

THE MAGAZINE OF MUSEUMS AUSTRALIA INC.

# MUSEUM NATIONAL

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**NOW THAT'S A QUEER NOTION!**

At a time when museums and galleries are addressing issues of audiences, sponsorship and recurrent — or indeed any — funding, and managing finely tuned operating expenditures against income, another potential threat has surfaced.

A 'leaked' green paper reported in *The Australian* foreshadowed significant changes to the Australian Research Council programs. While this is not relevant for our smaller museums, such funding provides a significant income line to museums engaging in research, with eventual flow-on effects to many more museums.

This is particularly true for our largest museums, especially the Australian Museum and the Queensland Museum which, along with the South Australian Museum and, to a lesser extent, the West Australian Museum, have received ARC funding over time. The Australian Museum has continually won ARC funding for the last 30 years and, on average, over the last three years, its scientists have successfully competed for approximately \$400,000 per year.

Among art galleries, there has been less focus on ARC grants to support research. Such research appears to have been sustained by individual organisations, with expenses often recouped through sale of publications and the development of exhibitions and their attendant audiences. A recent grant that uses the Museum of Contemporary Art as a case study was won by Sydney University, in partnership with the National Association for the Visual Arts (NAVA).

Partly, the differences between the two types of institutions reflect the historical grounding of museums and art galleries. However, in today's museums and art galleries, research remains critical to the management of collections and enhancement of access to our cultural heritage for the people of Australia, and provision of information for all visitors — whether in real or virtual time.

Changes proposed to the ARC funds would restrict museums' and galleries' access to these sources of support for research if funds are granted in block to universities.

After discussion with a number of directors of Australia's state and national museums and art galleries, the director of the Australian Museum and I have written to the minister, the Hon. Dr David Kemp, to express our concerns and to reiterate the need for first-class research to continue in our museums, and for our museums to have access to the primary source of funding for research. Hopefully, we will have an opportunity to put these issues before the minister so they are taken into consideration before any policy shifts occur.

**Dr Sue-Anne Wallace**  
*President*

#### This year in Museum National

*February* — our current issue is guest-edited by GLAMA, the Gay and Lesbian Alliance of Museums Australia. For further information contact Robert Swieca at the Powerhouse Museum on (02) 9217 0512, fax (02) 9217 0441, email roberts@pnm.gov.au

*May* — guest-edited by the Membership Special Interest Group. The May issue will focus on the role of museum friends' groups and their relationships with their institutions.

*August* — guest-edited by the Visual Arts/Crafts Special Interest Group. This will explore the challenges facing curators in today's changing employment market. August will also include highlights from Museums Australia's 1999 conference.

*November* — museum architecture.

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# MUSEUM NATIONAL

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**Cover image**

Ron Muncaster, *Cotton Blossom*, from the Powerhouse Museum exhibition 'Absolutely Mardi Gras: costume & design of the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras', 1996. Collection of the Powerhouse Museum. Photo Penelope Clay, MAAS.

*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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Museums Australia — Gay and Lesbian Policy Guidelines for Museum Programs and Practice

# Now That's a Queer Notion!

ROBERT SWIECA, SIMEON KRONENBERG, JANEY DOLAN

At the ICOM triennial in Melbourne in October, the general assembly adopted a resolution on museums and cultural diversity. Part of that resolution called for 'the promotion of cultural rights of all peoples'. No doubt this is a point that all of us in the contemporary museum world would support, but just what are the cultural rights of all peoples? If we define cultural rights as the rights of diverse communities, we also need to define the word community. By some definitions, 'community' is interpreted broadly and enables groups to define themselves as communities in their own terms. Community is also a state of mind, an aspiration, a proposition that a group of people acknowledge they are involved with each other, held together by bonds and social relationships — and in addition by exclusion, as in the case of the gay and lesbian community.

Since the 1970s, gays and lesbians have grown from a hidden minority to a community so large and sure of itself that it organises the largest night-time street celebration in Australia — the Sydney Gay & Lesbian Mardi Gras. There are also openly gay members of Parliament, members of Parliament whose electoral support is from the gay and lesbian communities, and gay and lesbian members of local government. There are gay legal services, shops, supermarkets, travel agencies, churches, plumbers and electricians. Yet, still, gays and lesbians are vilified in the press, harassed at work, the target of violent attacks and subject to non-recognition of their partnership rights.

In light of this, following a session at the Council of Australian Museum Association's (CAMA) conference in Hobart in 1993, which dealt with these issues, a resolution calling for a policy about gay and lesbian identity in museum programs and practice was sent to the plenary session of that conference. This was endorsed at that plenum session and a committee was established, and convened by myself, to write such a policy. Two years later, after

several drafts and a six-month period for comment, the final version of the policy was endorsed at the second Museums Australia annual conference in Brisbane in December 1995. It is the first and only policy in the world that addresses the gay and lesbian community and museums. This is something we, as Australians,

**I also think it's important to recognise the issues affecting gay and lesbian people in the collecting policies of the institutions, and how this might need to be reflected in the collection documentation information.**

should be proud of because it stands out as a beacon of our tolerance. Only time will tell if the policy will endure the test of time to help the world recognise that what was once an invisible community can be a valuable asset in terms of this country's cultural diversity and history.

Museums Australia also has a special interest group that acts as a meeting point and focus for these issues — GLAMA — the Gay and Lesbian Alliance of Museums Australia — which was established in December 1994 at the first annual conference of Museums Australia. GLAMA auspiced the final draft of the policy and is guest-editing this edition of *Museum National* in an effort to further the principles espoused in that policy.

I recently discussed the policy, published as an insert in this issue of *Museum National*, and its impact with Simeon Kronenberg (national director, Museums Australia) and Janey Dolan, who has

recently been researching culture specific policies in Western Australian museums at the Research Institute for Cultural Heritage at Curtin University. Janey is also branch manager, Museums Australia, WA.

## **Robert Swieca**

*Acting manager of education and visitor services, Powerhouse Museum.*

**Simeon** — The critical issue is the degree to which it is possible for a policy like the GLAMA policy to be effective within a museum environment, and what does effective in fact mean? How do you measure it? It seems to me that in some ways it's not effective because we haven't been very good at advocating on its behalf. I also think it is difficult to quantify the way in which those kinds of policies are in fact taken up by the sector.

**Janey** — Certainly everything I've looked at in relation to policy development within museums, more specifically outside of the bigger state museums, indicates that if you don't back it up, and you don't do workshops, and you don't explain and extrapolate for people, it's very easy to excuse it as too difficult or perhaps outside of the scope of those particular institutions. I think that is a really, really important point.

**Simeon** — I think that is absolutely right. Unless you're prepared to put in a strategic plan about how you're going to advocate on the policy's behalf, you may as well not bother. And what it means is that small museums, in particular, who don't have the resources, are not able to deal with these policies in any effective way at all.

**Robert** — I think it's also really important to say that if people in museums have a genuine commitment to cultural diversity, and there are lots of institutions that really are following through on this, then you find that this sort of policy support happens anyway; that the principles espoused in the gay and lesbian policy

are followed through and people are paying attention to it.

It's also combined with market driven forces, especially in the larger institutions in Sydney, because there is such a huge market available there. I suppose it's the lure of the almighty dollar, or the almighty visitor figure, that's inputting into that. Once you have people concentrating on the economic benefits of gays and lesbians they then start thinking about all the other associated issues as well.

**Simeon** — Cultural diversity pays off in terms of visitor numbers is what you're saying. Yes, I agree with that. But I think that raises the problem of the degree to which those institutions in fact understand what the implications of the policy actually are, and that is that if you adopt seriously a policy such as the gay and lesbian policy, or *Previous Possessions, New Obligations*, it means a fundamental shift in the way the museum actually sees itself. And that has to go through every aspect of the museum environment, both in its programs for a public, perceived to be gay or otherwise, and also in its attitudes to staffing. I think it's too easy, for example, for a museum to

say, 'We had a Juan Davila show last year. We've done it, we're there!' The issue is not just representation, it is also about internal structures at the museum itself.

**Robert** — Most museums are bastions of white anglo-saxon culture and I think a lot of museums that have cultural diversity programs are only paying lip service to that multicultural thing. It is tokenistic, yes, and you don't really have people who are thinking through, to the widest degree, the massive change that's happened in Australia and how that's reflected in their own workforces.

**Simeon** — It's also true that museums are way ahead in terms of at least recognising that some of these issues exist, and that has to be seen as a good thing. But in terms of the way that the museum might change, or want to change, it's not an issue at all.

**Robert** — It needs something similar to the responses of New Zealand museums to biculturalism, but it needs to be something that's wider still for us.

**Janey** — When the draft gay and lesbian policy came out it was looked at by the

Western Australian branch of Museums Australia. One issue was that while the policy, in principle, was quite good, in practice it was not very effective because if you have a state government that doesn't recognise basic things like single sex partnerships, you can't implement a policy that requires an entire change of the institution's culture because it runs up against state laws. That needs to be taken into consideration with the development of these policies. It's not just about how you change the museum culture because it's more than just the museum culture that's involved.

**Simeon** — That's what sets this policy apart from, say, women's issues or indigenous issues, in that gay people are actually legally discriminated against. As a consequence it means that any kind of policies that museums might adopt are only wallpaper. They're not going to the heart of the matter which, of course, is legal equality and legal acceptance of gay relationships.

**Robert** — What you're saying, going back to that New Zealand analogy, is that New Zealand has a treaty. If we're talking about

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a new Constitution or a new preamble to our Constitution, it needs to talk about a cultural diversity that recognises everyone and all people's contributions to society.

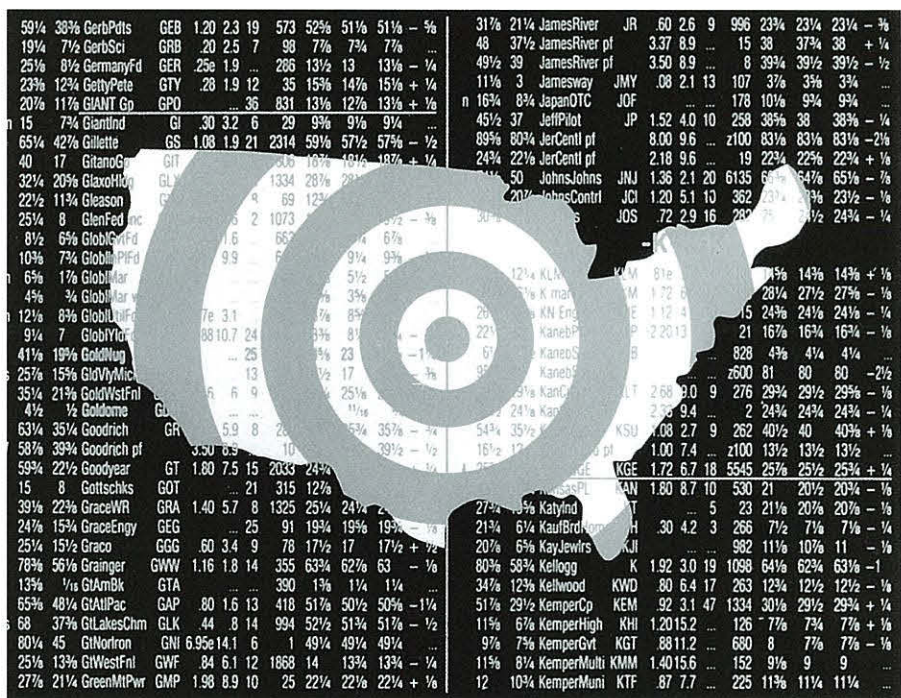
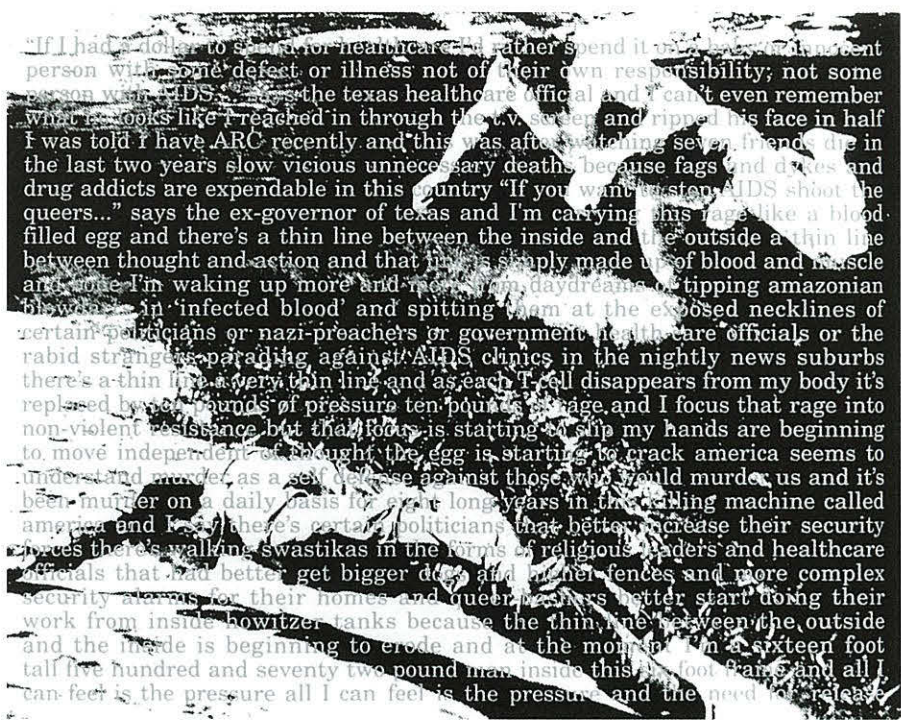
**Simeon** — Given that, what is the role for museums?

**Robert** — The trouble, I think, with a lot of museums is that they're not challenging people. In these days of market orientation, I think museums have become safe places for the leisure market. I'm talking about the larger institutions, where that idea of challenging people's perceptions about what we believe in, looking at our society and at realities, sometimes gets left behind.

**Janey** — That's also to do with external forces, which links back to the smaller institutions. When you present an exhibition or an approach that upsets a sector of the community, such as the Mapplethorpe exhibition in Western Australia, you create such a furore that if you're in an institution that doesn't necessarily want to address the problems, it's a lot easier just to let it go. And for institutions, such as smaller institutions, that aren't covered by legislation — for example, the notion of reconciliation means that public or state institutions have to address that issue in their exhibitions and their approach — it's very easy, again, just to say, it's going to create a problem, just leave it.

**Simeon** — But that's not a problem specific to gay people. There are lots of exhibitions that might offend all sorts of people for all sorts of reasons, and museums have to be careful they're not kowtowing to sectional interest in that regard. The argument about gay representation is that we represent something like ten or fifteen percent of the population. If we were all green, people might then be forced to address the issues, but we're not and that's the problem. The difference is a kind of invisible one so museums, I think, have a responsibility to make sure that they in fact understand that there is a need on their part to investigate the imperatives of social justice, if nothing else, because otherwise I think they discriminate.

**Robert** — I think we recognise that dealing with gay and lesbian issues is difficult not because the issues themselves are difficult, but because of the invisibility of the majority of gay and lesbian people in



David Wojnarowicz (1954–1992), United States. *Untitled (for ACT UP)* 1990, silkscreen, two panels. Courtesy P.P.O.W. Gallery, New York. From 'Don't Leave Me This Way: Art in the Age of Aids'. Collection of the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra.

the community and because there is this legal discrimination that exists. And there are two sorts of things you're finding. One is this idea of working out what the community is, but the other concerns the societal things implicit in this discriminatory practice. And how do you overcome that? It has to come from somewhere on high. I think Museums Australia should submit something to those people who are writing the new preamble to the Constitution. Just

look at South Africa's Constitution, for example. I think it is the only constitution in the world that has a preamble that recognises sexual orientation.

**Simeon** — That is, in fact, the essential and critical framework in which museums have to operate, isn't it? That is, within that discriminatory law situation. That means it's a big challenge for museums because it could easily be said, for

example, that it was inappropriate for museums to be supporting what, in fact, was a kind of illegal situation.

**Robert** — Under anti-discrimination laws, it's illegal to discriminate against people. But a lot of those laws are based on de facto relationship marriage laws, and homosexuality was never addressed in those laws when they were formulated. So they get left out. Gay and lesbian people are being discriminated against in terms of their rights to access their partner's estate not because there's a law that says, 'Thou shalt discriminate against homosexual people', but because there's a law that says that people who are in de facto or de jure relationships have the right to these sorts of things. And the definition of de facto and de jure relationships has always been based on heterosexuality. It needs Parliament to actually come out and say that the extension of de facto is now homosexual and heterosexual relationships, or all types of relationships.

**Janey** — That's the fundamental link to museums. It's the discrimination by omission. The fact that those types of relationships are not mentioned in that legislation means they're not included in the broader legislation. It also means they don't appear in museums as an identified community unless somebody goes out of their way to identify them.

**Robert** — I also think it's important to recognise the issues affecting gay and lesbian people in the collecting policies of the institutions, and how this might need to be reflected in the collection documentation information. Those sorts of things

will then flow down into how the exhibitions are created and, in fact, the interpretation of the collections.

**Janey** — But the fundamental thing is the changing of the broader cultures and I think talking about constitutions and broadening our vision across a whole range of sectors is the key to breaking all that down. That's a very big fight that goes beyond writing a policy. I would suggest that beyond policy, ALL staff in ALL museums should be made to understand and implement principles of true cultural diversity in their work. For example, cultural diversity workshops and discussions for everyone from cleaner to director. There needs to be an understanding that cultural diversity affects all sectors of the museum, that gay and lesbian staff are not there to address just gay and lesbian issues, and Aboriginal staff are not just Aboriginal liaison officers. Gay and lesbian, Aboriginal, women's issues do not only affect the lives and cultures of isolated groups who identify as such, but are the very components that influence all our lives and cultures — broadly, overtly or otherwise. These kinds of boundaries and classifications are still strong in many museums and while you only identify these issues in exclusion to all other sectors of the museum, there is no real chance to change practice. This also links into the whole constitution/treaty preamble idea.

You've got to work at a national level, or global level, and that then flows through to a more grass roots or community level.

**Simeon** — But that's precisely where the resistance lies, mainly. I suppose because

of distrust of that ideological imperative to be inclusive and, secondly, it's a question of resources. Those smaller museums will argue that there's not the resources in place to deal with these sorts of issues.

The 'Art in the Age of AIDS' show was interesting in this regard. Ted Gott, the curator, was passionate about the show happening because the gallery had only a tiny number of works about the subject in its collection. He saw the exhibition as a way of partially redressing that fact as well as drawing a wide and diverse audience to the institution. The audience participation happened, the show was a most successful one, almost of blockbuster status, but the gallery was apparently reticent about purchasing work. Normally, the expectation would be that an institution like the NGA would make a substantial purchasing commitment but it didn't happen in this case. Some works were purchased eventually, but many important opportunities were lost. So the longer-term impact of the show is compromised. However, it must be said that the NGA was the first major state institution in the world to tackle the subject of AIDS so it should be congratulated for that fact alone, and gay people everywhere owe a debt to Ted for having the guts to push it through.

**Robert** — Imagine if we had a comprehensive bill of rights, like in South Africa, as part of our Constitution, or if the first president of Australia was a gay man or a lesbian. Or even if the current Governor General would speak out, not only in terms of reconciliation, but about gay and lesbian people too. That's the sort of societal shift we're talking about that needs to happen.

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# Culture Specific Policies in Western Australian Museums

JANEY DOLAN

This discussion is based on preliminary research I did for my Masters in Applied Cultural Heritage Studies at Curtin University. The original focus of my research was the development and application of cultural diversity policies in Australian museums — in particular, Museums Australia's *Gay and Lesbian Policy Guidelines for Museum Programs and Practice* and *Previous Possessions, New Obligations: policies for museums in Australia and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples*.

My research was limited to an analysis of Western Australian museums, where I immediately encountered a void in the impact of the *Gay and Lesbian Policy Guidelines*' principles. I tightened the focus of my study to *Previous Possessions, New Obligations* but continued to revisit the issues surrounding the *Gay and Lesbian Policy* document, and to think about issues that were preventing its uptake, particularly in smaller regional, local and community museums.

The way in which a policy is presented and received, and the very different cultures that exist within museum practice, were recurring themes with significant implications. The *Gay and Lesbian Policy Guidelines* and *Previous Possessions* both rely on some fundamentals to ensure their effective recognition and application: a clear definition of culture and of cultural diversity; an understanding of the intangibles of cultural practice; recognition that history is contested and contextual; and an obliging membership willing to turn guidelines into practice.

In order for recognition of broad definitions of cultural diversity to be possible, local and community museum workers need to be encouraged to think about diversity within the local and national community, and the importance of museums in addressing it. Perhaps a major problem for both the *Gay and Lesbian Policy Guidelines* and the *Previous Possessions* document is that while they could, and indeed should, exist within the context of a broader Museums Australia

policy on cultural diversity, such a policy is still only in its draft format. This means that member museums have been confronted with policies in very specific and complicated areas before being presented with a general document that outlines and explains what Museums Australia means when it speaks of cultural diversity.

**In order for recognition of broad definitions of cultural diversity to be possible, local and community museum workers need to be encouraged to think about diversity within the local and national community, and the importance of museums in addressing it.**

Many people continue to have difficulty understanding the broadness of the definition of the term 'culture'. As a concept, culture still tends to manifest itself in definitions of ethnicity. In a nation where we continue to have trouble accepting that we are of diverse but hopefully equal ethnic roots, the next step, which involves recognising broader and alternative notions of culture, is a complex and difficult task. There remains little space for discussion of cultural diversity which encompasses gender, sexuality, class or other variations.

Local community museums are the product of their communities and their histories. They are inextricably linked to the notion of community identity and therefore need to focus their attention on very local needs and stories. The people who identify these stories do so through their own versions of local history. If this version denies or derides any cultural or community group's existence or version of history, that group's stories will never appear.

A convenient excuse for such omissions is the lack of relevant material in collections. Many museums in Western

Australia function only through their objects — the object/ideas debate rarely arises. Object-fixated practice and a lack of recognition about contextualisation of collections are significant obstacles to the effective application of cultural diversity policy. Such an approach does not allow for diversity of experience, multiple readings of history, or the intangibles of culture. Many community museums do not perceive a need for contexts for collections, only a need for more space.

As the peak professional body for the industry in Australia, Museums Australia aspires to support the elevation of quality museum practice. This can place it in an awkward position in relation to community museums. The authority of national policy initiatives is limited, for example in Western Australia, by the fact that the State Government does not recognise Museums Australia as the key policy organisation but allocates this responsibility to the state museum. Members are well aware that they are empowered to make their own decisions regarding their participation in national policy initiatives. This has meant that where there is opposition to a policy or its subject matter, the state branch has to decide how far it can push the issue. To this point the Western Australian branch of Museums Australia has not sought to actively promote the *Gay and Lesbian Policy Guidelines* amongst its members, although it is working hard with *Previous Possessions*.

I think the most important task is to overcome the narrow understanding of culture. Only when museums learn to look beyond their own immediate experiences will there be room for real change and for better acceptance and use of documents such as the *Gay and Lesbian Policy Guidelines for Museum Programs and Practice*.

*Janey Dolan is branch co-ordinator of Museums Australia (WA) Inc., and is completing a master's degree at the Research Institute for Cultural Heritage Studies, Curtin University of Technology.*



# Fresh Perspectives

JONATHAN PARSONS

Visitors to the Sydney Gay & Lesbian Mardi Gras (SGLMG) Festival, held in Sydney in February each year, often comment with surprise at the level of participation from major cultural institutions.

They are surprised at what they see as the 'mainstream' aspects of the festival, thereby implying the festival belongs at the 'margins' or on the 'fringe'. This is a curious notion, given that one of the catchcries of the gay and lesbian liberation movement has been that 'we are everywhere'. The question is, why is gay and lesbian culture not seen by parts of the gay and lesbian community, and the broader community, as part of the mainstream? There is not space to explore in detail the complexities that this question raises, but it is useful to look at some of the reasons for the inclusion of major cultural institutions in the festival program and to examine some possible future directions.

The collaboration between the festival and Sydney's major cultural institutions has been a relatively recent phenomenon. The first association with the festival was initiated by the Powerhouse Museum when it hosted the Quilt Project in 1990, five years after the first Mardi Gras festival program began. Regular participation began with the Andy Warhol exhibition at the MCA during the 1994 SGLMG Festival.

It is no accident that cultural institutions' involvement in the festival program has increased at the same time as pressure has increased on these institutions to justify their existence through audience attendances. Association with the festival forms part of cultural institutions' strategies to address these areas of concern. Perhaps the best examples of this were 'Absolutely Mardi Gras', in 1996 at the Powerhouse Museum, and 'Diaries — A William Yang Retrospective', in 1998 at the State Library of NSW.

The former exhibition focused on the history of visual artists involved in the costume and design of the Mardi Gras parade. It included photo-documentation, costumes and objects worn or carried by



William Yang, *Ian Jopson as the Angel*, Sweatbox's Barbarella Party, 1989. Photograph from the exhibition 'Diaries — A William Yang Retrospective', held at the State Library of NSW, 1998. Courtesy William Yang.

participants in the parade. Artists represented in the exhibition included Michael Gates, Brenton Heath-Kerr, Ron Muncaster, Philippa Playford, Brian Ross and Peter Tully. This exhibition contributed to the best audience figures the Powerhouse had ever had for a February/March period. During the exhibition period, 43% of all visitors to the Powerhouse attended the temporary exhibition. This compares favourably with an average of 25% of total visitors to the museum who would normally visit temporary exhibitions.

'Diaries' was a self-selected retrospective of 25 years of Yang's photography, putting his gay and lesbian work into the context of his entire output. The exhibition substantially increased audience attendances to the State Library of NSW in the first quarter of 1998.

During this period there has also been an increasing recognition by cultural institutions of the need to reflect or respond to the culturally diverse nature of Australian society. The SGLMG Festival, grounded as it is within the gay and lesbian community, is increasingly recognised as a key component of the culturally diverse nature of Australian society. Through its Community Access Program, the Australian Museum has perhaps been one of the most pro-active Sydney institutions in addressing these issues of accessibility and representation, often resulting in communities gaining access to other areas of the museum's program. During its six year history, the Community Access Program has opened the door to many of Sydney's subcultures, including the gay and lesbian community. The most recent involvement

with the SGLMG Festival was in 1998 with the hosting of the touring exhibition 'Forbidden Love, Bold Passion. An Exhibition of Lesbian Stories 1900s–1990s', curated by Ruth Ford, Lyned Isaac and Rebecca Jones. The exhibition examined 90 years of Australian lesbian history through the stories of nine women. This fruitful relationship will continue in 1999 through the Australian Museum's Indigenous Program, when it will present 'Warrali Burrul'. Guest-curated by Michael Brogan, the exhibition will examine indigenous Australia's involvement in the 21-year history of SGLMG.

Arguably, a more exciting development for both the festival and cultural institutions comes from the recognition that gays and lesbians, because of their difference, can offer a fresh perspective on old subject matter. In the 1998 festival, Indian artist Bhupen Khakhar held his first Australian solo exhibition at the Art Gallery of NSW (AGNSW). Curated by Victoria Lynn and John Kirkman, the exhibition was a particularly exciting example of the trend. Khakhar's large scale, sensual and erotic watercolours were placed within the

AGNSW's Asian art collection. This provocative juxtaposition located Khakhar's work within the dynamic, ever changing history of Indian art. Thus, Khakhar's work was not seen as discrete from the narrative of Indian art. It also encouraged a re-examination of the earlier forms of Indian art on display in the gallery.

Another visual arts project in 1998, 'Singing Up Stones', re-invented the familiar. With support from the City of Sydney, Lisa Anderson projected a series of images onto three of the Opera House sails. This was the first time the Opera House had permitted projected images onto Australia's cultural icon. The public art event, held in February, was accompanied by a specially commissioned soundtrack simulcast on local community radio station OUT FM, and by simultaneous projections on the southern pylon of the Sydney Harbour Bridge.

In the 1999 festival we see these types of projects continuing at the Australian Museum's new gallery, the Djamu Gallery, at the refurbished Customs House, with 'Blak Beauty', curated by Brook Andrew.

This ground-breaking exhibition will look at the notion of beauty from an Aboriginal perspective, a subject matter rarely articulated in exhibitions of Aboriginal culture.

These projects of intervention highlight the best of what the gay and lesbian community can offer not only its own community but the broader community as well. However, they do tend to require a longer lead time than the more conventional social documentary-style exhibition. The future challenge for the SGLMG Festival and Sydney's major cultural institutions is to become involved in much longer term dialogue and planning so that the full potential of this rich area of creativity can be utilised. The festival has, up until this point, had a great deal of support from middle level management at cultural institutions, allowing for the relatively small but significant contributions to the festival over the years. We are yet to test whether this will be translated in the future to a higher level of goodwill and support.

*Jonathan Parsons is festival director of the SGLMG Festival.*

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## Forbidden Love — Bold Passion: An Exhibition of Lesbian Stories 1900s–1990s

RUTH FORD AND LYNED ISAAC

'What the hell has this shit got to do with science, culture or the history of Newcastle. A complete waste of time in an otherwise well presented museum. This demonstration/promotion of a social disorder should be kept in the closet.'

'Very affirming to hear the older women's voices. Thank you for recognising the variety of self identification.'

'This exhibition is a display of a vocal minority subverting the media to their own ends to validate their minority lifestyle. Boring!!!'

'Loved it! We dykes have made it to a museum!!'

*Review comments from the response box for 'Forbidden Love' at venues in Newcastle, Melbourne and Sydney.*

'Forbidden Love — Bold Passion' was an exhibition about lives, loves and identities. It explored the lifestyles and attitudes of 'lesbians' in Australia over the last 90 years. The lives of nine very different

women were presented on panels in the form of a closet door flying open. Their stories, recounted individually and as thematic excerpts, told of isolation and discrimination, of political movements for

acceptance and rights, of meeting places, relationships with family, and of love, romance and heartbreak.

Walking around the closets visitors could touch many of the objects, which included ephemera, clothing and documents, or leaf through facsimiles and listen to oral-history story segments on CD. They could also respond to the exhibition and participate in the debate surrounding it by writing comments to be displayed on the response board. These comments highlighted both the outrage and excitement expressed about the exhibition — and particularly its location in a public space.

In touring the exhibition, we faced obstacles because of its subject matter. Three weeks before the exhibition was

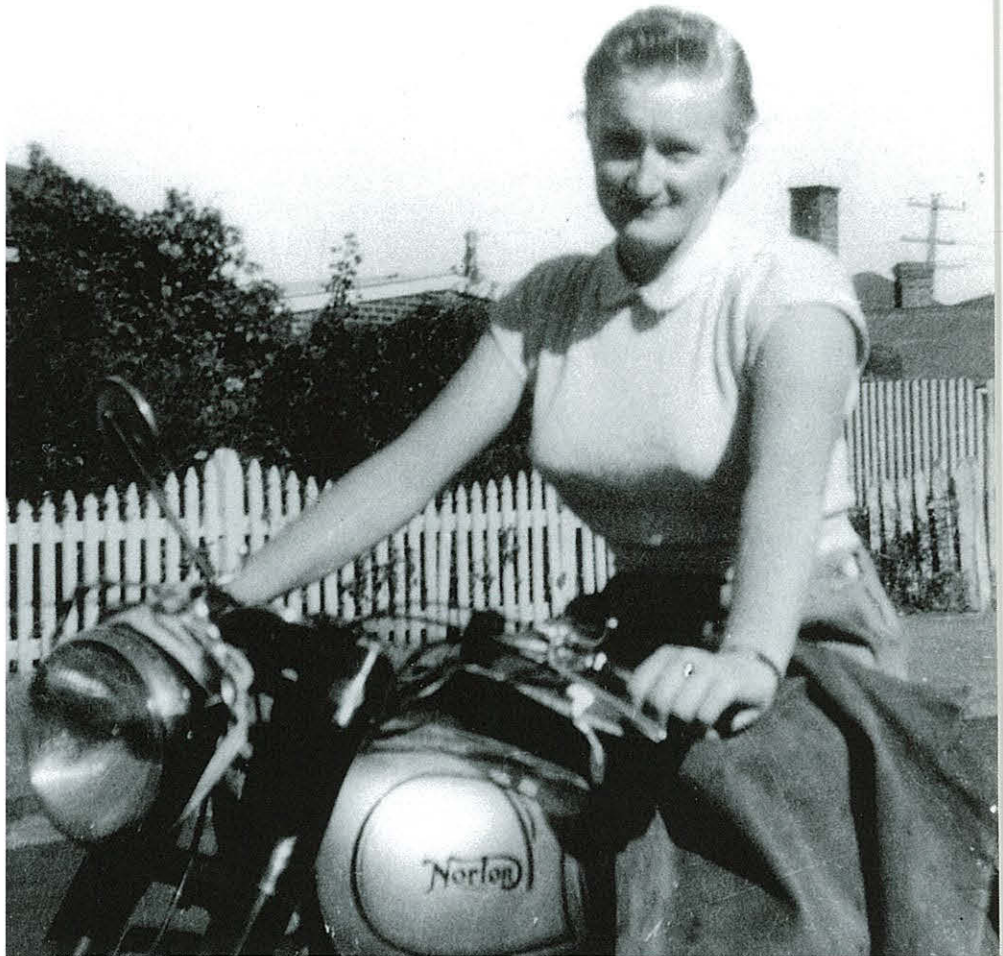
scheduled to open in Albury, the council banned it and it only went ahead after protests by local lesbians. Despite its national success, we were unable to secure museum venues for the exhibition in Western Australia, Queensland or the Northern Territory. In Newcastle, the museum was lobbied to have the exhibi-

**In Newcastle, the museum was lobbied to have the exhibition closed or fenced off so that children and teenagers could not have access. One school visiting the museum used its own teachers to form a barricade around the exhibition.**

tion closed or fenced off so children and teenagers could not have access. One school visiting the museum used its own teachers to form a barricade around the exhibition. A Tasmanian freight company refused to freight the exhibition after learning of its subject matter.

Why the controversy? 'Forbidden Love' had no sexually explicit material in it, although it did deal with sexuality and same-sex love between women. It simply brought lesbian stories, images and artefacts into the public domain and claimed a space often denied in the past. The majority of negative and angry comments focused on the inappropriateness of having the exhibition in the public eye, more particularly in a museum where children and teenagers might see it: 'What's it got to do with history?'; 'Keep it private'; 'You're contaminating children'. These comments point to the power of the exhibition genre. An exhibition provides an experience which is simultaneous and multi-sensory, it is very public, it cannot easily be dismissed.

There are a number of reasons for these responses. Sexuality is seen as 'private', lesbians and gays have been — and are still — subject to fear, hatred and discrimination. Traditionally, museums and their collections have been both conservative and hegemonic. Exhibitions have tended to represent 'the facts' and have dealt with a limited range of 'public' subject matter. Museums are changing, however, and their exhibition programs are beginning to



Jan Hillier, 1954. From the exhibition 'Forbidden Love — Bold Passion: An Exhibition of Lesbian Stories 1900s–1990s'.

challenge the way people think about themselves and their society. As they come to cater increasingly for children, this has set up a situation which made the presence of our exhibition in a museum space, for some, an intolerable affront to cherished expectations.

In the past, lesbianism in Australia has inhabited a culturally invisible, unspoken realm. In the large, funded archives and libraries, there are few documents that recall same-sex love between women, often because family or self-censorship has tempered their production and survival. Giving voice to the unspoken and visualising the invisible were important aspects of 'Forbidden Love'.

By putting these women's stories into an accessible format within a public space, we hoped to challenge the exclusion of lesbian women's lives from mainstream history and its institutions — museums, libraries and archives. In claiming this public space and talking openly about sexual identity, we roused the ire of some

visitors and affirmed others. The exhibition challenged many people and generated extensive community debate and dialogue — evident in the thousands of written responses, including comments which engaged with others on the response board. If we had published a book, who would have applauded or decried our efforts?

*Ruth Ford is a historian based in Victoria, Lyned Isaac is a museum curator currently living in New Zealand.*

'Forbidden Love — Bold Passion' was curated by Ruth Ford, Lyned Isaac and Rebecca Jones as a joint project of History Inverted and the Australian Lesbian and Gay Archives. It toured to Newcastle, Albury, Melbourne, Launceston, Penrith, Castlemaine, Adelaide, Hobart and Sydney from 1996 to 1998 with funding from Visions of Australia, the Federal Government's National Touring Exhibitions Project. Lesbian communities developed their own local component at each venue collecting photographs, stories, ephemera and documents.

# The Shock of the Few

GARRY WOTHERSPOON

An image can bestow power. Any member of a minority culture will be able to tell of the sense of validation, of empowerment, given by seeing respectful representations of their culture — whether as a photograph, on TV, in a film, or as the subject of an exhibition.

The exhibition 'Absolutely Mardi Gras', held at the Powerhouse Museum early in 1996 to coincide with Sydney's annual Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras, satisfied the desires of lesbian and gay communities to see their art, their lives, their customs and rituals — their culture — celebrated. We saw images of ourselves in full cry, in all our flamboyant plumage, poking fun at all — ourselves included — for all to see.

Each year since 1978, the Sydney Gay and (since 1988) Lesbian Mardi Gras parade has taken place on Sydney's streets. Initially it was a political demonstration against the laws that penalised the emotional and sexual life of gay men, and the attitudes of a society that saw same-sex love as just something that happened from the navel down. But over time it has evolved into a major cultural event. This month-long festival now features everything from art exhibitions to harbour cruises to sporting events to concerts and theatre, and a film festival. It is a tour de force, a showcase of the talents of a creative, imaginative and stimulating subculture.

The exhibition caught aspects of this subculture very well. Focused on the parade, it featured curated costumes, props, posters, photographs, drawings, jewellery, wigs — and two videos — which gave a sense of the wide-ranging creativity involved. Mardi Gras has given the city of Sydney Fred Nile's head on a plate (à la John Baptist), Imelda Marcos chasing hundreds of shoes along the street, a queen and some noisy corgies in a very grand car, hundreds of marching boys and girls (usually cross-dressed) and floats galore. Perhaps our community's sharpest jabs are for those who condemned and persecuted us in the past. So when around two hundred bare-breasted

dykes-on-bikes now lead the parade through Sydney's streets, think of it as a bit of tit-for-tat for insults and humiliations in the past. Many of the exhibition's photographs nicely caught the looks on the faces of the onlookers — from disapproval to acclamation and joy.

**Yet there is value in that shock. Indeed, the educative process often starts with shock, and then moves on to considering the issues, to understanding, to tolerance and then to acceptance.**

Like Cinderella's glittering coach — once a mere pumpkin — there were major transformations recorded. From such humble raw materials as fibreglass, dowselling, plywood, ping-pong balls, polystyrene, leather, lycra, roller-blinds, formica and sequins were created costumes and floats of incredible wit and glamour — the many stylish creations of Ron Muncaster, Maude Boate, Brenton Heath-Kerr, Peter Tully and David McDiarmid, to name but a few. Of course, such an exhibition also had its darker side: it was a timely reminder that many of these artists are no longer with us. The gay community, perhaps more than any other, has felt the impact of the ravages of AIDS. Australia's creativity is the poorer for their loss.

Exhibitions like this play an important role in helping foster a sense of identity. Many older lesbians and gays can clearly remember when they first saw images of homosexuality, treated respectfully, in a public space — usually in a cinema, in films such as *The Killing of Sister George* or

*Sunday Bloody Sunday*. At a time when this was far rarer than today, for many of us those few images were like a flash from another world, indicating, hopefully, a better future. Indeed, some of the first 'publicly funded' images of homosexuals in Australia, from the second half of the nineteenth century, were photographs — police mug shots — of men arrested for committing 'homosexual' crimes. And over the intervening years, the images of homosexuals that the public were most likely to see were those associated with either criminals or freaks: the scandals that were so salaciously reported in the newspapers, of the women who lived their lives dressed as men, or the men who were caught expressing love, lust or affection for a fellow man. Such public acclamation as the exhibition gave was something that had rarely occurred before. It was a spectacle of pride for the many lesbian and gay people who came to see it. Or even heard about it.

Such an exhibition was also important from another perspective. In this day and age of diminished government spending on the arts, education and culture, one of the most precious functions of any museum is its educative role. And the trend in museums such as the Powerhouse — to consciously not set themselves up as preserves of elite cultures — is to be applauded. Such an exhibition helps encourage a society to think about ideas of diversity and enjoyment — indeed, of enjoyment in diversity! This is both appropriate and admirable at a time when the idea of Australia as a successful social laboratory is under threat. One hundred years ago, with a strong egalitarian tradition, we led the world in the fields of social welfare and industrial legislation, in attempting to deal in a civilised manner with that ongoing conflict between capital and labour, and ensuring a fair deal for all. And today, when the world is fraught with intercultural conflict, Australia's example of a living, working multiculturalism, based on acceptance of diversity, once again stands as a shining beacon, a successful experiment for

the world to see. Exhibitions such as 'Absolutely Mardi Gras' play their part in helping keep such ideals alive.

Perhaps such an exhibition was, for some, far too confronting. In the plethora of images that have graced the walls of museums in Australia since the white invasion, these would constitute but a few. But any exhibition showing the creations of a culture long despised in Australia would undoubtedly cause some to pause, even to feel a shock. Yet there is value in that shock. Indeed, the educative process often starts with shock, and then moves on to considering the issues, to understanding, to tolerance and then to acceptance. Thus, such an exhibition, validating as it does the idea of diversity, is to be applauded. It is this latter point — the shock of the few (no matter how few) — that represents such an important step.

And perhaps it worked. Several parts of the exhibition were immensely popular with the general public, including the film festival, where tapes of recent Mardi Gras parades were shown. Several other activities also drew large crowds. In one segment, Meeting the Makers, held on weekends during February and March, artists Michael Gates and Claude Fabian worked at their creations — the former creating wigs for his alter ego Maude Boate, the latter crafting his imaginative jewellery. Similarly, in the courtyard, the lesbian group LesArtes Society worked at its float, which appeared later in the parade. Such activities allowed the public to get a sense of the creative process, of what went into making works that might appear in either an exhibition or parade.

That such an exhibition could even take place is perhaps comment that some of the



The Sacred Cows float was built by LesArtes Society at the Powerhouse Museum during the 'Absolutely Mardi Gras' exhibition in February 1996. Here, one of the attendant Sacred Cows gets dressed in the museum's marquee where the float was assembled. Photo Scott Donkin, Powerhouse Museum.

political goals fought for by the lesbian and gay communities since the early 1970s are being attained. One could also

suggest that museum policies, of trying to connect with the various communities and cultures that make up Australian society, are also relevant. It certainly seems that as Sydney's Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras has become more open and accessible to the wider population, so too is this mirrored in exhibitions such as 'Absolutely Mardi Gras'. One might call it a symbiosis of mutual benefit.

Exhibitions are by their nature temporary, but a more lasting memento of those images was the book of the same name. The book allows for a more permanent record, with a magnificent collection of photographs. While it focused on costume and design — in particular what people wear in the parade and why — it also included excellent chapters on the politics and history of the parade and on activities behind the scenes at the workshop, where many of the floats and costumes were put together. And in the book there is an ongoing record of many of the items that were on display, creations such as Gingham Woman, Tom of Finland, Cowdyke and Lucille Balls. Once again, images that tell a story that the rest of Australia has rarely heard.

The power of images, then, is not to be underestimated. Even if few in number, they have the ability to shock, to change ideas, to create new ways of seeing things. For many, it may well have been their first viewing of Sydney's Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras. And perhaps, in the future, they may feel moved to see it for themselves. In the flesh. Such can be the persuasive power of an image.

*Garry Wotherspoon is a Sydney-based writer.*

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# 'It's 1999 — What's Queer About New Zealand Museums?'

NEIL ANDERSON

No better than to start with the blunt questions, eh? Faced with the challenge of describing the place of our identities within late nineties New Zealand museology — I guess that's a natural response for a museum educator!

But the question is more than a blunt cutting to the point — it's also designed as an open-ended question. We wanted to tap into some real life views and experiences of queer staff rather than launch a solo espousal of 'this is where it's at folks'.

Accordingly, *What's Queer?* encourages museum staff from different professional areas to respond on a more personal basis. Interestingly, our respondents have negotiated this stretchy area in three key ways: addressing awareness and acknowledgment of queer audiences; considering queer content; and being confidently out of the closet at work.

In New Zealand there's a fundamental background of hastened social change that naturally puts the spotlight on museums regarding their relevance to the queer community, and contemporary society in general.

Despite regional and local differences, we face a fairly similar overall political context — a situation more common to small countries with small populations. New Zealand's social and political change since the 1984 election of David Lange's Labour Government has been especially rapid. Successive governments have pursued monetarist economic policies but have also seen the relatively rapid improvement of social policies, including those around sexual orientation. At times the change has been so rapid it's been hard to step back and examine it — except that we seem to be at a point where the critical mass of people who are out, combined with enthusiastic marketeers in the corporate world, are taking queer existence beyond the newsworthy and into general pop and consumer culture.

In this context it's becoming pertinent to ask if museums match this social

change, or whether, as I found in research in 1990, many New Zealand museums and galleries predominantly have interest in elite audiences and establishment content.

Our respondents' comments indicate significant advances at New Zealand's new national museum, Te Papa. No doubt a more comprehensive survey across the country could raise a book of more contradictory views!

*Neil Anderson is manager of Te Papa Productions.*

**We're fortunate at Te Papa in that we have a handful of motivated, enthusiastic individuals who promote queer visibility.**

We're fortunate at Te Papa in that we have a handful of motivated, enthusiastic individuals who promote queer visibility. However, I believe that this promotion should be institutional as well as individual. Te Papa, as the national museum, has a responsibility to reflect the diversity of New Zealand and its communities and to provide opportunities for visitors to see themselves represented in exhibitions. So, what are we doing at Te Papa to provide these opportunities? Part of my role as a researcher for visitor and market research is to define our audience/s and to see whether their needs and expectations are being met.

Each month we conduct visitor profile interviews and amongst the demographic information we collect, we ask about the sexual identity of our visitors. Occasionally this is a fraught question as some 'straight' visitors find it offensive and intrusive — or they simply don't understand what it means. But for our queer

visitors it is a question that acknowledges them as part of our core audience. This information will (hopefully) allow us to advocate for integral rather than marginal or token representation. While I think we have a way to go yet, we are doing the groundwork to ensure that Te Papa reflects our queer communities.

*Lisa McCauley works in visitor and market research.*

Fabulous Sweetie' reads the label on this black vinyl shoulder purse covered in fun fur and sequins. I mean, how camp is that! This drag bag is one of two items on display in Te Papa's 'Parade' exhibition whose tag line is, 'Where there are people, there is art'. The other item is a beautiful gold headpiece. The exhibition celebrates the artistic creativity of New Zealanders.

The exhibit is themed around Devotion, Wellington's annual queer dance party. This innovative apparel is surrounded by photos taken at the 1997 party and shows members of our community getting it on on the dance floor. Wall-to-wall lycra, latex, and leather!

I think the display goes a long way in recognising that queer culture is an inseparable part of society. Albeit a small step, it is however a bold one for the national museum of New Zealand to take.

Ironically, an exhibit directly beneath our camp one is a set of miniature plastic models of our All Blacks, New Zealand's national rugby team. They are on display in a pullout drawer. Makes a change for something queer to be out in the open and a butch icon hidden in the bottom drawer!

Don't you think it's fabulous, Sweeties?

*Greg Cleave is a Te Papa host.*

I have found that it takes people of many cultures, from wide and diverse backgrounds, and many skills to bring a museum's vision to life. This has occurred here, with the success of Te Papa Tongarewa.

The number of diverse cultures that are embraced and respected is very wide. The group of skilled gay and lesbian professionals that contributes to the continuing successes here is in all areas of the museum. Their contributions add to the strength of this institution.

As a white gay man, raised in Florida, I have found it challenging but very rewarding to bring my particular skills to Te Papa. The fact that I make some delicious 'American-style' walnut brownies, and bring them in for the folks here to enjoy, doesn't hurt either!

*George Schneider is theatre and audiovisual technician team leader.*

I remember going to a meeting not long after I'd started at the old museum, where Neil and Co. were presenting the findings of their survey about queer/trans visitors. The survey was to find out things like how many and how often queers were visiting the old museum and what sort of stuff they came to see. I was also asked if I had any queer mates who would be in a focus group to find out similar stuff.

I thought it was really weird that anyone would do that kind of research, especially at such a big institution. To put my reactions in context, before starting work at the museum I was a mechanic in a suburban garage, where the rules were if you

couldn't hide the fact you were queer, you should at least keep quiet about it. I thought it was wild that you could be open about it in a workplace.

The museum continues to amaze me with this. There is even a whole activity station in 'Parade', one of our major exhibitions, which is devoted to gay/trans stuff. At the Devotion party before the opening, we were all looking for good bits of costume that might go into it, so it was kind of like a family having some part in what the public were going to see about us.

Now that queerness is an accepted part of the new museum, it would be good if transgenderism could go the same way.

*Mandy Lowe is an exhibitions maintenance technician.*

The most rewarding aspect of working in a museum in New Zealand is the positive atmosphere engendered through being part of a gay-friendly institution. For me there is an intrinsic sense of continuity between home and work, and the necessity to pretend to be someone else and hide who you are has been banished. I have found that all my working relationships rest on a base of total honesty and understanding and are all the better for it.

*Jonathan Campbell is developer of Leisure, Pleasure, Learning.*



'Parade. Where there are people, there is art.' The exhibition, celebrating the artistic creativity of New Zealanders, includes an activity station devoted to gay/trans culture. Courtesy Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa.

## The Australian Lesbian and Gay Archives

The Australian Lesbian and Gay Archives is an initiative of the Fourth National Homosexual Conference held in Sydney in 1978. The archives celebrated its twentieth anniversary in 1998.

The archive's collection is a record of queer ideas and experiences which provides a unique space in which queer lives are documented and queer voices are privileged. The collection boasts over 15,000 periodicals, 40,000 newspaper clippings, and 1,000 ephemera files. There are hundreds of posters, badges, audio and videotapes currently being indexed on database for greater accessibility.

Over the past twenty years artists, playwrights, film makers, academics, journalists, students and the just plain interested have relied on and delighted in our vast collection.

The Australian Lesbian and Gay Archives is a community-based, non-profit organisation that operates on volunteer labour. Individual assistance is offered to those who undertake research on site.

For details contact Graham Willett on (03) 9344 7944 or [g.willett@politics.unimelb.edu.au](mailto:g.willett@politics.unimelb.edu.au)



Badge depicting the cover of *Young, Gay and Proud*, a book of proud, factual information for gay and lesbian students, published in October 1978 by the Gay Teachers and Students Group, Melbourne. Collection of the Australian Lesbian and Gay Archives.

# Cultural Heritage Management in Vanuatu

RALPH REGENVANU

This article is based on the paper given at ICOM 98 by Ralph Regenvanu, director of the Vanuatu Cultural Centre, in which he described the centre's alternative approach to cultural heritage management in one of the most culturally diverse countries in the world.

The Republic of Vanuatu in the South Pacific has a population of about 160,000 people who speak approximately 113 different languages. Given that a linguistic group is usually regarded as a 'culture', the country is one of the most culturally diverse on earth. This diversity is manifested in numerous forms of social organisation, ritual life and cultural and artistic expression within the archipelago. As is the case for most of Melanesia (which encompasses West Papua, Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, Fiji, Vanuatu and New Caledonia), Vanuatu's cultures are still very much 'alive': most people still speak their local language, sustain themselves through traditional subsistence agriculture, participate in age-old rituals and live in traditional kin-based groups on their ancestral lands.

The Vanuatu Cultural Centre is a body established under national legislation to provide for 'the preservation, protection and development of various aspects of the rich cultural heritage of Vanuatu'. It comprises all the key cultural heritage institutions: the National Museum, the National Library, the National Film and Sound Unit and the National Cultural and Historic Sites Survey. The cultural centre attempts to manage national cultural heritage in the context of extreme cultural diversity, both within the nation and the vibrant local-level traditions, principally through its cultural fieldworkers network. This network offers an example of an alternative approach to the notion of training cultural heritage managers and involving communities in cultural heritage management.

The Vanuatu Cultural Centre was established by the colonial administration in the 1960s as a conventional library and museum whose function was to maintain its collections of literature, natural history specimens and ethnographic objects for visitors and the local population. It was the visionary work of two anthropologists working in the then New Hebrides in the

mid-1970s, Peter Crowe and Kirk Huffman, that shifted the institution's emphasis from maintaining collections to working in the islands and among the local village populations to record aspects of the country's cultural heritage. As Vanuatu's indigenous cultural knowledge is held and transmitted orally, this recording work has consisted mainly of audio and video recordings. It has come to focus particularly on details of histories, traditions and cosmologies, ritual life and practices, culturally important sites and

**People living within  
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and history of  
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neighbouring areas.**

places, languages and classification systems, and the ongoing recording of significant cultural and historical events. The latter (which is essentially history-in-the-making) is recorded on video. Examples of (usually ritual) material culture are collected for storage and display in the museum, but almost everything else is documented on audiotape.

## Training

While the cultural centre has come to serve as a central storehouse for the products of heritage documentation programs, the actual work of recording and research within the country's different cultural groups has been approached through the volunteer fieldworkers program. This program is now seen as a model for grassroots cultural heritage management in the region. People living within their own lin-

guistic and cultural communities are selected to document the culture and history of their own and neighbouring areas. These fieldworkers are trained to use notebooks, tape recorders, and still and video cameras to record cultural information. Basic ethnographic research techniques are learnt such as dictionary-making, the recording of important cultural and historic sites, and recording of genealogies. Training is also given in the more general aims and methodologies of cultural heritage preservation and development, for example, the regulation of traditional copyright and access rules and the promotion and revival of traditional skills and values.

Most of this training takes place in annual two-week workshops held at the cultural centre's head office in Port Vila, with funding from the Australian Government. In addition to their training component, the workshops also facilitate the recording and preservation of aspects of Vanuatu's traditional knowledge and cultures. During the workshops, fieldworkers present their research findings on the particular topic identified for that year's workshop, and learn of corresponding traditions in Vanuatu from other fieldworkers. These presentations are recorded in their entirety and subsequently transcribed, edited and published (subject to traditional copyright restrictions) as books in Bislama (a form of pidgin and the most widely spoken of three national languages).

Cultural fieldworkers from around Vanuatu also work with staff at the National Museum in mounting exhibits from their local areas in the museum's permanent exhibition space. When the National Museum's new building opened in 1995, the opening exhibition was set up by fieldworkers working alongside the museum's full-time staff as well as staff from the Australian Museum. The fieldworkers were responsible for setting up exhibits from their respective cultural groups and for providing advice on culturally appropriate procedures. They simultaneously received training and advice on technical aspects of these tasks such as conservation, restoration and mounting.





The cultural centre fieldworker (third from right) and male elders of the Naa'hai speaking area of the island of Malakula at the opening of the Naa'hai Cultural Centre, October 1998.

Through their involvement in site survey and registration activities in their own areas, with site officers of the National Cultural and Historic Sites Survey, fieldworkers have been gaining experience and training in basic site recording skills since 1990. Since 1996, an annual six-week training program in basic archaeological techniques, run by archaeologists from the Australian National University (ANU), has also been held for fieldworkers and cultural centre staff on the main island of Efate. No less than 15 fieldworkers and many more local community members have since received hands-on training and experience in identifying potential archaeological sites, planning and excavating small test-pits, identifying and classifying excavated artefacts, and recognising geological and cultural features in excavated transects. Over the next three years, this training will be enhanced to include drawing of site maps and plans and the mapping of sites using GIS technology.

A handful of fieldworkers from areas in which particularly rich rock art sites are located have also received training in recording and conserving these sites. In 1998 the local fieldworker and site custodians at one of Vanuatu's premier rock art sites on the island of Malakula participated in an intensive course run by professionals from the ANU and the Australian Heritage Commission. Subsequently, the fieldworker was able to take

**Some of the most exciting work being undertaken by the cultural centre's fieldworkers today concerns the re-valuation, re-learning and revival of aspects of traditional cultural heritage in their respective communities.**

part in an international rock art preservation training course held in Indonesia. Other fieldworkers have also participated in international cultural heritage fora, undertaken linguistic training courses at the ANU, and one has been a visiting research fellow at the ANU's Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies.

#### **Future Directions**

Some of the most exciting work being undertaken by the cultural centre's fieldworkers today concerns the re-valuation, re-learning and revival of aspects of traditional cultural heritage in their respective communities. A number of fieldworkers have rebuilt traditional *nakamals* (men's houses) on their original grounds after these were abandoned with the introduction of Christianity a generation ago. The express purpose of these reconstructions

has been to provide the proper forum for traditional knowledge to be learned and traditional ceremonies performed. In the context of these reconstructions, and also in contexts without this specific component, fieldworkers have been reviving certain traditional rituals and ceremonies that have not been practised for at least a generation. They have also established 'custom schools' in which children can learn their traditions. In late 1998, the fieldworker from the Naa'hai linguistic community in the south of Malakula established the first culturally specific centre for an individual cultural group. This indicates a future direction for cultural heritage management in Vanuatu which sees individual cultural groups establishing their own centres in which to caretake their own heritage.

In fulfilling its role as the custodian of Vanuatu's national cultural heritage, the Vanuatu Cultural Centre has built up a network of cultural resource managers in the country's local indigenous communities. Serving as counterparts for the cultural centre's programs in these local communities, the fieldworkers also provide guidance on the development and implementation of policy in the national institution itself. More importantly, fieldworkers are helping their communities to develop their own culturally-distinct approaches to the management of their own cultural resources. This, in effect, dilutes the cultural centre's role as custodian of Vanuatu's cultural heritage and refocusses it as a facilitating, training and coordination body for local-level cultural heritage initiatives, and as a national preservation-oriented storehouse for the cultural property of indigenous cultural groups. This development can only assist in the management of Vanuatu's cultural heritage in the context of its extreme cultural diversity.

*Ralph Regenvanu is director of the Vanuatu Cultural Centre*

**The Vanuatu Cultural Centre's web page is at: [HTTP://artalpha.anu.edu.au/web/arc/vks/vks.htm](http://artalpha.anu.edu.au/web/arc/vks/vks.htm)**

For a map depicting the languages of Vanuatu please contact *Museum National's* editor or see *Arts of Vanuatu*, Fig. 204, pg. 171, edited by J. Bonnemaïson, C. Kaufmann, K. Huffman, and D. Tryon, published in 1996 by Crawford House Publishing. Tel: (02) 6332 2677, Fax: (02) 6332 2654.

# Learning in Museums: A Personal Perspective

JANETTE GRIFFIN

In this article Janette Griffin reports on an aspect of research she recently undertook for a PhD dissertation on integrated school-museum learning experiences in science. She discusses a current view of the nature of learning, relating this to the circumstances of learning in museums, and how we might identify learning in a museum setting. In a future issue of *Museum National* Janette will look specifically at how appropriate conditions for school group learning in museums can be facilitated.

## Learning

The ways in which people learn has been intensively investigated over recent years. A widely held current view is that learning is a conceptual change, the construction and acceptance of new ideas or the restructuring of existing ideas. The key concept behind this is that learners construct personal meaning by linking new experiences to prior understandings. It involves change and development of ideas, rather than the simple acceptance of new ideas. It is an individual process in which each learner may make different meanings from the same new experiences, as they each carry a different set of prior understandings. At the same time, however, learning takes place within, and is influenced by, the social context. Learners' existing attitudes and beliefs will determine their acceptance of new ideas.

As young people have had fewer experiences than adults, they have fewer anchors on which to link new experiences and they will therefore use whatever seems the most reasonable link. In this way, children from a very young age develop ideas to help them construct meanings and to make sense of their world. These connections are not always the same as generally accepted views and 'misconceptions' may be formed.

What is learned is inseparable from how it is learned. People respond differently to an experience depending on the environment in which they encounter it. They react differently to questions from a stranger or a peer; they respond differently to environments which allow free exploration compared to a tightly structured environment. Knowledge construction is influenced and aided by contexts that afford rich links with the person's interests. The environment affects not only concept and skill development but also, and perhaps more importantly, it can

affect attitudes to learning itself. Both physical and social environments impact on learning. Vygotsky formulated a theory in which an individual's understanding is developed through engagement and conversation with other people — particularly with those at a higher level of understanding in the particular field being investigated.<sup>1</sup>

Curiosity is an important attitude that takes learners forward into new experiences. Curiosity may be stimulated by a gap between current understanding and a newly encountered phenomenon — when new events cannot be explained by currently held ideas. An increased range of experiences will increase the possibilities of sparking curiosity. When people are presented with unfamiliar phenomena a natural learning process is to ask questions. Questions are a way of exploring and making sense of the environment.

For a newly developed idea to become a permanent part of a person's knowledge, the idea needs to be tested and applied in a variety of circumstances. Play, while not always considered a significant part of the learning process, can lead to the development of skills in observation, experimentation and the testing of ideas. Duckworth considers learning itself to be a playful process — it involves toying with ideas in an attempt to reduce complexities until simple and elegant generalisations emerge.<sup>2</sup> This involves time to explore and become thoroughly familiar with ideas. Learning is not an efficient process that can be planned, structured, organised or streamlined.

## Museums as Learning Environments

Museums are often described as informal learning settings. They differ from formal learning settings such as schools or tertiary institutions in that learning is intrinsically motivated through personal

curiosity, observation and activity. This often contrasts with formal settings where the content to be learned is determined by others and the process is often motivated extrinsically by grades and exams. While the process of learning is a natural one and cannot be forced on anyone, appropriate conditions for it to occur can be provided.

Museums offer a special opportunity for the experiential nature of learning, based on encounters with real objects and unfamiliar phenomena. Visitors to museums choose their experiences and ideas may not necessarily be met in a prescribed sequence. Opportunities for learning may be fragmentary and unstructured — it involves a sense of wonder.

Museum public programs, then, can be considered as facilitators of learning. Displays and visitors are partners in the learning process. If visitors have some control over their own learning, the relationship between museum and learner is more symmetrical than in a didactic situation where the museum is seen as teacher rather than as a place to learn.<sup>3</sup> When visitors have some control, it allows them to adopt their own preferred learning strategies within a framework that may be facilitated by the environment.

A paradigm which recognises the impact of personal interactions in the learning process, as well as the impact of social interactions, has some clear implications for the provision of effective conditions for learning in a museum setting:

- Learning involves action, which implies a degree of choice and ownership. If visitors are given some choice in their learning at museums, their curiosity will lead to selection of their own areas of interest.
- Learning is stimulated when the visitor meets new experiences or phenomena that cannot be explained by their current set of understandings.
- Learning involves arousing curiosity that can be satisfied through question-asking.
- Learning is facilitated when links between new and existing ideas are optimised. By providing potential links between prior learning and new experiences, museums can assist in the process of conceptual change.

- Learning can be facilitated by encouraging the use of a range of learning opportunities and activities.
- Learning is supported by peers and 'experts'. Facilitating social groupings that allow team learning and contact with informed staff will enhance conditions for learning.

### Identifying Learning in Museums

As described, learning is a personal, developmental process which involves the accommodation of new experiences with prior understandings and attitudes, and which is influenced by our social interactions. Further, it involves making connections between experiences from all sources, therefore it is not possible to determine what aspects of a visitor's understanding of a particular idea result from the museum experience alone. Learning is a continuous process, we take in information from many sources. The more experiences we have, the more information we have to play with and develop new ideas.

In a social constructivist paradigm the central players are the learners — what they bring to the learning situation and what they each take away. The emphasis is on change in understanding rather than a predetermined knowledge outcome. So how can we determine whether museum visitors are learning?

As well as each visitor making their own meaning from what they meet, the informal nature of the setting adds to the dilemma — each visitor will be stimulated by different aspects of the displays and will meet different ideas — it is not possible to determine the specific information to which individual visitors are exposed.

In order to investigate learning specifically during the museum visit, it may therefore be more valid to look at processes that indicate it is taking place. In an environment where learners are constructing their own meanings out of experience, the important issues involve their actions, rather than the nature of the subject they are learning.<sup>4</sup> It may be more valuable to consider how visitors *are learning* rather than what they *have learned*.

The similarity of views about conditions which are favourable for learning and the behaviours which reflect the presence of these conditions is impressive. Synthesising this literature has led to the development of a set of indicators of engagement

in learning which includes both individual and social behaviours.

### Behaviours Indicative of Favourable Conditions for Learning

- a showing responsibility for and initiating personal learning;
- b actively involved in learning;
- c purposefully manipulating and playing with objects and ideas;
- d making links and transferring ideas and skills;
- e sharing learning with peers and experts;
- f showing confidence in personal learning abilities;
- g responding to new information or evidence.

In applying these descriptions to learning within a museum environment, each item was expanded to create a set of specific indicators of engagement in learning processes within a museum. Examples of some of these indicators are shown in the table below.

### Examples of Indicators of Student Engagement in Learning Processes in a Museum Setting

- showing responsibility for and initiating personal learning:  
e.g. talking to themselves about exhibit;  
deciding where and when to move;
- actively involved in learning:  
e.g. standing and looking/reading;  
absorbed, close, concentrated examination;  
persevering with a task, e.g. drawing;
- sharing learning with peers and experts:  
e.g. talking and pointing;  
pulling others to show them something;
- showing confidence in personal learning abilities:  
e.g. explaining to peers.

These indicators have been trialed by noting behaviours of primary school children at the Australian Museum during 1997 and 1998, and matching their behaviours with the indicators. These results were compared with other more traditional measures of learning (obtainable only from visitors such as a group of school children). The indicators compared well with the other measures of learning.



Museums offer a special opportunity for the experiential nature of learning, based on encounters with real objects and unfamiliar phenomena. School students participating in an activity at the Australian Museum.

Importantly, this set of indicators of engagement in learning processes is neither a sophisticated nor fully tested way of determining learning. It has been developed with school students in mind. It gives no indication of what, if anything, is *being learned*, only that a process is being used which indicates that the visitor may *be learning*. Nevertheless, it does have potential for gauging learning, particularly when used in conjunction with other measures of learning. Further testing and researching of this approach to determine learning in a museum will be conducted at various museums in America and Sydney during 1999.

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This article is based on research reported in Griffin, J.M. 1998, *School-Museum Integrated Learning Experiences in Science: A Learning Journey*. PhD Dissertation, University of Technology, Sydney. (Contact Janette.Griffin@uts.edu.au)

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# Science Museums Look to the Future

ROBIN GARNETT

In 1998 Robin Garnett, from New Zealand's Science Centre and Manawatu Museum, attended two international science museum conferences. In this report she outlines some of the major issues arising at Learning Science in Informal Contexts, held at Questacon — The National Science and Technology Centre of Australia, and the Beijing International Conference on Science and Technology Centers.

Last September, about sixty overseas and Chinese science museum professionals gathered in the white dome of the China Science and Technology Museum for the 1998 Beijing International Conference on Science and Technology Centers/Museums. The building of a large extension to this Beijing museum will take the total floor space to 65,000 sqm. The Chinese Government is supporting a massive increase in the number of science museums in China. It sees them as a key instrument in promoting 'the knowledge based economy' which it says will gradually take over in importance from the agricultural and industrial economies. Chinese science museum directors talked of their institutions providing life long learning in science and new technologies, and giving children creativity and initiative as a complement to discipline-based learning taking place in Chinese schools.

The Beijing conference started with an overview from Per-Edvin Persson, president of ECSITE (The European Collaborative for Science, Industry and Technology Exhibitions) and director of Heureka, The Finnish Science Centre. Persson believes it is not helpful to distinguish between 'science centre' and 'science museum' as they offer much the same services and he refers to both as science museums. He noted that the core business of science museums remains interactive exhibits and that each institution still operates from a specific building as its home base. He identified four current trends in science museums: they have an increasing presence on the internet; they place greater emphasis on current topics; they include artefacts and real experiments; and they have an increasing number of education programs.

Persson also described what he thinks are the six characteristics of successful science museums: they have strong academic connections, often senior staff have been university professors; they have a combination of public and self-generated

**Attention must be given to visitors' day-long needs such as parking, toilets and cafe, as well as to exhibitions.**

funding — public funding indicates community support and self-generated funding means an institution has to keep in close touch with its visitors; they are entrepreneurial; and innovative; they have dedicated staff; and they have a clear mission statement that is developed in consultation with staff and upheld by them.

Speakers discussed challenges ahead in maintaining visitor numbers as the range of options for people's leisure dollar increases. Attention must be given to visitors' day-long needs such as parking, toilets and cafe, as well as to exhibitions. Exhibits must also be created with the user in mind — we should try to look through visitors' eyes rather than our own in deciding which medium to use.

In my own paper I discussed the Australian conference and outcomes of research into learning in science museums in Australia and New Zealand. In Australia the number of studies into the way people learn science in informal contexts such as science centres, museums, zoos and botanical gardens is increasing. Pressures to evaluate science learning come from the institutions themselves, from teachers concerned about the educational value of school excursions, and from sponsors wanting confirmation their dollars are being spent appropriately.

Research at the Australian Museum, Sciencentre and Scitech Discovery Center have shown effective ways of linking schoolwork with visits to museums. Museum staff work with teachers to prepare children for their visit and to inte-

grate the visit into the school curriculum. They endeavour to give children a purpose for their visit.

Dr Leonie Rennie, from Curtin University, suggested that asking whether people learn science in a science centre is a bit like asking whether people learn to read in a library. She described learning as 'an internal change in a person — the formation of new mental associations or the potential for new responses — that comes about as a result of experience'. Dr Rennie pointed out that the change may include new emotional responses and new skills as well as the formation of new ideas.

How can we measure this complex, intensely personal experience called 'learning'? Typically, researchers have given visitors tests before and after their visits and looked for improvements in their knowledge. They have watched visitors, audiotaped them, interviewed them, videotaped them. Most studies claim that, on the whole, some cognitive, affective and psychomotor learning does occur for most visitors at science museums but there is variability in people's experiences and in the quality of learning outcomes from exhibits. Many results are inconclusive. The measurement of learning does not lend itself to conventional experimental method because the more variables are controlled, the more the visitors' experiences become contrived and unlike normal experiences in science centres. Dr Rennie maintains that we need to broaden our perspectives and, rather than asking, 'Do people learn science in informal contexts?', we should ask, 'Do informal contexts help people develop a more positive relationship with science?'. This opens up research to studies that are more broadly based and which cover changes over longer periods of time.

Dr Janette Griffin from the University of Technology, Sydney, suggested it is meaningless to even try to measure learning and that it is more appropriate to look for visitor behaviour that is consistent with the behaviour we associate with learning. That is, to look for indicators of learning rather than to try to take measurements of it.

Several people reported in-depth studies of visitors' interactions with

exhibits. Gilles Bloch, from the University of Strasbourg in France, has developed a research technique for studying visitors' interpretations of the science concepts demonstrated by particular exhibits. He discretely videotapes an adult using an exhibit, then invites the adult to watch the video. At intervals he stops the recording and questions the visitor about their thoughts and reasons for doing certain things. Gilles also makes a video of the adult during the interview process, and is

now cutting CDs that show the videos of the visitor interacting with the exhibit and the discussion of their experiences, side by side on a display monitor.

His research has revealed serious misunderstandings of some exhibits. For example, in a hand battery exhibit the majority of visitors thought their own bodies were generating electricity which was recorded on the metre. This and other studies reported at the Questacon conference showed the great importance of pro-

totyping exhibits with visitors to ensure the intended meaning is conveyed.

At the end of the Beijing conference, participants headed back to India, Japan, Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines, Australia and New Zealand, resolving to continue to share good ideas about science museums in the future.

*Robin Garnett is head of interactive programmes at The Science Centre and Manawatu Museum, New Zealand.*

## Site: time: media: space — new media in museums

ANGELINA RUSSO

New media and its relationship to museum practice is the 'stuff' of a growing number of seminars and conferences. The 'real body' experience is re-interpreted through 'virtual' mediums to determine means and methods for using new media in museums.

The site: time: media: space: new media in museums seminar, held in October at the Museum of Sydney, was one in a diverse community of such forums. It brought together designers, artists, curators, institutions and academics to discuss innovative exhibition projects which explore the potential of new media technologies in the museum. Discussions contributed to the appreciation of the wider creative potential offered by new media.

The seminar motivated conversation on the ways in which new media might augment exhibition practices or be employed to create entirely new forms of visitor experience or interpretive techniques. It touched on established issues — interpretation, display, evaluation — and presented some interesting and unexpected results derived from the reliance on new media in the museum.

Mediation, fragility, interaction and containment were recurring themes presented through diverse project work and signalled the development of varying qualities to the museum experience.

Gary Warner, creative director of CDP Media, introduced the parameters of site:time:media:space as existing and future conditions of the museum experience. He established the context for further discussion.

Paula Dawson's research and design work for St Brigid's Church, in Coogee,

### **The framing and boundary of images and histories associated with new media works are absolutely determined by the medium.**

involved advanced technological understanding and inspiring translation into dramatic visual display. 'The Shrine of Sacred Heart' showcased some of the best, yet most fragile works reliant on new media. The piece acts as a metaphoric mediator between the viewer and the omnipotent, but the three dimensional space in which the holographic images are located are no longer available to the public as supply problems have left the piece without crucial lighting equipment.

Maria Fernanda Cardoso presented 'The Cardoso Flea Circus', a revival of the lost art of flea display. While presenting a delightful and inspiring piece on the history and significance of the flea circus, she remarked on the longevity and success of the live performance as its main drawback.

The show was developed to allow intimate association with both the collection (fleas) and performance. Success has demanded the mediating technology of video and live broadcast to allow viewers to view the performance but, in doing so, has signalled the end of the real body experience and the introduction of a framed and bounded view (television screen) through which viewers must immerse themselves to participate in the surreal encounter of the show.

Both Dawson's and Cardoso's works are based in the experience of real events and strive for 'real body interaction' and in doing so offer the profound constraints of mediating technology and the fragility of delivery methods.

The framing and boundary of images and histories associated with new media works are absolutely determined by the medium. Containment, both physical and virtual, were discussed throughout the day and were highlighted by Jon McCormak.

McCormak is well known for his artificial life projects and here he spoke of 'escaping the container' of the frame and glass cabinet and developing new ways of moving through virtual spaces. His entertaining discussion of the 'Disneyfication' of museum sites and spaces was a little unnerving when placed in the context of earlier speakers.

Ian Wedde, concept curator in humanities at New Zealand's Te Papa, spoke of that museum's need to win new audiences. In the case of this museum, escaping the containers and boundaries of traditional museum practice relied not only on the use of new media but on developing strategies uncommon to museum programs.

Interestingly, those who delivered papers that located their work within a greater technological framework proved invaluable in defining the need for complex understandings of content within such productions. Too often, interactive displays use mind numbing sensory mechanisms to immerse the viewer in the exhibit. The act of interaction with these objects becomes the spectacle with the collection an interesting (and sometimes not so interesting) adjunct.

In the space of new media, where non-linear, individual navigation defines each and every user's interactivity with the site, the complexity of the traditional museum is sometimes ignored. The seminar acted as a sort of 'laying the cards on the table' for museums and probably raised more questions than it

answered. It demonstrated that we (museum professionals, designers, academics) need to be more critical about locating new media within the museum program.

The use of advanced software does not automatically lead to interesting, educative and entertaining displays; only

through thoughtful and creative translation by curators and designers can we develop clearer impetus for using new media to deliver museum content.

*Angelina Russo is a Master of Architecture student at the University of South Australia. She is writing a thesis on virtual museums.*

## COMMENT

# Ancient Cultures — New Worlds. Really?

ALISON CARROLL

I have never seen Euro-centrism expressed so astonishingly or so clearly as at the recent ICOM conference in Melbourne. Here in Melbourne, despite at least fifteen years of public debate, ICOM managed to confirm that the centre of the world IS elsewhere. I'd seen it at previous Museums Australia conferences, where little attempt was made to communicate in a serious way with people of our region, and I assumed it was because of the non-art museums' 'local' agenda. But this was an international conference, a real chance to say something about our region as an interesting, intelligent, self-possessed part of the world.

My remarks are made as a delegate only — I'm not privy to internal discussions on this issue, and perhaps those who were may care to answer this piece.

I have a litmus test for Australians I meet, which is based on their attitude to 'Asia': they don't have to 'do' anything about 'Asia', but they do have to acknowledge its relevance and importance to us. (Young people almost all do, and the older ones split!) From the beginning of the ICOM planning process I was interested to see how this manifested itself. Quite early on, I was asked my opinion about involving people from Asia. And my answer was that it seemed to me a fantastic opportunity to bring a whole new group of people in, and to place Australia as a relevant and central place for discussions about museums on an international level. But to do this required real commitment, time, effort and inclusion. That people from Asia had to be included in the planning, in the intellectual decisions about topics and in the high profile speakers' lists. Real commitment had to be made to find out ways to encourage delegates from there.

(My one proactive offer, working with a group of colleagues who had toured together in Japan, was to compile a list of Japanese senior art museum personnel as potential speakers. The hierarchy of Japanese museums seems to insist that the directors must be asked before their peers and staff can start to think of attending.)

And what did happen? In practical terms, of the 1,300 delegates listed, only 53 were from Asia, and I counted only five from Japan (none from a leading museum — the one listed Japanese speaker, who in the end did not come, is an independent curator/consultant). As a note to those thinking the economic crisis in Asia would preclude delegates, certainly it is an issue, but there is funding in Asia for such things. Bodies like ASEAN Council for Culture and Information, with enough warning, can support applications for conference visitors, as can other funding organisations in Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Singapore and Hong Kong.

In the intellectual content of the conference, there was no important agenda about Asia anywhere. This was such an irony with the title being 'Ancient Cultures — New Worlds'. Here we were so well placed in Australia to really discuss this grand issue with our Asian neighbours (half the world's population, remember), so far from Europe and the hegemony of the USA.

If a serious approach had been taken with the concept offered in the conference title, the old worlds of Asia adding their different responses to dealing with contemporary issues would have taken the discussion in challenging, different directions. It could have created different access points to this cosy ICOM world.

But the old order continued unchallenged. I made one note when Rudi Fuchs was speaking about cultural universals, saying we 'all' acknowledged that Greek art was central to us, to wonder what the two Korean guests in the audience were thinking.

The languages of ICOM are so obviously those of colonisation: Spanish, French and English. For museums to perpetuate this, even to celebrate it, when they should be leaders of critical, self-conscious assessment of the presentation of 'cultural material', seemed even more ironic in terms of the conference title and for museum culture generally at the beginning of the 21st century.

It seemed a further irony that the one speaker from Asia, Marion Pastor Rocés, in a way confirmed the Euro-centredness of the conference. Her piece was based on a critique of the West where works from, say, the Philippines were displayed without appropriate context. She quoted Euro-American writers and artists to support her case.

I would have been much more comfortable if she had included examples of how it was being done well in the Philippines — as Emmanuel Kasarhérou did in speaking about what they were doing at the new museum in Noumea.<sup>1</sup> The experience of the people from the Pacific — from Noumea and Vanuatu — were for me the only breath of air around.

*Alison Carroll is director of the Asialink Arts Program.*

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# Museums, Visual Artists and Collective Copyright Administration

MICHAEL MCMAHON

The Government's 1995 *Review of Copyright Collecting Societies* is, 'founded upon the belief that copyright plays an essential role in any developed sophisticated society. If society is to recognise creativity, innovation and imagination, then copyright is the principal tool by which we accord that recognition. This is economically expressed by the award of a range of exclusive rights which grants to the owner, the power of control and the right of economic exploitation.'<sup>1</sup>

The report was prepared by well known Sydney arts lawyer Shane Simpson after his examination of the operation of the collective administration of copyright in Australia. Simpson reviewed the collecting societies which administer the copyright of authors, musicians, composers, music publishers, film producers and the owners of sound recordings. In doing so he highlighted the absence of any organisation which could collectively administer the copyright of Australia's visual artists. This absence resulted in a loss of income for this group of cultural producers.

Simpson wrote, 'The loss of income from and control over the exploitation of copyright that flows from the disparate art practices, geographic decentralisation and low income level of visual artists, together with the concealment of the practice of copyright infringement which is tacitly condoned by the lack of any efficient administration, are characteristic of the visual arts sector of the cultural industry and market in copyright works.'<sup>2</sup>

In response to the advocacy efforts of the visual arts sector and its supporters — and Simpson's specific recommendation — the Commonwealth Government made a financial commitment to the establishment of VISCOPY Ltd, a collecting society for the owners of copyright in artistic works. The objective was to give visual artists a voice in the uses which are made of their copyright. The establishment of VISCOPY Ltd was also an acceptance of Simpson's finding that the collective administration of individual rights of copyright generally benefits both the owners of the primary property and those who make secondary use of that property.<sup>3</sup>

VISCOPY Ltd is a non-profit distributing company governed by a board of voluntary directors. The directors include visual artists, photographers, indigenous artists and lawyers and business advisers with experience in the administration of copyright. Its representation includes over 35,000 Australian and overseas visual artists.

**The controversy and exaggerated response is exacerbated by developments in the digital area, particularly the ability to place collections online.**

The establishment of VISCOPY Ltd as part of the Australian copyright scene was bound to be controversial as the organisation attempted to change practices which depended on the isolation and limited bargaining power of individual visual artists. And controversial it has been, particularly in the galleries and museums sector.

The controversy and exaggerated response is exacerbated by developments in the digital area, particularly the ability to place collections online. Recent media comments by Brian Kennedy, director of the National Gallery of Australia, are indicative of a more general response by galleries and museums to visual artists asserting their rights. Kennedy is quoted in an article about the digital use of artistic works as saying, 'The key to the electronic revolution is that the electronic image can be provided free of charge but with a usage charge. It is in the interests of artists generally that work should be on show.'<sup>4</sup>

These comments illustrate the dilemma faced by museum professionals in dealing with copyright material. Some of them long to operate under the old paradigm of the gallery as patron — the idea that the gallery is obliging the artist by having

works on display and that it is in the 'interests of artists generally' to make their work available free of charge. But museums must now operate in a new paradigm where new rights and the need to exploit them must be for the benefit of both the artists and the institution. And where visual artists as copyright owners are beginning to join together to ensure that access to their work is made easier for the users and that they get their share of the economic benefit of making their work available.

Many art museums have traditionally been seen as the copyright 'good guys' and have extensive experience in licensing art works for reproduction in a wide range of circumstances. This makes it all the more difficult to understand why they are currently adopting a position which professes to uphold artists' rights while at the same time challenging the legal obligation and need to pay for the use of Australian artists' copyright. Perhaps it is partly explained by the fact that — unlike the users of other copyright and their colleagues in libraries and educational institutions — they are not accustomed to the collective administration of copyright licences which allow for copying of works at a very low unit cost.

VISCOPY Ltd is working to introduce better copyright practices into Australian museums and galleries.

*Michael McMahon is a partner at Logie-Smith Lanyon, Lawyers, Melbourne, legal advisers to VISCOPY Ltd.*

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Through its Standing Committee on Museum Practice, Museums Australia is currently looking at the broad implications of copyright practice as it affects museums. *Museum National* would welcome correspondence on this critical and sometimes contentious issue.

# Tears, Fears and Cheers: Migration to Australia 1788–1998

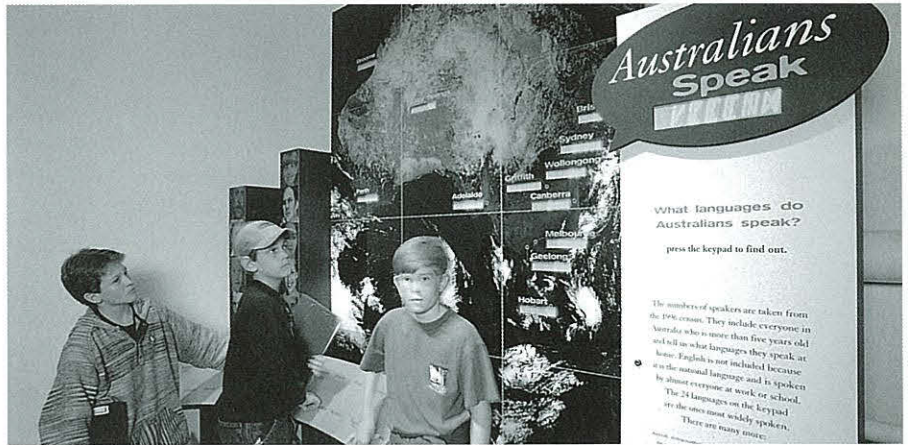
KEVIN JONES

'Tears, Fears and Cheers' opened at the Australian National Maritime Museum in April 1998 and closed in October. It was an attempt to produce a major history of immigration to Australia and, I hope, contributed to Australia's current wrangle with multiculturalism and immigration.

Our audience research highlighted that significant minorities in each of our focus groups believed a museum exhibition on immigration would be about immigration either before or after the Second World War, but not about both. They also believed such an exhibition would not be about themselves. Those who came to Australia after the war believed it would be about pre-war pioneers; those who came before the war believed it would be about *ethnic groups* coming after the war.

This demonstrated the potential value of the exhibition and told us about the balance we would need to find in our stories and marketing. We decided that 'Tears, Fears and Cheers' should stress continuity to try and overcome the perceived division between pre-war and post-war migration, and include a straightforward message that almost all of us are descended from immigrants. We did this by dividing the history of immigration into sub-themes based on when people came and where they came from: convicts from 1788; gold from the 1850s; settlers from the 1860s; Europeans from 1939; and boat refugees from the 1970s.

The exhibition's introductory panel began with Tan Thanh Lu coming to Australia in 1977 from Vietnam and celebrated his entry into a continuing history of immigration. Visitors were asked to nominate their own ancestry by placing a plastic chip in a bar graph of acrylic cylinders charting the ancestry of visitors to the museum. As a survey of visitors it was flawed in that school groups took handfuls of chips to increase the vote for their own ancestry: Italians, Chinese, Maltese, New Zealanders and British all took turns at being the largest groups in our survey. But it still achieved its objective in that visitors, albeit in a small way, were asked to place themselves in the picture at the start of the exhibition and for a moment identify themselves as one of Australia's immigrant communities.



'Tears, Fears and Cheers' was an attempt to produce a major history of immigration to Australia.

One of the problems we faced in dealing with the perceived pre-war/post-war division was the imbalance of material and sources available for each — the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are represented in collections by gilt-framed paintings and rare artefacts, the 20th century is often represented by domestic and improvised objects. Reconstructions of ships' cabins and migrant hostels helped overcome the problem by giving continuity and rhythm to each sub-theme. Each period was also introduced by a fine art work, although not all had gold frames.

We debated how we should include indigenous Australians. One view was that Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders are not immigrants so should not be included; another view was that they should be included by showing their responses to immigration. A third option was to show how indigenous people came to be in Australia. We eventually commissioned members of the Timbery family, from the Bidjigal community, to produce a painting showing their view of how they came to be in Australia and how they felt about the history of immigration.

To help establish the exhibition's contemporary connections, three films dealing with contemporary issues were placed in the middle of the gallery and the historic sub-themes were displayed around them. The films juxtaposed contrasting views without overt editorial comment: people talked about how many migrants Australia should take, they discussed post-war migration, and nine-year-

old children talked about their experiences of coming to Australia.

The overall tone of the exhibition was positive but it did show some of the hard bits. Racism was there, for example, but it was not dominant. We took the view that it was important to woo audiences with a positive message — particularly now.

We could have produced an exhibition emphasising diversity and change but, in the abstract, I don't see any clear way to arbitrate between those options. In an empirical sense, I think the exhibition was defensible within the evidence we had. Our exhibition was produced for an audience that did not expect to see an exhibition about both pre-war and post-war immigration, but did want to see an exhibition which reflected its own experiences. Our approach was influenced by the information we had about these perceptions and, while we cannot claim to have found a conclusive answer, the importance of our attempt to include as many immigrant groups as possible was borne out by exit surveys of visitors. These showed that visitors who had found reference to the ships they travelled on, or their countries of origin, were amongst the happiest.

Kevin Jones is a curator at the Australian National Maritime Museum.

'Tears, Fears and Cheers' won the Government and the overall Grand Award in last year's National Multicultural Marketing Awards, organised by the NSW Ethnic Affairs Commission.



## Transforming Cinderella Collections: The Management and Conservation of Australian University Museums, Collections & Herbaria

Edited by Peter Stanbury. DCA/AV-CC University Museums Project Committee, 1998.

In 1996 the first *Cinderella Collections* report hit the desks of vice-chancellors at universities in Australia. Its effects have been significant in focusing attention on the importance of university museums, and improving their profile both within universities and in the wider museum community.

The preface to this, the second report lists at least six quantifiable and substantial achievements arising from the first report, including an enormous increase in the development of policy by universities in regard to their museums and collections. (Now, 31 out of 36 universities either have an approved policy or are close to it.)

In addition to these listed achievements, there have been quite significant individual results which are in part attributable to the first report. Chief of

these is the growing cooperation between members of the sector, evidenced in several substantial projects as well as in minor ways. The development of AUMOL (Australian University Museums on Line) is one such project, which commenced with an Australian Research Council grant to the Macleay Museum, at the University of Sydney. AUMIS, the Directory of University Museums and Collections web page managed by Macquarie University, is also performing a major positive role in giving focus and presence to university museums and collections. In addition, a forthcoming exhibition, 'Cinderella's Gems', curated by Tony Geddes at UTS and Belinda Allen at UNSW, of artworks from most NSW universities, is set to tour regional New South Wales in 1999.

Not all the news has been good, however. At least one university museum has been closed and its collection transferred to another institution, and at least one collection (also a geological collection) has been disposed of less appropriately, nor following guidelines to good practice.

The report is in three main sections. The first updates the 1996 report, and includes

selected museum policies developed following *Cinderella Collections*; and an example of a strategic plan, to assist other museums come up to speed. In other words, the second report continues the useful tradition of being something of a handbook for those who manage these collections, and a guide to good professional practice.

The second section, the major part of the book, reports on a survey of the conservation status of the collections owned or administered by universities in Australia. For the most part, the picture is grim. Only two universities have any conservators on staff, and in both cases these are mainly concerned with antiquities collections. Contract conservators are used by university art curators when funds are available, and the need for them is well appreciated by this group. However, most of the other collection types are virtually unconserved and frequently held in conditions which are far from any professional museum standard.

This is the section that one hopes will have most impact on the decision makers, as in general the position is dismal. However, the section is overlong, including much of the detail of the

## ICOM in Australia

The relevance of ICOM membership for Australian museum professionals was never more evident than in November last year, when 1600 delegates from all over the world converged upon Melbourne for ICOM 98. Only a world-wide organisation could provide the mechanism for such a large and diverse group to arrive at coherent and productive resolutions, and for the many strands of activity undertaken by special interest groups or committees to interface so well over a short period.

From 2–7 July in 2001, the next general assembly and conference will be held in Barcelona, Spain. The 18th general assembly came to its conclusion with a multimedia presentation about Barcelona, which communicated something of the warmth, passion and vitality of that city, but if there are more Australians than ever before attending the next conference, I doubt the lure of

Barcelona will be the only attraction. The impetus is just as likely to be the enthusiasm generated in Melbourne by the experience of a sense of community on a grand scale: it's all very well to know about the issues that face museums in different environments, but to actually speak with and listen to colleagues at first hand creates a reality that is far more insistent than words in print, images on a page or even the flash of email transmission.

One of the things to look forward to in Barcelona is the glimpse that might be revealed, of cultural issues underlying museum practice in that particular country, and the ways in which the Spanish people are able to reflect these issues in their cultural institutions. It was clear from the first moments of ICOM 98 that the debates inherent in the relationships between indigenous and settler cultures in Australia were to

become both a bewildering and revelatory experience for many people visiting this island continent for the first time.

Museums only have relevance insofar as they reflect and relate to people — and concern with human and cultural matters is a universal one, transcending national and geographic boundaries. The existence of ICOM is as much a reflection of this concern as it is an expression of the cultural diversity it encompasses. ICOM needs supportive and discerning individuals as much as it needs the breadth of vision which maintains the vitality of its operations. So keep up your ICOM membership and head for Barcelona — perhaps via an international committee meeting or two, along the way.

*Doreen Mellor, ICOM Australia national committee member and editor of the ICOM newsletter. Doreen.Mellor@flinders.edu.au*

survey, and tends to mix practical advice aimed at collection managers with awareness-raising intended for university administrators.

While in some cases the conservator's report produced few surprises to museum staff, in all cases the existence of an independent assessment is of considerable value in putting a case to the university. However, given the truly difficult financial circumstances of most universities and their museums and collections, immediate action to improve the conservation status of many collections is unlikely unless special allocations of funding are made.

The last section (fortunately on different coloured paper) updates the Directory of University Museums, Collections and Herbaria (available through AUMIS, with a direct link to AMOL and AUMOL) and this is of particular and regular use to those of us working within the sector. The arrangement by state and university is in clear tables which include all relevant data (description, scope and significance of the collection, as well as contact and location details). One hopes it will be of equal use to university decision makers.

*Transforming Cinderella Collections* is a long and heavy report. It is dense reading, although carefully constructed. I fear that it will not have the impact of the first report, useful though it will be to the actual staff of museums. Much of it records information at too basic a level to attract the attention of busy senior staff who will read little more than the executive summary and recommendations, and perhaps the directory section which relates to their own institution. For even this, we in university museums are grateful. Whether it will have greater impact will depend to a large degree, as ever, on the energy of museum staff in promoting their cause.

**Vanessa Mack**

*Director of the Macleay Museum, University of Sydney*

### **Caring for our Culture**

*Published Museums Australia Inc., 1998.*

*Caring for our Culture* will be a valuable addition to the shelves of those local museums staffed principally by volunteers. It was prepared by the Museums Australia Standing Committee for Regional, Local and Specialist Museums and Galleries — Working Group, and was

launched during National Museums Week in May. The national guidelines 'for museums, galleries and keeping places' will assist all of that ilk to chart their own direction within an agreed framework, and to realise their potential. It is pleasing to pick up an Australian publication addressing these needs after years spent adapting British and Canadian tracts to antipodean conditions.

There are over 2,000 museums in Australia. Most are run by volunteers, dedicated people who are eager to learn, willing to apply professional standards, but who frequently do not have the human or financial resources to achieve their aims. For many years the state branches of Museums Australia and the chapter membership system have done their best to bolster the confidence and capabilities of those who are isolated by travel-time and distance. It is therefore heartening to see in the introduction an acknowledgment of the important role played by local museums as part of the national scene. Small museums are the custodians of many significant collections, and it is therefore fitting that the guidelines are supplied to members without cost — one way of helping to ensure that the keepers of our heritage are working to a common plan.

The guidelines consist of a set of comprehensive questions identifying the core responsibilities of museums. These questions for self-evaluation should not be regarded simply as a check list or as a 'pass or fail' test. The authors are aware of the limited resources of the sector. Thus, the aim and the challenge is for a museum to review its performance, and then to devise a strategy to meet the national minimum standards while paying due regard to the museum's own purpose and priorities.

There are two sections: 'Planning and Purpose', and 'Operational Guidelines'. The suggestions for applying the guidelines indicate they can be used by a museum on a stand-alone basis, but the authors recommend the involvement of an outside facilitator with experience of museums and expertise in chairing meetings. This is sound advice, but it may not always suit the circumstances of smaller, isolated museums. The document also has a summary of purpose introducing each part, worded discreetly with a view to encouraging the potential user. The further reading reference section at the rear is almost too fulsome.

The topics within 'Planning and Purpose' are there to assist museum committees to focus on the fundamental whys and wherefores of their organisation, and to ponder the strengths and weaknesses of their daily operations. We are told that the first section, called 'Understanding Your Museum' and occupying half a page, is the most important. But it is quite apparent from the wealth of detail in the following 25 pages which part of the book will engage most of the typical museum committee's time and effort. Each topic in the 'Operational Guidelines', such as 'Explaining and Communicating', has a helpful statement revealing the relevant objective.

The section on 'Managing Collections' is the most comprehensive and is an illustration of the high standards set by the guidelines. Here the thinking is based on the wide range of expertise in the working group. I feel obliged to say, however, that this section reveals a degree of inconsistency in the objectives underlying the guidelines. The set questions go beyond core responsibilities, but are not so expansive as to include a question directed to external access to records and collections. Surely, in this section, or within 'Researching Collections', some reference could be made to the example of AMOL for online access.

The range and success of the individual questions in promoting the desired national standards, as well as the methodology, will depend upon the target audience actually using the various sets of questions and responding through the feedback sheets. I understand that, as part of the production process, different sections of the guidelines were trialed in different states, but without the entirety being tested. The critical questions are: How will the guidelines work in practice? Will they have to be adjusted to suit local conditions and requirements?

The guidelines are a valuable blueprint. Because the document moves beyond a basic summary of core responsibilities, and points the way to some larger issues, it seems to me that all museums should start the process outlined in *Caring for Our Culture*. The standing committee should certainly be commended for the high standard it has set for itself as well as for the local museum sector.

**Sally Anne Hasluck**  
*Museum consultant, WA*

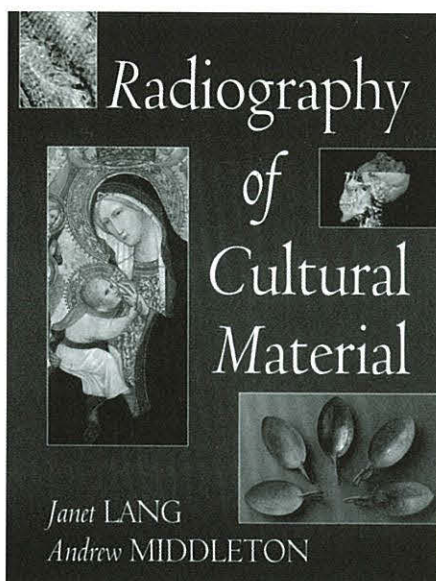
## Radiography of Cultural Material

Eds Janet Lang and Andrew Middleton,  
Butterworths-Heinemann, 1997.

My first impression of *Radiography of Cultural Material* was very positive. The cover is great, with coloured images of a Madonna, Roman spoons, a CAT-sectioned head and some textile: something for everybody and good quality stuff at that. Having read almost every word in the 200 pages I believe this book should be bought by all museum and art gallery librarians for their curators and conservators. I admit that I am not a practicing radiographer but I have used x-rays and a variety of other imaging techniques over the past 20 years in conservation work. The problem has always been to find a general summary of the variety of available techniques which is sufficiently detailed to be practical and yet not so dry that it sends you to sleep as you read it in bed after a hard day at work.

The nine chapters are well balanced and the editors have done a good job in ensuring the styles are consistent, making it read more like a single-author book than a collection by specialist authors of individual chapters. The theory and practice sections in chapter one should not be skipped, as the variables that are carefully noted show how clever you have to be to get the optimum results. After digesting this section the reader is able to more fully appreciate the subtleties associated with the various images generously scattered throughout the book. The colour sections add significantly to the scientific and aesthetic value of the work. Although I am familiar with the use of x-rays and other imaging techniques for metals, the sections on ceramics and paper are eye-opening. Conferences have given me an insight into the use of various techniques for works of art on canvas but the chapter on paintings is even better, for it is all there and available as soon as you open the section.

For those who like a bit of a mystery, the chapter detailing the use of clinical radiography on archaeo-human remains is gripping stuff; it could send budding crime novelists into realms of great imagination. Having got into the realm of human remains, the penultimate chapter relates issues of human foibles in the form of forgeries and fakes. The ingenious ways



in which the gamut of techniques has been applied to root out the cleverest of tricksters makes for a good read and provides a wonderful stimulus to thinking about our own collections and guessing how many of our national icons are indeed fakes made by conmen in the not too distant past!

The final chapter was disappointing to me in that I wanted more details about imaging issues and how to make sure that what I request of external service providers will be what is needed for our curatorial activities. By the end of the book I found I wanted more. However, given that 'sensible people' are not addicted to finding more examples and applications of techniques for their own situation, most readers will be content to know they now have a ready reckoner of applications in *Radiography of Cultural Material*.

Most of the chapter authors are from the British Museum's Department of Scientific Research. If this book is typical of the output of that organisation, the future of their collections is in very good hands. One thing that really impressed me was the excellent referencing of the sections with many good French and German periodicals cited. I thoroughly recommend this book. Every institution training conservators and curators should provide several copies in their libraries; otherwise librarians will have to put it on the reserve collection shelves to prevent it being always out on loan.

**Dr Ian MacLeod**

Director of museum services, WA Museum

## Information Management in Museums

By Elizabeth Orna and Charles Pettitt.  
Second edition, Gower, 1998.

Here is a must have for those of us involved in the struggle of managing museum information and explaining it to others. It is a much updated version of the 1982 edition with a useful 'then and now' introduction which places museums in an information management context. This is followed by a helpful good news/not-so-good-news summary of the comparisons which set the style for this readable text.

The aims of the book are clearly stated. The authors highlight the need for 'a text which: 1. Helps readers in the museum professions to think productively in the light of their own experience... 2. Presents basic principles... 3. Spreads knowledge of successful practice...'

Likewise, the targeted readership is clearly museum staff, managers with responsibility for 'any aspect of the information activities of museums', and students. It approaches the topic from an institutional information management direction rather than from museum collection management practices. This offers a comforting and confident feel for museum information managers scrabbling on the sides of those apparently unconquerable mountains in order to capture, order and provide access to museum information and knowledge.

The book is arranged in two parts. The first includes aims one and two and is a theoretical coverage of the topics, tempered strongly with a practical element. It covers the museum information context, users, access, strategy and human resources and then moves into the use of information technology.

The chapter format opens with 'in this chapter' and closes with 'summary' and 'references', which give the reader an excellent path into the topic. The references offer an historical aspect which would be otherwise difficult to obtain.

The second and larger part contains case studies and opens with a useful 'topic finder' list. It covers a wide range of topics including business plans, data capture/entry by volunteers, information systems strategies, standards, MDA and marketing strategies. The cases are from individual institutions and although all come from the UK, they cover a good

range in type and size. Each study has an introduction or background explanation and concludes with an evaluation and references. The UK focus carries through to software and standards coverage and so reduces the appropriateness in the Australian context but, if kept in mind, this does not reduce the value of the studies as practical examples incorporating basic principles.

Museum information is at the fore throughout the book but it is also placed in its community context and linked with its close-cousin relationships to libraries and archives. It emphasises the conceptual practical approach. Advice on how to start is structured and sensible without being simplistic or denying the complexities and difficulties involved.

Chapters on technology and computerised information management systems include issues of integration, impact, internet, images, interactions and copyright. Diagrams showing data flow and backup routines are clear and meaningful. The basic requirements for commissioning and setting up a computer system are well covered and will act as a sound anchor for those embarking on the turbulent, partially-charted waters of museum information system acquisition. The information can be applied to both small and large museums.

The designer diagrams offer a refreshing look at difficult-to-illustrate concepts, such as information cycles and museum knowledge. They are a little confusing at first since they are without a heading and rely on the text reference to the figure number. Once studied, however, they offer what museum exhibition graphics strive for: an insight into elusive concepts.

If you are in a small or large museum and can associate 'scrabbling' with museum information management, are seeking single-liners to clarify and articulate your heartfelt principles and integrity, or need to hold your ground with computer information technology providers, this book is for you. If you are looking for an information policy or information management strategy to modify for Monday's meeting, there isn't one, but the building tools are definitely there.

#### **Alison Melrose**

*Co-ordinating curator of information services, Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery*

### **Boomerang: Behind an Australian Icon**

*Philip Jones. Adelaide, Wakefield Press, 1996*

This fascinating monograph reverses the trend of recent decades to consign topological analyses of items of material culture to rarely-read catalogues and dusty monographs.

Carefully and thoroughly researched — and clearly written — this book provides a timely and detailed examination of Australia's premier cultural icon: the indigenous boomerang. The copious photographs provide a vital counterpoint to the detailed text; at the same time, they provide a variety of cultural contexts within which the reader may appreciate the wide diversity, as well as a commonality of themes, encapsulated within the subject.

This book examines the wide stylistic range of boomerangs collected since Europeans first arrived in Australia. Most examples come from the South Australian Museum, which holds the world's largest and most representative collection of Aboriginal artefacts, and where the author is senior curator in the Department of Anthropology. Significantly, the history of individual boomerangs provides an insight into the colonial relationships which served to frame, and inform, the nature of these early encounters. As Jones notes (p.5), 'Like European commodities, boomerangs and other artefacts became objects of exchange within a new sphere of contact'.

Through colonisation and cultural appropriation, images of Aboriginal boomerangs have come to play a key role in the emergence of a popular national Australian identity. Aboriginal perspectives continue to play a vital part in the definition, and re-definition, of this cultural icon.

Boomerangs are not unique to Australia: Jones refers to the archaeological record in Egypt (4,000 years B.P.), North Africa (9,000 years B.P.), and Poland (23,000 years B.P.), but notes that the world's oldest known wooden boomerangs were excavated in South Australia in 1973. Dated at more than 9,000 years B.P., this example had lain, along with other wooden artefacts, perfectly preserved in a peat swamp. Jones asserts that there can be no doubt that indigenous Australian cultures can claim the longest continuous association with the boomerang.

This enduring association is reflected in the many Boomerang Dreamings that occur across much of Australia, and the evidence provided by rock art surviving from this period. Jones reproduces several Dreaming stories associated with the boomerang, specifically the returning boomerang, which are supported by images within contemporary acrylic paintings from Central Australia. He provides detailed accounts of how boomerangs are made, in all their material and aesthetic diversity, and the manner in which they are used: as percussion instruments, for fighting and hunting, and as items of exchange. The use, in particular, of returning boomerangs to hunt birds on the wing is recorded widely. Coastal-dwelling Aboriginal groups also used wooden boomerangs, later made of sheet steel, to hunt fish. Even more interesting, however, are records documenting the Aboriginal use of boomerangs for sport, demonstrating prowess and accuracy.

This book derives, in part, from the exhibition 'Boomerang!' curated first in 1992 by the author and Chris Anderson, former director of the South Australian Museum. A highlight of that exhibition, for this writer, was the display of 'boomerangabilia', an extraordinary collection of objects, assembled largely from private sources (including those of the exhibition curators), that have emerged from the broader Australian setting. These items depict, in some way, an image of the boomerang. Powerfully symbolic of the processes of appropriation experienced by many Aboriginal cultures, these images illustrate dramatically the trivialisation of specific localised Aboriginal cultural values and a denial of the religious, land-based nature of these societies. Advertising logos compete with travel brochures, football jumpers with ashtrays: all are examples of manufacturers' utilisation of ubiquitous images of the Australian boomerang.

This book is a vital contribution to our understanding of Australian popular culture, and the role that Aboriginal imagery has played in its development. Engaging but scholarly, this book provides a succinct and evocative statement on the significance of Australia's most important cultural icon.

#### **John E. Stanton**

*Curator at the Berndt Museum of Anthropology, University of WA*

A CD-ROM entitled *Boomerangs: echoes of Australia* has also been produced to incorporate interactive elements such as flight simulations, boomerang-making kits and a virtual gallery of over 250 boomerangs from the South Australian Museum collection.

### Lyre Bird Press

Perc Tucker Regional Gallery, Townsville.  
October–November, 1998. (Hoped to tour if funds forthcoming.)

Townsville's Perc Tucker Regional Gallery recently hosted a truly celebratory exhibition focusing on the thus-far 21 years of creative life enjoyed by the Lyre Bird Press. Perhaps most importantly, the exhibition highlighted the efflorescence of its achievements in the period since 1992 when its activities were vastly re-invigorated by an unforeseen, exciting and ultimately highly productive partnership formed between it and the College of Music, Arts and Theatre at James Cook University in Townsville.

Originally established in Melbourne in 1977 by Tate Adams and George Baldessin, the Lyre Bird Press aimed from the outset to produce limited edition *livres d'artiste* — or artists' books, an art form about which both artists were passionate. Adams had nurtured the idea of a fine art press since his years in London in the 1940s and 50s, and Baldessin was enthused by the art form as he found it in Paris in the mid-1970s. After a tragic setback in the premature death of Baldessin, Adams went on to produce several prize-winning volumes such as *Diary of a Vintage* (1981) and *John Brack Nudes* (1982). The latter remains among the most lavish artists' books ever produced in Australia. A single poignant trace of Baldessin's involvement at this early stage is the one-off volume illustrated by all members of Baldessin's immediate family and presented to Tate and Glen Adams for Christmas 1977. Now held in the James Hardie Library of Australian Fine Arts in the State Library of Queensland it, and copies of other early Lyre Bird editions, were re-assembled for the Perc Tucker show.

Operating into the mid-1980s from a small but elegant Queen Street office in the heart of Melbourne's central business district, Adams continued to plan *livres d'artiste* — including a memorial volume featuring Baldessin's prints. Now, more than a decade later, and having in the

meantime moved to North Queensland, Adams is finally preparing a volume with six etchings reprinted from the artist's original plates. These, together with five Music Hall etchings re-printed from Fred Williams' original plates, were key works in the recent exhibition. With an introduction by Barry Humphries and a complete catalogue of all Williams' early music hall etchings, these prints were also bound into a spectacular book, launched on the opening night in the presence of Lyn Williams.

Other recent publications on show included Jan Senbergs' large book of lithographs *In The Studio* (1988) and Julie Haas' popular hand-coloured drypoints assembled under the title *The Seven Deadly Sins in Sideshow Alley* (1988). These, and notice of forthcoming publications elaborated in the catalogue, provided ample evidence of continuing 'southern' input into the Press's activities.

Equally exciting was the energy and vivacity of the contribution by Queensland artists — particularly colleagues and students at James Cook University and other local institutions including the Perc Tucker, whose director, Frances Thompson, is to be congratulated for arranging this important exhibition.

Adams' unplanned and fortuitous meeting in Canberra with artist Ron McBurnie proved the fateful catalyst for the revival and survival of the Press. James Cook University provided a studio; Adams contributed both his unique expertise and the Lyre Bird imprint; and the artists and students immediately rallied around. Evidence of this happy arrangement, and also in the show, were 23 large original prints in various techniques produced by thirteen artists for an ambitious volume, *Palmetum* (1999), that will feature Townsville's famous palm gardens. Prominent among contributors are Townsville artists Anneke Silver, Anne Lord, Margaret Wilson, Cheryl Wilson, Normana Wright and Ron McBurnie.

Another feature of Lyre Bird's Townsville phase is the fresh ideas, and often humour, that characterised many of the books featured in the exhibition, including the 'off-the-wall' series contributed by print-making students. James Cook lecturers are also right behind the project, the exhibition including Ron McBurnie's heart-warming children's tale for adults, illustrated by nineteen etchings, *The Boy Who Tried to Kiss Himself* (1994). Also featured were pre-publication images intended for



Ron McBurnie, *The Boy Who Tried to Kiss Himself*, 1994. Etching, Lyre Bird Press.

inclusion in Cheryl Wilson's forthcoming book of *Ex Libris Bookplates* by North Queensland artists and Anne Lord's tribute to Queensland's famous Flying Art School.

Also evident from works on show is the new artistic fervour this friendly and productive environment has unleashed in Adams himself. His books *Island Voyage* (1996) and *Pandanus and Coconuts* (1997) provide new interpretations of the tropical landscape from the hands of a master relief-printer and wood-engraver.

The enthusiasm of visitors to this beautifully installed exhibition was quite infectious, exemplifying the vital role the arts can play in a community such as Townsville, where collaborations are truly and generously supported. The exhibition was accompanied by a striking illustrated catalogue complete, in its limited edition form, with an original 21st birthday card engraved by Tate Adams, and individual artists' interpretations of the Lyre Bird scattered throughout the text. All-in-all, a rare and memorable event.

Jenny Zimmer is a Melbourne-based writer.

### The Australian Family

*Twenty exhibitions at fourteen cultural institutions in Melbourne and six in regional Victoria. The Australian Family: Images and Essays.* ed. Anna Epstein, Melbourne, Scribe, 1998.

Imagine twenty different perspectives on the Australian family from twenty different collections. A rich mixture of the genteel and the criminal, the poignant and the



From the Jewish Museum of Australia's 'Circles and Cycles. The Australian Jewish Family' exhibition.

passionate, families at home and families separated, in formal portraits or holiday snaps, generations working together in the family business, Chinese and Italians, the newly arrived and those who were always here. The objects, images, stories and dramas of family history were exhibited for our delight and reflection as they wove similarity and difference into complex patterns of continuity and change.

These exhibitions and the excellent book which accompanied them were the product of an opportunity seized when it was realised that the Museum of Victoria would not be open for ICOM 98. What would the 1,500 delegates see when they flocked to Melbourne?

Dr Helen Light, director of the Jewish Museum of Australia, and other colleagues in Victoria's small museums formed a group to propose an ICOM museum event to show off their fine collections and museological talent. They chose *The Australian Family* as a topic with universal appeal.

Funds were raised to employ a project administrator who not only edited the book, but coordinated umbrella activities: a grand opening at Government House during ICOM, support for educational programs, and a marketing and publicity effort, especially in the regions. An excellent pocket book guide called *The Australian Family: This is us!* was distributed free.

In addition to these common activities, the group distributed funds on an equal basis to support the twenty exhibitions.

For the participant curators it was important that the topic was not prescriptive. They were free to interpret it as they wished and relate it to their own collections and interests. As one commented, 'It was a great impetus to do something more adventurous. We just needed that oomph, both from the money and the other things we did together.'

While it is impossible to discuss each exhibition here, I offer a few highlights.

The Dromkeen Collection of Children's Literature used book illustrations to represent change in family life. Images of Father in business suit reading the paper while Mother glides gaily round the kitchen in frilly apron have given way to Dad in bare feet and frayed jumper preparing an evening meal, with a multi-racial group of kids helping out.

The Old Melbourne Gaol examined the lives of women prisoners, many driven to crime by the pressures of family life in an era of no safety nets for hard times. They also show a family exhibit of a different kind: the dramatic four suits of armour worn by Ned Kelly and members of his family in their last action together.

Well-known racing families featured on audio and video interviews at the Australian Racing Museum, while the dynastic approach was also taken by the Performing Arts Museum. Famous musical comedy families featured in picture and sound. Visitors were glued to their headsets, enjoying the lively 'behind the scenes' talk characteristic of show biz.

At the Jewish Museum of Australia I especially liked lying on a bed, gazing up at a magnificent wedding canopy and listening to couples of every sort discussing their marriage and each other! To say nothing of a vigorous young people's argument about circumcision.

To highlight the importance of the gardens to family life, Rippon Lea devised a walking trail of photographs from the albums of the two families who owned the estate. A fascinating contrast between the Victorians dressed to die on a hot day, and the scantily clad young people round the swimming pool 50 years later.

The book of this project, *The Australian Family: Images and Essay*, is wonderful. Well-researched and interesting essays with abundant illustrations make it an excellent resource book as well as a delight to read. Mark Peel provides a compassionate introduction which surveys major continuities and changes in Australian family life. His descriptions of the relationships of family, kin and country in the cultural traditions of Aboriginal people lead us more deeply into the anguish of the stolen generations. This is complemented by a fine essay on the Koorie family by Tracey Johnston, who celebrates the strength and resilience of abiding attachment.

I commend this book to you for capturing the flavour of this inspiring project. Wise leadership and imaginative collaboration gave breadth and depth to the things they could do together, while encouraging them to create something memorable in their own separate spheres. It is a model worth studying.

**Rachel Faggetter**

*Museum Studies, Deakin University*

### **Immigration Museum**

*A campus of Museum Victoria. 400 Flinders St, Melbourne.*

Indigene and immigrant constitute the two poles of Australia's human history. The former has been studied, collected and exhibited in museums since first European contact. Museum exhibitions of Aboriginal culture are now largely made in consultation with Aboriginal people, and independent keeping places and cultural centres dot the countryside with Aboriginal-controlled presentations of indigenous history.

Immigrant history, however, barely appeared in museums except as relics of Great Men: explorers, political fathers, mining or pastoral barons. The social history focus on the daily life of ordinary people arrived in the mid-1980s, when the new state ideology of multiculturalism was in full voice, and curators began consciously to collect evidence of non-British presence in Australia. The theme of migration emerged as one of the central stories of Australian society.

South Australia established the nation's first dedicated Migration Museum in 1985. Other state museums soon offered exhibition programs on the social contribution of migrants, though it has been observed that the pronounced non-Anglo character of the subjects suggests a rather calculated definition of migration. With the opening in November of Victoria's new Immigration Museum, and planning for one in Sydney, ethnic community interests receive politically satisfying but policy-free public acknowledgment.

Melbourne's Immigration Museum is housed in the old Customs House, a splendid neo-classical building on the bank of the Yarra, though now divided from the river by railway lines. In an elegant restoration, bluestone piers stand proud in white halls. A Festival Courtyard with Tribute Garden opened recently.

In fact, the building houses two museums. On the second floor is the Museum of Hellenic Antiquities, product of a special agreement between the Victorian and Greek governments to provide eponymous exhibitions. The collocation of immigration history and Greek culture could seem to overwhelm the inclusive emphasis of multiculturalism. Hence the two are distinguished by separate content, style and admission charge.

The inaugural exhibition of Hellenic antiquities is a display of Mycenaean jewellery and seals, including the recently repatriated Aidonia Treasure, all from the National Archaeological Museum in Athens. Australian classicists will rejoice to see this ancient and beautiful material, but it must be said that it is presented in such a staid manner that only classicists are likely to appreciate it.

By comparison, the first floor, containing the Immigration Museum displays, presents in very different terms. Drop-dead style, a dense but abstract object display, omnipresent audiovisual media, all bathed in a weird blue light, traverse

the theme of 'Leavings'. Further display cases focus on individuals' histories via their objects. This is a method meant to personalise experience, but it has become too frequent in contemporary museums; it is time for museums to offer more comparison and analysis of experience.

The imposing Customs Long Room, lined by giant order white Ionic columns, is obviously such an important architectural space that heritage considerations preclude any exhibit touching the walls. It's a difficult constraint for a museum, here answered with an abstract ship containing three walk-through cabin scenes of different eras. This too is a hackneyed device, though enlivened by ultra-realistic privy noises (children shriek with pleasure) and by external portholes with amusing vignettes on animal migrants such as rats and cockroaches.

The final gallery presents 'Impacts', the products and lifestyles introduced by migrants. Predictably, it focuses on food such as the espresso coffee of the Legend Cafe and a pasta business dating from the 1850s. Again, the style is cutting edge, but it is complex and confusing. A child's eye-height panel of questions featuring a comical cat lines this room, a friendly gesture.

All good museums these days have an 'access gallery' (sometimes more of a ghetto) where community groups can put on their own shows. The Immigration Museum's first community inhabitant is the Italian Historical Society, exhibiting 'La Dote: the importance of the dowry in the Australian Italian family'.

I have not yet noted that throughout the museum runs a stream of Aboriginal stories. Intended as recognition that immigration affects the indigenous population, it is more honoured in gesture than in depth of history. In fact, this might be said of the entire Immigration Museum: a victory of style over substance by political correctness clothed in hypercool design. It's an elegant but not encouraging vision for Australian museum integrity.

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