The Museums and Galleries National Awards were established in 2011 by Museums Australia to celebrate and reward excellence in museum practice across the cultural heritage sector, highlighting the success of Australia’s museums, galleries and cultural organisations, from small volunteer-run associations to the largest state and national institutions. The Awards have developed and grown in popularity in 2012.

The Awards program encourages excellence and recognises the significant positive impact of our highest achievers in contributing to the sector by establishing benchmark excellence in Exhibitions, Public Programs, and projects and developments that promote ethical and sustainable practices.

The 2012 Awards were presented at the Museums Australia National Conference in Adelaide, South Australia, on Tuesday 25 September 2012.

Visit www.museumsaustralia.org.au for more information on the Awards, including winners from 2011 and the 2012 shortlist.
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NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY

EXHIBITION JUDGES

Rebecca Coronel, National Museum of Australia
Dr Christopher Chapman, National Portrait Gallery
Bernice Murphy, Museums Australia

PUBLIC PROGRAM JUDGES

David Arnold, National Museum of Australia
Glenda Smith, Museum of Australian Democracy at Old Parliament House
Marie Wood, heritage and museum education professional (retired)

SUSTAINABILITY JUDGE

Lee Scott, Museums Australia
NATIONAL WINNER

Gwoonwardu Mia
Burlganyja Wanggaya: Old People Talking - Listen, Learn and Respect

The Gascoyne region’s five Aboriginal language groups have come together to celebrate and recognise Indigenous culture. Burlganyja Wanggaya: Old People Talking is an interactive permanent exhibition that tells the stories of the Gascoyne’s Aboriginal people in their own words.

Judges comments: ‘The panel was strongly impressed by the historical importance of this material and project - especially the dynamic ways in which important stories of Indigenous experience of social history (individually and collectively) were achieved with community consultation and reference to shared memories as laying pathways of interpretation that link different generations, while also connecting Indigenous history to wider Australian social history. Diversity of media, from oral history with elders through to interactive media and participatory technology, were felt to link older and younger generations creatively and positively. Judges were also impressed by the high design values, clarity and professionalism of the final installations, which should be very engaging to wider audiences visiting the area of Gascoyne in Western Australia.’
LEVEL 1
LESS THAN $20,000

HIGHLY COMMENDED
Wanneroo Regional Museum, Western Australia
Museum Playgroup Program

Judges comments: ‘This program is an excellent way to engage the community with the museum’s collections and connect children and parents with local history and culture.’

WINNER
Western Australian Museum Geraldton, Western Australia
Recollecting Sydney: A Call to Mind

A program designed to assist and encourage relatives of men lost on HMAS Sydney in 1942 to share recollections and document memories to enrich the museum’s collection and understanding. People are invited to bring photographs, letters and any other materials to the museum, where an artist helps to create a shared memory that, when joined with others, will leave a poignant story from the people who recall the men of Sydney II - as husband, father, brother, uncle, cousin or friend.

Judges comments: ‘This is a well thought out, innovative concept that engages the local and national community in the conservation of memory of a particular event of national significance. The project also helps to inform and enrich future commemoration of the event.’
LEVEL 2
$20,000 - $150,000

HIGHLY COMMENDED
Sydney Observatory (Powerhouse Museum)
Transit of Venus

Judges comments: ‘The Observatory has used a web of media to make this event highly accessible to a broad target audience. The activities developed to coincide with the transit were innovative, fun and educational, employing a comprehensive use of new media.’

WINNER
Australian National Maritime Museum
Nawi – Exploring Australia’s Indigenous watercraft

In 2012, the ANMM held a major conference - Nawi - exploring Australia’s Indigenous watercraft - aiming to throw new light on the study of Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander craft, to look at the long history of bark and dugout canoes, rafts and outriggers craft through fresh perspectives, as a catalyst explore their importance to communities around Australia, historically and today. Nawi brought together many practitioners, along with theorists from a range of communities, institutions and disciplines interested in the history, mapping, conservation, construction, interpretation and presentation of Australia’s watercraft.

Judges comments: ‘A well-designed program with strong community involvement, Nawi reconnects a little researched aspect of Australian maritime history into a contemporary setting while establishing a model for sustaining a lost Indigenous cultural practice. The museum has acted as a catalyst for the community to come together with ideas, knowledge and skills, essentially forming a self-sustaining relationship.’
LEVEL 1
LESS THAN $20,000

WINNER
Newcastle Museum
Newcastle Museum Green Team

In collaboration with the Newcastle City Council, Newcastle Museum has made proactive efforts to enhance the environmental sustainability of their facilities as the pilot department of the Council’s 14 Step ClimateCam Framework. In particular, the Museum has utilised lighting programs that offer stable, controlled lighting that adheres to environmental and conservation best practice.

Judges comments: ‘The carefully managed light replacement project is part of the ongoing, integrated, staged sustainability framework adopted by the Museum as part of its redevelopment. The environmentally responsible ‘Needs Pods’ redevelopment of the museum is enhanced by these projects that continue to manage and reduce the museum’s carbon footprint and reach sustainability goals.’
Inspired by the National Quilt Register, the Australian Dress Register was launched by the Powerhouse Museum in 2011. The Australian Dress Register is a collaborative, online project about dress in New South Wales pre-1945. This includes men's, women's and children's clothing, ranging from the special occasion to the everyday. Museums and private collectors are encouraged to research their garments and share the stories and photographs while the information is still available and within living memory. The Register encourages people to consider their collections very broadly and share what they know about members of their community, what they wore and life in the past. This provides access to a world-wide audience while keeping their garments in their relevant location.

Judges comments: ‘Thematic collection projects like this are vital in building awareness of the importance of the Distributed National Collection, and bringing together communities to engage collaboratively, share information and develop a national context for clothing collections. This project demonstrates sustainable practices through increased recognition, documentation and significance assessment, training in collection care, and access.’
LEVEL 1
LESS THAN $20,000

HIGHLY COMMENDED
Subiaco Museum
Saving Face

Judges comments: ‘This entry was very comprehensive. We are impressed by the combination of portraiture and audio components; and the strong sense conveyed of who these people are.’

WINNER
Royal Western Australian Historical Society
Mapping Memories

Wendy Lugg, resident artist with the Royal Western Australian Historical Society, has explored the collections of both the Society and the State Library of Western Australia for stories that resonate with her own family memories. In the resulting exhibition, Mapping Memory, artifacts, maps, ephemera and documents from these two important heritage collections intermingle with the artist’s memorabilia and artworks in a rich layering of personal family story, collective memory, and the landscape they share.

Judges comments: ‘This entry covers a wide range of subjects; it uses good images and strong contextual material. It has surprising content. Very good utilisation of material was made within parameters established. An innovative combination of community connections and collaboration.’
LEVEL 2
$20,000 - $150,000

JOINT WINNER
Australian Museum
Museum2you

An environmental education program on the issues of sustainability, climate change and biodiversity. It brings the Australian Museum’s programs and services to regional communities who do not have first-hand access to the museum.

Judges comments: ‘Judges admired the innovative treatment of this important and topical theme, and its use of a variety of media to engage audiences broadly and diversely.’

JOINT WINNER
Monash University Museum of Art
Slave Pianos | Punkasila | Pipeline to Oblivion: 3 projects by Danius Kesminas and collaborators

Australian artist Danius Kesminas is the brainchild behind some of the most ambitious and dynamic contemporary art projects developed in the past decade. Working collaboratively, across diverse disciplines - art, music, performance, video, publishing, agit-prop and opera - Slave Pianos | Punkasila | Pipeline to Oblivion presents three major projects by Danius Kesminas and his respective collaborators.

Judges comments: ‘Judges were impressed by the innovative reach of this contemporary art project, its international scope, the breadth of its curatorial treatment and presentation, its diverse audience appeal, and its high-quality catalogue essays.’
LEVEL 3
$150,000 - $500,000

WINNER
Museum of Australian Democracy at Old Parliament House
Marnti Warajanga - A Walk Together

A Museum of Australian Democracy travelling exhibition in association with Wangka Maya Pilbara Aboriginal Language Centre and photographer Tobias Titz. The struggle for equality, self-determination, and financial independence has been fought through significant national movements, and continues to rely on activism at a local level. This exhibition presents people from the Pilbara region in Australia’s north-west as they reflect on their journey towards equality in their own country.

Judges comments: ‘Judges felt that this project was outstanding in its treatment of its subject. It was focused, probing and innovative. They especially appreciated the project’s degree of consultation with Indigenous people and community representatives on important aspects of social memory and Indigenous activism, and the connection and interweaving of these stories and memories with powerful strands of Australian social history in the cause of voices from the whole of Australian experience contributing to and deepening an understanding of ‘democracy’ as underpinning the museum’s mission.’

ABOVE: Bruce Thomas comments on culture and language, 2009
LEVEL 4
MORE THAN $500,000

JOINT WINNER
National Gallery of Australia
Renaissance: 15th & 16th century Italian paintings from the Accademia Carrara, Bergamo

Raphael, Sandro Botticelli, Giovanni Bellini and Titian are some of the painters represented in this exhibition. More than 70 works on panel and canvas were shown displaying the foundations of the grand tradition of European painting.

Judges comments: ‘Judges noted that, among various high-quality projects from the National Gallery in recent years, this exhibition had needed to grapple with some challenges to achieve optimum success: especially that only few artists were famous (and represented by a limited number of works); that the material was so visually unfamiliar to Australian audiences broadly; and that the artworks were drawn from one city and single institution. Judges felt that the Gallery’s address to these ‘challenges’, and building of the material into an accessibly interpreted and beautifully installed presentation of the paintings, heightening awareness of iconography, were all outstanding.’

JOINT WINNER
Powerhouse Museum
Love Lace: Powerhouse Museum International Lace Award

134 artists from 20 countries unleash their passion for lace in this exhibition of winning entries and finalists in the Powerhouse Museum International Lace Award. The exhibition ranged from bold large-scale installations and sculptures to intricate textiles and jewellery. Materials included gold and silver wire, linen and silk, as well as mulberry paper, tapa cloth, horse hair, titanium and optical fibre.

Judges comments: ‘Judges were strongly impressed by how far this exhibition encompasses a huge range of media and concepts of ‘interlacing’ elements of structure in contemporary creativity, including digital media. The innovative ideas behind the exhibition gained their reward in a hugely expanded audience impact, and appreciation of design ideas so positively linking an historical subject and deep artefactual tradition with new areas of design, materials, structure and form-concepts today.’
In the exploration of gardening in South Australia, visitors are taken from the first local Indigenous groups, through immigration from Europe, to how people share their gardening techniques today. Focusing on Unley’s gardens and gardeners, visitors get to learn about every facet of gardens from the fences that surround them to the ornaments that dress them, up to the plants and food they yield.

Judges comments: ‘An engaging project, innovatively presented, well researched and visually appealing, with strong connections to a diversity of community members through a subject to which all can relate positively.’
LEVEL 3
$150,000 - $500,000

WINNER
National Trust - Polly Woodside
Polly Woodside - Melbourne’s Tall Ship Story

A new museum to tell the story of the Polly Woodside tall ship moored in the adjacent dock. Using its object collection, the Polly Woodside employs innovative museum interpretation and programs to engage wide visitor interest in the ship’s history and Melbourne’s maritime culture.

Judges comments: ‘Judges felt this was a very well developed project that pressed far into an expert interpretation of its material and subject matter, not just relying on the obvious historical strength of the major artefact (the Polly Woodside ship). Judges were impressed at how interpretation supported living conservation project objectives, thereby strengthening values of sustainability longer term.’

ABOVE: Polly Woodside gallery.
LEVEL 4
MORE THAN $500,000

HIGHLY COMMENDED
National Library of Australia
Treasures Gallery
Judges comments: 'This project was well scaled, well designed and realised, in delivering a new, high-quality permanent facility.'

Newcastle Museum
Permanent Exhibition Redevelopment
Judges comments: 'A very well sifted treatment of a diverse collection, freshly interpreted and strongly displayed. Good community engagement was achieved and excellent programs produced for the public and schools.'

WINNER
Gwoonwardu Mia
Burlganyja Wanggaya: Old People Talking - Listen, Learn and Respect

The Gascoyne region’s five Aboriginal language groups come together to celebrate and recognise Indigenous culture. Burlganyja Wanggaya: Old People Talking is an interactive permanent exhibition that tells the stories of the Gascoynes Aboriginal people in their own words. The exhibition includes the 32,000 year old shell necklace, images, artefacts, the amazing Burrowing Bee film, an interactive light table and a sky dome experience.

Judges comments: 'The panel was strongly impressed by the historical importance of this material and project - especially the dynamic ways in which important stories of Indigenous experience of social history (individually and collectively) were achieved with community consultation and reference to shared memories as laying pathways of interpretation that link different generations, while also connecting Indigenous history to wider Australian social history. Diversity of media, from oral history with elders through to interactive media and participatory technology, were felt to link older and younger generations creatively and positively. Judges were also impressed by the high design values, clarity and professionalism of the installations, which should be very engaging to wider audiences visiting the area of Gascoyne, WA.'

ABOVE: Multi-light touch table at Gwoonwardu Mia where visitors can take a photograph of themselves, create a collage and email it home.