THE MAGAZINE OF MUSEUMS AUSTRALIA INC.

MUSEUM NATIONAL

VOL 7 • NO 4 • MAY 1999

NEW CENTURY, NEW MUSEUMS, NEW FRIENDS

FRONT DESK

As I write, we are looking forward to the 1999 Annual Conference, the first time that Museums Australia has met at its national conference in regional Australia. As you read, the conference will be behind us and a new national council in place for the period 1999–2001. I want to take this opportunity to thank the national council of 1996–1999 for their diligent work on behalf of the membership of Museums Australia. We have worked through our corporate plan, not without strong debate, and developed a business plan, identifying the core strategies for our association. New groups have been drawn into MA, particularly CAUMAC, the Council of University Museums, and the Regional Galleries Association. I am confident that our association is now well placed to move forward in developing services for members and in positioning MA as the key body to reflect the museum profession and museums of Australia.

While there will be changes in the national council, reflecting the votes of the members of Museums Australia, there are also changes foreshadowed in the national office. Until recently, Simeon Kronenberg was our national director, a position to which he brought considerable warmth and expertise, and showed diligence and dedication over the past four years. Alongside his role in the national office, he curated various exhibitions of contemporary art, wrote art reviews and provided regular comment to *Art Monthly*. We thank Simeon for working with and for us, and wish him success and enjoyment in his move into curatorial ranks at the McClelland Gallery, Melbourne. Interviews will be held shortly for the new national director.

One of the first tasks for the national office and the new national council will be to establish an office for Museums Australia in Canberra, a decision taken by the council at its meeting in February in Adelaide. Reflecting the important role of Museums Australia in advocating for the museum profession and for the role of our museums in society, our location in Canberra is expected to provide greater opportunity to develop and project a national role. Some functions will be retained in Melbourne. The National Museum of Australia has generously offered office space for Museums Australia. From this position, we look forward to working more closely with the national institutions in developing national frameworks and policies.

However, right now our concern is greatest for West Australian museums because of the legislation currently under debate in WA. *The Culture, Libraries and the Arts Bill 1998*, if passed, risks alienating the community from their museums and libraries, as ultimate control would reside with the minister. Such blatant ministerial interference with the governance of museums and libraries would result in a loss of public confidence in their cultural institutions, undoubtedly reducing public patronage in the form of benefaction, commitment to board service and volunteer activities, not to mention the risk to corporate sponsorship. As for ministerial control over acquisitions, rather than board scrutiny relying on the opinion and judgment of its curators, scientists and other professional staff, the collections of the state could face slow decline, stagnation or, worse, undue interference in accordance with ministerial taste.

Your association is briefing relevant bodies and individuals in order to see this bill defeated. Our museums must retain their ability to reflect our society, to preserve our cultural heritage and to manage their business professionally, and not fall under the control of the government that was, after all, elected to represent us and not to run our cultural organisations.

Sue-Anne Wallace
President

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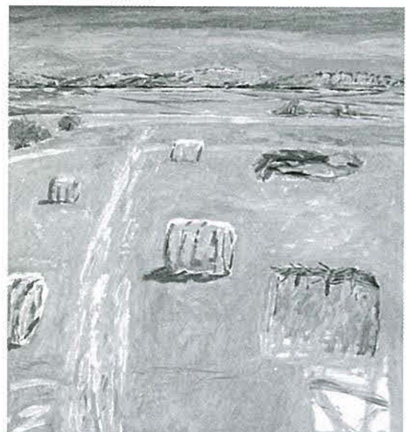

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David Chapman, *Cressy Harvest with a Red Cloud Shadow*, 1982, oil on canvas. Collection Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery. Purchased with the assistance of Friends of the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery.

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Museum National is published quarterly by Museums Australia Inc., and provides a major link between the association and its membership. *Museum National* aims to present news and opinions and to encourage debate on issues of museum practice, including the business of the association as appropriate. It seeks to represent the diverse functions and interests of the many institutions and individuals who comprise Australia's museum community. The content of the magazine reflects the policies of Museums Australia Inc., and is guided by an Editorial Committee. Contributions from those involved or interested in museums and galleries are welcome.

Department of the Environment and Heritage

The theme of this issue of Museum National is museum friends and their role in the museum community. And it seems that the issue on everyone's mind is how friends groups are responding to challenges that face a more business and customer focused museum community. It is certainly clear that museums really are starting to appreciate that a well run friends group constitutes one of the greatest assets for any museum operation.

David Tunny, former executive director, Friends of the Art Gallery of NSW and Kevin Fewster, director of the Australian National Maritime Museum, write as friends administrator and museum administrator respectively, fleshing out the many issues that affect relations between friends groups and their host museum. Hugo Leschen, immediate past president of the Australian Federation of Friends of Museums, describes how friends groups in Australia are coming under the more direct influence and control of their host institutions and how these changes are not always easily accomplished.

Linda Richardson, editor of Museum National, Ian Higgins, general manager of the National Gallery Society of Victoria and myself talk about reinventing museums and their friends groups. Museum friends are the 'loyalty' members of museums and, indeed, keeping these loyal members happy remains one of the great challenges of any museum, especially in a competitive leisure marketplace. A fact borne out by the larger friends groups spending more time engaged in research and monitoring of the success of activities in an effort to ensure they remain focused on serving their members.

A series of case studies from across Australia provide some wonderful insights into operations of museums and their friends groups. Max Dingle, president, Australian Federation of Friends of Museums and Carol Serventy, president, World Federation of Friends of Museums, describe the Australian and worldwide museum friends scene, where increasing professionalism of friends groups is apparent.

Friends and museum professionals will be gathering for the WFFM Congress in Sydney in September 1999. I hope many Australian museum professionals will join with their museum friends in September to share the experience in this remarkable museum gathering.

Kenneth Park is community affairs manager of Wesley College, Melbourne, and guest editor of this issue of Museum National.

Don't Be Afraid To Jump Into Bed With Your Partner

DAVID TUNNY

As someone who has worked in the area of museum membership for a number of years, a comment made by a member in an attitude survey a few years ago has always stuck in my mind. In answer to a question about what their membership meant to them, the person answered, 'My membership card gives me a proprietorial feeling as I walk through the door'. For membership managers this is music to the ears; for museum professionals this can be their worst nightmare.

For some working in museums, the notion of member as proprietor confirms their vision of a well meaning amateur with views on everything, from the arrangement of pictures on the walls and the merits of the latest blockbuster to the quality of the coffee in the cafe.

In less enlightened times the views of members were simply ignored. Nowadays, a strong members group, either run independently or as a department of the institution, is seen as essential. Museums understand members are their most loyal audience and generally they are accorded special status.

But listening to what members think about particular shows, about the balance of an annual exhibition program, or the layout of the museum and, yes, the shortcomings of the cafe, has not yet caught on. Audience research is common, usually by buttonholing people as they wander around the museum and asking them a series of set questions. Using members in focus group settings, where free flowing discussion takes place across a range of topics, and which can reveal why people hate the latest lovingly presented show, can be instructive. I am hard pressed to think of any museum that has a consultative committee of members who are regularly asked how they view the museum's efforts.

It seems that if members are negative about certain aspects of the museum it is unlikely the casual visitor will be enthusiastic. Many members are passionate about the institution to which they belong and really care about its wellbeing and its future. Hearing what your best customers think, and acting on the results, makes good sense.

Which brings me to the nub of this article. The bad old days of them and us, daggers drawn, and 'bloody members' as I have heard them referred to, are well and truly behind us. Members are generally nurtured by museums. But they have not yet been fully embraced as 'partners'.

This is perhaps the last phase in what has been a long road to accord the

member the status that their custom and patronage deserve. Someone who pays to have a relationship with a museum does so because that institution rates highly in the hierarchy of things that have importance in their spiritual life.

Today, more then ever, museums face a hard to please leisure market, one that has little loyalty and is constantly bombarded with new and different offerings. Whether they like it or not, museums are seen as just one more leisure-time option by the cultural consumer. The museum experience will be measured against all the other cultural products (and the non-cultural products too). So the museum cannot afford to ignore the reality of the market — as hard as this is in an endeavour where collection, enquiry, challenge and conservation play such fundamental roles.

Members can help the museum stay in touch with the market, in all kinds of ways. In my last role as a members manager, there were always some key indicators of the likely success of a new exhibition. One of these was the response to the traditional members viewing function — the wine and cheese night. Within a few days of bookings opening, it was possible to predict the likely success of a new show. This barometer proved virtually faultless as a way to measure the general appeal of shows. It was also a measure of the need to continually move with the times, as the term 'wine and cheese night' became decidedly old fashioned and attendances dropped off. The event was reinvented as 'Arts after Hours' and its lifespan was extended.

Much debate goes on in the curatorial corridors of museums about why shows fail to draw an audience. With the best will in the world it could never be said that curators are in the best position to judge audience tastes. Yet that audience is right under their noses — members who come to more events than anyone else. Embrace them for they reflect the wider attitudes of the more promiscuous cultural consumer. Without ever wanting to assume the mantle of curator, from a grass roots perspective they can tell museums much about what is good and bad about the things they do. After all, there is much spoken in absolute frankness between the sheets.

David Tunny is a consultant specialising in membership development, business planning, marketing and research, currently working with the Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales. He is a former executive director of the Art Gallery Society of New South Wales.

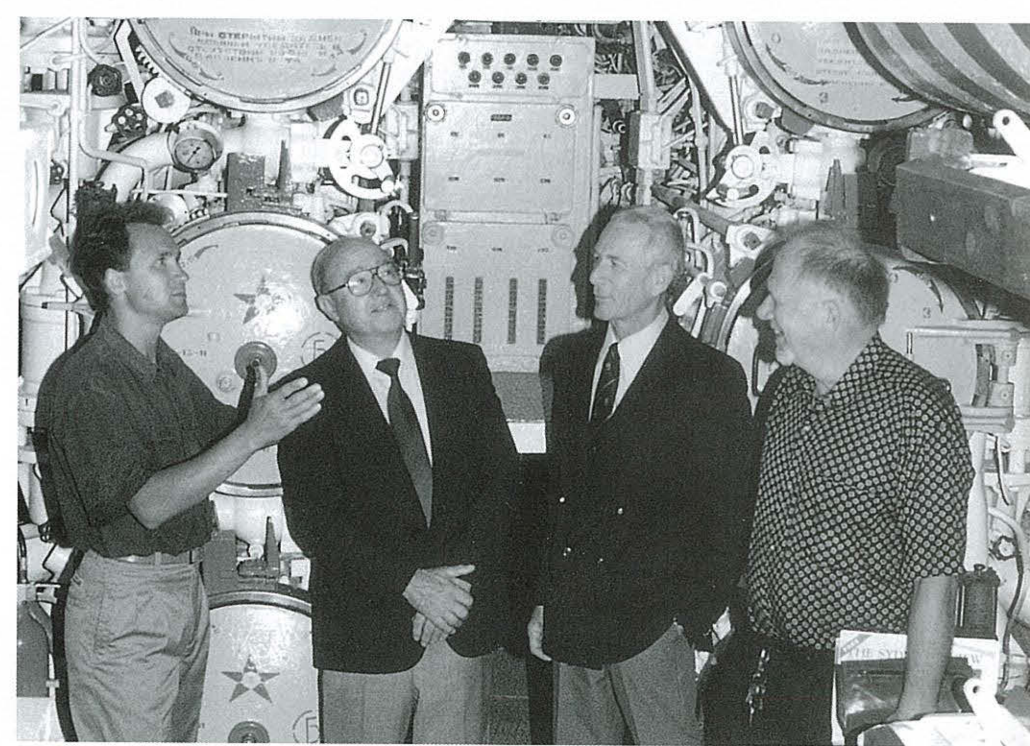
Museum Members — A Director's Perspective

DR KEVIN FEWSTER

How many conferences have we all been to where the theme has been 'building links with the community', or some such title? Invariably, the speakers stress the imperative need for museums to strengthen their ties with those members of the community who come to our museums, and with those who currently do not.

Museum members* are, I believe, probably the key group in fostering these bonds. Not only are they crucial in their own right, because they directly support our institutions through their regular attendance and annual subscription dues, but they also serve as our cheerleaders, our boosters to the wider society. As we all know, nothing matches word-of-mouth endorsement.

A healthy, vibrant members program is a good indicator of a museum that is alive and has strong community links. Should the day ever come when the museum needs to defend itself from media or political attack, the years put into nurturing its members are likely to be richly rewarded.



Visiting Russian submariner Igor Kolosov (left) shows members of the Australian National Maritime Museum through the torpedo room on the Russian Foxtrot submarine, displayed recently at Museum Wharf on Darling Harbour, Sydney.

It is often assumed that members join because they are regular visitors to the museum. While for many this is obviously the case, it is far from a universal truth. Nearly 20 per cent of National Maritime Museum members live well away from Sydney and hence get to our building infrequently. I'm sure our profile is far from unique. Sure, we give our 'Out of Port' members (as we call them) a discount on their annual dues, but they still clearly derive strong personal satisfaction from belonging to a major cultural institution. Several interstate members have told me that, as well as enjoying our publications, they regard the museum as their home away from home when they visit Sydney.

When we were considering how to structure our members program, probably the biggest issue we debated was whether to link it directly to our large volunteers program or whether to keep the two separate and distinct. We followed the latter course and experience suggests we made the right decision. Many of our volunteers (and some staff too) are also paid-up members. As such, they enjoy all the normal benefits offered to members. I far prefer this to the situation I know of in some other museums where certain volunteer contributions constitute eligibility for membership of the members/friends group. It obviously works well for some, but I worry that it can lead to a confusion of roles or possibly promote jealous comparisons of the relative worth of one's assistance.

The great change I would like to see introduced for museum members in Australia is the allowance of membership dues as a taxation deduction. Our governments are regularly asking us to look towards the American museum model with less support coming from the state and more from corporate and community sources. Members programs are the cornerstone of the American museum world. Every American city has numerous museums boasting memberships of tens of thousands. My American colleagues unanimously agree that the reason for this is that a significant part of an individual's or family's annual membership dues can be claimed as a tax deduction.

While offering tax deductibility would deprive the Australian tax department of a very modest amount of money, it would encourage museums to be more responsive to their community and, as a bonus, be less directly reliant on government support. Moreover, it would encourage membership across the entire spectrum of museums. Some people would join for the direct benefits offered, others would pay their dues as a symbolic or real way of showing their support for their local museum or gallery. Either way, the museum would be financially better off and, perhaps far more importantly, it would have immeasurably closer links with its community. It would, I feel sure, be supported across all parties and, indeed, across the nation.

With taxation reform the flavour of the month, I suggest all who read this should lobby their local parliamentary members. You just never know...

Dr Kevin Fewster is director of the Australian National Maritime Museum.

* I have not distinguished between 'members' and 'friends' programs. Generally friends groups are constituted as separate bodies to the museum whereas members programs are run within the museum. The National Maritime Museum runs a members program which is administered by staff working within the museum's Commercial and Visitor Services Branch. We currently have over 6000 members.

Become a member!

of the Australian Federation of Friends of Museums

The AFFM is the national voice to promote museums for the benefit of all Australians

The AFFM represents membership groups and enthusiastic individuals who support culture and the perfoming arts - including museums, galleries, botanic gardens, libraries, zoos and archives around Australia.

AFFM supports all Friends groups by sharing news, advice, help and good practice about membership and volunteers.

Who can join? ... members groups, friends groups and individuals

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AUSTRALIAN FEDERATION OF FRIENDS OF MUSEUMS INC.

Living in Changing Times: The Evolution of Museum Friends in Australia

HUGO LESCHEN

There has been an interesting change taking place in museum friends groups over the past decade or so. A change which may have gone unnoticed by many, but which will inevitably alter the way members of the general public relate to their cultural institutions.

Friends in Australia have traditionally been established according to what can be seen as the English model. A group gets together, often of the 'worthy' sort of citizen, to provide additional help to their local museum, art gallery, library or such like. They are not interested in playing the role of a professional member of the museum's staff, preferring instead to gather together other like-minded people to establish a group primarily to advocate the good works of the museum and promote its cause to the local community, through whatever networks may be available to them. They are usually constituted as an incorporated association with their own articles and board structure, and they have a mission statement that dedicates their efforts to the museum's general betterment, while preserving their own independence If they are involved in fundraising at all, their role is usually dedicated to assisting with the purchase of new acquisitions. In a sense, it is about members of the public working together to improve the public's collection.

The other model generally seen in friends groups is most common in the United State of America. There, friends are a part of the development/fundraising/marketing department. They are run by professional museum staff, with perhaps a group of high profile members forming a consultative committee. Their primary, sometimes only, function is to run activities and events, galas and the like, that raise funds for projects nominated by the museum. Given their primary focus, they generally include a disproportionate number of people who are concerned with such things as social status and meeting people who might be able to help them move up various pecking orders.

Friends frolic in Adelaide after two days of intensive meetings: (L–R) Ian Higgins, National Gallery Society of Victoria; Sylvia Jordan, National Gallery of Australia Membership Department; Kenneth Park, Community Affairs, Wesley College; Hugo Leschen, Australia Foundation for Culture and the Humanities, and immediate past-president of the AFFM.

Over the past ten or so years there has been a distinct shift in the general landscape of Australian friends whereby some groups have moved, by degrees, away from the English model towards the American one. This process has been more evolutionary than revolutionary and has, of course, taken on a uniquely Australian quality about it. However, the fact that many museum friends groups are now seen as integral cogs in some museums' fundraising efforts, and that some have been reconstituted to become part of certain museums' administrations, thereby losing their independence, should give us reason to pause and consider what we see as the role of friends groups in the future.

The very essence of Australian museums is based on the fact that they are owned by the public for the public's benefit. The vast majority have been built up over the years, generally through public benefaction and the generosity of a number of key philanthropists. Unlike many American museums, Australian museums are not usually based on the former collection of a wealthy industrialist, nor are they owned by a trust or charitable body. Australian museum collections are nearly all owned by the state, with civic minded people playing their part in holding and improving the various collections for future generations.

While accepting that museums need increasing amounts of non-government support, it would be a mistake to lose sight of the invaluable contribution friends have played in the past - acting as advocates for their institutions across social boundaries, motivated by the common good. Visitation records only indicate how many people have walked through the doors over a given period of time. An active and dynamic friends group, on the other hand, provides an insight into how the community in general values the museum and what part it plays in the very texture of the community's life. If this can be achieved while also increasing funds, all the better. But if the increased funds come at the cost of broad public commitment, we should all consider the long-term consequences for collections that do not belong to any one person or group, but to us all.

Hugo Leschen is program manager of the Australia Cultural Fund, Australia Foundation for Culture and the Humanities. He is immediate past-president of the Australian Federation of Friends of Museums.

Reinventing Museums, Reinventing Friends

IAN HIGGINS AND KENNETH PARK

The National Gallery Society of Victoria is undergoing a period of change. Ian Higgins, general manager of the gallery society, and Kenneth Park, community affairs manager at Wesley College and guest editor of this issue of *Museum National*, recently spoke to *Museum National* about the changes and broader challenges facing friends organisations in Australia.

MN — Museums today are facing new needs and new challenges. What impact is this having on their friends organisations?

IH — I would describe it as pressure to perform financially and to perform according to the objectives of the parent organisation. There are increased pressures involved in running a museum — they have to be run much more as businesses and they have to be accountable — and I think there is pressure for friends to be run in a similar way.

MN — Are friends organisations responding well to these changes, or are they struggling?

IH — I think they are struggling. They are struggling to grow and to be relevant. There's so much competition out there now for the discretionary dollar.

KP — Friends groups are having to change, whether they like it or not, otherwise the museum will move to change them. Sometimes it takes several years of careful negotiation and changes of leadership, on both sides, to actually come up with a pattern of operation that is acceptable to both sides. The National Gallery Society of Victoria, for example, is a very different sort of organisation than it was fifteen years ago.

MN — Is that because of the changing needs of the gallery?

IH — It's because we have to make ourselves relevant to our members and to the market out there, but there's also pressure from the museum management. The gallery society is currently moving from being a public company to become a department of the gallery. The board of directors of the gallery society, i.e. the company, made the decision that this was in the best interests of the organisation, and the gallery itself.

The changes come at a price but I think we have to accept the fact that change is part of today. At the end of the day the gallery society exists to support the National Gallery of Victoria and if that support needs to be channelled in a different way, then so be it. The trustees of the gallery are concerned that membership should continue to have a voice within the organisation, so four of the eight members of the committee in the new structure will be elected by the members and Steve Vizard, president of the council of the trustees and also the current chair of the gallery society, has strongly made the point that membership benefits will be maintained, and if anything enhanced.

MN — So ultimately it's the institution that controls the structure of the friends organisation, but it can't go off in a direction the friends disapprove of — the institution has to change with its friends?

IH — Yes, but perhaps another angle is that unless the institution offers attractive membership benefits, people won't maintain their membership.

KP — Friends groups exist because of the museum, so ultimately they have to work with the museum and go in the direction of the museum. But it's important for museums to understand that friends groups were set up for particular purposes, and sure, they're prepared to change, but sometimes that takes time. It's important that museum friends groups are recognised for what they bring to the organisation, other than just money.

IH — Friends groups today are really the loyalty program of a museum, in the same way that Qantas has a frequent flyer program and Ansett has a frequent flyer scheme.

MN — Are friends the frequent flyers of the museum world?

KP — The frequent and loyal visitors of the museum world. And you have to look after them and be very professional in the office environment. Friends are very demanding, and so they should be, because they pay money to come to events and they expect a level of professionalism which is much greater than was expected ten years ago.

MN — Do museums appreciate this increased professionalism?

KP — A museum is not worth its salt unless it can sustain a vibrant friends program. Friends need to be treated with

The National Gallery Society of Victoria's membership stands at around 11,000 and is the gallery's largest support group. Members enjoy exclusive and at times free access to special exhibitions at the NGV. This benefit is regarded by members as the most important membership benefit.

respect because they're a significant resource. But you also have to be prepared for them to stand up and say, 'Hey, look, we think you're wrong'. If you can't manage your friends, I think you're stuffed when it comes to trying to manage the public. If you can't keep the people who are really interested in your organisation engaged, what hope have you got?

MN — In seeking new dollars and new friends, do museums sometimes forget about retaining existing members?

IH — There's an element of that. But it costs far less to keep an existing customer than it does to go out and attract a new one. This is where it's becoming much more of a business. You have to look after your existing customers, and the decision to grow should not be taken at the expense of your existing customers.

MN — Are these issues being confronted overseas or does Australia have its own particular set of circumstances?

IH — In Melbourne we've done a lot of benchmarking with overseas galleries and found that membership benefits are pretty much the same the world over. Members generally get discounts for admission, at the museum's retail outlets, at the food and beverage outlets, there'll be a members room, and probably a spread of discounts you can obtain around town through your membership card. The benefits that we offer and the prices that we charge have been benchmarked against six of the top museums in the world, and our benefits are highly attractive and price competitive.

KP — It's a very sophisticated operation — membership benefits are a carefully researched package of ideas and a continuing analysis of those ideas to make sure the package is right.

MN — Is the overall strength of the museum program a drawcard for members or will they visit anyway because the museum is their club?

IH — Programming is a benefit. Research that we have done, however, shows that the most valued benefit of membership is the discounts to special exhibitions, where members can get up to a 50 per cent discount. Members programs are really designed to boost membership in terms of offering some exclusive opportunities.

KP — And members might visit for a particular lecture, but then they'll go to the shop, have a coffee, see an exhibition, and before you know it they're value adding right through the museum. I think they see membership as an investment that is going to offer a great return. But it's also an opportunity to support the museum and its activities. And the fact that they think of the museum as a place to bring family and friends is all largely due to the fact that they feel a sense of pride in the place.

MN — What happens if the members disagree with the direction of the museum, or of a particular exhibition, or a particular director?

KP — Max Dingle's reference to a marriage is quite interesting. You have to work at the relationship and that's why friends representatives on advisory groups or boards is important as a conduit. It's up to the museum to feed as much information through to the friends leadership as possible, and there needs to be some cross-fertilisation all the way through.

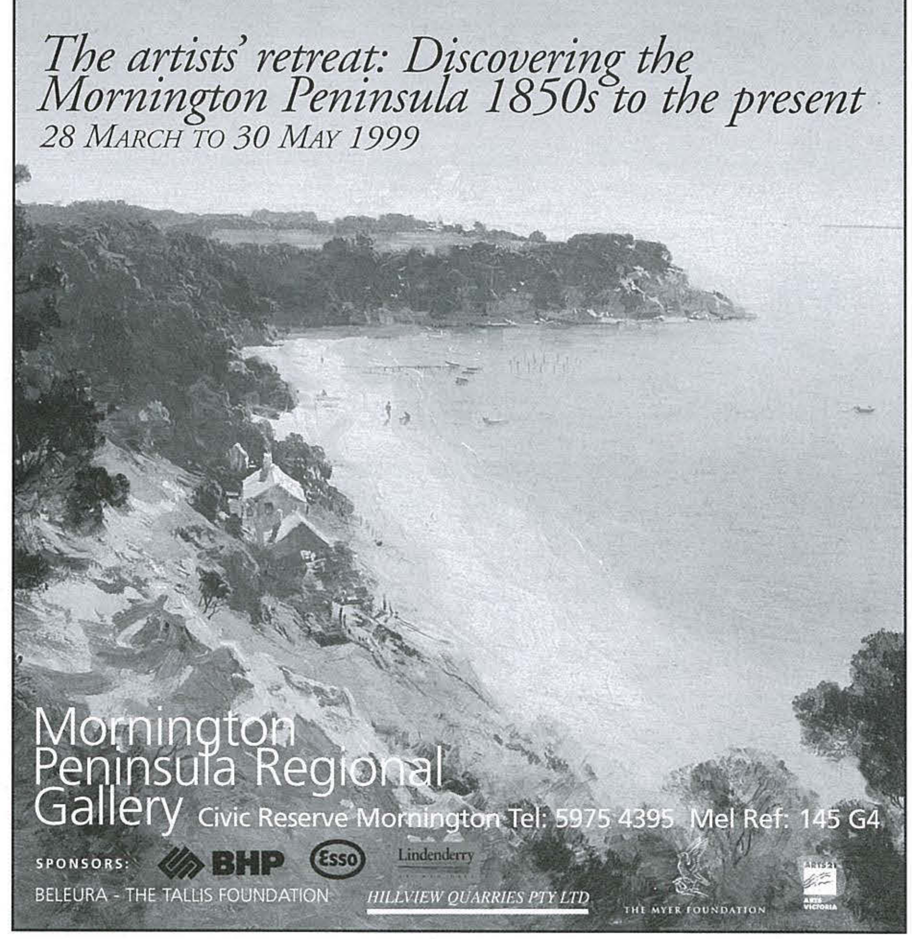
IH — I don't altogether agree with the concept of a marriage. Marriage implies partnership and equality and I see friends organisations and members very much as a loyalty program of their parent organisation. We're really talking about customers who are regular visitors to the institution. They have a stronger affiliation with that institution, they're prepared to pay for it, but in return they want a series of benefits and opportunities. That's really the crux of it. And it's very important that the parent organisation has a strong image in the community because that flows on to how successful the friends organisation can be.

MN — Are friends also sponsors?

IH — No, sponsors are not generally individuals, rather they are companies. Friends are there to provide financial support as well as loyalty but the financial support is very important. The National Gallery Society of Victoria, between 1993 and 1998, provided more than $1.3 million in cash to the NGV.

KP — Friends are supporting the institution and that's basically it. Feeling good is part of that. The challenge for these sorts of organisations is to maintain that sense of feeling good about supporting institutions, but at the same time managing it as a properly run business that can sign off on things and get the money that's required for particular projects.

MN — David Tunny recounts a comment made in an attitude survey: 'My membership card gives me a proprietorial feeling as I walk through the door'. Do you think



this is how gallery society members feel about their institution?

KP — I think when Ian's members come through the door they expect to be recognised and looked after. And Ian and his staff do their best to do that because they realise they are the loyal audience of the gallery. But friends are not the owners of the museum.

IH — And as museums become more commercially focused the emphasis on all staff responding to customer needs becomes that much more part of the training and part of the culture of the institution. But I tend to disagree with the notion of ownership. We're about providing benefits to people and if we draw on the analogy of the airlines providing 'club' benefits, the airline contracts to provide you with certain benefits over a twelve month period and you really have very little say in the running of the business as such.

MN — Would friends organisations and directors of regional museums have a different perspective on that? The relationship and sense of involvement in these museums seems much more direct.

KP — A director of a regional gallery has to deal with the board of management and the friends and so the potential for disagreements is there. It takes a very smart director and a smart president of the friends to keep it all on an even track.

MN — What type of person does it take to be a friends manager?

IH — It is a business now of ensuring customer satisfaction and of raising money for the parent organisation. So the skills required are much more the skills of business — strong customer focus, management systems, financial systems, product development — where you understand what your customers want and you refine your product accordingly. The people we want are in many respects generalists. Certainly it helps to have a strong interest in the arts.

KP — Australian friends groups have been generally based on a European model whereby they were established for support and advocacy of the museum. In America friends groups have been established from within the museums and they are managed by the museum for specific purposes, such as fundraising. It's a much more businesslike approach and we are tending to move very much in that direction, in terms of management and staffing.

IH — Yes, but the big difference between the big organisations, particularly in the United States and here in Australia, is that in the States a large proportion of your annual dues are tax deductible and that has a very large impact on how successful you can be. Under our current tax laws you cannot claim a tax deduction on your membership because we are providing benefits for the price of the membership.

MN — Is this something the AFFM is going to lobby for?

KP — I think it's absolutely important to try and address that issue because we've got to try every way of maintaining and developing membership.

IH — I don't like our chances in Australia because the major state museums are part of the state collection. While government funds these institutions, museums must always look at other ways of earning additional revenue. But at the end of the day it's still a government institution and in the US this is not the case, except in Washington DC. So to expect the tax deductibility that you have in the US, I think, is very unlikely. Nor do you have the same personal wealth in Australia that you have in the US or Western Europe. But in the longer term things may change and government policy will, I think, start to encourage people to give to the arts.

KP — The critical thing for the future, I think, will be making sure that the friends group that you have really does, honestly, keep its members happy and content, and indeed challenged by what goes on in the museum. And the way in which the friends group presents and structures itself in terms of leadership, surveys and so on, those remain critical issues. You can never assume your membership is happy. You've got to keep checking and monitoring and I think that is the great challenge for the future. ■

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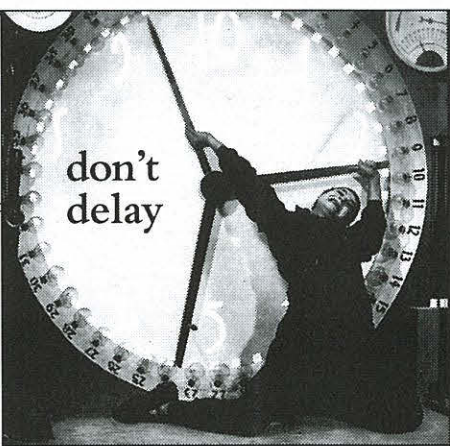

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Growth, Retention and Fundraising in the Friends of New Norcia

DOM CHRISTOPHER POWER

New Norcia is a small monastic township located 130 km north of Perth. It was founded by Spanish Benedictine monks in 1846 and it continues to be the home of a living community of nineteen monks who actively manage the town and the farm that surrounds it.

- **friends group formed — 1991**
- **1838 members**
- **no dedicated office or members room**
- **administered by monastery secretary who spends one day per week on friends business**
- **operates as a benevolent dictatorship run entirely by the monks**

Growth

Since its inception the Friends of New Norcia has enjoyed a steady growth in membership. In 1998, 253 new members signed up and it is estimated that a similar number will subscribe in 1999. One reason for this regular healthy growth is that the Friends of New Norcia is easy to join — it doesn't cost a great deal ($15 annual subscription), the money goes to a good cause (restoration of the town), and there is even the possibility of some attractive benefits (several newsletters per year and invitations to special events).

However, good causes don't simply sell themselves. The healthy growth is because it is easy for people to join, coupled with clear selling strategies that are practised in a disciplined way.

In the early years of the Friends of New Norcia the preferred strategy was direct marketing — sending letters and inviting people to join. This strategy worked extremely well — some years producing up to 350 new members — because we were clear about our target market of former pupils and prominent West Australians.

As the target markets decreased our focus moved to the 50,000 people who visit New Norcia annually. Converting visitors into friends requires a new strategy which involves having attractive literature readily available throughout the town, identifying the work of friends at various project spots around the site, and having guides and monks personally invite visitors to join. Conversion through this strategy is rarely the result of one hit. It requires a series of different hits culminating in a personal invitation.

Retention

A friend of New Norcia could be forgiven for saying, 'It is so easy to join but it is so difficult to leave'. Probably more effort now goes into retaining friends than into getting new ones and, fortunately, our strategies work well — over the last few years the Friends of New Norcia has enjoyed a retention rate of around 93 per cent.

The first and most important way to keep friends is by regularly communicating with them. A marketing principle we work to is that there should be some form of communication at least every 90 days. Of these, the newsletters are particularly important. They are not expensive or glossy but they are well produced with witty writing and excellent pictures. There is a strong attempt to make communication two-way, with contributions from friends.

We also make offers. People will keep subscribing to an organisation that is alive and achieving things. While activities don't have to be numerous, they do have to be appropriate and well organised. Numbers at our annual Friends Picnic Day have grown each year to reach 750 in 1998.

Finally, when it comes to renewal time, persistence is important. Experience has taught us that we may need to remind some friends up to three times.

Fundraising

Fundraising is a relatively simple and straightforward affair. Each year at renewal time friends are asked to make a donation in addition to their re-subscription. On average over 98 per cent respond positively, giving anything from $5 to $5000. Each year the total donated amount has risen. In 1998, in addition to subscriptions of $23,135, friends donated $32,505.

Our fundraising is also project oriented. Each year a new project — usually a restoration job — is identified as the friends special project. The project is selected to ensure maximum donor appeal and the request is made in detail, together with photos and endorsements.

New Norcia features the Old Police Station (left hand foreground), the Old Four Mill (right), and St Ildephonsus' College (background).

We especially care for our larger donors. The old 80/20 rule is at work in our fundraising — more than 80 per cent of our total donated funds come from 20 per cent of our friends. Knowing this, a better quality donation request is sent to major donors. Similarly, while all donors receive a letter thanking them for their generosity, major donors also receive additional and regular expressions of thanks.

Finally, to ensure continuity in successful fundraising, achievements need to be celebrated. An excellent way of ensuring the success of a new special project is by successfully completing the last one — preferably with a public unveiling accompanied by loud trumpet blowing!

Dom Christopher Power is procurator at New Norcia.

Friends of the Edith Cowan University Museum of Childhood

BRIAN SHEPHERD

This case study is written from the perspective of the director of a small museum and it may not be congruent with that of members of the friends committee. Although both have the interests of the museum at heart, are agreed on its mission, policies and strategic development, and likewise are both bound by the friends' constitution and its strategic plan, the motivations, responsibilities and line management structures that influence me as a member of the university's staff do not apply to the friends to the same degree.

Looking at the evolution of the Friends of the Museum of Childhood, it is useful to distinguish between big 'F' Friends and little 'f' friends, the former referring to those belonging to an official organisation and the latter to anyone showing an active interest in promoting the welfare of the museum. When I took charge of the museum in 1985 there was no formalised structure for either Friends or friends. A roster of helpers to cope with visitors over school vacations was the nearest thing to a volunteer program.

The museum needed to develop a strong support network. A newsletter entitled *Childhood Friends* was begun in 1985, and a number of occasions were organised at the museum under the banner of Friends meetings. These included talks about the collection and demonstrations by prominent craftspeople, such as doll makers and miniaturists. Simultaneously, events were held for academic staff in the university and for teachers who had shown interest in the museum's work. This practice continued for four years and successfully raised awareness of the museum and its work, and helped us find willing voluntary workers who we regarded as very important friends of the museum. The large Christmas party held each year to thank our growing number of friends was, I believe, one of the most significant periods in developing the cooperative spirit that has been a strong feature of the museum.

By 1988 there appeared to be sufficient support to establish a formalised Friends organisation. A steering committee was formed and this group worked with the staff over a period of almost a year to generate a constitution and to seek incorporation. The university financed a full colour membership brochure. A gratifying aspect of launching the Friends was the large number of life memberships taken out by those who had been involved in the museum's work.

A particularly useful role of the Friends has been assisting with grants and sponsorship.

Over the past decade the Friends has served the museum in a variety of ways, though I must admit to an overall feeling of disappointment that it has not flourished to the extent I had hoped. A hard-working committee has organised an annual calendar of events, including lectures, demonstrations and holiday programs for children. The committee is kept briefed on all significant museum happenings. As an incorporated body the Friends manages its own finances and organises its own program, though both are done in consultation with the director, who is an ex-officio member of the committee. The president of the Friends also sits on the museum's advisory committee — in a small organisation there are advantages in a group such as the Friends bringing an independent perspective to bear on the affairs of the museum.

A particularly useful role of the Friends has been assisting with grants and sponsorship. The museum's photocopier and a computer have been purchased through grants obtained by the Friends. Two further grants from the Lotteries Commission totalling $70,000 were possible because the Friends, as an incorporated body, was eligible for funding while the museum itself, as part of the university, was not. Through its own fundraising the Friends has purchased a major display enclosure, a microwave oven and has paid for some major conservation projects.

Present membership is approximately 60, which I find disappointing after a decade of hard work by succeeding committees. There is much goodwill between the staff and the Friends but this does not mean that tensions do not arise from time to time.

Currently the Museum of Childhood is negotiating arrangements for its relocation to a more prominent location where it will seek to become more of a children's centre. This move and its change of mission is raising the level of interest and commitment of university administrators who see the Friends organisation as a potentially vital ingredient in gathering community support for the concept. A close working relationship, therefore, not only with museum staff but also with university personnel such as a marketing manager, development officer and community affairs officer, may be a key to enhancing the Friends role and building effective membership.

Brian Shepherd is director of the Edith Cowan Museum of Childhood.

The Australian Museum Society

SANDRA HARRISON

- **established 1972**
- **4295 memberships (approx 9500 people)**
- **office but no members room**
- **two full-time and two part-time staff**
- **office volunteers four days per week**
- **TAMS Council was established as a subcommittee of the Australian Museum Trust. Primarily self-funding with limited infrastructure support from the museum.**

On the face of it, the relationship is quite straightforward — the Australian Museum Society exists to support the work of the Australian Museum and to help the museum achieve its goals. Simple. In reality, however, this relationship is much more complex. It is a perpetual balancing act, both in strategic and logistic terms, to maintain the needs of the society against those of the museum. It is a four-way relationship between the society's council, its staff, and the museum's trust and staff. This can be especially tricky, as the society is self-funding and self-governing. Astoundingly, the structure does work well, provided the lines of communication stay open. And most of the time they do. So, 27 years on, the society remains one of the museum's success stories.

Just how the society supports the museum's work has certainly changed over the decades. In the early days the workload placed on TAMS was varied and diffuse — from running the cafe, to coordinating museum venue hire, to the regular responsibilities of a membership organisation. While this extraordinary workload has been rationalised over the years, and the responsibilities of the society are now more defined, TAMS remains distinctly multi-skilled, and works collaboratively with the museum in many of its key areas.

Public Interface — the society is one of the public faces of the museum and offers an extensive program of events for many sectors of the community, not just its members. This program highlights the work of the museum and the broader scientific community, and provides a public forum for current issues. It includes the usual range of membership events: evening lectures, special exhibition viewings, book launches, weekend tours, scientific field trips, behind-the-scenes tours of the museum's collections, and events for families and children, the museum's target audience.

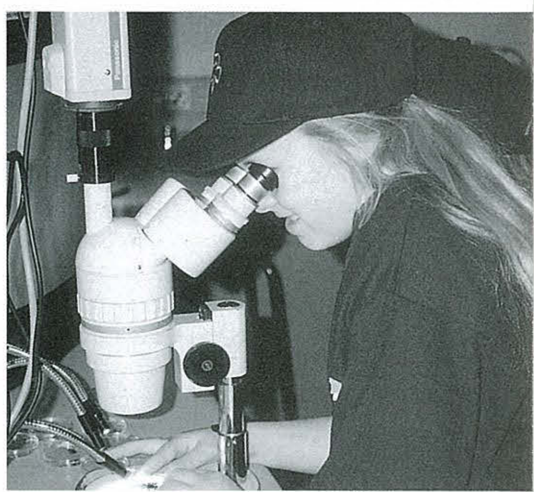
Loyalty Stream — by definition, society members are the museum's most loyal supporters. Together with the marketing department, TAMS has established a scheme which, through a number of initiatives, encourages repeat visitors along a 'loyalty stream', via an annual pass to full membership.

Fundraising — over the last three decades, the society has been one of the museum's principal financial supporters. It has sponsored many galleries (Birds of Australia, Planet of Minerals, Dreamtime to Dust) and, most recently, Search & Discover, a multimedia information and resource centre that opened early in 1997. Such a major financial commitment as Search & Discover is not without long-term consequences and the society has lived through a number of lean years to regain its financial stability.

Corporate Membership — the society works very closely with the museum so that corporate membership and the museum's sponsorship endeavours are complementary. The two organisations share resources to support both programs, including staff, so that duplication and confusion are minimised and opportunities maximised. The Corporate Members Program provides just one of several entry points for corporate involvement in the museum.

Virtual TAMS — our website originally provided a facility for new members to join and for members to book society events. However, the site has now become an effective and important means of communication with members — our 1998 survey indicated that 60 per cent of members have access to email and the Internet. We have launched a special online membership category to cater for this sector, the NetSet.

In the past year the society has increased its membership significantly, a direct response to marketing efforts during the 'Ancient Egypt' exhibition. This new group is such a substantial component of the total membership that a separate survey is underway to determine their expectations and whether these expectations, and the membership demographics, are the same as those of existing members. Regular and ongoing evaluation of the society's membership has recently been established.



The Australian Museum Society was a major sponsor of Search & Discover, the Australian Museum's multimedia information and resource centre.

The society's subscriptions and events program are its financial base, covering all its running costs and providing contributions to the museum. While the response is high in volume, the margin on each transaction, whether a subscription or an event, is very narrow. Sometimes, the temptation to run fewer fundraising activities with a greater margin is almost irresistible, but this would weaken one of the society's strengths. It is the breadth of community support for TAMS, and therefore the museum, that is most important, as it so obviously reflects what the community values.

Sandra Harrison is executive officer of The Australian Museum Society.

Friends of the Art Gallery of South Australia

CLARE TIZARD

- **established 1969**
- **2450 members**
- **members lounge and office**
- **paid staff**
- **operates as an incorporated body**

The Friends of the Art Gallery of South Australia first met in May 1969. Sixty people attended. The organisation's purpose, as outlined in the address from the then chairman of the gallery, was to 'make a real bridge between the people of South Australia and their Gallery'. The two specific tasks set out in this inaugural address were to establish a fund to buy works of art for the gallery and to distribute the *Art Gallery Bulletin*.

The friends first Constitution outlined the group's objectives: 'To foster interest in the activities of the Art Gallery of SA and to raise funds to be passed on to the Art Gallery of SA for the purchase of fine or applied art or any other object for the collection'. These remain the objectives of the friends but since the inception of the Art Gallery Foundation in 1980, much of the major fundraising is now done by the foundation with the friends concentrating on fostering interest in the gallery's activities.

The friends group has a unique structure. It operated as a constituted organisation until 1994 when the gallery decided to employ the executive officer directly. Rather than include paid staff within the gallery budget, the friends committee reimburse the gallery for the monthly salaries. In late 1994 the position of administrator was established, as an employee of the State Government, with the position being directly responsible to the manager of the gallery's public programs section. This staffing structure relieves the committee of the responsibility of employment but still empowers it with the organisation's finances. While this works in theory, the financial size of the friends has grown (turnover has increased threefold since 1984) and a rethink of the model is probably required as the friends head into the year 2000. The duplication involved in working for two masters has no place in a busy membership organisation.

The friends group currently does no outside promotion of membership but relies on word of mouth about its functions program. We also rely on direct mail to non-member participants in our functions program, do joint ventures with other agencies and direct mailouts to other groups to broaden our audience.

One of the strengths of the friends group is its ability to provide a varied and balanced program within budget constraints. The recent 'Life and Death Under the Pharaohs' exhibition is a good example of how fundraising through functions can be achieved. The gallery expected the show to be very popular and was prepared for large numbers of people. The friends sought to capitalise on this by promoting its general friends functions to a wider than normal audience. The friends ran seventeen functions for the exhibition, with over 1500 people attending. Eighty per cent were non-members and two per cent subsequently joined after attending a function. The after-hours viewings, the backbone of the our program, provided many people with the opportunity to view the show without the crowds. A simple formula of guided tour followed by food and drinks (prepared and served by volunteers to keep the cost down) enabled us to serve over 1000 people over five weeks.

The future challenge for the Friends of the Art Gallery of South Australia is to uphold the standard of activity that we have developed over the past few years. Our members expect a varied program of dinners, lectures, films and talks, and these need to be continued. By creatively using the temporary exhibitions program and the permanent collection, it is possible for us to maintain a high standard throughout the year. The next development will be to increase the staffing levels to meet the demand of the new members — a development that can be achieved through increased functions.

Clare Tizard is director of the Friends of the Art Gallery of South Australia.

National Gallery of Australia Membership Department

SYLVIA JORDAN

- **established 1982**
- **28,308 members**
- **membership office, members lounge**
- **three full-time paid staff, 48 volunteers**
- **membership is part of the NGA structure and reports directly to the foundation/sponsorship/development section**

Within the National Gallery of Australia, membership is part of the development department, which also looks after sponsorship and philanthropy. The three full-time staff in the membership office develop and implement the members program and membership campaigns. They work closely with other gallery departments such as education and public programs, marketing, public affairs etc., to ensure the program is successful.

Canberra has a population of approximately 300,000 people and, of these, 18,556 are members of the National Gallery of Australia. In total, the gallery has 28,308 members, the remaining 9,752 mainly reside in New South Wales with some scattered throughout Australia and overseas.

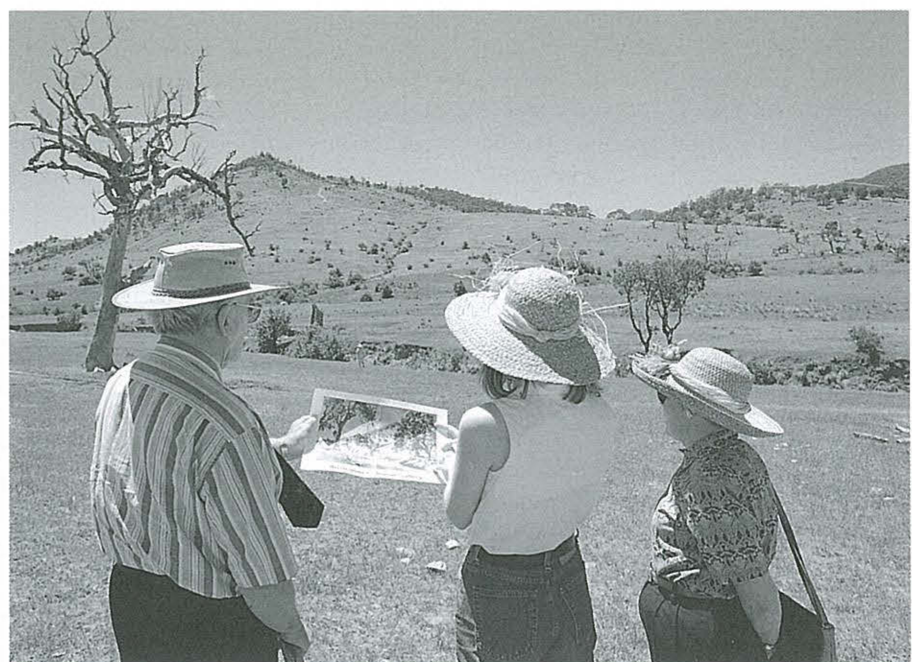
The gallery's accessibility for interstate members, particularly Sydney, a three hour drive away, is an important consideration when developing member programs. NSW people regularly make day trips to Canberra to attend exhibitions or particular events at the gallery, so member events are often held over weekends. Much care is taken to have programs

coincide with current exhibitions at the gallery. For example, the gallery recently held a members preview of the Emily Kame Kngwarreye exhibition, which was attended by over 350 members. The hospitality industry in Canberra notices a marked increase in business when the gallery holds a major exhibition.

Occasionally, events are organised which take members on art-related day trips away from the gallery. One popular day trip is to Arthur Boyd's homestead and studio at Bundanon, on the Shoalhaven River near Nowra. Another is to Michelago, near Canberra, to view the site of George Lambert's painting *The Squatter's Daughter*. The owners of the property welcome gallery members to view the site of the painting, explore the historic homestead and enjoy the magnificent gardens.

Because of the gallery's physical location and Canberra's relatively small population base, the membership program looks outward to attract members. The program links with interstate museums, such as the Australian Museum for example, to run programs for NSW-based members. The membership department also develops programs around NGA travelling exhibitions so that interstate members can attend programs while the exhibition is showing in their own state.

A recent survey of gallery members indicated very high levels of satisfaction with the quality, quantity and variety of membership events and benefits. The membership magazine, *artonview*, received a highly favourable response and is, of course, particularly important for interstate members. The spectacular view of Lake Burley Griffin from the members lounge also rated highly in the survey.



National Gallery of Australia members at Michelago, the site of George Lambert's painting *The Squatter's Daughter.*

In October 1998, the council of the NGA recommended that the Federal Government should remove the general admission charge to the permanent collection. The gallery's director, Dr Brian Kennedy, stated that his job was to provide access to works of art and information about them. He saw the admission charge as a barrier to this access. As free entry was seen as an important member benefit, there was concern that members may decide not to retain their membership. At this stage, however, there has been no such dramatic effect.

It is now the gallery's aim to increase membership and introduce a fundraising element to the mix of activities and benefits. Statistics show that after three years of being a member, most people are likely to retain their membership. In March 1997 a joining fee of $5 was introduced. It was advertised extensively to our current members that this charge would not affect them unless they let their membership lapse, and this appears to have been a good strategy for retaining members.

Sylvia Jordan is co-ordinator of membership at the National Gallery of Australia.

Friends of the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery

JAN KELLY, SIMON BOUGHEY

- **established 1984**
- **497 memberships, 780 members comprising individual, family, concession, country, corporate, small business**
- **shared office space with the Royal Society of Tasmania at the TMAG**
- **no paid staff**
- **incorporated body with ex-officio representation of museum director and one trustee representative**

The Friends of the TMAG faces an interesting mix of constraints and opportunities. Competition from other cultural organisations in a small community is offset, in part, by community interest in the museum and in cultural events generally. In response, the Friends of the TMAG has endeavoured, in the first instance, to establish a broad-based program for the sheer enjoyment and stimulation of its members.

The program is advertised through the friends quarterly magazine and monthly mailouts, in which curators also contribute with articles reflecting the diversity of the museum's programs and collections. The friends maintains an important association between the museum and the wider community through this newsletter.

Lectures are held for the general public and interest in this part of the program is being broadened by including interstate speakers. Exhibition-related functions are also held regularly and members are encouraged to bring guests. A marketing

campaign to attract new members, particularly young people, is being discussed.

A small population is a real consideration for the friends and for other cultural organisations in Tasmania. A concession rate is offered but this is currently available only to those who are over sixty and who hold a government senior or pension card. With time on their hands and limited discretionary money available, the importance of the friends broad-based program is a key to interesting this sector in membership.

Importantly, the friends group offers reciprocal benefits with other museums interstate and this is popular with those members who travel interstate to see exhibitions not available in Tasmania.

In the past three years, the friends group has incorporated new technologies, updated its image and introduced corporate and small business memberships to further broaden its appeal. Small business members are given a certificate to hang in their place of business, which shows they support the Friends of the TMAG and also gives exposure to the friends. This has proved particularly important and some ordinary members have converted their membership to this category. Where possible the friends group has negotiated corporate memberships to enable their membership to be passed directly to the TMAG to be spent in an area related to their business, e.g. Australia Post — communications collection.

Over the past sixteen years, the Friends of the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery has donated $180,000 to the museum, approximately $12,000 per year.

The Future

It is important that the friends and museum staff work well together but it takes time to build relationships. Staff are invited to all functions, and there are some staff members who are also members of the friends.

A particular constraint for the friends is that it does not have a representative on the board of trustees and its influence is therefore limited. While there is a trustee representative on the friends committee, detailed information about the museum's direction and activities is sometimes limited. As a committee, the friends group is interested in the development of the museum but the group currently has no real opportunity to be directly involved. The committee includes people who are experienced in management, budgeting, conference and event management, tourism, retail, public relations, display and small museum management. The committee would be prepared to take on projects, given an opportunity.

The major focus of the Friends of the TMAG over the coming years will be to:

- increase membership to 2000 by the year 2000;
- have a friends representative on the board of trustees (requiring alteration to an Act of Parliament);
- have an opportunity to influence changes to the museum which will benefit the community, the museum and the friends;
- have a part-time paid staff member to coordinate friends events.

Jan Kelly is honorary secretary of the Friends of the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Simon Boughey is president.

Friends and the Museum Community

MAX DINGLE

Museums Australia's Membership — Friends and Volunteers Special Interest Group was established in the early days of the association to represent the interests of friends and volunteers.

It is important that good relationships are developed between museum staff and friends and volunteers. At the 1997 WFFM conference in Mexico, I gave a paper entitled (courtesy of Dr Samuel Johnson) 'Marriage may have many pains, but celibacy has no pleasure'. I drew a parallel between marriage and the partnership between friends/volunteers and professional staff.

'The marriage between Friends and Professionals should have similar qualities to those expressed in that famous Mexican novel *Like Water for Chocolate*. Doctor John Brown tells Tita his grandmother's theory: "Each of us is born with a box of matches inside us but we can't strike them by ourselves, this needs a combination of oxygen from your partner and the warmth of the setting. As the phosphorus in each match explodes a pleasant warmth grows within us, fading slowly as time goes by, until a new explosion comes along to revive it. Each person has to discover what will set off these explosions in order to live. It is the fire that nourishes the soul." To put this in the context of friends and professionals — the warmth of the museum and its collections cannot light a fire in the heart, and nourish the soul of either friend or professional, without the oxygen of a partnership.'

On their side of this marriage, friends are advocates, fundraisers, promoters, volunteer workers and providers of many social events.

Apart from working on our 'marriage', the Membership SIG is working on a number of projects, including this issue of *Museum National*. In a future issue we hope to focus on volunteers. Friends and volunteers are difficult to separate but both areas have much to say. While not all friends are volunteers and not all volunteers are friends, in a huge number of museums, especially regional, the main support group is the volunteers. These volunteers not only do voluntary work but also provide a similar support structure to the museum as would a friends group. In other museums the friends organisation is the source for volunteer staff. Friends/volunteers are incredibly diverse. Just as there are many different museums, so are there friends. While they may be called members, volunteers, subscribers, supporters or friends, their one common objective is to support their museum.

The Membership SIG has also recently completed a new publication, which is a compilation of papers from the AFFM's many seminars and workshops over the years plus other papers gathered from the

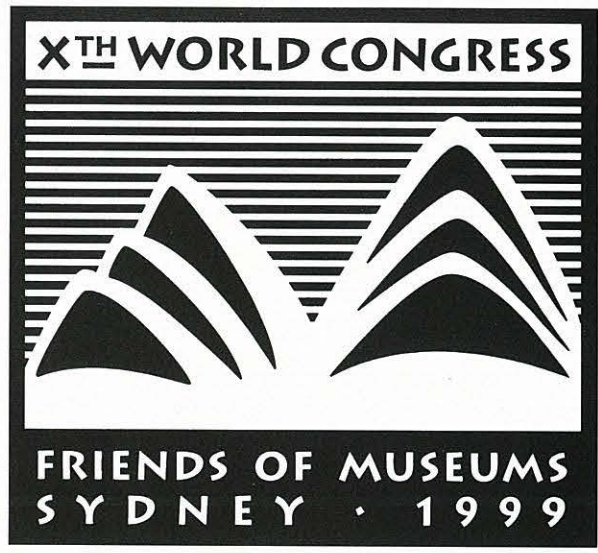
WFFM's triennial congress and Museums Australia's annual conferences. A bibliography and ethical guidelines for friends organisations, approved at the 1998 AFFM AGM, have been included. This publication, taken as a whole, is a knowledge bank of wisdom and hard won experience. It is essentially a *Guidebook — how to start, manage, market and maintain a friends group*, and so this is now its title. It is available through the SIG and the AFFM.

At Museums Australia's 1997 conference in Darwin, the Membership SIG held a session which included a paper by Susan Bridie on unlocking the mystique of membership. I think her final words are very important, 'If a museum recognises the value of a strong membership organisation and both the museum staff and the membership staff unite to provide a good product you will have the benefit of a loyal, dedicated and interested community of people to spread the word'.

Max Dingle is assistant director of the Australian National Maritime Museum, president of the AFFM and former convenor of the Membership — Friends and Volunteers Special Interest Group.

New Century, New Museums, New Friends

Xth World Congress, Friends of Museums, 13–17 September 1999



This year's WFFM congress in Sydney will present a vivid world picture of museums at the close of the 20th century and how they are preparing to meet enormous challenges.

Speakers from around the globe will address the big issues confronting all museum people, keeping a constant eye on the role of voluntary support groups.

The Xth World Congress, the WFFM's first congress in the Southern Hemisphere, will include two concurrent programs - the working program, based on the Art Gallery of New South Wales, and the cultural program, which will introduce Sydney's distinctive environment, its way of life and its cultural collections.

Delegates in the working program will hear:

- Dr Shirley Thomson, director of the Canada Council for the Arts: Museums Responding to Cultural Diversity.
- Dr Antonio Battro, Argentinean author and educationalist: Malraux Revisited — Musee Imaginaire or Virtual Museum?
- Christina Acidini Luchinal, superintendent of the artistic and historical patrimony of Florence: The Future Conservation and Public Presentation of Florence's Renaissance Treasures.
- Dr Michael Fopp, director of the Royal Air Force Museum, Hendon (UK): The Implications of Emerging Technologies for Museums and Their Friends.

Other speakers in this program will include Dr Inga Maria Mulk, director of the Ajtte Mountain and Sami Museum in the Swedish high mountains; Dom Christopher Power, the Benedictine monk who manages New Norcia WA, Australia's only monastic town; Marie-Claude Tjibaou, widow of assassinated Kanak nationalist leader Jean-Marie Tjibaou, after whom Noumea's cultural centre is named; and Marieanne Anderson, president of the Norwegian Federation of Friends of Museums.

Working sessions will cover marketing and communication, new technologies, fundraising and development.

Coach tours will enable cultural program delegates to see Sydney's highlights, enjoying the hospitality of friends along the way.

A host of events for all delegates will include a twilight opening reception at Sydney Opera House; the opening ceremony in the Great Hall at Sydney University; the gala conference dinner at Sydney Town Hall; a harbourside breakfast at the Australian National Maritime Museum; cocktail receptions at museums and historic houses; and a farewell Sydney bush dance and barbecue.

The congress will provide a wonderful opportunity to meet and mix with friends from around the world. For a registration brochure contact the WFFM Congress Secretariat on +61 2 9241 1478, fax +61 2 9251 3552 or www.wffm-congress.aust.com.

Bill Richards, WFFM Congress, Sydney.

The Xth World Congress is sponsored by the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, AAP Information Service, the Ian Potter Foundation and the NSW Ministry for the Arts.

Museum Friends: A Worldwide Movement

CAROL SERVENTY

The World Federation of Friends of Museums (WFFM) was established in 1972 by Luis Monreal, a Spaniard who directed the work of the Friends of the Museums of Barcelona. Now, in 1999, WFFM members number sixteen national federations and 23 single associations that represent 1.5 million people from 30 countries. The Australian Federation of Friends of Museums (AFFM) was one of the six founding members.

From its three offices — in Mexico City, Paris and Sydney — WFFM works to assist museums by supporting the growth of friends of museums and by encouraging these groups to band together in national federations. Governments often ignore small groups, but in combination they have a stronger voice and our national federations are increasingly able to lobby municipal, state and national governments for support for museums and cultural heritage.

Friends of every different kind of museum, library, gallery, archive and botanic garden give extraordinarily diverse support to their institutions in equally diverse areas of interest. As well, they carry out all the traditional activities of friends groups.

For example, about 30 associations of museum friends in four geographically close regions of Europe — Lombardy in Italy, Catalonia in Spain, Bad-Wurtenberg in Germany and the Rhone-Alpes in France — have united in a dynamic cultural venture that focuses on a different project each year. In Canada, the friends have promoted the collections of all their member museums in a magnificent book, *Significant Treasures*. In Switzerland, the Friends of the Museum of Cantone Ticino, with only 500 members, finance one major restoration each year of frescoes, paintings, or even works of architecture in need of urgent care. In Cyprus, the Federation of Friends of Museums was concerned that tourists, but not the children of Cyprus, valued and visited their superb archaeological museums and sites. After ten years of complex effort, this federation of only four member associations convinced the Ministry of Education to include educational visits to museums in the curriculum for elementary school children. The ministry has now asked the federation to help create programs for the whole of Cyprus.

WFFM Presidents of Honour, Florence, 1998. (L-R) David Mawson (UK), Carol Serventy, current WFFM president (Australia), Anna Grandi Clerici (Italy), Aristote Phrydas (Greece).

Friends groups are as interested in exploring the changing roles and responsibilities of museums as are museum professionals: public education in social values and environmental issues, objects versus ideas, public access and so on. We are also learning about web sites, the virtual museum and online membership.

We have always raised money. Many of us still do, but we all seek a relationship that is more rewarding to us. We hope that friends and professionals can work together to develop other ways for us to help them and our museums. The WFFM executive is pursuing this concept on a world scale with the executive council of ICOM in Paris.

Our networks, which spread around the world, are continually exchanging ideas and information about everything friends and volunteers do, as well as new ideas in the 'museum industry'. Information is shared informally through personal contacts, newsletters and regional meetings, and formally at the annual open sessions and through plenary sessions and workshops of the WFFM's three-yearly congress. The Australian federation is organising a splendid experience for WFFM's tenth international congress in September 1999 in Sydney. I offer you all a warm welcome to it.

Carol Serventy is president of the WFFM.

An information booklet on the WFFM is available free from 36 Diamond Road, Pearl Beach, NSW 2256. Fax (02) 4342 6291 or carols@cci.net.au. The WFFM *Code of Ethics for Friends and Volunteers* (1996) can be adapted to the needs of any individual association.

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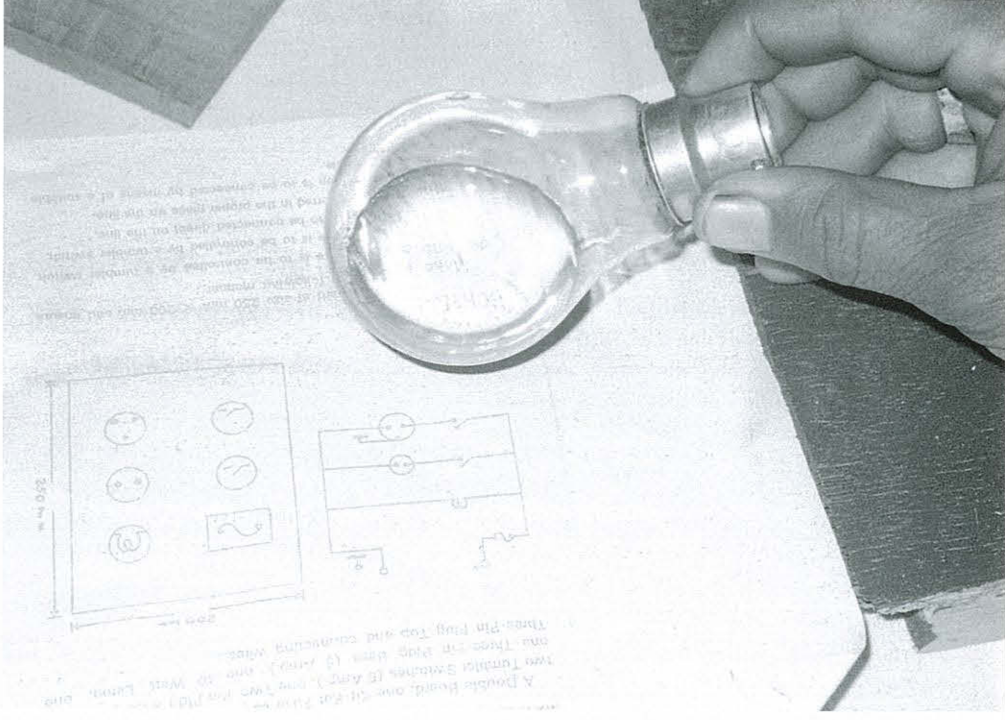
Reaching Into The Homes And Workplaces Of Our Community

DAVID DEMANT

There are many ways that cultural organisations can reach into the community. Our doors can open to greet streams (hopefully) of visitors; outreach teams can set up in 'remote' locations; screens can reproduce our images and knowledge via the web. Of course, there are the different types of media: printed, electronic, broadcast, tape and video.

But how can we ensure that we have an impact within the community, so that we are more than just a place to visit in the ways listed above? How can we develop real partnerships with the communities of which we are a part? This article explores two programs, one in India and one in Australia, in which partnerships with local communities offer real opportunities for such impact to occur. These examples are not meant to be definitive, nor are they meant to be the final word.



A light globe magnifying glass — after its innards are removed, the globe is half-filled with water to produce a water lens.

India

In January I visited Northern India to find out, among other things, as much as I could about the work being carried out by the region's many science centres. These centres are organised as a network by the national science centres in Calcutta and Delhi.

The network has two purposes — education and community support — that is to assist in solving local problems using the scientific method. The science centres engage in the usual activities of such institutions, but they are also heavily involved in community activities.

The network's headquarters are in Calcutta, at Science City, with major national centres in Delhi, Bangalore and Mumbai. These national centres are mainly concerned with science popularisation. There are also smaller, regional science centres in most of the 25 state capitals. Then there are district science centres, and science centres in schools which are set up by the National Science Centre but which it does not operate. The National Science Centre instead trains teachers in the development of kits, which are essentially sets of experiments, that aim to teach particular scientific concepts to students. The kits have to be portable, open-ended, low cost and easily fabricated from local, easily obtainable materials.

The science centres also pursue campaigns through the countryside using science demonstrations to disprove superstitious beliefs — superstition is regarded as very debilitating!

In Sirsa, a very rich agricultural area in Haryanna Province, north-east of Delhi, I visited a remote rural science centre, as guest speaker in a professional development course for teachers. The course aimed to show teachers how to make inexpensive science exhibits. The centre has a few traditional interactive displays, typical of the kind you will find in any science centre in Australia, but its main activities include professional development for teachers and classes for students. I was shown some of the things the teachers had made. One item was a light globe magnifying glass — the globe had had its innards removed. The globe was then half-filled with water to produce a water lens. Another was apparatus for the production of hydrogen using discarded medical equipment and bicycle valve rubber. These items were typical of the creative spirit and lateral thinking being encouraged by the science centres.

In many centres there are training schemes for the unemployed. In Tiranelveli, near Madras, the centre's staff are teaching people how to dye cloth and how to recycle materials. In Pirulia, 250 km from Calcutta, the science centre brought in agricultural experts from universities to assist farmers who were concerned about their low crop yields. These experts are not normally accessible to farmers, who probably do not even know of their existence and, even if they did, could not afford to pay for their services. Nor are these experts aware of the problems farmers are experiencing. So, both parties gain from the experience. Another example is the provision of advice on

customising tractors to better deal with local conditions.

An impressive example of community involvement comes from Bhopal, where the director described the science centre's impact on the local community during its development and immediately after it opened. Before its development, the local community used the campus for toilet facilities, drainage and dumping water, fishing, cattle grazing and as a short cut. When the centre opened, these community activities were stopped and consequently the community refused to visit. Staff decided a strategy was needed to reverse this negative image and to encourage the local community to use the centre. This strategy consisted of three main parts. Firstly, an outreach program was initiated through which local problems were discussed, sometimes with scientific experts. Competitions, linked to important dates such as World Environment Day, were held for school students, and films were shown about nature and the environment. The second prong of the strategy was to include community representatives in the centre's staff structure. The third prong addressed some of the original concerns of the community with respect to the site: drainage of water was re-routed, the playground was partially restored, and restricted income generating activities were permitted, such as fishing and grass cutting. After a year, this strategy has resulted in visitation of 100 local people a day.

Australia

My second example concerns a Museum Victoria travelling exhibition called 'Future Harvest'. The exhibition dealt with our relationship with the environment, dependence on the land and sustainable farming methods. It featured actual case studies from each of the regional Victorian venues the exhibition toured. It contained interactive exhibits as well as historical and contemporary collection items.

'Future Harvest' was developed to enhance the museum's links with rural Victoria. It aimed to encourage discussion about the possibilities available to people in rural communities, especially in regard to sustainable farming practices, and to encourage people to consider different options to their current behaviour, attitudes and, most importantly, their farming practices.

I believe 'Future Harvest' provides an example of how a museum might work with communities in Australia to develop partnerships. The case studies that were a significant feature of the exhibition were all based on very concrete examples that related to the experiences of rural communities. The case studies were all commercially viable and were based on research carried out in local areas by Museum Victoria staff. Their development required an enormous amount of work. The project team went out into the various communities while developing the project, and had to establish networks and gain the confidence of each community.

'Future Harvest' was developed to enhance the museum's links with rural Victoria.

One of the case studies was Berrybank Farm, which is home to 15,000 pigs. This large scale intensive feedlot farm is located at Windermere, west of Ballarat.

Pigs' bodies are only capable of utilising half the food they eat — the rest is lost as waste. This creates a huge waste management problem for the farm. The pigs at Berrybank produce the same quantity of effluent as a city of 40,000 people — almost two-thirds as much as the City of Ballarat. To address this problem, an innovative system of waste management has been devised which is both efficient and economical. The system recycles the total quantity of effluent to produce useable products: electricity (generated on site from the conversion of biogas into heat), water, solid organic matter and grit. Electricity is used on the farm and the surplus is sold to the national power grid.

Berrybank's recycling system cost approximately $2 million to install. That cost was repaid in five years through sales of the products and efficiency savings.

There were other similar case studies that were, to varying degrees, just as impressive.

Museum staff collected data on how the exhibition might be influencing people's attitudes. These interviews yielded a mixed response, but there were several responses which indicated that the exhibition had struck a chord with some visitors.

The statements listed here relate to the case studies. They come from adults aged between 35 and 65.

'Can you really run an orchard and minimise the amount you spray? I might find out about these pest traps, they're great!'

Dairy farmer: 'We're looking to diversify but are a bit scared and don't know where to start. I've come here to look for alternatives and think about the future.'

'I really want to follow up the lucerne story and contact the Twiggs. I knew they were good plants but I had no idea how valuable they were until I read the panels. I want to explore using lucerne on my farm.'

'I disagree with some of this exhibition. The Bible says we've only been around for 6000 years, so how can soil have formed over 350 million? But I am very interested in the lucerne case study and would like to talk with him. I believe natural farming systems are the only way we can be sustainable.'

Return visitor (fourth time): 'I think the exhibition is really very good. It didn't tell me everything I wanted to know. The farming seminars were particularly inspiring — holding 30-minute sessions was good, any longer and we wouldn't have got anything out of them anyway. I'm now exploring the possibility of growing walnuts on my property and going into partnership with someone else.'

'I came to see the exhibition to get an idea of what could be done with a 5 hectare block of land. I am very interested in the case studies, particularly the Crawford family's tree farming.'

The lesson?

The lesson of these two examples from Australia and India is simple — that it requires a lot of very hard work and a strong commitment from the museum if we are to encourage consideration of alternate view points and options over the long-term. It also requires a commitment on the part of museums and science centres to see their work in the long-term if they are serious about integrating themselves into the community.

David Demant is a learning advisor and exhibition project co-ordinator at Museum Victoria.

David Demant's visit was funded by the Australia-India Council, PO Box E8, Kingston, ACT 2604. Tel (02) 6261 3928.

'Future Harvest' toured regional Victoria during 1998 and showed at Scienceworks from October 1998 to April 1999.

Museum Storage — Finding the Right Balance

HEATHER GAUNT

A storage system for artworks in a museum is a fascinating thing. Not only should it house individual items safely, and be organised in a way which allows simplicity of physical access and a logical layout of diverse objects, it is also a showcase for the museum. Behind the scenes, things should look as good as they do in front. Of course, this is not always the case and careful storage of collections often comes a poor second to the curatorial concerns of collections display. As collections manager for The University of Melbourne art collection, I had the opportunity to ensure that storage was not neglected during preparations for the building of the new Ian Potter Museum of Art. I was fortunate to work with our director, Frances Lindsay, who was as keen as I to see our collections in safe keeping, whether on display or off. This article briefly examines some of the research I undertook in other institutions to find a balance between budget, best quality, and available space for the new Potter Museum's storage.

Storage areas are the domain of the collections manager. They are places where objects are kept in an environment where they are least likely to change their condition, and where the rule is for orderliness to enable staff members to easily locate any given item. In recent years, particularly in the USA, storage has moved closer to the public domain, with the concept of 'visible storage' and public access becoming an increasing part of daily life behind the scenes. Public accountability is partly the impetus for this change, as is — I believe — the increasing demystification of the museum. This places new pressures on storage. It must function well and look good, and it must stand up to the environmental and physical hazards of additional numbers of people, who are not necessarily trained in museum protocol, moving through the spaces. In the institutions I visited, staff had embraced different methods in tackling the various issues of best practice storage and I was interested to see the ingenuity museum professionals had demonstrated in solving problems and overcoming budget difficulties.

In recent years, particularly in the USA, storage has moved closer to the public domain, with the concept of 'visible storage' and public access becoming an increasing part of daily life behind the scenes.

The Potter is a smallish-sized museum, more in the line of a regional gallery than a state institution. I began my explorations into storage — around three years ago — at those Victorian regional galleries that had recently improved their storage: Geelong Art Gallery, where major renovations include new storage, and Ballarat Fine Art Gallery, which had also renovated its storage.

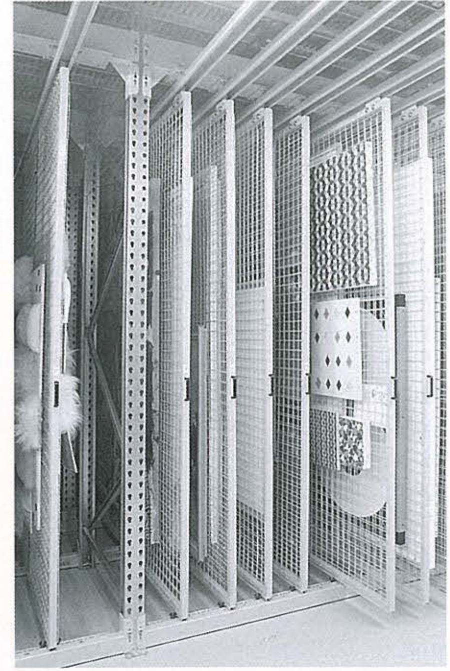
The storage at Geelong is notable for its excellent use of what is, in effect, a small floor space, combining facilities for a variety of objects in a single long room. Compactus racking for paintings — common to all larger institutions — is installed in two-thirds of the room, with open shelving at one end for decorative arts items (particularly the ceramics which make up a great proportion of the collection) and working benches with space underneath for mount cutting and temporary framing, and an open floor space at the other for large objects and sculpture. Ease of access is guaranteed by the central corridor — into which the compactus racks slide — running the length of the room, with access through double doors at both ends.

This centralised storage area contrasted with Ballarat where, out of necessity, storage areas have been created around the gallery spaces within the old architectural structure. I think the disadvantages of this system are that a number of spaces open directly onto public areas (with consequent security concerns), and the awkwardness of some of the spaces that have been created, with great ingenuity, in cupboard-like corners of the old building. I noted that layout as well as size was of central importance.

By contrast, in the next year, I visited the Australian War Memorial and the National Gallery of Australia, in Canberra. Both benefit from having larger monetary resources as well as more staff to organise and manage the storage areas. The AWM, while storing massive objects such as tanks and aircraft in its store at Mitchell, also has an effective paintings storage system on compactus racking in its off-site store.

I was beginning to notice subtle differences in the details of compactus storage: whether the rows of compactus have solid ends, like a library compactus (which presumably reduces movement of dust and dirt between the racks) or open; whether they are top suspended or supported principally from runners on the ground (which makes a difference to how easily they slide and the amount of damaging vibration during movement); whether the guiding tracks on the bottom are flush with the floor, raised, or in fact indented into the floor (which makes a difference as to whether you trip over them, or how much they catch dirt); whether the mesh on which the paintings hang is single or double (single is cheaper, double means the hanging systems from one side of the rack do not interfere with the backs of paintings on the other side); and indeed how the paintings hang on the racks.

The NGA was an eye-opener, with a seemingly endless budget to build site-specific storage systems ranging from a beautiful wooden drawer system for textiles, to floor-to-ceiling solander box storage. In their storage layout both institutions have differentiated between varying types of objects, with different systems set up in self-contained areas. This is obviously a luxury of space not available to smaller museums, and has a number of advantages including security, increased ease in locating specific objects, and the possibility of environmentally conditioning certain areas to suit specific types of collections. The AWM has also grandly solved the problems associated with 'open access' to the public: at Mitchell a new store has been built specifically for the large machines, aircraft, etc., with a viewing ramp so that visitors can look down on a very dramatic display.



Ian Potter Museum of Art, main paintings store. Photo Robert Colvin

Ian Potter Museum of Art, mezzanine paper store. Photo Robert Colvin

Over the next year or so, I visited museums in Sydney, Brisbane and London, noting in each how available storage systems and floor plans had been adapted to suit different types of objects unique to each institution.

In 1997 plans for The Potter were being resolved and the storage needed to be finalised. Working with representatives from Brownbuilt, who had designed and installed storage at Geelong Art Gallery, we refined The Potter's storage systems, working from a document drawn up in 1996. This document analysed the types of collections we had to store, the approximate numbers of items, and my suggestions for the types of storage I felt were required for these collections. The storage plan consisted of five main components: compactus racking for the paintings; slotted static racking, of different heights for different sizes of frames, for the framed works on paper (glazing on the front of all works allows them to be lent against each other in a way that the unprotected paintings cannot, with the added advantage that the semi-closed shelving minimises light reaching the more fragile paper surfaces); shelving for solander boxes (limited to waist height so that one person can lift them from the shelves without straining); open shelving for our boxed indigenous cultural collections (which were moved from the old building) and supermarket shelving for the very long boxes containing spears (no annoying cross-support struts around which boxes have to be manoeuvred); and existing closed shelving transferred from the old building for the decorative arts.

In the final plans the storage was split into four principal areas based around collection types. We have made maximum use of the very high ceiling in the main storage room by creating a mezzanine floor, supported by the steel support structure of the compactus system on the lower level. The mezzanine floor — necessarily constructed of a steel mesh to allow air flow as the entire room is air-conditioned as one — supports the static racking and open shelving for boxed items. A separate smaller 'print room/ study room' houses the solander boxes and features a large central table for cataloguing.

Minor alterations were made in the actual construction. I decided to raise the height of the paintings compactus, at the last minute, to ensure that our largest paintings fitted comfortably on the racks, consequently raising the height of the mezzanine floor and making for a very low ceiling in this area. We also found that necessary building features in the small 'study room/print room' reduced the amount of available wall space for shelving so some of the open shelving on the mezzanine floor was converted to solander box shelving. Small adaptations were also made to the sliding system of the compactus racking which made a significant difference to the smoothness of their glide.

We moved the collections to their new storage areas in the second half of 1998 and I've been very pleased with the final result, with the exception of a few problems currently being addressed. For example, security of the areas was not ideal, with many opening directly onto areas accessible to the public. Locks and an alarm system have minimised these problems. The open meshing of the mezzanine floor was recognised as a potential problem, with dust and small objects able to fall onto the paintings below, so a finer mesh floor, which still allows air flow, is being investigated. Powder coated metal used on the storage systems provides a smooth surface on which frames of works slide smoothly, is easy to maintain and minimises environmental pollutants being emitted from the storage structures themselves.

Throughout the process of designing the storage, I worked with consultants from Brownbuilt, who adapted two basic types of structures already in use by their company — compactus racking and adjustable open shelving — to my very specific needs.

The cost for all the storage systems was quite minimal — some two per cent of the overall budget for the building — and in the long run I believe we have achieved a highly professional result. Floor areas in the new storage spaces are uncluttered, allowing plenty of aisle access necessary for safe moving of items and unimpeded walking space for staff and visitors.

A surprising amount of new storage is in planning or has been recently constructed in Victoria at the moment, with renovations to the National Gallery of Victoria, major new storage at Museum Victoria, and recent upgrades of the storage at Bendigo Art Gallery. No storage system will ever quite match up to the collections manager's hopes and plans, but within the limits of budget and available space dictated by the size of the institution, improved storage conditions for our valuable cultural heritage is always possible.

Heather Gaunt is curator of collections management at The Ian Potter Museum of Art, University of Melbourne.
Email h.gaunt@art-museum.unimelb.edu.au for information or to view new storage at The Potter.

Museums and Law

ANDREW T. KENYON

Welcome to a regular column about legal issues. There are two aims. First, to mention relevant legal developments and sources of further information. Secondly, to provide a series of short articles, written by a variety of lawyers and academics. These will set out the basics of particular legal topics, or explain recent changes or proposals for reform. Correspondence is welcome! Future topics will include loans, export controls and especially copyright, which is seeing significant national and international change.

Reform of copyright law remains high on the Federal Government's agenda. A draft bill concerned with the 'digital environment' was released in February. It may become law later in 1999. Consideration of an important two-part report also is expected this year. The Copyright Law Review Committee examined ways to simplify the *Copyright Act* in relation to what subject matter is protected, the rights given to a copyright owner, and the use of copyright material by others. Both parts of the report are available online at: http://www.agps.gov.au/customer/agd/clrc

Authenticity

Debates about authenticity and art are familiar in Australia, with concerns reappearing regularly within cultural institutions and the media. The best response often may be pursuing specialist authentication services like those offered by the Ian Potter Conservation Centre at the University of Melbourne. The most noteworthy recent event about authenticity, however, may be a London criminal trial. But before setting out a few things about that case, what legal implications does 'inauthenticity' have?

Work completed in the style of another *can* create many difficulties. There may be breaches of civil law — allowing others to sue for compensation — and there may be breaches of criminal law — raising the possibility of prosecution. Here, it is enough to note three areas of concern: copyright, 'guarantee' terms implied by law, and criminal activities related to fraud.

First, if the new work reproduces a 'substantial part' of a work protected by copyright, the copyright owner can sue. Copyright protects *qualitatively* significant (rather than just *quantitatively* large) parts of works from being reproduced. What if an artist's style is copied, rather than any particular work? Copyright does not protect the style of an artist, but other remedies may exist to protect an artist's commercial and business reputation. For example, if people are confused by a new work that adopts a particular style, the artist associated with that style may be able to sue the new work's creator, or institutions involved in handling the work.

Work completed in the style of another can create many difficulties. There may be breaches of civil law ... and there may be breaches of criminal law ...

Secondly, when works are sold, loaned or exhibited, terms may be expressly stated in agreements, or they may be automatically implied by law. These terms can include guarantees of authenticity. So if you or your institution buys a forged painting, there could well be a legal remedy. In the past, some legal judgments may have treated the art world as a special case, and suggested that attributions can only be a matter of opinion not fact — for example, in considering whether vendors or agents had been negligent in attributing a work's origins. That 'leniency' should not be expected now, particularly under legislation. At the same time, art trade practice that is more ready to honour the spirit of transactions may deal with many of these concerns.

The third area is crime. It can be illustrated by the English prosecution of John Drewe for charges relating to fraud and theft. In February 1999, Drewe was convicted for activities spanning the previous decade and sentenced to six years imprisonment. He commissioned works in the style of artists like Jean Dubuffett, Marc Chagall, Nicholas de Stael and Alberto Giacometti. Drewe gained access to the archives of the Tate Gallery — after donating £20,000 to the institution — and the Victoria & Albert. This gave him access to extensive records, including files from defunct galleries and dealers. Drewe gave the forged works a provenance by altering or replacing parts of these records. He then sold the works internationally, at times through major auction houses. One fake Ben Nicholson reportedly fetched US$175,000 in North America.

The works were actually painted by John Myatt who pleaded guilty to conspiracy and became the prosecution's principal witness. Police believe up to 200 works were involved, but only 60 have been recovered. The prosecuting barrister, John Bevan QC, described the case as 'quite simply the biggest contemporary art fraud the 20th century has seen... with these forgeries sold throughout Europe, in the Far East and in America. It was brilliantly carried out and the damage done is considerable.' The trial also illustrates some of the common difficulties in legal remedies — it ran for almost five months and is estimated to have cost £4 million. The time taken for the scheme to emerge and be responded to also is significant. While Drewe's actions began in the mid-1980s, police became involved only after his ex-wife reported concerns to them in the mid-1990s, at about the same time as two art dealers contacted police.

The case makes especially clear the need for integrity in a work's provenance. For example, works that raise suspicion before one auction or exhibition may be withdrawn, only to reappear later. Then, previous concerns may not be easily traced. Questions of authenticity and forgeries can easily be linked to the origins of art history, and how best to deal with suspect works remains an issue for the art trade and cultural institutions.

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Placing Women: Women's History and Heritage Methodology Search Conference

University of Tasmania, Hobart, February 1999

LINDA YOUNG

Specific expressions of women's lives are hard to find in the official list of Australian heritage places, the Register of the National Estate. The places deemed to relate to women are almost entirely institutions: prisons, convents, hospitals, schools. Despite a multitude of domestic houses, gardens, churches and public buildings where we know by logic that 51 per cent of the population lived and worked throughout their lives, there is little trace of Everywoman in the built heritage. How can women be so invisible in the layers of the cultural landscape?

The big answer is a comment on a sexist society which has always devalued women, marginalised their productive and reproductive work and condemned their memory to oblivion. But in these days of affirmative action, and in the light of social and feminist history, the Australian Heritage Commission aims to represent the (place) heritage of all Australians. Recognising the gap, it made a grant in 1994 to develop a methodology for the identification and assessment of women's heritage places. The project was undertaken by Hobart heritage consultant Miranda Morris on behalf of the Tasmanian Office for the Status of Women, using Tasmania as a specimen of the Australian condition.

Work resumed in late 1998, when a call was distributed to attend a 'search conference' on the topic in Hobart in February 1999. Some forty women from all states responded at their own or their institution's expense. Participants received a copy of Morris's report with which to prepare their thinking.

The report, *Placing Women*, is an important statement on Australian women's history and its public expressions. Morris confronts the central question: what is a women's site? Apart from the kinds of institutions mentioned above, it is evident that 'all sites are women's sites but that women have been rendered invisible in their commemoration'.(p.12) The report therefore considers the forms of history, place and material culture that women have left behind which can today be recognised as heritage. These issues lead to few obvious conclusions, so Morris tested six types of study showing different ways in which women's sites might be identified, commenting on the advantages and disadvantages of each approach. Ultimately, she concludes that it may be more important to make the evidence of women's heritage visible through interpretation than to nominate specific places as summative exemplars and she proposes ways in which women's heritage can be promoted 'beyond the Register'.(p.13)

The core of the problem was described by Chris Johnston, Melbourne heritage consultant, in a paper to the 1992 Women in Archaeology conference. 'Much of women's lives has been about process rather than product', she writes, 'and many social processes do not produce the sort of evidence that we protect through our heritage registers and legislation. That is, many processes do not produce places'.[1] Johnston and a handful of other feminist commentators suggest that the concept of heritage needs to be extended with a conscious eye to include women's history and culture in the public record.

Essentially, this is Morris's position too. She concludes with a radically different kind of thematic schema based on the measurement of productivity based on life enhancement (a model by NZ economist Marilyn Waring) and the market of work undertaken for no remuneration (the 'free economy' defined by Finnish economist Hillka Pietilä). Morris proposes fourteen categories of women's life-enhancing contributions to the free economy, from giving birth, to forming relationships to nourishing the spirit.(p.102) For example, within the subcategories of 'Giving Birth' she identifies childbirth in the home environment (supported by a kinswoman or a midwife), in a lying in home, in a maternity hospital etc., ante- and post-natal care, surrogate motherhood, contraception and abortion, unwanted birthing and shunned birthing, and infanticide. She connects these categories to places (often houses), e.g., midwife Mrs Jack Goggins' house in Bothwell; Queen Victoria Hospital for Women in Launceston; Mt St Canice Magdalen Home for Girls, Hobart; and the site where Mary McLaughlin was hanged in Hobart Gaol.

This is a stunning range for thinking Heritage. There is nothing like it in extant registers. If such a collection of places were formally listed it would reshape professional — and community — ideas about the nature of heritage and women's place in it.

By contrast, the keynote speaker at the conference — Dianne Dodd of Parks Canada — described a much more conventional approach developed out of a special project to commemorate women in Parks Canada properties by plaquing selected sites. Dr Dodd recounted her own research program on the theme of women and health, which produced plaques on a number of nursing schools, the headquarters of the remote area nursing service, and a number of early female doctors' offices. She also described the difficulty of proposing commemoration of an early advocate of birth control whose commitment was driven by eugenics and anti-Semitism — a telling example of the compromises that modern values can require of history.

Plaques have a bad image in Australia, having often been proposed as 'recognition' of heritage significance when an original building is demolished. At the same time, it was agreed that the 'Blue Plaques' of London (which mark the houses of famous people) contribute a real sense of peopling the contemporary environment with the historic past. Overall, participants concluded that the Australian system of heritage place identification and assessment is both more inclusive and more demanding than what was required at Parks Canada, and that we should not be satisfied with plaques alone.

Participants in Placing Women were asked to consider aims, frameworks, strategies and actions to recognise women's heritage in two group variations:

as small mixed groups and as professional groups. The latter generated what might be seen as the tectonic lines of the conference. Federal and state government heritage officials tended to speak a common language; the independent practitioners and the interpreters-and-community group coalesced; and a small academic contingent of historians and women's studies specialists held fast. I think the bundle of 29 strategies that eventually emerged from these densely consultative processes represents distinct concerns within each grouping (it must be said this is my personal analysis!).

The strategies can be grouped broadly to cover governmental ways of recognising and implementing women's heritage sites; a persistent call to recognise the intangible and movable culture expressions of women's heritage, on the grounds that they represent more of women's experience than do places; likewise, a recurrent proposal to recognise women through interpretation and reinterpretation of sites; and finally, a raft of proposals to improve heritage practice in general by making it more responsible, communicative, interdisciplinary, diverse and ethical. Given that the conference was funded by the Australian Heritage Commission, whose mandate is place heritage and whose remit has been relentlessly reduced by the Federal Liberal Government, many of the strategies fall way beyond realisable scope. Nonetheless, they are important rhetorical claims for the recognition of the distinctive, hidden character of women's heritage — in fact, of the heritage of many marginalised people.

Placing Women was a bold step forward in the process of identifying what constitutes heritage. It is now usual to seek 'community' input into heritage decisions — it is one of the strengths of Australian heritage practice. The conference was both more structured and more eclectic than some community consultations I've attended; contradictory as this sounds, the outcomes were very rich, if somewhat confused. Morris is yet to write up the conclusions, and in good feminist practice, it will be a continuingly open process via an electronic discussion list. Contact Miranda Morris for subscription details: mimorris@netspace.net.au Copies of the report can be obtained from Julia Searle (02) 6274 2132; julia.searle@ea.gov.au

Linda Young is senior lecturer in cultural heritage management, University of Canberra

Reference

1. Johnston, C. 1993, 'Gaps in the Record' in du Cros, H. and Smith, L. (eds), *Women in Archaeology: A Feminist Critique*, Canberra, ANU, p.206.

Ron Appleyard 1920–1999

The 1937 annual report of the Art Gallery of South Australia records the employment of a junior assistant, the sixteen-year old 'Master Ronald Appleyard', to assist the Director, Louis McCubbin. Apart from four years service in the AIF 1941–45, Ron Appleyard never worked anywhere else and when he retired in June 1982, he was the longest-serving officer in an Australian art museum.

In 1965 Ron was part of a group of like-minded directors and art-museum curators who established the Art Galleries Association of Australia, renamed the Art Museums Association of Australia in 1979. He was its resourceful and hard-working foundation secretary and later served as vice-president and president. Having worked in almost all areas of an art museum, Ron knew the importance of co-ordinated efforts, good administration, and what may now be known as best practice in museology.

Ron realised the importance of recording and retrieving information in the running of a museum and he advocated the appointment of appropriate staff and improved methods of cataloguing and record keeping. In the late 1960s he introduced his new numbering and cross-referencing cataloguing system to the AGSA. The basis for this came from his contact with overseas museums and through his own travels and active membership of international cultural organisations. Accordingly, he strove for the support and development of young curators and their profession in Australia.

He was made a Fellow of the Museums Association (UK) and also served on the councils of many cultural organisations, including the Arts Council of South Australia, Australian National Advisory Committee for UNESCO (Visual Arts Committee) and the Australian National Committee for ICOM. Realising the importance of travel to art museum employees, he lobbied for travel grants, especially for attendance at national and international conferences.

At a time when almost all directors and curators in Australian art museums were drawn from the ranks of practising artists or art teachers, Ron was an exception and was unusual in being an art museum administrator and art historian. He wrote numerous articles for art journals and was a valued contributor to dictionaries of art and artists. From the 1960s, he researched and wrote increasingly on colonial art and artists, becoming an authority on many.

In 1981, Ron Appleyard was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia for his services to art. He retired from the AGSA in June of the following year but continued to research historical artists after his retirement. Despite recurring bouts of ill health in the mid to late 1990s, his irreverent sense of humour remained as undiminished as his dedication to his research projects.

Ron was instrumental in the growth and development of his profession in Australia. He died at age 78 on 8 January.

Judith Heaven is an independent curator based in Adelaide. She is a former curator of Australian decorative arts at the Art Gallery of South Australia.

Preservation Planning: Guidelines for Writing a Long-Range Plan.

By Sherelyn Ogden. American Association of Museums/Northeast Document Conservation Centre: Professional Practice Series, 1997.

I love a good plan. Unfortunately, my reality rarely embraces a well-ordered, coherent sequence of events, neatly prioritised and widely agreed upon. Instead, I seem to constantly respond to the haphazard collection of crises that is my life. And while I wait expectantly for the magic formula that will transform plan to action and bring this chaos to some kind of structured order, the reality is that it has probably been held up in the traffic.

It was with some pleasure and a large amount of hope, therefore, that I noted the arrival of two potentially valuable planning documents: *Strategic Planning Manual*, by Jennifer Colbert for Museums Australia, and *Preservation Planning: Guidelines for Writing a Long-Range Plan*, by Sherelyn Ogden for the American Association of Museums.

The first book should be familiar to all readers of this *Museum National*, having been distributed free to the entire membership of Museums Australia. The second book, *Preservation Planning*, is approximately 120 pages with an accompanying floppy disc. It is part of the Professional Practice Series, published by the American Association of Museums. The series provides an impressive range of material on many museum topics: I must have a look for *Museums and Consultants: Maximising the Collaboration* and the *Standard Facility Report*.

Overall, *Preservation Planning* is an excellent document and a useful addition to the literature. The volume is divided into eleven sections with seven appendices. Sections include: Background Considerations; Process and Plan Overview; Gather/Review Existing Documents; Overall Approach to Writing the Plan; Drafting the Plan; and Implementing and Updating the Plan.

This is the most thorough guide to preservation planning I have seen. It aims to assist staff in small museums, who have no planning experience, to produce a useful, professional plan of high enough standard to be accepted by a board or funding body. Accordingly, the content, layout and process are clearly covered in the step-by-step overview. Sections are linked by reference to the plan structure, which forms the chapters for the completed Preservation Plan.

Unfortunately, the book is bulky in both content and format. Devised as a joint project between Old Sturbridge Village and the North East Document Conservation Centre, the 'workshop' format makes its valuable information difficult to access. Page numbers are not sequential beyond their individual chapters, which makes cross referencing arduous. There is also a great deal of wasted space, with many pages containing only two paragraphs covering half a page. A tighter layout and edit would facilitate use.

The book comes formatted in a spiral binder — very useful in a document that is primarily a tool. Unfortunately the cover is flimsy and the tabs denoting each section sit beyond the cover, hence they are vulnerable, easily torn and creased — not so useful in a document that is primarily a working reference.

My other criticism is that while the content deals successfully with *how* to provide assessment for a preservation plan, there is very little detail about *what* should be assessed. Appendix 3 describes these areas, including Environment, Storage: Facilities and Containers, Conservation Treatment, Staff Training and others. But for a workbook aimed at 'smaller and emerging museums' ('Introduction' p.4) there should at least be a good bibliography pointing out relevant literature in these areas.

Despite my comments on its bulk, this is an extremely useful book. It would be a valuable resource in a museum studies course, as well as for smaller and emerging museums. As a conservator, it is a document I will refer to when developing preservation plans, and I would recommend it to anyone who wants a sound introduction to the practical issues of preservation planning.

Robyn Sloggett
Chief conservator, Ian Potter Conservation Centre, University of Melbourne

Experiencing Material Culture in the Western World.

Edited by Susan M. Pearce. Leicester University Press, London and Washington, 1997.

In the past two years the outpouring of books and articles on collecting and museums has begun to focus on material culture and its place in museology. While it is doubtful that all will make an enduring contribution to the exploration and understanding of material culture, this eclectic new anthology includes some worthwhile contributions. Thirteen authors consider themes ranging from the role of language in the construction and interpretation of the material and conceptual world, the position of material culture (in particular, collections) in popular fiction, and the interpretation of material culture within a complex framework of production and consumption, the symbolic and the self-perceptive.

Sean Hides draws upon an impressive bibliography to guide us through shifting descriptions of the material and social world, examining the way ideologies have influenced the reconstruction of the past. Led by the steady hand of Michel Foucault, he identifies three main epistemological periods: the Late Renaissance (c.1550–1650), the Classical Age (c.1650–1790) and the Modern Age (c.1790–1900). The first was distinguished by a focus on resemblances between objects, the exotic and the microcosm; the second was the great period of classification; and the third considered origins, processes and relations. It is a useful summary, and a simple but effective argument for the recognition of our own subjectivity in material culture studies as well as the contemporary practice of archaeology.

Søren Askegaard and A. Fuat Firat plod through an earnest account of the theoretical and practical relationships between consumption and production, and between desire, necessity and the symbolic functions of objects. Drawing on a rich inheritance of scholarship, they argue that the hegemonic economy-driven market should be replaced with a 'theatre' replete with symbolism and individual autonomy, better reflecting the multiple dimensions of human life and aiding the 'construction of meaningful lives'. (p.135) This paper stands in sharp contrast to the lightweight essay contributed by Mary McGee Wood. Wood dedicates no fewer than three pages to verbatim exchanges from a knitting news group (which she fails to analyse), then apologises at the end for 'all those contributions I did not have enough space to use'. (p.79) Her point is that there is a fundamental distinction between language used for 'material' and 'immaterial' (or 'art' and 'science') purposes. It would be far

better for the reader to explore the thoroughly enjoyable essay on semantics and material culture by Christian J. Kay.

Editor Susan Pearce also has fun with words, exploring the interdependence of 'narrative, things, food and bodies'. (p.3) Her metaphorical dinner includes roast fowls which 'traditionally include their own liver, and perhaps other bits of giblets, chopped up, and the whole mixture... lightened and softened with beaten egg: what we enjoy are the detached innards and the potential young chick returned into the body from which it came, and reheated again to living warmth... [served in dishes which] represent the bird as it was in life... It is a material image of consuming death-in-life and life-in-death which stands at the heart of our culture'. (p.5)

Several contributors consider words and meanings woven into the form of popular fiction. Helen Wilkinson introduces us to collectors portrayed in recent fiction, in particular the work of A.S. Byatt, and Katherine Edgar struggles to come to terms with the relationship between popular fiction and 'mass beliefs'. The reunification of Germany provides fertile territory for a more confident exploration of the role played by material culture in the construction of identity. Milena Veenis argues that goods played an important symbolic role in the changing political, economic and social experiences of East and West Germans.

The book concludes with a breezy assortment of ideas on the 'language of collecting' from artist Julian Walker, ranging from shifting concepts about the validity of gathering large collections of similar objects to the nature of object value for curators and visitors. Although his tendency to generalise and to skim is problematic, and his ideas lack originality, his observations are often well-aimed, such as the description of museum stores 'filled with large numbers of remarkably similar boxes containing larger numbers of remarkably similar objects that have been collected in remarkably similar ways. And it is the burden of our collecting society that we have repeated this activity in remarkably similar buildings in most of our major towns and cities'.(p.260).

Let us hope that the ways we explore and articulate the material evidence of the past are not doomed to repetition also, for want of originality and a surfeit of enthusiasm. With few exceptions, this book generally moves us in the right direction.

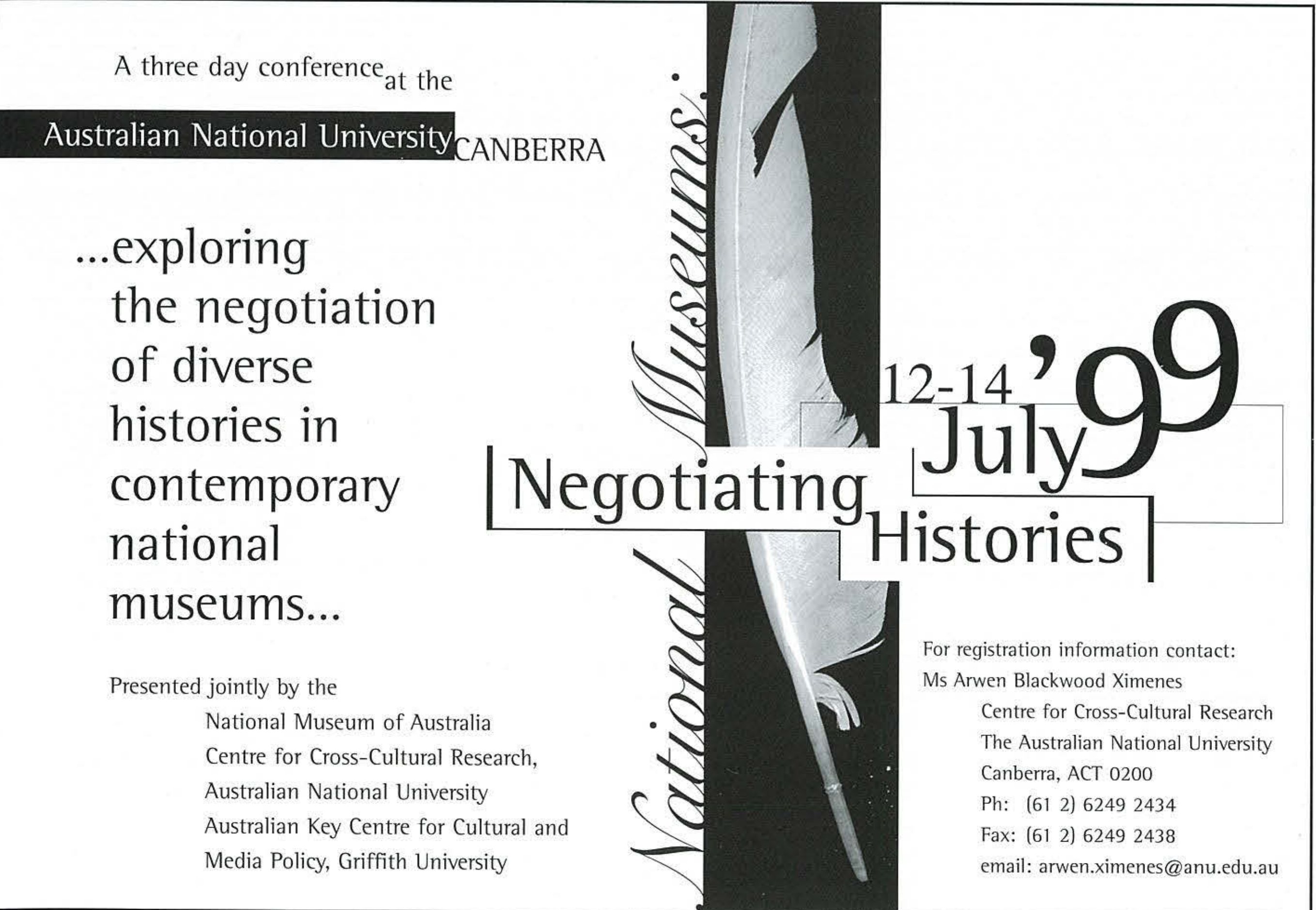
Deborah Tout-Smith
Curator of history, Western Australian Museum (currently on leave in the USA)

Conservation and Care of Collections.

Edited by David Gilroy and Ian Godfrey. Western Australian Museum, Perth, 1998.

My initial reaction to this book was pleasure that former colleagues at the Western Australian Museum had finally managed to get it to publication, and that, at last, here was a handbook to guide small museums in the care and maintenance of their slice of the Distributed National Collection.

The layout within the chapters makes information easy to find, and I particularly liked the summary section at the end of each. The chapters devoted to object



materials are thorough, and those on photographs, paper and textiles are comprehensive and easy to read. I was particularly appreciative of the line drawings, which clearly explain a range of support, storage and handling techniques, not always easy topics to talk about unless you can actually demonstrate! While there is an introductory chapter on preventive conservation, actual treatments are generally confined to the chapters dealing with specific materials. I also liked the case studies, as they provide readers with actual examples of how object treatments are carried out at the professional level. Nothing like providing a good example, and a glossary for the technically unprepared, like me!

Now for the down side. I have worked with local and regional museums in three states for six years and I harbour a number of concerns for the workers in small museums, volunteers for the most part, and their use of this publication as anything other than a reference tool. Firstly, nowhere is the issue of *why* an object should be considered for conservation or restoration discussed. Surely any treatment of an object should start with identifying its value and significance to, and within, the collection? Secondly, there is no discussion or reference to the importance of counter-disaster planning, which I believe should be an integral part of the management and preservation of collections.

The use of chemicals and chemical-based treatments is detailed in several chapters, with a clear inference that local museum workers can carry out these treatments. Yet in my experience many of them lack the resources and facilities, not to mention the confidence, to do so. Many chapters mention in the summary section that it is wise to check with a conservator first, but this information should be capitalised, bolded, and placed at the beginning of each chapter!

The level of detailed treatment in some chapters begs another question, not addressed in the text, Why do museums need to 'fix' things? In many cases collections would not require the level of treatment detailed in the book if they had been better housed and cared for in the first place, with the museum rigorously acting within the guidelines of a defined collections policy. Museums and museum workers also need to accept some objects ought to be accepted as 'old' or 'worn', and active conservation, or attempts at restoration, will undermine the integrity of historical use. A useful addition would have been a discussion of the broader issues of collection management, and the place of collections conservation within its framework, to place the contents in a more appropriate context for use.

Conservation and Care of Collections is a good companion for conservators and qualified outreach staff working in the field. It has lots of useful information for local and regional museum and gallery workers, and is a welcome reference. However, it fails to place conservation and collection care within the overall context of collections *management*, and encourages workers in small museums to undertake object treatments that may well be better left to trained conservators, or at the least done under their tutelage. Overall, my comment would be: handle with caution! And if readers want to use the treatments detailed in the book for a particular object, check with your state museum first!

Zoe McKenzie
Project officer, Museums and Galleries Foundation, Sydney

Western Australian Museum, Perth: New Entrance Building

A study of the entrances to the Western Australian Museum reveals both an ongoing struggle to define architecturally the space of the museum and a set of changing relationships between the institution and its visitors.

The 1890s Beaufort Street entrance, immediately north of the railway line and central Perth, was in an imposing Romanesque Revival style. The entrance to the combined museum, art gallery and public library was up a short but grand flight of stairs. Once inside, the visitor encountered a glass case containing a huge stuffed bison that arrived at the museum in 1899. A grander entrance was planned originally for James Street, but was never built, so the stairs, round-arched doorway and bison have framed generations of West Australians' perceptions of the institution of museums: as a solemn space of awe and contemplation.

In the 1970s the museum moved away from that vision and offered the visitor an entrance on Francis Street indistinguishable from any late 20th century business building. The nine storey, office block style building was planned initially for administration, but was used also for exhibition.

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The National Cultural Heritage Control List describes the types of objects controlled by the *Protection of Movable Cultural Heritage Act 1986.*

New regulations from 1 May 1999 simplify and update the Control List. If you are intending to export, you should check the Control List to decide whether your object falls within the criteria and if an export permit is required. There are penalties for breaches of the Act.

Victoria Cross medals won by Australians cannot be exported. If already outside Australia they may re-enter temporarily provided a certificate of exemption is obtained.

There is no application or permit fee. Information, advice and application forms are available from the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts.

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National Cultural Heritage Committee
Department of Communications,
Information Technology and the Arts
GPO Box 2154
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Phone: (02) 6271 1610
Fax: (02) 6271 1122
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Website: *www.dcita.gov.au*
(look up 'export permit' under Easyfind)

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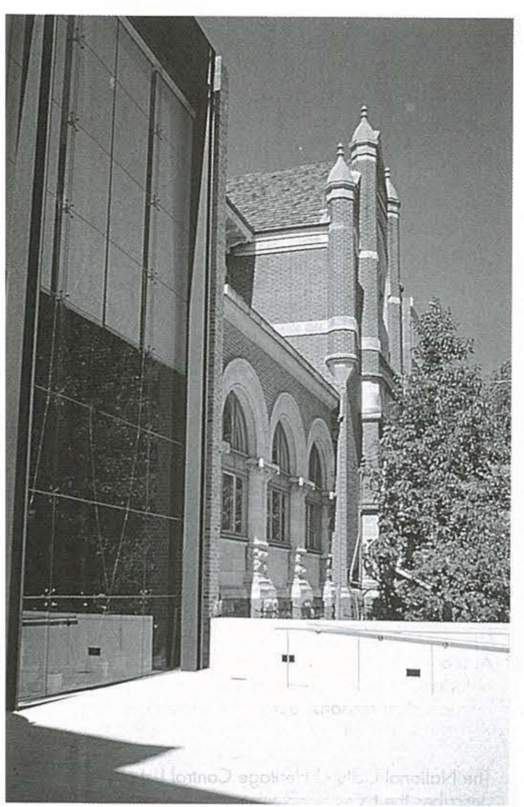

Side view of the entrance building at the Western Australian Museum.
Photo Douglas Elford.

The building design privileged office and conservation facilities over the public exhibition galleries, which had to be reached by lifts with several floors marked as off-limits to visitors.

As the Perth Cultural Precinct took shape, the museum effectively found itself with its back to other core cultural resources. The Art Gallery of Western Australia, the Alexander and Battye libraries and the Perth Institute for Contemporary Arts faced the James Street mall while the museum entrance was a city block away. To rectify this lack of civic cohesion, in 1992 and 1993 the museum opened a low-key entrance onto the mall.

In February 1999 the museum opened a new front entrance, this time partly realising the 1890s vision of a grand James Street entrance while also fulfilling the ideals of the cultural precinct. The new entrance is a visual link for visitors both to the state's chief cultural institutions and the surrounding streets of cafes, nightclubs and small galleries.

A glass, steel and white terrazzo segment designed by architects Cox, Howlett and Bailey Woodland has been constructed to abut the two older buildings, Hackett Hall and the Jubilee Wing on Beaufort Street. It creates an entrance which is a visual and internal link between the museum's various structures, inviting the visitor to look beyond its glass walls to the historic buildings of the site. The new building's material transparency means it does not impose itself on the visitor, but in an act of virtual self-erasure it gestures towards these grand older buildings. The entrance's centrepiece view is now the old Perth Gaol, constructed in 1856.

The $8m building and refurbishment has tripled existing exhibition space, which includes a new interactive science discovery centre. In its restored glory, Hackett Hall, built 1911-1913 and once the home of the State Library of WA, will house the multi-disciplinary exhibition, 'Western Australia: Land and People' and an information resource centre.

For the visitor, the stylish entrance to Western Australia's flagship museum promises to be both welcoming and exhilarating. A three-storey high terrazzo walkway enables visitors to connect the two original buildings, offering exciting vistas from the museum interior of the foyer and beyond to the skyscrapers of the retail and business district. This generous use of space will encourage visitors to enliven the space with their presence, and for the first time all galleries will have disabled access.

Dr Jennifer Garton Smith
Subiaco Museum, Perth

Tasmanian Tiger: The Mystery of the Thylacine.

Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, now travelling via Visions of Australia: at Questacon, Canberra to 11 July.

Icon of Tasmania, the thylacine contains a further multitude of meanings: strange marsupial, shy but savage, tragic extinctee, maybe mystery survivor. It's a great topic for a travelling exhibition from the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, one of the last Australian museums in which nature and culture are still united. Appropriately, the exhibition surveys the thylacine from the multiple perspectives of palaeontology, biology, Aboriginal myth and art, nineteenth and 20th century science and visual art, contemporary craft, marketing and mystery.

Visitors enter through a red velvet curtain leading to a video player caged in chicken wire, endlessly playing clips of the last incarcerated animals. After this grim beginning, historic images amplify skeletons, skins and mounted specimens. A reproduction slab hut is furnished with skins, string and pegs, accompanied by the voice of a trapper (I was wishing for a bench to sit down on by this time). Thylacine artworks ranging from scientific illustrations to jocular contemporary craftworks line the walls. Last but not least, there are enough trackball video interactives to keep

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Alb. Quarrell with his kill. Collection Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery

numerous children occupied — adults may get a look in by stepping forward assertively.

The theme of extinction predominates. John Gould foresaw it in 1851 as he made the first reliable drawings of the beast. The striped pelt made it something of a trophy in the Victorian hunter aesthetic, evidenced in a parlour photograph. But the vernacular name 'tiger' was probably the animal's nemesis, conjuring a much more ferocious image than reality ever expressed. Emigrants of the 1820s were described as terrified to seek work inland for fear of Tasmanian tigers.

The real enemies were the sheep-owners. Their flocks may have been savaged more by feral dogs than thylacines, but in 1881 a bounty was introduced which killed off 2000 animals in 20 years. The bounty could be paid only for dead animals, though the Tasmanian Museum begged trappers for live specimens. The thylacine was declared a protected species in July 1936, two months before the last live specimen died in the Hobart Zoo.

Thylacines have been glimpsed ever since, but with no definite evidence of survivors. Still, it seems just enough possibility persists for a wishful belief of near-mystic quality — or is it just nutty? Curator Kathryn Medlock sensitively explores both the belief and the phenomenon of belief. No less than seven big tiger searches have been mounted since 1937, to no effect. An amusing sequence of videos puts the arguments of the true believer, the scientist and the sceptic. The scientist points out that though every other rare species turns up among road kills, there's nary a tiger — a point that struck me, a tourist who had recently driven along Tasmanian roads lined with dead possums and other critters.

The only place you can see thylacines today is in museums. There are more of them overseas than in Australia, having been part of the exchange currency of Tasmanian museums throughout the nineteenth century. The exhibition buttresses this logic with a so-called 'Curator's Database of Thylacines in International Collections', which enables the visitor to discover, for example, that there are five specimens in two Belgian museums, and so forth throughout the world. This could be a genuine curator's database, but what does it mean to members of the public?

It is a question also to be asked of the entire push to put museum collections on the Internet, a very fashionable objective in cultural policy these days. Bluntly, the information that x specimens are located in A, B and C museums is of minimal value without substantially more detail, provenance and context. What gives the data meaning is interpretation of the significance of the said specimens, i.e., the curator's specialist expertise. This exhibition fulfils the task thoroughly, and the Tasmanian Museum's exhibition website adds more. (www.tmag.tased.edu.au/tastiger)

Without vastly more resources for publicly accessible museum collections (other than library or archive collections of neat, regular-shaped documents), it is hollow to claim that online collection records are a great leap forward for the public's knowledge of collections. Interpretive exhibitions such as 'Tasmanian Tiger' continue to demonstrate that real objects and curatorial knowledge make a uniquely powerful communicative statement.

Ultimately, 'Tasmanian Tiger' is about awareness of the fragility of the natural environment. In all 42 species have become extinct since 1788; many more species are currently listed as endangered. Accidents of history, misunderstandings of Australian ecology and wilful human blindness wiped out the thyalcine — let it not happen again with others.

Linda Young
Cultural Heritage, University of Canberra

The Politics of Display: Museums, Science and Culture.

Edited by Sharon Macdonald. Routledge, London, 1998.

The devil made me do it. Whenever my exhibition work is criticised for daring to advocate a position (any position) or for being unbalanced or even biased I want to credit the temptations of the underworld for my perceived transgressions. In reality I'm proud of my biases, or at least some of them, and see value in giving them interpretive rein if they capture and hold the attention of my audience to convey a justifiable message. This wasn't

always the case — an aspiration to perfect balance used to rule. But after years of conference papers about owning up to your biases and colleagues telling me that objectivity is an illusion, I realised that my image of blindfolded curatorial justice had transmogrified into a blinkered political being.

The Politics of Display: Museums, Science and Culture, edited by Sharon Macdonald, is another welcome shake of justice's beam balance. Reading it will help peel away the museological blindfolds of those who think it is achievable to be a neutral arbiter of information. The book consists of eleven essays (plus an introduction and afterword), some of which appeared in a shorter form in the journal *Science as Culture*. The strength of this collection is that it exposes and explores the hidden opinions behind museum interpretive practice in several countries over the past 150 years. I particularly like the following four pieces.

Tony Bennett's chapter covers nineteenth century communication objectives that parallel some modern notions of social engineering. He describes the growing liberal vision to make transparent the meaning of science exhibitions — that museums should 'speak to the eyes'. The working class should be enabled to extract the meaning of the displays at a glance and be informed by clear labels. This contrasted with the opaque symbolism contained in the profusion of riches (e.g., showcases of a hundred examples of the same thing) displayed in more conservative bastions.

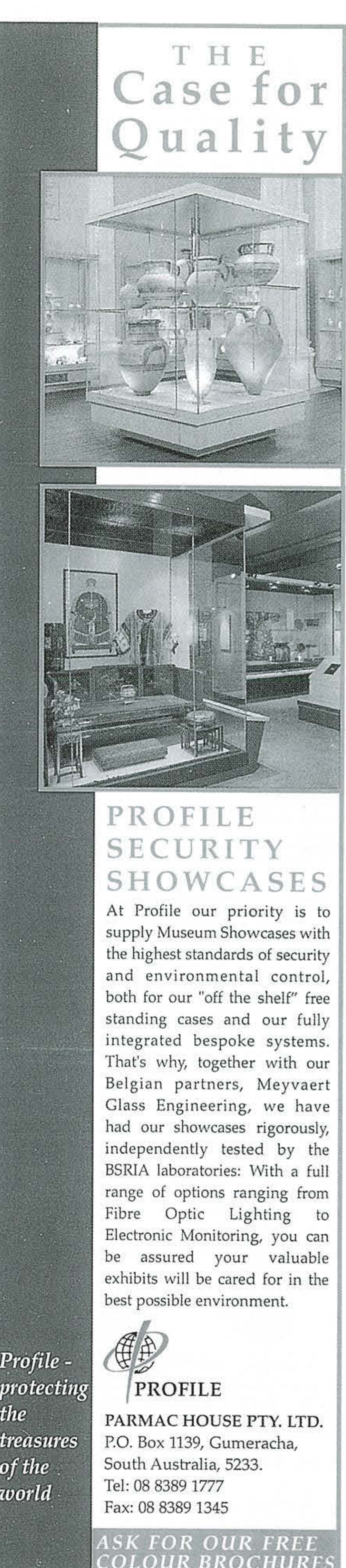
Tracy Teslow examines the prevailing anthropological assumptions of the early 20th century that led to the 1933 'Races of Mankind' exhibition at Chicago's Field Museum of Natural History. This display of 101 life-size bronze sculptures of the principal human racial types was originally arranged to imply a racial hierarchy, with European (males) at the top of the homo sapiens' heap. But the lesson is more than the clash of perspective with our late 1990s sensitivity to cultural diversity, and even more than the false argument that racial purity or human typological boundaries can be defined. It's that the sculptor cheated — her creations were sometimes a misrepresentative synthesis of contradictory opinions on the appearance of people she never observed, or consisted of idealised parts modelled from various individuals.

Thomas Gieryn analyses the controversies surrounding two Smithsonian Institution exhibitions, 'Science in American Life', and one which was planned to be 'The Crossroads: the End of World War II, the Atomic Bomb and the Origins of the Cold War' but which instead became the 'Enola Gay' display. He was involved in developing the former and was an interested observer in the battle about the latter. He presents several sides of the complex accusations of imbalance both in the content of the exhibitions and in the arguments of the curators and their critics. And he strives to do this in a remarkably balanced way.

Andrew Barry compares and contrasts the roles of interactive displays as exemplified at three institutions in different countries. Socially and politically charged terms such as 'empowerment' and 'accountability', and the theme of popular culture versus scientific and technological information are featured notions in this essay (and are referred to in other chapters in various ways). He explains how the Exploratorium in San Francisco uses interactives to disseminate a sense of scientific experimentation to the wider public. By contrast, the Cité des Sciences et de l'Industrie in Paris wants to connect the individual visitor with the vision of France, the technological nation, through engaging interactive sensory experiences. In a third type of approach, London's Science Museum seems less deterministic in its use of interactives and emphasises the continuing centrality of collections for the public face of a modern science museum.

Most of the chapters of this book took me through realms of hidden agendas, strongly held but narrowly defined positions and other interpretive complexities. Only one or two of the essays bordered on the turgidly academic and tended to over-analyse. After all, anything can be reinterpreted. But to read the essays is to contemplate that however you want to interpret any subject, you'll likely run afoul of your own and others' obvious and subtle political, social and economic biases. This is a vital lesson for museum studies students and seasoned museologists alike. Then again, who cares what others think. Whoops — the devil made me do that!

Dr Jesse Shore
Senior curator, sciences, Powerhouse Museum, Sydney



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