



The magazine of Museums Australia Inc.

MUSEUM NATIONAL

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Australian Museums & Cultural Diversity

Editorial

Ten years ago, museum delegates participated in a national conference to consider ways of making Australian collections more representative of Australia's diverse communities. New Responsibilities: Documenting Multicultural Australia brought together staff from museums, libraries, archives and historical societies. Over 160 institutions contributed to a survey that attempted to chart the range, scope and underlying policies of collecting activity in Australia. It indicated a range of collections which documented the cultural life of many indigenous and migrant communities. Approximately half of the respondents could state that they collected material in languages other than English. Only a handful, however, had addressed the policy issue of whether to translate this material for research and display. Another weakness at policy level was revealed: fewer than 15% of respondents had prepared 'a written policy relating to the acquisition of material about Aborigines and/or other cultural groups'. Yet there was an enthusiasm associated with participating, and a willingness to share and to learn, that was carried forward from the conference recommendations and into the bi-partisan *National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia* (1989).

The *National Agenda* placed a high priority on the coordination of policy and resources between collecting institutions. Consequently, in 1991, the Commonwealth published *A Plan for Cultural Heritage Institutions to Reflect Australia's Cultural Diversity*. How well have we implemented this Plan? *Museum National* includes a report from the Department of Communication and the Arts on a 1996 survey of museums' progress with the Plan. The article also surveys initiatives in the heritage sector that respond to the stimulus of new audiences and different collecting patterns.

This *Museum National* attempts to 'reflect Australia's cultural diversity' by presenting some examples of contemporary practice in museums around the country. Our working definition of cultural diversity comes from page 6 of the Plan: 'Australians - no matter what their gender, age or economic status - come from various linguistic, ethnic, racial, religious and cultural backgrounds. Cultural diversity encompasses all these issues'.

Those who heard visiting Canadian Michael Ames speak during his recent stay in Australia will be aware of the high regard he has for our museums and their engagement with challenging themes. In an interview conducted exclusively for *Museum National*, Ames spoke with Maryanne McCubbin about the tension between the cultural and political roles and responsibilities of museums.

The case studies have mostly been recruited from museums that are known to be pro-active in their work with diverse communities. If your thinking is stimulated by the accounts of museum initiatives that are presented here, you could consider offering a paper to the forthcoming ICOM conference on the ways in which your museum is operating in a culturally diverse environment. *Museum National* previews the ideas behind the October ICOM conference 'Museums and Cultural Diversity: Ancient Cultures, New Worlds', adopting a local focus: 'Australian Museums and Cultural Diversity'.

We present in this issue a glimpse of the multi-faceted ideas, interpretations, innovations and inspirations with which Australian museums have responded to an increased awareness of cultural diversity.

We say a grateful farewell to former Editor Marianne Wallace-Crabbe, as we welcome her predecessor Linda Richardson into the Editor's role for the February issue. Marianne's role as Project Manager, Professional Development has seen her juggling *Museum National* and the professional development program of Museums Australia. On behalf of the Editorial Committee, I congratulate Marianne on her achievement of six high-quality issues of the magazine. We wish her well for her future.

Margaret Birtley
Guest Editor

Themes for future issues of *Museum National* are included here for readers' interest.

May 1998 - Performing Arts (compiled by guest editors from Museums Australia's Performing Arts Special Interest Group).

August 1998 - Indigenous issue (compiled by guest editors from Museums Australia's Indigenous Australians Special Interest Group).

November 1998 - Cultural Diversity (to celebrate and report on the ICOM 98 conference).

Anyone interested in submitting articles, reports, photos or reviews to these issues should contact Linda Richardson at Museums Australia's national office.

***Museum National* has a revised editorial statement, printed overleaf on the Contents page. The new statement emphasises the magazine's policy relationship with Museums Australia more clearly.**

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Cover Image (detail)

Emil Goh, *despair*, 1996. From the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art and the Institute of Modern Art's touring exhibition 'Above and Beyond Austral/Asian interactions'. Reproduced courtesy of the artist, ACCA and the IMA.



DEPARTMENT OF
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Museum National is published quarterly by Museums Australia Inc., and provides a major link between the association and its membership. *Museum National* aims to present news and opinions and to encourage debate on issues of museum practice, 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. The content of the magazine reflects the policies of Museums Australia Inc., and is guided by an Editorial Committee. Contributions from those involved or interested in museums and galleries are welcome.

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Culture as Diversity

by Peter Beilharz

So what is it you look for in a city? When I hit a city or a new town, first thing I do is walk, smell, take in the noise and colours, the silhouettes, work the senses. Second thing I do, often, along with ferries and towers, as applicable, is head straight for the gallery or museum. Habit? Maybe. Pointyhead? Okay, I confess. Certainly these institutions, galleries and museums shouldn't be seen as the souls of cities. They are artificial, as cities are, and expressive of moments and particular interests, however they are configured. Yet they also serve to orient, somehow; they compress or concentrate, and they do offer some sort of clue to a city, some sense of purpose or being, of place and time. They are institutions that symbolise cities. Of course, we moderns (or pomos) like to stroll; we seek pleasure, stimulation, difference, the other; we want to be entertained, amused if not educated (though probably educated too, able enough to bring back stories to tell our friends). Maybe we seek to be elevated even? If galleries are the modern substitute for churches, the places where art now occurs, museums offer us civilisational glimpses, senses of identity, nation or region, progress (or decline), the cultures or artefacts of the subjugated as well as the victors.

Already the distinctions become interesting. Art tends, until recently, to happen or to be authorised in galleries; museums are different, or they used to be. The masses of exotic stuff plundered and piled roof-high in early collections becomes classified, more austere and directed, and, of course, explained. The word intrudes into the realms of thing and image, as now does the infernal sound-box, canned victims dutifully daleking through ordered space in good sequence. The floor plan we obediently acquire at the front door, however, tends probably to go in the back pocket, and to stay there. Some works of art, some artefacts seem to call us, even out of order; and often it's the juxtaposition of objects which is provocative, as say in Hobart or in Castlemaine. So maybe we're back to the piles of stuff, where we began, beyond classification? The distinctions remain important, nevertheless, because arguably we are animals that judge, or distinguish. To use a more evocative word, we **value**, and our values shift variously. There still remains, I suppose, some kind of basic distinction between museums and galleries, even when it is not actively enforced. Museums gather tools; galleries are closer to God. Modernity upsets that distinction by making a god of technology; the machine becomes sublime. The classical distinctions between contemplation and *techné* have been unravelling for centuries. Art follows religion in leaving its vessel and entering the ordinary world, thank God. Dada's great revolution is merely to tell us this, in your face, forcibly or rudely.

As you enter Auckland City Gallery there's a great display of portraits of Maori by Pakeha. Interesting idea, portraiture; should by rights have died years ago. Alongside the various portraits by Gottfried Lindauer,

there are those by the even more celebrated (now) Charles F. Goldie. The information panel alongside relates that in 1911 one critic suggested that Goldie's works were 'more suitable for a museum of ethnology and anthropology than for the walls of an art gallery'. Ah! for the lost days of razor sharp minds and crystalline distinctions. Either ethnography or chocolate box stuff, such was Goldie's earlier fate. Such distinctions fail, today, to compel, not least of all because Maori apparently like these portraits. What, after all, is Frida Kahlo's Blue House in Coyoacan - is it a gallery or a museum? Are we more intrigued by the results, set in paint, or by the objects of the life? How can we distinguish the two, once we disallow final completion of the artwork as a defining attribute? Or why, shifting southward, should we privilege the print form legacy of an anthropologist like Claude Levi-Strauss over the photographs he has left us of Sao Paulo in the Second World War? Isn't there something about the visual that at least gives the illusion of direct contact or proximity?

The weakness of the great divide in tradition, I suppose, is to imagine (as Goldie's early critic did) that we are closer to God, whereas the others are further away. We inhabit the realm of the spirit, they leave behind them only a culture of things. We carried the spirit of history, whereas they left only material fragments, occupying another place and embodying another time. Strange thing is, this kind of arrogance has also been uneven in its application. Museums, cathedrals to science, have often been more celebratory than galleries; and moderns have often been more enchanted by the 'primitive' than by our own gods. At the same time that we value high culture, Rembrandt or Turner or Matisse, we also celebrate *techné* or practice, we worship the machine and encourage our children to participate in museums as **activities**. Some actually value both high culture and mechanical culture, or 'culture' and 'civilisation'; and like Goldie's critic, if with a contemporary twist, after Gauguin, after Picasso we value the other even more than our own classical icons. What this means is that culture is, or cultures are, diverse by definition; they appropriate, borrow, reach back to images of imagined pasts, local or foreign, stretch sideways - Japanesey in Frank Lloyd Wright, Chinoiserie, aboriginalism in Australian painting like Margaret Preston's.

So what's the fuss? There will always be high culture, or a canon; those who know will always persist in telling us what we should, or must, appreciate. Do not adjust your headsets, or mindsets! Alongside the official determination of 'cultures' there will always be a plurality of cultures, a diversity of cultures, even before our noses, even in the canon which is specified for us. You see it every time you juxtapose, as a spectator, when you look out of the window of the Louvre and see something, somebody, more momentarily captivating than what is on the wall.

You see it in the dolls' houses and furniture in the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, in the eyes of the portraits that follow you wistfully or sneeringly in London's National Portrait Gallery, in the juxtaposition of historic, documentary pictures and contemporary chrome and neon work in Buenos Aires, the latter all within morbid echo of Evita, thirty foot under. We make our own order, that is to say, as when you might choose (or not choose, but follow the path all the same) to reverse the recommended historical teleology and walk upstairs rather than down in that Portrait Gallery, reversing the authorised and developmental schedule of time whether wittingly or not. You choose it, when (if you can) you prioritise the American collection of the Whitney over the vast loot stored in the Metropolitan or MOMA, or if you ponder Brett Whitely's matchsticks **outside** the Art Gallery of New South Wales, pointing up and out like the two fingered salute, against the Finger Wharf rather than plasterboard and gilt. Culture is diverse.

As actors, or spectators in these scenes, that is to say, we do not follow scripts set out for us as consumers of art of things; wittingly or not, we stumble from one section to the next, get the order wrong, create our own order, and have a good time. The result? Cerebrally captured? Don't know; but I don't remember ever having visited a gallery or museum that I haven't enjoyed. You can look at the walls, out the windows or (let's own up) at the other people looking; for it is a spectacle, n'est-ce pas? So I take a friend of mine from Utrecht to visit the Annie Leibowitz show in Melbourne, and he says loudly as we enter, European inflection, 'I could have done that!' Some sneer while others smile, agreeing silently with their facial muscles, for this is still a religious activity, even though we kid ourselves we are there to see, or be seen. And we value the things, or the photographs or paints, we treat them as familiar old friends, renew our acquaintances, turn out into the elements rejuvenated or edified. We ain't stupid; we know that what we encounter are representations, we know the criteria for selection are restricted, and we still insist on having a good time, whether it's Mambo visuals, posters or surfboards at Manly Gallery, or Bonnard or the Indian Magic Flute in Sydney Central, or whatever.

So what is it you look for in a museum, or in a gallery? It's not my role to advise or instruct curators or people who work in these institutions, so this is a postcard, some random thoughts on how I think I encounter them on my travels. What's on my mind, I guess, is that visitors are actors, that they create, enjoy or deny, walk away from what disappoints them, that they, we, treat these wondermaking institutions as we do the cities or towns they are located in. We act out our diversity in and against what is represented to us as significant. We value, every day of our lives, and we value differently in diversity. It is all these stories and wanderings stacked up together which make up culture as a whole way of life.

On my way out of Auckland there are two guys busking the blues on a centre street corner, Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee. These guys are cooking with gas. They are Chinese. Walk on.

Peter Beilharz, Professor, School of Sociology, Politics and Anthropology, La Trobe University

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Museums and the Presentation of Cultural Diversity

Michael Ames is professor of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, and was the Director of the University's Museum of Anthropology until 1997. He was in Australia last year as visiting research fellow at Curtin University's Research Institute for Cultural Heritage. During his visit to Australia, Michael Ames spoke to Maryanne McCubbin, Head Curator of Australian Society at Museum Victoria, about the complexities of presenting cultural diversity within museums.

MM: Recently, you spoke about the characteristics of Australia's cultural diversity which you think lead the way for the world.

MA: The experiences that Australia has had with its major immigration movements, along with similar experiences in Canada, New Zealand and the United States, provide very valuable examples of liberal democratic societies which are committed to a degree of equality, even though they don't always manage it. In many other parts of the world, they either don't accept or deport immigrants, or they have very undemocratic regimes. In that sense Australia and the United States can be models for others. The States is a big country, so a lot of people look to it. A lot of countries are more of the size of Australia, Canada and New Zealand, however. They're very useful models and ought to be promoted as such. If people only look at their own country, they miss that comparative perspective.

The Melbourne Museum, the Immigration Museum, Fremantle Museum and the Museum of Western Australia, for example, are giving a lot of attention to the issue of immigration, which is part of the diversity question, and you're also questioning issues about reconciliation. Reconciliation is a big question, including in Canada. Will the governments and the mainstream populations ever come to terms with their origins, which were filled with violence? They have to at some point. The whole world is watching and if they don't do it properly, they're going to lose stature in the world, and that translates into problems with trade and political influence.

MM: Your arrival is particularly timely, with the Wik debate and Pauline Hanson, and it seems to be a teetering, edgy time.

MA: Yes, a lot of these issues are beginning to reach a peak, I think. I feel fairly confident that the majority of the Australian people are of goodwill, and that there will be resolutions to the Wik debate. It won't solve everything; you can't in one document rectify 200 years of history. It's a continuing process and there's going to be something after Wik, another major case.

The courts often play strategic roles that jump-start an issue onto the next level. This is happening in Canada where important legal decisions about land

claims or fishing rights have jump-started other things. You then almost need another crisis to get things moving again, but each time I think there's another step forward.

MM: You say the courts and the political systems are by definition combative, and that for this reason the cultural sector is ideal to lead and drive those sorts of issues, as well.

MA: I think so. I came to that conclusion watching politicians try to create some sort of accommodation between the French and the English parts of Canada. It seemed fruitless because politicians, just like lawyers, are paid to disagree with each other. But when ordinary French-speaking and English-speaking people got together, they found grounds for agreement. And I thought, if we could somehow get this outside of the political arena. The cultural sector is a major arena; the performing arts are very outspoken here and back home, and they're playing the leading role in speaking out. Art galleries also show political art (which they should do a better job of contextualising), and I've always advocated that museums should include political art in their exhibitory.

In Australia the Christian churches are beginning to play an interesting and useful role in the Wik debate. They're saying 'Be cautious - this present ten-point plan isn't good enough'. Whereas the cultural sector represents a broader base, and it is also its role to speak out. But it's difficult when your government and your museums are intertwined - how political can you be and get away with it?

MM: Are museums sites of consensus on the one hand and political institutions on the other?

MA: Yes, and by being political you won't necessarily get consensus. Museums should be political but they should choose their politics, rather than having them imposed. It's political for museums to say, 'We want to hear both sides', and to be a venue for civil debate. You don't have to take a position on Wik necessarily, but why not, if you want to? There is a real need among ordinary people for a place where they can talk more calmly about these issues. It's not just the 'chattering classes' who are opposed to Wik - ordinary middle-class people are still concerned and have a right to be heard, and would appreciate this opportunity in a quiet, civil place.

There's a big failure in communicating what the issues are, and everyone's arguing without understanding the issues. I found it hard to find your Government's ten-point plan - I finally found it on the Web and it was recently printed in the newspapers. Maybe museums could become resource centres for contemporary issues like this. And then you use history to contextualise the issues.

MM: Nevertheless, museums do have their politics imposed on them by political and funding masters, and also by the lobbying of various community groups. It's very difficult in practice for museums to define their own politics.

MA: It's extraordinarily difficult and it means walking the tightrope. You have to be aware of funding requirements and the influences of government, and you have to respond to community groups so you don't alienate them. That does mute the voice - there's no question about it. But I also feel that within those limitations there's an obligation to try.

We found the most effective way was to employ contemporary indigenous artists. They sometimes take hits at us because we're part of the establishment, which is fair, and people respond to their messages more than to ours. Sometimes they're very subtle. We've had indigenous people write their own stories - just calm little narratives - but suddenly they include a kicker about how they lost their land that gets the messages across. In our museum we've nailed up on the wall the proclamation of the local indigenous community's land claim, with a map showing what it's claiming - with no comment. People look at it and they're quite amazed. I think the public generally appreciates that kind of information if it's given in a non-didactic way.

MM: You've argued for a very broad, lateral interpretation of cultural diversity, with which I agree. You've applauded the many museum policies here in Australia for minority groups. But I wonder about this move to ever-increasing inclusivity.

MA: In the Museums Australia Gay and Lesbian Policy, a key argument is that the group should be represented in the collections and the programs because it's an identifiable, tax-paying group. That's fine, but if you take that argument then every group should be represented and this is impossible for museums, especially in terms of collection-based representation. Maybe we need more specialised museums, but there's no money for that. The access gallery is also a great idea, coupled with rotating programming. There needs to be less emphasis on acquisitions. Exhibitions should be based on ideas and supported by collections.

MM: But ideas-based exhibitions - especially those about identity politics - can become didactic. This may even be the reason why museums still find it hard to access some audiences - people are put off by lectures on what to think.

AM: Didactic exhibitions also attract a lot of other people, though. I guess the solution is in the mix - have some exhibits which are didactic but which are balanced with more open, fluid and responsive exhibits, supported and made evident by different design styles. Mix is great. Wherever you go, there's another world of discovery. You'll probably find exhibitors want to be didactic in the access galleries.

MM: To some extent it depends on whose voice it is, and if it's seen to be the curator's it can be taken quite differently than if it's seen to be the artist's or the 'authentic' voice.

MA: That's part of our post-modern era. The traditional authorities are not respected and museum visitors want to hear the chronicle of real people. The curators lose their voice temporarily, but they creep back in through the editing process. People want what appears to be authenticity, even though the speaker is couching her or his voice in a very careful way too. It's staged authenticity. But then in ten years time, we may swing back a little to master narratives again. They're there all the time; they haven't gone away. Economic rationalism is the greatest master narrative of all and has been here all along, even though we pretend there are many different narratives. The market philosophy and the role of reason and progress never ceased to be important, and yet they have become a hidden history, in a sense, because they've seeped down into our common sense so we no longer recognise them as master narratives.

MM: You have critiqued post-modernism for the sort of nihilistic, relativistic position it sometimes takes.

MA: John Hirst talks of two theories of multiculturalism, one of which says we're all equal, there's no master narrative and there's no consensus about one being better than any other. The other theory recognises that all groups are equal, yet they also agree about a set of values and institutions of the host country. I interpreted 'host' as meaning indigenous as well as settler communities - they're co-hosts, and that's why reconciliation needs to be achieved in order to develop a truly multicultural society. If indigenous and non-indigenous people could somehow identify a set of values - including rationalism, liberalism and utilitarianism - and also take indigenous attitudes towards land, family, mutual support and history as always being present, rather than something to put in a museum because you no longer need it.

New Zealand is trying to do that with the Maori and the Pakeha, and it's fraught with political problems. The problem there is that bi-culturalism doesn't include everyone else.

MM: An article I read recently suggests that one of Australia's accidental virtues is that we don't have a strong sense of nationhood and national identity.

MA: They say that about Canada, too. We laugh at the Americans when they salute their flag, but they do have a strong sense of national unity. Whenever anyone raises the question of Canadian identity, they get booed. Canadians don't want to talk about it. I find extreme nationalism very uncomfortable, but we need something because I fear being absorbed by the United States. Though it is a marvellous country, I don't want to be them. Maybe it doesn't make a lot of difference. National identity is an ephemeral thing which you can't even articulate, and yet it's important because it's about feelings.

MM: You stated recently that people ride with an assumption about the irrevocability of history?

MA: I took that idea from Veronica Brady's book, *Can these Bones Live*. It just means that history is what we say it is, and so that's why we can revoke it. History, as it is revealed to us, is a social construction because it can be reconstructed through a process of reconciliation, that is by not perpetuating past wrongs.

MM: But there are also empirical realities, like genuine preclusion of cultural diversity in Australia for many decades.

MA: Brady was arguing that by recovering what we call the repressed parts of history - the massacres of Aboriginal people and the stolen generation - we can change our understanding of history, and that's an important step towards reconciliation.

My argument is that liberal democratic societies should look for equality of results rather than equality of opportunity. I support those who say that disadvantaged groups really need some assistance to bring them up to a level where they can compete. I agree with preferential treatment, though it's hard on those who are not part of those programs because they lose out and there's that resentment.

In Canada we have arguments about immigration taking away jobs and changing housing values. A couple of years ago in Vancouver, housing prices started going through the roof because people were buying up all kinds of things. Locals blamed immigrants from Hong Kong because they were visible. Then a survey about migration to Vancouver showed the majority of migrants were from eastern Canada and that they were the ones driving up the prices, but it took a long time for that information to get out. It's those kinds of issues that need balancing; in introducing changes for some people you need to help other people overcome their concerns about it.

Another interesting thing about different cultures is their different standards of courtesy. Often what might seem discourteous to us might not be intended that way, such as how close you stand to people in public arenas, or even driving habits. So sometimes it's not a racist comment, it's more of a cultural one - 'that's not the way we do it here', kind of thing.

MM: All this is about maintaining order in society, and how much difference a society can tolerate. What special roles do you see the museum having in encouraging order in society?

MA: Museums can help articulate what might be the founding myths and the integrating stories of the society. One way of doing it is simply identifying and extolling various cultural heroes through time. There's a Canadian museum called the Woodland Cultural Centre, run by the Iroquois Six Nations. It's a nice mix of archaeology, anthropology and art gallery, and includes a hall of fame. They have portraits of famous Iroquois, and that's neat for their community and it's a nice thing to do in museums. Just a mix of famous people or folk heroes in the community - of different cultures, of course. And these histories become stories, just as Ned Kelly became famous, and the concept of larrikin has become very much a part of Australian male identity.

MM: The idea of celebrating heroes really interests me. For indigenous cultures, I'm sure it's very important because it re-writes history, but when it comes to my culture, I have a problem with the hall of fame idea, because the power issues within non-indigenous historiography have allowed some people to become heroes and other people not to become heroes.

MA: Maybe you have to create the heroes. It's the hidden histories you have to uncover. There were a lot of women around, and their stories haven't been told that much. There was a play in Sydney of Captain Thunderbolt and Mary, his 'gin', and she was the feature of the play. There's a role for cultural institutions to play. The performing arts are trying to do it, and maybe museums could add to that too. It's a balancing act.

Can These Bones Live, by Veronica Brady, is published by Federation Press, Sydney, 1996.

Michael Ames was a keynote speaker at Museums Australia's 1997 conference Unlocking Museums. His paper will be published in the conference proceedings.

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'A Brick of Potential': Presenting Australia's Cultural Diversity at the Migration Museum

by Viv Szekeres

'History is the poisoned well, seeping into the ground water. It's not the unknown past we're doomed to repeat, but the past we know. Every recorded event is a brick of potential, of precedent thrown into the future. Eventually the idea will hit someone on the back of the head. This is the duplicity of history: an idea recorded will become an idea resurrected. Out of the fertile ground, the compost of history.'

I came across this wonderful quotation in a recently published book called *Fugitive Pieces*, by Canadian writer Anne Michaels. It took me back to a recent conversation with curator Kate Walsh, who had just given a talk to a social club about the work of the Migration Museum. At the end of her talk, the invariable question was asked. It is always the same question, and by now we are so used to it, we wait for it. 'Ah, but what about the Anglo-Celts?' Of course, the answer is to explain that Anglo-Celts are part of the history of the development of a culturally diverse society. Neither Anglo-Celtic 'pioneers' nor the indigenous people they encountered were neat homogenous groups, and all their histories have a place in the Museum.

Musing over the depressing regularity of this question, we came to the conclusion, not for the first time, that other than those working in the field of cultural studies and some like-minded museums, few people really understand the inclusivity embedded in the meaning of cultural diversity.

If we are right about this, then it is probably also true that very few Australians know or understand the history of our country, or perhaps they do know it, but find it hard to make the links between cause and

effect. The irrefutable fact is that major arrivals of people have shaped the social and cultural fabric of Australia with the same irreversible momentum that plate tectonics has had on forming the geological features which, together with the Dreaming, have created the shape and spirit of our continent. The effect of this past, where people have come from all over the world to a continent that already had many different groups of indigenous people, has been the development of a population which, including the early settlers from Scotland, Wales, Ireland and England, is ethnically one of the most culturally diverse in the world.

When I first began working at the Migration Museum, we interpreted cultural diversity in the ways I have described. In our displays and programs we were concerned primarily with ethnic diversity. It was only after my involvement on the Federal Consultative Committee on Cultural Heritage in a Multicultural Australia that I was introduced to a broader interpretation of the concept, which included other ways in which we are socialised, such as class, gender, age and regional differences. Ideas which I am sure grew like a second mini period of Enlightenment during the 1970s, influenced by feminism and the growth of indigenous and political protest movements. The effect on programs in the Museum was immediate. Working from the wider definition of cultural diversity we were able to address a major problem we had been facing. As a museum established to present immigration history and the cultural 'traditions' of the many people who have come from all over the world to settle in Australia, we were finding that if you only feature 'ethnicity', the outcome will invariably reinforce the stereotypic and confirm attitudes of prejudice.

A TWIST OF FATE

A TWIST OF FATE



A Twist of Fate

This is the logo for a program opening at the Migration Museum in February 1998. It explores the idea that anyone, at any time and anywhere, can become a refugee - it only needs a twist of fate. The subtitle of the program is 'A Twist of Fate: an experience of war; pain, torture and survival. The stories of refugees who have settled in Australia'. The sub-text is that democracy is precious.

Using art installations, theatrical techniques and sound, 'A Twist of Fate' invites the visitor to follow three journeys: from Vietnam, Latin America and eastern Europe. The visitor must travel through a refugee camp alone, a key card unlocks the doors and sound booths which reveal the stories along the way. The refugee camp is intended to be disturbing and confronting. At the Migration Museum we are trying different ways of presenting history, with minimal text. Please tell us if the messages about history and experience have been conveyed and if the effect is powerful enough.

One of the most exciting aspects of working in a museum that is constantly grappling with ways of presenting ideas about immigration history is that fundamental questions about the ways we interpret and express the complexities of cultural identity constantly emerge. Questions such as: What contributes to one's cultural identity? Is there an Australian cultural identity? Do features from other cultures contribute to this identity? How does this relate to citizenship? What do we mean when we talk about 'tradition', which is a concept used a lot in relation to the past and cultural diversity? Tzeve, from *Fiddler on the Roof*, knew exactly what he meant by 'tradition', but I find it a very slippery concept. There are many ways in which its usage can reinforce very conservative ideas, which distort the past and prescribe the present and future. It seems to me we should be getting worried when the government of the day wishes to take us back to certain 'traditions', which they tell us not only did exist but which are being eroded. We saw it happen in Nazi Germany and in Greece under the generals, where a totally mythological past was constructed to serve the political agenda of official propaganda.

I feel an understanding of cultural diversity is becoming an essential element of what Eva Cox in the 1996 Boyer Lectures calls 'A Civil Society', a society where there is an enthusiastic acceptance of cultural differences, a compassion for those on the margins of our society, a sincere commitment to Aboriginal reconciliation and an unequivocal rejection of racism as essential features of our democracy. Reviewing the

past eleven years since the Migration Museum opened to the public, it is these features of Eva's conceptualisation of 'A Civil Society' which, through the history of immigration, we have been trying to present in exhibitions and programs. The fact that over the next few years there are going to be other museums of immigration history in Australia also presenting ideas about cultural diversity is, I feel, a very exciting prospect. A multiple of migration museums have the potential to change many more attitudes and, for us here in Adelaide, this has to be a good thing.

But before we get too carried away - A Reminder. Not everyone will think this is a good idea and at the Museum we have our critics. For example, when we tell the stories of the impact of European settlement on indigenous people, the struggle for acceptance by many non-English speaking groups, or the racism experienced by some Asian immigrants, our detractors accuse us of being 'too politically correct'. Justice Marcus Einfeld, speaking on reconciliation near Goondiwindi, recently said, 'If that is a black armband view of history, I willingly wear it in recognition of truth, sorrow and commitment to reconciliation. Rather an armband than a black blindfold to shut out the truth.' It is a powerful point. I agree with him and it is just as true for museums who deal with ideas about what cultural diversity really means.

**Viv Szekeres,
Director,
Migration Museum.**

Museum of interacting cultures: Melbourne's Living Museum of the West

by Olwen Ford

In 1984 a rather strange, inside-out museum was established on Melbourne's western side. It focused on people rather than objects, and began exploring the dimensions of cultural diversity, initially through oral history. Since then, it has involved people in documenting, preserving and interpreting the richness and depth of its region's social, industrial and environmental history. Over 14 years it has developed as a museum of interacting cultures, a theatre of encounter between people of Aboriginal, Anglo-Celtic, Asian, European, American and African origin, between workers and artists, young and old, past and present.

Melbourne's Living Museum of the West is Australia's first ecomuseum, which it defines as, 'A

concept whereby the total community, its environment and its heritage are considered as part of the Museum'.(1) The concept is still unusual in Australia. Some museologists remain sceptical, yet Australian museums and galleries, large and small, practise many of the ideas of the ecomuseum. 'Ecomuseums are based on the belief that museums and communities should be related to the whole of life', writes Nancy J. Fuller, and adds, 'The ecomuseum becomes a tool for the economic, social and political growth and development of the society from which it springs'.(2)

On the face of it, Melbourne's Living Museum of the West is a small museum with a small collection. But it is the verb 'collecting', rather than the noun

'collection', that distinguishes the Living Museum's activities. Its base in Pipemakers Park is not only the repository of the Living Museum's core collection and an indoor/outdoor exhibition space, but the jumping-off point for investigating, documenting and interpreting the broader collection distributed throughout the region itself, including natural, Aboriginal and historic places.

In the act of collecting memories, documents, photographs and places, and presenting or communicating these in a range of forms, the Living Museum is constantly interacting with living communities. The Museum is committed to a relationship with the people of the region, involving them in the research and presentation process. 'Involving' ranges from the chance encounter, the casual phone call or informal drop-in situation, to regular contact and structured projects requiring months of negotiation, a range of funding sources and consultancies. Commissioned work, whether to produce an art piece or to undertake a heritage study, always includes opportunities to involve local communities.

An early principle was the emphasis on people researching their own history. For this reason, there was no research on Aboriginal themes until there were contacts with Aboriginal communities and funds to employ Aboriginal staff. The Museum's staff and supporters have also included Vietnamese people researching the experiences of Vietnamese migrants, and Greek, Macedonian and Italian staff documenting the migration and work experiences of their communities. Many of these staff worked on the Museum's training and employment programs, and have been involved in producing publications, exhibitions and, most recently, a CD-ROM. The largely self-directing initiative of each staff member has contributed to the Museum's cultural diversity and productivity.

The audiotapes, transcripts, photographs and artworks collected or generated are now part of the Living Museum's collection. Those involved in Museum projects have gained confidence and a sense of identity from the experience of working as part of a

museum of many cultures, in a region where two-thirds of the population are overseas-born or the children of overseas-born. The interaction of cultures has occurred between people of different ethnic backgrounds, different gender and different educational backgrounds. There have been opportunities to challenge dominant narratives to ensure that many voices are heard. Interacting with local councils in the area of heritage and cultural policy is a current strand in Living Museum activity, part of a process of bringing about changes in attitude and perception.

Since 1989, the Living Museum has taken part in the reclaiming of Aboriginal heritage by Aboriginal people, and a sharing of this with other cultures. The Wurundjeri prepared a display within a larger exhibition, 'The Amazing Maribyrnong', about the river flowing past the Museum's headquarters in Pipemakers Park. Two philanthropic trusts funded the appointment of the Museum's first Aboriginal Cultural

Officer, Robert Mate Mate, who told Dreamtime stories to children at kindergartens, explained Aboriginal weapons and tools to school pupils and gave lectures to tertiary students. He arranged a concert, Ilbijerri, in Pipemakers Park, where a multicultural audience had its first encounter with indigenous dancers, musicians and poets. Leaflets in nine languages promoted a second concert, Nutbroki, where the audience tasted kangaroo cooked in traditional style by young Koorie apprentice gardeners based at the Museum.

Helping to establish a training scheme for Koorie gardening apprentices was one of the Living Museum's most dynamic projects, demonstrating the capacity of an ecomuseum to effect

change in society and in its surrounding environment. Six years later, the Koorie Gardening Team is a flourishing business, working across the Melbourne area and employing 15 people. Four of the original six apprentices have become certificated gardeners and a further four (including three young women) are graduating shortly. The project met a need in the area of Aboriginal employment and training, but has also given team members opportunities to develop their



The late Joe Tripodi, concrete pipe worker, reflects on the ruins of his old workplace, now part of the History of the Land Trail at Melbourne's Living Museum of the West. 1987.

Photographer: Gary Vines

own cultural identity. The team has planted indigenous species along freeways and a nature trail and Aboriginal garden in Pipemakers Park.

Developing the History of the Land trail in Pipemakers Park produced a powerful example of interacting cultures, expressed through mosaics, plants and artefacts, amidst the foundations of a large pipe factory shed. Here, Italian and Anglo-Celtic Australians once toiled to make eight-foot concrete pipes. Here, Koorie artists and a range of people of many different ethnic backgrounds have worked to transform the ruins of the factory shed into a garden that depicts human impact on the land from the thousands of years of Aboriginal history to settlement by many different cultures over the last 163 years. The mosaics include a Dreamtime story, symbols of the European invasion and settlement, a mosaic made by people with physical and intellectual disabilities, and mosaics depicting the theme of reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.

A pioneer women's shelter, commemorating the district's Irish pioneer women, was a joint venture between the Living Museum, a local history society and culturally diverse participants in an employment and training scheme. The shelter, itself a work of art affirming the Celtic strand in Australia's history, is now a popular meeting place. It is also a symbol of the important partnership between local history and heritage organisations and the Living Museum.

The challenge of 'community' is infinitely complex in a culturally diverse world. Ivan Karp suggests, 'Every society can be seen as a constantly-changing

mosaic of multiple communities and organisations'.⁽³⁾ Because of its role as an ecomuseum, Melbourne's Living Museum of the West finds itself a constantly changing mosaic, reflecting and responding to the communities it seeks to serve. Its staff have implemented its philosophy and principles by conscious and constant effort. In celebrating a whole region, its stories, its life and its history, the Living Museum is in fact engaged in a process of community cultural development, a major justification for all museums in today's world.

The Museum's outcomes are not always visible. Its assets, in terms of the total cultural heritage assets of its region, have yet to be calculated. It still has a long way to go. But its creative approach to its multicultural region and its involvement with Aboriginal communities ensure it is indeed a 'museum of interacting cultures'.

Olwen Ford
Formerly Museum Director
Melbourne's Living Museum of the West

(1) Haffenden, P., 1994, *Your Heritage Mate*, Melbourne's Living Museum of the West, Melbourne, p. vi

(2) Fuller, Nancy J., 1992, 'The Museum as a Vehicle for Community Empowerment: The Ak-Chin Indian Community Ecomuseum Project', in Ivan Karp, Christine Mullen Kreamer & Steven D. Levine, *Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture*, Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington, p. 328

(3) Karp, I. in *Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture*, p. 3

Sweet and Sour: Experiences of Chinese Families in the Northern Territory

by Mickey Dewar and Christine Tarbett Buckley

In 1994, following a request from Leonie Lee on behalf of Darwin's Chinese community, the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory (MAGNT) decided to develop an exhibition to showcase the Chinese community's contribution to territory history. MAGNT staff worked with the Chung Wah Society (the society that unites and provides a meeting place for all Chinese irrespective of religion, nationality or beliefs) and representatives of the Chinese community to develop the exhibition 'Sweet and Sour: Experiences of Chinese Families in the Northern Territory'. The exhibition was developed in tandem with the Chinese Museum, which opened in 1996, two months after 'Sweet and Sour'. These projects have led to an enduring relationship between

MAGNT and the territory's Chinese community.

Darwin's Chinese community represents one of the city's most long-standing, non-Aboriginal associations - families often contain five generations of Australians. 'Sweet and Sour' aims to show that economically and socially, the Chinese have been integral to Darwin's character and development through their activities in mining, market gardening, industry, commerce and culture. The exhibition also deals with threats to ethnic identity that have occurred during times when the community has felt pressured to adopt a mainstream Australian perspective. Above all, it aims to explore, through oral history, photographic and personal collections, what it means to be an Australian Chinese in Darwin.



Photo of Dolly Ng Yuen used on the official invitation to 'Sweet and Sour: Experiences of Chinese Families in the Northern Territory'. Reproduced courtesy of Mrs Evelyn Yuen. 'The name says it all. We want to tell the story of the sweetness and why we stayed here but we need to remember there was a sourness at times, as well. The whole thing is very Chinese!' Eddie Quong, OAM.

The exhibition was developed using oral history accounts as a source. Material was compiled by the National Library under Diana Giese, Francis Good of the Northern Territory Archives' Oral History Unit, the community as part of their research, and a small program initiated by MAGNT. The integration of the text, concept and design was made wholly 'Chinese' by designer Jeremy Chin, a fourth generation Darwin Chinese, who created a mix of colour and movement with shimmering satins and brightly coloured banners. Although much of the original research and community liaison was done by the Curator of Territory History, Mickey Dewar, the exhibition was put together and brought to culmination by Curator, Glen Dimond. The scope of the exhibition was made possible by a grant of \$72,000 from the Australia Foundation for Culture and the Humanities, under The Australian Experience 1995 funding.

Development of 'Sweet and Sour' proceeded in tandem with the Chinese Museum project and it provided a springboard for the Museum's development. The Chinese community's mandate to collect, interpret and display their history was an integral part of exhibition discussions - with the interest generated then being directed towards the activities of the Chinese Museum. MAGNT, as an umbrella organisation, provided practical and professional assistance. Working on two major projects did create its own set of difficulties for the committee and some members, such as Daryl Chin

and Robyn On, found all their spare time tied up with one or other of the projects.

The decision to develop the exhibition coincided with an upsurge in community interest. A dedicated historical sub-committee of the Chung Wah Society had done some work towards the development of a Chinese Museum in Darwin and in 1992, to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the bombing of Darwin, the sub-committee had assembled a display of pre-war 'Chinatown'. Through an intensive program of oral histories and photographic evidence, a model of Darwin's Cavenagh Street in the 1930s, with family businesses identified, had been assembled and displayed at venues around Darwin. A further project looking at the contributions of individuals from within the community was developed some years later. Development of the Museum followed.

The Chinese Museum committee successfully applied for a grant from the Northern Territory Department of Ethnic Affairs and, working under a designer chosen from the community, implemented the design changes necessary to change a temporary display to a full-time public facility. MAGNT obtained funding under the Northern Territory Heritage Grant scheme to upgrade the existing photographic and historical display.

This work complemented ongoing MAGNT projects under the National Estate Grants Program to document Chinese sites of significance in the Darwin hinterland and train members of the community to conduct their own oral histories. Participants were themselves interviewed by MAGNT history staff in an ongoing project to document 'Being a Darwin Chinese' for 'Sweet and Sour'.

Because of the ongoing relationship with Chung Wah, a committee was formed comprising members of the historical sub-committee of Chung Wah and other interested members of the Chinese community to oversee and co-ordinate the exhibition process. This was loosely codified in a letter of understanding from the Chinese community and signed by MAGNT's Director. Although the exhibition and Museum projects were discrete, there was a great deal of overlap between them. Material from the Chung Wah display, for example, formed a part of the 'Sweet and Sour' exhibition. Copies of the transcripts of the oral interviews and copies of the NEGP research material were lodged at the Chung Wah Chinese Museum. Genealogical data is held at the Chung Wah as part on an ongoing process to document the community. MAGNT undertook to house the large and fragile Stretton banner, presented to the community by Australian Archives (which requires strict environmental controls), until such time as the Chinese Museum was in a position to permanently house it.

'Sweet and Sour' has provided a focus for ongoing research by the Darwin Chinese, for the Darwin Chinese. The main thrust of the research has therefore been consultative and workshop based. The close relationship between the Chinese community and MAGNT forms part of MAGNT's role to help communities research and document their histories. 'Sweet and Sour' is a focal point in that process, but it will continue after the exhibition has finished. MAGNT is committed to the right of individual

communities to collect, display, interpret and curate their own histories. It is the role of state or territory institutions to work with those communities to facilitate this process through advice, physical and human resources and expertise to enable community collections to be maintained. State or territory institutions can operate as safety nets for the cultural resources and collections held by a community in times of natural disaster or social upheaval, but a large part of their work should be to assist the communities to present their histories in the way they consider

most appropriate. Partnerships of this nature between major museums and individual groups can be highly rewarding for both parties and forge enduring links between the institution and the community.

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What difference has it made? Reflecting cultural diversity in the Queensland Museum

by Judith Bartlett

Queensland's contemporary cultural diversity is represented by peoples from some 100 cultural groups. One in ten Queenslanders speaks a language other than English at home; more than 36 languages are used in Queensland, the most common being Chinese, Italian, German, Greek, Dutch, Japanese, Spanish and Vietnamese. Approximately one in five Queenslanders was born overseas.

The Cross-Cultural Studies Section at the Queensland Museum presents issues relating to the migration of peoples to Queensland. In establishing the section in 1994, the Museum's aim was to both promote cross-cultural understanding and to document and interpret the cultural diversity of the state. To achieve this aim I have had to consider how we represent the concept of difference.

Given Australia's history as an immigrant nation, ethnicity is inextricably tied to the understanding of an Australian identity. Ethnicity, as one form of difference, is best explained through a relational approach which facilitates an investigation of its particular historical context. The mere recognition or description of difference does not reveal its inner meaning. The meaning is interpreted through the specific historical context which necessitates an understanding of power relations and social reality as a whole.

Synergistic social relations operate between multiple peoples and cultures, and such relations are often competitive and conflictual. Ethnic or cultural groups in modern settings are repeatedly re-negotiating their boundaries and re-interpreting or creating their expressive symbols in response to changing realities, both within these groups and the host society. There is no static entity called the ethnic group or the host society and, within the framework of Australian contemporary museology, the question of representation has to be confronted.

Despite the amount of history that has been written in Australia, there is little written about our multicultural nature and the Queensland Museum's

collections have under-represented material culture relating to immigrants who speak English as a second language. It was clear that to make a difference the Museum would need to do research, build collections and mount exhibitions which took the relational aspects of cultural diversity as their starting point, rather than simply adding an ethnic spin to a more conventional mix where conservative, nostalgic attitudes can prevail. As the written records and existing heritage collections were weak, an oral history program was a necessary aspect of this work.

The oral history program has enabled us to explore social changes within groups and, over time, to record changing reactions to the immigration experience and to personalise 'the group'. Our focus is on the people and the stories behind the objects we collect and display. The objects are thereby positioned in the world of human relations, meanings and values. In this manner, we present issues relating to the immigration experience through collective stories which are illustrated through individual reflections, anecdotes, descriptions, personal memorabilia and material culture.

A series of recent exhibitions entitled 'With a story to tell...' presented acquisitions as stories about immigrants' personal experiences. Some stories were specific to particular cultures, others were cross-cultural or common to many cultural groups. They resulted from projects devised through partnerships with different groups and collaborations with individuals. They involved a program of integrating the collection of objects with the collection of key items such as oral histories, photographs, documents such as diaries, letters, business records and newspaper cuttings, and ephemera such as posters.

One story provided insight into the relations between migration, Italo-Australian ethnicity, gender relations and sport in Queensland. Italo-Australian women were the first women in the world to play bocce (an Italian bowling game) competitively. These women infiltrated a sport that traditionally unified

men and marginalised women. Over the past 25 years they have created a social and sporting network that they work to maintain. Women such as these have too often been portrayed as stereotypical victims or generic figures in the scholarly literature. They, however, did not see themselves as victims but as active agents in matters of familial and social relationships, and this sense of personal agency was strengthened through their migration experience in Queensland. This story also revealed issues common to culturally diverse societies such as intra-group conflict, oppression by the dominant group, and marginality through language barriers.

Importantly, these exhibitions more than any other proved that museum visitors will spend time reading lengthy texts when the stories are real rather than generic. The exhibition series, although small and not an exhaustive overview of the migrant experience, was highly successful because it was contained, intelligently designed and not over fabricated. It was planned to be aesthetically pleasing, challenging and interesting - rich with objects and supporting material - and directly involved the owners of this material. The installation concept encouraged viewers to reflect on what it is to be a Queenslanders and reinforced the place of a varying cultural diversity in the visitor's mind.

The Queensland Museum engaged individuals and communities from different cultural groups to produce the 'With a story to tell...' exhibition series. At present, the Museum does not have a dedicated community access space, but such a space is included

in the draft planning for the recently approved Queensland Cultural Heritage Centre. The Museum has made contact with culturally-specific organisations by mailouts and by visits. The Museum has also linked specific research and exhibition projects with local groups and invited them to participate. 'Traditional Games and Sport in Queensland' and 'Food and Cultural Identity in Queensland' are examples of two such projects. Some groups have requested the documentation of a particular cultural practice, for example, an annual pig slaughter and sausage production process with the Stanthorpe Dante Alighieri Society was documented through photographs and oral history. Other groups have requested a more ongoing relationship with the Museum. For example, the Queensland Jewish Board of Deputies has signed a cultural agreement whereby, in partnership, we build a documented collection that represents their history in this state.

By endeavouring to more truly reflect cultural diversity, the Queensland Museum will provide the broadest context possible for the interpretation of the state's history and cultural heritage. We have made a significant start but we still have a considerable way to go. Developing relationships with previously underserved constituents is a long and difficult process and one that has seen inevitable changes in museological practice at the Queensland Museum.

Judith Bartlett
Curator, Cross-Cultural Studies
Queensland Museum



Sausage production, 1995. Dante Alighieri Society members, Stanthorpe, Queensland. Courtesy of the Queensland Museum. Photo: Bruce Cowell.

Museums, Communities and the Fremantle History Museum

by Ann Delroy

The Fremantle History Museum, one of the Western Australian Museum's three metropolitan sites, has been undergoing a change of identity. After opening in 1970 as Australia's first state history museum, it failed to keep pace with shifts in history scholarship and the major changes which began to take place in museums during the 1980s. It did not relate to its immediate local communities at a time when various communities were gaining a voice outside the Museum. It became a museum without a heart and soul. Because it dealt with history it was devalued and neglected within its own patriarchal, natural science-orientated museum governing body.

Since the mid 1990s, we have worked to make the Museum a vital part of the life of Fremantle's communities in particular, and Western Australian communities in general. One of our main historical objectives has been to present history in an inclusive way, emphasising the importance of issues such as gender, ethnicity, class and race to the individual experience. The ways in which individual visitors relate to and identify with the histories presented is crucial to the relevance of the Museum within communities. The establishment of a dialogue with the way the past is presented underpins the presentation of historical themes and issues.

Much of what we are doing at the Fremantle History Museum is what Kenneth Ames describes as 'background' history - history that values the daily rhythms of life, the lives of ordinary people at home, at work and play, and history that values the lives of those exploited by the orthodox patriarchy of competition, progress, domination and control.⁽¹⁾

In the model of South Australia's Migration Museum, a community access gallery was launched in the 'new' Museum. A space in which various community groups can present their stories, histories and roles makes a clear statement about ownership of the museum and collaboration with communities. Since 1995 the program has included exhibitions by numerous migrant communities, and other communities such as the Down Syndrome Association, whose exhibition dispelled some of the myths about people with the syndrome.

In late 1996, we opened a temporary exhibition about the lives of workers at the Arnott, Mills and Ware cake and biscuit factory, which had operated in Fremantle for nearly 100 years before its closure in March 1992. It had been one of the largest single industrial employers of women in Western Australia. Following the period of mass migration after the Second World War, it was also a large employer of workers from non-English speaking backgrounds, initially from southern Europe and more recently from South East Asia. At the time of closure, 90% of

the workforce were women and 75% were born overseas. Fourteen languages were spoken on the factory floor.

History staff from the Museum, in conjunction with people from the Trades and Labor Council, Food Preservers' Union, the State Library and Fremantle Library documented the history of the factory and the lives of its employees. The resulting exhibition addressed some key issues, including the gender division of labour, the double day of women, the impact of new technology on women's employment in the factory, scientific management in the workplace, and the experience of migrant women. Workers were foremost in the exhibition; the development and 'progress' of the company being presented in terms of its impact on them.

Its opening was attended by several hundred former employees. The factory's time clock, now used to clock-on exhibition visitors, became a hub of activity, with ex-workers recording their experiences on the 'clock-on' cards and slotting them on the time board for others to read. It was an exhibition about their lives, told from their perspective, acknowledging their contribution to the Western Australian community.

Also in 1996, we opened a major long-term exhibition entitled 'A New Australia: Post-War Immigration to Western Australia'. Western Australia, and Fremantle in particular, is significant in the lives of many of Australia's post-war migrants. Until the advent of air travel, immigrants first set foot on Australian soil in Fremantle, before moving to other parts of Australia. Many have journeyed back to Fremantle and the migrant camps to 'relive' those first days on Australian soil. The Fremantle History Museum is ideally located to present their stories.

The exhibition is also a way of publicly acknowledging their contribution to Australian society. Many who were part of Australia's first mass-migration program, which sought to increase the country's population from seven million to twenty million within a generation, have felt their contribution to Australia's social, cultural and economic life and their daily life experiences in a new land have never been properly recognised. These people, who were brought to Australia to perform certain categories of work to ensure the growth of the Australian economy, were expected to fit in to the 'Australian way of life', unlike later migrants who came under the banner of multiculturalism.

'A New Australia: Post-War Immigration to Western Australia' is presented as a narrative, with emotional strategies employed to give greater feeling and meaning to the exhibition. The most powerful tools are the oral histories and the individual family

stories. Oral histories are often juxtaposed with those from Australian government sources, adding depth to their meaning. These make the exhibition immediately accessible, bringing out the pain, joy and humour of migrant experiences. The emotional overlay placed on photographs and otherwise impersonal objects transforms these materials into things of meaning.

We have also used strategies to encourage interaction between viewers and the exhibition, and between viewers themselves. The exhibition encourages them to participate in the stories and enables a sense of ownership of the exhibition. We have asked questions throughout the exhibition and invited viewers to reflect on their own experiences or to imagine what the circumstances depicted might have meant to them.

It is made clear at the outset of the exhibition that the story presented is not a definitive history, for there can be no single 'right' perspective of the past. Immigration is a personal journey and the exhibition tries to capture something of the past, using a range of sources - official records, individual letters and diaries, oral histories, photographs, posters and the things that people have treasured or chosen to keep. Viewers are invited to build on the exhibition by sharing their stories and material, and so become partners in the presentation of migration history.

The objects displayed offer tangible evidence of the information presented. The power of the objects and images used to document the storyline is made all the greater because, almost without exception, they relate directly to the lives of the individuals discussed. They are not used merely as backdrops to the storyline, but as integral sources of evidence. Many are ordinary items which take on powerful meaning when presented in the context of their owners' experiences.

The comments books at the end of the exhibition show how an audience can assert its own identity as part of its experience of an exhibition. The responses have been quite extraordinary in number, content and detail. Some tell of individual and family experiences and how different, or similar, they are to those presented. Others thank the Museum for telling their stories publicly. Children and grandchildren of these immigrants have gained a new understanding and knowledge of their own family's experiences. Others have said the exhibition has given them a new understanding and respect for every 'old migrant Australian'.

Ann Delroy
Head, History Department
Western Australian Museum

(1) Ames, K.L. 1994, 'Anonymous Heroes: Background History and Social Responsibility', *Museum News*, Sept/Oct 1994, p.34

Objects, histories and democracy - a personal journey through 'Travellers and Immigrants: Portuguêses em Perth'

by Andrea Witcomb

In November 1997, an exhibition entitled 'Travellers and Immigrants: Portuguêses em Perth' opened at the Fremantle History Museum's Community Access Gallery. The exhibition is interesting at two levels - as a model for the way in which a community gallery space can be used to establish connections between very different communities, and in its approach to questions of ethnic identity and their relationship to the material world.

The exhibition is the result of a convergence of interests. I was seeking to combine the demands of lecturing in a research institute and a mandate to be involved in the production of cultural heritage, with my background as a social history curator and my interest in Portugal, where I was born and raised until I was 14. Members of Perth's Portuguese community, in particular the Portuguese Community Council, were interested in achieving greater public prominence for their community but did not have the resources to

do anything on their own so we approached the Community Access Gallery's curator, Deborah Tout-Smith, to seek help from the Western Australian Museum in applying for grants. The Fremantle History Museum had made initial contact with the community during the development of its post-war immigration exhibition, and welcomed the opportunity to extend the relationship. We felt that my language skills and connection to Portugal might help in gaining community support for the idea of an exhibition at the Museum, thus establishing some formal links between them.

We established a three way partnership and, with everyone's help, I prepared a successful grant application to the Australian Foundation for Culture and the Humanities. Further financial help came from the WA Lotteries Commission and the City of Cockburn, through the Portuguese Community Council's own efforts. The budget of approximately \$10,000 paid for my curatorial input, the printing of

a catalogue, labels and graphics. The rest was donated in kind by members of the partnership. Of particular importance here was the input of Curtin University's museology students, who designed the exhibition and co-ordinated its production as part of their studies.

Important characteristics emerged about the Portuguese community as I got to know some of its members. This was no single, unified ethnic community. As well as the distinctions of class, educational background and time of arrival, there were also geographical distinctions which pointed to a history larger than simply that of nationality. The patterns of immigration to Western Australia closely followed political and economic situations in Portugal and its overseas provinces. It was a history of empire as well as Portuguese history.

For example, the first wave of Portuguese migrants to Western Australia began arriving in 1952. They were all from the island of Madeira and they came because the population of Madeira was larger than the island could support.

In the 1960s people began to arrive from Portugal itself, driven mainly by the need for greater economic security. In April 1974, the revolution occurred, overthrowing the right wing dictatorship that had existed in Portugal since 1932. Along with the positive process of democratic reform, there also followed political upheaval, economic insecurity and general instability. In the provinces it meant independence followed shortly after by civil war. In Angola, Mozambique, Guinea Bissau, Cabo Verde and East Timor, thousands faced political persecution. Many sought refuge in Portugal, eventually migrating to places such as Western Australia. Thus, the late 1970s and early 1980s saw another wave of migration of people whose experiences were different to those who had migrated earlier.

Also, these different waves of migrants generally have long family histories of migration which makes it



Pillow sham (enfeito da carma).

Part of Maria Antonia's trousseau, the decorative cloth is hand embroidered with a crocheted border.

Lent by Luisa Ribeiro, Maria Antonia's grand daughter.

Photo: Heather May.

very difficult to understand the Portuguese community as a single ethnicity.

One of the women featured in the exhibition defines herself as an Australian born overseas. Audrey Satar was born in Goa, in India, when it was a Portuguese province. As a five year old, her family moved to Mozambique, where they had family connections. She went to school there and Portuguese, rather than English, became her language. She later attended university in Lisbon, during which time the revolution broke out. Returning to her family in Mozambique for a holiday, she watched as the country gained independence then slid into civil war. Her parents soon emigrated to Australia. Travelling between Portugal and Mozambique, feeling she no longer had a place to call home, Audrey eventually decided to join her family in Fremantle.

Personal histories like this both problematise ideas of cultural authenticity as the basis for an understanding of ethnic identity and make the survival of family heirlooms and special objects all the more special. They also point to another tension for museums - that between ideas-driven exhibitions and object-driven exhibitions. Thus, while the exhibition's oral histories point towards this notion of cultural travel and reflect an ability on the part of those interviewed to think about their life stories in quite abstract terms, I also found that a significant number of families preferred to talk instead about specific objects or photographs. Their discussions were about remembering their 'terra' or birthplace. Objects were for them a very concrete way of symbolising their identity. Quite often, this preference came from the older migrants, especially those from Madeira. This might reflect their class position - many have little formal education and are not used to answering abstract questions.

Despite the fact that oral history is often defined as a medium for giving voice to those who do not have access to public institutions or ways of writing their own history, I found that even oral history was too abstract and too formal for some. Objects, then, became a very important means of democratising the museum space, of bringing into the museum a group of people who had no natural or social connection to it. It was an important experience to have at a time when many in the museum community are worried that the focus on objects, rather than ideas, has been partly responsible for a museological practice that privileges curatorial authority and is implicated in imperial ideologies.

'Travellers and Immigrants' successfully brought together a number of different communities in the space of the museum. It was also important, for me, because it reaffirmed a belief in the promise of objects as cultural brokers and museums as spaces where the possibility of cultural democracy can be usefully pursued.

Dr Andrea Witcomb
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Bridging Three Worlds: the process of a museum partnership

by Helen Light and Anna Malgorzewicz

'Bridging Two Worlds: Jews, Italians and Carlton' was the product of an innovative partnership between the Jewish Museum of Australia, the Italian Historical Society (Co.As.It.) and the Museum of Victoria. From its opening in August 1992 until its conclusion in March 1994, the exhibition was received positively by visitors from all communities and by the museum profession itself.

The exhibition aimed to provide a solution to the issue of how best to reflect Australia's cultural diversity in a mainstream public institution. Through a co-operative working partnership between a mainstream cultural institution and two culturally specific organisations, we hoped to develop a model for Australia's museums which would be reflected in the project's product and within the working process itself.

In the planning and implementation of this project, the process and the product were equally important. While the exhibition was to focus primarily on the experiences of Jews and Italians who migrated to Australia and settled in Carlton, an inner suburb of Melbourne, it was essentially to be about the experiences of all migrant groups who had left their homes and settled in this country. The exhibition aimed to foster a greater appreciation of the positive dimensions of Victoria's cultural diversity.

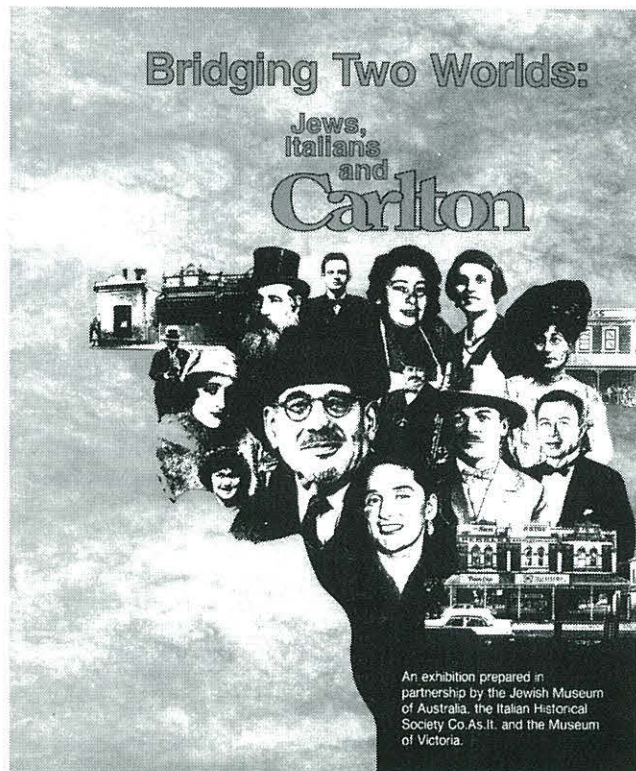
The tri-partite partnership was formed with the most idealistic of intents. We believed the process would enable the Jewish Museum of Australia and the Italian Historical Society to bring an intimate knowledge of and expertise about their respective communities into the Museum of Victoria, while also providing access to the resources of these communities. The Museum of Victoria would provide both communities with access to its wide public forum and contribute its expertise, resources and infrastructure.

The partnership was formally agreed to during an inaugural meeting of the Executive Steering Committee, comprising the President of the Council of the Museum of Victoria, and the Chairmen of the Jewish Museum of Australia and the Italian Historical Society. All decision-making power and ownership of the project rested with the Committee. A working group comprising curators from the three organisations, a designer, education officer, Museum of Victoria public programs' staff, and the Director of the Museum of Victoria met regularly with the Steering Committee.

The collaboration was formalised a year later in a partnership agreement that reflected the spirit of idealism in which the whole project was conceived and developed. It designated equal responsibilities for and equal ownership of the exhibition for the three partners, and defined the existing structure and powers in order to safeguard this notion of partnership.

The three curators were responsible together for determining the intellectual content of the exhibition and its thematic foci. The curators from the two culturally specific organisations worked with committees from their own communities collecting research material, objects, photographs, oral histories and ideas. The Museum of Victoria curators researched the general history and demography of Carlton. Designers and education staff were attached to this working group so that exhibition design would evolve in tandem with the conceptual development and the selection of artefacts.

This structure initially seemed appropriate in light of a most idealistic but perhaps naive understanding of the meaning of such a partnership, and the assumption that each partner shared the same vision. The partnership was founded on an understanding of equity in terms of contributions from each partner. We recognised, in theory at least, that the Museum of Victoria as the mainstream institution could provide greater concrete resources in terms of staffing, financial support and infrastructure for exhibition production. The two community organisations were ideally placed to network within their own communities to collect material content and information, and were best positioned to tell the story of the exhibition. But the challenge of weighting these different contributions as equal was not always realised.



The basic question is whether the problems we encountered were axiomatic to any such partnership, or simply symptomatic of the fact that our particular partnership was without precedent and was entered into in good faith but somewhat unrealistically. We were so committed to this partnership that all the players were too afraid to take a stand on issues that were important to the project and which could possibly rock the boat.

Issues we encountered included the following points.

- Questions of power and balance were often at the heart of issues. The partnership structure encouraged the involvement of the Steering Committee and the working group in the decision-making process but vested equal decision-making power in each partner.
- We did not define clearly enough the parameters of responsibility for the Steering Committee and it became difficult to argue curatorial issues without endangering goodwill or consensus between partners.
- The equitable realisation of an equal partnership was a difficult concept for some to comprehend, particularly for those not directly involved in the process.
- There was the problem of scale within the partnership. To succeed, an attitude of respect among all three partners and a realistic recognition of the equal value of the contribution each can make, is essential.
- There was also difficulty in understanding the notion of equity as it related to the distribution of practical outcomes.
- More problematic were the different agendas, perceptions and expectations among the partners. Each player extracted their own reading of the partnership.
- The quest for balance as distinct from equal representation was difficult. The tangible evidence of the two communities' respective histories is not equally weighted due to historical and cultural reasons.

The Museum of Victoria, conscious of the importance of this innovative project, initiated two reviews - one of the process and one a summative

survey of the exhibition itself. The results provided us with insights to make the following recommendations for future projects.

- Each player needs to enter such a co-operative arrangement with a clear understanding about the aims of the project, the nature of the relationships and the expectations of each participant.
- An exercise of this nature should appoint a dedicated, independent project manager to ensure loyalty to the project and its completion.
- Fiscal responsibilities must be shared to ensure that power is equally weighted between the partners.
- Each organisation must be realistic about the workload involved in the project and plan accordingly.

The exhibition has been hailed in the professional community as a ground breaker in its reflection of our culturally diverse community because of the authenticity of the experience it portrayed. This appeared to be the reason for its popularity with the general public as well. Without doubt, we believe the success of this exhibition was due to the partnership process. It was because of the full participation of the two community organisations that the exhibition resonated so truthfully and spoke so authoritatively. The commitment of the mainstream institution ensured that these voices could be heard.

The concept was ambitious. The process was agonising. But the result justified and confirmed the means.

Dr Helen Light
Director, The Jewish Museum of Australia

Anna Malgorzewicz
**Director, Immigration Museum &
Hellenic Archaeological Museum**

This is an extract of an unpublished article originally developed in 1993/1994 and revised by the authors for publication in *Museum National*. Copies of the full article are available from the Editor, *Museum National*.

Partnership Agreements: More Than the Paper They're Written On?

by Moya McFadzean

Every day museum people consult with colleagues either within or associated with the museum industry. We request information, advice or referral, we exchange our knowledge, expertise and contacts. Rarely do we analyse this currency of intellectual exchange and our dependency upon its informality and availability. Museums have innumerable, highly productive informal relationships with cultural organisations, community groups and individuals. Official documentation articulating the parameters of these relationships is neither necessary nor appropriate in many cases. However, there do exist opportunities

to formalise particular relationships between organisations of all sizes. Such opportunities can help democratise what may be an unequal relationship of exchange. They can forge stronger ties, diversify cultural representation, identify potential collaborative ventures and officially recognise expertise and resources that might otherwise be taken for granted.

Where consultation is regular and demand on resources frequent, or where two organisations are seeking to be pro-active in developing a long-term relationship, a formal agreement is a valuable outcome, as much for the development process as the

completed document. There is a general trend towards increased collaborative ventures within the cultural industry, partly engendered by the requirements of state and federal funding bodies for partnered initiatives.

The development of formal agreements with external bodies is part of a collaborative trend at Museum Victoria, which has significant precedents such as the 'Jews and Italians' exhibition held at the Museum in 1992. This exhibition resulted in the development of a cultural agreement with the Italian Historical Society in 1993 and the initiation of a co-operative agreement with the Jewish Museum of Australia in 1996. We have developed the term 'cultural agreement' to describe the document developed with the Italian Historical Society which has, as a key element, a joint collection strategy. The term 'co-operative agreement' refers to formalised commitments to consultation and collaboration.

Co-operative agreements are also being developed between Museum Victoria and the Museum of Chinese Australian History and the Victorian Folklife Association. All agreements are collaboratively written by representatives of Museum Victoria and each of the partner organisations, with the document then proceeding through each organisation's formal channels for approval.

The agreements articulate the reciprocal recognition and respect for expertise that exists within the participating cultural organisations. They outline a commitment to avoiding duplication of resources and collections and provide a clear delineation of collecting responsibilities (even when instances must be judged on a case-by-case basis). They create a formal mechanism through which a large organisation (Museum Victoria) can involve community organisations in broad planning and development issues to ensure a breadth of cultural representation. Finally, the agreements lend previously informal relationships a level of seriousness and official integrity to be recognised at all levels of each organisation.



Detail of the St Joseph's altar in the Melbourne component of 'Chops and Changes' produced by the Italian Historical Society and the Valguarnera Social Club of Melbourne. The breads produced as part of this transported Sicilian religious tradition represent the complexities of the adaptation of rituals in a new county and the gradual decline of these intricate skills and traditions in the new and old countries. Photo: Rodney Start. Courtesy Museum Victoria.

The challenge in the formalisation of existing goodwill is for the agreements to be broad and flexible while being specific enough to have meaning; to be formal without being intimidating; to be plainly written without legal ambiguity; to be idealistic yet practical, ambitious yet pragmatic.

Interesting questions of definition have been raised through this process. When is consultation - a courtesy? A collegial exchange of information? A loan request? Exploitation? Consequently, at what point should consultation in such a relationship be paid for?

The participating organisations need to be cognisant of resource limitations which result in an inability to respond to requests immediately, even if the spirit of the agreement privileges the partner. Similarly, partners need to understand why a joint project may be impractical or inappropriate. Larger organisations such as Museum Victoria need to be sensitive to the severe shortage of staff and funds of the smaller organisations which may limit participation. Conversely, smaller organisations need to understand the competing demands on staff within large organisations. The benefits of the partnership agreement must be reciprocal and balanced.

The Museum and its partners have learned that we cannot anticipate or cover every possible scenario. The agreements must be flexible and realistic in their expectations - there is no point writing agreements that are so ambitious we set ourselves up to fail. The agreements are more about being open to possibilities and the provision of formal channels through which to pursue them. They must include a review clause which requires evaluation at regular intervals.

On the other hand, we are aware of the dangers of producing convenient 'feel good' documents which are never actually utilised. Museum Victoria also needs to ensure it does not privilege the more organised 'voices' in terms of consultation to the detriment of communities which do not have the more structured mechanisms through which to operate. We must look to other sources for consultation and collaboration while keeping our informal networks active.

A recent example of the partnership agreements in action involved the 'The Chops and Changes' touring exhibition from the Migration Museum in Adelaide. It inspired a collaborative project between the four current and soon-to-be partners of Museum Victoria. Our five organisations joined forces to develop a local component for the touring exhibition. With Museum Victoria acting as facilitator, each organisation produced an element relating to their specific cultural interest. The process resulted in collaboration between curators and other areas of expertise within the organisations, such as education officers and public relations staff. It drew on the breadth of Museum Victoria resources such as preparators,

technicians and information technology experts. The project included a key collaboration between the Victorian Folklife Association and Museum Victoria to develop a kitchen food recipe database which will be an ongoing development project. This project required a separate contractual agreement regarding software and intellectual ownership, access and future developments and uses. It included a small nominal fee paid to Museum Victoria by the Victorian Folklife Association for the software development.

Debriefing will reveal the successes and problems of this process, such as the need for more formal planning, the clear articulation of expectations at the outset; more realistic recognition by the facilitating body of the work involved and resources required. A major success of the venture has been the forging of stronger relationships between all five organisations.

The development of a partnership agreement is an invaluable exercise in the articulation of existing and potential benefits of a relationship, and provides a forum to discuss concerns. It forces partner

organisations to define their collections and collecting interests, identify areas of overlap, duplication and synergy, seek potential for resource sharing and joint cultural initiatives, and to engender a recognition of community expertise which can be demonstrated at the highest levels of organisations. Interest in the partnership agreements has extended to the international arena with requests for information from museums such as the Walsall Museum and Art Gallery in England. If, through these agreements, our organisations can maintain a keen awareness of the cultural interests and expertise beyond our own walls and develop collaborative initiatives, these agreements will always be worth much more than the paper they're written on.

Moya McFadzean
Senior Curator, Australian Society
Museum Victoria

(The name Museum Victoria reflects recent changes to the Museum's corporate identity.)

Programming for Young People with Special Needs

by Lyndall Phelps and Sue-Anne Wallace

Since its inception in 1993, Bella, the Museum of Contemporary Art's program for young people with special needs, has grown into a successful and rewarding series of events. In 1997, the program was expanded as a result of a grant from the NSW Department of the Ageing and Disability and the enthusiastic patronage of Dr Edward and Mrs Cynthia Jackson.

Back in 1993, the program commenced as a one-day event designed for the education and pleasure of young people who might not usually have the opportunity to visit the Museum. The Jackson's support enabled the program to commence, and because their patronage was a celebration of the tragically short life of their daughter Belinda, a young artist, we called the program Bella Celebration.

As the inaugural Bella Celebration coincided with the Year of Indigenous People, the Museum worked with the teachers and principal of La Perouse Primary School, a school with a large Koori population, some of whom identify as Eora people, the Aboriginal tribe who lived first on the land where the Museum now stands. We invited the entire school to the Museum and throughout the day, 150 students took part in a series of workshops including sand painting, a talk on bush tucker, an art workshop and a tour of the MCA. There were performances by the Karawal Dance Group and Kooris in Theatre.

In 1994 and 1995, Bella Celebration followed a similarly festive pattern of workshops and entertainment. We sharpened our focus to provide activities which were tailored to the needs and interests of each group. In 1994, Cromehurst Public School, whose pupils have intellectual and physical

disabilities, was invited; in 1995, Museum educators worked with the Royal Blind Society to plan a day of educational entertainment for vision-impaired students from all over NSW.

In 1996, the format was changed to allow contact with a wider range of students and we called the revised program simply Bella. Bella 1996 was extended over a two-week period of shorter workshops. Two-hour workshops led by Museum educators - who are artists as well as educators - took place in the galleries with themes based on different artists' work on exhibition in the Museum.

We contacted institutions catering to the needs of disadvantaged young people - hospital schools, youth welfare centres, special units of primary and secondary schools all over Sydney - and the response was overwhelming. Bella 1996 proved so popular we did not have enough resources to cater for such a demand.

So in 1997 we sought additional sponsorship, receiving the grant from the NSW Department of Ageing and Disability. Bella 1997 was extended from two weeks to two months, allowing us to offer our services to a number of community groups and to bring the program to audiences unable to visit the Museum.

The program again met with an overwhelming response, with over 1500 students and teachers taking part from as far afield as Sydney's outer western suburbs, the Hunter region and the south coast of NSW. All participants had intellectual, physical, psychological, behavioural and/or sensory disabilities.

In addition to our in-house program, in which students were encouraged to view current exhibitions and take part in artist-led practical workshops, Bella



During Bella 1997, students from The Mt Druitt Tutorial Centre created sculptures, paintings, drawings and collages. These were exhibited at the MCA last October.

1997 saw the introduction of an outreach service. Two separate programs, each running over a six-week period, were developed. The first was held at Mount Druitt Tutorial Centre, a behavioural institution for children aged 11 to 16 years, the second at the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital School.

Under the guidance of artists Geoff Harvey and Louise Katz, students at Mt Druitt Tutorial Centre created an array of sculptures, paintings, drawings and collages that were exhibited in the MCA in late October. The students enjoyed working with artists and using materials that had rarely before been available to them, and their parents were clearly impressed with the engagement their children showed over the period of the program.

Children attending the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital School were also given the opportunity to make their own works of art. Using the witty images of illustrator David Waller, with the assistance of artists Caroline Ho Bich Tuyen Dang and Finch Van Sluys, the children were challenged to produce a range of competent, indeed exciting, artworks.

There is a strong need within our community for educational programs, particularly within the arts, for disadvantaged young people. We intend to develop further this program for young people with special needs.

The MCA is a not-for-profit company which receives only 6% of its revenue from government sources. While this may restrict our capacity to deliver as wide a range of programs as we would like to do, the MCA remains committed to undertaking our special needs program in recognition of the terms of the bequest of our founding benefactor, John Wardell Power: '... to make available to the people of Australia the latest ideas and theories in the plastic arts by means of lectures and teaching and by the purchase of the most recent contemporary art of the world ... so as to bring the people of Australia in more direct touch with the latest art developments in other countries'.

We are convinced that the MCA's Bella programs have contributed to the cultural wealth of the people of Australia through the young people whose needs are such that museums must make a particular effort in order to quench their thirst for artistic creativity and knowledge. Moreover, our artist-led programs have provided a model for other institutions to engage with this demanding, yet rewarding, audience.

Lyndall Phelps, Curator Youth Programs

**Dr Sue-Anne Wallace, Director, Museum Education & Curatorial Programs
Museum of Contemporary Art**

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Government Initiatives in Cultural Diversity

by Rachel Symons

The Commonwealth Department of Communications and the Arts (DCA) is committed to managing programs that encourage creativity and excellence and access to diverse cultural experiences; improving the sustainability of cultural organisations, and assisting in preserving and promoting Australia's heritage. *Department of Communications and the Arts Annual Report 1996-97*, p. 34

A Plan for Cultural Heritage Institutions to Reflect Australia's Cultural Diversity

In 1989, the Cultural Ministers Council (CMC) agreed on a plan to coordinate efforts by cultural heritage institutions to reflect the cultural diversity of the Australian people in their collections and practices. In 1990, Insearch Consultancy surveyed a sample of major Commonwealth, state and territory collecting institutions to ascertain the extent to which their collections and activities reflected Australia's cultural diversity. Two thousand copies of the ensuing report, *A Plan for Cultural Heritage Institutions to Reflect Australia's Cultural Diversity*, were distributed.

The DCA, on behalf of CMC, conducted a survey in 1996 to monitor the Plan's implementation. A cross-section of 38 large and small museums and collecting institutions, from all states, responded. Their responses demonstrated that progress has been made in many areas by those institutions that have taken on board the recommendations of the 1991 Plan.

Australia's collecting institutions are best reflecting their commitment to cultural diversity in their public exhibitions. Multiculturally diverse exhibitions and activities are frequently developed in close consultation with the cultural and community groups involved. This process includes community consultation, organising speakers and special events to accompany exhibitions, descriptions of cultural contexts of items on display, and seeking items for institutional collections. Exhibition themes reflect the cultural diversity of specific communities, the social impact of multiculturalism in the community, and the contribution of individual migrant groups. Examples include 'Preserving Italian Cultural Heritage' (Ingham, Queensland), 'Dutch Migrant Experiences in Northern Tasmania', 'The Skaubryn Disaster - the story of the Maltese coming to Australia', 'Mandala Magic: Tibetan priests bring their rituals to celebrate Australia Day', and 'The Cultural Connections of Sport'.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history, culture, art, traditional music and dance have also

become a major focus in exhibitions and activities. Numerous exhibitions have been targeted specifically towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, including 'Tide Riders of the West', 'Women's Business Travelling', 'Yarrabah - the people of the early years', 'The Spiritual and the Social' and 'Captive Lives: Looking for Tambo and his Companions'.

The 1991 Plan recognised the importance of education within institutions as a means of emphasising cultural diversity and cross-cultural awareness. The survey results indicated a strong commitment to ongoing training programs for employees and volunteers about cross-cultural issues. Approximately half of the responding institutions carried out in-service training for employees and volunteer staff with the focus falling evenly between Aboriginal and cross-cultural awareness. The courses addressed museums and cultural planning, cross-cultural customer service, recognising cultural differences in public contact, and Aborigines in museum working groups.

Institutions with collections relating to people from non-English speaking backgrounds and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have adopted various initiatives to enable greater access to their collections by these groups. Initiatives documented include tours conducted in relevant community languages, development of a school visit package *Who is an Australian*, employment of a full-time multicultural consultant to promote the use of collections, and employment of multilingual staff and Aboriginal curators. A number of institutions also have relevant staff to ensure cultural diversity in their collections. Staff positions include multicultural program officers, curators of cross-cultural studies, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage advisers, and Aboriginal outreach officers.

Heritage Collections Council

While much progress has been made, more work needs to be done to encourage other institutions to recognise the advantages of culturally diverse exhibitions, training programs and collecting policies that will enhance their collections, and promote their accessibility and relevance to all people in the community. This work is to be facilitated by the Heritage Collections Council's (HCC's) new strategic plan through to 2001. Its mission is: 'To tell the story of Australia through accessible well managed and conserved heritage collections: reflecting the continuity of our history from its beginning indigenous traditions through to contemporary Australia's cultural and natural diversity'. The HCC is

involved in a number of activities and initiatives to identify our cultural heritage and develop and implement strategies for multicultural and indigenous heritage.

The HCC's Collection Management and Conservation Working Party will release the National Conservation and Preservation Strategy for Australia's Heritage Collections early in 1998. This will include provision for examining whether there are specific conservation training needs in the diverse cultural collections held by communities across Australia.

Conservation training is provided to people from non-English speaking backgrounds and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples through a conservation training internship program, funded by the Collection Management and Conservation Working Party. These include:

- a six-month pre-conservation training internship for a Cantonese-speaking person from an Asian community, hosted by the Powerhouse;
- a six-month internship for an Indian conservator to work on Indian collections, hosted by the Australian National Gallery;
- an Arabic-speaking intern will be employed by the Powerhouse to learn basic preservation knowledge in order to promote conservation to NSW's Arabic community;
- a pre-conservation training internship for an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person, hosted by Museum Victoria;
- a six month internship to develop conservation strategies for collections relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, provided by the National Library of Australia;
- the South Australian Museum, in partnership with Artlab, will extend existing conservation training for community-based indigenous personnel.

Distributed National Collection Program

The Department, through its Distributed National Collection Program, funded Museums Australia (Qld) to develop the *Guide to Cultural Protocols for Museums Working With Their Diverse Communities*. It will include an introductory approach to cross-cultural communication, advice on how to work appropriately with culturally diverse communities, protocol tips, policy guidelines, case studies and a list of resources.

In 1995, the Department, in collaboration with the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, developed a cultural mapping methodology, which involves a community in identifying and documenting both tangible and intangible local cultural resources. Elements may include galleries, craft industries, local events and industries, as well as memories, personal histories, attitudes and values. The process encourages communities to diversify the range of cultural products or activities they offer. Funding was supplied through the Department's Distributed National

Collection Program to trial the methodology within the Cherbourg Aboriginal community, 300km west of Brisbane, as part of the Queensland Local Government Cultural Development Strategy.

Other Commonwealth initiatives

The Department seeks to ensure that all Australians enjoy access to cultural materials and activities through programs such as Visions of Australia, which provides grants to cultural and community organisations to develop and tour exhibitions of historical and scientific material, visual arts and craft, multimedia and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture.

Organisations which received funding in 1997 include:

- Migration Museum, SA, to tour 'A Twist of Fate', which tells the story of three refugees;
- Australian National Maritime Museum to develop 'Faces of Australia' - an investigation of the historical changes that have shaped the population and an examination of ethnic relations;
- The National Philatelic Centre, Australia Post, to tour 'The Millionth Migrant';
- Canberra Contemporary Art Space to tour 'Black Humour', in which humour and satire are used to highlight the Aboriginal struggle for justice, equity and sovereignty.

The Department also supports a range of new media products and programs, such as the Australia on CD program and Australia's Cultural Network. Australia on CD brings together Australia's emerging multimedia industry, national cultural institutions, content creators and multimedia professionals to provide insights into Australian music, indigenous culture, performing arts, scientific endeavour, sporting achievements, prehistory and the environment. Australia's Cultural Network (<http://www.acn.net.au/>) is being developed as an interactive Internet gateway to Australia and Australian culture, and will help promote public access to collections, activities and events in cultural institutions.

**Rachel Symons,
Project Officer,**

Department of Communications and the Arts

For information on the above initiatives contact Annabelle Cameron at the Department of Communications and the Arts, GPO Box 2154, Canberra ACT 2600; Tel (02) 6271 1614, Fax (02) 6271 1079. Contact Museums Australia Qld on: Tel (07) 3255 0433; Fax 07 3255 0466 for information on the cultural protocols kit.

If you would like to receive details of Museum National's 1998 advertising schedule, please contact the Editor on (03) 9419 2422.

***Museums and Citizenship: A Resource Book.* By Tony Bennett, Robin Trotter and Donna McAlear, *Memoirs of the Queensland Museum*, volume 39, part 1, Brisbane, May 1996**

Museums and Citizenship: A Resource Book is a series of essays by Tony Bennett, Robin Trotter and Donna McAlear which offer a review and synthesis of the main developments affecting Australian understandings of the relationships between museums and citizenship during the past twenty years. The essays deal with five themes: citizenship, the representation of women, multiculturalism, first people in museums, and access and participation. Each essay follows a basic structure of an introduction, an exploration of new directions, case studies and a guide to key sources.

Have the authors met their stated goal? Tony Bennett's essay, 'The Museum and the Citizen', which is essentially a brief introduction to the core essays, says little that is new. Bennett summarises much that he has written elsewhere about the growth of the 'museum idea' and the civic value of museums in Europe and the United States, but disappointingly does not explore in any depth the role which Australian museums have played in exploring ideas of citizenship. For instance, a number of papers published about the Stockmen's Hall of Fame, the Living Museum of the West, the Jewish Museums in Sydney and Melbourne or the Chinese Museum in Melbourne provide snapshots of Australian identity. However, Bennett is correct to remind us that museums have moved away from the notion of fashioning a national citizenry by interpreting objects which suggest a single or privileged national identity. Rather the new civic function of museums is to create a tolerance and respect for diversity.

The core essays about women, multiculturalism and first people by Robin Trotter and Donna McAlear provide clear and fairly comprehensive overviews of a range of debates and developments in Australian museums since the early 1980s. Trotter's article on women surveys a range of issues dealing with representation and

practice within museums, about which much has been written and discussed at numerous conferences. Trotter also highlights new directions being pursued by a number of institutions to address the perceived gaps and silences in collections and interpretations, as well as the empowerment of women in museum operations and programs. The often neglected issue of employment, careers and decision-making is explored and recognises that increasingly women are now employed at senior levels, including directorships of our major institutions.

With multiculturalism and indigenous rights currently under attack by conservative forces, it is timely to recognise the progress and achievements made by many museums in addressing the complex questions of cultural diversity and reflecting many voices in both collecting policies and interpretative public programs. Trotter provides many examples of museums which are now working closely with communities to draw out our hidden histories. However, Trotter undervalues both the impact and significance of Adelaide's Migration Museum in setting this agenda and the fine work undertaken initially by Margaret Anderson and subsequently by Viv Szekeres in working with communities and giving reality to the rhetoric of museums as advocates in promoting social change. Similarly, DASET's *Plan for Cultural Heritage Institutions to Reflect Australia's Diversity*, compiled in 1991, was an important statement about the two way process between museums and communities working in a collaborative partnership to collect, interpret and display the heritage of all Australians.

McAlear's essay is an excellent summary of responses by North Americans and Australians to the challenges by indigenous communities about the representation of their cultures and heritages. She maps past tensions between Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders and museums which amassed substantial ethnographic collections and deprived these communities of their cultural heritage. As McAlear highlights, the return of cultural property to indigenous communities is an involved and difficult process for both museums and the communities concerned. Museums Australia's

Previous Possessions, New Obligations, a landmark policy framework initiated by Dr Des Griffin, has been of practical guidance to museums in addressing this complex issue. Equally important have been the sensitive programs for the repatriation of human remains and sacred/secret material held by Australian museums to the appropriate communities. Regrettably, overseas museums have not acted so responsibly.

Overall, *Museums and Citizenship* is a very useful resource book, providing succinct, illuminating and well written assessments of the debates, practices and policies about citizenship and Australian museums. The reading lists at the conclusion of each essay are also comprehensive. While I would have found an index useful, the Queensland Museum is to be congratulated for publishing this work carried out by the Key Centre for Cultural and Media Policy at Griffith University. It deserves to reach a wide audience. I would encourage the Key Centre to undertake a similar study within the next decade and for either the Queensland Museum or another major institution to publish the results. Let us hope that the progress made by museums to date will not be dissipated.

**Darryl McIntyre
General Manager,
Core Operations
National Museum of Australia**

***Thinking about Exhibitions.*
Edited by Reesa Greenberg,
Bruce W. Ferguson and Sandy
Nairne, Routledge, 1996.**

This anthology of 27 essays from European, North American and Australian writers focuses mainly on contemporary art exhibitions, but it is not just a book for artists and workers in art galleries. It addresses a broad range of questions that curators, designers, administrators, critics, academics and visitors grapple with as they confront the exhibition experience and the making of meanings within all museums and galleries.

The editors aim 'to introduce unfamiliar figures to an English-speaking or young readership' and

they have included several essays from the 1970s and 1980s, together with more recent pieces. As the introduction explains, 'The choice of texts is designed to create an eclectic mix: exhibition proposals, dialogues, diatribes, position papers, case studies, theoretical analyses, catalogue essays, long and short texts.' Together they cover the spectrum of writing on art exhibitions from the straightforward description of the One-Picture Gallery to highly theoretical pieces such as Bruce Ferguson's 'Exhibition rhetorics'.

The book is illustrated with about 90 black and white photographs - an essential inclusion given that most readers will not have seen the exhibitions discussed.

If you find postmodern jargon irritating then you'll need to skip quite a lot, but there is still a great deal to read that is stimulating and enjoyable.

People who attended the 1996 Museums Australia conference in Sydney will recall fragments of Fred Wilson's paper, published here with four photographs including the powerful *Metalwork 1793-1880* exhibit from Mining the Museum at the Maryland Historical Society. A masterpiece of eloquent juxtaposition, the showcase contains elaborate silver jugs and goblets alongside a set of slave shackles. Wilson sums up his views on the relationship between exhibitions and social change in simple, clear language, 'To my mind, how things are displayed in galleries and museums makes a huge difference in how one sees the world'.

In selecting the essay by Debora J. Meijers to open the anthology, the editors have chosen well. Meijers immediately asks key questions that resonate throughout the book, particularly in relation to power, subjectivity, individualism and visitor response. Her analysis of several European contemporary art exhibitions includes refreshing comments such as, 'Is this all obvious to the visitor? I do not think so, except for the initiated' and later, 'Those who share this subjectivity can share exciting and new visual experiences. Those who do not may well be annoyed.' Meijers welcomes the deconstructive purpose of the exhibitions she writes about, but regrets that all too often highly personal visions of the world are

presented as universal truths, by the very people who appeared to reject such notions. It is a pity Meijers' biographical details are missing from the Notes on Contributors.

In one of the major sections of the work entitled Curators or Caterers, Nathalie Heinich and Michael Pollack draw an illuminating comparison between the exhibition curator and the film director, arriving at a new definition of the 'exhibition auteur' with the high cultural status of creative artists such as painters, writers and composers. These auteur curators 'remain relatively singular and autonomous in relation to the institution'. They do not merely select and hang the works and retreat quietly back to their collections, instead they themselves are the big attraction and their interpretation is the focus of attention, not the artists whose works they choose to exhibit. The emergence of this new and powerful curator represents a radical shift for many institutions.

The Staging Spectators section includes Tony Bennett's 'The exhibitionary complex', previously published in 1988. His substantial analysis of the emergence of the art museum in the nineteenth century draws on Foucault's notions of 'institutional articulations of power and knowledge relations'. Together with several other pieces in this anthology, Bennett's article explores the ways in which galleries and museums operate as agents of social control. The historical, cultural and spatial functions of the institutions and buildings within which exhibitions are interpreted by visitors is the focus of attention in these articles, not the exhibits themselves.

This is a valuable perspective for everyone working on exhibitions as it reminds us that all interpretation takes place within a context. This context or framework is actually a series of physical and intellectual layers that often become invisible to the people working within cultural institutions. As we go about our work - developing the list of exhibits, writing the text and the labels, thinking about the marketing and education programs, creating exciting new designs - it is easy to forget how the elements surrounding an exhibition construct its meanings.

A review of this length cannot do

justice to the diversity and depth of the selection contained in this substantial reference work. Read it and engage in the cultural debate presented here by many of the key figures in our profession.

Gabrielle Hyslop
Exhibitions Manager,
Australian Archives

'Captive Lives: Looking for Tambo and his Companions'. National Library of Australia to March 1998, then Queensland Museum, Pinnacles Gallery (Townsville), Palm Island Community Hall, Cairns Regional Gallery.

Research into the lives of Australia's indigenous people reveals more and more stories that make the descendants of the Australians who allowed these things to happen cringe with shame. On a positive note, stories such as this exhibition's, of Queensland Aboriginal Tambo and his companions, who left their homeland to become 'curiosities' in Barnum's circus a hundred years ago, hold out the hope, in their resolution, of healing and reconciliation.

It is only by confronting and acknowledging the implications of stories such as these that we can contemplate a harmonious future with indigenous people. Comments in the exhibition's visitor's book show that viewers appreciate this message: 'moving' is the most frequently used term to describe the experience of viewing the exhibition. One visitor wrote 'Has John Howard seen this?'

'Captive Lives', with its jaunty and upbeat travelling-circus-style design, is an exhibition that repays careful study. It relates the fate of two groups of Queensland Aboriginal people as, over sixteen years from 1883, they are paraded through the circuses and dime museums of the United States, and the ethnographic displays associated with international expositions there and in Europe. One by one they die, except for two who return to Australia.

This tragic story and its contemporary echo when, in 1993, the embalmed body of Tambo, the first to die after a year of travelling, was discovered in a Cleveland, Ohio, funeral parlour, and was restored to his people on Palm Island, forms the



Billy, Jenny and Little Toby, 1885. Royal Anthropological Institute, London. Prince Roland Bonaparte. From the exhibition 'Captive Lives: Looking for Tambo and his companions'.

narrative basis of the exhibition. The story is a powerful one in itself. Curator Roslyn Poignant has used it as a vehicle to explore several themes which resonate throughout the history of black/white relations in Australia.

The exhibition first examines Aboriginal and European views of the land and its people, with the perspective of the explorer Dalrymple contrasted with that of Walter Palm Island, Tambo's descendant. It also shows conditions in Queensland at the time when Tambo and his companions left their homeland. How willingly they went we do not know, although two of them tried to escape in Sydney. But Queensland had become distinctly dangerous for indigenous people. The policy of 'dispersal' and the depredations of the native police form the background to any decision these Aboriginal people may have made to join R.A. Cunningham, Barnum's recruiter, on the North American circus trail as ethnographic 'curiosities' along with Zulu, Nubians, Toda and Fijians. As Poignant points out, 'Wherever the

indigenous were defeated in colonial wars, it was possible for Barnum's agents to find someone who had nothing more to lose'.

The tragedy unfolds, as the two groups of Aboriginal people travel through American circuses and 'dime museums' and on to Europe, on a bill with other 'curious people from all parts of the world', or advertised as 'Australian cannibal boomerang throwers'. And here another theme is manifest: Tambo and his companions were victims of the racial theories of the time.

The Aboriginal 'curiosities' were measured and photographed by anthropologists keen to demonstrate the validity of the physiognomical theories of the time. 'Respectable' research lent colour to triumphalist racism. Here the distinction between the 'dime museum' and the circus and the ethnographic museum blurs. As one visitor noted, the parallels between circuses and ethnological museums are 'most shocking in their detail'. Museums, as well as Australia,

have a 'dark history' which emerges in the context of the Tambo story.

Tambo is the first to die. His companions are told that he has been buried, but the truth is otherwise. He has been embalmed, and his body will be displayed, a curiosity in itself, until well into the twentieth century. A photo of Tambo is presented as a triptych, with each succeeding portrait more faded than its predecessor. As visitors pass through the archways, the dwindling of the groups as they proceed through America and Europe is announced in circus billboard fashion, setting up a disturbing dissonance between the typographic style and the story it conveys.

The exhibition achieves resolution with the claiming of Tambo's body by his descendants Walter and Reginald Palm Island, and senior elder Kitchener Bligh, the release of his spirit in a ceremony in Cleveland, and his repatriation and burial on Palm Island. After 110 years, Tambo has come home.

Healing is the dominant note of the exhibition's finale. As Roslyn Poignant wrote 'Some islanders say that the "old ones", the spirits of the ancestors, have returned. The healing process, without which there can be no reconciliation, has begun ... The will to forge a new contract with the original owners of the land opens the way to reconciliation.'

Every Australian should see this exhibition, which is travelling to other parts of the country with support from Visions of Australia.

Roslyn Russell
Australian Heritage Projects,
Canberra

***The Small Museums Cataloguing Manual.* Compiled by Caroline Carter; edited by Ingrid Unger; archives chapter by Bruce Smith. *Cataloguing Supplements*, 3rd edition. Arts Victoria - Department of Premier and Cabinet & Museums Australia (Victoria), Melbourne, 1996. Free to Victorian museums; \$20 to others, including postage and handling.**

This third edition of Arts Victoria's *Small Museums Cataloguing Manual* consists of two A4-sized books. The *Cataloguing Manual* explains the history of the cataloguing project,

justifies the documentation and cataloguing of museum collections, and introduces the nature of collection policies. Part 1 details the tools for cataloguing, the register, worksheets, and provides direction on cataloguing objects, photographic materials, and archival material. The processes of creating card indexes and numbering of museum objects are demonstrated. Part 2 details collecting procedures, describes how to handle and store objects, and provides a very brief reminder about loans. The appendices are extensive and include computer records, sample catalogue worksheets, a sample receipt tag, 'Glossary of Image Material with Reference', a basic bibliography and a list of related products and suppliers.

The *Cataloguing Supplements* offer a simple classification system for historical objects, a classification for Aboriginal material, a materials authority list and definitions for the list, a production authority list and definitions for the list, descriptive terminologies and their definitions.

The publication has both strengths and weaknesses. On the plus side, it is important for small museums to have access to inexpensive practical advice. A positive feature is the inclusion of a chapter devoted to archival material, collections which can form a significant part of regional and community collections.

The weaknesses include faulty information, such as reference to a computer database which apparently is not part of the kit. I would also quibble with some of the definitions accompanying the authority lists. How many people would define a crayon as a small stick of clay? The definition of liquid needs some work; it is currently 'a substance that is liquid!' There is also an absence of cross-referencing on some key ideas.

In relation to format, it would be helpful to have chapter indicators somewhere on each page to help the reader remember the context of what they are reading, and for a rapid move to other chapters of interest. Also, the publication needs to be indexed for easy access to the contents.

The focus of the *Manual and Supplements* is on social history artefacts at the expense of art, technology and natural history objects - all of which are often found in small museums. One solution is a single worksheet, flexible enough to cover all

types of collections. From my experience with small museums, workers want just one worksheet. I am not sure why the *Manual* advocates two; would it not be easier for small museums if they were collapsed together? There is a commendable acceptance that the object worksheet be used for archival material rather than a specialised archives worksheet.

The *Manual* recommends a two-page worksheet. In my experience of small museums, this is too long to work through and may present storage difficulties. Mackay region's museum workers prefer to use two sides of a small index card. But ultimately a computer database is the most effective storage device. Now that an increasing number of small museums have computerised systems, is it still worthwhile for the *Manual* to advise on card indexes?

I am somewhat disturbed that the *Manual* adds to the multitude of classification systems, not to mention the variations on the Summerfield system, now in operation in Australia. The museum industry must seriously address the need for a monitoring and harmonising body for classification systems.

We need to see an Australian publication which evenly weights all matters of collections management including acquisitions issues, comprehensive policies, the processes of accessioning, cataloguing and deaccessioning, and the processes in relation to inward and outward loans. Such a publication needs to be tailored for the day-to-day practices, priorities and capacity of workers in small museums and should not seek to introduce the ideal processes which the state and national museums and galleries aspire to. To achieve this, an all-embracing classification scheme is needed in Australia as a matter of urgency for those many small museums which own mixed collections of art, natural and other histories.

For all the comments above, it is important that this publication is available to small museums. It provides a useful start to the cataloguing process, and therefore will assist Australian museums to conduct more professional collections management practices.

Helen Tyzack
Consultant-Museum and Art
Gallery Management, Mackay

National Textile Museum of Australia, Urrbrae House, Adelaide.

In these modern days of interdisciplinary thematic contextuality, specialist museums express some of the more fetishistic characteristics that underlie the museum idea. They can be a little disturbing in their concentrated particularity. Thus the Australian stock of museums includes specialists in shoes, ships, steam engines, postage stamps, and such - each the product of a passionate individual or group. Sometimes they take the optimistic title 'National', to gussy up an importance otherwise not so clear to outsiders.

Specialist museums often receive little state funding, given the cost efficiencies of supporting one or two mega-institutions over a multitude of small ones. This means that many specialist museums exist as private rather than public organisations in the ICOM sense of the word.

These issues colour the museum environment into which the National Textile Museum of Australia (NTMA) was launched in Adelaide in 1996. Everywhere else, the big state museums have managed to divert local enthusiasm for specialist textile museums into support groups for existing collections - a rational move, but one which undeniably limits museums' textile focus. It might only have happened in South Australia, where the traditional interests of the big museums (art, ethnography) and the fragmented interests of the History Trust, offered no large alternative.

Happen it did, and a board of energetic directors engaged a professional as director; made a deal with the University of Adelaide for office, storage and exhibition space, and launched a program of exhibitions. 'Migrants from the Mountains', the James Cook University exhibition of Hmong costume visited in 1996; 'Portraits without Names' came from the Palestinian Costume Archive in Canberra in 1997, as did the 'Colours of Australia' quilts travelling with Visions; and the Museum contributed to a joint 'Festival of Wool', including the University's Waite Agricultural Institute and Urrbrae House Historic Precinct, in which the Museum is located. A spectacular collection of Mexican costumes makes a single

Australian appearance at the Museum to coincide with the 1998 Adelaide Festival.

This is a big program for an essentially volunteer museum coordinated by one woman, Director Gillian Ridsdale. But it is difficult to see how it can be sustained. The premises in Urrbrae House are attractive and environmentally sound, and the University's support is rare, given the constraints on higher education. The achievement of raising sponsorship for the exhibition program so far is monumental. The commitment and expertise of the Board are certainly crucial ingredients constituting the successes to date.

But can the NTMA move beyond being a venue for travelling exhibitions and develop collections and programs grounded in collections study? Sensibly, the Museum has not commenced collecting yet. This leaves the opportunity to consider whether it should, for there are significant resources of textiles in SA. The Migration Museum holds a range of historic and ethnic dress and other textiles; the SA Museum has assorted items of ethnographic dress and textiles; the Art Gallery of SA owns important art textiles. Then there are at least three other major private collections: Beth Catford's Yesteryear Costume Gallery in Ororoo; the new National Costume Museum in Lobethal (another self-proclaimed 'National'), based on Helen Hughes' collection; and the Embroiderers' Guild collection. Can these resources be conserved and displayed together? What should be done about material invisible in the stores of the state institutions? Is small-scale diversity and passion worthwhile in itself?

Ultimately, the Museum's future is defined by the question, is there a big enough paying constituency to support the NTMA? Put another way, can serious museums exist these days without state support? These are questions without obvious answers, but with which the NTMA will have to engage. I wish it well, but I wonder.

Linda Young
Cultural Heritage Management
University of Canberra

***Conservation and Restoration of Ceramics.* By Susan Buys and Victoria Oakley. Butterworth-Heinemann, Oxford, paperback edition 1996.**

In *Conservation and Restoration of Ceramics* Buys and Oakley have produced the most comprehensive coverage of the topic to date. Its re-issue in a paperback format costing \$69 as opposed to \$135 for the hard cover (published 1993) will help it receive the wide circulation it deserves.

The book is targeted to practising conservators rather than the general public. At the same time, chapters such as those on ceramics technology and deterioration, preventive care and display are likely to be of interest to curators, collectors and students of ceramics. The book will be valuable for students, as its approach from first principles to complex concepts is very clearly laid out. It is particularly strong in the area of decorative and functional western and eastern ceramics, whereas coverage of archaeological ceramics is less comprehensive, and ethnographic ceramics are barely acknowledged.

The book assumes some knowledge of chemistry but provides detailed information on the characteristics of ceramic materials, conservation materials and techniques to enable the conservator to make decisions appropriate to each individual artefact. This is a welcome change from the strict formulaic approach of past publications such as N. Williams's 1983 *Porcelain: Repair and Restoration*.

Many recommendations illustrate the differences in practice between traditional and more recent ceramics conservation practices. All conservators are united in treating problems which render the ceramic unstable, but thereafter, conservators are tending to become less interventionist.

In practice this translates as doing less and less 'restoration'. For example, new parts used to be made, losses fully disguised and ceramics returned to a 'new' appearance. These days it is recognised that the material itself may contain information which must be preserved; or that the alterations visible on a ceramic are part of its history and it may not be necessary or desirable to remove them.

Despite being former (Buys) and

current (Oakley) heads of ceramics conservation at the Victoria and Albert Museum, the authors recognise that the private market is a very significant part of the ceramics conservation sphere and are careful to include ways of dealing with its need for perfection. Many conservators earn their living from the private market and will find this information welcome.

I would query some of Buys' and Oakley's approaches, eg., stain removal. One person's stain is another's evidence of use or history. At Heritage Victoria we generally do not remove the rich and varied staining from our archaeological ceramics. It is usually stable and it illustrates how the item has spent, say, the past hundred years lying near the corroding metal and organic decay of a shipwreck. Removal of the staining would remove all evidence of context. Despite some discussion about evidence preserved in ceramics, Buys and Oakley seem to prefer to remove many stains and residues.

The most vexed issue in ceramics conservation, 'going over the edges' when inpainting (or retouching to use the authors' English terminology) is addressed honestly. Once an area of loss on a ceramic has been filled, the repair will always remain visible if the inpainting is kept within the borders of the fill. The only way to make the fill 'disappear' is to overpaint the edges. This is frequently done with an airbrush, and in the hands of a skilled practitioner the fill can be made undetectable to the naked eye (but fortunately, not to UV light).

The authors discuss the vast gulf in this area between the practice for private clients and for cultural institutions. Other publications have acknowledged this gulf (eg., J. Larney, *Restoring Ceramics*, 1978) and suggested that the conservator needs to consider each treatment according to the significance of the item and the needs of the custodian or owner. In general Buys and Oakley are more in favour of slight blurring (ie., overpainting) of the edges; this would not be the practice in most Australian museums or excavations.

The photographs are a major failing. They are small and black-and-white which often makes it difficult to see what is being illustrated. The health and safety section could be more comprehensive and does not

provide information on the way solvents can be absorbed through the eyes, a common hazard for ceramics conservators. A number of the conservation materials suggested are difficult to reverse and highly toxic. However, the authors are very sound on the harmful effects of unsuitable materials, such as chlorine bleach.

This excellent book will become a well used standard reference for many conservators.

Jenny Dickens
Conservator, Heritage Victoria

***The Discovery of the Past: The Origins of Archaeology.* By Alain Schnapp. British Museum Press, London, 1996.**

Australians are becoming used to archaeologists framing revelations about the ancient human past of this country within the expanding rhetoric of contemporary Aboriginal politics and identity formation. But the proposition that such discoveries relating to the distant past can reaffirm the cultural and political viability of present generations is neither an isolated nor recent phenomenon. That much is clear from Alain Schnapp's fascinating survey of European archaeological history. In fact, it is the book's central theme.

It was true for Nabonidus, the Babylonian king whose sixth century BC cuneiform inscription traced the king's dynasty back, not through memory or oral tradition, but through the carefully identified remains of his predecessors' palaces. It was equally true of the archaeological investigations undertaken by the great French antiquarian humanist of the early seventeenth century, Nicolas Fabris de Peiresc, as he strove to identify Gallic origins through the material remains which he assiduously collected and surveyed.

In Peiresc's researches, and in his considerable effect on a network of European antiquaries including Rubens, Galileo, Casaubon and the pioneer English archaeologist, William Camden, Schnapp identifies a new strain of professionalism which allowed archaeology to emerge as an independent scientific discipline. But rational, archaeologically-derived explanations of ancient phenomena were only gradually accepted by the learned elite; in the meantime a duality between scientific knowledge and mythological tradition prevailed

until the nineteenth century. Archaeological practice, differently defined in the four cultural zones of France, England, central and northern Europe, emerged against this diverse, often contested background.

Of course, as Schnapp makes clear, there was no single philosophy of knowledge. The era of systematic description ushered in by scholars such as Ole Worm, founded upon the diverse observations of Renaissance antiquaries, led to a divergence of theory rather than a convergence. While he doesn't state it in those terms, Schnapp suggests the irony of the central role of clerical archaeologists in adducing archaeological evidence which ultimately undermined the dominant orthodoxy of biblical chronology.

The gradual accretion of data in the fields of natural and human history meant that it became increasingly difficult for Enlightenment antiquaries to frame their work entirely within the orthodoxies of the period. Not surprisingly, for many scholars the organisation of archaeological data soon became an end in itself. In the process the science of archaeology progressed as never before. It was the Comte de Caylus, French dilettante and arts patron, who elevated descriptive technique and definition to a new level, locating objects within their manufacturing sequences, and helping to 'lay the foundations of a descriptive typology central to modern archaeology'.

Schnapp gives deserved space to the unfolding of archaeological technique and discovery during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries: the discovery of Pompeii, the British mania for opening barrows and tumuli, Champollion's decipherment of Egyptian hieroglyphics, the re-evaluation of Greek antiquities following Lord Elgin's appropriation of the Elgin Marbles. But the author returns to the theme of comparative archaeology as the true engine of the discipline, and the museum itself as its engine-room.

Schnapp's claim that 'true archaeological work began when objects were made available in collections or museums' (p.309) has added force when we consider that archaeological specimens joined natural history specimens in those contexts. The merging of these fields

of enquiry had occurred haphazardly throughout the centuries. Schnapp identifies the pioneer French archaeologist, Boucher de Perthes, as the first practitioner to make the connection explicit. Through his meticulous identification of type-sections and by precisely identifying the contents of strata, he dismissed the time barrier of Noah's Flood and 'crossed the threshold into archaeological stratigraphy' for the first time.

Through this methodology Perthes was able to state categorically that human and natural histories were interlocked. There was now a clear path forward for archaeology as a scientific discipline, empirically based and informed by the diverse and emerging specialties of the natural sciences, not the least of which was to be Darwinian theory itself. Schnapp closes his main narrative during 1859, the year in which *On the Origin of Species* was published.

The *Discovery of the Past* was originally published in 1993, in French. The translation is clean and balanced, although some of the sentences are rather weighed down with clauses. But Schnapp writes compellingly well and with great affinity for his varied sources. This is not a social history of archaeology and we gain few insights into the motivations or frustrations of individuals. Instead, Schnapp offers a view, or a series of views, of the emerging ideas which informed the uneven growth of a discipline over the millennia.

With more than 40 sub-headings punctuating its 370 pages, and more than 60 colour and 200 black and white illustrations, beautifully produced, the book has an encyclopaedic appeal, as well as the attraction of a good, seamless read. Its value as a reference work is enhanced by the final section, an 'archaeological anthology' in which Schnapp has selected key texts from the main antiquaries and archaeologists, corresponding to each of the book's chapters. While exposing the layers of the distant European past, Schnapp's thoughtful and provocative account raises issues of direct relevance to the present and future of our own archaeological heritage.

Philip Jones
Curator, Anthropology Department
South Australian Museum



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