

# TIMELINES

No. 23 June 2018

Museum Historians' National Network Newsletter



## THE MELBOURNE ISSUE

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## MUSEUM HISTORIANS' NATIONAL NETWORK COMMITTEE

<b>President</b>	Michelle Stevenson <b>Museum Victoria</b>
<b>Vice-President</b>	Rebecca Carland <b>Museums Victoria</b>
<b>Secretary</b>	Sarah Haid <b>Sydney Living Museums</b>
<b>Treasurer</b>	Eleanor Cave <b>Australian War Memorial</b>

### Ordinary Members

Christen Bell  
**History House Museum**

Malcolm Traill  
**Western Australian Museum**

### Newsletter Editor

Nina Buchan  
**Museums Victoria**

**Museum Historians** is a Museums Australia National Network, and Special Interest Group.

The cost of membership is \$15 and is open to all current members of Museums Australia.

To join Museum Historians please contact the Museums Australia national office:

#### **The Membership Manager**

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## FROM THE EDITOR

It is with eager excitement that we anticipate the next Museums Galleries Australia National Conference, to be held in Melbourne in June this year.

Amongst the offerings provided by the National MGA office, such as international guest speakers, workshops and welcome receptions, the Historians' Network has been busy making sure that historical practice and our network will have a strong presence in the week-long event.

We look forward to a series of lightning talks by our members, on current topics of best practice and debate around the conference theme: *Agents of Change*.

In addition, there will be social and networking opportunities, so hopefully we will meet up then, for exchange and support in all things museological and historical.

We hope, too, that our interstate and regional members enjoy all that contemporary Melbourne has to offer, along with a walk into its dark past on our guided tour.

Until then, Nina, Editor.

### CONTRIBUTING TO TIMELINES

There are two issues of *Timelines* a year, and all contributions are welcome; including articles, press releases, photos and short updates about exhibitions, programs and events.

**Issue One** published: April/May.

Contributions close March 31st.

**Issue Two** published: October/November.  
Contributions close September 31st.

**Contributions should be emailed to:**

**The Editor at [Timelinesjournal@gmail.com](mailto:Timelinesjournal@gmail.com)**

*Thank you* to the interviewee of this edition of *Timelines*, Curator Michael Reason.

## MUSEUMS AUSTRALIA HISTORIANS NATIONAL NETWORK BURSARY PROGRAM

Museums Australia Historians National Network (MAHNN) will provide funds for members to undertake professional development activities. This can include, but is not limited to: Conference/seminar registration fees, travel and accommodation costs to attend professional development activities, and/or research costs.

To be eligible for funding, you must be a member of the network and be working or studying in the museums/galleries/libraries/archives/heritage sector.

In 2018, the MAHNN will be offering bursaries of total value of \$1000, which may be shared amongst successful applicants, or awarded to an individual recipient. The recipient/s will then share a report of their activities with the group, via a contribution to *Timelines*. Members are encouraged to apply. Applications will be assessed by the MAHNN Committee bi-annually. Applications can be submitted anytime but must be received by **28 February** and **31 August** in any given year.

A panel consisting of three members of the executive of MAHNN will assess the applications.

Applications forms and details are available on the Historians page on the MGA website.

Please send your current CV with the application.

## FROM THE PRESIDENT

As we embark on a new financial year and all the associated planning for new projects and programmes I would like to take a moment to thank all our outgoing Museum Historians committee members and welcome all those who have stayed on in their roles or joined the committee for the first time.

On the next page there's an introduction to your 2018-2019 committee who I'm sure will bring some interesting ideas about how we can best use of the network.

Museum Historians is a network for our members so if you have an idea about how the network might do things better or ways we can reach out to all our members across Australia please do get in touch or start the conversation on our Facebook group.

I'd like to thank the organisers of our Dark History Tour at the MGA 2018 Conference I learnt stories about my own city I never knew. For those who couldn't make it there will be a report on the Tour in the next edition of *Timelines*.

I'd also like to thank Elspeth Wishart, Malcolm Traill and Sarah Haid for their lightening talks at the Historians AGM at 2018 National Conference and to those who watched on Facebook Live (Ian Terry). This was the first time we had tried something like this and hints at possibilities for the future, particularly the use of digital to more often connect our members from across Australia.

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President Museum Historians NN  
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## YOUR 2018-2019 MUSEUM HISTORIANS' NATIONAL NETWORK COMMITTEE

Following the 2017-2018 Museum Historians AGM the new committee is as follows:

### **President**

Michelle Stevenson is Senior Curator of Politics & Society and the Royal Exhibition Building at Museums Victoria. She is currently completing a PhD at Deakin University titled 'Snowflakes in a Sunburnt Country: a heritage of skiing in Australia'. Michelle has been President of the Museum Historians National Network since 2015 and prior to that was Timelines Editor from 2011-2015.

You can contact Michelle via phone (03) 8341 7381 or 0438580712, email: [mstevenson@museum.vic.gov.au](mailto:mstevenson@museum.vic.gov.au) or twitter @michellesmuses

### **Vice-President**

Rebecca Carland is Senior Curator, History of Collections & Scientific Art at Museums Victoria. Bec has over 15 years experience in collections, exhibitions, programs and publication within the museum sector. She is a passionate advocate for the promotion of women in the museums sector. Bec has been a member of the Museum Historians National Network for many years and this is her first time on the committee. Bec is also currently Vice President of the Professional Historians Association (Vic).

### **Treasurer**

Dr Eleanor Cave is the Acquisitions Project Manager at the Australian War Memorial. Her PhD explored the contribution of nineteenth century Vandemonian natural history collectors to global botanical science. Eleanor has been Treasurer of the Museum Historians National Network since 2015.

### **Secretary**

Sarah Haid is a lawyer with international experience in human rights and social policy. About three years ago she turned her professional attention to the area of museums. Today she works for Sydney Jewish Museum and for Sydney Living Museums.

Early in 2017 Sarah founded a professional community for emerging female leaders, the Women of Museums Australia (WoMA) Network, and was also appointed to the Board of the Historic Houses Association of Australia. 2018-2019 will be Sarah's second year as Secretary of the Museum Historians National Network.

### **Newsletter Editor**

Nina Buchan is a graduate of the Masters of Cultural Heritage program, Deakin University and currently works and volunteers at Museums Victoria. Nina is particularly interested in shared heritage, and the nature of memory, identity and performance in creating heritage. She has been editor of Timelines since 2016.

### **Ordinary Members**

**Christen Bell** has over 20 years' experience in the museum sector. He has been the museum curator at the City of Armadale since 2005 where he manages the City's moveable heritage collection as well as History House Museum and the Bert Tyler Vintage Machinery Museum. Since starting at the City of Armadale Christen's role has evolved from hiding in the office overseeing the collection and designing exhibitions to event planner, concert promoter, waiter, public speaker, tour guide, teacher, student, admin officer, policy developer, writer and film producer. He has been an ordinary member of the Museum Historians Committee since 2014.

**Malcolm Trill** is a historian and arts activist based in the town of Albany on Western Australia's South Coast. He works as a consultant historian and also as Public Programs Officer at the Western Australian Museum. Malcolm has been a member of the Museum Historians National Network for many years and this is his first time on the committee.

## SUCCESSION PLANNING

At the 2019 AGM our treasurer of four years Dr Eleanor Cave will step down from her role on the Museum Historians Committee. To assist with succession planning the Museum Historians Committee is looking for an additional ordinary member who would like to spend a year on the committee before possibly taking on the role of treasurer following next year's AGM (though this will be subject to a vote).

The role requires preparation of a budget and end of year financial statements and biannual reporting to Museums Australia. As well as approving any expenditure by the committee. The books are held by Museums Australia National Office and basic reporting is done by them.

### **More Information**

If you are interested in this opportunity please get in touch with

**Michelle Stevenson, President, MA Historians National Network.**

Phone (03) 8341 7381 or 0438580712

email: [mstevenson@museum.vic.gov.au](mailto:mstevenson@museum.vic.gov.au)

## THANK YOU

The Museum Historians National Network Committee would like to thank outgoing Vice-President Snjez Cosic who joined the committee as an ordinary member in 2016 before taking on the role of Vice-President in 2017.

During her time on the committee Snjez has been pivotal in organising the Museum Historians walking tours at the 2017 and 2018 Museums Australia National Conference as well as serving on the bursary committee.

We wish Snjez all the best for her future in the golden city of Ballarat.

## DARK HISTORY TOUR OF MELBOURNE

*When: Monday 4 June  
Meet: 12:45pm, Location TBC  
Finish: 6pm at SLV*

Join the hosts of  
Melbourne's Dead &  
Buried Podcast for a  
walking tour through  
Melbourne's underground  
history and uncover  
stories of crime,  
punishment, love, loss and  
civil disobedience.

### **Cost**

\$50 Historians  
\$60 Non-members  
(includes afternoon tea)

Presented as part of the  
Museums Galleries  
Australia 2018 National  
Conference.

**PRESENTED BY  
MUSEUM HISTORIANS NN**



MUSEUMS AUSTRALIA  
HISTORIANS' NATIONAL  
NETWORK presents...

LIGHTNING TALKS  
AT  
Museums Galleries  
Australia 2018  
Conference

A series of three talks  
on contemporary histor-  
ical and museological  
practice in the GLAM  
sector, on the topic  
“History as an Agent of  
Change”.

Followed by discussion  
& debate, Thursday, 7th  
June.



A recent exhibition at Melbourne Museum reveals the rebellious side of Melbourne's fashion world. Six key makers and models left their indelible marks on the city, and each was told at a crucial part of their lives "You Can't Do That!". Curator Michael Reason takes a moment to discuss the importance of their stories, the development of the exhibition, and why having a Can Do attitude in social history curation is important. Interviewed by Nina Buchan, MHANN.

Nina: I found the exhibition You Can't Do That very, very interesting, because as well as being about fashion, and rule-breakers, it seemed to me that there was a narrative of private lives evolving into public lives, into public figures, and public brands...and I thought that was a really interesting dynamic to draw out, from what could have been a more static exhibition. I think perhaps sometimes when you go and see a fashion exhibition it's a chronological display of frocks and dresses...

Michael: I guess that's what Art galleries tend to do more, and they do it very well, and often they are the big names, the big illustrious garments (and all that sort of thing); but being a museum we wanted to differentiate ourselves, so we are always about the object and about the story, the stories around it. With a manufactured item, it's about who made it, who designed it, and who wore it. So we're trying to capture both sides of those things. I think that's where people find the most interest, where a story is around an

object; particularly because a lot of clothing in there is day wear...

N: Absolutely...with pieces like Prue Acton's designs, many people in the audience are going to have a lot of fond, or strong memories of these material objects...

M: Absolutely...So we also really wanted to collaborate with the designers themselves, and they all agreed, fortunately. We were able to make videos with them as "talking heads", so that the audience can see and hear them tell their story, too.

***The videos and narratives focus on moments in their careers when they were told "You can't do that!" or "You mustn't do that!", and they said, "No! Actually, we're going to do that!"***

So that was an interesting thread as well. It's about clothing, but it's also about rebellion, and about being yourself, challenging convention, so we're hoping people can get a lot more out of it than what hem-lengths were being worn at a certain time.

## Interview—Continued

N: Absolutely! Which can be slightly pejorative to women, that they are part of a flock, and if hem-lines go up, they put them up, and if they go down...they put them down...

M: Yes, they can be more challenging than that. Some-one has to be the first one to put it up, someone has to be the first to put it down, and then someone has to be the one to say 'I don't care either way and I'm going to rebel'.

N: I love the way the exhibition touched upon sub-cultures within Melbourne, and around Australia, in that there were groups of people living big eras of their lives with music, music video, fashion scenes like Chapel St...and living in those clothes...

M: Absolutely. And what effect that has, and what they were trying to say...why they did and why they were attracted to a certain look...If a designer is rebelling, and you buy their particular clothes, than you are rebelling, too...so a sort-of celebration of not just the designers but then the consumers as well.

N: I love that. I'm thinking in particular of the outrageous Christopher Graf short dress which is on display, which has a zipper that reveals on the wearer's chest an image of a skeleton and heart underneath...

M: Oh yes, the Fashion Victim dress!

N: Yes!

M: Which I think is great in all senses of the word!

N: So that is, in a sense, a true embodiment of the creation, and a real collaboration between the designer and the wearer...

M: Yes, exactly, and it's a beautifully tailored garment, beautifully made. So it's classic, but it's also got this humorous touch as well; and, I think I said this in the exhibition too, you had to be bold to wear this, so you are really making a statement, as well. So he (Graf) gave them this tool to make that statement; it can be unique, and figure-hugging, but have that rebellious side to it as well.

N: How fantastic. When it came to developing the exhibition; how did you begin, and what was the lead-in time like?

M: We did a lot of research around some key collections that came into the museum; the Prue Acton collection for example was huge, and came with a lot of supporting material, such as designs, and documents from the business side of things. The Jenny Bannister collection had a lot of photographs, as well.

[Jenny Bannister designs featured heavily in the Melbourne avant-garde scene in the 70s and 80s, captured by Rennie Ellis among others – Ed.]

So part of the process was actually being very selective about content!



Christopher Graf and model friends in his iconic store in Chapel St, Melbourne. Copyright Christopher Graf with permission from Museums Victoria.



Andreja Pejic wears the “Tribute to Amy Winehouse Dress” for Gaultier runway. Copyright John Paul Gaultier with permission from Museums Victoria.

N: Contemporary figures such as Andreja Pejic feature prominently in the exhibition as well...

M: Yes, so luckily enough Andreja was available, and even assisted in securing the loan of a very famous dress, which she wore down the runway for [John Paul] Gaultier. The “Tribute to Amy Winehouse Dress”. We managed to secure that loan in only a month, where it can normally take much longer!

We only had a short time-frame of six months to deliver the exhibition, which definitely required some Can-do attitudes! We had a good team which enabled us to get it done; but we were sourcing mannequins right up until the opening week!

N: Wow! And, how did you get involved with *Stage One*, who produced the display cases and ‘shop windows’ of the exhibition?

M: We had a reasonably small space, and six large display cases to show each character. We were playing around with ideas, and we thought – why don’t we make these like shop windows? And *Stage One*, are of course, one of the more prominent Visual Merchandising display teams in Melbourne.

They work with Gucci, Dior, Chanel shops in Australia, but then also their big claim to fame is that they do the Myer Christmas windows every year. So, we gave them a brief, and they responded to that. We were going to put one object in each window; but then we told them about this one moment in time about these personalities that we were trying to celebrate, and they came back to us with a bigger idea. So with a bit of tweaking, we created a whimsical and informative display as a way of conveying this moment in their lives...

N: It’s a very visual story; you can almost read it without even referring to the text labels...

M: Exactly. And that’s the way Visual Merchandisers work, so it was perfect for the museum setting, because, as we know, a number of people will just look, and that’s fine, they’ll get something out of it. And other people will read, and other people will do both; which I have seen quite a lot of while I’ve been around the exhibition space.

N: And some people will sashay down the catwalk...?

M: Indeed, indeed! Which is the whole point of the catwalk feature!

I do see some people doing it, but especially the kids, and the parents will be more unsure! The parents say "I don't know if I'm allowed..." But if I see them, I say "Go for it!" "Don't worry about it!" You know, you give them the freedom and off they go...

N: So, once they have permission in that public space to let their hair down, they can!

M: Exactly. Certainly people feel reserved to let their hair-down in formal public spaces; perhaps not in a nightclub, but in a museum they are more reserved...But the kids don't have that problem!

N: Kids don't seem to have that problem, do they?!?

M: I saw this group of primary school-aged boys, sashaying along, a whole row of them. And they had no inhibitions about, you know, maybe this looks a bit girly, or a bit camp, off they went, they didn't care. They channeled their inner supermodel, and off they went!

N: ***So they will not be told – "You Can't Do that!"***

M: Exactly! (Laughter) Very true. Every-one can do what they like these days, and not feel bad about it.

N: Michael Reason, thank-you very much for talking to *Timelines* today.

M: My pleasure.



Michael Reason with Prue Acton. Copyright Kate C/MV



***You Can't Do That runs until July 15th, 2018 at Melbourne Museum, Carlton. With thanks to Museum Victoria, curator Michael Reason, and YCDT Team.***