhouse Museum was the first exhibition of this eminent Finnish architect's work in Australia.

Alvar Aalto was born in 1898. He was one of the major Finnish architects of the twentieth century, and his use of cross-cultural connections in his work made Finnish architecture internationally significant. The two predominant buildings featured in this exhibition, both designed before World War Two, are amongst his greatest designs: the Paimio Sanatorium is a masterpiece of functional design espousing the ethos of the international modern style and, in contrast, the Villa Mairea conveys a personal design philosophy expressing both reason and emotion. Emotion is present in the natural materials and curved sensuous lines, and reason in the rectangular white volumes. Although the house has a relaxed and unstructured quality it evokes an eclectic mix of French cubism and the Nordic forest. Despite their difference, inherent in the two designs is the fascinating paradox which inspires and informs all of Aalto's work: humanising the rational ethos of modernism to highlight its human uses.

'Points of Contact' was stylishly spot-lit and designed in a formal plan, with models and photographs of the Villa Mairea and Paimio Sanatorium balancing each other in a manner echoing neo-classicist architecture (an early, but not often discussed, influence on Aalto). Placed centrally and at right angles to these seminal designs was a time-line of Aalto's career from the 1920s to the 1970s and a series of chairs he designed, including the famous Paimio chair, which all appeared to float in space. Made of birch, they have inspired several generations of copies. Next to these were four

audiovisual screens displaying the Sanatorium and Villa Mairea, cleverly 'watched' by the 'Aalto stool', the famous icon of good design. Also included were examples of the Aalto vase, purportedly designed to echo the shape of the Finnish lakes.

Despite the interesting components and the fusion of architectural design and objects, the atmosphere of the exhibition space was a little flat and rarefied. The audiovisual screens did, however, provide an interesting diversion to the otherwise static, reticent nature of the exhibition. Although stylish, the design dominated the exhibition content: curved panels framed the space, surfaces were streamlined and materials such as metal and plastic predominated. Nevertheless, Aalto's major preoccupations with the use of wood, 'the form inspiring, deeply human material', and the free-form organic curves were lyrically evident in the exhibition's design, aptly evoking the seamless combination of art and nature that so enthralled Aalto.

Aalto envisaged his architecture and design as an organic whole, a total design concept which was open and receptive to human needs. However, this 'wholeness', the meshing of form and content, was missing from the exhibition.

The inherent problem with architectural exhibitions, and where they differ greatly to the display of

the decorative or fine arts, is that they are a three-dimensional (absent) artform generally presented within the strictures of a two-dimensional format. It is like a detective game where the viewer must solve the puzzle, putting all the architectural pieces together to imagine the reality of the built structure. None of the atmosphere conveyed by a built structure in its environment, so enveloping and convincing, can be gleaned by photographs and well-made models. Similarly, Aalto designed his chairs and vases to be contextualised in this total design concept.

Further, there was a dire lack of information on Aalto the man and the architect, nor his design philosophies, and thus a real lack of context for the objects and designs presented. A didactic approach is not desirable but some guidelines for the uninitiated are. The photographs presented were quite stunning, but difficult to place together in any logical fashion. The danger was that visitors could wander freely in and out of the space remembering only Aalto's name, the striking design of his chairs and vases, and a sense of esoteric mystery. One or two strategically placed information panels or even the occasional quote of Aalto's design philosophy would have allowed a launching pad for ideas. His architectural philosophy with its concept of integration and totality was attuned to late



Installation photo – Alvar Aalto – Points of Contact. Courtesy Powerhouse Museum. Photo: Sue Stafford.

twentieth-century architectural idealism.

Contextual display is something the Powerhouse Museum does very well, and although this exhibition is an 'import' it was disappointing to see that the museum's usual broadly interpretive approach to the presentation of architecture and design was not applied. Perhaps more thought could have been put into the intellectual engagement of the visitor. The 'architecturally enlightened' might understand the form of expression, but museum exhibitions must 'speak' to more than one audience.

The eclectic catalogue accompanying the exhibition combines articles by Aalto plus several academics and architects, as well as reproductions of all objects and images in the exhibition. In Australia, exhibitions devoted to architects are rare. The shortcomings of 'Alvar Aalto – Points of Contact' possibly demonstrate why, but his idiosyncratic genius, although ordered and slightly sanitised by the concern with presentation of the image, was still overwhelmingly apparent. It was a thought-provoking and in many ways beautiful exhibition.

**Ann Proudfoot**

**Former Registrar, currently  
Acting Curator, Decorative Arts  
and Design, Powerhouse Museum  
and freelance writer**

The illustrated catalogue *Alvar Aalto: Points of Contact*, edited by Pirkko Tuukkanen-Beckers, is available at the Powerhouse Museum Shop for \$28.

### **Environmental Management – Guidelines for Museums and Galleries,**

by May Cassar, published Routledge and Museums & Galleries Association, 1995. Hardback, \$79.95. Distributed Thomas Nelson Australia.

*Environmental Management – Guidelines for Museums and Galleries* helps fill in gaps in the knowledge base of conservators, but is also useful for other museum professionals and student conservators wanting to think more broadly and strategically about

collection environments.

May Cassar's book is about forward planning in the care of collections. Her first priority for a collection manager is the provision of a safe environment for collections, and that such a strategic approach must be an integrated one operating right across the organisation. This will invariably involve the museum professional in communication with buildings and services managers, architects, project consultants and a variety of contractors from air-conditioning engineers to pest control operators.

Such issues appear, however, to be low glamour stuff. What usually occurs is that this liaison and strategic thinking either does not occur, or is passed on to the conservation section. Amongst conservators there is also some reluctance to get involved with this sort of issue: treatments and treatment development are seen by many to be the 'real work' of the dedicated specialist conservator. However, some cultural collecting institutions create a specific position to provide this specialist advice, the incumbent functioning as the key contact point for the provision of specialist environmental advice. Again, this can marginalise environmental management. Either approach can make this important risk management issue very vulnerable. Environmental management is an activity to be pursued at all levels and with appropriate corporate acknowledgment.

Cassar stresses that conservators will increasingly find themselves caught up in collections management issues and that they will be doing so in an environment where museums and galleries are changing the way collections are accessed and used: conservators 'cannot remain aloof either from wider management issues or indeed from the public world beyond the museum doors'. She notes that the public can also be targeted for education concerning the breadth of preservation issues confronting modern museums.

Cassar argues that conservators have to be less custodians and guardians of rigid rules and more like quality control officers, ensuring

that changes occur within a consultative process and that standards are maintained. To be effective in their specialist role they must involve themselves in the broader decision-making and policy development of their organisations. The operational frameworks of most modern organisations have in-built analyses of risk management and cost/benefit. Conservators may see such issues as being dry and bureaucratic, but most organisations' decision-making processes will only factor in those opinions that argue satisfactorily within these frameworks: conservators need to take a measure of control in the changes facing their institutions.

Cassar spells out clearly and forcefully that shortcut, piecemeal approaches to the handling of environmental problems is irresponsible and results in quite serious long-term costs. Anyone with experience in the development of a new building or the refurbishment of an existing one will know the frustration of realising the environmental systems are the last phase of the project and the ones which will be squeezed to absorb blown-out budgets.

Once an organisation decides it is serious about the environmental conditions of its collections it needs to understand the problems. Cassar describes the steps involved in carrying out a conservation audit as an 'essential prelude to the development and implementation of an environmental strategy'. The audit isn't just of the collections but of the existing environment, the building and its services. Conservators will undoubtedly already be involved in the former, and efficient building managers will have done much of the last two in their asset life cycle planning. When a building manager begins at your museum it is unlikely they will have much previous experience in the museum environment. The preservation advice given to that building manager, and other museum staff, will be critical for establishing realistic specifications for the service provider. The construction of an environmental strategy is a consultative process involving conservators, collection managers, buildings and services personnel and probably consultants.

The strategy has a place in the organisation's corporate planning process, consequently the pay-off isn't only of value at an object level but also in a corporate sense.

Increasingly, conservators are providing an advocacy role for collections. They must therefore be prepared to be effective contributing members of project teams on environmental concerns and similar issues.

Many large organisations are moving towards more sophisticated building management systems which are capable of monitoring and controlling air-conditioning, lights, security and even staff movements via swipe cards. As such systems come online there is sense in conservators consulting with building services managers and tapping into these systems to avoid duplication of functions. There is some capacity to sharpen the results gained by a building management system in that conservators can usually do the intensive monitoring building managers need to assess their sensor locations. Once good communication exists, conservators are likely to find themselves consulted on changes. Therefore, their advocacy for collections not only has a voice but an understanding hearing. The collaborative relationship conservators and curators establish with buildings managers can result in solutions tailored to the collections, while still yielding real savings.

This publication's relevance to Australian readers is in the broader principles it conveys. Some examples are relevant to temperate and cool temperate climates, however, there is no attempt to consider tropical or subtropical issues, concerns which are clearly not a part of the book's brief. However, the book does stimulate thinking and questioning, valuable achievements when dealing with critical issues about which museum professionals have tended to be somewhat neglectful.

**Bernard Kertesz**  
Conservator, Australian War  
Memorial

(This is an abstract of a more detailed review which appeared in the AICCM's December 1995 newsletter, No. 57.)

### Collecting in a Consumer Society,

by Russell W. Belk, published  
Routledge, London and New York,  
1995 (as part of the *Collecting Culture*  
series edited by Susan M. Pearce).  
Hardback, \$98.95. Distributed  
Thomas Nelson Australia

Museums are inextricably centred on their collections. Collections are at the heart, and indeed the functioning of the museum. But how many of us think about how the process of collecting has evolved, and its place in today's consumer society. Museums are major collectors which in turn makes them major consumers. We can point to museums of all shapes and sizes with very diverse collecting briefs which have evolved in a societal setting that seems ever more blatant in its passion for consumption. Museums have moved on from the days of being simple 'cabinets of curiosities'. As players in the collecting game, that is the consumer society, it is worth reflecting on what it means for museums to be collecting in such a society.

Fortunately, Russell W. Belk has addressed this issue in his thought provoking and timely book. His overriding contention is that collecting is a form of consumption. The collector can be individual, institutional and/or corporate. Belk's stimulating book explores the relationship between the evolution of the consumer society and the rise in collecting activity. In doing so, he asks how and why we collect and discusses the consequent impact it has had on our contemporary culture. His well structured text is broken into five main chapters and also includes an excellent bibliography.

The first chapter on the rise of the consumer society examines, using an interesting and effective mix of theory and observation, the evolution of the consumer mindset, or consumer culture. The next chapter provides an historical analysis of collecting in which Belk concludes: 'We have seen in the development of collecting a strong coincidence with the development of a consumer society'. From here, Belk focuses on the individual collector and explores the how, what and why of collecting. He defines 'collecting

[as] the process of actively, selectively and passionately acquiring and possessing things removed from ordinary use and perceived as part of a set of non-identical objects or experiences'. He then looks at the institutional collector, starting with an historical approach which moves on to an analysis of this type of collecting in contemporary settings. His discussion suggests that if we are not careful, our museums, as part of this society, could play a growing role in the 'glorification of goods'. His analysis examines some obvious consumer influences including advertising, department stores and mass merchandising.

Finally, Belk pushes this theme by stating '...the largest failing of institutional collections in a consumer society is the uncritical celebration of stuff'. We see this in museums as they are forced to adopt more commercial marketing strategies for exhibitions in order to make an impact on the information overloaded consumer. Belk goes on: 'given the ostensibly non-market perspective of museums, they would seem in a key position to begin to explore the consumer-culture relationship between people and goods. Instead, they have to date been satisfied to focus on material culture alone. If consumer goods are increasingly the focus of museums and if there is no critical analysis of what these goods mean to our lives, then we are left with the impression that the goods enshrined in our museum temples are worthy of worship. Rather than participate so fully in consumer culture, museums can still cause us to notice this culture in which we are enmeshed and to reflect on its pleasures and problems.'

Russell Belk's book is a worthy contribution to the literature and its well developed arguments are convincingly presented. You may not agree with all of his conclusions, as some of us would be able to draw on examples of how institutions and we as individuals are attempting to do more than merely venerate artefacts. Nonetheless, Belk has succeeded in producing a very good read that does something really important: it makes you think.

**Kenneth W. Park**  
Curator of Collections, Wesley  
College, Melbourne

## National Conservation and Preservation Policy for Movable Cultural Heritage

Contact the Secretary, Cultural Ministers Council, Department of Communication and the Arts, GPO Box 2154, Canberra, ACT 2601. The electronic version is available from the National Preservation Office at the National Library of Australia at: <http://www.nla.gov.au/3/npo/cult.html>. This format highlights further information referred to in the document which can be accessed through the WWW.

**'Movable Cultural Heritage is an important element in the lives of all Australians. It is evidence of the cultural richness and diversity of Australian people, past and present. It helps define who we are'.<sup>(1)</sup>**

The *National Conservation and Preservation Policy for Movable Cultural Heritage* was prepared as a consequence of the former Federal Government's commitment to movable cultural heritage. The policy provides a national framework for governments, private, community and non-governmental sectors, as well as individuals and organisations involved in the care of movable cultural heritage. It is intended to guide activities at the local and national level, and establish a basis for the development of strategies and actions.

An important concept recognised in the document is that the movable cultural heritage of Australia is not confined to Commonwealth, state or local cultural heritage institutions, but a significant component is held by a wide range of organisations and the general public. The total makes up the distributed national collection.

The publication makes ten policy statements followed by information on related policies and an overview of key issues covered.

These policy statements affirm and recognise: the importance of Australia's cultural heritage; the cultural diversity of Australian people; the need to define the significance of movable cultural heritage and the need to conserve and preserve that heritage; the right of Australian people to have access to their movable cultural heritage

with conservation and preservation being essential to the provision of such access; the need for a coordinated approach involving governments and the private, community and non-government sectors; the need to raise the level of understanding about Australia's movable cultural heritage and coordination of community-wide skills development; and the need for research.

This policy document is a major step towards the long-term preservation of Australia's movable cultural heritage. Although many countries have already developed policies and implemented legislation for the protection of their built heritage, few have achieved the same level of protection for movable cultural property. It is probably assumed this is the responsibility of national cultural institutions and their respective acts, but these do not cover the needs of the distributed national collection. Australia is a world leader with its policy for the conservation and preservation of movable cultural heritage.

The next stage must surely be production of guidelines for implementation of the policies. For example, it is recommended that preventive conservation be taught at an adequate level in practical studio arts/crafts skill courses, and in museum studies courses. This should be extended to include, in the first example, the properties and long-term preservation problems of materials used by artists and craftpersons, and secondly, preventive conservation should be included in archaeology, librarianship, architecture and art history courses. If the policies are to have any effect they will need support and a change of priorities from related professions. Unfortunately, this criticism can also be directed towards some Commonwealth and state cultural institutions where the conservation of collections, being in general a 'backroom' activity, is given low priority. The excuse is invariably lack of funds yet objects continue to be added to collections, compounding conservation and storage problems. At the same time conservators must be responsible for the promotion of

conservation to ensure it is seen and appreciated by management, related professions and the general public. Conservation and preservation of movable cultural heritage is a joint responsibility.

Recent progress has been made in some fields of conservation, particularly 'preservation management', which has become a popular activity in Australian libraries and archives. They have made deliberate changes to their approach to collection conservation and preservation, moving away from single item treatment towards the total preservation management of collections in order to provide better public access to the material. Preservation management is now being included in library and archive training courses across Australia.

Significant progress has also been made in conservation training at the local level. The Conservation Working Party of the HCC is coordinating an Australia-wide series of workshops aimed at local communities. However, what is still lacking is any policy for promoting professional development of practising conservators. The provision of conservation training at all levels is essential.

Therefore, although the policy is a significant step forward, and the Conservation Working Group is to be congratulated on this initiative, it is really only the beginning. Just as significant is the need for communication, cooperation, and a change of attitude and priorities from all those institutions and individuals who work with, collect or are responsible for the distributed national collection.

**Professor Colin Pearson**  
Director, National Centre for  
Cultural Heritage Science Studies  
University of Canberra

### References

- (1) The Commonwealth of Australia, 1994, *Creative Nation*, Canberra

**NB: At the time of going to press we are unsure of the document's status under the new Federal Government. MN will report on progress.**



### **Cinderella Collections: University Museums & Collections in Australia. The Report of the University Museums Review Committee 1996, Australian Vice-Chancellor's Committee**

The broad scope of this report to the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee is both its strength and weakness. Its brief was to provide the Department of Employment, Education and Training, (through the vice-chancellors' committee) with basic data on university museums and collections, including a description of their physical characteristics, their nature, size, space parameters, holdings, staff, collection conditions, and their estimated values. It was to report on the quality and extent of the collections, the suitability of these to the teaching and research profiles of universities, their role in training for the professions related to the heritage industry, the existence and use by universities of performance indicators, and the availability and benefits of the museums and collections to the local community, as well as strategies to conserve and develop university collections as part of Australia's cultural heritage. This brief has led to difficulty in focusing on a single set of objectives, to confusion and repetition in arrangement, and uncertainty as to its audience.

Its major strength is its existence at all, and for that strength many shortcomings can be forgiven. It comes at a time when universities are questioning any expenditure on activities which are not seen as core. The major recommendation states: 'That each university adopt an overall policy for the establishment and maintenance of museums and collections, and a procedure for formal recognition of those which the university intends to maintain in the longer term'. (6.3.1)

That universities should know what they have, and should think about what they can maintain, is essential. While this may benefit some of the existing collections, the corollary is that others may be disbanded, and this possibility is raised. Combined with recommendations on staffing,

including that universities employ professionally trained museum staff, recognising these staff as having a professional status similar to that of librarians, and encouraging professional development opportunities for these staff, there is some hope that in those museums and collections which are recognised, real improvement is possible.

Part of the declared purpose of the report was to seek to broaden the basis of funding for university museums and collections, as guardians of a substantial and significant segment of the distributed national collection. For this reason, the first two recommendations seek funding from Commonwealth sources. The first seeks '...as a one-off strategy, special funds of \$5 million over the next five years to enable the most urgent of the backlog of conservation, storage, documentation and exhibition needs of formally recognised university museums and collections to be given immediate attention to enable them to reach acceptable industry standards'. (6.8.4)

Given that the report lists some 250 collections in some 34 universities, this is not much over five years. With a change in government, and the imprecise focus of the report and this request, I will be surprised if any moneys will be forthcoming. But other positive results are possible. For example, the report is already providing a stimulus for museum-based activities on campus, as demonstrated by Andrew Simpson's (University of Queensland) short report in the last issue of *Museum National*.

The 250 page report is in three sections: Part A, the executive summary; Part B, the review, covering many subject areas like governance, management, accreditation, staffing, funding, accommodation, facilities, use and access, relationship to museum training programs, and collections management. This section intermingles discussion of the survey findings on the museums and collections with recommendations for their better management. At times it reads like a basic text book on museum practice. Whether intended for DEET, for vice-

chancellors, to educate staff in university museums and collections, or for them to use as an argument to attract better funding, is never clear. Part C consists of a series of appendices which includes a list of university museums and collections, the survey results, an extensive bibliography (the purpose of which is not clear), a section on university museums in other countries (which is in fact on university museums in the UK) and some guidelines for policy development.

The report contains repetitions on several levels. The 68 recommendations are repeated three times, and, within the recommendations themselves there is much repetition of ideas. This may hinder implementation by their confusion. I believe greater emphasis on the single recommendation to appoint well trained professional museum staff to universities would have obviated the need for the number of low level recommendations and assisted implementation of fewer, stronger recommendations.

In spite of this it is to be hoped that the effects are positive and do lead to their recognition in universities. As Professor Di Yerbury said at the launch, university museums can be as important to universities as are their libraries, in community outreach, enhancement of quality of life on campus, in teaching and research and in their considerable support role to a university's academic mission. Frequently the museum is the only contact with a university available to the public, and for that alone, they are worthy of support by their university owners.

Vanessa Mack  
Director, Macleay Museum,  
University of Sydney

### **Most Curious and Peculiar: Women Taxidermists in Colonial Sydney**

*Macleay Museum, Sydney, until  
January 1997*

In Australian Aboriginal cultures, representations of 'the natural' have functioned to demonstrate the inter-relatedness of human existence to the landscape and its constituent

floral and faunal elements. In European Australian culture such representations have characteristically served to highlight the separation of humanity and nature. While the genteel Victorian drawing room may have been filled with potted plants and the skins, heads or feathers of assorted animals, such spaces were never anything but civilised. In both instances, conceptions of nature are central to the configuration of culture. While anthropologists have been considering this link for many years, historical interest in the relationship is comparatively recent and museums, at least in Australia, have rarely addressed the topic at all. “Most curious and peculiar”:

Women Taxidermists in Colonial Sydney’ does much to rectify this oversight.

Curated by Martha Sear and Susie Davies, this exhibition examines the Victorian practice of taxidermy through the careers of two professional women taxidermists,

Jane Tost (c. 1817 – 1889) and her daughter, Ada Rohu (c. 1845 – 1928). Jane worked stuffing animals for the British Museum before emigrating to Tasmania in 1856 with her husband. There, Tost performed taxidermy at the Hobart Town Museum but later moved to Sydney and was employed by the Australian Museum. In 1872 a fire killed Jane’s son and Ada’s first husband, James Coates. Benefit money raised later helped Jane and Ada establish Tost & Coates (later renamed Tost & Rohu after Ada remarried), a taxidermy business which also sold fancywork and novelties. In 1873 Ada Rohu exhibited her work at the World Columbian Exposition in Chicago.

According to Sear, whose doctoral research on women’s work exhibitions inspired this project, the exhibition attempts to illuminate how Victorians saw nature by locating taxidermy within different contemporaneous cultural ‘spaces’: science and the museum; the

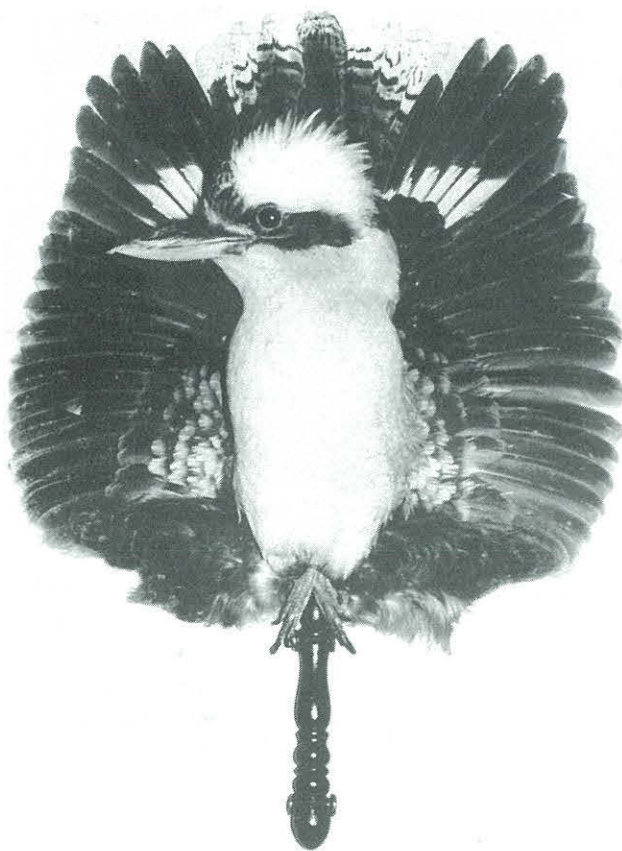
flourishing business of selling skins, feathers and stuffed animals; the domestic arena of genteel women’s handicrafts and artwork; the nationalism of world trade expositions; the more nebulous context of ethnographic collecting; and the incipient conservation movement. Displays include stuffed squirrels, an early twentieth-century lion skin rug and mounted gazelle head bearing the Tost & Rohu label, an unsourced kangaroo paw cigar-lighter from 1900, an unsourced hand-held fire screen made from a

stuffed kookaburra, and various bird of paradise fashion accessories.

Taxidermy was a respectable and worthy pursuit for men and women throughout the nineteenth century and the curators stress this sense of normality. In fact the exhibition’s title ‘Most curious and peculiar’ was in fact a term used in the final report of the Women’s Committee of the 1893 Chicago Exposition to describe Australia’s fauna, rather than taxidermy or the role of women in stuffing animals.

In the 1890s, Americans may still have thought antipodean animals were extraordinary, but European Australians had become familiar with ‘their’ fauna. This highlights one of the exhibition’s important sub-themes, namely the celebration of a distinctive fauna. The familiarity with indigenous plant and animal products, which was reflected and fostered by taxidermy, led to the incorporation of such floral and faunal motifs within nationalistic imagery. Barron Field derided Australia’s ‘unfamiliar’ animals and plants in the 1820s, and Marcus Clarke wrote of ‘weird melancholy’ in the 1870s, but by the First World War the kangaroo, the emu and the wattle had been incorporated into a new Australian coat of arms.

The strength of this exhibition lies in the way it demonstrates the various roles of taxidermy in nineteenth-century Australia and the way it compels visitors to confront the normalcy with which these objects – many of which are bizarre in our eyes – were regarded by Victorian Australians. The display space contributes to the experience – several of the museum’s old display cases have been turned around to form an interior room. Designer Lucy Bannyan is to be commended for her layout, as is Marianne Hawke for her graphic design. Indeed, as a quintessential Victorian museum space and collection which has remained remarkably unchanged since the early twentieth century, the Macleay Museum is an ideal site for such an exhibition. It is unavoidable that the spatial intimacy which contributes so much to the enjoyment of this exhibition also militates against the more expansive enunciation of the many themes which the curators have endeavoured to address. But these of



Kookaburra handscreen, c. 1890. Lent by J. B. Hawkins Antiques. Photo courtesy Macleay Museum.

course lay the groundwork for future exhibitions.

My main criticism, however, concerns the way in which issues surrounding gender and class have remained implicit within the interpretive text. This was a conscious strategy on the curators' part, who did not want to present a 'contributive history' which seeks to uncover the forgotten role of women in nineteenth century social and cultural pursuits. Rather, they have sought to reflect the ordinariness of middle-class women's involvement in taxidermy. Just as contemporary accounts made little of the exceptionalism of Jane Tost's position at the Australian Museum – she was the first woman employed at an Australian museum – this exhibition does not discuss the politics of gender and class in any explicit way. It seeks to normalise the role of women in business and science, an entirely valid position to take, however, I found myself asking for more discussion of social contexts and more about the relationship of Jane and Ada to the male members of the family who also had positions of power within the company. Perhaps more could also have been made of the relationship between taxidermy and non-middle-class women, whether Aboriginal or working-class European Australians, through the domestic necessities of food preparation and clothing manufacture.

'Most curious and peculiar' is part of a shift towards greater cultural interpretation at the Macleay Museum. Newer permanent exhibits include 'Spoils of War', based upon journal entries from Walter Wilson Froggatt's 1887 expedition to the Kimberly area in which a massacre of Aborigines is matter of factly recorded as an opportunity to gather ethnographic artefacts. The text is juxtaposed with contemporary items from the Macleay's own collection.

Future exhibitions will continue the theme of ethnography and collecting after 'Most curious and peculiar' ends in January 1997. I greatly look forward to these.

Ian Hoskins  
Assistant Curator, Social  
History, Powerhouse Museum

## The Powerhouse Museum Collection Thesaurus,

Judith Coombes (ed), *Powerhouse Publishing, Sydney 1995*

How often have you attempted to find, on your local library's catalogue, all books dealing with a particular subject only to discover that about half the relevant titles cannot be retrieved by the expected key words? Many libraries now have terminology control and museums are also tackling the same problem in collection information management.

*The Powerhouse Museum Collection Thesaurus* of standard terms for object names has been a substantial undertaking. It is the first of three publications planned by the museum to provide consistent indexing for management and retrieval of information based on the Powerhouse collection. The project was instigated by Des Beechey (senior registrar) with the support of the museum's previous senior registrar, Vanessa Mack. Registrar and editor Judy Coombes, together with staff of the registration department, have developed this thesaurus from a base commissioned from Lyn Farkas of Datascape Information Pty Ltd. Its major users will be cataloguers who, by incorporating the controlled, standard vocabulary of this thesaurus into object records, will ensure accurate retrieval.

The Powerhouse appears to be the first Australian museum to publish its thesaurus, though the National Museum of Australia has developed one for its collection and will soon incorporate this into its computerised system. A variety of strategies are used elsewhere for terminology control. The Art Gallery of NSW uses the Getty's *Art and Architecture Thesaurus* alongside guidelines from the National Gallery. The Historic Houses Trust has adapted Chenall's *Nomenclature for Museum Cataloguing* to Australian terminology using the *Macquarie Dictionary*, with occasional use of the Getty thesaurus for specialised terms – as does the Australian National Maritime Museum. Small museums rely heavily on Patricia Summerfield's *Classification Scheme for Small Museums*, but this lacks the cross-

referencing structure of the true thesaurus.

The thesaurus uses Australian spelling and usage and is issued in two volumes: *Objects Hierarchical*, which assists cataloguers to choose appropriate terms by revealing the structure upon which the thesaurus is based; and *Objects Alphabetical*, which is an alphabetical listing of terms accompanied by explanatory scope notes, and references to allied terminology.

The choice of object name and the hierarchy which supports it must reflect the needs of the collecting institution. So users outside the Powerhouse may need to adapt the thesaurus and provision has been made for adding new terms by supplying a returnable form for this purpose.

The introduction and the directions for use are expressed in unambiguous, accessible language and the scope notes are clear and concise, making the thesaurus accessible and user-friendly. However, the lack of a bibliography will be a drawback for cataloguers needing to know sources of current terms and information, and for those wishing to develop terms for particular collecting areas.

It will take some time before feedback emerges from museums using the thesaurus. However, an expanded introduction might have usefully covered the project's background with a brief explanation of the other two parts (a subject thesaurus and an authority file). An overview of the context of publications on nomenclature and classification used in museums would also have added perspective. This would have been of particular use to small museums as they develop and incorporate the controlled terminology of this publication into their cataloguing and indexing practice.

This substantial contribution to collection information management will have much use in Australian museums, particularly in the context of computerised records and networks in Australian museums.

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## Standards for Museums in Australia?

At the 1995 annual conference of the Museums Association of Aotearoa New Zealand, Kirsten Freeman (former museums accreditation program coordinator, Museums Australia, Victoria) and Geoff Speirs (museum services manager, State History Centre, SA) spoke about state-based museum accreditation schemes in Australia. In this report, Geoff Speirs discusses the possibility of a national accreditation program for Australia.

### The UK experience

In the UK there has been an explosion in the number of museums over the last thirty years, however, there have been no set of standards against which their performance could be assessed. In 1988, after an abortive attempt by the Museums Association (MA) to set up an accreditation scheme based on the American model of peer assessment against very demanding criteria, the Museums and Galleries Commission (MGC) and the area museum councils combined to establish a national accreditation scheme.(1)

The scheme has been responsible for a significant improvement in standards in museums throughout the UK and has strengthened museum networks in general.(2) It has become the benchmark by which government, the museum profession and the public judge museums; it is supported by local authority associations, funding bodies, and the MA (registration is required before museums can be eligible for grants from the MGC or the area museum councils); registration is a criteria in auditing local authority museum services; and the scheme further helps museums enhance their credibility and public confidence in them.

The scheme is funded by the MGC, the national museum body, and is run through the nineteen area museum councils. Each council has a full-time, MGC-funded position allocated to the scheme which is based upon a set of minimum standards. Museums apply voluntarily for registration and are assessed on-site by the appropriate area museums officer who then makes recommendations to a national registration committee drawn from senior staff in larger museums.(3)

Museums must meet eight criteria: an acceptable constitution; statement of purpose and key aims; access to professional curatorial advice; a collecting policy; maintenance of basic documentation records; suitable care of collections; public access and services; and a sound financial basis.

In 1996 the British scheme moves into its second phase in which all registered museums must reapply for registration according to slightly tougher criteria.

Although in principle the standards are again set at the minimum level, these can be expected to rise steadily over the life of the registration program.

The MGC and the area museum councils considered it essential that major museums take part in the program to ensure its success, and most major museums have now become registered. Meeting the minimum standards has not been easy for them either, however.

### A national accreditation program for Australia?

After more or less uncontrolled expansion, few could argue that it is not time for more regulation in Australia's museum industry. Government, sponsors and would-be donors of objects are looking for performance measures. *Cinderella Collections, University Museums and Collections in Australia*, for example, makes a strong case for a national accreditation scheme to assist in setting standards for university-run museums.(4)

Accreditation schemes operate in Victoria and South Australia and in other states museums must meet certain criteria to be eligible for project grants. We have not yet reached the point where existing schemes could not be superseded by a national one, but in two or three years time we may well have done.

I believe the initiative for such a national scheme should come from Museums Australia, who could also manage the program, or alternatively, the National Museum of Australia as part of its brief for outreach. Ongoing Commonwealth funding would have to be sought for a registration/accreditation officer to be based in each state, and to support a national committee drawn from all sectors of the museum community.

Criteria for registration or accreditation should be decided early in the piece. I favour the British principle of adopting standards which are realistically attainable by the majority of eligible museums, with a view to having perhaps three-quarters of all such museums working to attain the standards within three or four years. This approach has been successful in the UK: it also appears to be the way that New Zealand will go.

While these are preliminary thoughts only, Museums Australia's standing committee on regional, specialist and local museums has now received funding to develop and test guidelines for managers of the distributed national collection. This will take the debate further.

Geoff Speirs  
Museum Services Manager,  
State History Centre, SA

## References

- (1) Bower, R 1995, *Forward Planning and Registration, Stories from the United Kingdom* (based on author's notes from talk presented by Rosemary Bower at the MAANZ September conference.)
- (2) Wallace, L 1995, 'A Standards Scheme for Museums', *New Zealand Museums Journal: Selected Conference Papers 1992-94*, Vol 25, No 1, pp. 60-63
- (3) Freeman, K 1994, *Scholarship Report: 1994 Menzies Scholarship* (unpublished internal report to Museums Australia, Vic, on the registration scheme for MGC); see also *Museum National*, Vol 3, No 3, February 1995, p.15
- (4) University Museums Review Committee, 1996, *Cinderella Collections: University Museums and Collections in Australia*

## Museums Australia – 1996 professional development programs

**Museums Australia is the national association for all those who work in and contribute to Australia's museums, art museums and public galleries.**

The association offers a variety of services to members through its national office and its network of branches throughout Australia. *Museum National*, regular state newsletters, forums, seminars, publications, touring support and resources, professional development and training, advisory services and support are available to members. In 1996 professional development programs include:

**Museums Australia Inc (national office)**  
24 Queens Pde, Nth Fitzroy Vic 3068. Tel: (03) 9486 3399, Fax: (03) 9486 3788

Each year MA's national office offers professional development grants in self-directed programs (\$1000 – \$7500), and a professional development international exchange program, in partnership with the British Council (one grant of up to \$6000). Currently open to individuals working in art museums, art galleries and independent practice in contemporary exhibition areas. Closing date 12 August.

**Museums Australia Inc (NSW)**  
c/- Powerhouse Museum, PO Box K346, Haymarket NSW 2000  
Street address: The Gunnery, 43-51 Cowper Wharf Rd, Woolloomooloo, NSW 2011. Tel: (02) 358 1760, Fax: (02) 358 1852

This year's professional development program includes special workshops on volunteers in museums. Others include – Promoting and Marketing Your Museum; Planning Unique Exhibitions for Your Museum; Save Your Objects!: Accessible Conservation for Museums; Effective Collections Management; Museums and Schools: Effective Education Programs; Disaster Preparedness; Approaches to Collection Development for New and Existing Museums.

**Museums Australia Inc (Vic)**  
4/19-35 Gertrude St, Fitzroy Vic 3065. Tel: (03) 9416 1945, Fax: (03) 9416 0523

The September 1996 professional development seminar program comprises: Day in day out we go on curating: contemporary museum practice; The nature of the beast: membership organisations; Fringe dwellers: working outside

the institution; Big museum, small museum – what's the difference?

**Museums Australia Inc (Qld)**  
PO Box 3124, South Brisbane Qld 4101. Tel: (07) 3255 0433, Fax: (07) 3255 0466

MA(Q) and the RGAQ have received joint funding to develop training and professional development programs based on the 1995 report *Hidden Heritage*. MA(Q) helped sponsor and develop the RGAQ's 1996 April workshops which addressed social history exhibitions, conservation, exhibition design, touring exhibitions, cultural mapping and planning for local government, funding issues, marketing and promotion, maintaining community links, audience surveys, collection policies, and relating to youth audiences. MA(Q) will be employing a training and professional development project officer later this year.

**Museums Australia Inc (WA)**  
c/- Western Australian Museum, Francis St, Perth WA 6000. Tel: (09) 427 2770 Fax: (09) 328 8686

### Voluntary Branch Committees:

**Museums Australia (ACT)**  
Louise Douglas – President  
c/- National Museum of Australia, GPO Box 1901, Canberra ACT 2601. Tel: (06) 242 2122, Fax: (06) 242 2123

**Museums Australia (NT)**  
Dawn Mendham – Secretary, c/- Museum and Art Gallery of the NT, PO Box 4646, Darwin NT 0801. Tel: (089) 89 8254, Fax: (089) 89 8289

**Museums Australia (SA)**  
Louise Dauth – President, c/- Flinders University Art Museum, GPO Box 2100, Adelaide SA 5001. Tel: (08) 201 2692, Fax: (08) 201 2556

**Museums Australia (Tas)**  
Kaye Dimmack – Secretary  
c/- Queen Victoria Museum, Wellington St, Launceston Tas 7250. Tel: (003) 316 777, Fax: (003) 345 230

Future issues of MN will carry regular summaries of state branch training and professional development activities.

## Museums and Cultural Diversity – Ancient Cultures, New Worlds

### ICOM '98: Melbourne, 10 – 15 October 1998

Founded in 1946, the International Council of Museums (ICOM) promotes and develops museums and the museum profession at an international level. As a non-profit organisation, it is financed by membership fees and supported by public and private organisations. Based in Paris, France, the ICOM headquarters maintains a secretariat which is associated with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (UNESCO).

ICOM's 12,000 members in 120 countries collaborate in regional and international activities. These focus on the reinforcement of regional networks, professional training and exchange, promotion of professional ethics, fighting the illicit traffic of cultural property, and the protection of world heritage.

In 1998 ICOM will hold its triennial conference and general assembly at Melbourne's World Congress Centre.

Last year a board of management, ICOM '98, was established comprising directors of major Australian museums and other prominent individuals. The board is chaired by the Honorable John Button and the deputy chair is Kevan Gosper. Other members represent the Australian national committee of ICOM and Museums Australia.

'Museums and Cultural Diversity – Ancient Cultures, New Worlds' will focus on the increasing role of indigenous peoples in the community and is being planned as an intelligent and stimulating conference. Approximately 2000 to 3000 delegates are expected and conference organisers anticipate a strong contingent from the Asia Pacific region.

The conference will encompass meetings of 33 international specialist committees and affiliated organisations, which will discuss issues related to the

overall theme. The international specialist committees and affiliated organisations have Melbourne-based contacts assisting them with their planning. This contact group, the specialist liaison committee, will soon be contacting interstate committee members to rally their support. Equally significant is the working group, operating through an executive, which is developing strategies and options for excursions, coordination of institutional events, and transportation. Melbourne's broader museum community is also taking on the tasks needed to make the conference a success. The Museum of Victoria is providing staff time, facilities, materials and support to the executive office of ICOM '98.

Conference discussions will be interspersed with a range of cultural activities. Programming and tours accentuating the different cultural and heritage aspects of Australia's regions are being planned.

Internationally, ICOM '98 is strengthening networks in the United States and will be represented at the next American Association of Museums conference in May. With assistance from the Melbourne Convention Bureau and the Australian Tourism Commission, ICOM '98 representatives will distribute information to the 4000 AAM delegates and meet with other international ICOM members.

Professional conference organisers are being contacted to assist with management of the conference. MN will carry regular reports on planning for the 1998 conference but if you would like to be involved, or would like information on ICOM '98 contact Anthea Hancocks, Executive Officer, ICOM '98, c/- Museum of Victoria, PO Box 666E, Melbourne Vic 3001. Ph: (03) 9651 6783, Fax: (03) 9651 6321, email: [ahancock@pioneer.mov.vic.gov.au](mailto:ahancock@pioneer.mov.vic.gov.au)

## Disaster Preparedness in Sydney and the Mateship Principle

At 6.00am on 3 August 1990, large sections of the metal roof cladding of the Australian National Maritime Museum's administrative, conservation and storage buildings were peeled back by 60 knot winds during a heavy storm. Large quantities of water entered the building causing widespread damage to paper-based materials and objects. Within a few hours, however, conservators from a number of other

institutions in Sydney had supplied materials, equipment and labour to assist in the salvage of collections, archives and building contents.

### Disasters waiting to happen

Scarcely a week passes without some type of natural phenomenon causing a crisis in the world. Whether it be fire, flood, cyclone, earthquake or some

other hazard, these situations often threaten important heritage collections. The fate of the Leningrad Library, the LA County Library fire and the Florence floods are more famous examples, but numerous other cases can be cited to illustrate the reality of the threat. Even if they have not been hit by the big one few institutions have totally escaped smaller panics, such as burst pipes and leaking roofs, which threaten the collection and need immediate response.

Planning for such events in a systematic way has become increasingly common. It is a cost effective way of minimising loss of time and materials caused by a major incident, and such planning is actively encouraged by insurance companies.

The irreplaceable nature of the materials housed in libraries, museums and galleries also makes it essential to preplan salvage procedures to minimise permanent damage to the collections. For the last ten years, a group of institutions in Sydney have been meeting on a regular basis to think about the unthinkable.

The group began in 1982 as part of a series of meetings between the conservation departments of the larger state institutions to promote cooperation and resource sharing.

In 1985 the group was established as The Sydney Cultural and Custodial Institutions Disaster Preparedness Group (SCCIDPG) and invited a wider range of organisations to join, including the Historic Houses Trust, university libraries and bank archives.

The effectiveness of such a group depends on a prior commitment to cooperation. In the event of a fire or flood which results in large volumes of water-damaged material, the resources of a single organisation will be overwhelmed. A pool of trained conservation staff who can identify the major problems and carry out basic first-aid treatments will prevent the onset of decay. Group members also store equipment and materials for emergencies.

Lists of the quantity and location of these supplies are maintained and distributed to member institutions and can be made available to other group members at short notice.

### Maritime Disaster

When the Maritime Museum lost its roof in 1990 a system was well established which allowed

the museum's conservators to make one phone call to the chair of the SCCIDPG with details of the situation and a list of supplies needed. Working from the group's lists, she was able to phone around and obtain necessary dehumidifiers, blotting paper, fans, bags, waterproof clothing etc. Appropriate specialists were also contacted to assist with the salvage so museum staff had time to concentrate on their immediate problems onsite.

The drying-out work on the collection took another week to complete.

The SCCIDPG is currently working to maintain lists of equipment, materials and facilities required in salvage operations; to collate information relevant to disaster preparedness and recovery; and maintain effective communication between appropriate staff in member institutions.

Recent meetings have included guest speakers on topics such as salvage of magnetic media, liaison between staff and the fire service, and the effect of fire control systems. The psychological impact of disasters will be discussed in future meetings – many of us in the museum profession are probably more emotionally tied to our collections that we would care to admit.

Preventive conservation for the protection of entire collections has increased in recent years. Effective disaster preparedness is one aspect of this, since some investment in pre-planning helps minimise permanent damage and loss caused by a major crisis. The Sydney group has links with South Australia and is keen to communicate with other interested institutions.

Contact Colin Macgregor (Chair, SCCIDPG) at the Australian Museum on (02) 339 8111.



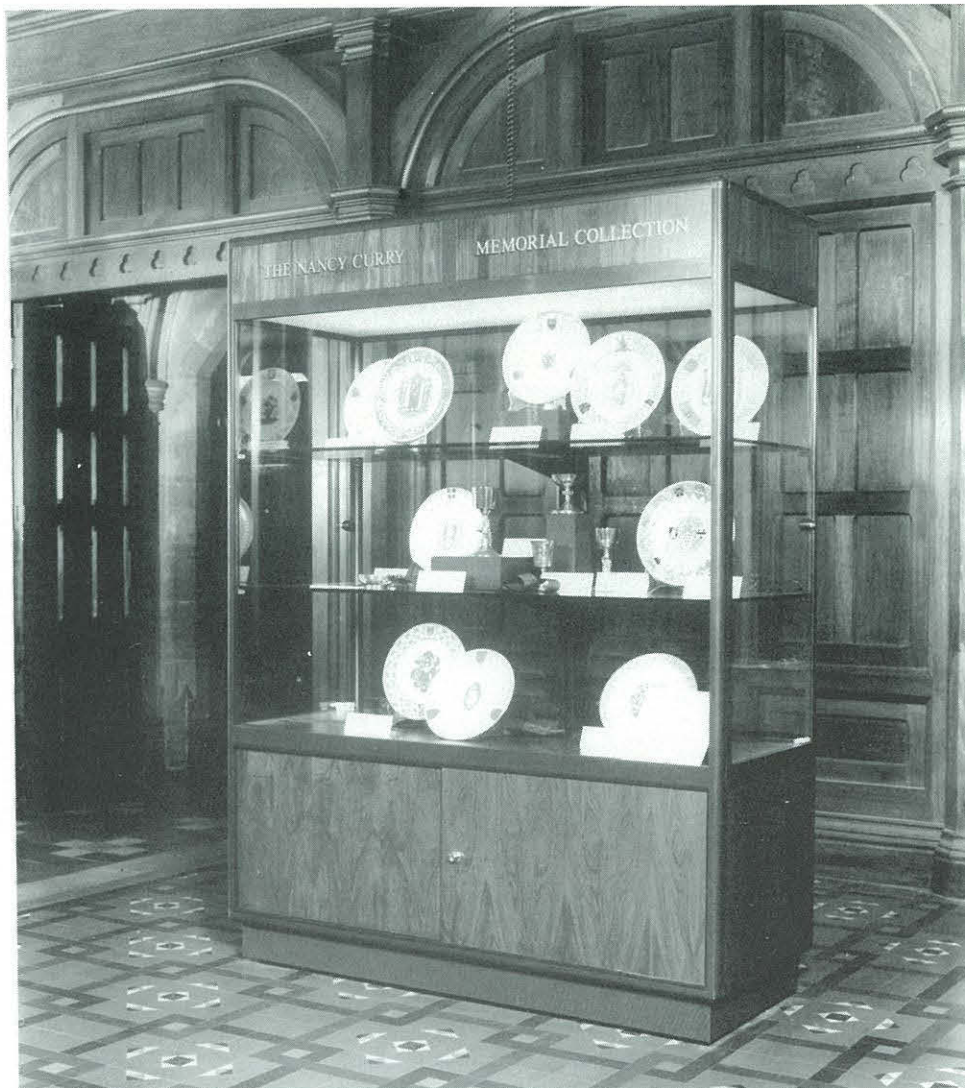
A fierce storm in August 1990 damaged the roof of the Australian National Maritime Museum's Union Street administration building. Within a couple of hours assistance had arrived and by the end of the day the building was stable and affected material had been given first-aid treatment to ensure it dried safely. Photo courtesy Australian National Maritime Museum.

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