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The Australian printmaker, Rew Hanks, was recently awarded the Grand Prize at the prestigious Kochi International Triennial Exhibition of Prints. It was for his 2012 depiction of Krefft’s Chair at the Australian Museum. The Chair was once occupied by an early Director of the Australian Museum, Gerard Krefft. The Director was physically removed from of his office, still resolutely occupying the chair, and unceremoniously dumped on William Street on the orders of the Board of Trustees in 1874 amid claim and counter-claim of falsifying records, misuse of public funds and drunkenness.

In the museum and gallery sector, how much has changed in the intervening 142 years? Krefft was at odds with his Board of Trustees all those years ago. This disconnect is not something that is unknown or even unusual in the museum world both in Australia and elsewhere. Krefft’s trustees were concerned that he dabbled too dangerously with modern scientific concepts such as biological evolution. Has the sector always been plagued with contestation, or was this event a historical outlier subsequently subsumed by the professionalism of modern museum practice at his former institution? Or did it represent a manifestation of social tensions caused by different world views of the time?

Krefft’s Chair is in the Australian Museum, Australia’s first and oldest museum in the city that was the entry point for European occupation of Aboriginal lands. The chair is therefore a symbol of contestation and resistance. But even in modern times there are pressures for change at this oldest of Antipodean collecting institutions.¹

The museum and gallery sector, from big city state funded institutions staffed by seasoned professionals to regional outposts staffed by dedicated volunteers are not immune from the tsunami of technological and socio-cultural change that is engulfing the modern world. Contestation is the new norm; different voices battle to occupy the heart of the public sphere, the differing interests and boundaries between those who fund, produce and consume culture in our museum and gallery spaces are becoming increasingly unclear. How much of what goes on in the modern museum and gallery is about contestation and resistance?
As the world becomes more intricately interconnected many argue that there is a need to reinvent concepts of governance, challenge expertise, democratise knowledge, in short, contest everything. Some argue that these changes mean the very nature of museums and galleries as organisations is changing, or has already changed. The only thing everyone agrees on is that more change is on the way!

The work we do in museums and galleries of any shape or size is impacted by unresolved tensions between the real and the virtual, the fixed and the mobile, the formal and the informal. Numerous new voices demand access to these spaces to tell their stories as they struggle to gain a foothold in the heart of the public realm. When everything is contested, how can we ensure that our museums and galleries and the work undertaken in their name represent civic responsibility, ethical practices and authenticity? Further to this, in relation to representation, what exactly is authenticity and by what standards could that be ethically definable? People in general still trust information from museological sources, but can we always anticipate that this will be the case?

This book represents a series of contributions about museum work. They originate from two particular sources but, as pieces of reflective writing on professional perspectives and practice in the sector they come in quite diverse forms. They also cover a wide range of territory that encompasses ambitious, big picture arm-waving about sector perspectives through to the documentation of some specific project minutiae.

Both of the sources were connected to meetings organised largely by the New South Wales state branch of the professional association, Museums Australia which, at the time of producing this compilation was morphing its name to Museums Galleries Australia as part of broader response to disruption, of a cacophonous nature, within the organisation’s operating environment. One source was a state based symposium in 2011, the other a national conference in 2015, both based in the city of Sydney. Australia’s largest and oldest city, as the site of the original onslaught that was to begin the European invasion of Australia, has a significant history of contestation. It is also the site of the first museum in the Antipodes.

In 2011, when the first meeting was held, there was significant evidence of disruption. It had been more than a decade since the New South Wales state branch had held a conference. Australian and New South Wales government policies were in a state of flux. The Collections Council of Australia had ceased operation in 2010. The Cultural Ministers Council had been
disbanded. The Collections Australia Network was in limbo. The state government agency Arts NSW had completed the Watts Review of its agency of service provision to the sector, Museums and Galleries NSW in 2010. A new Coalition had been elected in March 2011. Following one of the recommendations of the Watts’ report, the new government engaged a consultant to develop a strategic plan for the sector. The seminar, *Place Space and Identity: New Directions for NSW Museums*, held at Macquarie University, was organised to help navigate the changing contexts and stimulate contributions to the new state strategic plan.

Fast forward now to 2015, the Collections Australia Network was history, Australia Council funding had been slashed and partially replaced by a new Catalyst scheme under the direct auspices of the federal minister’s office and the insidious efficiency dividends had been impacting many major institutions for some time. Museums of all stripes were facing more challenges, and were attempting to find new ways to meet them. In the wake of the Global Financial Crisis, funds were tighter. This fiscal poverty is accompanied by increasing pressure to remain relevant to visitors, funders and science practitioners.

Sector insiders and managers argue that arcane knowledge must be balanced with popularization. There are increasing calls for enabling the public and other stakeholders to co-curate the messages brought forward in museum spaces. Topics such as First Peoples and ethics are now intersecting with natural history museums in a way never imagined even ten years previous.

In the spirit of reconsidering ‘everything’, the national meeting in 2015 was split into three overlapping themes. The first entitled “Medium” considered the museum as organisation and asked questions such as: what is the museum today and how is it changing? Are collections still central to the role of museums and galleries, or are they becoming increasingly irrelevant? What do collections represent, why are they important and how is this made relevant to both audiences and funders? Is there something special about the authentic object that can’t be captured by its digital surrogate? Museums and galleries come in all shapes and sizes, are there too many of them in Australia? There are always tensions between the big city organisations and the small regional ones, so we asked; do the smallest birds make the prettiest sounds? Do smaller and larger museums and galleries collaborate effectively? Should the work of all museums aspire to the same sort of professional standards? Who will staff the museums of the future and what sort of work will be done there?
The second theme entitled “Message:- People have agency” considered the overlapping world of the consumers and producers of the cultural content as organisational output. All museums recognise that there are many different voices demanding access to the heart of the public realm, who decides which voices occupy that space? Museums are encouraged to be inclusive, participatory, caring and innovative. They are meant to take on a whole range of characteristics that need to be measured and linked to the provision of public funding. Does this mean that policy instruments effectively drive organisational behaviour?

While all museums recognise that the audience has been empowered in recent years, does this mean we are too obsessed with audience needs? Does the public expert still have a role in the modern museum or is the audience the new curator? How much of these changes have been driven by new digital technologies and how much has been driven by new socio-economic realities? Has our love affair with the audience divorced us from our collections?

The final interrelated theme of the 2015 meeting attempted to draw these threads together by considering what happens when medium and message come together in unexpected ways. This allowed consideration of questions such as whether museums and galleries contribute to social good, and is this a reasonable expectation for any funding agency, either public or private?

We also attempted to poke the neoliberal beast of the public sector with a stick by asking, is social good only measured in the generation of tourism dollars or are there other intangibles that can be measured qualitatively? Are museums and galleries really society’s safe places to debate contested ideas or are they merely amorphous frameworks for an acceptable public monoculture? Does every program in museums and galleries have to succeed? Where are the spaces to experiment, fail, learn from the experience and grow? How clean is the money that funds the public culture in our museums and galleries? Does deprivation of funding drive innovation? All these questions periodically swirl through the deliberations of our professional association.

What follows in these pages, however, is not merely a collection of the proceedings of conference and symposium. Instead they represent ideas in response to many of the challenges outlined above. Some are direct transcripts of the spoken word presented in front of an audience, others are carefully reworked in response to feedback both on the conference floor and via ongoing debate within the professional association since. It is difficult to assess
whether much has changed since Krefft’s time, many of the aspects of contestation and resistance still colour professional debate.

Contestation and resistance is probably best indicated by current events in the state of New South Wales at the time of putting this book together. The upper house of state parliament is currently in the middle of a wide ranging inquiry into the museums and galleries of New South Wales. It was prompted by contestations and resistance that spilt out well beyond the polite boundaries of professional discourse.

There were strong protests and objections to state government plans to move the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences from its current home in Ultimo close to the Central Business District to the new growth centre in the west at Parramatta. Never before has a single issue divided the professional community of museum practitioners in our state more starkly. Many loudly protested that there are surely alternative strategies to the sale of the Powerhouse Museum site in Ultimo and its proposed move to Parramatta that can better support museum development in this state?

The terms of reference of the inquiry go well beyond this single divisive issue. It is investigating NSW government policy (or some would say the lack of it), funding and support for museums and galleries, museum and gallery buildings and heritage collections, including volunteer-managed museums and museums managed by councils. The spotlight is also being turned onto the potential funding impacts on museums and galleries affected by council amalgamations and whether there are unmet opportunities to revitalise the structure, reach, and impact of museums and galleries and their research and collecting priorities.

Furthermore, the development and transparency of advice to the government on priorities for NSW museums and galleries is being investigated plus the impact of the efficiency dividend on the budgets of museums and galleries over the last 10 years, and funding levels compared to other states. The economic impact of museums and galleries on cultural tourism, and their role in supporting the visitor economy in Sydney and regional New South Wales is also within the terms of reference for the inquiry. This represents the most far reaching investigation into the sector in our state, a direct result of contestation and resistance that has spilled into the public domain.
We have divided this compilation from leading cultural sector participants and observers, communicating within professional association parameters, into two sections namely: Perspectives and Projects. It is tempting to consider these as theoretical and practical sections respectively. But this would be incorrect, it is impossible, and, in fact, undesirable to separate theory and practice in any professional sphere of activity. Each should always inform the other, and so it is with the contributions in this volume.

At both of the professional association meetings that originated the content herein, issues were often debated with vigour and passion. This reminds us of the iconic Sydney sulphur-crested cockatoo that gathers together in noisy squawking packs, their voices often and frequently rising into a cacophony around contestation. Many of the public hearings into the museums and galleries of New South Wales in the state parliament on Macquarie Street were also reminiscent of the boisterous and argumentative birds.

In the first section on perspectives, Janelle Hatherly provides a positive piece on learning in museums. The modern museum can offer a variety of on-site blended learning sessions for a range of audiences, in particular schools and families. They use digital technologies such as iPads, iPhones, iPod Touches, digital cameras and 3D printers in combination with more traditional activities such as object handling, art and role-play to engage visitors with the museum’s collections and stories, so enhancing their learning experience. But how do they engender creativity and higher order thought?

Kim Williams, author of “Rules of Engagement” talks about the changing nature and expectations of leaders of large cultural organisations. How do they maintain relevance in a digital era where everyone is drowning in information and conflicting perspectives? He encourages organisations to be courageous. Alec Coles, currently leading the largest museum redevelopment project in the country, explores the limits of free speech in the current museum environment. Kim McKay, now the keeper of Krefft’s legacy talks about how museums can take a lead from media organisation and dig deep to provide content for display and broadcasting.

John Simons, who at the time in 2015 was President of the Council for Humanities Arts and Social Sciences, writes on how university collections represent a significant cultural resource that is often overlooked and how they could be developed into significant cultural assets. Simons raises an issue expressed by select senior executives with regard to university
collections, that they need to fit the scope and purpose of the institutions they serve, if they don’t there is no reason to resource or even keep them. He also raises criticisms of groups that attempt to set standards for how universities care for collections.

The two final offerings in the perspectives section both deal with issues central to the New South Wales state government inquiry into museums and galleries, specifically the status and situation of museums and galleries in regional Australia. Sally Waterson is a museum consultant, she writes on how communities use regional spaces to reflect identity and history and some of the challenges with local government at a time of changing demographics and technology. Kylie Winkworth is also a museum consultant, she considers the sustainability of the small museum sector in regional areas and provides some rules not just for sector health, but survival.

The topics of the chapters in the second part of the book also resonate with many of the issues touched upon in the first section. The importance of indigenous issues in museum work is reflected in a number of pieces. Scott Mitchell writes about some early collecting by the Australian Museum and the birth of commercial art practice at Yuendumu. Sally Manuivera writes about engagement with Maori communities at the Auckland War Memorial and Museum. Sandra Kirkwood writes about musicology curatorship on North Stradbroke Island and the importance of starting with an understanding of “musical relationships to Country”.

The digital impact on museum work is explored in a couple of papers in the second section. Christina Hardy asks whether we have moved too far away from being focussed on collection stewardship, but concludes that collection data is fundamental for creatively engaging communities. She outlines some interesting examples of creative digital engagement from New Zealand. Paul Rowe provides useful advice on how organisations, especially small ones with little digital experience can cope and adapt once they have made data widely accessible online.

Visual arts and visual aesthetics are becoming increasing important as a range of collecting and exhibiting organisations battle to attract people, funding and attention to their organisations and work. The second section has a couple of interesting pieces about unusual art collections. Steven Tonkin writes about the art collections of Australia’s major performing art organisations. Rachael Rose writes about the path to acquisition of an extraordinary collection of Hungarian art by the University of Tasmania, an unexpected home perhaps, but
indicative of some of the extraordinary richness that can be found in organisations that are not usually associated with collection building.

On the subject of universities as collecting organisations, Michael Mares tells the amazing story of the development of the Sam Noble Museum of Natural History at the University of Oklahoma. It is a profound example of why purpose and conviction underpin successful philanthropic fund raising programs. But not all university museums are massive enterprises that become de facto state museums like Sam Noble, Jane Thogersen and colleagues discuss how small campus-based museums can, and should, conceptualise what they do and how they engage in the same way as much larger and better funded museums. The potential of museums in higher education is demonstrated in the paper by Doctors McKenzie-Clark and Magnussen. Their story is the serendipitous conjunction of “high tech” medicine and a campus museum of ancient cultural artefacts, they explore the impact of 3D scanning and printing on research, teaching and museum practice.4

Three of the projects in the second section also provide some remarkable insights into how collecting organisations connect with the past in meaningful ways. Joanne Smedley tells the incredible story of Algernon Darge and how his remarkable collection of plate glass negatives ended up in the Australian War Memorial and how that organisation puts the collection to work. Sara Pearce writes about the award winning5 “Reminiscence Cottage” at the National Wool Museum in Geelong. Sara designed the cottage as a sensory experience reflecting Australian home life from 1930-1950 for people with dementia and their families. There is also a great piece by Doreen Lyon that shows how a small community museum can connect with its local community in extraordinary ways. The ability to do this is fundamental to the identity of many regional communities.

This compilation of writings therefore provides a snapshot of the collecting sector in Australia and elsewhere at this particular time early in the 21st century. It provides insights into the changing nature of museums and galleries while explicitly outlining some of their current challenges and opportunities.

Museums and galleries are referred to as being part of the broader GLAM (galleries, libraries, archives and museums) sector those organisations that collect and manage information. The GLAM sector in Australia is a diverse group of public interest organisations collecting and exhibiting cultural and environmental material. It is estimated that the combined collections
in the sector contain over 100 million objects (e.g. natural and human-crafted objects, records, books, artworks, recordings etc. but excluding archive material). Around 5% of this is on-display at any one time and 25% of it is digitised.  

The organisations that constitute the sector are charged with preserving this material as well as facilitating public access to it for research, education and inspiration. A recent CSIRO report identified many examples of innovative practice from Australian organisations, but also indicated that initiatives tend to be isolated, episodic and difficult to sustain in the long term. The report concluded that there were areas where Australia is trailing international best practice, specifically concerning the digitisation and access to artworks, books and audio-visual collections.

With such a patchy picture of a sector in the throes of transition, where some have started to make this difficult transformation but most are yet to complete it, where some organisations have made fundamental changes to their planning, structures and operations to place innovation and digital services at the core rather than as add-on activities, we need the collective wisdom of professional organisations. They can represent the collective thought leadership of the profession, they can set standards and facilitate the process of others making changes and achieving those standards. In challenging times they can also be a forum for contestation, where contestation embraces both the forces for change and the forces of resistance. Professional organisations can therefore represent both Krefft and his Trustees in the room together. As the Krefft story demonstrates, however, one of the difficulties with understanding contestation within a professional sphere is judging whether the forces for change or the forces of resistance are on the right side of history.

The challenges for professional organisations are obviously immense, as can be seen in microcosm at the 2016 New South Wales inquiry into museums and galleries. In times of change individuals, even those from the same organisation, can easily end up on opposite sides of a contentious question. The collections sector is diverse in both scale and scope, ranging from state and national institutions of massive scale in the cities through to volunteer run groups in regional Australia. Governments and other stakeholders, including the public, expect results from their investment of funds and/or time, so how they all respond to the challenges of contestation is crucial in determining how we will tell our stories and represent our identity in the future. It will be central to community well-being on many different scales.
Museums Australia, or Museums Galleries Australia, has been in operation since 1994, this national association works through state and territory branches, national networks, including the national office, and an elected Council to uphold Australia’s natural and cultural heritage. It actually has a much deeper history that extends far back into the last century, but 1993 saw an ambitious and successful plan to draw many of the disparate and loosely associated professional groupings engaged with museum and gallery work in Australia together in the one organisation. It is the national association that represents museums and galleries as well as the people and collections which exist within them. The mission is to enhance the value of museums to society by sharing knowledge, developing skills, inspiring innovation and providing leadership. The organisation advocates for museums, sets ethical standards and runs training and professional development for members wishing to advance their career. Museums Australia also promotes sector growth and development, advocates and lobbies to state and federal governments for the advancement of the sector, and raises public awareness.

The pieces of writing brought together in this volume represent the deliberations and thoughts presented by members and associates at various meetings of the organisation in recent years. They all entail a sense of how the sector is changing and how individuals and groups are responding to these opportunities and challenges that change brings. Contestation is everywhere. It probably always has been that way.

Acknowledgement

We would like to acknowledge the input of the long term Executive Officer of the New South Wales branch of Museums Australia, Paul Bentley. Paul was responsible for shaping the program for the 2011 state symposium and also worked with the committee on the 2015 national conference. More importantly he has always been ready to provoke, challenge assumptions and provide fresh insights when considering museum work and our national professional association.

Notes
2. The state symposium “Place, Space and Identity, the future of museums in NSW” was held at Macquarie University from 18-19th of April, 2011; the national...
conference “A Cultural Cacophony” was held at the Sydney Town Hall and other city venues from 21-24th May, 2015.

3. The last state conference prior to this one was in 1998.

4. This paper is in part an extension of some of the ideas originally presented in Simpson et al (2013), Museum literacy that is virtually engaging.

5. The cottage has won these awards:-
   2015 MAGNA Museums and Galleries National Awards Interpretation, Learning & Audience Engagement Winner - Level 1
   2014 The Museums Australia (Victoria) Award for Medium Museums: National Wool Museum for 'Reminiscence Cottage'


7. Ibid.


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Sowing the seeds of wisdom and cultivating thinking in museums

Janelle Hatherly

Introduction

Cultural institutions are human constructs and the collections within them represent what we as a society value. As keeping places of the cultural memory of humankind they provide the ideal context for aesthetic appreciation and for deepening understanding of what it means to be human: places where we can reflect on the past, contemplate the present and imagine our future.

This is highly relevant at a time when society is experiencing a technology revolution that is changing our world, faster and with greater impact, than the agricultural and industrial revolutions before it. In an effort to create economically viable popular visitor attractions, those who work in museums, art galleries, botanic gardens and historic houses are being pulled in all directions and are finding it difficult to answer the question: What do our organisations stand for?

At their best, cultural institutions are centres that inspire reflection, personal fulfilment and collaborative mindfulness. This paper deconstructs ‘inspiration’ and explores how we, the professionals who are the current custodians of these keeping places, can make meaningful connections with visitors and the wider community to stimulate thinking about natural and cultural heritage.

It identifies the unique qualities of indoor and outdoor cultural environments that sow seeds of wisdom and cultivate meaningful and ongoing engagement with curated collections through public exhibitions and programs.
In a state of flux

The World Wide Web turned 21 on 7 August 2012. Just as this milestone marks the transition of a young person to his/her adult life, this technological advance has catapulted our society into an Information Age with huge changes, opportunities and challenges. In the early 1990s about one million people owned a mobile phone, today there are between five and six billion in circulation. Personal smart phones incorporate the functions of computers, cameras, compasses, CD players and encyclopaedias – to name but a few devices – enabling communication on a global scale with true democratization of knowledge and ideas.

Information technology has also changed the way we do business and research. Big data sets can now be acquired and processed in ways not possible using traditional databasing techniques. In 2012 the amount of information stored worldwide exceeded 2.8 Zetabytes (1ZB = 10^{21} bytes) and, of an estimated 33% deemed useful, only 0.5% of that was analysed appropriately.1

If knowledge is what we understand (based on available information), and wisdom is the effective use of knowledge in decision making, the potential exists to significantly deepen humanity’s endeavours to understand the universe. By their size, location and public accessibility, cultural institutions can bridge the real and virtual worlds, bringing people together to discuss and debate the many complex social and environmental challenges.

The impact on museum planning

Whereas in the past, individuals and organisations could plan for the future with a pretty good idea of what the world would be like in 30 years’ time, now there is no knowing. How do cultural institutions prepare for an uncertain future? Certainly not by doing business as usual as this quickly results in falling behind the times and puts them at risk of becoming irrelevant.

How much cultural institutions need to change requires careful consideration as they can provide a perception of stability at a time when society is straddling old and new ways of doing things. Periods of great change are ideal opportunities to test the robustness of existing theories and past approaches. If what we do or know is as relevant today as it was 21 years ago, then it is worth retaining. There should be a place in our organisations for the old, the existing and the new.
Too much change and introduced innovation, especially when resources are limited, can also be detrimental as multi-tasking merely results in many projects being done equally poorly and overstretched staff and volunteers suffering a lack of strategic focus.

Museum professionals are a mix of multi-talented, highly skilled and passionate individuals who, in the past, had difficulty finding common ground in planning processes and arriving at a single vision and mission for their organisations. However, such diversity is a strength in the current environment. Planning for change while staying connected to the past, present and future requires collaborative creativity: where the scientific method is combined with the artistic process to create engaging exhibitions, public programs and accessible collections.

It requires teamwork and the development of a community of co-learners (active listeners with strong ideas of their own to contribute) in order to create inspiring public environments which are highly conducive to learning.

**Education – in need of new branding**

One of the main areas in society where current structures are still traditional and are at risk of becoming obsolete is our education system. The changes that have taken place throughout the world have created new demands and expectations for education. To succeed in this dramatically changing context, students must possess learning skills and knowledge not even in existence a few years ago.

Yet, education has been slow to change and embrace the Information Age. Many communities and schools seem locked into the Industrial Age model of mass production learning and cannot see beyond the limitations of an Agricultural Age calendar that binds educators and students in time, place and purpose. As Albert Einstein (1879-1955), physicist and Nobel Laureate, said: “The significant problems we face today cannot be solved at the same level of thinking we were at when we created them.”

This provides cultural institutions with exciting challenges and opportunities. Cultural institutions are described as informal learning environments well-placed to make a significant contribution to society from an educational perspective. Social learning, good teaching and instruction, mentoring and parenting are as relevant as ever and, now that information is at everyone’s fingertips, the time is right for trying out new ways of learning.
Many cultural institutions prefer not to use the term ‘education’ and now deliver ‘learning services’ and ‘public engagement’. This is because many people associate education with formal schooling and possibly negative learning experiences. After all, education can be defined as any process that fosters learning and “learning can be defined as occurring when experience causes a relatively permanent change in a person’s knowledge or behaviour. The change may be deliberate or unintentional, for better or worse.”

Passionate committed educators, however, know that the purpose of education is to foster a love of learning. Our final products are not programs, but transformed, enlivened individuals who leave us different than when they arrived; whose attitudes, beliefs, feelings, knowledge of the natural world and their place in it have been positively altered.

For this reason cultural institutions must promote hope and optimism – and focus on the positive. Gloom and doom messages, especially in turbulent times, risk ‘turning people off’. Museums and memorial sites must recognise the horrors of war, discrimination and other social injustices, but in ways that permit hope and optimism for the future of humankind. Botanic gardens and zoos may have very strong conservation agendas, yet they should avoid focusing solely on environmental degradation, climate change calamities and loss of biodiversity.

There is always a ‘glass half full’ component to every issue. For example, road accidents have never been lower, car engines have never run cleaner, farm productivity has increased more than 200% since the 1950s and stranger danger has no grounds in statistics. By marvelling at the resilience of nature and humanity’s creative genius our organisations can inspire and make a difference. As St Thomas Aquinas, the thirteenth-century Italian Dominican monk and one of the greatest intellects of the Middle Ages, said: “You change people by delight. You change people by pleasure.”

What exactly is inspiration?

In this Information Age the term ‘inspiration’ is increasingly being used everywhere and for everything. As a marketing tool it is used to mentally stimulate us into doing or feeling something beyond the ordinary. When it appears in our mission statements it relates to learning and engagement.
In essence, inspiration is part of the highest form of learning. A familiar and useful explanation of why we learn is provided by Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. See Fig. 1.

As long ago as 1954 Maslow postulated that humans are motivated to learn to satisfy needs, a condition that has evolved over tens of thousands of years. When humans take learning to its highest level, they are rewarded with ‘a-ha’ moments of self-fulfillment and creative output. Maslow noted that very few people become fully self-actualized because our society tends to reward motivation based on money, status, love and other social needs. Although we are all theoretically capable of achieving our full potential as persons, most of us are unlikely to do so.

Yet our contemporary world is the product of centuries upon centuries of such individualistic and collaborative mindfulness; humanity’s creative achievements are all around us. Maslow’s theories have stood the test of time and there are many on-line examples of where modern insights have been added into all five levels of Maslow’s hierarchy.
Contemporary understanding of how we learn

Advances in neurobiology and brain imaging have given new insights into how the human brain works. This is what we now know about the brain that is relevant to teaching and learning:

- Neuroplasticity has replaced the formerly-held position that the brain is a static organ. There is truth to the clichéd saying: ‘Use it or lose it!’
- Every time we learn a new task, our brain undergoes changes and grows more neuronal extensions.
- PET and MRI scans now show that new neurones are generated throughout life.
- Physiologically, performing such cognitive tasks causes an increase in dopamine release in the human amygdala (in the mid-brain) and we feel happy.
- This feeling of happiness motivates us to try again until we learn more ... and more.
- Learning promotes learning and, with practice, every individual can experience a degree of self-actualisation and identify with something bigger than themselves.

This has great implications for schooling at all levels. No longer need students think of themselves as smart or stupid. Whereas in the past students who were told they were bright were under great pressure to perform, and those who believed themselves to be stupid didn’t try, now everyone is encouraged to have a go. Innovative schools are harnessing research findings in neuroscience to encourage students to move on from a fixed mindset to a growth mindset. A growth mindset teaches that IQ can be cultivated through effort and education, by confronting challenges, profiting from mistakes, and persevering despite failure or difficulties.

The stage is set for more people to seek self-actualisation rather than be satisfied with self-gratification as they appreciate the importance of ‘99% effort’, value skill building and know that the more they apply themselves the more their ability grows.
The impact of computers on learning ... and what computers can’t provide

Computers are great learning tools! The vast amount of information they store means anyone can access any information to any level of complexity, whenever and wherever they want and at whatever pace suits them. Like Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, Bloom’s Taxonomy of Educational Objectives (first formulated in the 1950s) has stood the test of time and revised versions. The one in Fig. 2 has been created to accommodate modern digital learning tools.

Fig. 2: Bloom’s Digital Taxonomy by Andrew Churches

What computers can’t provide is that first encounter with that relevant piece of information at just the right time in an individual’s development to motivate them to want to find out more.

This is socially mediated and relates to the fact that learning cannot take place in isolation. As far back as 1896, the Russian philosopher Lev Vygotsky showed the importance of dialogue and social interaction in cognition. His theory of a Zone of Proximal Development explains...
how, with assistance and instruction, we scaffold knowledge and modify our world views. This laid the foundation for many advances in pedagogy over the next century.

Great educators/teachers bring their own passion and joy for learning to others. They help others to learn by knowing what information to make available when, and revealing relevance and relationships. Optimum learning occurs when we take the time or make the effort to be observant and interested in the world around us; when we take on tasks or try to understand issues that extend us. It is important that these are just beyond our comfort zone but within our achievable challenge level.

‘Too much or too little’ generally results in individuals experiencing task incomprehension (too soon) or task boredom (too late). Like good doctors, good teachers/parents/mentors are able to diagnose the condition/level of interest in others and facilitate learning by prescribing just the right remedy/amount of information or link at just the right time. Learning to learn and developing higher order thinking skills is socially and culturally mediated and occurs at different stages in an individual’s life. The age-old African proverb “it takes a whole village to raise a child” reinforces the importance of this methodology.

We can fail many times over but as long as we get accurate feedback and positive reinforcement along the way we will strive to master the challenge. This explains the addictive power of video games and, while they are basically unproductive, their mode of interaction makes computers and the internet wonderful aids to teaching and learning.

There is especially evident in ‘How to’ YouTube video clips for personal instruction on all manner of subjects. Educationally, Khan Academy4 made a great on-line contribution in this regard. The Khan Academy started when Salman Khan, a hedge fund analyst, put a maths lesson on-line to help his young cousin Nadia. Bill Gates calls him the world’s favourite teacher and, with seventeen million people a month (and growing) watching the 1000s of Khan Academy YouTube lessons, he regarded it as the world's biggest school. On-line learning tutorials are also making headway into the traditional classroom with innovative teachers adopting them as part of their teaching strategies for progressing students individually.
Brain changers

The human brain and our sensory organs are programmed to recognise patterns in our surroundings and to integrate this information into familiar patterns in our memory. Through pattern recognition we ‘think’, that is we make links, infer and experiment to deepen our understanding and generate adaptive behavioural responses.

Yet, with technology moving so fast, our very ability to think is being curtailed. Information bombards our senses and our brains can only process so much. When individuals feel overwhelmed and out of their depth (or more accurately, beyond their achievable challenge level) stress-induced functional and structural changes in the amygdala manifest themselves as anxiety, frustration, boredom and often anti-social behaviour. Our brains are being rewired for quick bytes of information and we find it harder to slow down and build focusing capabilities. Negativity to learning caused by stress is becoming a global problem that needs addressing.

The good news is that, according to the philosopher and cognitive scientist Daniel Dennett, humans are actually getting smarter. In an on-line video of a speech to Intelligence Squared he refers to The Flynn Effect (In the one hundred years IQ tests have been conducted, humans IQs have been steadily rising.) and discusses tools we can all use to transform our thinking to better adapt to the Information Age.

This increase in understanding of how the mind/brain works empowers cultural institutions to create better learning environments that sow seeds of wisdom and cultivate thinking as well as provide respite from contemporary social pressures.

Tourism and leisure contexts

In her 2014 paper ‘Visitors’ restorative experiences in museums and botanic gardens’ researcher Dr Jan Packer aimed to identify, from the visitors’ perspective, the circumstances that facilitate and enhance restorative experiences. By conducting interviews with visitors to Brisbane’s Botanic Gardens - Mount Coot-tha and the Queensland Museum she found that a museum visit enabled visitors to switch off and temporarily escape the stresses of everyday
life whereas being in an outdoor garden setting had positive health benefits with participants reporting an increased sense of well-being.

“Visitors’ comments illustrated the ways in which the unique environments encountered at museums and botanic gardens facilitate restorative processes. Visitors experienced fascination by being engaged in cognitive experiences (especially at the museum) or sensory experiences (especially at the gardens).” See Fig. 3.

Where we are affects how we think and behave. In the peace and tranquillity of a botanic garden – or in the outdoor spaces of an art gallery, historic house or museum – all our senses are stimulated at once and we have time to think. We attempt to make sense of our surroundings and make meaningful connections. We all learn differently and the natural world can cater for all preferred learning styles/interests. Even simple immersion in nature piques the visitors’ interest and stimulates their senses, but when this is accompanied by good interpretation a raft of ideas is generated and readily shared with companions. It’s like sowing seeds on fertile ground.

Brain imaging studies also show that information from each of the senses is stored in different parts of the brain, but they are all interlinked by dendritic extensions of neurons. When similar interests are triggered, often later in another environment, multiple neurological pathways fire at once and memory making is strengthened. This is the power of school excursions and why many of us remember those experiences years later. It also illustrates why cultural tourism is set to grow in this Information Age.
A great time for building social capital

We can’t hang on to youth forever, but we can stay learners all our lives. Traditionally cultural institutions were exclusive, now they work hard to remain relevant to new generational and community needs. They address issues of social inclusion by providing all community members with access to cultural resources and they encourage active participation in their research and exhibition development. The journey is a collaborative learning experience for everyone: the experts, the enthusiasts and the novices who make up staff, volunteers and the diverse visiting public. The outcomes are highly relevant collections, displays and experiences that contest and interpret contemporary societal values.

Recognizing that botanic gardens worldwide receive one quarter of a billion visitors each year, social inclusion was high on the list of priorities at the recent Botanic Gardens Conservation International Education Congress. This global network of educators committed their collective expertise to fostering a learning community by drawing up a draft statement of strategic directions going forward. Their findings are widely applicable and demonstrate collective creativity.

The delegates highlighted the need to:

a) Mobilize and support a growing number of audiences to become citizen scientists and environmental stewards conserving plants worldwide and in their own communities.

b) Develop the social role of botanic gardens by connecting with all sectors of society and engaging them beyond the gardens walls especially those that are currently marginalized.

c) Pursue a shared, multidisciplinary research and evaluation agenda and establish agreed measurable targets that contribute to and advance the field of conservation so that stewardship of biodiversity can be monitored and enhanced.

d) Create bridges among disciplines, within and across institutions, to harness the wisdom that can be created by blending multiple perspectives and in order to create greater impact.

Many botanic gardens have a clear focus on where they are going, what they stand for and what they can and should provide to visitors (real and virtual).
In conclusion

It is their vast priceless collections (the cultural memory of humankind) that enable museums, botanic gardens, historic houses and art galleries to readily provide visitors with collaborative creative learning opportunities. And now that this is supported by digital access to millions of cultural objects and associated information an ongoing, real and virtual dialogue is added to create holistic inspirational experiences.

A learning focus can give those who work in cultural institutions a clear sense of purpose and create an organisational USP (a unique selling proposition) that distinguishes museums from malls, botanic gardens from parks, and art galleries from aesthetic backdrops for culinary culture.

Cultural institutions are society’s centres for lifelong learning, mirrors that reflect what we as a society value and consider important. The collections within them and their multi-purpose venues are ideal real and virtual spaces that inspire people to reflect on the past, live in the present and create a better future. Does this describe your organisation?

Notes

References


The challenge of contemporary relevance in a
digital era

Kim Williams

My brief for this the final plenary session in the Museums Australia conference is to address the issue of contemporary relevance and its challenge for cultural institutions.

Now I know this is a tough speaking slot and comes at the end of three days of diverse, often brilliant and provocative sessions. You are all no doubt, talked out and for some, thought out. After such an array of riches and the hospitality attaching to it all you are probably at this stage, in a mental state to travel anywhere but here!

Nevertheless the opportunity to speak was irresistible. You all represent what I would describe as the ‘public academy’. It is a public academy which has a vital role as never before.

We all experience confrontational elements from the velocity and pervasive nature of change. These elements invariably arise from the changed behaviours and expectations which follow from the application of digital technologies. It requires adaptive ingenuity, the need to change organisational cultures ground up in order to maintain real understanding and core relevance.

This afternoon I will offer some thoughts on key elements of disruption – especially in the challenge of addressing the modern consumer or as I prefer citizen. Then I will provide some views on common challenges with policy and the time in which we live. Finally I will make some future observations.

As this is my self-imposed ‘Year without PowerPoint’ there are no slides – just a prepared speech to stimulate some thinking.

You work within the most potent creative institutions with resources which can confront the most fascinating and deadly feature of modern society – what I would describe as a fascinating paradox in such an information rich age - I am referring here to the unwavering march of general ignorance.
Your challenge is to confront it head on, no ifs, no buts. A head on direct knowledge attack on growing general ignorance.

Many may be thinking – what planet is he on?

Where is he coming from?

What the heck is referring to – doesn’t he know the internet pervades our very being?

Isn’t he aware of social media and its ubiquity?

Doesn’t he realise that Wikipedia provides 4,857,925 articles (at the time I wrote this speech four weeks ago) as compared with 100,000 in the last edition of Britannica in 2010?

That is 50 times the size of Britannica and even leaving aside the commercial and ephemeral serendipitous stuff in Wikipedia it is seriously much more substantial diverse and open than the Encyclopaedia Britannica ever was – doesn’t he get it?

Doesn’t he know that Wikipedia even includes independent articles reviewing its own performance - comparing its accuracy with others and offering numerous citations as to its fairness on many indicators and so forth?

Doesn’t he know Twitter and Facebook rule?

Doesn’t he know about the ‘Appocracy’ in which we live with Pinterest, Instagram, What’s App, Snapchat and many others.

Then there are Yahoo, Bing and of course almighty Google uniting and linking us all in a knowledge economy. One which shares endlessly?

I say in response Yes. Yes. Yes I do know all of that. And I would say it provides the essential challenge.

It is challenge particularly for museums, galleries and the great libraries of our nation for this year and beyond.

It is a challenge which is both confronting and very healthy. A challenge which has many component parts.

It is seen where the instant expert presents views on a daily basis. The challenge of that expert where she or he is empowered with remarkable resources as never before, invariably
from the friendly omnipresent ‘computer in your pocket’ with immediate access to so much, some would argue virtually all, of the world’s accumulated knowledge.

But (and it is a very big but), so often the reception of that information is absent the discipline of listening, analysing, synthesising and assessing in terms of context, relevance, perspective and the necessary skepticism which conditions all good, disciplined thought. Disciplined thought provides the bedrock of clear thinking and good learning.

All too often it is also absent the inherent insatiable curiosity which drives real evolution and improvement in thought, teaching and learning in core knowledge acquisition and transfer for humankind. Curiosity and its valuable partner scepticism are frequently absent in the search for an immediate answer and the opportunity to present an instant opinion.

We live in a bizarre netherworld where narcissism increasingly rules the day. A netherworld where citizens feel unconstrained in offering opinions, often extraordinarily firm confident ones, with alarming assertiveness on the altar of nothing more than their own ‘feelings.’ “The vibe”!

Often those opinions are landed with no more perspective than a single often anonymous source on any diversity of subjects without regard to perspective, alternate propositions and in blind disregard for the time taken to think, learn, test, listen, refine and then offer; which has usually in the past been seen as essential to the process of providing ‘worthy opinion.’

There reposes a core challenge – how do we refashion institutions to respond in ways that unite people with the glory of knowledge and study afresh, in a way which is imbued with some humility?

We live in an era of conundrums. It is often said that volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity are the bywords for the current era. In the inevitable way of things it even has its own acronym – VUCA.

Your conference theme ‘Message, Medium and a Cultural Cacophony’ refers to aspects of those four strands of volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity.

The challenge seems to me to repose in how we martial the amazing resources of the collections of the nation – individually and generally – to ensure that we are providing
stability, confidence, simplicity and clarity in sharing knowledge, creativity and the power of thought and learning.

Our own new acronym is SCSC in the service of exhibiting the intellectual and creative wealth of your collections. It is a core challenge.

You have been dealing with conference strands built around Medium and Message. ‘Medium’ is through the context of cultural production and how collections are curated and provided so that they relate to modern society’s needs. And ‘Message’ through people having agency. How one responds to the many voices seeking access to the public realm and how we measure relevance and performance.

Cultural leadership in a digital era has very real continuing challenges. The audience has many distractions not the least of which is the self-obsession of many – especially in those born in the last 30 odd years where evidence from various studies reveals really substantial increases in self-esteem, assertiveness, self-importance and narcissism, with a clear cultural shift focusing on the self to the detriment of community.

I would suggest this means for audience connection and stimulation to work it requires new skillsets in a context where there are so many touchpoints which are often increasingly fuzzy and diffuse.

Digital chemistry and personality permeates all communication, documentation, exhibition and engagement in the twenty-first century. It provides a central methodology for access as we have never seen it. Needless to say however, the core logic, intelligence and imagination has to come from all of you. You need to rethink in a way which reinvents your audience relationship, understands the gravity of the challenge and coherently and creatively attracts the community openly and I would suggest offers exciting challenge and even at times provocation in the service of liberating the collections.

If we care about and love our collections and the people who made the books, paintings, sculptures, maps, manuscripts, objects, stories, studies, science and tools that inform them, then we owe them the continuing honour of rethinking the challenge of community connection. That challenge must be accepted clearly, in a way which avoids being patronising and celebrates the journey itself.

The journey that is inherent to the joy of all discovery and learning.

Kim Williams
At its heart is the essential missing element of so much in the digital domain – a sense of refashioned citizenship, digital citizenship. It is a complex topic with many strands. At core I would suggest is the need to reinvest the value and need for the community’s relationship with humanity’s achievements and devotion to creativity and discovery.

It demands a renewal in the sense of wonder and devotion to the journey liberated to us all by amazing new tools. It needs a new toolkit, with different approaches to curation, planning, marketing, exhibition - on and offsite - and a never ending commitment to offer what I would describe as a devotion in our work to a new consciousness in managing collections in the service of underlying public need and interest.

Many of the institutions here have the burden of being incumbents in this era of endless disruption where the consequential impact arising from the turbulence of many of the processes we are experiencing can cloud judgement and alter perception as to key trends and cultural characteristics. For many, adjustment is confronting and it requires renovated governance approaches that accept risks, back talent and are obsessed with outcomes and not processes for the own sake.

It seems clear to me that our society is increasingly governed by several sustained characteristics, which are each profoundly unhelpful, indeed destructive of committed improvement and clear direction in national public policy formulation – especially for institutions like your own. Consequently that much abused term the public interest is serially disrespected.

We see this particularly as money is treated as the measure of value in all things rather than as one of many measures.

We see it in lowered priorities from some politicians and bureaucrats through neglect and disengagement in not seeing creativity and intellect as the vital crucibles of the national future.

We see it in commentators often being unable to disconnect discussion of creativity, science and the arts and their centrality to successful national expression and innovation, from rigid ideological positions and/or populist ranting.

And we see it in society generally adopting a perilous course to celebrate the anti-intellectual and the triumph of what I would term as ‘the general ignorance’ over considered respectful
debate which aims to test ideas and assumptions so as to arrive at evidence supported outcomes.

These forces are readily apparent in science and the arts which celebrate and empower creativity and innovation like nothing else. Support has declined, policies are malformed on the altar of populism and ‘dumbing down’ to an ever lower common denominator, and short term devotion rules the policy and resourcing day. This is allied with a fearsome trend, which denies and rejects considered knowledge based debate, replacing it with dogmatic assertion.

I would describe this process as the ‘infantilisation’ of Australian cultural and science policy. Unless a different, informed, caring and activist policy stand is adopted then stagnation, declining education standards and a marked talent drain will inevitably result. Without early correction we will have a poorer society and it will become ever harder to rebound. You will all be failing if these issues are not confronted with imagination and I would suggest a decent measure of passion.

You all know this and you also know that the serious work falls at the feet of many in this room. I would contend that in the twenty first century a society, which loses contact with and commitment to respecting, celebrating and appropriately resourcing science and the arts across many domains crucially including museums, galleries and libraries, will decay.

Your institutions celebrate intellect and the creative products from it every day. The task before you is to ignite the public in the service of what genuinely constitutes the long term public interest - a loving respect for and celebration of curiosity, knowledge, creativity and learning.

You have to do that as a simple assertion of your reason for being.

And quite frankly I think the challenge is one where you have to reinvent your institutions so that summary objective in conveying a loving respect for and celebration of curiosity, knowledge, creativity and learning is the governing theme in all that you do.

The performing arts, our galleries and museums and our education system central to their health are in real decline. Resourcing is compromised. We see performing arts centres and companies, museums and galleries constantly having to confine and contain the innovation and renewal in thinking so central to a vital culture. All too often you have been consumed with the need simply to tender to basic survival needs.
There are problems across the board but the solutions are in your hands and require fresh thinking and cooperative action – with each other, with government and with a firm focus on your client audiences.

There are so many examples that demonstrate an era of passive neglect – as much from silence in institutional governance as other sources - that I could never summarise them adequately in this short presentation. However they are changing the aspiration and destination on the part of our creators and that is profoundly unhealthy for Australia.

We all recognise that the internet and digital technology generally has changed forever the nature of information access, exchange and the direction of society through politics, commerce, creativity, education and communication in life as we know it.

Continuing fragmentation is guaranteed – the ferocity of attack and the velocity of change will not abate. Nations are being disintermediated. Merit, ingenuity, speed, flexibility and performance increasingly rule the day. Australia is losing in this process and it is losing because of national policy failure. The urgency of public policy renewal especially in education and the arts is impossible to over-emphasise.

We are a small country at ‘the bottom of the world’ (notwithstanding the internet) with many parochial pillars, which whilst they may be ‘cheerful’ to some, are venomous to national ambition and achievement. A nation of 24 million, which speaks English is either profoundly advantaged or potentially disabled as a result almost entirely of its public policy settings and the outcomes they achieve and reflect.

It is essential that we respect our duty of intergenerational care and acknowledge the need for national ground up policy and institutional review to ensure a healthy, vibrant and dynamic creative landscape, which is equally innovative, connected, ambitious and challenging for those whom we serve – the people.

I gave a speech a couple of weeks ago for Currency House here in Sydney in which I said I don’t have time in a presentation like this to offer assurance on delivered solutions beyond a strong plea to work together, refashioning directions and priorities built on common recognition that policy travels poorly and needs change.
I offered a fresh performance mantra for consideration. One which I suggest is relevant for a globally connected Australia in this century – especially for museums and other creative institutions.

Do not be bland!

Make a difference and banish the bland! It has been too prominent in our past and should have no place in our future.

We need to – back the bold!

We must strive for a voice that renews the reasons to celebrate creativity and intellectual courage. We must find reasons to win national respect and political commitment; reasons to renew many of our depleted specialist training institutions; reasons to revitalise curiosity, creative originality and to fearlessly drive innovation. We must find reasons to speak out making sustainable connection with new and old audiences in fresh relevant ways.

We need to back, defend and promote that which is about fresh Australian creative adventure! Since the 1970s Australians have taken to the world stage as never before. Yet we are on the precipice of what seems to comprise an overwhelming magnetism for the pedestrian or worse.

As that vulnerable little English speaking country there is no future in being bland! We need bold confident national futures, which only come from frank institutional review and the quality of the ambition it adopts. Across the sciences and the arts it is imperative that stakeholders work together to fashion a fresh positively integrated policy approach – one which ensures better cooperation and common objectives. One, which recognises this radically changed operating environment and the challenge provided in really capturing the public imagination in a good way.

Vivek Wadhwa wrote in a Washington Post piece just a few weeks ago that “Ray Kurzweil made a startling prediction in 1999 that appears to be coming true: that by 2023 a $1,000 laptop would have the computing power and storage capacity of a human brain. He also predicted that Moore’s Law, which postulates that the processing capability of a computer doubles every 18 months, would apply for 60 years — until 2025 — giving way then to new paradigms of technological change.
“Kurzweil, a renowned futurist and the director of engineering at Google, now says that the hardware needed to emulate the human brain may be ready even sooner than he predicted — in around 2020 — using technologies such as graphics processing units (GPUs), which are ideal for brain-software algorithms. He predicts that the complete brain software will take a little longer: until about 2029.

“The implications of all this are mind-boggling. Within seven years — about when the iPhone 11 is likely to be released — the smartphones in our pockets will be as computationally intelligent as we are. It doesn’t stop there, though. These devices will continue to advance, exponentially, until they exceed the combined intelligence of the human race.”

Clearly we all need to pay attention very closely. Kurzweil is one of the most consistently original digital thinkers, inventors and futurists. As many of you know his book from 2005 “The Singularity Is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology” has been of seminal importance predicting an exponential increase in technologies like computers, genetics, nanotechnology, robotics and artificial intelligence. He says this will lead to a technological singularity in the year 2045, a point where progress is so rapid it outstrips humans’ ability to comprehend it.

The message from Kurzweil is clear – change is accelerating almost unbelievably – clearly this calls for new modes of working in presenting artworks and knowledge if the community is to have productive engagement with that which has happened and will happen.

Does it reflect a strange amalgam between the writings of J G Ballard, Phillip K Dick, Aldous Huxley, Carl Sagan, Isaac Asimov, Neil Stephenson, George Orwell and many others? Does this all seem remarkably dystopian or will it offer new horizons of wonder, optimism and social improvement? Truthfully, the answer is probably yes and no.

Before we get carried away let’s remember that the genius Alan Turing was way ahead of his time imagining many of these things over 60 years ago. Indeed his views on pattern formation and tests for computers with artificial intelligence are still in use today. In some instances the more things change - the more they stay the same.

At core though we all need to have our feet on the ground and to be utterly realistic, recognising that these changes mean that standing still and managing institutions in the same way is not an option. Embracing these potent forces which drive reconfiguration in public mindsets is not easy. Relevant responses with new approaches to governance, management,
planning, and execution are essential if we are to drive sustainable connected and meaningful public engagement.

It is going to be a really bumpy ride. I suggest we relish the journey. Thank you.

Note

This is the provided transcript of a keynote presentation given by Kim Williams at the Museums Australia National Conference on the 23rd May, 2015 in the Sydney Town Hall.
Museums and freedom of speech

Alec Coles

As it embarks upon one of the most significant museum redevelopments in the Southern Hemisphere, the Western Australian Museum has committed to share the stories and experiences of all Western Australians, and to ensure that many different voices are heard, and perspectives presented.

Implicit within this, is the intention to open up the Museum to diverse and sometimes conflicting views. It is important that we do not impose our views upon our visitors and that we embody the principles of freedom of speech and of expression. We believe that this is laudable, sensible and essential in a 21st century museum.

Freedom of speech is a less precise concept than many of us would like to think. In a global context, it certainly does not mean, nor should it, that anyone can say anything, to anyone, anywhere, at any time.

In the first place, there have to be limitations on our right to offend, to discriminate, or to compromise public safety and security: in the second, every day we observe examples of free speech exercised, denied, defended or punished – sometimes brutally.

There are many dimensions to this issue in respect of museums, but of particular importance are the museum’s own position – the stance it may take in respect of an issue – and the degree to which it facilitates, encourages or constrains the views and/or voices of others. This is where the concept of many voices is both exciting and challenging.

Freedom of speech is often one of the first human rights to be defined in a state’s constitution. It is part of the First amendment of the US constitution. It is engendered in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human rights.

Interestingly, as Professor George Williams observed, last year.¹

“So far as I am aware, there is only one democratic nation of the world that does not expressly protect freedom of speech in its national Constitution… That nation is Australia.”

Alec Coles
Williams was speaking at a Constitution Day event hosted by the National Archives of Australia and the University of New South Wales. I was honoured to be asked by the National Archives of Australia to participate in this event entitled “Say what you like: a constitutional right?” it was mediated by the ABC’s Paul Barclay and later televised on the ABC “Big Ideas” series.

The panel of five speakers, as well as Professor Williams and myself, comprised Tim Wilson, the Human Rights Commissioner; Kirstie Parker, Co-Chair of the National Congress of Australia’s First Peoples, and Louise Allen from Amnesty International Australia.

I was delighted that the National Archives recognised the important role of museums in this space, but unsurprised when Paul’s first question to me was what was a museum director doing on the panel?

It was my cue to launch into an exposition of museums as places of debate and discussion; places where many voices should be invited and heard; as one colleague describes them – the new town halls, occupying the democratic vacuum once filled by those buildings that now tend to be populated by bureaucrats.

It was also opportunity to invoke that telling phrase “Museums as Safe Places for Unsafe ideas” so associated with my friend and colleague Elaine Heumann Gurian, and also coined here in Sydney by Dr Fiona Cameron, a research fellow at the University of Western Sydney, in her paper: “Safe Places for unsafe ideas? History and science museums, hot topics and moral predicaments”.

‘Safe places for unsafe ideas’ is a claim that, I suspect, many of us have used to describe the power of museums. It is an effective piece of short-hand that seems to crystallise the role and potential of a contemporary museum.

But in reality, how accurate or how defensible is the claim? How safe are those places? How unsafe the ideas? How prepared are we, as a sector, to embrace these principles? How prepared are our public and stakeholders to engage and support us in this endeavour? What are the implications of providing a platform for moderate and extreme views which may dissent widely from our own position?

With a mix of serendipity, coincidence and not a little irony, as I arrived in Sydney, in 2014, to participate in the Constitution Day event, the Sydney Opera house was hosting the 2014
“Festival of Dangerous Ideas”. Established in 2009 by the Opera house and the St James Ethics Centre, the Festival, has an international reputation and over the years has featured such luminaries as Christopher Hitchens, Germaine Greer, Julian Assange and Salman Rushdie. From my selfish point of view, it could not have been better timing - The Sydney Opera House – a public building – acting as a safe place not only for unsafe ideas, but positively dangerous ones!

In the event, it did not quite work out that way because the Festival had become embroiled in controversy, firstly because of its decision to include a particular speaker and subject on its program – and then for banning him. That speaker was Muslim writer and activist Uthman Badar: his address was titled "Honour killings are morally justified".

The Opera House defended its decision: "The Festival of Dangerous Ideas is intended to be a provocation to thought and discussion, rather than simply a provocation." Mr Badar, on the other hand, claimed that the session's cancellation “...is revealing of the extent and influence of Islamophobia in Australia.” He blamed "baseless hysteria" for gagging the expression of ideas and tellingly said "It also highlights, once more, that freedom of speech is a tool of power and nothing more."

I am not defending the apparent premise of Badar’s title: and I would not have attended the session if given the choice. On reflection, however, I do not believe that I would have cancelled it, either, and that is for three reasons: firstly, the cancellation gave Badar the oxygen of publicity; secondly, it gave him the opportunity to claim that he had been morally wronged; thirdly, I believe that an open debate would have better revealed the moral redundancy of any argument in favour of his subject.

This extreme example illustrates both the opportunities and the threats of setting museums up as places of open debate where the views and positions expressed will not always be our own and will not necessarily be mediated.

Perhaps there really is no such thing as a safe place, and perhaps sometimes the ideas might be just too unsafe – particularly when they drift into what we might characterise as hate speech.

In his 1995 text, “The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics” Tony Bennett claims museums have always acted as places of social transformation and social responsibility. I am
not sure that I would agree with this assertion, but even if it is accepted, at times the role has been somewhat subliminal.

My scepticism is borne out by a 2013 report on public attitudes to UK museums\(^5\) which revealed that whilst there was a high level of positivity and trust in museums, some people challenged the very ideas that Museums should provide a forum for debate, or promote social justice. Clearly, if we wish to claim these roles for museums - and many of us do - we still have a lot of convincing to do.

It does seem that amongst cultural institutions, public museums enjoy a particularly impressive reputation for trust and integrity built upon their status as collecting institutions, as (often) publicly accountable bodies and as (supposedly) objective commentators. It is this claim to objectivity that perhaps confers upon museums their apparent authority, but also possibly constrains them – the ‘safeness’ that Gurian and Cameron claim.

Cameron’s work surveyed attitudes amongst the public, members of which, according to her results, largely felt that museums should be apolitical and should not take a stance – in effect they should just present information and let people make their own minds up. In the same vein, some commentators have suggested that museums should be neutral spaces – I certainly hope not: ‘neutral’ conjures up images of banality, safety and lack of ambition – please let our public museums not aspire to that!

The WA Museum constantly grapples with such issues: notably accountability and the use of diverse voices. Video footage in the Western Australian Museum’s Maritime Museum in Fremantle features a young Aboriginal man who refers to the European invasion (of Australia). The piece is scripted, but that is not the point. One erstwhile visitor has taken issue with this to the extent that he has conducted a sustained campaign aimed at our Premier to correct what he claims to be a ‘misrepresentation’ of Australian history. Attempts to explain to him that whether, or not, it was an invasion or colonisation rather depends on your perspective, have been met with frosty derision.

Many museums, take a very polarised position, in some cases it is their raison d’être: few, I suspect, would deny the right of the Apartheid Museum in Johannesburg to tell the story of a previously oppressive regime, and a country’s emergence from it through the testimony of
those affected. Similarly, if you visit a Holocaust museum or exhibition you are unlikely to expect or desire a ‘neutral space’.

It is, however, always easier to accommodate multiple voices when dealing with issues that appear incontrovertible (at least in the eyes of the majority), or place the voice firmly on the side of international law. It becomes a much more complex task where histories are truly contested; where perspective is everything. It is more difficult, still, where the views expressed might become the focus of political interference.

We should not forget the controversy over the interpretive policy of the Australian National Museum when it was built. Some would say that this particular battle in the ‘History Wars’ remains one of the most unedifying and notorious examples of political determinism in attempting to define a Museum’s interpretive policy.

The annual exhibition ‘Behind the Lines’ at the Australian Museum for Democracy shows some of the best political cartoons of the year. It is an example of a mainstream institution able to challenge and, in some cases, ridicule political sensitivities. The cartoons, and the exhibition that collates them, set out to provoke debate and discussion. They also serve to humanise and make accessible serious subjects.

Cartoons were once considered one of the last safe bastions to which we could retreat to express dissent but that is no longer the case. The most notorious recent example of provocation answered with reprisal did not involve a museum at all. I suspect that before December 2014 most of, at best, were only vaguely aware of the satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo and even less so of the mercurial Stephane Charbonnier. Charbonnier famously stated that “We can’t live in a country without Freedom of Speech. I would rather die that live like a rat.” Words, of course, that became tragically prophetic.

At the time of the massacre, I wrote, in my weekly newsletter to staff about freedom of speech and defended the right of journalists and museums – in fact anyone –to express their views, or to provide a space for others to do so. In fact, I do not agree with the brinksmanship demonstrated by Charlie Hebdo, which, I suggest, was approaching the promotion of Islamophobia, however, I do defend the magazine’s right to freedom of expression, echoing the words of Evelyn Beatrice Hall, writing under the nom de plume S. G. Tallentyre about Voltaire who coined the phrase, often misattributed to Voltaire himself: "I disapprove of what
you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it"; I wonder, how many of us could truly live up to this maxim as Charbonnier did and, even if we could, do we have the moral right to expose our museums and our public collections to reputational or even physical damage by courting controversy?

The question must be asked again, where does the division lie between the museum’s role to provoke debate, or merely provoke?

Not all issues of freedom of speech in museums are so visceral. Some are positively prosaic. Freedom of speech is an imprecise concept: it need not focus merely on opinion – it may involve only the provision of information. One of the challenges of committing to a principle of many voices is ensuring the accuracy or integrity of information: people can make mistakes, or seek to mislead: in short, they can stuff up, or just make stuff up!

A frustrating Western Australian example is provided by the Welcome Walls outside the same WA Maritime Museum in Fremantle. The WA Museum was not the first and will not be the last museum in Australia to create a commemorative opportunity for 19th and 20th century immigrants arriving by boat. In Fremantle, the 20,000 or so names on the walls were submitted by relatives and friends – sometimes distant in time, or geography, or both. Some sources of information might have been reliable and their attention to detail meticulous, but others may have been based on the rumour that transcends family generations. People sometimes forget – and even when they remember, sometimes accounts are nuanced, varied, exaggerated, or fabricated as they are passed from one person, or generation, to another. This early attempt at crowd-sourcing information – a laudable democratisation of the migration story – has created an enormous research backlog validating the veracity of the many accounts which are riddled with errors concerning dates, ship names and even the spelling of family names.

As we commemorate Australia’s Centenary of Service expect much more of this. Confused and embellished stories handed down the generations will be rife: of diggers who might, or might not have served; or who might, or might not have been in this battle, or that one; or who won this medal, or that one. These are the things of which family legends are made, but with which the historic record has to contend.
Last November, we were proud to complete the National Anzac Centre in Albany, WA. The Centre features a significant amount of digital technology and content. Key to this is an on-site and on-line opportunity to add your personal contribution. These are monitored daily, but it is impossible in the time available to check each piece of information for accuracy.

There is also the question of how do we decide if a comment crosses the lines of decency, particularly in such a highly charged environment. Management at SBS certainly considered that Scott McIntyre had crossed it in 2015 when he posted a series of tweets critical of contemporary commemoration of Anzac, of Australia’s part in war, and of the nature of those who commemorate it. I believe his tweets were insensitive, ill-conceived, perhaps immature and, in at least one case, offensive – but should they have resulted in his dismissal? SBS claims that he breached its Code of Conduct in relation to social media. Others, including McIntyre and his lawyers, claim that his dismissal was politically motivated. It is a serious question: was he actually dismissed because he expressed an unpopular and anti-establishment view? It is a sobering thought for all of us in managing not only our own social media-driven lives, but also how we manage those of our contributors.

This leads neatly to consideration of one of Australian political and media obsessions: the treatment of refugees and asylum seekers – particularly those attempting to arrive, illegally, by boat.

In April 2013, a boat arrived off the west coast of Western Australia, eventually tying up in the port city of Geraldton. The boat was carrying refugees and asylum seekers from Sri Lanka. Of the criteria that define what contemporary material a museum should collect, one tries to imagine how significant that material might be viewed in 100 years’ time. One way to second guess this is by monitoring what is dominating the news at the present time.

There can be few subjects that generated more column centimetres, or air time, prior to the last Federal election than the question of refugees and asylum seekers attempting to get to Australia by boat. It dominated political debate and many would claim that it determined the scale of the incoming Government’s victory.

After much negotiation, the WA Museum acquired the vessel. Once this became public knowledge, a debate raged in the press and on social media. Should the Museum be lauded for its determination to document the contemporary history of Australia, and to tell the
stories of those desperate souls who boarded the vessel, or should it be vilified for wasting public money, or sympathising with illegal immigrants? Being accused of being unpatriotic was particularly harsh in the context of the Museum’s major contribution to the Centenary of Service commemorations.

The Museum became a platform for vigorous and sometimes fractious debate about this supposedly ‘unsafe’ subject, but it was a subject very appropriately addressed in a museum. It had a major part to play in telling the story of our state and our nation, of our relationship with the world, and of the human stories of the unfortunate passengers.

In displaying the vessel we will invite comment and the issue is, of course, which, and whose, ‘unsafe ideas’ should be explored or presented alongside this story? Freedom of speech is, a fine principle when the speaker agrees with you and your sensibilities, but whilst we might be comfortable giving voice to the refugees who risked everything in search of safety, respect and employment, will we be as comfortable giving voice to the views of someone who would ‘send them back’?

Where do we draw the line – and who decides? Will we give voice to extremists; to reactionaries; to racists; to Holocaust deniers; to climate change deniers; to creationists?

We should remember that the Constitution Day event, to which I have referred, was so-themed because at the time the Government was seeking to amend clause 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act. It would have removed protection against hate speech and racial vilification: it became known in some circles as the Bigot’s Charter. The amendment was abandoned at an early stage to the relief of many: as Kirstie Parker opines: “There is no nobility and no greatness in placing unlimited rights to free speech above the already limited rights of the vulnerable to be free from racist abuse”.

‘Faith, Fashion and Fusion’ is a Museum of Applied Arts and Science exhibition that toured WA in 2014 and 2015. Its theme is contemporary Muslim women’s fashion: nothing controversial here, or so you would think. However, when this opened in our Geraldton Museum, shortly after the horrific siege in Sydney, we received anti-Muslim sentiment and calls for the exhibition to be cancelled: our reaction was that there could not be a more important time to show such an exhibition, particularly if we were to be true to our aspiration to inspire people to explore and share their identities and culture.
Relevant here, are the comments of Kenneth Roth, Executive Director of Global Human Rights Watch, speaking on Q&A in 2014, when he noted that “… offence is very subjective and the offence that tends to govern is the offence of the powerful, not the weak”. 7

It would be inappropriate to conclude without reflecting on the awful recent scenes in the Mosul Museum shown here, or indeed the appalling violence at the Bardo Museum in Tunis, where 21 tourists died.

The concept of safe places for safe ideas seems depressingly redundant in this context but despite these events there is little doubt that I and others will continue to promote the concept; but in doing so we may have to accept that there really is no place that is completely safe, and that every idea is unsafe to someone.

The WA Museum was proud to host the Afghanistan: Treasures from the National Museum, Kabul exhibition last year. The incredible story behind the artefacts was that they had been saved from the National Museum when it was threatened by the Taliban. Five curators had hidden these treasures away until the threat receded.

The spirit of these people is crystallised in a plaque outside the National Museum in Kabul stating that “A Nation stays alive when its culture stays alive”: particularly poignant in that setting, it is, literally, a touchstone for all of us, reminding us that culture is expression, and that freedom of expression is crucial.

We are committed, in Western Australia, to create a Museum that encourages debate and that does not shy away from difficult issues and, above all, gives a voice to the people of Western Australia, allowing them to express their views; recognising that there is far more knowledge existing outside the Museum than could ever exist inside it.

But just as there are practical, intellectual and libertarian justifications for taking such an approach, there are also pitfalls, notably relating to accountability, accuracy, artifice, agendas and alternative viewpoints.

These pitfalls should stand as stark reminders to those who were deluded by the idea that sharing stories was just a matter of opening up the web site and letting everyone have their say.
The question before us is: Will we risk eroding the trust that we appear to enjoy on the back of a perception of museums as apolitical pillars of ‘truth’? Or, will we seize the opportunity to build new trust amongst those communities that previously saw us as organs of the establishment?

I staunchly defend the Western Australian Museum’s principle of many voices; of freedom of speech; of being that safe place for unsafe ideas. But I do so in the full knowledge that such a commitment may lead us into some dangerous and uncomfortable places that we might, sometimes, rather not have gone.

Notes

This is the text of a featured speaker presentation given by Alec Coles at the Museums Australia National Conference in May, 2015 at the Sydney Town Hall.


References


Mining media content in museums: Digging deep for new opportunities

Kim McKay

“Imagine switching on your TV at home and tuning into the Museums Channel. What would you see? Would the program hold your attention for at least three minutes...or at least through to the next ad break?”

Thank you Frank and good morning everyone. After last night’s party I’m surprised to see you here – I thought you might all be at church! It’s been a great few days here delving into the future of museums land – and what a magical place museums land is!

I think the night at the museum films just underscore this – museums should be places of imagination, of knowledge, of adventure and discovery and importantly, sometimes, places of fun.

Just take a look at the gang gathered here – they could belong in one way or another in any of our museums, the three Night at the Museum films have taken a worldwide box office so far of $1.35billion. Then add to that most recently Nicole Kidman as museum director in Paddington Bear, she’s handy with a taxidermy knife. Other releases such as George Clooney in Monuments Men and Helen Mirren in Woman in Gold, illustrate the same point.

Museums are entering popular culture as never before. Look at the Met in New York. Is it their Lombardo’s Adam – a restored masterpiece that has attracted the most attention? No, it’s the Met Fashion Gala, which was held earlier this month.

Today I want to talk with you about the opportunity I think is ‘going begging’ in museums – that of really mining our content to share through a variety of media channels – and to challenge you, hopefully, about the role each of your institutions or organisations can play in the future.
A see a dual role: museum as media platform - producer and distributor; and as educator – exhibitor, researcher and custodian. This is where the concept of narrative that Xerxes Mazda talked about so eloquently yesterday comes in.

Media, whether film or TV, has been using narrative, using story-telling, for well over a hundred years very successfully. And our early playwrights did the same.

Let’s now take a leaf out of their book, I’m going to look at how can we do this. And of course, I’ll also give you some insights into the Australian Museum’s transformation plan that we now have underway.

As you know I’ve only been at the museum for just over a year and I do love it – it’s an great experience to think about all the many and varied things I have done in my career – and I have been working professionally for 30 years – and having them all come together.

Working for and leading the Australian Museum is such a privilege – especially one steeped in history and tradition. As Australia’s first museum, its story is almost as colourful as the 18 million items in the collection.

We are the museum of Australia and the Pacific – a natural science and culture museum that’s been around since 1827, we are coming up to our 190th anniversary in just a few years.

The Australian Museum was built on the site of a convict garden, and opposite in Hyde Park there used to be a race track, so we were planted in the centre of quite a lot of nefarious early colonial activity.

The original plans for our site were extremely grand – it was meant to be a building to rival the grandest of European cultural centres where the museum, the library and the art gallery were to be housed together.

But in good NSW government tradition, they ran out of money and instead we became the recipients of a series of buildings, added to over the years, in 1800, 1870 and 1890 buildings forming a u-shape with an internal courtyard that rivals the size of the NHM’s courtyard in London – save for the 1988 brutalist building plonked in the centre of it!

Don’t get me started on interesting architectural decisions, and of course, now I’m adding one (Crystal Hall entry).
In the mid 1800’s Gerard Krefft, an amateur zoologist and curator came to Sydney from the Melbourne Museum (via the US and his home in Germany). After a year, the curator of the Australian Museum died and Krefft took over.

I really like Krefft because he introduced the study of science to the museum, naming over 30 Australian species including the saltwater crocodile and the cassowary, and participated in an untold number of field collecting expeditions. He also discovered the lungfish, not on an expedition, but by eating it at a dinner party one night.

Krefft also stood up and fought for science when it was under attack. In the mid 1860’s, the Australian Museum’s Trust were all creationists – Krefft had become an evolutionary theorist and had developed a friendship, via correspondence with Charles Darwin. Due to his strident beliefs and undoubtedly his lack of charm, Krefft fought vehemently with the Trust and there was even a government enquiry held into his behaviour over a trumped-up charge of theft from the collections. All the government found was that he was guilty of wilfully smashing a fossil jaw bone and occasional drunkenness!

One night, sitting in the parlour at the Australian Museum reading a book while sitting on the Director’s, the museum door was bashed down by two prize fighters from the local bazaar associated with the race track across the road. Hired by the Trustees, the burly blokes picked up Krefft in this chair and carried him out, unceremoniously dumping him in William Street. He was locked out and never allowed to return to the Museum.

Krefft, who had done so much to promote science and indeed open up the Museum to the public, was banished. His friendship, of course, with Charles Darwin continued and Darwin did recognise Krefft in later editions of *Origins of the Species*, but Krefft’s heart was broken and he died at 50 leaving his wife and 2 sons. His ancestors live in Sydney and I have welcomed them to the Museum. Indeed, his great, great, great grandson will be doing work experience with us later this year.

I’m telling you this story for a number of reasons.

Firstly, it’s a good yarn about standing up for what you believe in and promoting science and museology – Krefft used to stand behind canvas sheets at the back of display cases to observe museum visitors’ behaviour.
Secondly, we have recently created two reception rooms dedicated to Krefft – including the original round table and chairs where his disagreements with the Trustees occurred. I call them my ‘money rooms’ as it’s where I meet with donors and sponsors.

And thirdly, because there’s something we can all learn from Darwin.

“It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent that survives. It is the one that is most adaptable to change.”

To survive you have to adapt to change, Krefft is my guardian angel – and Darwin my guiding light.

So the Museum, I have found, is full of stories. It has provided amazing experiences as the past year has shown me.

I’ve had the best shop of my life buying a giraffe and a zebra for our new Wild Planet Gallery, and I’ve been through two cyclones – Ita and Nathan on Lizard Island where we evacuated the Australian Museum’s research station for the first time in over 25 years.

Lizard is the divine island on the northern tip of the Great Barrier Reef where Cook rowed out and climbed to the top of the hill – now known as Cook’s look, to see how he could navigate his way safely through the reef after having run aground.

I’ve recently visited Canowindra - the Age of Fishes Museum – highlighting Devonian fish fossils – amazing fossils unearthed by Australian Museum scientists – with a whole bed potentially waiting to researched further – oh and we’re appointing a palaeontologist back on staff.

And just this week I was holding the newly discovered fossil jawbone of a species of mega fauna from a dig in NSW – a giant kangaroo – which may even be a new species.

Being at the AM is very exciting, I love it. People come into my office and say, “Come and look at the grizzly bear….or come and look at this woolly mammoth thigh bone.”

And then there’s the fun. Here’s one of ours checking in to the hotel next door, The Pullman, for a social media competition linked to Wildlife Photographer of the Year.

It is the stories that matter, and where the opportunity for Museums in the future truly lies.

Think of the earlier SBS on air campaign – six billion stories and counting.
Well, at the AM we’ve got at least 18 million stories – as every object in the collection or indeed every person who has been on expeditions and discovered things knows.

When I first went behind the scenes as a Trustee – my eyes opened wide ….look at this story treasure trove.

“National Geographic would have a field day”, I thought to myself.

Here is one of our indigenous stories – an eel trap, eels can’t reverse so they swim in and are stuck, love it. What a great 2 minute vignette on you tube that would make.

Just wandering through the collection stores – I have the desire to open them up physically – and we will be doing that – but also to reveal and revel in the stories.

As you may know, I worked for over a decade with National Geographic in DC, first with NG Channels, as we launched it around world, and then with the NG Society, developing new global initiatives like the Genographic DNA Project – using citizen science to help reveal where we came from and how we got here. And we have now just created the AM Centre for Citizen Science – taking that experience I’ve had in citizen science and focussing on it.

With National Geographic and before that at Discovery Channel, I’ve travelled the world and had the most amazing experiences from Egypt to Peru, from India to Morocco.

National Geographic was founded in 1888 – around a round table similar to Krefft’s.

Back in the 1982 an academic from Maryland State University uncovered some films and went to the National Geographic Trustees with the idea of launching a new-fangled cable channel. They said no – the magazine would rule, we’re happy just making documentaries for Sunday night viewing.

Well, that man, John Hendricks went on to found Discovery Communications – now one of the largest communications companies in the world. He’s a billionaire of course.

So by the mid 90’s National Geographic had to play catch up. They got into bed with Rupert Murdoch’s Fox Channels – to launch NGCI (National Geographic Channels International).

Here is a National Geographic Channel clip – it’s a brand image clip and I’m showing it to you for a reason. If you take off the yellow border, it could be the Australian Museum or indeed your Museum.
We have to stop looking at ourselves as four walls where we display things, and start seeing ourselves as venues where we tell and share stories, where we engage the community on and off site – whether in our buildings or at home in their living rooms or through education or on public transport via smart phones.

I am going to stick my neck out today and say that I think the single most important role in any museum in the future will be that of Chief Storyteller: the person who can dig, find stories, tell stories and produce – bringing them to life for your target audiences.

Just like a TV network – you need to get to know your audiences intimately, and find out and then show them what they’re interested in.

Whether it is a 2 minute vignette, a 12 minute feature or a half hour documentary special, we had all better start seeing our organisations as story tellers if we are to remain relevant.

Here is a brief film clip by National Geographic. Phil Breslin is an Indigenous school teacher. He’s as good in the flesh as he is on camera. He is a great guy, who with the help of National Geographic’s storytelling expertise, can communicate in a new way.

Yes, it’s dramatic. It’s the competitive landscape of pay TV where advertisers have to be secured to pay for production and where audiences need to have their attention kept before the remote switches them over to another channel. Bang, three minutes average time spent viewing, and you’ve lost them!!

Here’s another, Tales By Light. Love this. People tell stories – so link the story of your objects with the story of people.

I want to unlock the 18 million stories of the Australian Museum and guide us into a new era where we become a museum and a media organisation – a platform for content creation and sharing, like no other, fulfilling our mission in a new way. And we’ll look to make money out of it too – as being associated with our stories will have enormous brand value.

**How do we do this?**

Here is a picture from our archives – it shows the filming of a documentary back in the 1950’s. This is today – a control room full of young smart people who can research, write, produce, edit and broadcast with virtually the tools that exist on their phone. We all need to join the new media revolution.
Here’s *Vice* – an incredible news and information site with curated content as well as self-generated content. It’s growing rapidly.

Imagine if this was the Museum’s site – maybe called keyhole – like Krefft peering into our collections – and not like the Google Cultural Institute either, which is an aggregator of content.

The University of New South Wales Science Faculty has just created a new media division and employed one of the best science journalists in the country and is becoming a great producer of science video content. We’ll do similar – but in a new way, working with University of Technology Sydney interns.

Maybe every media graduate in Australia can find a place at a museum. The media platforms are everywhere and are accessible.

Very quickly, I want to tell you what I’m doing at the Museum:

Crystal Hall, our new entry on William Street is underway. It liberates our College Street grand gallery space and exposes us to passing traffic – some 200,000 cars per day and very visibly signals change to all our audiences.

We’ll be opening the Crystal Hall around end July/early September. Inside the glass pavilion there will be a huge video wall – with lots of content and enough space of 200 visitors to queue. Here is Crystal Hall - I took this yesterday. It’s a steel and glass structure.

Coinciding with this is the launch of Wild Planet. Here’s my giraffe and zebra I talked about earlier. This is the first new gallery floor space in over 50 years. It is 630sqm and it has literally saved our collection from extinction.

We’ve also created other new galleries this past year including Garrigarang Sea Country and Bayala Nura – both new indigenous galleries; and Pacific Spirit – opened by Foreign Minister Julie Bishop providing a window into our extraordinary Pacific collection;

We’ve also moved the shop and upgraded our central Atrium space; and moved the café to the rooftop to take advantage of the spectacular view. In addition, we’ve renamed Australian Museum Research Institute (AMRI) – we’re getting our science on the floor. We have 90 research scientists and technicians, now led by Dr Rebecca Johnson.
Here is a picture of a famous art work, a preserved shark. That’s not us, but it could be us – they’re trying to be us (Discovery channel in Washington DC) but they don’t have what we all do:

- Content & stories
- Authentic research
- And above all community trust

I hope I’ve described a way forward to grow and engage your audiences like never before. You all work in an amazing and exciting world – the world of Museums. But it’s challenging and how we respond and the momentum we build in our industry is entirely up to us. So take the bull by its horns and mine that content!

Note

This is the provided transcript of a keynote presentation given by Kim McKay at the Museums Australia National Conference on the 24th May, 2015 in the Sydney Town Hall.
Museums, mausoleums and muniments rooms:
Letting in the light on university collections

John Simons

When the invitation to address this conference arrived I was at first loathe to accept it for two reasons. Firstly, I know little about museums other than as a visitor. Secondly, I was concerned that what I might have to say would not be appropriate for a group of museum professionals who are entirely devoted to the development and protection of museums of all kinds. It is true that in my current institution (Macquarie University) I do, as Deputy Vice-Chancellor Academic, have Executive carriage of policy and governance of the university’s various museums and collections which range from a very significant art collection and the biggest collection of ancient silver and gold coinage in the southern hemisphere through a small but well-founded museum of ancient cultures to less formal science collections and living collections such as the arboretum, the Indian spice garden and bush tucker garden. So I was persuaded to accept the invitation on this basis – whether this was wise the reader may now judge as the audience for the original brief lecture were able to do at the conference itself.

There appear to be five main reasons why universities might wish to host museum and collections:

1. The artefacts provide support to the university’s research and educational mission
2. The university is a cultural institution in its own right and cultural institutions might be reasonably expected to have their own collections
3. Collections, especially art collections, offer ways of adorning the university and projecting an atmosphere of culture and refinement
4. Collections can emerge because of bequests or donations which are diplomatically accepted in the hope of further philanthropic giving
5. Collections can offer an investment opportunity
Although this list is certainly not exhaustive it probably covers most of the sub-variants of corporate rationale and is presented in descending order of respectability with the disinterested pursuit of enlightenment at the top and the highly partial pursuit of money at the bottom. I imagine that very few university collections would emerge out of reason 5.

Around the world the hundreds of university collections, of every shape and size, represent a massive accumulation of objects and cultural capital which is to a greater or lesser extent available to the general public. This public has, in many cases, actually bought the items through their tax dollars and although most universities make some effort to open up their collections to more or less limited public access the fact remains that large quantities of material rarely see the light of day even within the university itself and certainly not to a wider public. This is a cause for concern as universities (unless they are entirely private) have a duty and a responsibility to serve the communities which fund them and to make available the amenities and cultural treasures that they have at their disposal.

And here we arrive at the first big difficulty. It is one thing to acquire a collection or an individual work of art. It is another thing entirely to display it in suitable conditions, to store it safely, to make provision for its maintenance and restoration and to ensure that appropriately qualified people are available and dedicated to its curation. Every work of art or artefact that a university acquires comes with an on-going cost requirement and this can, in some case, become a cumulative burden which far outweighs the value (either physical or cultural of the object). Many universities underestimate the extent of the on-going costs associated with museums and collections and, in times of fiscal stringency or austerity, even those which do not may not make spending on the maintenance of collections a priority.

This issue clearly causes anxiety in the world of professional museology and I am very struck by the language of two public declarations which address museum collections. The first is the Resolution of the University Museums and Collections Committee (UMAC) of the International Council of Museums (ICOM) which was promulgated on 14th August 2013 at an ICOM meeting in Rio de Janeiro:

1. Collections held by universities internationally are an important part of university and world heritage.
2. These collections are irreplaceable and must not be dealt with purely as fungible, financial assets of the university that can be disposed of to meet financial needs.

Therefore:

3. These collections must be valued for the role they can play in preserving the history of universities and for the role they can play in current teaching and research at universities, as well as for educating the public.

4. If a collection must be disposed of for any reason, it must be done in keeping with the professional standards of museums and the disciplines concerned. Any disposal of collection by a university must be done in consultation with, and on the advisement of, those experts who are responsible for the collection.

5. It is the responsibility of a university to provide appropriate protection for collections that they hold in trust for their students and faculty and the world community, now and in the future.

While no one could object to the language of clause 1, clause 2 is rather extraordinary for a number of reasons. Firstly it is clearly not true that any collection is irreplaceable – for example, a collection of twentieth-century art might have a Picasso but if that Picasso were replaced by a different one, or even a Matisse, that would not necessarily mean that the collection was irreplaceable. Secondly, if a university opted to sell a piece it would not cease to exist – it would just be in a different collection. Thirdly, a university (like any other collector) might sell a piece and then acquire it again later. So I can see no sense in which any collection is irreplaceable. The notion that any object – however culturally valuable – cannot be disposed of by its owner to meet a financial need is simply silly especially as it appears to be based on the entirely false premise that selling something in some way destroys it. The wording also seems to me to confuse the self-identity of a single object - which may be irreplaceable if it were, say, lost at sea – and the collective identity of a group of objects as a collection.

Clauses 3 and 5 are unexceptional although the language of coercion (‘must’) is never attractive. And, of course, the whole problem is that whatever pious hopes about the compulsory duty of universities to care for collections might be expressed the fact is that most universities can’t afford to do this anymore and would, in fact, be acting in a deeply
irresponsible manner if they did not allocate funding to their students when money is tight. It is also interesting that the ‘them and us’ mentality of the declaration is so engrained that there is, apparently, a difference between ‘universities’ and ‘students and faculty’.

Clause 4 returns us to the culturally fetishized and ideological language of clause 2. It is interesting to note that although the resolution has sternly admonished universities about the impossibility of disposing of collections it now admits that sales might happen. The question of the ‘experts’ responsible is a poignant one. It makes a big assumption about the capacity of even wealthy universities to maintain their collections and my guess is that in most situations these experts boil down to one hard pressed general curator who may or may not have any expertise in the relevant market whatever his or her knowledge of the artefacts themselves might be. Any responsible university seeking to maximise an asset sale would always use the services of market-oriented agents to ensure the best price which is, after all, the best way of serving the university.

The UMAC Resolution is clearly well-meaning but doesn’t constitute much more than a generous slice of apple pie located in a Manichean world where delicate treasures are cared for by underdogs who constantly have to defend themselves against the uneducated and unfeeling corporate barony of the university management. In other words, it offers no realistic guidance to universities or to museum professionals as they try mutually to negotiate the best ways to support collections in an environment of sharp competition for limited resources.

The Declaration of Halle adopted by the European organisation Universeum in 2000 offers a somewhat less colourful account of the duties of universities in respect of museums:

*Academic Heritage and Universities - Responsibility and Public Access*

Universities must acknowledge their wide cultural roles. Academic collections and museums provide special opportunities for experiencing and participating in the life of the University. These collections serve as active resources for teaching and research as well as unique and irreplaceable historical records. In particular, the collections of the oldest European universities provide windows for the public on the role of the university in helping to define and interpret our cultural identity. By valuing and promoting this shared academic heritage,
our institutions demonstrate a commitment to the continued use of these resources by a broad public.

Notice that the language of coercion and the idea that collections are ‘irreplaceable’ is in common with the UMAC resolution but the idea that universities should use their resources to teach and research and open their collections up to the public is much more explicitly stated. Of course, the programme which accompanies the Declaration is part of a funding bid to EU-Program Culture 2000 so the public which largely paid for the collections in the first place and continues to pay for their maintenance through the tax euro element of university revenue is to be asked to pay again through the subsidy of taxpayer funded EU grant. A very cosy arrangement for everyone but the taxpayer one might think.

However, the long suffering and necessarily deep pocketed taxpayer will, apparently, have the consolation of seeing though a window onto the role of the university and the shared academic heritage it represents. This really is rhetoric at its most fanciful. There is no such thing as a shared European academic heritage and - whatever the bland hopes of the EU to reduce the rich diversity of Europeans into a compliant herd directed by wise professional politicians and bureaucrats - the differences between European countries and institutions remain, thankfully, far more significant than the similarities. And the oldest Universities of Europe have never played a role in helping to define and promote cultural identity. For most of their history they have functioned as bastions of exclusivity defining themselves very precisely against what most people prefer and believe.

So given the failure of the international organisations to provide any credible guidance on the future of university museums (besides proposing further depredations on the tax payer) what can be done to maintain and develop these valuable assets in the realities of the world post-GFC and the choices that are made on a daily basis regarding the custodianship of cultural assets?

If a university needed to raise $1 million and had no way of raising it as extra revenue should it:

a) Sell a painting
b) Make a group of staff redundant
c) Reduce its investment in the student hardship fund?
That is the day-to-day reality at its most naked and although things are rarely as black and white as I am portraying them in this somewhat mischievous example the principle that all spending decisions represent more or less considered priorities holds good as does the brutal fact that in stringent times any organisation – university or not – will tend to direct funding into its core business at the expense of everything else. With notable exceptions museums and collections are seen, rightly or wrongly, as supplementary to core business although the value represented in the holding constitutes an on-going spending priority which does have a significant impact on the viability of the core.

So how can we assure the future and how can we shift the museum and collection more firmly towards the centre of core business. Here are some prescriptions:

1. Don’t deploy the rhetoric by which cultural assets are seen as intrinsically more valuable than or different from other assets. That merely draws attention to the idea that collections might not be core business and, in any case, it isn’t true.

2. Ensure that a very senior member of the university has responsibility for museums and collections and will speak for them round the executive table – this is almost a *sine qua non*.

3. Develop an acquisitions policy and de-accessioning policy which demonstrates that the collection can be self-managed and self-sustaining.

4. Develop, along with the philanthropic giving arm of the institution, a coherent programme for donations. The best source of funding for arts activities of any kind is and has always been private philanthropy there is absolutely no reason why the state, acting as the tax payer’s proxy, should make any special case for bailing out university museums and galleries when ensuring decent support for students is difficult enough (see the mini-quiz on spending priorities above).

5. Keep a lively programme of exhibitions and activities going so that the collections are seen as an organic part of the life of the university.

I suggested above that well-ordered and well-founded museums and collections relate directly to the core educational and research missions of the university and to the responsibility of universities to engage with their community stakeholders and funders. In this sense collections are clearly aspects of the core business of the university and it is on that basis that they should be defended. However, it should also be borne in mind that universities have the responsibility to be fiscally prudent as only careful management of spending
priorities enables the sustainability of the organisation and its service role –‘No money, no mission’ as a Vice Chancellor I once served under of used to say.

My view is that universities are enhanced by the museums and collections and that the potential of such entities for contributing to core missions has by no means been fully exploited. It is also – as will have become clear – that there is nothing special about collections per se and that they should be able to state their case on the firm ground of university mission and strategy and not on ideologically motivated appeals to an exceptional status.

**Note**

1. In April 2000, the representatives of collections and museums of twelve European universities assembled at Halle agreed to found a network, "Academic Heritage and Universities". The Universeum Project guidelines were presented in The Declaration of Halle (16 April 2000).
Regional museums, galleries, sites and keeping places come in all shapes and sizes. The overriding traditional commonality has been a community passionate about what the past means for future generations. In the current economic climate the relationship of community and local government to regional and remote museums is more important than ever. This paper considers the transforming role that both must continue to have in shaping future, relevant collections and contributing to local identity. Specifically, this work examines where museums and culture ‘fit’ within local government in recent decades. The past is considered in conjunction with the changing nature of local government and how we as museum professionals can embrace these changes. Having worked for the past decade with remote and regional spaces, I have been privy to the internal workings of both volunteer run spaces and of local government - two very different languages at times. In these times of increased competition and initiatives to self-fund, a positivist projection for future possibilities is essential, hence this examination of this hitherto understudied area.

This work has its genesis in a keynote presentation on the Regional and Remote day of the Museums Australia 2015 Conference in Sydney. I chose to pull the focus away from predominantly state and federally funded places (commonly in city centres), and to take a broad view of the terms regional and remote. Regional and remote places are here defined as those other than the ‘big’ institutions, yet many of which are in metropolitan areas as well as further afield. The term ‘spaces’, is used to encompass a broad range of museums including, for example; museums (art, science, history, immigration, house), libraries, national parks and historic places.

In recent decades, events such as the Bicentenary of white settlement, Sydney Olympics, the Centenary of Federation, and anniversaries associated with WWI - including ANZAC - are often accompanied by grant schemes that impact exhibitions and give rise to capital projects. As do
state and federal elections. Having observed the effects of such historical milestones on museums, there is a perception that ‘pots of gold’, that is significant grants from federal and state governments are a method for cultural improvement and museum making. A survey of recent projects around New South Wales both supports this notion but revels that the genesis for museum making and improvement is not solely grants. While significant capital grants are often the catalyst for development, still financial and community support at a local level is what makes these catalysts turn into production. In fact, culture has been - on paper and at a state level – more and more recognised as a key existing local government activity. My understanding that museums and local government are frequently not fully aware of the depth and extent of their relationships grew out of experience working for local government and with community, what is concerning about this is that these relationships are in danger of being unrecognised and undervalued.

According to the Australia Bureau of Statistics there were ‘1,019 museums operating from 1,276 locations in Australia at the end of June 2008. These locations included 768 social history museums, 425 historic properties and sites, and 83 other museums.’

Museums and Galleries NSW identified that there are

...495 operational museums in New South Wales. They included 293 community run and managed museums, 57 public and regional galleries, 51 public and regional museums, 37 community run and managed galleries and artist run initiatives and 23 Aboriginal cultural centres. The balance of the identified organisations were state or national galleries or museums located in NSW.

There are approximately 41 local government areas (LGAs) in Greater Sydney, 152 in NSW, and 565 in Australia. From a simple quantitative consideration of these statistics, it is clear that museums associated with local government numerically exceed the large state and federal institutions, both nationally and in New South Wales as an example.

In recent decades, this relationship between local government and culture has become recognised. While the traditional roles of local council colloquially known as the ‘three r’s’, that is roads, rates and rubbish, continue to predominate, culture has been increasingly seen as necessary, if not core business of local government. At a New South Wales state level, in 2004, Premier Carr acknowledged that
Local councils are among the largest and most generous contributors to the nation’s cultural development. We rely on them for local libraries, art galleries and many regional museums and other services.\(^4\)

Further, Local Government NSW itself has recognised the social benefits of culture and museums and the scope of local government commitments,

Councils are vital in enabling local people to participate in artistic and cultural expression. In a climate of expanding global homogeneity, local production and participation is increasingly important. In NSW they managing over 4000 cultural sites, deliver [sic] services, programs, events and local cultural planning.\(^5\)

The museum sector too has identified that ‘...the majority of organisations operate from council owned premises’.\(^6\)

Aside from this growing recognition of the extent of the relationship that exists, data further suggests the significance of local government in funding this majority of sites in Australia. While figures can be difficult to compare, they are ‘out there’ and suggest a significant investment. The publication *Museums, Australia, 2007-08* reported on sources of income for museums and art museums, including funding by local government;

Overall, 67% of museums' (excluding art museums) income was funding provided by all levels of government ($400.2m). The remainder consisted of income from admissions ($56.0m), fundraising ($40.7m) and other sources of income ($105.5m). Of the $657.8m in government funding for all museums (including art museums, social history museums and historic properties/sites), approximately $43.3m (6.6%) was from local governments.\(^7\)

Local Government NSW suggests that; ‘...Councils invested $435.7m in arts and culture during 2012-13, a 3 per cent increase from $421.8m in 2011-12’.\(^8\) And in 2013 Museums and Galleries NSW found that ‘...over half of small to medium (S2M) museum and gallery sector receives some level of support from local government and 30% receiving core funding’.\(^9\)

Indeed the 2013 report titled *All Culture is Local* identified ‘...twenty per cent of public investment in cultural activity in Australia comes from local government.’\(^10\) While museums are only a part of the cultural sector, these figures are still indicative of local governments’ existing funding and support.
Having worked with local government on several museum development strategies over the years, I have a suspicion that the figures identified above are modest. The seed of this pondering occurred in 2005, when on arrival as inaugural Director of Tweed Regional Museum in northern New South Wales I was charged with organising and coordinating three pre-existing organisations on several sites into one Council owned and managed entity. Initially I visited each volunteer group and asked the question ‘What does Council do for you already?’ The answer was usually along the lines of ‘not much, not enough, it’s too bureaucratic, we need more help’. However, when surveying museum support from within the myriad agencies of Council and spending more time seeing how the sites worked, a different - opposite - picture emerged. While the actual dollar figure allocated to the ‘museums’ account code was at that time minimal, a soft economy of in-kind support across numerous areas of Council already existed. For example, it emerged that apart from small annual cultural grants, which were well known, Council insured buildings and contents, maintained workplace safety standards, mowed lawns, upgraded car parks, provided improved disability access, fumigated, publicised, provided printing and internet access and other technology. However, as this was not centrally or strategically coordinated, and came out of a number of operating and capital maintenance budgets, the level of connection (and expenditure) was unknown to Council or the community groups and thus, undervalued on both sides.

Thus Council and its museums were having what I termed for the Conference keynote a ‘secret affair’ at it was there, but unknown to either party. While this has changed at Tweed, which is now a highly organised Council and community collaboration, in my experience since then in other LGAs, this is not a unique case, in fact it is typical of many. While I do not want to overstate the relationship, as many museums are in need of so much more assistance, I use this example as evidence that in some cases, perhaps many, the relationship is there, but is not coordinated, and at times ad hoc and therefore less mutually successful than it could be. A tension can arise whereby community museums perceive the need for more council assistance, while council staff are assisting at the very inner and outer limits of their core responsibilities. Both groups are working hard to work together, but this needs recognition and coordination, both for basic morale maintenance but more importantly to chart strategies for growth and future sustainability and for contributing to local identity. At times of state and federal funding issues this tension I argue can be harnessed, recognised and
celebrated as a potential good news story, and more importantly, as a strong basis on which to build.

Having identified that numerous local government areas service numerous museums, my original presentation moved to highlight some high points in these relationships. Recent case studies of success stories at a local government level, while not comprehensive (and it is crucial to note there is still plenty of work to be done) vary in scope and outcomes, but each achieved final outcomes due to community energy, local government coordination and some aligning of the stars. For example, Albury Museum and Library cultural precinct was the first piece of contemporary civic architecture in forty years in the town centre. The funding structure for this project was described by Regional Arts NSW at the time;

...has a total budget of $17 million (including the purchase of the land), the bulk of which will be provided by council, with an (exceptional) $1.3 million contribution from the NSW Ministry for the Arts Capital Infrastructure Program and a $330,000 grant from DOTARS.\(^\text{12}\)

While the final structure of funding changed somewhat, the final product has been described as a ‘game changer for the City’ and attracts over 220 000 visitor per annum.\(^\text{13}\) In the same precinct, as of March 2015, $7 million of the $10.5 million dollar Murray Art Museum Albury (MAMA) redevelopment is Council contributions.

Also in regional NSW while non local support is substantial for the Orange Regional Museum redevelopment, local contribution for the size and population of the LGA is significant. Of the $8 million value of the project, $4 million is Federal Government contribution, $1 million from the State Government in the value of the Crown Land, $2 million from Orange City Council and, significantly $1 million from community fund-raising.\(^\text{14}\)

A similar picture of the importance of community fundraising and local government is the Margaret Olley Art Centre at Tweed Regional Gallery. The multi award winning and highly popular project is a $4.2 million extension to existing Tweed Regional Gallery. The infrastructure budget alone was comprised of a $1 million donation by the artist’s Estate, $1 million grant from Federal Government’s Community Infrastructure Grants Program, $200,000 from Arts NSW, $1.2 million from Tweed Shire Council and the balance from community fundraising by the Friends of Tweed Regional Gallery Inc. and the Tweed Regional
Gallery Foundation Ltd. Also at Tweed, a $3 million museum redevelopment was recently completed in Murwillumbah, of which the state contributed $600 000 and Council committed $2.4 million. Tweed Shire Council also paid for a $600 000 purpose built off site store and contributed land. While these are only a few examples and they are all ‘success stories’, it is clear that based on figures alone, there is no one manner in which museum improvement happens. In all of these cases, the complexity and length of projects coming to fruition cannot be understated. And it must be reiterated that this paper is aimed at identifying positive ways of looking to the future, given growing paucity of some areas of public funding. What this group do however indicate is the power of local government/community/museum partnerships.

So what does this retrospective teach us for the future? In 2014 in New South Wales the Baird Government announced the ‘Fit for the Future Plan for Local Governments in NSW’.\(^\text{15}\) The Plan was the result of a three-year Independent Local Government Review Panel which resulted in what is known as the Sansom Review. Among other outcomes, the Review recommended that 105 of NSW’s 152 councils merge.\(^\text{16}\) The Plan to act on the Review announced a number of measures including; $1 billion NSW State Government funding to LGA’s to consider mergers, the suggestion that this plan may save councils up to $600 million in loan interest payments, as well as other efficiency benefits. Council mergers in Australia are not historically unprecedented. Queensland in 2007 and 2008 reduced the number of local councils from 157 to 73 - more than half - with some controversial outcomes.\(^\text{17}\) For example; Noosa Regional Council, incorporated five State electorates, whereas Waggamba Shire, based in Goondiwindi, covered 18,000 square km with a population of less than 5,000. Similar merger initiatives have been undertaken in the Northern Territory and Western Australia.\(^\text{18}\)

In researching this paper, I was unable to uncover data about what LGA mergers mean for local museums and heritage. There is much information and discussion on the economic benefits of mergers, yet as local museums are often repositories of collections pertaining to local identity, this area needs critique. The question is; is there evidence in other states to suggest what does the future structure of local government mean for regional and remote museums?
A recent business planning workshop with a large Sydney metropolitan LGA was a chance for me to test these ideas with a local cultural community and see what their knowledge of the *Fit for the Future Plan* is, and how far their thinking was to be ‘fit for the future’. When asked what may happen if the Council merged with another larger, more politically important LGA in the Greater West, the volunteers replied along the lines of; …what’s the use if we merge we’re going OK?, ‘well our histories and collections are indivisible, so why not?’, ‘but we need a cultural precinct here, not there’, ‘but they’ve already got one, so who’d come here’. The answers clearly reflected that these groups, though incredibly enthusiastic and in many cases already nimble, were not taking into account the impending changing nature of their very environment or searching for opportunities to harness this for betterment.

So, by way of conclusion, this paper has discussed the scope and size and connectivity of local government to our thousands of museums in Australia. It has taken a broad definition of regional and remote museums to encompass all manner of places that do not fall directly under the state or federal governments remits. Statistics demonstrate that regional and remote museums are the majority (numerically, not in size or budget!) of the museums in our country. While the amount of museums is known, what is more encouraging is that the value of cultural infrastructure to local identity is recognised by local government and is being acted on in significant ways. Museums and local councils need to be aware of the strength and importance of their existing relationships. However where this local government/community/museum relationship is so crucial and already and mutually beneficial, we need to be aware of impending changes. To be fit and ready to make a future of plenty, we need to be active contributors to current debate, positive collaborators, and be ready to make change work for us.

Notes

18. Ibid.
More on the museum diet: Ten strategies for sustainable museums and collections

Kylie Winkworth

Have Australians turned museum-making into a community hobby where collecting is verging on hoarding? The figures, and the facts on the ground, suggest Australia has an unsustainable number of museums and collections. The legacy of the last 50 years of collecting arguably surpasses our capacity to be true to the idea of a museum holding collections in perpetuity. Our collecting binge may imperil the opportunities for the next generation to create collections that are meaningful for them. Australia needs to go on a museum diet.

Building on a paper presented at the 2010 Museums Australia Conference, this paper proposes a recipe for more sustainable museums and collections. This is not, as some have suggested, a museum euthanasia program, but a set of practical strategies to create more sustainable collections and museums.

Have you ever seen that American TV show called Hoarders? This show attracts millions of viewers in the US where the problem of hoarding is the focus of considerable attention from governments, psychiatrists and a new type of consultant - the professional organiser, part psychologist, part logistics expert. This may be an alternative career path for all the underemployed museum consultants.

For those of you that haven’t seen the show, it features middle aged or elderly people whose homes are completely engulfed by the stuff they’ve accumulated. Psychologists, organisers and family members intervene to try and help the afflicted hoarder confront the reality of their condition and clean up their homes. It’s painful to watch the hoarder struggle to see the junk that everyone else sees. As we know one person’s junk is another’s treasure.

One strand in the complex of psychological or psychiatric syndromes that make up hoarding is associated with collecting.

Many of the people featured on the show start out on the hoarding road as collectors. They rarely have objects of intrinsic value but we see enormous collections of beer cans, tools, toys...
and textiles – the latter one my own potential hoarding weaknesses. The collector-hoarders are some of the most stubborn cases as they have a ferocious belief in the value and meaning of the stuff they’ve accumulated.

You can see where I’m going with this. I think many people attracted to museums have hoarding tendencies, myself included. There’s a kind of morbid fascination in watching the show to see people whose hoarding tendencies are completely out of control. When I work with museums on deaccessioning programs there is usually one person in the group where the hoarding tendency is more prominent and who will struggle to let go of the junk so the significant museum objects have room to breathe and tell their story.

So what is the difference between hoarding and collecting? True collectors, whether individuals or institutions, acquire, research, document, organise, educate, exhibit or share their collections. A hoarder is very good at the acquisition part of collecting but falls down on the other standards. And there is something else. True collecting is always discriminating at the point of acquisition, and a true collector edits the collection to refine and improve it. Many hoarders collect everything that falls within their special interest: beer cans, cats, ties, toys or even things of the same colour. True collectors on the other hand are always refining the scope of their collecting interest. They might start out collecting coat hangers for example but this will quickly get out of hand. Friends will bring coat hangers from their holidays or op shops, relatives know just what to get them for Christmas. Pretty soon the house is swamped. However the true collector will refine and edit their collection. So they may for example narrow their collecting criteria to wooden coat hangers that have interesting shapes, or shop labels, and put the rest of the coat hanger collection back in circulation at the op shop or in the rubbish.

Psychologists and professional organisers are puzzling about why hoarding appears to be a growing and increasingly common community problem. Is it that stuff is so much cheaper for us to acquire? Some posit a genetic role in hoarding. My father was a hoarder so I know who to blame when my house gets out of hand. Others diagnose hoarding as an obsessive compulsive disorder. I’ve always believed that collecting is an innate human trait and that we use collections to help us make sense of the world, to understand it, order it and by doing so to have some control over it. Almost every child creates a collection of things that have special meaning for them. They put their collection in a little box. They know every item and each has
a memory or story. Most children grow out of their collections, but others will go on to be hoarders or to create bigger collections in museums, making their personal hobby into a community hobby.

For many years I’ve been concerned about the sustainability and continued growth in the numbers of museums in Australia. New museums are opening every year. Governments and communities much prefer to open new museums, rather than fix the ones we already have. It wouldn’t be an issue if we had coherent policies and plans to support and edit the museums we already have, but like the hoarder we’re not dealing with the museums and collections that are already crowding our museums and communities.

In recent papers I’ve argued that Australia has too many museums and that we need a museum diet or some museum population control policies.\(^1\) Comparing the museum numbers per head of population:

- In the UK, there is one museum for every 24,000 people.
- In the US there is one museum for every 17,642.
- In Australia there is at least one museum for every 7,458 people.\(^2\)

So Australia has more than twice as many museums per head of population as the US and more than three times as many museums per head of population as the UK.

Without a proper census of museum numbers these figures are almost certainly an underestimation. When we take a more accurate museum census in regional areas, the museum numbers are even higher. In one small rural community we found one museum for every 43 people.

Australians prefer to open new museums rather than fix the one we already have. And it is a bit like hoarding, just focussing on the new stuff or the next museum idea and not looking at all the existing museums that are already cluttering Australia’s cultural backyard. Thus the numbers of museums are always growing, while the list of existing museums that have been reinvented or redeveloped is very small.\(^3\) Museum making has become a kind of community hobby, new museums are created with too little public scrutiny of their rationale and sustainability and without reference to the museums already operating in the region.

Does it matter if Australia has more museums than other countries? If museums are a public good, then might more museums be even better? Not necessarily. The funding for museums
in Australia is very small, especially for the majority of museums without recurrent
government funding. We have no equivalent of the UK or US museum policy and funding
councils. Here in Australia the commonwealth and state governments have abandoned four
attempts to sustain national policy bodies for museums and collections.

At the heart of the museum idea is the concept of a permanent collection held in trust for
current and future generations. This promise cannot possibly be fulfilled if the de facto
museum policy is to let a thousand flowers bloom. Collections and museums cannot be in a
state of constant growth and development, at least not if we are serious about sustainability
and the promise of collections held in perpetuity.

It is accepted that all collections must be guided by a collection policy and that this policy
framework is essential for the ethical management of a collection. But are 3000+ separate,
uncoordinated collection policies the answer? Imagine if health or education or
communications were run on the same lines; or 3,000 railway gauges of different sizes and
standards. But this is the policy incoherence running rife in Australian museums. As the costs
of keeping collections is rising, and communities are committing substantial resources to
museums and collections, in kind if not in cash, we need to talk about how to better organise
and structure the legacy of fifty years of ad hoc museum making.

People working on the ground with museums in regional Australia confront these issues on a
daily basis. We’ve all seen the pain that new museum ideas and developments can create in
communities where there is already one or more museum that may have been there for 30
or 40 years and is perhaps struggling to stay afloat.

I’ve been thinking and talking about these issues of museums and sustainability and the
museum diet for the last few years. At a recent Museums Australia conference it was
suggested that I was arguing for museum euthanasia. This is not correct. But I do think we
need a museum population plan so that new museum proposals are evaluated in the context
of existing museums. That’s what families do when they contemplate more children. And
that’s what communities need to do. Like kids, a museum is a lifetime commitment, and
indeed it’s beyond one lifetime in the case of museums. A museum is an intergenerational
commitment that carries costs and obligations not just for the proponent but for future
generations. So, new museums should not be opened without careful scrutiny. A museum is
not a community collecting hobby which can be put aside when we move onto the next idea.
In response to my papers on the museum diet others have suggested it’s just a kind of Darwinian process of evolution and the weak museums will die and those that are effective and supported by the community will thrive. The problem with this analogy, or a Darwinian survival of the fittest museum policy, is that many of the museums in trouble are the older museums with significant collections. These collections are typically not well documented and they are at risk as volunteers age and die and the museum’s life support systems crumble. Of most concern is that the stories of the objects, which go to the heart of their meaning for communities, are not written down and it’s almost impossible to retrieve these stories once those who collected the objects have passed on.

So what are my 10 strategies for sustainable museums and heritage collections?

1. Museum Diet

No funding for new museums that doesn’t also involve planning for, or the uplift and redevelopment of existing museums and collections.

It is obvious that we cannot continue opening new museums ad infinitum. If the current pattern of museum development continues, we risk betraying the fundamental idea of a museum as a permanent institution with collections held in perpetuity for current and future generations. We are not honouring our obligations to the previous generation of museum builders to care for their collections, if we keep adding to the museum population without regard for sustainability and our responsibilities for the museums we already have.

This does not imply a population ban on new museums or new museum ideas, but new museum proposals should involve integrated planning for all the museums in the community.

2. Sustainable Collections

It used to be the case that collections and museums could be understood as one and the same thing. Curators ran museums and their job was looking after collections. But museums are now complex multifaceted operations. There are many different jobs in museums and curators and collections are now just one of many competing interests. In today’s museums, large and small, it is easy for the inanimate collections to slip off the list of priorities and to get less and less funding and attention.
Too many museums large and small are simply warehousing collections, storing the stuff while people rush around pursuing the next big thing, be it building development, community gardens or social media. This is true for state museums, and it is also the case for community museums. Too many small museums look like antique shops without the prices. In just about every community museum I’ve worked in the collections sit there while volunteer time is taken up with the complex job of keeping the doors open, doing the roster, fundraising, building maintenance, and going to workshops and volunteer training.

This is no criticism of the dedicated volunteers who keep community museums afloat. What they’ve achieved through decades of selfless work in their communities is the creation of what are now significant community assets.

But we need to put collections back at the centre of our museum thinking. And we need to have a conversation about sustainable collections and what they might look like in every level of the museum industry.

The key sustainability challenge for museums is not about green buildings and air conditioning; it’s confronting the paradox of museum collections in a state of perpetual growth and development, and already pushing the limits of museum building and storage areas. So how can we have sustainable collections, which are true to the promise of collections held in perpetuity for future generations, but which do not diminish the opportunities of the next generation to develop collections which are meaningful for them?

We already know that young people coming to our museums have little idea of the meanings and uses of so many items of redundant technology. It’s doubtful that they will want to look after our museums if they find nothing in the museum of their life and memories.

Among other things, sustainable collections mean that our collecting legacy to the future should not be so large that it prevents the next generation from developing collections about their time, place and culture. This brings me to my third strategy.

3. Deaccessioning

When I watch the Hoarders program and see the anguish of the hoarder’s kids I know part of their worry is that they are going to have to clean up the stuff. If the hoarder doesn’t deal with their stuff their kids are likely to be completely ruthless and get rid of everything. That is one of the risks if we don’t get our collections in order.Ly ruthless and get rid of it all.
All houses need de-cluttering from time to time and museums are no different. Deaccessioning is best done methodically and regularly not in a single blitz. Make it a regular part of the museum’s housekeeping. There are some simple ways to deal with deaccessioning: have an approved policy and procedures, build it into collection work programs, make an annual commitment to deaccessioning, research items proposed for deaccessioning, communicate with members, ensure the process is transparent, report on deaccessioning in annual reports, keep good records.

4. Sustainable Collections Plans for every region

This is something we’re working towards with museums in central NSW. The Sustainable Collections Program is funded by Orange, Blayney and Cabonne Councils and Arts NSW. It is now in its fifth year and is working with 15 museums, historical societies and community collections. The project was conceived in part to address a sometimes laissez faire attitude to the opening new museums. Its focus is on the documentation and assessment of collections, and the presentation of distinctive stories in museums whose collections were not widely appreciated in their communities.

At the start of the project the councils had a low level of awareness of the museums and their particular needs. We argued that by harnessing new resources and improving planning, the museums could better support local economic development, education initiatives and creative enterprises. A case for funding was built around the collections as important community assets that need maintenance and investment to sustain their value and significance; that the collections were not well documented or sustainable; and that there was a lack of planning and coordination to tell distinctive stories and link with regional tourism strategies. We spoke the language of local government and tried to align the project with relevant council plans and priorities.

The focus of the project is on the documentation and assessment of collections and on working with the museums to identify distinctive objects and stories, and collections. Following on from this work are new interpretations, exhibitions and education initiatives.

What might a sustainable collection plan look like? A sustainable collections plan is like a strategic plan for a region’s museums with key goals around sustainable collections, interpretation, education and community engagement, and museum development. It links to
local government and identifies priority projects built into forward planning. Museum development projects are strategically coordinated, focusing on significant objects, documenting collections, working side by side with museum volunteers, and improving the co-ordination and development of collections and stories.

5. Strengthen and Develop Regional Networks

Museums linked into regional networks

Networks should be funded and resourced

Brisbane’s Living Heritage Network a national model

So we need a strong network of museums in each region supported by a curator or co-ordinator, and over time a regional museum officer in every region. The museum networks are supported by trained paid curators funded to undertake or broker collaborative projects. Their work would include documenting and assessing significant objects and collections; deaccessioning items of low significance; interpreting distinctive regional stories; developing education programs based on collections and local stories linked to curriculum outcomes; enhancing access to collections on line, publishing and promoting awareness of collections; and fostering community engagement through museums. Working with the museums and councils they would also develop sustainable collections plans for each region, identifying strategic priorities for museums and collections.

6. A network of strong well-funded regional museums functioning as regional hubs

- Regional museums managed by councils
- Working as a museum hub
- Supporting a regional network of community museums
- Projects, mentoring, services, training, travelling exhibitions, collection advice

It is obvious to me that we need a network of regional museums to parallel the regional gallery network. Long established historical societies in major regional cities, like the Cairns Historical Society, need funding pathways to become regional museums, staffed and funded by councils. And councils need meaningful funding incentives to take on responsibility for museums in their local government area. A network of regional museums will only be achieved by strategically promoting regional museum opportunities to larger councils, with
attractive funding incentives. An integral part of the regional museum is a regional museum officer working in partnership with community museums in the region.

It’s not a one size fits all prescription. It may be a well-established historical society having an agreement with council, as happened at Wagga, or it could be like the Tweed River Regional Museum where three small historical societies combined to broker an agreement with council to become a regional museum.

Admire what the MDO (Museum Development Officers) network does but it’s failing to drive significant investment by councils and an uplift of long established museums in often poor quality buildings which are not fit for purpose.

7. Investment in Paid Trained Staff

3,000 community museums and collections can’t be sustained by a diet of ad hoc volunteer training.

The challenges facing volunteer managed museums are well known: current volunteers are aging and dying, replacement volunteers are hard to come by, the sector is expecting volunteers to work as if they are paid staff with sometimes onerous obligations and standards programs, people are working longer and looking after elderly parents, as museums grow the challenges of managing the operation imposes unrealistic burdens on committee members and key volunteers, many of them are working 30 or 40 hours a week.

As I’ve said elsewhere, we don’t hear librarians calling for volunteer training or standards programs. They want well-equipped modern libraries run by trained librarians, and a network of professionally supported small libraries in every community linked to a major regional library. Regional galleries don’t settle for volunteer training and yet more workshops, they want paid trained art curators working in purpose built modern galleries. Why should museums settle for anything less?

It was infuriating that the recent Museums Australia summit when it came to the regional and community sector could only think of the same old policy prescriptions of museum training and accreditation.

Why is it that our peak museum body can’t face up to the elephant in the room and recognise that museums need paid trained staff, if not in every museum then at least in every region?
And here I don’t mean one MDO covering an area twice the size of the UK with dozens of museums but a critical mass of trained staff with career pathways and reasonable pay.

In the last two decades almost every major volunteer community enterprise has gone through a process of professionalization to help them better deliver their services. This is not to replace or diminish the role of volunteers but to better support their work, here I’m thinking Surf Lifesaving, Meals on Wheels, LandCare are all supported by paid trained people. And, in the case of Meals on Wheels and Surf Lifesaving, both have had massive programs of infrastructure investment.

8. A Viable Museum Economy

• Recognition of the asset value of collections
• Funding for business plans
• Sharing ‘best ideas’ for income generation
• Fees for services like loans
• 10% of every grant retained for museum operations
• Research into the financial basis of community museums

As Bill Clinton famously said - it’s the economy stupid

But what sort of economy do we have in community museums? You might think this is a funny question but we need to talk about money, where it comes from, how we use it and how we can get more of it if we’re serious about the future of our museums. We know that many of the traditional ways that museums earn money are now failing; as visitor numbers fall so does income from admissions, and visitors are buying fewer books.

So we need to be forward thinking about the economy of museums. Some museums are like old age pensioners surrounded by valuable antiques, hoarding cash in the bank, but with the house falling to rack and ruin around them, lacking the funds and resources to renew the displays, getting fewer visitors apart from the palliative care workers of the museum service industry, so the poor museum is ignored by the neighbours and the community. These museums are at risk of dying alone and might not be found for weeks. In fact, if we’re honest, there are already many largely closed and shuttered museums, not able to open for the two hours a week they promise on the door.
So what might a sustainable museum economy look like?

There should be funding support for museums and collections centred on collections, based on significance, and programs to help museums develop, interpret and share their collections with funding opportunities to enable them to engage the best skills of the cultural sector – art, theatre, film, design etc.

We should not expect community museums to do everything for free

Why shouldn’t community museums be able to keep 10% of every grant to go into their working budget? Bigger organisations are routinely able to take a management fee from any grant.

We should be valuing collections so we can make a stronger case about their asset value, and the need for investment in maintenance and conservation.

Every museum should have a business plan and a forward budget, rather than just reactive when bills come in. This fosters a spirit of meanness about investing in the museum and collections. We need to discover the best ideas that museums are using to stay afloat and generate income and share these with other museums.

**9. Advocacy**

Let’s talk about the museum class system in Australia. This sees people living in regional and rural communities having what are often second or third rate museums – or worse, because after paying taxes to fund state and national museums, they then have to either pay again for museums through their local government rates, or, more likely, set up and operate museums through their own fundraising and voluntary efforts.

How is it that 95% of all museum funding goes to the handful of state and national museums in our capital cities, while the vast majority of museums and heritage collections are left in the hands of elderly volunteers working in often decrepit heritage buildings.

How is it that the oldest and most numerous cultural organisations in Australia, with the most volunteers, found in every community of Australia, holding irreplaceable heritage collections of huge significance to their communities, working in the most decrepit buildings, how is it that they are completely absent from arts and cultural policy discussions?
This happens because of a failure of advocacy, because museums don’t speak with a single voice to governments, and because the organisations that purport to represent the museum sector are inherently conflicted in the policies they recommend to government.

Regional museum networks need a new representative body. Your interests are not the same as MA (Museums Australia) or CAMD (Council of Australian Museum Directors), or even MGNSW (Museums Galleries New South Wales) or M&G Qld (Museums and Galleries Queensland), but these are organisations that purport to speak for all museums. And what are they saying? That all community museums need is more training, standards, accreditation, tiny grants and building patch ups.

We can’t sustain museums on a diet of outreach and trickle-down economics.

This is surely our biggest failing as an industry. We need to put collections and their stories at the heart of our advocacy for museums and collections.

Community museums can and should be powerful advocates if only they could harness their power: 3,000 museums, each museum with an average of 20 volunteers and 50 members, unique stories and collections, more volunteer hours worked in museums than in any other aspect of community museums.

Say no to accreditation without significant investment in people and infrastructure.

10. A Coherent Policy for Museums and Collections

This has been a dream for the museum sector since the 1975 Piggott Report first proposed an Australian Museums Commission to co-ordinate policy and programs. It was the committee’s number one recommendation.

Does policy matter? Yes because it can and should drive programs and spending priorities. Without an explicit policy framework governments may make poor choices about funding allocations on the basis of special pleading, marginal seat status, or sentiment. Was it really a federal government priority to spend $5.5 on the Museum of Australia Democracy in Ballarat when the government already has its own Museum of Australian democracy in Old Parliament House in Canberra? Was funding a $5m Slim Dusty Museum in Kempsey really the Howard Government’s number one priority for museum funding in regional Australia? Drive down the Pacific Highway near Kempsey and you can see the impressive shell of the Slim Dusty
Museum. You just can’t visit it because they’ve run out of money to put in the drive way, parking or power and water.

Objectives

- A vibrant cultural life in rural and regional communities, creating more liveable communities with a sense of place and distinctive identity discovered and interpreted in local collections and heritage places
- Conserving significant heritage collections held in communities across Australia in museum buildings that are fit for purpose
- Sharing stories about people and places to reach new audiences and develop regional and rural economies, tourism and education opportunities
- Engaging audiences and promoting access to collections through all forms of contemporary cultural practice
- Digital access to collections and distinctive regional stories
- Museums working in regional networks on collaborative projects to share and develop sustainable collections and museums
- Access, equity and opportunity for rural and regional communities and their museums, ie no triple taxation for cultural facilities, each community has reasonable access to funding for their significant stories, places and collections from both the state and federal governments.
- Employment of paid trained museum curators by local government with adequate funding incentives from the state government
- Strategic planning as one of the key tools to involve local government in supporting their museums

Notes

2. These figures are derived by dividing the population figures by the estimated number of museums. For the UK museum numbers see http://www.museumsassociation.org/about/frequently-asked-questions. For the US museum numbers see http://www.aam-us.org/aboutmuseums/abc.cfm#how_many. For a comment on the number of Australian collecting organisations see
There is no accurate census of museum numbers in Australia. I estimate the number at a conservative 3,000. Local and regional surveys show higher numbers of museums than statistics compiled by state agencies. For example, the NSW the town of Hay has one museum for every 527 people

3. The new Library and Museum in Albury is a notable exception, rehousing the collection from the Albury Regional Museum formerly housed in the 1860s Turks Head Hotel

4. The Museum, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) in the UK and the Institute of Museum and Library Services in the US

5. The collections advisory bodies initiated and abolished include the Heritage Collections Working Group 1990-93; the Heritage Collections Committee 1994-96; the Heritage Collections Council 1997-2001; and the Collections Council of Australia 2004-2009

Reference

PROJECTS
“To the city for dancing”: The Women Artists collection and the birth of commercial art practice at Yuendumu

Scott Mitchell

Abstract

The early 1980s were a key moment in the development of both the Western Desert Painting Movement and the wider Australian Aboriginal art industry, as critics and the public slowly began to recognise the artistic and commercial values of Indigenous art. One of the significant events at this time was the 1982 Women Artists exhibition in Sydney, for which nine painters from Yuendumu in the Northern Territory danced, sang and exhibited their paintings for the first time to a wider audience. This paper attempts to place the 1982 Women Artists exhibition into an historical context and describes the large collection of Yuendumu women’s art made by the Australian museum at the time. When contextualised through the memories of the surviving artists, the collection provides a unique insight into how the women began to engage with the commercial art market at the birth of the Indigenous art industry. Emerging from this analysis is a picture of radical and innovative artistic experimentation by the Yuendumu women, an observation with implications for long running debates about cultural authenticity in Western Desert art.

Key words: Yuendumu, painting, collections, women, artists

Introduction:

“Yeah, we went to Sydney a long time ago. We all danced at that gallery. We were all friends. When we danced, we were happy.” Rosie Nangala Fleming, Yuendumu Artist.¹

In October 1982, nine Warlpiri women² staged a world first: an exhibition devoted to Aboriginal women’s art. They travelled from the remote Western Desert community of Yuendumu, 300km northwest of Alice Springs, to sing and dance for audiences in Sydney, to display their paintings in the Australian Museum, and to use those paintings to illustrate Warlpiri kinship systems and tjukurrpa (dreaming) stories. The art used to create the exhibition was subsequently incorporated into the cultural collections of the Australian Museum. This collection now offers a unique window into art practice at a key moment in the development of the Aboriginal art market.
Hailed as the world’s “last great art movement of the twentieth century”\(^3\), the Western Desert Painting Movement has enjoyed three decades of critical and commercial success. Sometimes referred to as Aboriginal “dot paintings”, acrylic works on canvas by Western Desert artists have intrigued the world with their abstract forms, vibrant colours and close association with Aboriginal spirituality. In 1982 however, the work of Aboriginal artists was mostly still relegated to the ethnography sections of Australian museums, or dismissed as “primitive” or “tourist” art (e.g. Coleman 2009; Jones 1988; Morphy 1998, 2001; Murphy 2011; Neale 2015).

A striking illustration of the low public profile of Aboriginal art at the time is provided by the opening of the National Gallery of Australia in Canberra, which took place during the same week that Women Artists opened in Sydney. Warlpiri women danced with their paintings in Sydney but in the nation’s capital it was Queen Elizabeth II who opened proceedings. The National Gallery of Australia, which now has the world’s largest public display of Aboriginal art, was criticized at the time for not having a single piece of contemporary Aboriginal art on display or in its collections (Burns 1983; Megaw 1985: 51).

Another illustration of the relative obscurity of Aboriginal art in 1982 comes from the Aboriginal community of Papunya, located approximately 100km south of Yuendumu. Papunya artists had begun to render their sacred designs with acrylic paint on canvas and board a decade before (see below), but struggled to find a market for their work until the mid 1980s (e.g. Johnson 2010:134). Destined for fame as founders and leading proponents of the Western Desert Painting Movement, in 1982 Papunya artists were still ignored by art galleries, collectors and museums for whom they were not considered “ethnographically authentic” enough (Megaw 1985:29).

Women Artists was one of a handful of exhibitions in the early 1980s that challenged restrictive stereotypes about “primitive” Aboriginal art and paved the way for the explosion in national and international recognition for Aboriginal art in the mid-1980s. Collections of artworks from this period are therefore potentially of great importance in illustrating how artists began to engage with the commercial art market. This paper attempts to place the 1982 Women Artists exhibition and collection into an historical context, to describe the collection itself, and to contextualize it through the observations of contemporary Yuendumu artists. It also draws on the recollections of two of the original nine women who produced Women Artists, Lynnette Nampijimpa Granites and Rosie Nangala Fleming. Emerging from
this analysis is a picture of radical and innovative artistic experimentation by the Yuendumu women, an observation with implications for long running debates about cultural authenticity in Western Desert art.

The *Women Artists* exhibition, Yuendumu and the birth of the Western Desert Painting Movement

“A long time ago we used to only paint on caves, and sand paintings. And on women’s boards, and on wooden sticks and body painting.” Otto Jungarrayi Sims, Yuendumu artist.4

The origins of contemporary Western Desert acrylic painting in traditional cultural practices such as ceremony, body decoration, cave painting and sand drawing have been well documented by anthropologists (e.g. Batty 2011; Faultsch 1993; Kimber 1995; Myers 1991, 2002). For example Anderson and Dussart (1988:90) noted in respect to Yuendumu:

> The materials – canvas and acrylic paints – are European in origin. The content and execution of the paintings, however, lies firmly within the framework of desert Aboriginal culture. The topics are generally mythological ones to which the painter has a particular relationship, and the set of polysemous symbols [dots, concentric circles, straight and curved lines] used is the same as that found in the older art forms of rock engraving, ground design and ceremonial body painting.

Put another way, contemporary acrylic paintings effectively “…offer sacred designs for secular, public viewing” (Anderson and Dussart 1988:91).

One of the first attempts by Western Desert artists to present ceremonial images to a wider audience began in Yuendumu in 1969, when a group of Warlpiri men started building the Yuendumu Men’s Museum. One of the first community museums and keeping places in Australia, the building was used to store cultural artefacts and provide a place where law and knowledge could be taught to young men. The men painted the internal walls with a series of murals based on ceremonial designs, which while secret –sacred in nature could be viewed by European men and older European women for a small fee. The result was, at the time, “…the most coherent museum presentation of Aboriginal culture in existence” (Philip Jones, quoted in Finnane 2015).

A more widely recognized starting point for the Western Desert Painting Movement occurred in 1971 at the nearby community of Papunya. Encouraged by primary school teacher Geoffrey
Bardon, Aboriginal men began rendering traditional designs used for ritual objects, body decoration and cave paintings on to flat (canvas or board) surfaces, for sale to outsiders (Bardon 1979,1991; Johnson 2010; Megaw 1982; Myers 2002). While commercial and critical recognition for their “aesthetic experiments” (Ryan 2011:18) took more than a decade to crystalize, their activities were watched with interest in nearby communities.

In Yuendumu outsiders began supplying Warlpiri people with cardboard and water paints, encouraging them to reproduce the ritual designs used for body paintings, sand drawings and ceremonial objects in a more permanent form (Dussart 1988). These efforts were relatively unsuccessful until acrylic paints were first made available in the community in the late 1970s, at which time artists began experimenting with applying acrylic paint to rocks, buildings, small canvas boards and wooden objects (Anderson and Dussart 1988:99; Dussart 1988).

In 1977, as these changes were taking place, Yuendumu women established their own museum for meetings, to store ritual objects, and for teaching dancing, singing and painting to younger generations of women (Kahn 1983; Konencny 1983). An active centre for painting and cultural activity, the women’s museum was invited by the Australian Museum to produce an exhibition as part of a “Women in the Arts” festival, scheduled to take place in Sydney in late 1982 (Konencny 1983). At the time the Women’s Museum was attempting to raise funds to buy a vehicle for women to hunt, enact ceremonies on traditional sites and visit other communities for ceremony (Kahn 1983:23). Working in the grounds of the Women’s Museum, more than 30 female artists collaborated to paint 140 works, which were sold to the Australian Museum for use in the exhibition and incorporation into the permanent collections.

The majority of the painted works prepared for sale were wooden objects including dancing boards, wooden dishes, digging sticks and fighting clubs (see below), which traditionally were used for women’s ceremony after they were painted. In one sense, this production of painted objects for exhibition was a direct continuation of existing cultural life within the community. The artworks had to be dispatched to Sydney in two separate lots, with the transport of 24 works (mostly digging sticks and dancing boards) delayed, because the women used them first in a ceremony held at a nearby community. In other ways the project was a distinct novelty in the life of the community. A sense of this can be gleaned from the difficulty the artists faced as they sought to obtain suitable packing materials to transport the artworks to
the Australian Museum. No bubble wrap or tissue paper was available either locally or in Alice Springs, so they were forced to compromise and wrap the painted works in newspaper and cling wrap before posting them to Sydney.⁶

According to curator Kate Kahn (1983:23), the artists were concerned that audiences should be made aware that the painted “…objects were not to be considered in artistic isolation, but together were derived from and sanctioned by mythological ancestors. All were linked to specific sites, and plants and animals, emphasizing an intimate connection with the environment.” Warlpiri cultural practice was therefore reflected not only by labeling the paintings with their associated dreaming stories, but through the physical layout of the exhibition itself, with two sets of parallel cases each containing objects by artists from one of the four paired skin groups (Kahn 1983:23). Two showcases in the northern section of the gallery displayed ceremonial objects relating to the Napanangka/Napangardi and Napaljarri/Nungarrayi skin groups and two cases on the southern side displayed objects related to Nangala/Nampijinpa and Nakamarra/Napurulla (Kahn 1983:23). This pattern, which was clearly labeled for exhibition audiences, mirrored the internal layout of the Yuendumu Women’s Museum, where objects were stored based on the same physical arrangement of skin groups.⁷

To further illustrate the cultural context of the painted objects, nine Warlpiri women travelled to Sydney in October 1982 to open the exhibition with performances of traditional body painting, songs and dances. Lynnette Nampijinpa Granites remembers that, prior to the exhibition, she was painting:

...just a little bit at home ...working on canvas with my sister and my sister was teaching me when I was a young girl how to do painting and about proper Dreaming so I could learn Dreaming. And the old ladies would teach us. They said: ‘Do you want to go Sydney and open the museum?’ And then we went and danced there. We would always go everywhere and dance, to the city for dancing.⁸

Rosie Nangala Fleming also remembers her visit to Sydney as a noteworthy event:

We did work at the Museum for business, dancing business, yawuru [dance / ceremony] business at the Museum. That time we yawuru, different types of yawuru. We all danced, black and white. Yeah, we all went to Sydney a long time ago, for dancing and painting up...⁹
The women spent two weeks in Sydney, performing at the Museum, busking and creating more painted objects and other art works, which were also sold to the Museum or to the public through the institution’s gift shop.

Critic Ann Stephens (1982:20) applauded the way that Women Artists could “…not only confront a white audience with great visual pleasure, but also raise crucial questions about our understanding of Aboriginal reality”. Photographs of the dancers dressed in ceremonial regalia appeared in the Sydney newspapers, but the Women Artists exhibition passed with little other public commentary and it closed in March 1983.

Looking back, it is reasonable to suggest that the exhibition and its associated event program represented a significant milestone in Yuendumu women’s practice. Despite the muted public reaction, the women continued to paint: according to Lynette they began to go the Museum shed “every day” to paint on “little canvasses”. Beginning with “mainly old ladies”, Lynette remembers, more and more people – men and women – began painting after the exhibition.

The subsequent growth of painting activity at Yuendumu has been well documented (Anderson 1993; Anderson and Dussart 1988; Dussart 1988, 2000, 2006; Megaw and Megaw 1993). In 1983 the community’s men began painting the now famous Yuendumu Doors (a series of dreaming stories painted onto the doors of the Yuendumu School and now held in the South Australian Museum). By 1984 the community was selling sufficient quantities of art that 30 of the senior women artists were finally able to pool their resources and buy a four wheel drive vehicle. In 1985 the community established Warlukurlangu Artists, one of the longest running and most successful Aboriginal-owned art centers in Central Australia.

In Rosie Nangala Fleming’s words: “A long time ago there were only a few people painting, but now it’s different, there are a lot of people painting big canvases. Everywhere, lots of people are painting.” From their relatively low-profile beginning in 1982, the Yuendumu community has now staged thousands of exhibitions nationally and internationally, while the financial turnover of Warlukurlangu Artists places it among the most commercially successful Indigenous art centers in the country.

The Women Artists Collection

“We used to paint on all those different things... and it’s all there, present in the museum. Yeah, for the ceremonies we’d paint them all up: music sticks, dancing boards, parraja...
[wooden dishes] and yawuru [dance/ceremony], putting down the tjukurrpa [dreaming] on your body. And the tjukurrpa is present on you.” Alma Nungarrayi Granites, Yuendumu artist.\textsuperscript{15}

The Australian Museum holds approximately 350 objects and paintings from Yuendumu, of which 140 were acquired from the Yuendumu Women’s Museum for the 1982 exhibition (Table 1). As indicated in Table 1 (and described in more detail below), most of the artworks assembled for display were carved and painted wooden objects. These objects, which often have intricately incised surfaces, were carved by men, after which the surface of the wood was prepared with an “undercoat” of red ochre mixed with animal fat or cooking oil (MacGregor 1998:13). Women applied the painted designs on these objects with variety of acrylic and water-soluble paints, with black, yellow, red and white as the dominant colours.

For each object the documentation provided by the Women’s Museum included the function and Warlpiri name, details about the painter and their kinship relationships, and the dreaming stories, totemic ancestors and sacred sites to which the design on each work relates. In 2014, Warlukurlangu artists who examined photographs of this collection were consistently able to identify the dreaming stories depicted on the painted objects. As one artist exclaimed, “You can really see the tjukurrpa [dreaming] in these works, it’s really present.”\textsuperscript{16}

Table 1. Summary of objects provided for the Women Artists exhibition, 1982

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Object category</th>
<th>Warlpiri name\textsuperscript{17}</th>
<th>Object description</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Painted wooden dancing</td>
<td>Yukurrukurru</td>
<td>Long oval hardwood boards held by women during dancing.</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>34.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>objects</td>
<td>Wirliya</td>
<td>Literally “foot /feet/track”. Carved wooden birds feed used by women in rituals about that particular dreamtime bird or animal ancestor.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ngipiri</td>
<td>Literally “egg”. Carved wooden eggs used by women in rituals about that particular dreamtime bird or animal ancestor.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turruru</td>
<td>Painted wooden clapsticks, shaped to a point at both ends, joined at one end with spun human hairstring. Painted over incised, burnt in pattern.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Object category</td>
<td>Warlpiri name</td>
<td>Object description</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jipilyaku</td>
<td>Carved wooden snake (death adder) and carved wooden duck.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-total</td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>60</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>42.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Painted wooden utilitarian/dancing objects</td>
<td>Pili</td>
<td>Oval wooden scoop used for digging, when painted carried in dancing.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parraja</td>
<td>Multi-functional carrying dish, painted and carried by women in ritual/performance contexts</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kuturu</td>
<td>Club used for fighting mainly by women.</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>15.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Karrparnu</td>
<td>Hardwood digging stick, painted and carried by women in dances featuring ancestor women</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>17.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mardu</td>
<td>Concave dish used for scooping and carrying water. Can be used as a ritual object after painting.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-total</td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>68</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>48.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body ornaments</td>
<td>Ngamirdamirdi</td>
<td>Prickle comb – made with prickles thrust through a twig.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yinirnti</td>
<td>Seed (Erythrina verspertillo) and human hairstring necklace</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parnngarma / Waluwarnu</td>
<td>Headband/ornament</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-total</td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>8</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other painted object</td>
<td>N/a</td>
<td>Painted wooden boards</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N/a</td>
<td>Crushing stone</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-total</td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>4</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>140</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. continued.

The most common objects submitted for the exhibition (comprising 68 objects, or 48.6% of the total) were “dual function” wooden objects. These objects had an ostensibly (or normally) utilitarian function, such as *parrajas* (softwood dishes used for a variety of functions such as holding babies, carrying food and winnowing grass seeds), *karrparnu* (hardwood woman’s digging and hunting sticks) and the *kuturu* (women’s fighting club). Also present in small numbers are examples of painted *mardu* and *pili* (soft-wood scoops or dishes used for digging earth, or water). All of these objects shared a common attribute: when painted with ritual
designs they could be used for women’s ceremony, either carried by the dancers or placed on the ground during the performance. Photographs of the Women Artists exhibition in Sydney show the women dancing with painted parraja held in both hands in front of the body.\textsuperscript{18}

Another common category (58 objects, or 41.4% of the total) is that of painted wooden objects made specifically for women to carry or use during dancing. Unlike the objects described above, they did not necessarily have a “utilitarian” function. However the dance objects were created in essentially the same way: carved from wood by the men, rubbed in ochre and fat, and painted by the women with dreaming designs in acrylic paint. The most common objects are yukurrururruru, flat oval wooden boards made from hard mulga wood and held by women during dancing. Other painted objects included turruru (clapsticks) and objects created specifically for dancing and ceremony – carved wooden ngiripi (eggs), and the wirliya (bird’s foot sculpture), which were held by women when performing dances relating to bird ancestors such as the emu and the mallee fowl. Two carved wooden animals are also included in this category – a carved and painted sculpture of a duck (Jipilyaku), which according to the collection documentation was carried during dances associated with the emu dreaming, and an incised snake figure, similarly identified in the collection records as being carried during ceremony.

Present in smaller numbers within the exhibition were body ornaments worn by women during dancing (8 objects or 5.7% of the total), including one example of a yinirnti seed necklace, ochred head bands – some of which were decorated with cockatoos feathers, and an example of a ngamirdamirdi (prickle comb), worn in the dancer’s hair. The women demonstrated the use of the yinirnti seed necklaces, which were wrapped around the body in long loops, and the feather ornaments, which could be fixed to the head or carried, with objects they made specifically for their dance performances in Sydney in 1982.\textsuperscript{19}

It is striking that only a small number of objects (n=4 or 2.8%) appear to have had no connection with dance or performance at all. Objects in this category included a single crushing stone, coated with red ochre and apparently used by toothless people to crush yams and goanna bones. The remaining objects are three thin rectangular wooden boards, uniform in size (520x390mm) and painted in acrylic designs on both surfaces. While the designs painted on these boards are similar to the other paintings in the collection, the fact that they were rendered in a two dimensional, rectangular form makes them distinctive in the context
of the 1982 material (although they are typical of later work produced in the community).

According to the anthropologist Francoise Dussart (2006), acrylic paintings on canvas became (and have remained) the dominant form of commercial art production in Yuendumu since 1983. Today, Yuendumu artists continue to make and sell a variety of “craft” items including clap sticks, wooden dishes, boomerangs and seed necklaces, but these represent a very minor component of art production (and commercial sales), and unlike canvasses are not normally exhibited. The almost complete absence of rectangular, two dimensional paintings, and the dominance of three-dimensional painted wooden objects in the 1982 Women Artists exhibition therefore represents a marked departure from what became standard practice by Yuendumu artists. It also differs from established practice at nearby Papunya, where artists have consistently produced commercial artwork on two-dimensional surfaces (timber panels and canvas) since the early 1970s.

One explanation for this difference in approach might be that canvas was relatively unavailable in Yuendumu in 1982, meaning that the Women’s Museum was required to produce art in alternative forms. However, there are records of canvas paintings from Yuendumu from as early as 1976, and the artist’s recollections (see above) tend to suggest that small canvas boards were available at the time. Furthermore, a scarcity of canvas would not explain the reasons that Yuendumu artists chose not to paint upon potentially more readily available two-dimensional surfaces, such as timber panels, in the same way as artists at nearby Papunya. Instead, it is possible to see the use of painted ceremonial objects as part of a strategy employed by Yuendumu women to ensure that external audiences would appreciate the cultural context of their art, and not view the women’s work in “artistic isolation” (Kahn 1983:23).

Looking through photographs of the 1982 collection in 2014, Lynnette Nampijanipa Granites was clear about the connection between the objects used for the Women Artists exhibition and dance performance:

Yeah, we used to dance with digging sticks. This is a digging stick, and these are dancing boards. Yeah, like that one. Nulla nullas [clubs], coolemons [wooden bowls] and dancing boards... they are all for dancing...We would paint them especially for business. We would paint them up when the business would start. We’d paint up all the coolemons, for yawuru [dance/ceremony], you know. And
then at night time we would dance, we’d use them – like these ones... All night we’d dance.\textsuperscript{23}

During interviews in 2014, both Lynnette and Rosie emphasized their memories of dancing in Sydney, much more so than painting, and it is possible that Women Artists was originally conceptualized as much as a piece of performance art as it was a piece of visual art.

Anthropologist Howard Morphy (2001:46) has noted

...so many forms of Aboriginal art are the temporary product of performance – body paintings, sand sculptures and ground drawings, string constructions and fragile headdresses – or sacred objects, in making works that could be sold Aboriginal craftspeople clearly produced artefacts whose form was influenced by interaction with the market.

It is possible, from this perspective, to view Women Artists as a kind of transitional artistic experiment, part of a move not only from a primarily performative to a primarily visual form of art, but a transition between a strictly temporary art form to the creation of permanent works.

In the past painted Warlpiri wooden objects, of the type represented in the Women Artists exhibition, were a strictly temporary art form. Designs were applied with ochre, and at the end of each ceremony, the painted designs were wiped off the objects, which were then oiled and wrapped, and stored until the next time they were required (MacGregor 1998:13). Some of the painted objects in the Women Artists exhibition may have been used this way: as noted above a number of dancing boards and digging sticks were used for ceremony in a nearby community before they were sent to Sydney.

The application of “permanent” acrylic paints to the Women Artists objects, to make them suitable for sale, therefore signaled a significant, although not complete, departure from existing cultural practice. As noted above, the wooden objects in the collection were rubbed with an oily mixture of ochre and fat before they were painted, a treatment which would have facilitated the removal of ochre and paint at the end of each performance. As museum specimens this method proved to be less than ideal. Conservators have been required to treat significant flaking and other degradation of the acrylic paint in the Women Artists collection due to the “…manufacturing process, which causes the paint to be insufficiently bonded to
the artifact…” (MacGregor 1998: 15). Such problems are not apparent in the Museum’s Yuendumu artworks collected from the mid 1980s onwards, suggesting that the artists quickly adapted their practice as the expectations and needs of buyers became clearer.

Conclusion: experimentation, “authenticity” and the Western Desert Painting Movement

“...it is one of the many paradoxes to which the study of Western Desert [Aboriginal] paintings leads that the hoped-for success of such pictures in the European art market may contain the seeds of their own destruction as a living force in the society which is producing them...”
Vincent Megaw, anthropologist, 1982.24

“Some of the elders when they paint they sing. They sing with the land and the ancestors, remembering how they danced in the dreamtime…” Otto Jungararrayi Sims, Yuendumu artist, 2014.

Since the beginning of the Western Desert Painting Movement, commentators have worried about whether the new acrylic forms can be regarded as “traditional” or “culturally authentic”, and whether producing art for exchange on the open market would ultimately erode the vitality of community cultural practice (e.g. Megaw 1982,1985; Michaels 1988; Myers 1991:29, 2004; Stephens 1982; Sutton 1992). It is a debate that continues to resonate: journalist and author Nicholas Rothwell recently complained about Western Desert painting’s “…fateful journey away from its origins in ceremony and law”; and the “…slackening’ and ‘diluting’ of once-was traditional glory”.25

Rothwell’s position has been actively challenged by Biddle and Stefanoff (2015) who have highlighted the emerging use of video, photography and computer animation by Western Desert artists. The two researchers organized Same but Different, the first national forum on experimentation in Central and Western Desert art, and curated We are in Wonder LAND, the first national exhibition devoted to contemporary art from the Central and Western Deserts of Australia.26 Pointing to the innovative use of new media, Biddle and Stefanoff (2015:99) argue that: “Beyond the success of the Western Desert painting movement, a new arena of intensive activism and vanguard aesthetics is currently taking shape across the desert...” and that contemporary desert art should not be seen as “imprisoned by the past”.

Yuendumu artists are certainly among the desert artists actively embracing the commercial and artistic possibilities opened up by new media and technologies. For example they have
recently begun selling music on iTunes, distributing their films on national television, and screening their animations at film festivals. Three decades ago, Yuendumu artists were equally innovative and experimental, although their challenges were very different. Through the collections we can see that the women who created *Women Artists* were exploring the use of acrylic paints in place of traditional ochres, exploring painting on two dimensional, rather than three dimensional surfaces, and exploring how to produce permanent rather than temporary artworks. The collections reveal both how nearby communities such as Yuendumu and Papunya adopted different responses to these challenges, and how those responses within the community of Yuendumu changed over time.

In conversations with this author, Yuendumu artists were keen to emphasize that as painters they continue to innovate. In particular, artists are consciously developing their own individually recognizable and unique styles of painting. As Alma Nungarrayi Granites relates:

> Yeah, he [my father] wanted us to paint his Dreaming. So there’s other *tjukurrpa* (dreaming)...I used to paint them, but now I just want to paint *Yanjirlpirri*. It’s a really long Dreaming, the Star Dreaming. And my brother Otto, he’s doing the same Dreaming but in a different way. We do it in a different style.

Despite the sibling bond between these painters and the close relationship between the stories they paint, the dramatic contrast in style is immediately apparent.

Within her lifetime, Alma has observed many changes in the way paintings have been produced in her community, yet in the way she describes her art there is a profound continuity:

> ...it still represents the *tjukurrpa* (dreaming) and the stars, it represents the... earth, and the sandhills and the rockholes. But using different paintings... In the old day we painted circle, circle, circle. Same way. Now we move away from that. But still the same story. Same *tjukurrpa*. Same country.... It’s not only just painting, it holds everything and we hold it in our heart so we can keep it close and pass it on to our children.

If there must be debate over the (supposedly declining) “cultural authenticity” of Western Desert art, then we need to recognize that the Western Desert Painting Movement involves, and has always involved, both continuity and change.
In 2014 the Australian Museum went back to Yuendumu to collect a new body of artwork by artists including Alma and her brother Otto. Contrasts between the older and younger collections (in materials, methods and individual stylistic variation) reflect the evolving nature of art practice in Yuendumu, and the seismic shifts in the wider Aboriginal art market over the past three decades. Continuities (the bold use of colour, dominance of dots as a graphic form, and above all the continued association with tjukurrpa stories) reflect the artists’ ongoing commitment to maintaining their cultural identity.

In 1982, the year that Women Artists was launched, the pioneering art critic desert Vincent Megaw wrote of Western Desert paintings that “...the message, the story persists, the medium is ephemeral” (Megaw 1982:213). The Women Artists collection shows that this continues to be true.

Acknowledgements

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Notes

1. Interview recorded at Yuendumu, May 2014. Transcripts of all the artist interviews quoted in this paper are held on the Australian Museum collection database.
2. Lucy Napaljarri, Lucy Nampijinpa, Rosie Nangala Fleming, Sheila Napaljarri, Tilo Nangala, Maggie Nakamarra, Lynette Nampijinpa Granites, Doris Napaljarri, Diane Nampijimpa (Kahn 1983:23)
3. The quote has typically been attributed to art critic Robert Hughes, although this has now been questioned, see http://www.acaa.org.au/canvass-issue-3/?bookmarks=34%2C35
4. Interview recorded at Yuendumu, May 2014
5. Correspondence Mary Laughren to Kate Khan, Australian Museum, 22 March 1982, AMS305/3/5
6. Correspondence Mary Laughren to Kate Kahn, Australian Museum 22 March 1982, AMS305/3/5
7. While the Yuendumu Women’s Museum no longer exists, Lynnette Granites described to the author how objects were stored in separate cupboards depending on the skin group to which they related.

8. Interview recorded at Yuendumu, May 2014

9. Interview recorded at Yuendumu, May 2014


11. Interview recorded at Yuendumu, May 2014

12. Interview recorded at Yuendumu, May 2014

13. Cecilia Alfonso, Manager Warlukurlangu Artists, personal communication May 2014

14. Office of the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations 2012 *At the heart of art: A snapshot of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander corporations in the visual arts sector.*


15. Interview recorded at Yuendumu, May 2014

16. Wendy Nungarrayi Brown, interview recorded May 2014

17. Warlpiri names and functional descriptions are based on information provided by the Secretary of the Yuendumu Women’s Museum Society Mary Laughren, Correspondence dated 22 March 1982 and 7 April 1982, AMS503/3/5.

18. These objects were made by the women in addition to the 140 objects from the exhibition, and were subsequently also acquired into the Australian Museum collections.

19. See images in Australian Archives AMS503. Many of these objects were also subsequently acquired by the museum in addition to the 140 objects within the exhibition itself.

20. Cecilia Alfonso, Warlukurlangu Manager, personal communication June 2014

21. By comparison the 1982 Papunya exhibition “Masterworks of the Western Desert” consisted of works on canvas (Mundine1983)

22. Papunya acrylic paintings, including those held in the Australian Museum collections, are commonly rendered on panels of wood, masonite and other scrap timber.

23. Interview recorded at Yuendumu, May 2014


26. Exhibition was on show at University of New South Wales Galleries, Sydney from May to August 2015.


28. Interview recorded at Yuendumu, May 2014

29. The paintings can be compared in two of the documentary films produced for the Museum in 2014: See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G6RM48a92NA and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kC6F6bwirc

30. Interview recorded at Yuendumu, May 2014
References


Art on the way to the theatre: Performing arts centres and their art collections

Steven Tonkin

Abstract

Australia’s major performing arts centres, Arts Centre Melbourne, Adelaide Festival Centre and Sydney Opera House, are the custodians of significant art collections. When these venues opened in the 1970s and early 1980s, the foyers and public spaces were decorated with site-specific paintings, sculptures and tapestries by some of Australia’s leading 20th-century artists. Over the decades these works of art have for the most part remained in their original, now heritage-listed interiors. These venues have therefore been transformed into museological environments for the preservation and display of valuable ‘art historical’ collections. This paper will examine some of the tensions between the original and current contexts by considering issues, such as venue redevelopment and refurbishment, conservation and security challenges, and the commissioning of contemporary art to engage audiences on the way to the theatre.

Keywords: Australian Art, Performing Arts Centres, Sydney Opera House, Arts Centre Melbourne, Adelaide Festival Centre.

Arts Centre Melbourne is one of Australia’s premier performing arts centres, encompassing Hamer Hall, the Theatres Building, including the State Theatre, Playhouse and Fairfax Studio, as well as the Sidney Myer Music Bowl located in parklands of King’s Domain. Besides being principally known as a performing arts venue, Arts Centre Melbourne is also the custodian of two very important public collections, the Performing Arts Collection and an Art Collection. The Art Collection, which is the focus of this paper, is arguably one of the most significant public collections of Australian art outside the major state art galleries. Yet the works of art often go unnoticed as theatregoers scurry to their seats for a performance, or jostle to get a drink and a snack during the interval.

The foundation of Art Centre Melbourne’s Art Collection dates back to the construction of what was then known as the Victorian Arts Centre in the 1970s and early 1980s. The works of art from this time are predominantly site-specific and embedded within the architectural fabric and interior public spaces. The Art Collection has therefore been a vital part of the history and evolution of Arts Centre Melbourne over the last four decades, while a number of these works are now recognised in their own right as significant examples of Australian art.
The first acquisitions for the Art Collection took place in 1973, under the direction of the Victorian Arts Centre Building Committee, with the support of the William Angliss Art Fund. The imperative at this time was to acquire major public sculptures for the cultural precinct, and this resulted in the commission of two landmark monumental sculptures: Clement Meadmore’s *Dervish* 1973–81, today located on the riverside promenade; and Inge King’s *Forward Surge* 1974–81, which is one of Melbourne’s most prominent and well-loved public sculptures, sited on the lawn between Hamer Hall and the Theatres Building.

Following the initial sculpture commissions for the grounds, attention then turned to the interiors of the Melbourne Concert Hall (now Hamer Hall) and the Theatres Building as construction neared completion. The interiors were deemed to require a different aesthetic to the modernist architecture of the exteriors. The outcome was that Melbourne-born, internationally-renowned stage designer, John Truscott, was approached to provide a creative vision for the interiors and foyers, which were realised during the final years of construction between 1979 and 1984. Truscott worked across theatre, dance, opera, film and festivals, and was lured back from abroad to undertake this monumental task.

Truscott’s design brief encompassed everything from the striated rock finish of the Concert Hall to the coffee tables in the foyers. Works of art were integral to Truscott’s conception of a secular cathedral to the arts, and he can be credited with instigating the commission and acquisition of major works of art from some of Australia’s leading 20th-century artists. It was Truscott’s skills in persuasion and his range of personal contacts within the art world that helped secure major series of works by Arthur Boyd, Roger Kemp, Donald Laycock, Sidney Nolan, John Olsen, and Jeffrey Smart, among others; along with a ground-breaking selection of early Western Desert paintings and tapestries. In keeping with Truscott’s original vision, many of these works of art remain in their original locations and frames within the heritage interiors of Arts Centre Melbourne.

In retrospect, the process of commission and acquisition was perhaps more spontaneous and less bureaucratic than might be the case for a similarly ambitious project today. For example, in approaching the abstract painter Donald Laycock, Truscott just sent him a brief one-page letter enquiring whether the artist would be ‘interested in painting four works for the new Melbourne Concert Hall’. The outcome was Laycock’s most significant public commission. In another turn of good fortune, during a brief visit to Australia in 1982, Sidney Nolan dropped
by the office of George Fairfax, the General Manager of the Victorian Arts Centre, to tell him that he had decided to donate his monumental botanical suite, *Paradise Garden* 1968–70. Fairfax asked whether Nolan would mind putting something in writing, at which point the artist grabbed a piece of scrap paper and scribbled: ‘After some years it gives me a lot of pleasure to finally see *Paradise Garden* at the Victorian Arts Centre and I would like to now formally give the paintings to the Trust,’ signed ‘Sidney’. From circumstantial beginnings arose a stunning Art Collection.

A more conventional commission was undertaken by Arthur Boyd who completed sixteen paintings for the State Theatre circle foyer, including *The Actor* 1984, and *Landscape with Dog* 1984, which incorporate a number of recurrent themes evident in the artist’s work from the 1950s onwards. Boyd then painted fourteen views from his Bunyipon property on the banks of the Shoalhaven River, New South Wales. In homage to the cyclical rhythms of the landscape, the artist captured the shifting light and colours at various times of the day: from the crisp clarity of the early morning to the hazy glow of the river bank bathed by the late-afternoon sun. The Shoalhaven series presents a panoramic vista that spans the entire foyer.

John Olsen’s series of paintings in the State Theatre stalls foyer is based on operas, and includes works titled *Benjamin Britten’s Peter Grimes* 1984; *Bizet’s Carmen and the Bullring*, 1984; *Don Giovanni* 1984; and *Mozart’s Papageno the Bird Catcher in ‘The Magic Flute’* 1984. Olsen noted at the time: “I felt very happy working on the theme of opera. It suits my narrative inclinations. Aside from the atmosphere of music, the sequential story themes provide exciting motifs for pictures.”

Olsen’s series culminated in a pictorial rendition of Giuseppe Verdi’s *Aida*, completed in 1985. It is an eclectic composition combining ritualistic symbols and ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs with a stark modernist depiction of the Temple of Vulcan, in which Radamès and Aida are buried together in the final scene of the opera. *Aida* is painted on convex hardboard panels moulded to the curvature of the foyer wall, which emphasises the site-specificity of the work of art to the interior in which it is located.

Other major commissions worthy of particular mention, include Hugh Oliveiro’s opulent mural, *The Four Seasons* 1983–84, located at the entrance to the Theatres Building; Mary Macqueen’s *Pavilion Suite* tapestries, woven by the Victorian (now Australian) Tapestry Workshop during 1984–86, including one that shows an aerial view of a summer concert at
the Sidney Myer Music Bowl; and Jeffrey Smart’s 10-metre long masterpiece, *Container Train in Landscape* 1983–84, in the Fairfax Studio foyer. Many of these ‘foundation’ works of art have remained on permanent public display for more than 30 years, so that over the decades, Arts Centre Melbourne’s venues have, in effect, been transformed into a museological environment for the preservation of a very significant ‘art historical’ collection.

In another chapter to the Art Collection, over the last decade, Arts Centre Melbourne has embarked on the active collecting of contemporary works of art that speak of and to the performing arts and the creativity of performance, and which reflect the entwined histories of art and performance throughout the twentieth century to the present day.

The development of this contemporary collection has occurred alongside a cross-disciplinary exhibition program, which has incorporated thematic exhibitions exploring various creative intersections between the visual arts and performing arts. Recent exhibitions have included *Sight & Sound: Music & Abstraction in Australian Art* (2010); *Black Box <> White Cube: Aspects of Performance in Contemporary Australian Art* (2011); *Singing the World: Western desert art from the collection of Arts Centre Melbourne* (2012); *Performative Prints from the Torres Strait* (2013); and most recently, *Show Time: The Art Collection of Arts Centre Melbourne* (2014). *Show Time* was scheduled to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the opening of the Theatres Building in 1984, and was curated as a self-reflective exhibition exploring the history and evolution of the Art Collection since the 1970s.

One specific collection development initiative has been to acquire contemporary Australian photography, in which the works are in some way theatrically framed and staged. This ‘performativity’ is widely evident throughout contemporary practice, whereby the artist takes on the role of a central character, or operates behind the scenes like a movie or theatre director. Recent acquisitions have included photographs by Siri Hayes, Polixeni Papapetrou, Deborah Paauwe, Darren Siwes and Anne Zahalka.

Another collection development initiative has been to commission new works of art informed by the history of the organisation, or inspired by Arts Centre Melbourne’s nationally-recognised Performing Arts Collection and its main collecting areas of circus, dance, music, opera and theatre. As illustrative of this approach, in 2008, Canberra-based sculptor Anna Eggert was invited to visit the Performing Arts Collection, where she was able to study an opulent 1890s gown worn by Dame Nellie Melba in the lead role of Violetta in Verdi’s *La
Traviata. In response, and with an attention to detail reminiscent of a late-19th century couturière, the artist created a dazzling life-size ‘figurative’ sculpture using silver and stainless steel, which seems inhabited by Melba’s presence.

A third initiative, which recognises a subsidiary ‘corporate’ function of works of art when they are displayed within an organisation, is the recording of artistic representations of Arts Centre Melbourne’s iconic architecture. These include Michael Shannon’s Original Concept of the Victorian Arts Centre 1963, on permanent display in the Hugh Williamson Room, and a recent commission offered to Melbourne artist Jan Senbergs, who realised Melbourne Labyrinth – Yarra and the Arts Precinct in 2014. This painting locates Arts Centre Melbourne as the cultural heart of the ever-expanding metropolis of Melbourne, and is now displayed in the entrance to the exclusive President’s Lounge. These current initiatives and strategic acquisitions aim to facilitate the re-contextualisation, and therefore re-interpretation, of the existing ‘historical’ art collection.

The Art Collection is undoubtedly one of Melbourne’s cultural jewels, which is freely accessible to the public, patrons and visitors, from early in the morning when the Theatres Building opens until the curtain falls on the last performance of the night. Despite the organisational significance placed on the Collection by Arts Centre Melbourne itself, it is also worthwhile to consider this collection in a wider historical and cultural landscape.

In the international context, and particularly in North America, the second half of the 20th century witnessed the founding of the modern performing arts centre. Author Steven A. Wolff has identified four stages their evolution. Firstly, beginning in the 1960s, modern performing arts centres provided a ‘home’ for traditional and elite ‘high’ art forms - the symphony orchestra, opera, ballet, and national theatre companies. Secondly, in the mid- to late-1970s, they were promoted as a ‘place’ to visit - a city landmark and tourist destination driving inner urban renewal. Thirdly, in the early 1990s, performing arts centres began to carve out a broader ‘community’ role by providing education, family and outreach programs, directed towards attracting new multicultural and non-traditional audiences. While, looking to the future, Wolff envisages the emergence of ‘fourth generation’ contemporary performing arts centres that will play an innovative multi-disciplinary leadership role across the ‘creative industries’.
The establishment of the major state venues in Australia has similarities with the history of modern performing arts centres in North America. The 1970s and 1980s witnessed the final construction and opening of a number of major Australian performing arts centres. Most spectacularly, the Sydney Opera House was officially opened in October 1973, in the same year as Adelaide’s Festival Theatre. The opening of the Victorian Arts Centre followed suit in the following decade, with the Melbourne Concert Hall (now Hamer Hall) opened in 1982 and the Theatres Building in 1984; meanwhile the Queensland Performing Arts Centre was completed in 1985 as part of the wider Queensland Cultural Precinct.

There are also intriguing parallels in the formation of the art collections held by these respective performing arts centres. There are similar approaches to the display of public sculptures and interior works of art, and the common representation of individual Australian artists. There are also similar preservation issues, as well as future redevelopment plans facing these organisations which will inevitably impact upon their collections.

*Art and Australia* devoted its summer 1974 issue to the new Sydney Opera House, highlighting its iconic architecture and the incorporation of works of art. Special attention was given to John Coburn’s two theatre curtains, *Curtain of the Sun* 1971 and *Curtain of the Moon* 1971, and the ‘undoubted success’ of John Olsen’s monumental mural *Salute to Five Bells* 1973.

Nevertheless, the initial impression was that the impact of Jørn Utzon’s architectural masterpiece overwhelmed the art, reducing it to a subordinate, decorative function – a situation that has not altered dramatically today. While Olsen’s mural remains in its original location – although for conservation reasons usually hidden behind a curtain to protect it from sunlight – over the last decades there have been some significant changes, as well as some timely additions. For example, the Larrakitj memorial poles were installed in 2002, while more recently, Jørn Utzon’s own tapestry design, *Homage to Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach*, was unveiled in the Utzon Room in 2004. Yet despite the millions of tourists who make the pilgrimage to the Sydney Opera House each year, it is debatable whether many notice the works of art that are on public display.

The similarities between Arts Centre Melbourne and the Adelaide Festival Centre are perhaps more evident to the casual visitor. The Adelaide Festival Centre’s art collection is highly visible throughout the public foyers and precinct. There are ongoing performing arts and visual arts
exhibitions and displays, while the art collection has continued to grow, albeit more slowly, with the support of the Adelaide Festival Centre Foundation.

Fred Williams’ 1973 suite of thirteen *River Murray Scenes* at the Adelaide Festival Centre can be compared with Boyd’s Shoalhaven series at Arts Centre Melbourne; meanwhile Sidney Nolan’s multi-panelled *Rainbow Serpent* 1973 at the Festival Centre is closely related to *Paradise Garden* 1968–70 in Melbourne’s State Theatre foyer. There are also large paintings and tapestries by Sydney Ball, John Coburn and Leonard French, among others, located throughout the foyers in Adelaide. In addition, the surrounding plaza is populated by public sculpture, such as Bert Flugelman’s stainless steel forms, while the fate of Otto Herbert Hajek’s 1973 urban environmental sculpture in front of the Centre remains bound up with the anticipated redevelopment of the Adelaide Festival Centre Plaza.

Just as the composition and presentation of art collections exhibit similarities across the respective state performing arts centres, so to do some of the current curatorial and collection management issues. At Arts Centre Melbourne, the very fact that in keeping with historical authenticity of the interiors, the works of art are still displayed in their original locations and 30-year-old heritage frames, poses a number of issues when assessed in relation to current museum environmental and security standards. While the works of art have generally survived in good condition with an ongoing conservation maintenance program, this has not precluded recent consideration of re-framing and glazing as an option to protect the works of art into the future, which would, nevertheless, alter their ‘original’ presentation.

A major challenge facing Arts Centre Melbourne is how to negotiate the museological requirements presented by the Art Collection, while functioning primarily as a contemporary performing arts venue. This is perhaps anecdotally apparent during performance intervals. Arts Centre Melbourne’s increasingly innovative programming and successful attraction of new audiences has invariably presented public use and access requirements that would have been unforeseen when the Art Collection was conceived and displayed in the early 1980s.

Yet, most significantly, the inevitable ageing of these performing arts centres since the 1970s and 1980s has necessitated varying degrees of refurbishment and redevelopment to bring the venues up to present-day theatre standards.
As a result, Arts Centre Melbourne’s Hamer Hall was closed for 18 months during 2010–12, for a major redevelopment led by Ashton Raggatt McDougall Architects, before re-opening with great fanfare in July 2012. For the Art Collection, this process of redevelopment required a delicate balancing between retaining the historical integrity of the Truscott-designed interiors and the role played by the ‘original’ works of art, while facilitating renewal in presentation through the inclusion of new contemporary works.

Major new commissions included John Aslanidis’ dazzling music-inspired painting Sonic Network no. 11 2012; and the sculptural-light works Silence 2010–12 in the St Kilda Road Entrance foyer, and Falling Light 2010–12 in the Velik Foyer, both created by Robert Owen’s production studio in collaboration with Melbourne lighting-design firm Electrolight. These new works respect the history of the building and its interiors while at the same time offering a contemporary perspective on the vital role that the visual arts can continue to play within Australia’s performing arts centres.

Arts Centre Melbourne’s Art Collection continues to chart a course in exploring the creative intersections between art and performance. The ongoing challenges in curating and managing the collection are; to balance a reverence for the past without becoming a mausoleum; to engage with the present without becoming merely ephemeral; and to embrace future opportunities to ensure that the Art Collection continues to engage and inspire visitors and patrons on their way to the theatre.

Notes

2. John Truscott correspondence with Donald Laycock, dated 29 September 1981; Arts Centre Melbourne, Art Collection Archives.
3. Sidney Nolan note to George Fairfax, quoted in Fairfax, op. cit., 183.
5. S. A. Wolff (2011), The evolution of the performing arts centre
References


Abstract

The Tyler Collection is an extraordinary testament to the vision of a collector who captured the tension of immense cultural and political change in Communist Romania. It represents a fascinating time capsule which has taken a serendipitous journey from Bucharest to Hobart via the collector’s home in Washington DC. Coming from a time and place unambiguously remote from its new home, it now awaits a fresh life within the University of Tasmania Fine Art Collection.

Keywords: Romania, Art History, Tasmania, Ceausescu, Petrescu, Byzantine

In 2010 I received the first of many letters from Mr Geoffrey Tyler about his personal collection of artworks. Tyler was born in Melbourne and spent some of his childhood in Hobart, attending the University of Tasmania to receive a BSc in 1949. He worked as a meteorologist in Melbourne in the 1950s, and in 1958 received a Master’s degree in Economics from the University of Melbourne. He worked for the Australian Treasury Department as an economist in Canberra and London before moving to Washington DC and joining the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in 1966. Tyler was assistant director of the European Department of the International Monetary Fund during the 1980s. He retired in 1988, but remained living in Washington.

At the start of our correspondence Tyler was seeking to make plans for the preservation of his art collection. Although an alumnus of both the University of Melbourne and the University of Tasmania, he suspected that our much smaller institution would greatly appreciate the gift of artwork and funding to maintain it. As a life-long collector of art, he wanted to ensure his collection would be preserved and valued into the future. Tyler also recalled how much he’d enjoyed his years in Hobart, and so offered to donate his art collection to the University of Tasmania.

"It’s full of memories and what you want to do in the end is to keep it maintained as a unity; and I looked around and said 'Where can I send it?' and I thought of Tasmania because that's where I went through high school and university," he told ABC radio in 2011. In particular,
the University policy of having its Fine Art Collection as much as possible on display for the enjoyment of staff and students was an important factor for Tyler in choosing the University of Tasmania as a suitable home for his own collection.

Easily perceived as obscure and of unclear relevance to dominant historical themes of Tasmanian public art collections, the collection of over 700 works of print, painting, drawing and sculpture, together with an archive of correspondence and library of Romanian language publications, nevertheless found a new home in Hobart when the Vice Chancellor, himself a devotee of Eastern European ecclesiastical architecture, enthusiastically welcomed it as part of the University’s Fine Art Collection.

Tyler was an avid collector not just of art, but of books, antique silver, music, stamps, and rugs. While in London in 1960, he began to collect art seriously and among his earliest acquisitions was a proof set of William Blake’s engravings illustrating the ‘Book of Job’. Living overseas, he had little chance to collect Australian art but was able to purchase Leonard French’s ‘Three Towers No 1’ and paintings by Daws and Blackman. A subsequent acquisition was of an early painting by Arthur Boyd, ‘The Sisters’ (c1949). Other artwork – paintings, prints, drawings, sculptures, and ceramics were collected - artists from Britain, Europe, and US; but the substantial body of the Tyler Collection is of Romanian artwork, collected when Tyler made frequent visits to that country between 1973-1987 during assignments with the IMF.

“By pure chance” Tyler looked in the window of the state-run gallery Fondul Plastic in Bucharest. He purchased a painting and met the artist, Corneliu Petrescu. Petrescu and his wife Mariana went on to become close life-long friends with Tyler, guiding him in the formation of his collection of Romanian art, and introducing him to their circle of friends, many of whom were significant Romanian artists. Tyler said that “the Petrescus and other close artist friends helped me choose quality, representative works, and gave me many as gifts. Petrescu in particular was an artistic mentor as well as a friend.” More broadly, Tyler was able to stimulate and support the professional development of this group of Romanian artists, and provide a rare conduit for their works to reach the West.

When Tyler moved back to Washington he maintained a weekly correspondence with Petrescu. Tyler would source gold leaf and other art supplies for Petrescu, as these were hard to obtain in the economic environment of Communist Romania. In return, Petrescu’s letters
would usually contain gifts of small artworks and painted cards for birthdays and Christmas, which Tyler catalogued and kept. Spanning the 1980s up until Petrescu’s death in 2009, this archive of letters provides a valuable insight into the daily life of Romanian society under the dictatorship of Nicolae Ceausescu and the changing political landscape. Copies of Tyler’s correspondence will soon be transcribed from a range of sources, including later email files, offering an intimate gift of dialogue between two friends, a valuable archive of social, political and cross-cultural relations.

In addition, the Collection contains forty painted wood icons from Russia, Macedonia, Serbia, and Romania, and twenty Romanian icons painted on glass. When Tyler and I first started our correspondence, he listed various paintings, books, and sculptures, and said – “there’s also a group of icons which you may or may not be interested in taking, but to me they are the heart of the collection.” My reply was that accepting the collection without them was unthinkable. Their importance to Tyler and also the profound cultural context they provide makes them indeed the very soul of the Tyler Collection.

The icon is one of the most important genres in Byzantine art. Likenesses of Christ, the Madonna, saints and angels were used as objects of veneration in Orthodox churches and homes alike for centuries. In Romania, this importance extends beyond the ecclesiastical to celebrate key elements of Romanian history and culture. Palade (2006) points to the establishment of the first Romanian feudal states, which enjoyed unusual freedom in the Orthodox Balkan world of 14th and 15th centuries. Established under the early reigns of the Fanar princes, these were ‘Houses of Peace’, where “Romanian Christian art constantly manifested an aesthetic experience in its own right”. In addition to establishing territories that retained their own military, administrative and political structures as a defence against Ottoman rule, “all great church founders, be they princes or noblemen, concerned themselves with forming and preserving the artistic tradition which definitively linked Romanian art with the Byzantine Commonwealth.”

In this way, the Byzantine aesthetic tradition underpinned the entire medieval history of Romanian Christian art, “as one of its basic co-ordinates, like the revered remembrance of an exemplary past”. Continuing in Wallachia and Moldavia throughout the 16th and 17th centuries, this aesthetic tradition was celebrated and developed as rulers of the two principalities competed through the architecture, painting and sculpture that characterised
the great monasteries they each established." This creative renewal of tradition remained unchallenged until the arrival firstly, of the Occidental influenced painters from the Moscow School in the early 19th century, followed by enforcement of the Soviet art of socialist realism in the 20th century.

Tyler observed that on his visits “most Romanian artists had (icons) on the walls of their studios and homes, treasuring them as works of art rather than religious objects.” Their influence is apparent in the imagery and decorative style of many of the artists represented in the Collection, Petrescu in particular. Petrescu made art counter to the push from the Communist government to abandon Byzantine styles and marginalise the influence of the once-powerful monasteries of Romania. This is clear in his religious imagery and extensive use of gold leaf, and even in the titles of his paintings, such as ‘Byzantine Composition’.

Thus, the Tyler Collection comprises approximately 800 items - paintings, prints, sculpture, ceramics, and religious icons. It is mostly of Romanian art, and predominantly by one artist, Corneliu Petrescu. The collection contains a unique selection of Romanian artworks from 18th century icons through to 20th century modernist works. The breadth of styles represented in the Collection illustrates important social, cultural and political phases in Romania’s recent history, especially the repression of monastic traditions associated with the rise of Communism; an important range of artworks that would otherwise have been confined in Romania under the authoritarian rule of Nicolae Ceaușescu (1965-1989). It is through Tyler’s position with the IMF that artwork could be taken out ‘from behind closed doors’ to come together in a collection that is unique in Australia.

For me the singular most important aspect of this collection is what it meant to Tyler. He didn’t gather art for show, prestige, or profit, but because he was moved by the imagery and by the artists who made it. He stressed to me that, as a frequent visitor to Romania working long hours to return to yet another hotel room, the warm friendship extended by Petrescu and his peers was invaluable to him. They welcomed him into a rich cultural world full of music and beauty, and life-long relationships.

The majority of the Tyler Collection arrived at the University’s Hobart campus in 2013, a few months after Tyler’s death in Washington. The artworks have been photographed, catalogued and entered onto a dedicated database. Tyler’s widow, Frances, is an annual visitor to the
University and an integral part of discussions around the future of the Collection at the University.

An important responsibility of the University of Tasmania in accepting the Tyler Gift is to consider the potential of the collection as a research and teaching resource for the University. This unique and highly personal collection allows us a glimpse into an unparalleled period of change in Romanian aesthetic traditions that occurred during Romanian communism. It is an extraordinary assemblage to have travelled out of that time and place, and adds a profound cultural dimension to the University Fine Art Collection. The task now is to research and contextualise this collection in a place so far physically and spiritually from its home. The terms of reference for the Tyler Gift acknowledge the potential of the Collection in this regard; to assist Romanian students, Romanian artists or arts scholars who are invited to visit the University.

It is also envisaged that the Collection will grow with the acquisition of both Romanian and Australian artwork. A detailed understanding of the recent history of the creative arts in Romania is therefore critical, along with a thorough understanding of the character of Tyler’s personal assemblage of works, which must continue to critically influence its growth.

Over the years that Tyler and I discussed the eventual donation of the Collection, I undertook trips to Washington, New York and London to liaise initially with the Tylers and then seek to identify organisations and individuals who might support the University’s development of the Tyler Collection. I also sought contact with Romanian interest groups in Tasmania and on the mainland, although these are modest. In Washington DC I was able to meet with managers from other university collections including the Katzen Gallery and Grey Gallery, and the Romanian Cultural Institute in New York. This provided many exciting ideas and models for the development of the Tyler Collection within the University. The idea of creating links with art institutions in Romania – in particular Bucharest National University of Arts and Cluj–Napoca University of Arts and Design – was suggested, as well as artist exchanges, hosting travelling exhibitions, and identifying links between students/staff from faculties within the University of Tasmania (e.g. literature, philosophy).

In London, through the Department of Art History and the Ruskin School of Art, I was able to meet Dr Deborah Schultz from Richmond University. She provided a list of helpful contacts within Romania, including the Directors of the National Museum of Contemporary Art, and
the Institute of Art History (both in Bucharest). She also suggested that Professor Dennis Deletant (Professor of Romanian Studies) visiting at Georgetown University in Washington DC would be interested to hear about the Collection and could provide further information. Frances Tyler has since met with him in Washington. At the Romanian Cultural Centre in London, Carmen Campeanu and Ioana Stan were also interested in possible involvement with future projects connected with the Collection.

In 2013, I was introduced to Dr Alexandru Popescu, Senior Research Associate at Balliol College, Oxford. Dr Popescu, a Romanian scholar of Psychiatry and Psychology of Religion, recently published a study of the philosopher Petre Tutea, one of the outstanding Christian dissident intellectuals of the Communist era in Eastern Europe. His multidisciplinary work on the psychology of religion in Romania suggested that Popescu might be of assistance in investigating the scholarly significance of the Tyler Collection. On showing him a selection of works, it became immediately apparent that his knowledge of Byzantine art traditions and Romanian monasticism, coupled with personal experience of the period during which the collection was assembled, offered a significant opportunity. Dr Popescu was moved to see that three of the significant artists, including Petrescu, were from his native county of Ploiesti, Prahova. Since our initial meeting, it has been agreed that the Tyler Gift will fund a visiting research fellowship for Dr Popescu in 2016, with Distinguished Professor of Philosophy at the University of Tasmania Jeff Malpas, taking the role of Academic Leader.

Dr Popescu’s knowledge in theology and Byzantine iconography will be invaluable to the University in understanding the more than sixty icons on glass and wood, as will his knowledge of the artists in the Collection, who include Stefan Caltia, Silvia Radu, Georgeta Naparus, Vasile Gorduz, and Ion Pacea. A process of rigorous scholarship in the interpreting and contextualising of the artworks, correspondence, and archive of books should lead to several outcomes. These include articles in scholarly journals, public lectures and conference papers, and ultimately a book published to coincide with eventual establishment and public launch of permanent exhibition space dedicated to the Tyler Collection. This will serve as a comprehensive catalogue for the Collection, and a landmark reference that realises the cultural and academic value of the Tyler Collection and pays a fitting tribute to the vision of Tyler. The collection of Tyler’s letters is another rich archive that, with both sides of the correspondence now available, also offers potential for a rich and fascinating publication.
Dr Popescu will also be able to contribute invaluable support in developing an appropriate network of research collaborators, building on the initial engagement that I have been able to establish. The opportunity to establish a working relationship with the University of Oxford and Balliol College is a valuable one as the University of Tasmania seeks to grow its global engagement.

Recently the Ambassador of Romania in Australia and New Zealand, Nineta Barbulescu, visited the University and was surprised and excited to discover a unique gem of Romanian culture quietly residing in an unexpected corner of the Antipodes. Opportunities have now been suggested to show elements of the Collection, including an exhibition in Canberra, and perhaps even a return visit to Romania.

Against the rich backdrop and pivotal importance of Byzantine art throughout centuries of Romanian national identity, the Tyler Collection might be seen only as a small, isolated curio of a distant tradition – incongruous, even anachronistic amongst the vibrant, experimental contemporary culture of Tasmanian arts. However, I feel certain that Tyler’s aesthetic passion for collection, born of an unlikely connectedness between an Australian economist and a dedicated group of 20th century artists bearing the legacy of the Medieval Fanar princes, will soon be recognised as an intimate act of quiet, visionary brilliance. The Tyler Collection has captured a small but precious slice of European art history, plucked from the precipitous edge of a receding Byzantine world and deposited in a place that could not be more remote from its origins. During the coming months of research and exploration, the Collection will slowly prove that a veil of apparent obscurity can be drawn back to reveal something unexpected, fascinating and profound.

Notes

2. G. Tyler, Personal Correspondence, 2009-2011, Fine Art Collection, University of Tasmania.
4. G. Tyler, Personal Correspondence, 2010-2011, Fine Art Collection, University of Tasmania.
5. M. Palade, “The Importance of the Byzantine Legacy for the Romanian Sacred Art”.
6. Ibid.
7. M. A. Musicescu, “Byzantium and the Art of Romanian Principalities”.
8. Palade, op. cit. 27.
9. G. Tyler, Personal Correspondence, 2009-2011, Fine Art Collection, University of Tasmania.

References


Abstract

In 2013, the Commonwealth Government commissioned the National Archives of Australia to take carriage of recommendation 20 of the government’s response to the Senate report findings into, *The Commonwealth contribution into Former Forced Adoptions Policies and Practices*. Later that year I was recruited to the stakeholder engagement role on what was known as the Forced Adoptions History Project. For the next two years I was immersed in the world of the ‘other’. Now the project has come to a close, my time to reflect has come. For my part, I can recognise there are many perspectives; binary positions that like magnets with different polarities attracted and repulsed, they eventually osculate into a cultural context. Perhaps the greatest lesson to learn is that it does matter what colour clothing you’re wearing, what we do as individuals but also as institutions, the way we construct and influence the community from the perspective of exhibitions, content development and even public programs has huge implications on how history will be remembered and recorded.

**Keywords**: Forced adoptions; national archives;

I am a storyteller, an ethnographer of sorts, trained in social science. I am fascinated by society and culture, exploring who we are as individuals and as a community. In 2013, I accepted a contract position with the National Archives of Australia as a Stakeholder Engagement Officer on the Forced Adoptions History Project. The creation of the role and my subsequent appointment was a reflection of the nature of the project as unique with a remit to collect the experiences of individuals affected by forced adoptions. Direct engagement of this kind was not the traditional business of the National Archives. Records of forced adoptions did not exist within the immense resources of the National Archives collection. These records were state based, often in private collections and notoriously difficult to locate.

My role had not existed previously nor does it exist today. The Archives had previously ventured into crowd sourcing content but such undertakings had always been anchored in the collection. It is fair to say the project was unique and required adaptability and agility in ways of seeing and working. In practice, this project meant rolling up our sleeves to work with the community of the affected; to sit and listen to another person’s pain. Not usually the ‘done thing’ for the commonwealth, as professionals in government, we are far more comfortable with facts and records than with feelings.

To reflect the dynamic at work in the project, I submitted a paper for the 2015 Museums Australia conference, called the “Power and the Passion”, essential elements of the NAA
project and yet I found myself presenting at a session on “Introverts and Extroverts”. Navigating this shift meant turning to my default position, social science and the notions of binary opposites a paradigm that fits nicely with this discussion that provides an even greater opportunity for reflection. For our cultural reading of everything from gender, status and beyond, all play on binary relationships. A notion that suspends things together and yet separates, it is a relationship defined by the ‘other’. Like magnets with different polarity they attract and repulse; symmetry vs. asymmetry, introverts and extroverts, hero vs. villain, power vs. passion and so on. It’s the way we make sense of the world giving structure and form, from one side of an equation to its counter position.

In approaching this discussion I had a hundred ideas running through my head as I tried to consider some clever way of entertaining my audience, some participatory moment to excite the audience but instead I faced reality, that’s not me. Instead I will write about my truth, my experience, after all the Forced Adoptions History Project has been seen by many, as a recovery of the truth.

The Forced Adoptions History Project was one of the most challenging projects I have ever worked on and yet it taught me some of the greatest lessons in life. Through the process of national consultations, 14 formal workshops and tens of thousands of emails, I learnt something about people, an important life lesson, that sometimes there is strength in feeling vulnerable - sometimes a shiny suit and a slick sales pitch doesn’t send the right message. Sometimes it is the introvert rather than the extrovert that needs to be seen.

Early on in the project, after a particularly draining consultation, I remember discussing my work with my father, the weight of responsibility I felt and the need to get it right. His answer, “Just do your best and besides what other people think of you is none of your business and more to the point it has as much relevance as what colour underpants you are wearing.”

Salient words for my father but then my father is an interesting man. At seventy something he is a man of another time, a golden age of Australia. Born in Kensington and schooled in Darlinghurst, he put the deposit down on his first home in Bondi at 24, the same year he married my mother. The deposit came from a win on a long shot at Flemington, the equivalent to a year’s salary on a single race. It sounds unfathomable but in the 60’s my dad was the youngest bookie ever given a bag. Racing was in the blood, it was in his veins, he’d been a chalkie for his dad for years.

But these men, despite this small vice, were men of conscience and so as a general rule the earnings from a Saturday at the track was followed by a visit to Sr. Ann, a Josephite who worked to build St Margaret’s Maternity Hospital in Darlinghurst. The community of Darlinghurst and surrounding area had gotten behind the nuns. In particular, the racing community, who it was said bought the land and fundraised for the much needed maternity hospital. My grandfather spent so much time fundraising for the hospital that it earned him the name Doc, a nickname he took to the grave in January 1972 where he was eulogised for his community service and commitment to family. I never knew my grandfather just his legacy.
On 15 November 2010, the Senate referred to the Community Affairs References Committee an inquiry into former forced adoption policies and practices. The findings released in 2012 found that very same hospital was one of the top twenty reported to have undertaken the unethical and illegal policies and practices of forced adoptions. So my question to you is how will history record my grandfather as hero or villain?

It was an interesting phenomena that throughout the consultation process it became clear that as a representative from the Commonwealth Government, we held an inordinate amount of power, disproportionate to those affected. For the women of forced adoption, institutional power still loomed large, perhaps a little less than in my grandfather’s time but they still lacked agency. They could influence, contribute as we consulted them but in the end it was the work of the team to make the ultimate decisions, it was the professionals and The Archives as an institution that held the power. Contributions through the website were essentially the collection - but even then this had restrictions - they had to follow protocols to ensure contributions could be published online and while we can justify this within legislative frameworks or from legal advice under Privacy Principles, this was not an unfettered collection of personal experiences.

From a social science perspective forced adoptions pared back to a basic principal was concerned with domesticity and social contracts around notions of motherhood and the idealised post-war family. This was the business of bringing back order from the chaos of war - instilling values. The dominant power was reaching into the sacred space of home and hearth and as many women have argued hegemonic masculinity was alive and well. While I can concede to this viewpoint, I would add that there were other forces at work – society was stratified – with professionals being experts and individual not encouraged to advocate for themselves the power differential of institutions and authorities was enormous. And within this golden age, the practice of forced adoptions was accepted as everyday occurrence. There was no support for an unplanned pregnancy or unmarried mother- this was a stigma to be hidden away or erased. Against this backdrop, is it any wonder that many women went to their grave with the secret?

Yet for others passion burnt fiercely, fuelled by the sense of injustice despite being told to go home and forget the experience of having a child. For half a century the rage simmered below the surface till the feeling had become fury. For women such as these the significance of the National Apology is without bounds. It is everything and nothing in a single defining moment. It is vindication, validation and for some it was realisation that the past could never be recaptured only the hope that lessons learnt for future generation to prevent such events from occurring again.

In May I was visited by a woman I will call Tiger Lily. Over a coffee we spoke, She had arrived from interstate unannounced to see the exhibition (Without Consent). Her first words to me were, “you didn’t expect us to accept the exhibition – did you - you know we won’t?”
I assumed there was some issue with the narrative but then she said something I didn’t expect, “Why wasn’t I or my friends included - my friends, we fought together why aren’t we in the exhibition?”

Then she mentioned another group that had been adversarial, and asked about their absence from the exhibition.

I remembered some of these women she mentioned, they had been tough in building consensus, they would be hyper critical and right when I thought I had lost them, they would touch my hand or do something affectionate, as if to say this is business don’t take it personally. On the day of the exhibition launch, one had handed me a card with this Margaret Mead quote, “never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

In answering Tiger Lily - I could only say it is the curator who decides. But she really didn’t seem to care about the content of the exhibition. This diminutive woman who had never known true power, an introvert, wanted me to hear her message, she hadn’t come to workshops, just like me she didn’t do the group thing. Now it was too late to do so, she wanted to talk,

“This should have been the story of women. You’re a woman, you must know. You’re a mother you know how to nurture, you can’t go back to pretending you don’t know. I can’t keep fighting, it is up to you as a woman to carry this. I’m passing this to you. For a moment I thought she meant forced adoptions and then she said the work of being a feminist”.

The ideology was the legacy, not her story. This conversation was not about history, content or events but about the future. For me that was indicative of the success of this project, it is a conversation. Its legacy is connections made over coffee, workshops public programs or understandings made through the exhibition. The work of the Forced Adoptions History Project is a beginning not an end.

Tiger Lily wanted me to see her as more than one of the 250,000 Australians affected by forced adoptions. She didn’t define her entire existence as being about those events and more to the point she wanted to know that I had been irrevocably changed, that I would have courage fighting the good fight.

This interaction also left me wondering about those others, the people we hadn’t reached or indeed how many introverts hadn’t been comfortable in participating. It is always the dance in projects of heightened emotions, how do we ignore the noisiest, the loudest voices and find the unassuming observers; the introvert who remain in the wings being reflective and considered. Or when they feel small, over shadowed by the slick sales pitch of the shiny suited extrovert.

I wasn’t a child or mother of forced adoptions and yet I shared something of the legacy. For cultural Anthropologists it takes two years in the field – my time to reflect is now.
I could argue a case about histories for the need for expert and objectivity but I would be preaching to the converted. History holds different truths, discrete perspectives understood through a relationship of belonging to the dominant narrative or existing outside.

Forced adoptions narrates a tale of the authority of government failing to protect the rights of its citizens at a time when they were most vulnerable. But more importantly it is about women and children, it’s about love, trauma and resistance.

As I reflect upon my father’s wisdom – I think my dad got it wrong, it matters what colour underpants you’re wearing. What we do as individuals but also as institutions, the way we construct and influence the community from the perspective of exhibitions, content development and even public programs has huge implications on how history will be remembered and recorded. For my part I can stand objectively acknowledging the binary positions of Tiger Lily and Doc. I can suspend them like magnets with different polarities and I can explore them discretely as the authority of the institution gives way to the perspective of the masses.

Symmetry vs. asymmetry
Introverts and extroverts
Power vs. Passion

Notes
The Forced Adoptions History Project was recommendation 20 of the Government response to the Community Affairs Committee of the Senate report, “The Commonwealth Contribution into Former Forced Adoption Policy and Practices.”


Federal cross-agency mapping analysis recorded St. Margaret’s listed as one of the top twenty hospitals mentioned in the report.

The woman, represented a group of regional women who have lobbied for many years and are amongst the original women who sought justice through political and legal means.

Reference

An expedition into the changing world of museum collections: Are they vital or a thing of the past?

Christina Hardy

Abstract
As museums fight for a position in the modern world they have had to adapt and reconfigure themselves to remain relevant, popular and funded. Has this moved museums too far away from their collections and traditional purpose? This paper will argue using examples of public programmes, digital engagement and exhibitions that despite the move towards focusing on the audience, the collection is still integral. Projects developed in Nelson, New Zealand will be outlined to support this argument. These ventures include an outreach project at Founders Heritage Park which uses museum objects to evoke memories and facilitate discussion and a digital programme at The Nelson Provincial Museum which uses digital images of glass plate negatives held in the collection to engage the public and seek help identifying World War One soldiers. These projects are predominantly audience driven however, they could never exist without the museums’ collection or the acknowledgment that objects are powerful. It will be argued that for museums to succeed in the future a way to coordinate collections work with audience development needs to be established as without an audience a museum is not needed. But without a collection a museum is not a museum anymore.

Keywords: Museum collections; public programmes; outreach; museums; reminiscence; digital projects

Museums are booming on a global scale. There are more museums being built and funded than ever before and yet museums are in the midst of a conceptual crisis. The role and function of a museum is no longer secure. Museums have developed and changed from focusing inwardly on the growth, care and study of collections to focusing outwardly on providing an education or entertainment service for the public. This shift has changed the dynamic of museum staffing structures and the missions they seek to fulfil. It has created debates around what a museum is and whether they should still exist. It is no longer enough to just collect objects, funders need to see the value a museum is giving to society. This has created an increasing pressure on museum staff to create successful public programmes and increase visitor numbers. This in turn creates a divide within the museums ideologies and
raises tensions between the objectives of the collections and public program departments. This paper seeks to introduce the changing conception of what a museum is before establishing an insight into two examples of public programmes that benefit the collections whilst engaging the public. Therefore providing a possible way forward for museums to protect and grow the collection whilst engaging new audiences and consequently demonstrating their value in society to their funders.

In the 18th century the private collections of wealthy Europeans became public museums, funded and supported by public money and public bodies. At this time museums became mediums or texts much like books, films, television and video today. Through curating exhibitions they sought to tell stories which educated the public and gave them access to unfamiliar and exotic artefacts. However, there are some key differences between museums and other media. These include the longevity of museum programmes and exhibitions and the permanence embedded in the solid walls of a museum. Museums are also physical spaces that require visitors to step inside and participate with them. But most importantly perhaps, museums have collections. This is something all other media are missing. It is the collection that gives the museum authority as a medium and defines it. As such, a museum can only be a natural history museum if it contains natural history collections.

However, as museums have developed they have increasingly been split into three main functions. Firstly collecting and collection care, secondly research or curation and finally communication or museum exhibitions and public programmes. These all have different priorities and are often working against each other or forming independent existences. This has caused the definition of what a museum is today to become more flexible. Are museums exhibition centres, education centres, research institutions or guardians of a collection? Perhaps museums are all of these things. One thing that is central to all these definitions is collections. Museums may not be the only institution or group whose job it is to preserve history or memory anymore - there are archives, community groups, newspapers and the internet for that now. But museums are the only ones in society whose job it is to make memory from the tangible, to preserve and collect tangible items and to interpret material culture in its original form.

To some extent this is a hangover from the nineteenth century where objects were seen to have the power to convey knowledge, meaning and understanding (if properly collected and classified) without interpretation. At this time it was...
believed that visitors could be educated just by seeing an object. But this is not believed to be the case anymore. We now use educators, visitor hosts and interpretation panels along with objects to convey our meanings or stories in exhibitions.

However, collections do not need to be the enemy of innovation and public engagement. In Nelson, New Zealand a project was initiated in 2013 which used objects from Founder Heritage Parks’ collection to engage with the local community. It was possible to use this heritage parks collections because of the unique context of this museum and the relationship it has with its collections. The majority of the museum’s collections are on open display and were acquired to be displayed or used in a much more hands on approach than is generally advocated by museums.

The project brought together objects, text and images based around simple and universal themes to create an outreach service to the local community. These objects are being used in care homes in the local region to run group reminiscence sessions. These informal gatherings seek to use objects to trigger memories of events or emotions which can then be shared with the rest of the group, should the participant wish. To do this the care home is asked to organise the participants into small groups (no more than ten) which are able to meet in a quiet and comfortable space. Once the session starts the participants are given access to the objects and are asked to share their stories.

Objects are key to this as it is through touching objects and smelling them that memories are triggered. The best themes for the boxes are universal and provide the participants with choices of what time of their lives they would like to reminisce. In Nelson the boxes are based around the themes of home life and work life. Other good themes are games and toys, school days, nights out and holidays. The objects encourage participation and enable access to the collection intellectually and physically. Touching these objects links the participants to the past and to past peoples. It is an intimate and important experience based on the authenticity of the objects. But more importantly, it gives control to the participants. Museum staff usually control all aspects of the collection – who has access, where objects are displayed, how they are to be viewed and how they should be understood. But in this project the participant controls the object. The participant decides which angle to look at the object from and how it should be interpreted to the group.
This project therefore provides a multi-sensory and inclusive activity with many benefits to the participants including increased confidence with object handling, exhibitions and research. There is increased confidence in group participation through providing a relaxed way of interacting with people from both inside and outside the care home environment.\(^6\) The recalling of memories also has an important function in sustaining a persons’ sense of self as it gives the participant a chance to reflect on where they have been and how they came to be who they are now. The triggering of memory keeps the brain active and the handling of objects and using them the way you would have in the past triggers muscle memory.\(^7\) This provides mental and physical stimulation that encourages a sense of well-being in the participant. These are benefits not just for the participants but also the caregiver as they learn about their patients and are able to more satisfactorily care for them.

As well as the numerous benefits to the participants outlined above there are also advantages for the museum running the program. This kind of project enables the museum to reach out to their local community and, in particular, a section of the community that may not be able to physically access the museum building anymore. It promotes the museum not just to the participants, but also their families and the staff at the care homes. It provides opportunities for the museum to learn new stories and provenance about collection items and it promotes the collection to the public by advertising what the museum holds. This is supported by the experiences of Simpson, Davis and Hill (2004) who recognised the aged care community as an “untapped resource of information” after their institutional documentation related to a photograph was challenged by their participant’s knowledge of dress codes and the composition of portraits in the 1930s.\(^8\) It can also provide ways to develop the collection with oral histories relating to the museums objects. All of this adds value to the museum. It makes the museum more relatable to its funders who are less knowledgeable of museum practices and are likely to prioritise community endeavours.

However, it is crucial with projects such as these that the collection is protected. To ensure this is the case, a project like this can use objects which have been specially donated or purchased for the museums handling collection. It is also possible to use objects from the museums’ collection if their collection policy allows this and the donor agrees. The kinds of objects which can be used from a collection need to be robust, possibly one of many duplicate items and are not unique or significant. Despite these barriers to using collection objects
these projects have almost become standard museum practise in the UK. Beamish Museum is often seen as a pioneer of this work but another good example is Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums which have expanded the concept to create digital stories about their collections which have then been accessioned into their collections.⁹

As this project developed, the local library in Nelson became interested in contributing to this endeavour and they are now managing the project. This reminiscence project fulfilled many of the libraries missions in terms of public access and community engagement. They also have funding to execute outreach programmes like this through their home delivery service. This made the library an ideal place to run the project in conjunction with Founders Heritage Park. Through this collaboration, the library and the museum have provided a successful model for sharing resources and working with each other in a way that utilises the strengths of each institution. With this example the library have the staffing, volunteers and funding available to run the project, whilst Founders Heritage Park provides the objects and a fully formed outreach programme. The library is now utilising their friends scheme to acquire more objects and develop more boxes around different themes. They are aiming to loan the boxes to both care homes and individuals in the region and start using the boxes to record oral histories. Through this the library is always reaching out to their local communities and demonstrating their value in society to gain further funding and resources.

Another way of developing public programmes that both engage the public and develops museum collections is through digital projects. Digital engagement has provided a new way for museums and their communities to take possession of their heritage and share it with the wider community. The Nelson Provincial Museum sought to achieve this with the work they are doing to commemorate the centenary of World War One. The museum has created a continuing exhibition centred on the war life and home life of those from the Nelson, Tasman region during the war years as well as a WW1 website branching from its own website.¹⁰ This is a region and family centred website containing information created by staff and volunteers on all the men who served during WW1 from the Nelson, Tasman region. It includes updated daily diary extracts transcribed by staff from two men who served during WW1, as well as detailed biographies of key figures represented in the museums’ collections and exhibition. Within the scope of this project over fifteen hundred glass plate negatives were digitised. These negatives were taken by the Tyree Studio before and during the war years. They
predominantly depict WW1 soldiers and their families. To achieve this, three part-time
digitisation technicians, already employed by the museum, were re-directed to digitise the
WW1 glass plate negatives and capture basic data regarding the negatives in excel
spreadsheet format. This data and digital images were then imported into the museums
Vernon CMS database and its Collections Online website\textsuperscript{11} by the museums Digital Imaging
Technician and IT Manager. Discovering the identity of those depicted on the negatives was
only possible through deciphering the surnames scratched on the negatives by the Tyree
Studio at the time of photographing the subjects. As such, to identify those depicted on the
negatives, a staff member was employed to research the negatives and identify their subjects,
using government archives, the museums own archives and the Auckland War Memorial
Museums Cenotaph Database.\textsuperscript{12}

However, at this time the museums’ Collections Online facility was adapted to make it
possible for the public to comment on object records. This data created by the public then
automatically fed back into the museums’ collections management database. This meant that
whilst the staff member was working on the images, members of the public were also
identifying the people depicted on the negatives. Without any promotion of the public ability
to comment online by the museum, it proved quite popular with local historians and
genealogists. This feature gave the public access to digital images of the collection, access to
the museums data, a chance to contribute to the museums knowledge and the possibility of
finding images of family members they did not know existed. This work was then utilised by
the museum with articles in the local press, reunions with old Nelson families to ask for help
identifying their relatives and items posted on the museums Facebook and Twitter accounts.
This project not only gave people access to the collection digitally, it also prioritised a large
collection for digitisation and research. It improved the data the museum has on its
collections and the use of public engagement increased the knowledge of the men depicted
on the negatives more effectively than a large team of museum staff could have achieved.

Although this project engaged many people in the museums community, it perhaps did not
reach its full potential. The main people who participated with the project were historians
and genealogists who were already engaging with the museums website, archives and
exhibitions. The museum did not promote the project to the wider community. This hindered
the opportunity for people outside the museum’s regular supporters to engage and
participate with the project. The digital records for the glass plate negatives were also not edited or curated before being placed online. All one thousand six hundred and seventy-five records were placed on the website in alphabetical order creating a mass of records including many duplicate images. This created an overwhelming amount of images and data for the website visitor to engage with.

Despite the shortcomings of this project its potential to appeal to the community was evident. This is significant because museums need to appeal to their communities to survive in the future. They need to remain relevant and interesting to visitors whilst maintaining their core work and identity. Through this, museums will maintain their position of performing important social and civic functions in society whilst remaining the protectors of Taonga (treasure). Traditionally as the focus has shifted onto public engagement, collections and collection care has been pushed out, but this does not need to be the case. Collections staff and public programmes staff need to find a way to work together to create engaging ways of reaching out to the community whilst protecting and growing the collection. Through this, museums can engage the public with authenticity and increase their knowledge of the collection, they can provide content for exhibitions and they can promote the museum in the media with stories of the public connecting emotionally or intellectually with collections. The two examples discussed above provide useful models for utilising the power of museum collections to connect with the public using physical objects and digital images. Museums are thus able to demonstrate their value to the community and the funders who keep museums alive.

Notes

1. Conn, (2010), Do museums still need objects
2. Ibid.
5. Arigho (2008), Getting a handle on the past: The use of objects in reminiscence work
6. Rowlands (2008), Aesthetics of touch among the elderly.
7. Ibid.
10. http://ww100.nelsonmuseum.co.nz

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Creating new forms of value with Indigenous customers: Auckland War Memorial Museum, a case study

Sally Manuireva

Abstract
Auckland War Memorial Museum works with Māori stakeholders to co-develop an equitable approach to collection care, documentation and interpretation. This research project was completed in December 2014 as part of a Master in Business Administration at University of Auckland and sought to reframe those communities as customers in order to explore the potential for audience growth and participation. Specifically it posed the question: could a market orientated strategy result in new forms of value being created for and with Māori people?

By considering a range of largely qualitative data, including from museums beyond Auckland, a picture of value creation for and with indigenous people in museums was created. This formed the basis of recommendations to Auckland Museum and generated insights for all museums that have a commitment to the indigenous population they serve.

Keywords: indigenous; Māori; customer; value creation; participation; strategy.

Auckland Museum and the New Zealand context
Auckland Museum, Tamaki Paenga Hira, has stood in Auckland Domain since 1929, although it was first established in other premises in 1867. Collecting began in 1852 and now the Museum houses a broad collection including Māori taonga1 and pre-eminent collections from throughout Polynesia and the Pacific.

Governed by the Auckland Museum Trust Board, the institution has a legally enshrined commitment working in partnership with Māori people. The Trust Board is advised by the Taumata-ā-Iwi, especially on matters of custodial policy and guardianship of Māori taonga.

Recently the Trust Board approved Future Museum, which is a 20 year development plan.2 It heralded a strategic shift towards greater engagement with the people of Auckland, an increased focus on collections and a commitment to delivering a coherent Māori dimension. Future Museum is the foundation for the aforementioned co-development aspirations around collections.

The timing of the Museum’s focus on co-development is not accidental. Māori are recognized as the first people of New Zealand and there is a legislated commitment to a bi-cultural society.
in the Treaty of Waitangi, which was signed by Māori chiefs and representatives of the British Crown in 1840. A number of iwi are moving through the process of settling historical claims against the Treaty, which should result in increased participation by Māori in many aspects of city life. At the same time, the expectations of the Māori people of their museums are changing:

“New Zealand museums, like its society, are moving from a colonial, authoritative and centralised position in relation to their visitors into a radically different situation of partnership, devolution and co-management of cultural heritage with source communities”.

**Can new forms of value be created through a market orientated approach?**

This question was inspired by material on market orientation and value creation, especially the seminal work of Treacy and Wiersema (1993) into customer experience and market leadership, which places excellence in customer intimacy over excellence in operations and product design as a means of creating value. The research question was further refined into these sub-questions:

- What do we know about value creation in museums for indigenous people?
- What do we know about value creation at Auckland Museum for Māori customers?
- What might a customer value driven strategy look like for Auckland Museum?

The research methodology involved triangulating data from a range of secondary sources. The first source of data was a literature review. The second source was the published strategic documents of a number of museums from a pre-defined region of North America, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, namely institutions that were cited in the literature review.

The third source was strategic documents and visitor research findings from Auckland Museum. All the material was from secondary sources as primary research was not permitted. As a result, there is a low presence of indigenous voices in the study, a constraint that was addressed in the recommendations.

Definitions were important, starting with “indigenous”:

Practicing unique traditions, (indigenous peoples) retain social, cultural, economic and political characteristics that are distinct from those of the dominant societies in which they live. Spread across the world ... they are the descendants – according to a common definition – of those who inhabited a country or a geographical region at the time when people of
different cultures or ethnic origins arrived. The new arrivals later became dominant through conquest, occupation, settlement or other means.  

This definition was also adopted by the New Zealand Human Rights Commission in relation to the Treaty of Waitangi settlement process. In addition, other terminology was taken into account in the data gathering including ‘aboriginal’, ‘First Nations’, ‘native’ and ‘source communities’.

In terms of other definitions, there is a widely accepted explanation for ‘museum’ within the profession:

“A museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment.”

The museum concept is grounded in a European and American tradition and so has a strong colonial heritage. It was established that ‘museum’ can mean something quite different from an indigenous perspective and that there is an emerging paradigm where indigenous peoples are developing their own museums and cultural centers. This could be seen as either an opportunity or threat and is highly relevant to this topic.

Value, market orientation, customers: what does it all mean?

A market-orientated approach can be described as “… a management philosophy or process (that) seeks to create superior value for customers by responding to market information”. This overlaps with the concept of customer value, which can be described as understanding people’s needs and satisfying those needs in a manner that is superior to competitors. The work of Treacy and Wiersema was of particular importance; it places excellence in customer intimacy (defined as being expert in understanding and meeting your customers’ needs) over excellence in operations and product design. It is argued that market orientation results in loyal customers, who are highly motivated to help the business succeed. Organisations wishing to be more market orientated may need to change their business model, as resources should be focused on creating and sustaining customer intimacy. It seems that audiences today expect to actively participate in cultural experiences and this represents a significant opportunity for museums and their customers:
A growing body of scholarship suggests potential benefits of these forms of participatory culture, including opportunities for peer-to-peer learning, a changed attitude toward intellectual property, the diversification of cultural expression, the development of skills valued in the modern workplace, and a more empowered conception of citizenship.11

Audiences are increasingly searching for multi-faceted, unexpected encounters and learning is becoming more informal, merging with the idea of leisure. Participatory culture means more self-directed, co-created and collaborative experiences.

Thus there is a major shift towards the audience being the central determiner of value, enabled by a market orientated approach and by placing participatory culture at the heart of corporate strategy.

Only a small amount of published material about market orientated strategy in museums was identified and indicated that a service-orientation is more common. Yet market orientation can have a positive influence on economic performance in museums because understanding and addressing customers’ needs increases competiveness.

The setting for this enquiry is one of a new era of equity and power sharing, where individual contributions are valued and relationships are developed with indigenous communities for the long-term:

“Today’s leading museums are shifting from colonial upholders of a world captured and made miniature for all to behold, to institutions seeking to share responsibility and become meaningful to tomorrow’s generation of globally connected descendants”12

Value creation in museums for indigenous people

The strategic documents of a selection of other museums were studied for evidence of a focus on indigenous people and value creation.

This indicated a range of ways in which value is created for indigenous communities in museums, namely: collections, representation, governance, planning and policy and digital access. These seem to be about medium to long term value creation with a focus on specialist services and expertise. Furthermore, museums appear to be more focused on indigenous people as ‘communities of interest’ or stakeholders as opposed to ‘customer’. But it was also clear from the research that the idea of ‘customer’ in the public sector is more challenging than in the private sector, not least because of the complex environment in which public sector organisations operate13 and the way museums are defined.
The two areas that appeared most likely to drive value were greater equity in governance and digital. Having said that, ‘representation’ clearly matters; it is clear that indigenous people wish to see their culture – past, present and future – accurately and authentically presented, which is a legitimate and valid expectation. Taking into account the shifting landscape of museums’ engagement with indigenous communities, it can be argued that such representation is essential and non-negotiable and must be in place before a conversation can begin about new forms of value being co-created.

Thus a picture forms of complex, constraining issues, not least of which is the inequity in power relationships and the range of understanding of ‘a museum’. Indigenous people’s expectations of the museums that claim to serve and represent them are changing and this change is being accelerated by factors such as legislation, digital technologies and the aforementioned emerging culture of participation.

Whilst the literature review also endorsed the view that a participatory culture leads to value being created for and with indigenous peoples, the evidence was that collaboration between museums and indigenous people tends to be isolated to projects and dependent on individual relationships. The challenge for museums – and Auckland Museum is no different - is how to scale this up from a project to the whole business. This must be in symbiosis with the provision of specialist services such as support for repatriation of human remains and sacred objects. Digital is a clear opportunity in terms of co-creation, collaborative learning and meaningful engagement. Currently this is most vividly seen in relation to collections and indigenous knowledge but the digital revolution offers exciting prospects for museums as they think about changing their relationships with indigenous customers.

Overall, the conclusion is that value creation for any customer is underpinned by three themes: this must be a shared journey with customers, that market insights are invaluable and that the museum must be a listening, responsive organization.

**Value creation at Auckland Museum for Māori customers**

As the primary case study, published documents relating to Auckland Museum and the home city were reviewed. In terms of external context, Auckland is home to the largest – and growing - Māori population in New Zealand, projected to reach 820,000 by 2026. A population that is young in comparison to the general population, it suffers disproportionate levels of deprivation. There are complex stakeholder Iwi relationships across Auckland and
there are some powerful external influences on this topic, namely legislation, digital and learning.

In financial years 2012/13, 847,000 people visited Auckland Museum. In that year, more than half the visitors to the museum were from Auckland, just under a third are international visitors and the remainder are domestic visitors from the rest of New Zealand. From this, 10% of visitors to Auckland Museum identify as Māori, which compares favourably to the demographic of the city. Nevertheless, this is a percentage that the Museum is seeking to increase.

It appears that Māori customers value a family and social experience, with a greater focus on Māori/Pacific history and culture than anything else. They report high levels of satisfaction and say that they feel welcome at the Museum. The Museum has a low level of insight into their interests although it is known that they are relatively high level users of Facebook.

The analysis indicated that audience development efforts should focus on families and young people. In the world of participatory culture, these two segments overlap around social and informal learning. There appears to be a low correlation between what would generate value for Māori customers at Auckland Museum and the things which museums more broadly believe create value for indigenous customers (i.e. collections, representation, governance, planning and policy and digital access). Evidently it is necessary to understand the needs and motivations of Māori customers at Auckland Museum more intimately.

On a positive note, Auckland Museum has an articulated Māori dimension, which is a strategic point of difference that adds value for other customers (Porter, 1996). Auckland Museum’s current work with Māori communities on the identification, documentation and interpretation of taonga is at the lower end of the co-development spectrum in that it was a project initiated by the Museum within a pre-determined framework. Nevertheless, it provides a solid foundation for a more collaborative approach in the near future, where those communities would be more firmly in the driving seat from the outset.
A customer value driven strategy for Auckland Museum

The recommendations for Auckland Museum are based on principles that could apply to all museums, those being:

- Involve and understand indigenous customers;
- Widespread staff expertise is critical;
- Digital matters, embrace the revolution;
- Innovation and change, including to the business model, are at the heart of this topic.

With those principles and the work around customer intimacy in mind, the recommendations are presented within a framework of market orientation: customer perception of value, customer needs and building long term relationships, as summarised in Figure 1.

One of these recommendations is for Auckland Museum to adopt a market shaping approach by establishing working groups focused on families and young people. These working groups should draw on expertise from across the organization and also from external advisors and be empowered to be flexible and responsive in their approach. The intention would be for working groups to operate in a networked way and not as silos in the organization.

It is also recommended that further work is undertaken to test the findings and recommendations of this research with staff, customers and advisory bodies. Cumulatively, this would address the low visibility of indigenous voices around the subject.

As far as performance measures are concerned, these are vital as only through measurement will practice change. This could include: the strength of customer voice, customer metrics, and digital and social media usage. Adaptations to the business model may be required, such as different staff roles, flexibility to respond to customer needs and enabling personalisation of products. Overall, being a listening and learning organization, placing customers at the heart of the process is critical.
**Figure 1: Recommendations for Auckland Museum**

*Principle of Market Orientation – Customer’s perception of value*

**Actions:**
- Identify with Māori customers what they value in terms of the current and potential offer
- Test and shape ideas for products and services with Māori customers
- Generate and use good customer analytics

*Principle of Market Orientation - Meeting customer’s needs*

**Actions:**
- Identify with Māori families and young people what their needs are, with a focus on currently unexpressed needs.
- Pilot working parties with both these segments, outside the existing business model
- Audit and plan to develop staff skills and competence
- Test and embed a range of digital and interpretative approaches

*Principle of Market Orientation - Building trusting relationships for the long term*

**Actions:**
- Establish and use meaningful customer metrics
- Draw on the expertise of respected representatives of the target customers
- Build a network of ambassadors to champion the Museum’s efforts and to form an open feedback loop
- Make the voices of Māori customers visible and vibrant to other customers
- Ensure appropriate use of communication and distribution channels, including social media, mobile devices and the web

Fig. 1. Recommendations

At the time of writing this article, implementation of these recommendations is being planned.

**Final thoughts**

The study resulted in a vivid picture of the potential for value creation in relation to indigenous people. This is within a new frame of reference of participatory culture. The research forces attention on long term customer relationships rather than stakeholder
interactions. It confirms that the potential of this new era of collaboration is significant, identifying digital technologies and social experiences as particularly potent value drivers.

It is apparent that a number of challenges in adopting a market oriented approach will arise. Not only are museums grappling with legacy issues of power and authority, but they also face complex expectations as public service providers. Moreover, making a strategic shift to customer excellence over operational and product excellence may prove challenging for some institutions, as it requires a responsive and authoritative (not authoritarian) culture. The most effective response to this challenge would be to meaningfully amplify the voices of indigenous people in museum processes through mechanism identified in the research.

Reflecting on the themes that emerge from this research, it is notable that the commitment of people – be they customers, employees, in governance, or key stakeholders – is essential on this transformational journey. It is also critical to have relevant performance measures; without these, change is unlikely to occur.

Overall, Auckland Museum has a solid foundation on which to build and is well placed to make this journey in partnership with Māori customers and using a market orientation frame.

Notes

1. Taonga, or treasure, is used to refer to diverse items of cultural significance in New Zealand museums.
4. An iwi is a Māori tribe descended from a common named ancestor or ancestors, and is usually comprised of a number of hapū, which is a sub-tribe.
7. The details of these institutions are available upon request

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   http://mitpress.mit.edu/sites/default/files/titles/free_download/9780262513623_Confronting_the_Challenges.pdf
   Date accessed, November 23 2014:

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Music museum curatorship: Reclaiming rights and responsibilities for musicking on Minjerribah (North Stradbroke Island), Australia

Sandra Kirkwood

Abstract
The Music Curator describes a staged approach to support the reclamation of rights and responsibilities for music-making on Minjerribah (North Stradbroke Island), in southern Moreton Bay, Queensland. This is part of enabling a localised movement toward claiming agency for planning the future course of musical development—especially early childhood musical development. The stages are to firstly understand the local music history from the perspective of local people. Secondly, the person-environment-occupation transactions are described to understand people’s musical relationships to Country. The Person-Environment-Occupation (P-E-O) Model, developed by Canadian occupational therapists (Mary Law and colleagues, 1996), is commonly used to assist individuals to adapt their occupational performance to adverse circumstances. Finally, local people and stakeholders are invited to engage in a strategic planning process to develop Music Action Plans for facilitating community musical development in the future. These stages of musical development are briefly discussed in this paper to highlight the role of the Music Curator, as an occupational therapist and ethnomusicologist, who facilitates the creative process. There are indications that the P-E-O model can be applied to the new context of music curatorship, especially for cultures with strong environmental relationships.

Keywords: Music museum, museum curatorship, ethnomusicology, Australian music history, Aboriginal Australian cultural heritage, Asia-Pacific community music.

Introduction
The vitality of music-making on North Stradbroke Island (NSI) is sustained by transactions between people-environment and their musical occupations. The Aboriginal people of NSI refer to the southern Moreton Bay region as ‘Quandamooka,’ which is the traditional land and sea of the Ngugi, Nunuccal and Gorenpul peoples. Following the devastating impact of colonisation on Quandamooka people’s language, lore, lifestyle, and cultural traditions, a renewal process of revitalising Jandai language, song and dance has been instigated by the Elders and Native Title Holder Aboriginal Corporations. The author has ancestral connections to the Quandamooka region, through the Irish mariner, Charles Lee who manned the lighthouse in the 1870s at Cowan Cowan on Moreton Island (adjacent to North Stradbroke
Island). The Lee family settled at West End, Brisbane, following the death of Charles Lee at age 64 (Brisbane Hospital, 1884). They named their house ‘Cowan Cowan.’

In this small island context, music curatorship involves supporting local people to better understand and plan how to reclaim rights and responsibilities for keeping music heritage and culture strong. This article describes how this renewal process may be stimulated by a creative, staged approach which outlines the emerging role of the Music Curator working in collaboration with Museum, Schools, Elders and Quandamooka Yoolooburrawbee Aboriginal Corporation. One aspect of this process is to develop musical resources and technological applications that sustain the ‘best fit’ between people-environment and their music occupations.

The stages in this collaboration are firstly, exploring the music history of NSI and mapping sites of cultural significance for children’s musical development; secondly, observing the people-environment-occupational transactions that occur during music-making; and lastly, facilitating strategic planning with stakeholders to develop Music Action Plans. In the wake of colonisation, the role of the Music Curator is to support and enable local people to participate in action learning and building capacity for music history research. This process occurs in the context of meeting with a ‘Community of Discovery’ — a democratic collective composed of Elders, museum staff, volunteers and people who are interested in exploring music history and planning how to enhance children’s musical development in the future.

The paper demonstrates a socio-ecological approach to the curatorship of music history and sites of cultural significance by applying the P-E-O Model with small island communities in Queensland, Australia. This place-based planning supports the gradual return of roles and responsibilities for music teaching and learning to the Island peoples.

Quandamooka Music History and Heritage

The reason that it is necessary to understand music history and culture prior to strategic planning, is that there has been disruption of Quandamooka song, dance, lore, language, livelihoods and music occupations through colonisation (Meston, 1923). Quandamooka refers to the Southern region of Moreton Bay that was populated by the Ngugi, Nunuccal and Gorenpu Traditional Aboriginal Owners prior to European invasion and settlement of the island from the early 19th century. Dunwich, a township on North Stradbroke Island became
the site for a series of church and government institutions in the 19\textsuperscript{th} and 20\textsuperscript{th} Centuries which had their own musical traditions and culture.

The key historical milestones of the establishment of institutions at Dunwich are outlined by members of the North Stradbroke Island Historical Museum (Carter, Durbridge, Cooke-Bramley, 1994). In 1827, Governor Darling commissioned the building of an outpost at Dunwich as a Military Post and Stores Depot. This enabled the larger ships to service the penal colony to unload their incoming and return cargoes in the shortest possible time. The military station was withdrawn from Dunwich with the closure of Brisbane’s Penal Colony in 1839. A Catholic Mission to the Aborigines was established on these premises in 1843 by four Passionist Fathers, one Frenchman and three Italians, but closed by 1847 due to a number of reasons including language difficulties, physical hardship, church red tape, and response of Aboriginal people (Carter, Durbridge, Cooke-Bramley, 1994: 44).

A quarantine station was sited at Dunwich in 1850 to protect free settlers from disease. It closed in 1864, and a Benevolent Institution began operating at Dunwich. A quarantine emergency demanded that the Quarantine Station re-open again in 1865, which then moved to Peel Island. The Dunwich Benevolent Asylum officially opened in 1867, and was a home for the aged and infirm—but also housed younger people with a disability, inebriates, and for a short time, lepers. Conditions were poor and over-crowded (Rentoul, 2015). Church services and concerts were held at the Asylum in the Victoria Hall, which opened in 1896. “The hall had seating for 300 people, with a stage, piano, pipe organ and wings which allowed concert parties to dress for vaudeville acts and concerts. Artists came from Brisbane to perform in the hall” (Carter et al., 1997: 55). The asylum moved to Eventide, Aged Person’s Home at Sandgate, in Brisbane after WW2 (Diamond, 2012). Vincent Martin (1997) reports that by 1947, all Aboriginal people left the Island because there was no longer work there, since many were employed in menial labour for the Asylum. Some people returned when sand mining commenced operations on NSI in the 1950s, which provided some local employment—but with very serious environmental consequences (Ferguson, 1997).

The loss of traditional Jandai language and song and dance customs occurred as part of the dispossession of Quandamooka people from their land, language, and occupational role of cultural transmission across generations. Response to the disruption of Quandamooka people’s traditional lifestyle is evident in adaptations of corroborees-- to stage a new form of
entertainment for the European settlers (including asylum employees). Newspaper accounts report that the most successful entrepreneurs of this genre were John William ‘Billy’ Cassim, and ‘Funny Eye,’ (Welsby, 1921; Dunwich celebrities who have passed away, 1890). Cassim’s Aboriginal name was Nyoryo, meaning rope hauler, also spelled Nuwhju in some accounts. He was born around 1840 and passed away in 1890. The unnamed writer of this newspaper article (1890: 787) describes Nyoryo’s role: “Billy was a born comedian and buffoon. His services were essential to the success of every corroboree; no set part was given him, but he was left free to improvise parts for himself, which invariably ‘brought down the house’.”

The corroboree entertainment that Cassim improvised included the Chinaman corroboree, and the South Passage Corroboree (Dunwich celebrities who have passed away, 1890: 787).

In the former, two Chinamen go fishing. Casting their net, they have a haul of sharks, and nothing but sharks. Of course the nets are torn to pieces, and they are in dire distress. The motif of the play is slender enough, but the attempts of the blacks to rig themselves up as Chinamen, and their imitations of their jabbering and gesticulations in terror at the sharks, and the lamentations over their torn net, were as provocative of laughter amongst their own countrymen as among the whites who happened to be present at the performance.

In “The South Passage Corroboree,” a party of blacks go to the telegraph operator stationed there and inform him that they had just come from the back beach of Stradbroke, where a big ship was ashore. The telegraph operator of course sends word to Brisbane, and a steamer comes to the relief of the supposed shipwrecked party. Finding themselves duped, the white fellows swear at the blacks who are assembled to witness the fun, and even shoot at them, but with no effect, as the blacks are off into the scrub with shouts of derisive laughter.

A similar corroboree by ‘Funnyeye’ is described, using costumes from observation of European music-making in Brisbane (Dunwich celebrities who have passed away, 1890: 787):

The only play or corroboree of a similar kind known among the Amity Point blacks was the “Monkey Corroboree” by Captain Funnyeye, who was the philosopher and sage of the tribe, and predeceased Billy [Cassim] about a year. Funnyeye, on a visit to Brisbane, saw a monkey on a barrel organ... On arrival at home he set to work, and,
after spending days of toil, he got himself faultlessly rigged out as a monkey in every
detail, a kangaroo skin and tail forming a capital groundwork. His whole rig-out and
imitations of the monkey’s tricks produced a great sensation, and there was issued a
special command for a repetition of the play.

A noticeable aspect of the European reports of staged entertainment by these Aboriginal men
is that they adapted the function of the song and dance to generate an income for
themselves—taking up a collection during the performance (Welsby in Thompson, 1967:
123); as was customary in European traditions. The spiritual significance of corroboree
performance may have been lost, but the stories of everyday life scenarios were enhanced by
comedic musical performances of Aboriginal cultural leaders.

Quandamooka peoples’ language loss coincided with the establishment of the Myora
(Moongalba) Aborigines Mission at Moongalba on NSI in 1892. Archibald Meston (1923: 19)
states that the loss of whole Aboriginal tribes and languages occurred in the last thirty years.

Among the old Moreton Bay tribes there were seven dialects spoken, and they are all
practically extinct. In my lifetime I have seen tribe after tribe disappear, one dialect
after another become extinct, until there is hardly a soul left of the people who spoke
the dialects familiar to me in my youth. The tribes of Moreton, Bribie, and Stradbroke
Islands have gone for ever, and all that is left of their dialects, presumably, is what was
taken down by me in 1870 and 1874. On Stradbroke Island there are still some half
castes and quadroons who speak part of the old Coobennpil dialect but with them and
even that will disappear, so that white people in the last short period of 30 years have
seen whole aboriginal tribes and their languages passing silently away from us, like a
series of dissolving views, into Eternity. It seems to me to be a scene so solemn, and
tragic, and pathetic, as to be capable of exciting pity in the hardest hearted and serious
reflections in the most thoughtless.

This interruption of the usual transmission process of song and dance customs, and the loss
of the occupational role of ‘song men and women,’ had a profound effect on diminishing the
traditional ceremonial practices and spiritual responsibilities for Caring for Country and living
things. The relationships between people-environment-community music practices were
adapted by Quandmooka people over time as they were forced to assimilate to European
lifestyles, but remnants of language and song were still passed on by the ‘Grannies’—Kindara, Lizzie, Sydney and Mary Ann and others at Moongalba, even though this was forbidden on the Myora Aborigines Mission (Durbidge & Cooke-Bramley, 1997).

With the removal of Aboriginal people to reserves and missions, or adoption by white families, social dislocation occurred and European songs and Christian hymns predominated in institutional settings, such as schools, missions, and churches. Faith Walker (1997) reports that the Myora Aborigines Mission was very different to many other Aboriginal missions in Australia; as evidenced by Walter Roth, Chief Protector of the Aborigines, report of his visit to Myora in 1905. Roth (1906) stated that, “they speak good English and are well able to take care of themselves.” The extended family were located in close proximity to children on the mission at Myora. The residents of the Myora Aborigines Mission organised many of their own activities within the constraints of requiring approval from the Mission superintendent or managers (Walker, 1997). Paul Tripcony (1972, 1973), advises that dances were held at the Myora Aboriginal School at Christmas, Easter and Arbor Day. These evenings were organised by a residents’ committee and music was supplied by Aboriginal artists using accordions. This is supported by the accordion artefact that was brought to the North Stradbroke Island Museum by Ellie Durbidge in 2000 (Fig. 1). The museum metadata record states that it was played by Fraser Brown (an Aboriginal stockman who drove cattle on NSI). Brown played the accordion at dances at the Capembah Café, Point Lookout, NSI.

Ellie Durbidge states, “Fraser and other boys [Jack, Thornton, and Arthur Borey] rode their horses from Dunwich out to Point Lookout for the dances.” The donor’s estimated date of the accordion is 1946 to 1956, however the instrument is almost identical to the photograph of the Paolo Soprani ‘button-box’ or melodeon with 12 keys online,¹ which is estimated by the owner to be dated from 1900 to 1920. The Paolo Soprani company (which has changed hands) confirmed that the accordion dates from the early Twentieth Century. It is therefore, highly likely that the accordion artefact is older than originally estimated in museum records, so may have been played on the Myora/Moongalba Aborigines Mission which was situated near Capembah Creek. The accordion is one of the few tangible remains
Fig. 1. Wooden accordion donated to North Stradbroke Island Historical Museum in 2000, by Ellie Durbidge (photograph by Sandra Kirkwood, 2015). Storage location DM-AR-OS-C04; Queensland Museum ID number: 6193.

of Aboriginal music-making that is available for public display on NSI. The Paolo Soprani accordions were manufactured in Castelfidardo, Italy, which suggests introduction to NSI by Europeans. It is not known who originally owned the accordion or brought it to NSI, or how Fraser Brown came to learn to play the instrument. Further oral history would be beneficial to understand more about the musical repertoire and performance tradition. Cultural diversity of the NSI population increased following WW1 and WW2 after closure of the Myora Aboriginal Mission in 1943, and the requirement for the children to attend the Dunwich State School. In the post-WW2 period, migration, tourism, broadcasting, internet and multi-media technologies have resulted in translocation of music traditions from various locations around the world to NSI. There has been no scholarly study of NSI music history to date, which indicates the need for further research across cultures, to show the musical developments in the NSI coastal townships of Dunwich, Amity Point, and Point Lookout. Some recordings of
Aboriginal language and song on NSI survive in historical archives of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) which can be accessed and analysed through collaboration and consent with Aboriginal Corporations. There is potential for ethnomusicology research if Elders and Native Title holders permit.

**Current state and contemporary music-making on NSI**

North Stradbroke Island, known as ‘Minjerribah’ to Quandamooka people, is distinctive from the mainland in several ways. There is only one school on the Island that caters for the preschool and primary years from Prep to year 6. The secondary department at Dunwich operated for 20 years, and closed in 2012. The old Dunwich high school campus and the former vocational training and learning centre is now occupied by the Quandamooka Yoolooburrabee Aboriginal Corporation (QYAC) which manages the native title interests of the Quandamooka area, following the Quandamooka Native Title Determination by the Federal Government on 4 July, 2011.

Demographic analysis of economic challenges experienced by small Island communities by Howard Guille (2014, p. 11) reveals that there has been considerable gentrification of North Stradbroke Island at Point Lookout. Economic inequalities exist for Island residents with lower median individual incomes and greater unemployment rates recorded at Dunwich, compared to Point Lookout in 2011 (Guille, 2014, p. 14). Inequality of income distribution is also associated with statistics related to disadvantage and unemployment. Aboriginal people make up twenty-one per cent of the population of NSI, and this is as great as forty per cent at Dunwich. Guille (2014: 15) states that “The estimate is that in 2006 about 18 per cent of non-Aboriginal households, and up to 45 per cent of Aboriginal households, in NSI were living below the poverty line.”

Quandamooka Yoolooburrabee Aboriginal Corporation (2015) has established businesses and strategic plans for native title holders to become more self-sufficient and to generate income in sustainable ways that safeguard the natural environment. One of the niche creative industries is revitalisation of remnants of traditional song and dance by brothers--Joshua Walker (Yullu burri ba cunnjiel, 2013, CD), Raymond Walker, Che Walker, and the Yulu Burri Ba dancers that performed at the inaugural Quandamooka Festival in July, 2015. The dancers perform regularly at festivals and cultural events on NSI.
It is not a level playing field, however, because some people and cultural groups have better access to music tuition and support from musical mentors than others. This is largely due to financial means and the people’s affiliation with musical sub-cultures. There is a plethora of musical festivals which provide public entertainment for people of all ages such as: the annual Stradbroke Chamber Music Festival; the Lines in the Sand Festival; the Island Vibe Festival; the inaugural Quandamooka Festival (2015); and performances of the Stradbroke Island Singers choir, and local singers and musicians at cafes, markets and public halls.

This cultural diversity of contemporary music performance has arisen through a rather haphazard, demographic mix of interactions from people who are co-located on the Island, and visitors who perform for hotels, clubs, and events on NSI. The socio-cultural environment and politics of musical performance has been affected by educational practices and government policies, particularly those concerning the rights and restrictions on Aboriginal peoples following colonisation. Quandamooka people’s cultural expression has been restricted under the control of government institutions and music education practices which largely followed European musical traditions in the Aboriginal Mission, institutions and state schools. The resulting music-making of people on NSI reflects globalisation patterns and socio-political policies which govern pathways to music teaching and learning through the Early Years Learning Framework and the Australian Curriculum. Many teachers struggle to deliver culturally relevant creative arts education as part of the mandatory schooling of children from the age of 4 to sixteen years. Informal music education occurs outside of school for some subcultural-groups, and some children access private tuition, and participate in community music groups or through digital technologies if they have the financial means and support—complicated by having to travel to the mainland for high school, music lessons, band practice and concert performances.

Preliminary mapping of the contemporary music-making on NSI reveals that there are numerous opportunities for musical entertainment at local festivals and events, and by attending groups such as YouthLink holiday activities, the Q-Crew contemporary dance group, or Yulu-Burri-Ba dance troupe. From Prep class, children are taught to sing the national anthem and some other songs in Jandai language by their class teacher who is a Quandmooka Aboriginal woman. Quandamooka traditional song, dance, storytelling, arts/crafts, Jandai language and cultural practices are being revitalised by Aboriginal Corporation’s and Elder’s
involvement in festivals, and the commissioning of research for community cultural education.

Musical instruction in European instruments is available for students from years 2 to 6 at primary school. The history and current state of musical development requires further study by local people and music researchers because it has not yet been documented in a systematic, scholarly way. Musical developments tend to occur in an ad hoc way according to the resources available and capacity of residents, teachers and culture bearers to access services and support—such as Redland City Council and Arts Queensland Regional Arts Development fund. There is value in exploring the music history of NSI over time, to inform strategic planning with stakeholders to develop Music Action Plans that can be implemented by local people, rather than relying on state government services. The community cultural organisations, Aboriginal Corporations, Dunwich State School, and the NSI Historical Museum all have potential for agency in supporting children’s musical development in the future.

The focus on the shared vision for early childhood musical development arises from Oodgeroo Noonuccal’s vision, expressed in the “Song of Hope” poem: “to our father’s fathers, the pain, the sorrow… to our children’s children, a glad tomorrow.” The aim is for collaboration between services and strategic planning that enables children to find pathways in musical development, and to access suitable teaching and learning opportunities that are culturally relevant, and available regardless of economic means.

**Application of the People-Environment-Occupation Model (P-E-O)**

Conventional methods of music history were not considered suitable for NSI due to the high demographic of 50 per cent of Aboriginal students reported at the Primary School. An alternative model has been proposed by the Music Curator who is an occupational therapist and ethnomusicologist. The Person-Environment-Occupation Model is an enabling approach that was developed by Canadian occupational therapists (Law et. al, 1996; Strong et. al, 1999) to help people with a disability to negotiate different aspects of their life to obtain a ‘better fit’ for better functioning in activities of daily living, work and recreation. This transactional approach can be applied to support people’s cultural engagement with community music because it is relational and also considers the importance of the connections between people, music-making occupations, and the environment. This socioecological approach is proposed
for describing and analysing music history and planning culturally engaged early childhood community music practice for NSI. The study provides a new application of the model beyond its original context. This will reveal whether the theoretical model is suitable or needs to be tailored further to the unique needs of small island communities. It may also be necessary to explore further updates of occupational performance models and consider the recent development in technology and other factors.

**Role of the Music Curator**

The first stage of engagement of the Music Curator is to get to know people, community cultural organisations and Aboriginal Corporations, and to understand who is responsible for organising the musical events and gatherings. Attending musical events and festivals reveals the nature of people’s participation and the musical repertoire and style of performance. This allows the Music Curator to negotiate a brief for supporting music-making on the Island with the community cultural development sector.

The music curator may then guide the description of music history in terms of people-environment-occupations, and assist with the mapping of contemporary music-making on the agreed terms. The assumption is that every person has a unique music story of how they have experienced music during their lifetime, or even the lifespan of a band or choir. Some people like to tell their music stories in creative ways, demonstrating how they play and sing familiar music or sharing their favourite audio-visual recordings. The museum has archival records of past performances which can be retrieved for analysis with the consent of the people involved.

Strategic planning involves consulting with stakeholders to plan how to achieve the best-fit between people-environment-music occupations. The proposed approach to curatorship is as a support person who can connect people with music resources and services. The author’s previous publications reveal research on these culturally engaged frameworks (Kirkwood, 2009). An innovative participatory action research process is outlined in relation to writing the Centennial music history of a band (Kirkwood, 2008). These case study examples reveal adjustments that need to occur to tailor the approach so it is suitable for each location, musical occupations and for each community cultural group. Care must be taken in
generalising findings from one location to another, or even to different time periods or socio-cultural groups. Local people are best to guide the approach on their terms.

**Creative Process and Research Proposal**

The proposed action research study of music-making on North Stradbroke Island is still in the early stages of planning. Reflection on archival research to date reveals that the Quandamooka people are unique in many ways. Faith Walker’s research on the history of the Myora Aboriginal Mission indicates that Quandamooka people on NSI have demonstrated considerable initiative, self-direction and competency in advocating for their needs when living on the Myora Mission (Walker, 1996, 1997 and 1998). Continuous cultural connection has been demonstrated through the successful Quandamooka Native Title Claim in 2011. This has positioned Quandamooka people well for safeguarding their own music heritage and cultural traditions. The initiatives of the Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders in Council (2011), in developing Jandai language resources has paved the way for Elders to support the creation of songs in language. The Quandamooka Yoolooburrabee Aboriginal Corporation is supportive of revitalisation of Jandai language.

Through the inspiration of Oodgeroo Noonuccal’s poetry, and the example of Elders, this has led to success in documenting continuing song and dance traditions of Quandamooka people. The profile of niche creative arts industries has been raised by Quandamooka Yoolooburrabee Aboriginal Corporation at the inaugural Quandamooka Festival, from July to September, 2015. This creative cultural renewal process is also part of music teaching and learning—for cultural education. The strengths of Quandamooka people in revitalising their Jandai language, song and dance traditions and even Nyoryo, Billy Cassim’s adaptation of corroboree performance reveals that local people are resilient and have the capacity for agency. It follows that local people can develop their own Music Action Plans—given the necessary infrastructure and resources. Obtaining support relies on building co-operative and collaborative partnerships with human services that support place-based planning and implementation of recommendations for early childhood musical development in the future.

The early indications from this study of music curatorship, is that it may support the further return of rights and responsibilities for music teaching and learning to Quandamooka people and community music groups. In this way, culture-bearers can continue to exercise agency
and develop music occupational roles that were formerly suppressed by institutional control of people’s cultural expressions. The United Nations *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (section 27), 1948, states that “Everyone has the right to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.” It follows, therefore that pathways are needed to access support and guidance from mentors and music leaders, advisers—including music curators who are skilled in processes of community-based rehabilitation with museums. This discussion is part of a planned dialogue with Aboriginal corporations, community health services, school, and the local community cultural service organisations. To date, several organisations have written support letters for PhD research through the University of Newcastle, School of Creative Arts and the Wollotuka Institute. The possibilities are very promising for collaborating with community groups to negotiate and plan how to enhance children’s musical development in the future.

**Summary and Conclusions**

This paper has outlined the scope of the role of the Music Curator and a proposed action research study in collaboration with community cultural groups, North Stradbroke Island Historical Museum, Dunwich State School, and Quandamooka Yoolooburrawbee Aboriginal Corporation. Consultation with these stakeholders and the University is necessary to ensure that the research proceeds in an ethical way that supports local initiatives and leads to better understanding of local music history. This generates an evidence-base for strategic planning that supports community groups to develop Music Action Plans which are aimed at enhancing children’s musical development in the future. The action research demonstrates a new, emerging role of an occupational therapist/ethnomusicologist working in the historical museum context with the small island communities. Further reports and publications are planned to share the research findings as the study progresses over the next two to three years.

**Notes**


References


This article has been independently peer reviewed

Sandra Kirkwood
How to cope when you open your digital doors

Paul Rowe

Abstract

A desire to open up access to collections information has led many museums and galleries to provide online access to all of their collection records. This is an exciting opportunity for heritage organisations to better engage with their communities, but it also creates new challenges and increases the demand on limited staff resources.

Online visitors may provide new information about items in your collection, but who will manage these interactions and how will you incorporate this information into your current catalogue? Will this new workload require shifting priorities from existing duties? How does the impact of online collection projects differ for social history, natural history and art collections? What unexpected results can come from sharing all of the collection records?

Keywords: digital access, audience engagement, collections data, data quality, copyright, metrics

The participants

This article is the result of an online questionnaire and follow-up discussions during April 2015 with fifteen art and heritage organisations that have made the commitment to share the bulk of their collection records online. Each of the survey participants was able to provide concrete examples of how the online visitors had changed the way they worked.

The breakdown of the participants was as follows: eight museums, six galleries and one university; eight social history collections, six art collections and three natural science collections; five New Zealand organisations, five Australian organisations, two US organisations and three UK organisations; three small organisations (1-5 full-time equivalent employees), five medium-sized organisations (6-30 full-time equivalent employees) and seven large organisations (greater than 31 full-time equivalent employees). Two of the organisations managed multiple collections types.

The mission of many of the surveyed organisations included goals of inspiring and helping to educate their audience. While most of them aimed to serve their local community, many also aspired to connect with people around the world. Sharing information recorded about their collections was seen as an important step in meeting these goals.
The challenges of providing online access to the full collection catalogue

A typical survey response was that “the museum has had to reorganise itself to respond actively to the increased demand for information on the collection”. Putting your collection online will have a noticeable impact on your organisation. “At least half of the members of the public who contact us with specific research enquiries have already used the online collections explorer” (River and Rowing Museum).

50% of the organisations said that they now had to spend more time answering queries.

With the large number of digitised records now available online and the facility for people to comment and add information we are dealing with a ballooning number of queries, but more significantly a surge of people offering us further information to update our records with. This is very encouraging but does present challenges to deal with this interest within existing staff constraints.

Working to put a large number of our collection records online has been an important priority for us, and one that continues to boost access to our collections. It has opened up many doors and usage continues to build. However the success of this is also presenting us challenges, chiefly how to deal effectively and efficiently with the growing flow of information from our community in a timely manner.

*Puke Ariki*

One organisation logged all enquiries requiring more than 15 minutes response work. These enquiries increased from 250 to 400 per year after putting the collection records online.

Many of the participants also reported increased demand for loans (38%) and reproductions, including more obscure collection items which were now being discovered online. Determining the copyright status of each collection item was time consuming, particularly for pictorial collections where most of the material was still in copyright. This alone was a major portion of the effort involved in online collection projects.

The data is never perfect and putting it online exposes these flaws. However, there is real value in putting the collection online, even without images. Without the online record most of your audience will not even know that you have the object. It’s an opportunity to find new information about your collection items and to correct mistakes that would not otherwise
have been spotted. “We are spreading this work amongst a pool of staff who complete it together with their normal cataloguing work. When this information is being entered it is a reality that other work must necessarily be put to one side.” (Puke Ariki). A report into how researchers discover physical objects found that “their most important wish is that online access to museum databases to be provided as quickly as possible, even if the records are imperfect or incomplete”.¹

There was also strong evidence that the type of enquiries changed after collection records were put online. The simpler questions could often be answered directly from the website, but this in turn led to more difficult questions. However, these questions also led to better connections between the museum and the community interested in its collections. More discussion was now taking place and museum audience interaction had been enhanced.

**Coping with the challenges**

50% of the organisations were able to get funding for additional staff on a project basis. This can be a tactic to help keep on top of the added workload. You could apply for project funding based on reaching new audiences or based on metrics for interest in other similar material you have already released online.

We are still in the early stages of digitization but are excited about the potential for linking our collections to larger collections databases worldwide. We are also seeing an increase in involvement and funding from individuals and organizations outside the college due to the accessibility of the catalogue.

**Randolph College Natural History Collections Project**

George Oates was one of the team who developed the Flickr online photo website. She recently said “If you don’t know how your stuff is being used, or who is using it, or when it is used, you will remain in a black hole”.²

When planning an online collection project is it important to decide on how the desired outcomes will be measured. For example, if one desired outcome is to increase the connection with your online visitors, then tracking the proportion of returning visitors to the website could be one measurement to follow.
Google Analytics is a free tool that provides a wealth of statistics about website usage. Keep an independent record of the metrics you’re tracking. Once a month, make a note of the key things you measure. A minimum of one full year’s worth of statistics is required before you can factor in seasonal trends. These metrics can help justify the work you and others are doing and can demonstrate success with concrete evidence over time. Google Analytics can also help you respond to short term events. For example, an item on the website may be popular because of an event in the news. You could then choose to write a blog post to make the most of the additional exposure and be part of the wider discussion about the event.

Volunteers can help with the additional workload. Direct contact with people interested in the museum can be extremely rewarding for the volunteers and they are a huge asset. However, before involving a wider group of people in the cataloguing project you should have some basic standards in place. What minimum elements of information do you want to capture about your collection? Which fields can make use of standardised term lists to ensure consistency? An easily accessible internal standards document, even just a few pages, can greatly improve the quality and consistency of the information you record.

The overall quality of the cataloguing can also be improved through periodic review of the data entry. Common strategies include automatic checks on all changes, such as setting required fields, and detailed spot checks on individual records. Data can also be improved by searching for records with missing information. For example, a search for all artist records with no date of birth or death recorded could be the starting point for comparing the records with public data sources such as the Australian Dictionary of Biography.³

Standardised term lists can help online visitors navigate your website. For example, the object type could be presented as a link so that visitors can easily click to see all of the items of this type in your collection. Improving how your online collection is presented can help visitors answer their own questions. You may be able to use term lists that have already been developed. The Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences (formerly the Powerhouse Museum) has an Object Name thesaurus for social history and this is free for download from their website.⁴

Organising your online collection into broad categories can also help visitors explore it, particularly if they are not familiar with the extent of the collection or are just browsing for items of interest. This can be a simple page outlining significant subsets of the collections with
search links based on the cataloguing data available. 20% of respondents were also adding broad, public user-oriented, categories into their original catalogue records with the objective of improving the online accessibility of the collection.

External standards go into greater detail on how best to catalogue your collection. The Collections Trust website has a whole range of online guides for all common museum processes. The Getty’s Categories for the Description of Works of Art takes account of all typical art catalogue fields and provides rules for common problems such as unknown makers.

The Australian Copyright Council provides a book specifically to help galleries and museums understand copyright law. In Australia you cannot publish a photographic reproduction of a work of art if you don’t have copyright clearance. You could however tackle the easier groups first, including art or photographs out of copyright because of when they were made or photographs you have taken of household social history items or natural science specimens.

The online collection needs to clearly mark the copyright that applies to each record and image. Use the least restrictive licence you can as this will make the content more useful to those who discover it online. “The promiscuous spread of digital assets is a key factor in delivering on museums’ missions to educate, inform, stimulate, and enrich the lives of the people of the planet we live on.”

Copyright owners often cannot be traced, giving rise to ‘copyright orphans’. Maintain documentation on the efforts made to trace copyright owners. Use your online collection to help trace copyright owners for copyright orphans by giving visitors a clear way to get in touch about copyright issues. Establish procedures for when there is a copyright dispute so that there is already a clear policy should a conflict arise. The simplest approach is to take the content off the public website until the copyright issue is resolved. Auckland Art Gallery found that when a copyright owner was identified for a copyright orphan, most copyright owners were willing to allow continued online access to the material via the Gallery’s website.

People will talk about your organisation and your collection. Having permanent pages for each collection item will allow you or others to share this content in many ways, including on social networks such as on Twitter or Facebook. 75% of respondents had part-time or full-time roles to cover social media and online engagement. “We have increased the number of student interns, who manage our website and social media pages and also have numerous curatorial
tasks, including cataloguing and digitization. Research has increased due to greater accessibility of the collections” (Randolph College Natural History Collections Project).

You can reach a larger audience by sharing your records with other sites. The National Library’s Trove website can periodically copy your records onto their website as another place for this content to be discovered. For specimen records, The Atlas of Living Australia website provides a place to share these collections in the same way as Trove does for other collection types.

Puke Ariki allow the public to add comments to each online collection record and this has unearthed a lot of new information. For example, one repeat visitor has added captions identifying who is sitting in a series of school sports team photos. Someone in the organisation must have the responsibility to respond to these comments, including thanking those who provide new information. There are definite benefits to publishing the entire collection online, rather than a smaller set of ‘perfect’ records. Even if some information is incorrect, it is beneficial to be corrected by a member of the public as it offers a chance to verify the new information and improve your records.

Online collections did not increase the demand for information about the natural sciences collections in the survey. Significant items, such as type specimens, are separately documented in much greater detail in science journal publications. The organisations with natural science collections did not note an increase in work since putting their collections online, possibly because the material had a more specialised audience.

Survey participants were unanimously positive about the overall impact of putting the collection online. Typical comments included “it’s not negotiable for a serious public art museum in my opinion” (Auckland Art Gallery) and “it has revitalised our small local history Museum and significantly extended our reach” (Mataura and Districts Historical Society).

Celebrate success

The questionnaire brought forth examples of the community enthusiastically supporting the online collection. “I have loved the new digitised museum records. To see my Grandad’s gorgeous big ears popping out of a photo online ... is truly heart-warming” was an example from an online visitor to the Mataura and Districts Historical Society website.
You will delight people by putting your content online. Celebrate your successes and keep a note of them. These successes can help you defend your past work and secure funding for the future.

Notes


Reference

19,000 glass plate negatives: Algernon Darge’s First World War legacy

Joanne Smedley

Abstract

In August 1923 the Australian War Museum, (later Australian War Memorial), received a letter from Algernon Darge, a Melbourne photographer and lanternist since 1903 to purchase his First World War collection of approximately 40,000 glass negatives and a set of registers. With the announcement of the outbreak of war in August 1914, men rushed to enlist and land was offered to set up a training camp at Broadmeadows. Seeing the money making opportunity Darge was quick to set up shop on site. This paper introduces the man, the collection of glass plate negatives created by him during the First World War and how it developed his business. It then goes on to explore what happened once the collection came to the Memorial, how it was used and how we are able to interpret the collection today.

Keywords: First World War, Photography Studio, Portraits, Australian War Memorial, Glass plate negatives, Photographers

Darge: the man

Melbourne commercial photographer and businessman Algernon Darge was born in 1878 and his obituary in January 1941 described him as “a pioneer Melbourne photographer, motorist, flyer, squab breeder and town figure”.1 His dress was described as “grotesque and his manner that of a profound thinker, his motor cars as things of incongruity, covered with his own inventions ...including a real skull and crossbones.”2 Early on he was described as “ubiquitous”3 and this seems to be a common description in various contemporary newspaper snippets.

Darge’s head office was at 175 Collins Street, a site which also housed the business premises of the offices of two of Melbourne’s daily newspapers The Herald and The Argus.4 He advertised his business as “Out-door and Press Photographers” with “Photographs taken of anything – anywhere – anytime”.5 Darge operated as a photographer from 1903-1940.6 His birth name was Algernon Charles Gordon Sharp and it was under the name of Algy Sharp that he initially operated “Darge.” Photographers. In 1913 he changed his name by Deed
Poll to Algernon Darge, perhaps to overcome the confusion of a different surname to his studio’s name or possibly because he had become synonymous with his studio.

**The Darge Photographic Co. First World War collection**

An active photographer from 1903, his photographs of activities and groups, including motoring events, school groups and shopfronts are referenced in many contemporary newspapers and archives. However, the best known and largest surviving part of his archive is the images taken at military camps in Victoria at Broadmeadows, Seymour and Point Cook, along with some studio photography at Collins Street and some military related city work. The Darge Photographic Co was one of a number of Victorian studios that went to the new Broadmeadows military training camp to set up tent studios. The studio photography at these locations is often documentary and business-like and an insight into the activities in camps at the time. The collection also contains many soldier portraits and family groups. He
bequeathed his non-military collection to The Argus and the Melbourne Technical College (where he had previously worked), but it is unclear how much of this collection remains. The State Library of Victoria which received The Argus picture collection holds over 350 Darge items in their collection but they are print versions from a number of private donations. It seems his formal offer of negatives to The Argus was not taken up.

The largest part of the military collection was photographed at Broadmeadows, the site of the main army camp and the various “Schools of Instruction” such as officers and signallers. We do not have anything that tells us about how Darge came to set up at Broadmeadows but must assume that, like other photographers, he saw an excellent business opportunity. The Darge photographers had a tent studio set up where people would write their name on a slip, hand it to the photographer who recorded their name in the register and then a photograph was taken. Photographers would also roam around camp and take images of tent groups, visitors and camp facilities. Sample prints were put up at the tent studio and

Fig. 2. DAAV00005 Officers watch a Bristol Boxkite training aircraft flying over Point Cook, image courtesy of the Australian War Memorial.
people could order their prints. There was no sitting fee, just a cost for the items ordered. Hundreds of images were taken every day.

The Memorial’s photograph collection

The photographs collection of the Australian War Memorial amounts to over 900,000 images covering all conflicts and the Darge images are a considerable part of this collection, as well as the largest studio collection held within it. The genesis of the Memorial’s photograph collection was the work of the official photographers during the First World War, primarily Frank Hurley and Hubert Wilkins, both established commercial photographers and members of polar expeditions and adventurers who had been appointed in late 1916 after it had been argued by Charles Bean that Australia needed its own photographers. Bean advocated for a memorial and museum to tell the story of the Australian experience of War and from 1917 this was taking shape. Relics and records were gathered and collated by the
Fig. 4. DA12126 Corporal J H White and young girl, embedded negative number in the bottom left, image courtesy of the Australian War Memorial.
Australian War Records Section (AWRS), based in London and the work of the Official Photographers was integral to this. Official photography also became a revenue raising activity with soldiers able to purchase images taken by Hurley and Wilkins – much like they were purchasing Darge’s images - but collated in reference albums or advertised through official publications.

**Acquisition of the Darge collection by the Memorial**

The Darge collection did not take a direct path from the studio in Collins Street to the Memorial. It took numerous people’s involvement, and negotiations over an almost 20 year period to acquire the collection. This path is documented tortuously on a Home and Territories Department File of Papers held at the Memorial.8

The offer Darge made by letter in August 1923 itself did not come out of the blue, and it may have been prompted by a visit by Darge had from Mr Alfred G Brown, ex member of the AIF9-himself a donor of photographs to the War Museum.10

Brown wrote in mid-September 1923 to Charles Bean, advising him of a conversation he had had with Darge on a recent visit discussing destroying negatives and the disposal of his wartime collection and suggesting the Memorial make contact. In 1919 *The Geelong Advertiser* reported “the cessation of war has led the soldier photo to drop out of fashion”11 perhaps even more so in 1923 when Darge was contemplating the fate of his wartime collection and the storage space required for it.

Brown reported that Darge had 30,000 to 40,000 negatives of military interest for which he was finding storage [a] difficulty12 Brown listed twelve areas (including portraits of almost every man who went through Broadmeadows Camp, students at Schools of Instruction, sports and games etc.,) covered by the Darge collection and suggested it “might be of great historical value to the Commonwealth & you and the War Museum authorities”.13 Brown suggests approaching Darge directly. It would seem, however, that Darge had already been talking informally to War Museum staff.14

**Acquiring images for the Memorial’s collection**

Three days after Brown’s letter, Bean wrote to Mr A G Pretty, Acting Director,15 suggesting a prompt reply to Darge would be worthwhile and the material on offer would be of interest as “in collating the photographs for Volume XII that the War Museum collection did not comprise
very many covering the life of the A.I.F. in Australia”. Charles Bean worked very closely with John Treloar to acquire material for the War Museum’s collection but also to assist with his work on the twelve-volume Official History. The photographs for Volume XII, the *Official history of Australia in the war of 1914-1918* had been sourced from early on and evidently Bean thought Darge’s work would complement this neatly. The War Museum responded to the advice from Bean and started a formal discussion and negotiation for the collection. The museum also advised Bean that Darge had been putting out feelers to someone in the Melbourne office but “knowing the man and his methods, we took no notice”. One senses the Memorial was wary of Algernon Darge, especially considering his peculiar reputation, and careful to protect its interests.

Darge suggested £250 would be a fair price for the entire collection and this offer went to the Finance Sub-Committee who rejected the offer. They stated “neither the record value of the collection of 30,000 negatives, fully indexed, offered by the “Darge” Photographic company for £250, nor the probability of successful exploitation, were sufficient to warrant the expenditure”. The basic wage for a male in 1923 was £4 2s so to put £250 in some perspective, this equates to more than a year’s salary of the average man. As this price was considered too high, the War Museum went on to ask for a price for 100 selected photographs of camp life. This was rejected by Darge as too much effort for too little money.

Bean quite quickly lost interest in the collection and claimed he could get 100 similar images from other sources and if Darge does offer them to other places then well and good as they are not lost. “They are not worth more than £25 to us – I think” Darge countered with an offer of £100 which was ignored. Much later in 1928, he suggested £50 for the entire collection, stating it was the price of scrap glass, but even this was not accepted. It was then not until 1938 that Treloar asked if a check could be made on the Darge negatives and contact was made again. Darge had moved to William Street with his collection and had not destroyed all the negatives as he had said in 1923. This time the offer was a knockdown £30 and it was accepted by both parties. The earlier negotiations may have failed as Treloar was seconded away from the Memorial at the time.

To facilitate the transfer, a Memorial staff member, Eric Keage, formerly of the AIF and the Australian War Records Section in London was sent down to talk to Darge to get a sense of the collection and how it was created. He then supervised the transportation of the negatives.
and registers (listings arranged by number within the different studio locations). A set of index cards was created by a Memorial typist, creating an alphabetic record of client names from the registers. This new index would allow images of individuals to be ordered and was necessary as the registers were created in numerical [and by default chronological] order and not searchable by name.

The collection lies dormant

So the glass plate negatives did eventually make it into the Memorials collection, but the work on this three ton collection was far from over. Problematically, the first 7000 or so portraits never actually made it to the Memorial, although the Memorial does hold the corresponding register. It is likely Darge had started destroying the plates for scrap, probably after the initial negotiations broke down, and the negatives had been moved to his new premises. At one point the Memorial had only been interested in acquiring portraits of those soldiers who had gone on to become personalities or worthy figures during the First World War, but now they had a much broader collection to store and manage. From the original offer of supposed 40,000 negatives, the approximate 19,000 glass negatives that the Memorial ended up with was still a substantial collection and makes it the largest studio collection acquired by the Memorial. It can be roughly grouped into 12,000 half plate glass negative portraits or portrait groups and about 7,000 images on whole and half plates of camp life and groups in and around tented accommodation, training activities and schools of instruction.

Once it was acquired in 1938, like much of the collection, it was stored for posterity, but not widely used. Anecdotally a mention of the Darge collection was made in a Victorian genealogical magazine in the 1980s used to trigger an occasional request for a portrait reproduction. In the 80s and 90s a burgeoning interest in genealogical research started a wave of research that continues today.

The adoption of a computerised collection management system (CMS) in the late 1980s meant the Memorial started to look at making a portion of its collection available to the wider public and electronically locatable. The part of the collection that was regarded as “core” highly visible and iconic images, such as those by Hurley and Wilkins, the Department of Information, and portraits of people who died as a result of their service, were selected and recorded on the CMS. Once the Core was added other priority projects were bid for to get into the queue of adding to the CMS. In an interview with former Senior Curator of
Photographs, Ian Affleck, he related that Bill Fogarty, then Head of Photographs Film and Sound, had argued that the Darge collection should be the next large set [of images] to be added to our collection management system. He felt this collection deserved some exposure and felt the interest and commercial sales would justify the program. The Director was not interested because he believed there would not be a good financial return in sales reproductions for making it available. This echoes the concerns the Memorial had when discussing the acquisition of the collection in the 1920s.23

However, reason won out and in the late 1990s a team of four people was appointed to register the Darge negatives onto the Memorial’s collection management system and trigger the duplicating of negatives, the Memorial’s preservation program of the day. These images initially went onto large videodiscs and three stand-alone computers in the Research Centre for the public to use. By the mid-1990s the Memorial’s photographic collection was going out onto the internet, one of the first collecting institutions to put their collection online in this way and images from the Darge collection were a part of this.

**Interpreting Darge’s legacy**

This documentation process also proved challenging. The service records, all now scanned and available online at the National Archives of Australia (NAA) website, were not then. We negotiated access to the service records held at NAA, a process which was slow and hard to make comparisons if the correct files had not been requested together. The Darge registers can be quite hard to read, sometimes names are mis-transcribed, mistakes have been made and in hindsight we might have been less sure we had the right identities. Even though most names have what should be enough to identify someone, the reality is many people shared the same initials and surnames. An image identified in the register as ‘Franklin C’ could refer to any of eight different men by that name that embarked from Australia. Beyond this, the name in the register reflects the name of the client and the client is not necessarily a military person or the subject of the photo. Interpretation of the registers was also made difficult without column headings across all registers. It is only recently that the numbers and dates appearing beside entries in the registers indicate reorders. These numbers can be interpreted as a success story as his reorders indicate over 34,000 orders.

In the scheme of the Memorial’s collection this might have been a capricious acquisition; one of the comments made by the Acting Director of the War Museum, A G Pretty, was that it was
purely Victorian content and therefore excluded other states.\textsuperscript{24} Although it is a predominately Victorian\textsuperscript{25} collection, research into individuals and analysis\textsuperscript{26} of the existing captions and has proved this is incorrect and other states and territories are represented.

Conclusion

A lot of the collection is opportunistic, random images of soldiers on horseback, tent groups and portraits. It was free to have your photograph taken, so many did. Business would have relied on quick developing and supply of prints.

Research and discovery continues both of Darge and his legacy. Darge was clearly an idiosyncratic man who was an inherent adventurer and business man, willing to try new techniques and market himself and his business. The internet and access to the collection has brought the collection to a wider audience than he might ever have imagined but he certainly would have approved because of the exposure it brings to his collection.

The Darge collection of negatives is a visually unique, at times frustratingly opaque body of photographs created by a rather odd man. Its diversity is vital in understanding our nation’s military and social history. And it is a collection that we came very close to missing out on.

Notes

2. Ibid.
5. AWM93 701/025/019 Darge letterhead
8. AWM315 701/025/019
9. Late Captain, 24th Battalion, awarded Military Cross, French Croix de Guerre
10. AWM315 17/3/193 Photographs loaned for copying by Captain A.G. Brown, MC (also loan of Block to Captain Brown)
12. AWM315 701/025/019
13. Ibid. letter from AG Brown to Charles Bean
14. Ibid. letter from Mr A G Pretty to C E W Bean 22 Sept 1923
15. Treloar had been seconded away from the Memorial
16. AWM315 701/025/019 letter from C E W Bean to A G Pretty
17. Ibid. letter from Mr A G Pretty to C E W Bean 22 Sept 1923
18. Ibid. extract from Minutes of meeting of the Finance Sub-Committee held on October 22nd 1923
19. Year Book Australia, No. 17, 1924, p 555. [ONLINE] viewed 30 July 2015,
21. AWM315 701/025/019 letter from Bean to Pretty 26 Sept 1923
22. Ibid. Letter from Darge to A G Pretty 26 Nov 1923
23. Ibid Extract from the agenda of the Meeting of the Finance Sub-Committee 22 Oct 1923
24. Ibid.
25. Until completely researched the exact breakdown between states is unknown

Bibliography

A cultural renaissance in museums and collections at the University of Oklahoma

Michael A. Mares

“A Perilous but Ultimately Successful Journey in Tornado Alley from Indian Territory through the Dust Bowl and the Severe Storms of Bureaucratic Animosity”

Abstract
The Sam Noble Museum of the University of Oklahoma has made an extraordinary journey that began shortly after the historically unique Oklahoma Land Runs of the late nineteenth century. During this long history it has functioned under various names as the state’s natural history museum and its collections have grown continuously, even when its facilities were among the most atrocious in the country. The museum weathered the Dust Bowl days of the Great Depression, which were especially pronounced in Oklahoma. By the 1980s, various attempts at obtaining funds for a new facility had failed over the decades for reasons ranging from economic downturns such as the Depression, to socioeconomic factors associated with the end of World War II, and the ever changing whims of university presidents. The museum buildings were a ragtag lot of castaway structures (barns, stables, wooden barracks) that were ill equipped to protect the extensive and priceless collections (10 million objects and specimens) against the terrible weather that characterizes Oklahoma in the heart of Tornado Alley. Finally, in the mid-1980s a successful drive for a new museum building with adequate staffing and funding for the facility was undertaken. It took 17 years to complete the project that involved private donors, strong support by the general public, strong support by Oklahoma’s legislature, support by the City of Norman, and total dedication of the staff and volunteers, as well as, eventually, the university administration. From those unpromising beginnings and through the years when catastrophic loss was risked each day, the museum that emerged at the start of the 21st century was one of the finest university museums in the world. As testament to the progress that had been made by the museum, it won a National Heritage Preservation Award (shared with the National Archives that saved the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution), the U.S. National Medal for Museums (the only Oklahoma museum to win this prestigious award), and was selected for the Club of Excellence by the European Heritage Association (the only Oklahoma museum ever selected). These national and international distinctions were a fitting recognition of the difficult challenges that had been overcome over the museum’s history.

Keywords: University museums

Since its founding in 1890, the University of Oklahoma has developed some of the finest natural history, cultural, and library collections in the Midwest and the largest in Oklahoma. Some of these collections are global in scope and importance. Collections represent several areas of scholarship. For example, the Carl Albert Center Congressional Archives contains
official papers of 60 former congressional members, including former Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, Carl Albert.\footnote{1} The Western History Collections, a part of the University of Oklahoma libraries, is one of the premier document and photographic archives on the history of the American West.\footnote{2} The Charles Russell Center for the Study of Art of the American West contains photographic and other archives on major Western artists.\footnote{3} Three other world-class collections at the university now have facilities that are state-of-the-art and each developed their buildings after long struggles over many decades. In the 1980s, a new library addition provided housing for what is one of the world’s finest History of Science collections.\footnote{4} In 2000, the Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History, which had been on campus for more than 100 years, opened in a new facility for the study, exhibit, and preservation of 10 million items of natural and cultural history.\footnote{5} In 2006, and again in 2013, major new wings of the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art opened, expanding the older museum building significantly and making beautiful galleries available to display art from throughout the world.\footnote{6}

Oklahoma is one of the poorest states economically speaking (generally hovering in the lowest decile of the 50 states).\footnote{7} Nonetheless, the state’s flagship university, the University of Oklahoma, often spurred on by strong directors of these various museums and collections, by major donors, or by culturally or scientifically oriented university presidents, managed to preserve its collections despite experiencing long periods of very challenging economic times during which major collections were housed in substandard facilities. This article will focus on the Sam Noble Museum and its remarkable development over the last 25 years. Given its extraordinary success in preserving and developing its collections, the University of Oklahoma can serve as a model for those institutions in other states, or even in other countries, that are finding it difficult to provide adequate support for their museums, libraries, and collections. Many collections are said to have developed by accident, and to a certain extent this is true, but many universities have supported the development and programs of their collections to the benefit of the larger institution.\footnote{8}

The difference between success and failure for a museum or collection often turns on a thin sliver of serendipity. Sometimes having a few key people whose passion for the collections and belief that collections are integral parts of university life, as well as being major contributors to research, education, and social good, results in an unyielding drive to succeed
in the face of adversity. The University of Oklahoma entered the 21st Century with its museums and collections in outstanding condition. How this happened after a century of dire threats to many of the collections and numerous abortive attempts to build museums is a story of unyielding tenacity, complete institutional loyalty, and undying belief in a righteous cause, as well as the actions of a few key personalities who were in place at critical moments of an institution’s history.

A geological cabinet, museum, apparatus and library

Universities are often poor keepers of material heritage since almost all endeavors of America’s higher education system are oriented toward purely academic functions, especially undergraduate and graduate teaching and research. This has become more pronounced over the last few decades as externally funded grants and contracts have become increasingly important to university administrators seeking the overhead money that accompanies such funds. State budgets are being reduced because of the general economic downturn and the increasing unwillingness of state legislators to invest in higher education (e.g., the University of Oklahoma received 38% of its budget from the state in 1980; in 2013 state support was only 17%). Administrators see grant and contract funds as a source of money for infrastructure and program development.

There are more than 4,500 colleges and universities in the United States, almost all of which maintain collections, many with dozens of collections scattered across campus. Numerous activities of scholars, students, donors, alumni, administrators, and even politicians result in collections of specimens, artifacts, artwork, cultural objects, archives, and other items being developed, accepted, and stored on campuses across the nation.

These collections may have existed for decades without the awareness of most administrators, who may fill administrative positions having high turnover rates and thus may have little or no knowledge of collections that lie within their administrative sphere. Such collections may have been accepted and maintained by people who knew little or nothing about modern museum and collection management techniques and operations. They may be unaware of the moral, ethical, and financial costs associated with a long-term commitment to collection care by academic departments or by the institution as a whole. Moreover, the founders of the collections may be dead or retired, with the collections demanding care and support long after they are gone. The university and its administrators may be ignorant of the
value of the collections—whether monetary, scientific, or cultural value is considered. Frequently, the collections are the greatest treasure owned by the university.

Oklahoma’s natural history museum appeared early in Oklahoma’s history. Oklahoma’s western lands had been offered mainly to European settlers in events that were unique in human history, the Oklahoma Land Runs. People lined up on horseback or in wagons and at the roaring of a cannon raced into the unclaimed territory to stake their claims to land that would serve as farms or rangeland. Towns, such as Norman, were founded in a single day. The first land run occurred in April 1889 and by 1895, when the last land run occurred, more than 800,000 ha had been apportioned to mainly white settlers. With Indian Territory in the eastern part of what would become the state of Oklahoma, and with the western Oklahoma Territory now settled, towns, cities, and even universities were quickly established.¹¹ (Fig. 1) The University of Oklahoma was founded in 1890 after the first Land Run. By the end of the century, the legislature was interested in establishing a museum at the Territorial University.

In 1899, the Territorial Legislature passed a law establishing the position of Territorial Geologist. The legislation dealt with the collections that would be amassed as a result of the activities of the geologist.¹² The law described a department of Geology and Natural History to begin the scientific survey of the Territory of Oklahoma, and mandated the discovery and development of natural resources, including flora, fauna, and minerals.

![Fig. 1. Oklahoma’s first Land Run, 18 April 1889. (Historic photo)](image-url)
The geologist would be the “curator of the geological cabinet, museum, apparatus and library, and shall, from time to time, as may be practicable, add thereto specimens of minerals, organic remains and other objects of natural history peculiar to this Territory and other states and countries.” Later in the bill, archeological collections were included in the materials that needed to be amassed and studied. With remarkable foresight, this legislature in this raw territory had mandated a museum that not only concentrated on Oklahoma’s natural and cultural history, but one that would be global in scope. They went on to say: “The office of the Territorial Geologist shall be in such room as may be assigned for that purpose in the Territorial University by the president of said University; and he shall keep such office and the Territorial museum open during the usual business hours of other offices of the Territory, when not engaged in the field or other work requiring his absence therefrom.” The bill noted that these efforts were to “promote science and aid in the diffusion of knowledge.”

As in most universities at the founding of their museums, the collections that began as small sets of specimens or items on a shelf in a professor’s office, or that were displayed in a case in a laboratory or hallway, subsequently grew. Collection expansion occurred without a development plan to deal with the ever-increasing costs associated with storage costs, staffing, operations, and maintenance. Indeed, at the founding of most collections, the continuing and growing cost of collection development seldom appears to have been considered by either the collectors or the institutions. The collections in Oklahoma were to be placed in a room that would be assigned by the president somewhere on the campus. Since it was to be open to the public, presumably the legislature was thinking along the lines of an exhibit museum (as well as a teaching and research collection) that might have an outreach component for the people of Oklahoma. Inherent in their legislation is the idea that civilization needed museums and other cultural amenities, and Oklahoma was no longer a frontier.

The pattern of collection development at the University of Oklahoma was similar to that followed by numerous university and state museums as the young nation developed its cultural and scientific infrastructure in new territories and states. Similar stories of museum development with financial and other challenges over time characterize the early natural history museums in Kansas, Nebraska, New Mexico, Texas, and other states.
A tough neighborhood

Oklahoma is a land of many natural challenges. In particular, the University of Oklahoma is at the heart of what came to be known as Tornado Alley. Because of the geography of the United States, with the Rocky Mountains west of Oklahoma, the warm and moist Gulf of Mexico to the south, and the prevailing westerly winds, the region came to be characterized by some of the most violent storms on earth: tornadoes, whose whirling and devastating winds exceed 500 kilometres per hour. Few structures can survive such forces. (Fig. 2) Additionally, the region is subjected to significant droughts. In the 1930s, the Dustbowl and Great Depression were especially pronounced in Oklahoma. Thousands of Oklahomans emigrated to California to escape the heat, dust, and high unemployment that characterized the state during that decade (Fig. 3).
Fig. 3. Newspaper headlines showing the effects of the Dust Bowl in Oklahoma and the surrounding region during the Great Depression of the 1930s. (Historic photo)

Floods, extreme heat, massive ice storms that crush trees and cause electrical outages, high straight-line winds exceeding 140 kilometres per hour, hail as large as grapefruits, downdrafts, microbursts, thunder snow, derechos, and other unusual phenomena of thunderstorms have made Oklahoma an ideal location to study extreme weather events. Indeed, the University of Oklahoma is home to both the National Weather Service and the National Severe Storms Laboratory whose tornado chasers are famous throughout the world. In recent years, fracking activities related to petroleum extraction have made the state a center for earthquake activity, with earthquakes of 3.0 magnitude or larger becoming 600 times more frequent in the last several years (there were 567 such earthquakes in 2014).

The challenges of building a museum

As the university’s collections grew in the early 20th century, several attempts were made to build a museum facility to house the collections and exhibit the material. One near success occurred in the early 1920s when the university president funded a collecting trip to Alaska and northwestern Canada to bring back specimens of the North American megafauna (grizzly bears, caribou, mountain goats, etc.) that would excite Oklahomans and their legislators to provide funds for a new museum. Those specimens are still part of the museum’s collection,
but the governor and university president had a falling out over political party differences. The governor then vetoed the funding bill that would have resulted in the construction of a new museum. The president left the university and the governor was shortly thereafter impeached. No museum was built.

As Oklahoma entered the Great Depression (John Steinbeck’s *Grapes of Wrath* was written about the Dust Bowl and its impact on Oklahomans during the Depression), unemployment in the state soared. President Franklin Roosevelt’s Works Progress Administration sought to employ people who had lost their jobs. Laborers were assigned to faculty members who had large projects to employ people. About 50 workers were assigned to the museum’s paleontologist, Dr. J. Willis Stovall. Using the workers to dig for dinosaurs in Oklahoma, he found a large number of specimens that included uniquely important dinosaurs and many fossil mammals as well. These specimens suddenly brought the vertebrate fossil collection to prominence, and demanded more storage space.

During this same period archeologists from the university were also given large teams of laborers to excavate extensive burial mounds in eastern Oklahoma that dated back more than a thousand years. Their efforts to discover the Spiro people (the mounds are located near the town of Spiro) and their extensive burial goods and human remains formed the foundation of the museum’s archeology collection. The Spiro Mounds are the pinnacle of pre-Columbian archeological material in North America.¹⁸

Stovall developed a plan to bring all of the university’s collections under a single museum umbrella, and in the late 1930s he was named director of this museum, which was physically scattered among many departments and colleges. Although Stovall made repeated attempts to obtain funds to build a new museum, he was unable to do so. When he died, his lasting contribution, beyond the vertebrate fossil collection, was having pulled most collections into a single administrative unit with a few old buildings housing most of the collections and offering a small space for exhibits (370 m²).

With Stovall’s passing in 1952, numerous directors tried to attract university and private money to support the construction of a new museum building. These directors were gifted scientists and administrators, but were never able to succeed in their quest for a modern museum building. Indeed, after failing to find support for a new museum building, several left to assume other museum directorships where they were highly successful in developing
museums and programs that are their legacy today. At the end of the 1970s, the collections were scattered in 10 different substandard buildings: one was a horse stable, one a wooden barn for storing caissons, two were wooden barracks built in WWII, and the others were attics and basements in classroom buildings. The main museum building, which was constructed in the early 1930s as an armory for the Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC), served as the exhibits building. After Stovall’s death, the museum was renamed the Stovall Museum of Science and History.

The drive for a new building

This was the situation when I became director in 1983 (I came to the museum as curator of mammals in 1981). The museum staff was only seven people and I was the only paid PhD level curator. Stovall’s old buildings had deteriorated in the preceding three decades. During rains, not only the roofs leaked, but the walls and floors leaked as well. The abandoned horse barn contained the state’s ethnology collection, including 1,000 rare baskets dating back to Territorial days. These were stored in a dark hallway lacking climate control. The baskets had to be kept covered with plastic sheeting to protect them from the dripping roof and walls during storms, but then they would have to be opened after the rains to reduce the chances of mold destroying the baskets. The museum contained at least five million specimens and artifacts. This was the number I used during the drive for a new facility; after we moved into the new building and actually counted items, it turned out we had more than 10 million specimens and objects!

The storage conditions of the Stovall Museum were the worst that I had seen at any university and, in fact, were worse than any museum I had visited in my travels throughout the world. This was the greatest treasure of the state of Oklahoma from many standpoints. It was the state’s scientific and cultural heritage. How could this have happened? (Fig. 4)
Universities as keepers of heritage

The University of Oklahoma had had several presidents that were appreciative of the museum and its collections, but several were not. The longest serving president, Dr. George Lynn Cross, had even been curator of botany in the museum’s collection. However, the pressures on administrators in the early decades of the developing university involved building dormitories, classrooms, football stadiums, and other buildings related to education or student life. A museum hidden away in dilapidated buildings with a tiny staff was hardly the kind of eye-catching project to attract attention from administrators or donors.

In the latter half of the 20th Century as American universities changed from hiring home grown faculty members as president—people of serious academic accomplishments, institutional loyalty, and familiarity with the institution—to hiring generalized managers with often dubious scholarly credentials who could manage any institution and who were highly mobile and always seeking new opportunities, the panorama for museums became much less positive. Museums are all about regional, state, and institutional heritage. If someone does not understand or appreciate that heritage, then why support a museum hidden away within the university structure?
A number of points that could be applied to many university museums characterized the museum at the University of Oklahoma. From the point of view of presidents, provosts, and deans, the needs of collections seemed too challenging to receive a significant part of the university’s budget and too problematic about the possible return on such an investment. From speaking to scores of administrators across the country, most believe that collections:

- Use up valuable space that more lucrative programs could fill
- Require staff members to care for them
- Require an increase in operating funds
- Have embarrassing facilities
- Bring in little money for their operations or research
- Always need a new facility
- Lack a powerful constituency
- Attract few visitors
- Do little for the university or the public
- Seem to be massive agglomerations of junk

In most cases it is hard to argue against this administrative view. Most collections are guilty as charged, and certainly the Stovall Museum fit that description in 1983. By the 1980s, administrations in U.S. higher education were having state budgets reduced by legislators. There was an anti-education move that began in the administration of Ronald Reagan and has only increased to the present day. General reductions to university budgets at the state level characterized most of the country. The difference in state allocation was made up through increased tuition rates charged to students, reductions in spending, few salary increases for faculty or staff, and increased reliance on fundraising and research grants and contracts. There was thus great pressure on deans and departments to make money with a department or campus organization, such as a museum. Fields other than natural or cultural history were in ascendancy with strong funding sources at the national level, whether microbiology, biochemistry, physics, chemistry or genetics. All were very fundable and none was associated with collections.

A move toward a new museum had failed about every decade or so for 100 years. I saw that it was vital to establish support among one or more constituencies if there was to be a drive for a new museum. The university at the time was not in favor of committing any funds to
a new building. In fact, some of the administrators during my first decade wanted to reduce the size of the staff and budget or eliminate the museum altogether. 

I spoke throughout the state to every service or social group that would like to hear about the museum. While driving throughout Oklahoma, I dictated a book titled *Heritage at Risk*. It was published with grant funds and detailed the beauty, extent, and fragility of the museum’s treasures. My motto was, “This is your stuff.” I showed people that the greatest treasures they owned were stored in stables and horse barns and were in constant danger of total loss to fire or storm. How embarrassing! Oklahomans knew about how fragile buildings can be and the destructive Oklahoma weather. The book had grown out of my many speeches and was given to anyone who had a position of any authority in Oklahoma: politicians, academics, university administrators, social club chairs, mayors, potential donors, business leaders, and so on. 

My Assistant Director, Peter Tirrell, had developed a remarkable set of traveling exhibits that opened in 75 of 77 counties over seven years with exhibits on Oklahoma natural and cultural history. We used real objects (or copies) from the collections. They were designed for malls, schools, banks, city buildings, and any kind of public space in towns across Oklahoma. Indeed, they opened in more than 400 locations in the state, bringing the museum to the people. The importance of these beautiful and diverse exhibits cannot be overstated. We were serving the people of Oklahoma in their small towns and villages. Of course, we never missed an opportunity to let the people of Oklahoma know that their stuff was in danger. Several staff members joined me in touring the state. Little by little we began to reach supporters. Indeed, by the time we were ready to build the new museum, we had reached about two thirds of the three million citizens of Oklahoma with information about the museum, its collections, and its programs, and they loved the museum.

For several years I worked with state representatives and state senators to develop a state law that recognized the museum as a state resource, not merely a university organization. In 1987, the legislature and governor approved a law that I worked with my legislators in refining. The Stovall Museum became the Oklahoma Museum of Natural History, the official natural history museum for the state of Oklahoma. The museum was no longer merely a campus museum. It is an enormous challenge to write a law and try to cover every eventuality that might arise concerning the organization far into the future. Thus I included everything
from the authority of the director, to the scope of the collections, to the hope of a new
building and expanded staff, as well as mandates to do research, build and maintain global
collections, maintain a technical library, and conduct educational activities and programs for
the people of Oklahoma.

*Heritage at Risk* struck a chord in many Oklahomans. Shortly after its publication, a group of
citizens in Norman became a support and lobbying group for a new museum: the group’s
name? *Heritage at Risk*. Their goal was to have an election for a $5 million bond commitment
on the part of the City of Norman. They worked to have a special election called by the city.
This necessitated petitions, meetings with city fathers, and public city council meeting
appearances. Such an election for a university project was most irregular. The only time the
city had provided funds to the university was when the university was founded in 1890. Now,
a century later, we were asking the city to do it again. The election question was written in
such a way that the town would not expend the five million dollars until the state put in $15
million and another $15 million was raised from private donors. I had estimated that the cost
of a new museum facility would be $35 million, so estimates were based on that goal. By the
time it was built, 15 years after the initial estimates, it cost $42.5 million.

The support group was successful, and in 1992 70% of the citizens of Norman approved the
$5 million bond issue. We had done our homework, but we were still a long way from having
the total funding. A statewide bond election was held for higher education construction
projects. Our support groups worked statewide to garner voter support. The $15 million for
the museum was a small part of the $360 million bond issue; voters approved it by more than
54%. I learned later that the museum, the only statewide project given that we were the
state’s natural history museum, was the glue that held voter support together for the whole
bond bill. Shortly after the statewide bond election was approved giving the museum project
a total of $20 million, the Noble family foundations donated $10 million (the largest donation
by a factor of 3 in the university’s history). Some friends of the Nobles donated two million
more dollars, and we were well on our way to having the money needed to begin final
planning of the new building. The provost, the chief academic officer for the university, held
a meeting of his senior staff right after the large donation had been received. The topic? How
can we stop this project now? It is hard to convince some people of the righteousness of your
cause. Had I been invited to the gathering, I would have told them to forget it. This was the people’s museum and there was nothing they could do about it.

A new president

In late 1994 David L. Boren was named President of the University of Oklahoma. Not only was he a native Oklahoman, but also had been a state representative, governor of the state, and a United States Senator for 16 years. Moreover, as a Yale and Oxford graduate, a Rhodes Scholar, and University of Oklahoma Law School alum, he was a renaissance man with wide ranging interests in politics, international affairs, history, science, and art. He was the most popular person in Oklahoma. He came to love the idea of a new museum and supported our efforts wholeheartedly. With a strong supportive hand leading the university, I was able to work closely with him to raise the additional $12.5 million that was needed to construct the building. Planning was completed and groundbreaking took place in early 1996. Just after construction began, we developed a plan to use continuing state funds for building operations to complete as many of the permanent exhibits as possible. The plan included a gradual shift in the $4 million in continuing state money from exhibit needs to hiring new staff members. Over the next four years, we built about one third of the permanent exhibits (which were frightfully expensive, with their original estimate being more than the cost of the museum building itself!), and had hired nearly a hundred people.

There were nine different university presidents and interim presidents between the time I became director and the time David Boren arrived, a period of 11 years. Some interim presidents were supportive—one had even volunteered at the museum—but the powers of an interim president are constrained. One of the “permanent” presidents was a strong supporter of the art museum, but had little understanding or appreciation of natural history. Perhaps his background as a fundamentalist preacher made it difficult to get excited about a museum founded on evolutionary principles. Of the remaining two presidents, neither was from Oklahoma and neither was a scientist. I do not think their initial views of the museum included an understanding of the importance of the collections or the significant contributions that a campus museum made to faculty and student life. To be fair, given the horrendous physical plant and very small exhibit space, it would be a challenge for most presidents to see the potential of the 100-year-old museum that could only be viewed as a
failed organization from the standpoint of its outward appearance. President Boren grasped the potential; the others did not. Of such an intangible is leadership made.

The new museum opened to the public in May 2000. We entered the new millennium after an especially long journey from Indian Territory through the 20th century and beyond. In essence, the various directors had been struggling to build a new museum since early in the 1900s. The fact that I happened to be the person in a long line of directors to actually see the results of hard work expended across the decades was humbling. They had struggled against enormous odds, often within reach of a new facility, only to have it snatched away at the last second. However, they continued to build the collections, conduct research, publish, and serve the people of Oklahoma, notwithstanding their grim surroundings. Without their efforts, my own efforts would likely have failed. The collections were the heritage of the people of Oklahoma, their collective memory of nature and culture in the state. In the end, the collections were, after all, their stuff. (Fig. 5)

Fig. 5. The Sam Noble Museum today. (Sam Noble Museum archival photo)

Museum professionals ask what is it you did to overcome the terrible situation in which your museum was positioned at the start of the drive for a new facility? Here are a few points that will prove significant:

- Show the value of the collections to your superiors and your supporters
- Make the value clear to the general public
Give individual and personalized examples of why and how collections are important and relevant

Be able to articulate why collections must be preserved and permanent

Find your audience

Put significant resources (time and money) into public relations, even if you do it yourself

Increase outreach enormously

Become a part of peoples’ lives; it is, after all, their museum

Use all staff members to reach out to everyone possible

Keep the museum in the news

Make people understand that museums are forever and that this benefits their lives, their children’s lives, and their grandchildren’s live


As the person who helped move the museum from one of the worst situations of any museum in the world to one of the best, I can say that thousands of people were involved in this project in some way or other. Some did a lot, some did less, but all were important. It was their museum and they will live with the results of our efforts far into the future. It is my hope that their future will be at least a bit brighter thanks to the existence of a first rate museum of natural and cultural history in Oklahoma: the Sam Noble Museum.

Notes

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Reframing the small university museum

Jane Thogersen, Gina Hammond and Andrew Simpson

Abstract

This paper considers the application of five specific, related frameworks, usually associated with large, well-funded institutions and discusses how they can be applied to a small campus museum. We discuss programs developed by the Australian History Museum at Macquarie University in Sydney and show how these support either individual or multiple frameworks. We therefore contend that the utilisation of this set of frameworks is a positive methodology for the consideration of current museum programs and the development of new programs. We also argue that a higher education setting, with its diversity of intellectual resources, is fertile territory for this type of museological conceptualisation.

Keywords: University museums, conceptual frameworks, collaboration

Introduction

This paper is an investigation of the ways in which a small university museum can adopt a similar outward facing philosophy and practice as that adopted by larger, mainstream museums.

The Australian History Museum (AHM) is one of a number of museums at Macquarie University in Sydney. It is located within the Department of Modern History, Politics and International Relations within the Faculty of Arts. Universities develop collections for a number of reasons.¹ The collections of the Australian History Museum grew from a pre-existing teaching collection, a dedicated exhibition space opened in 1996. The exhibition and collection themes embrace indigenous Australia, immigration, women, war and society.

Like that experienced by many university museums, the relationship between a museum and its higher education parent institution can be complex and varied. This can include the impact of changing senior university leadership on campus museums.² Macquarie University currently adopts a disjunct governance model³ for its university museums and collections, there is no centralised coordination of museum activities or governance. The museum has a Management Committee consisting of academic staff members from the host department.

Like many museums within a department within a university without a coordinated institutional strategy, it is faced with challenges of limited space, staffing, budget, public
awareness and accessibility. Unlike well-funded state and national institutions, it doesn’t have the benefit of being a destination in its own right. In this fast-paced digital-age, museums that are poorly resourced and have a limited profile by virtue of their institutional positioning, in general, often run the risk of becoming stagnant, edging ever closer to being considered a ‘glorified-storage-facility’.

There are, however, many ways that the small museum can reimagine itself in order to create and/or maintain vibrant relationships with its patrons and society in general. At the AHM we have reframed the way we operate in order to sustain a two-way relationship with our stakeholders and, essentially, continue to justify our existence as a working collection and exhibition space. We have borrowed the concepts from mainstream museology usually associated with larger, independent collecting organisations.

There are many different pressures in modern museum practice that encourage museums to be proactive, inclusive, purposeful and to have a positive impact on audiences. Much of the thinking associated with this stems from museums seeking to demonstrate their instrumental value resulting from public investment.  

This paper considers five frameworks of value provision associated with large museums and shows that they can be applied to small specific purpose higher education museums. The five frameworks for considering the Australian History Museum’s ‘conceptualization’ can be categorised into these main areas or topics: beyond the physical; informer; carer; mentor and collaborator. The first of these (beyond the physical – the projection of information beyond the walls of the museum) provides a platform that enables the other frameworks that represent different forms of engagement.

Beyond the Physical

While important in the university museum context, the ability to envision the museum ‘beyond the physical’ (the objects, the display cabinets, the storage space) is a very important step for any collecting institution. Embracing digital solutions can often be daunting, especially for museums that are low on budget, staff and time. It is, however, important to recognise that audiences today are global ... if you want them. With this in mind, and at the
risk of adopting the salesmen’s mantra, it is not a question of how can you afford to get online; but how can you afford not to?

An online presence is vital and a constantly evolving requirement for all museums. Whether it is a fully-dedicated custom website, a blogsite, or simply a page on a tourist site, as a base level this allows for the sharing of important contact, event, and collection information with potential visitors, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. A strong Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) strategy can also offer increased awareness, with high ranking sites or pages allowing the public the happy accident of ‘stumbling-upon’ them. Having an online presence does not guarantee increased revenue or increase the trickle of visitors to a flood, based on visitor behaviour – the true value is in the increased awareness; with visitors often using a museum website to find out about recent events and exhibits, search museum collections, get directions and hours of opening.

As a university museum, the AHM has both the benefits and restrictions of having a microsite within a larger institutional website. We have the benefit of a supported Content Management System (CMS) in which to build our website. From a google search perspective, being part of the university’s site assists our ranking. But we are also left with a fairly rigid structure to our website that does not always allow for creative flair and outside-the-square online exhibition design. For this reason we have decided to play to our strengths – to focus more on online content for its research and educational value, rather than its aesthetics and edgy design.

The Australian History Museum has incorporated a publicly searchable collection database to our website, allowing (and prompting) an increase in the use of the collection by researchers (academic and general public), educators and students. Collection access is now available to people who are not physically able to visit the museum and those that do visit can now plan and prepare based on their objects of interest, or can maintain a connection with us after their visit has ended. Our database is also regularly integrated into education programs and student assessment tasks at various levels of study – from primary schooling through to postgraduate degree programs.

Other than the opportunities of awareness and information sharing, being online also allows for a virtual exhibition space. Where space is at a premium, this becomes an infinite extension
of the museum’s physical presence. Not just a solution to space, online exhibitions allow for the easy integration of mixed media and related information in a way that may be less fluid in a physical display, all of which can be viewed by a virtual-visitor anywhere and at any time. Online exhibitions also allow for international partnership projects, as well as ease of integration with education programs across primary, high school and tertiary institutions in both their use and development.

Social Media, like it or not, is a driving force in today’s society, so small museums owe it to themselves to join that conversation and the potential it offers. Social history museums, in particular, are ripe with prospects for social sharing platforms. Not subject to as many copyright related restrictions as institutions such as art galleries, the social history museum houses a plethora of quirky, relatable and mundanely fascinating material that can reach a wide audience and appeal to them on many levels. Beyond this, different social sharing platforms can allow the museum to adopt different personas in order to connect with different social, cultural and age groups.

Currently, the AHM’s Social Media portfolio includes Twitter, Facebook, Flickr and the newly adopted Instagram. Social Media has been a platform for sharing object information in relation to important events and calendar dates as well as creating challenges, quizzes and games using the collection as the foundation for these – but it also offers huge potential to engage in multi-directional conversations that feed back into and expand the information the museum has about its collection. It is a useful way to connect with and support peers, and to develop an awareness of the Museum and Collection sector in general. As social media is not so dependent on computer infrastructure, much of it can be driven by smart phone technologies.

For the small museum, a social media portfolio is also a great way of driving engagement with younger members of the community as well as student interns and volunteers. At the AHM we recognise that aptly named ‘digital natives’ – a generation of people born into the digital era – are constantly surrounded by a large variety of continuously evolving information technologies. Harnessing representatives from this generation has the potential of developing novel connections with new audiences and museum content. An example of the value of this to the AHM are projects that have brought in undergraduate and postgraduate Media and
Marketing Studies students at the University. This has provided fresh perspectives, as well as different ways of thinking and doing; the relationships forged with these students and educators has illustrated the value of the social history museum to a new stream within the university.

In order to improve and future proof the Social Media portfolio plans for the museum, it has recently been used as a case study client for a Media Studies Postgraduate unit at the university. The unit assigns a team of students to assess our Social Media Portfolio and design a strategy to improve the relevance our current activity to prospective stakeholders. Because this unit will run each year, potentially with each new intake of students comes new and innovative ideas to drive change and innovative practice. It is the potential of these sorts of collaborations that allows us to posit that university museums are fertile ground for experimental museum practice.

Perhaps one of the more ground-breaking projects we have been working on recently is the adoption of 3-Dimensional technology solutions. It is very easy to get caught-up in the hype that is 3D technology, especially the wonderment that is 3D printing, though the AHM has primarily focused its efforts on the adoption of 3D scanning. As a university museum we have the benefit of having fantastic IT facilities, especially in relation to 3D technology. The previously available hardware and software was not simple. For this reason, we were fortunate enough to partner with other department projects within the Faculty of Arts, so that our interns could receive training and supervision whilst scanning objects from our collection. The museum conducted a pilot intern placement program in the second half of 2014; the success of this was marked with further grants to work on larger and more complex projects in this field. A revised project on a larger scale, with upgraded hardware and software (that cuts the scanning time dramatically) commenced at the start of 2016.

The main aim of the 3D scanning project is to create an online resource of high resolution 3D models that can be accessed by any person with the internet anywhere, any time – thus increasing the collection’s visibility tremendously. The museum can then continue to build education packages around these resources for primary, high school and tertiary groups that can be simply downloaded from the web portal. The catalogue should also encourage ease of integration with existing education programs as well as academic research, whilst providing
rural and remote ‘visitors’ a chance to experience the collection in full. Other than the immense educational value the 3D catalogue will provide, it will also provide an object back-up solution and support the preservation of the physical objects in the collection. The museum is fortunate to be able to create relationships with staff and students from Education programs on campus, providing useful experiences for the students and building on the resources the museum has to offer. Copies of rare and fragile items can be used for object-based learning programs.\textsuperscript{10}

3D digital images of the objects can also be integrated into physical displays through the use of Augmented Reality solutions as well as guided-tour apps. This allows for objects, seen behind glass, to be viewed at all angles and allows for the visitor to further engage with a display.

It is also important to understand that the physical and digital are not mutually exclusive. At the AHM we try to integrate both into an exhibit in a way that appeals to a broader audience. The integration of digital elements into a physical display can broaden the appreciation and understanding of the content, allowing for the display to be seen also for its technical and creative-design elements, potentially broadening the visitor profile. This can be something as simple as integrating a QR code into a display that directs a visitor to an instructional video clip, audio file, image slideshow or more information. Alternatively, it could be creating a digital tour experience for a physical display using a custom-design app or already available solutions that are currently free for museums to use.\textsuperscript{11}

**Informer**

The association of the museum as “informer” is nothing new, museums have been houses of sage and curious wisdom since their inception. Much has been written on museums as information providers.\textsuperscript{12} The link between collections and knowledge in higher education is well established.\textsuperscript{13} Because of this long association it is often easy for the museum to rest on the laurels of its predecessors, seeing a few labels as enough to maintain the role of informer to a crowd that can bring Google up on their mobile phones in a matter of seconds. The key here is not to focus on what other informers might distract from the museum, but rather to understand how these other informers can be utilised to further support and enhance the museum experience.
The Australian History Museum has a scalable education model, with a base source-work analysis program that can be reshaped, built-on and adapted depending on the student level and curriculum topic. This allows for a tried and tested solution with the ability to reach a wide educational market. Beyond this, educational programs must be relevant; we tailor our school programs and kits to current curriculum requirements, so teachers and students engage in a significant and worthwhile manner. Due to our physical location in NSW, our face-to-face education programs have been predominantly developed in consideration of the NSW Board of Studies curriculum. The education kits that are created in relation to our online exhibitions, however, take on a national curriculum focus. An example of this is the different versions of the ‘Migrant to Citizen’ education program that were developed specifically to take in to consideration those variances in focus.

Embracing the role of university museum, the AHM supports and integrates, wherever possible, with departments and faculties on campus. Our artefacts often form part of student research and assessment tasks and the museum often hosts tutorials and seminars. Use of physical objects are at the core of a variety of tutorials developed as part of specific university level units of study, as well as primary and high school programs. Collaborative projects and exhibitions staged across the campus with other collections have further developed an awareness of the AHM to new types of audiences. A useful example of this was the 2014 exhibition 'Affinities: Seven Museums, Fifty Objects' which was an exercise in highlighting the synergies between seven very different university collections. The importance of what this exhibition presented was recognised with a 2014 MAGNA award.

Seeing the museum as informer is not just about creating education programs for schools and university students. The museum should also be an informer to the community (or communities) in which it sits, and a range of organisations visit and are involved in a variety of capacities, from RSL branches and genealogical societies to aged care facilities. The museum is constantly looking for new ways to engage with new audiences. We also see benefit in understanding that the role of informer goes both ways. We rely on our stakeholders to build on the stories, histories and experiences being told and shared through the museum. Adding interactive elements to a display can create another dimension where the exhibit not only informs the audience but becomes a platform for the audience to inform others. What better way to engage with the audience than to make them a part of the story.
being told or to give them an opportunity to share their own experience and history. All collaborative endeavours in modern museum work are opportunities to learn and grow.

**Carer**

The idea of the museum as carer has been a subtext of mainstream museum work for many years, but only recently has there been some theoretical exploration in terms of new museology. It is most commonly couched in terms of museum service provision for the elderly, something not often associated within a corporatized higher education system. Yet it represents a unique way in which higher education can provide meaningful qualitative community engagement.

While the “Museum as Carer” is perhaps a less common reframing in this context, it is one that is currently gaining momentum and represents an extension of earlier programs run by the University Art Gallery. While it is discussed only briefly here, we anticipate it will become an area of increasing focus in coming years to ensure it is engaging with the wider community in meaningful ways. This approach is built around the concept of how the museum can give back and support the community in which it exists (be it local or far reaching). It is important to not adopt the build-it-and-they-will-come attitude, but rather assess the community wants and needs and actively work towards collaboratively addressing perceived shortfalls. Ongoing research projects will support our understanding of community needs and development opportunities.

The Australian History Museum sits on Macquarie University grounds in North Ryde, and a number of Aged Care Facilities are located in close proximity. For this reason it was considered a useful community contribution to develop a dementia therapy program based on the concept of reminiscence therapy. A pilot program was developed and tested in 2013, Music, Memory and Museums, in collaboration with Psychology and Cognitive Science staff and students on campus. The program integrated live music with social history objects as a form of reminiscence therapy and was successful in engaging with dementia sufferers. Since then the AHM has further developed the program and has integrated the object therapy into the Art and Alzheimer program at the Macquarie University Art Gallery. The new collaborative program or Art and Object Engagement has developed well, resulting in a regular group of attendees, and will hopefully lead to future research partnerships with Psychology, Sociology.
and Cognitive Science staff and students. The potential for value adding in an environment that incorporates a broad span of public higher education disciplines is significant.

The Australian History Museum also has well established programs relevant for local migrant residents. These can also be framed as “Museum as Carer” programs. This is important given that New South Wales is the only Australian state that doesn’t have a museum dedicated to either its immigration history or history, a remarkable anomaly indeed. One that was compounded by the closure of the Migration Heritage Centre at the Powerhouse Museum and indicative of a policy vacuum in this area from the current (and previous) state government. Furthermore, to provide institutional context, Macquarie University is home to a student population of over 40,000 representing over 100 nationalities.¹⁹

The museum is therefore constantly looking for ways to engage with a large international student population. An area currently being targeted is ESL (English as Second Language) programs, with discussions focussing on ways that the social history museum can provide context for these students. Introduction to Australian social history programs are run in the museum using sources to discuss different aspects of Australian history and culture with people new to the country. This process can also obviously be framed as socially inclusive practice that aligns with the universities principles and practices.

**Mentor**

The Museum as Mentor is a very beneficial and scalable concept. It is one that can be considered at either the organisational or individual level. They are usually opportunities that encourage exploration, observation and creativity. The former is usually considered in terms of larger state or national organisations mentoring small or volunteer organisations, in the later it relates to the provision of internship and work experience opportunities.

It has already provided opportunities to broaden experience and build networks; it is reliant on the Museum’s commitment to provide access to training in various aspects of museum management, while focussing on mutually beneficial gains. For example, comprehensive intern and volunteer exposure to areas such as collection management (tools and processes) and curatorial training ensures that what they then produce as a part of the program has a defined benefit to the museum. The Australian History Museum does not have a budget to
pay interns or volunteers and thus recognises the need for placement tasks to be of high educational and vocational value. As such placements are specifically designed around projects so the intern or volunteer develops a sense of ownership and responsibility, whilst improving both industry-specific and broader project management skillsets.

University museums, unlike other small museums, can often offer students, interns and volunteers opportunities to engage with new technologies whilst exploring the potential of their specific degrees (this can be as broad as marketing or computer science). As mentor, the Australian History Museum, also provides opportunities for collaborative, cross-disciplinary group placements where students from different backgrounds (such as engineering and computer science to modern history and education) can work together and share different approaches. Benefits of the mentor relationship for the AHM include integration of new perspectives and approaches, availability of a varied skillset, the ability to resource, and thus take-on, more projects, and increased exposure through community engagement.

As a university museum it is also important to develop a mentor/mentee relationship with peers. The AHM relies on the many collections at Macquarie University for assistance and guidance in different areas. The Macquarie University’s Museums and Collections (MUMAC) group consist of staff occupying a range of different positions responsible for the management of individual museums and collections on campus covering the sciences, history and the arts. The MUMAC group meets regularly to discuss collaborative activities and share resources. The MUMAC group essentially acts as a sector self-help group within the higher education institution. The museum is also planning to develop opportunities with sector industry peers and external partners in order to share knowledge and experience and learn from the experiences of others.

**Collaborator**

Finally, collaboration brings all of the above together. Museums as social enterprises in the context of modern museology are increasingly viewed more as collaborators than experts. This is part of the reorientation away from objects and collections and towards people and relationships. It is just as important for a small university museum to pursue this approach as it is for a large state funded institution.
Without understanding the essential nature of this approach to reframing a small university museum each topic discussed above is likely to fail or at least be limited in reach and impact. Without a central commitment to the importance of building collaborative relationships, projects and solutions will not reach their greatest potential. While a museum situated within a university has a readily available collection of potential internal stakeholders, it takes an enormous amount of negotiating to develop relationships that will ultimately be mutually beneficial and allow those potential stakeholders to understand the power of working together.

At the time of writing, the museum maintains relationships on campus that include various departments within the Faculties of Arts, Science and Engineering, Education and Human Sciences, and various service provider groups such as Marketing and Information Technology. Work with academic departments in this capacity ranges from source-based assessment unit integration and museum content translation and interpretation through to the loaning of items as film props or social media portfolio development and analysis. As noted above the Australian History Museum also works with other museums and collections on campus to create collaborative exhibitions and share resources.

Externally, some of the many relationships developed as a result of collaborative engagement include those with many aged care facilities, primary schools, high schools, the Greek Consulate in Sydney, local RSL groups, local genealogy groups, historical societies and PROBUS clubs. By taking advantage of the Corporate Engagement section of the university and the resources they provide on campus we have engaged with corporate partners in the local business park. Although quite new, this relationship both increases exposure for the museum and collection and offers the potential of financial support.

Reframing the operations at the Australia History Museum has not only produced sustainable new multi-faceted relationships with stakeholders, the end result is also empowering for the casual visitor who ultimately benefits from the richness of these relationships and the diverse ways knowledge about the ‘object’ can be disseminated.

Notes

3. One of the four-tiered system outlined by Simpson (2012), Modelling governance structures for university museums and collections.

4. These issues have been explored by Scott (2009).

5. There is an extensive historical literature on this subject, for example: Besser (1997), The transformation of the museum and the way it’s perceived; Cameron (2003), Digital Futures I: Museum collections, digital technologies, and the cultural construction of knowledge; Coburn & Baca (2004), Beyond the gallery walls: Tools and methods for leading endusers to collections information; and various contributors in Anderson (ed) (2012), Reinventing the Museum: The Evolving Conversation on the Paradigm Shift.

6. The database for the collection was developed separately from other collection information systems at the university, this is a characteristic of a disjunct governance system (Simpson 2012) where an institution lacks centralised coordination. At Macquarie University this issue is currently being partially addressed by bringing collection data from the Faculty of Arts into the one system.

7. Simpson et al. (2013), Museum literacy that is virtually engaging.

8. Simpson (2006), University Museums and an Incubator and Interchange for Museum Practice.


10. Simpson & Hammond (2012), University collections and object based pedagogies.

11. One example of this used by the museum is the izi.TRAVEL app. (https://izi.travel/en)


15. The MAGNA Awards (Museums And Galleries National Awards) are awarded annually by Museums Australia. Affinities won an award in 2014 in the temporary and travelling exhibition category.


20. The MUMAC group was previously a formal committee of the university reporting to the Vice-Chancellor. This arrangement ceased in 2006 with a change of leadership, but the group continues to meet and work together in an informal capacity.

References


Real and virtual: The role of computed tomography and 3D imaging in museum practice

Jaye McKenzie-Clark and John Magnussen

Abstract

The role of a museum involves the acquisition, exhibition, conservation, communication and research of the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity, and plays an important part in the management of our cultural inheritance.

Commonly, however, audience interaction with museum collections is restricted because of the significance and value of the exhibits. To overcome this difficulty, museums frequently duplicate artefacts to facilitate tactile audience participation, thereby increasing the educational value of the assemblage. Traditional reproduction methods are problematic, however, in terms of the accuracy of the copy and the impact on the physical integrity of the original object. Similarly, conservation and research of museum collections often requires invasive techniques and investigative compositional analysis of artefacts, but this is also constrained because most analytical techniques employed today are partially or totally destructive.

This paper outlines the use of medical Computed Tomography (CT) and 3D printing in museum practice, and highlights the potential of these methods to achieve the key museum objectives of communication, conservation and research.

Keywords: Computed Tomography, 3D imaging, 3D printing, museums, education.

Introduction

Museums throughout the world differ enormously in terms of the size and theme of their collections, yet it is generally agreed that every museum has three main principles under which it operates. The first aim is to educate the museum audience, to communicate information to the viewing public. Secondly, each museum has a responsibility to classify, preserve and display collections in an appropriate manner to ensure the conservation of the collection for future generations. A third, perhaps less apparent goal, is to support investigative research, to study and analyse the collection in order to understand better the nature of the objects and their origins. This paper discusses the role of medical CT scanners and 3D printing within the museum sector and the potential of these techniques to facilitate these three key objectives. The article focuses primarily on ancient artefacts housed in the Museum of Ancient Cultures at Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia.
Educators have long recognised the value of a wide range of learning and teaching stimuli such as visual, auditory and tactile experiences for knowledge acquisition. Physical interaction with objects is identified as a valid learning and teaching tool. In the study of antiquities, however, the impediment to learning is the inability to handle, examine or touch valuable artefacts. For security reasons, museums create a visual or physical barrier between the visitor and the object. To overcome this difficulty of audience disengagement museums often create replicas or copies of expensive and/or fragile artefacts so that the public can interact with the objects. Accurate replicas of artefacts from collections therefore have a valid role to play in the education of museum audiences; they provide the visitor with the chance to closely inspect and touch objects, which would normally be out of bounds. The museum experience is thereby enhanced when the audience can physically engage with, rather than merely view the object.

There are complications however with the traditional techniques employed to make replicas in terms of the accuracy of the copy and the impact on the physical integrity of the object. In the past, contact moulding techniques were commonly employed to recreate a solid object (as opposed to images). This produced a negative or relief of the object to be copied, which in turn was used to mould the replica in positive form.

This class of contact moulding suffers several significant limitations. It is not without risk or even certainty of damage that a physical compound would have to be applied to the surface of an object in close enough contact to render a faithful reproduction of its features. It is also often the case, due to the physical complexity of the object, that the internal features or interstices cannot be captured. Today museums rarely permit this technique to be used because of possible damage to the artefact.

More recently, 3D surface scanning has been used as a method of capturing the external surface features of objects, which can then be digitally stored, manipulated and displayed. Whilst avoiding the pitfalls of object damage due to direct physical contact, this technique is not without its own restrictions. The surface to be recorded needs to be visible to the optical capture system; the scanner cannot record internal or shadowed areas. Similarly the object must be mounted or held in some manner and the area of mounting will need to be scanned
separately and arbitrarily reconstructed. Difficulty of capture also occurs when artefacts have surfaces with very high or very low reflectivity or if they are partially transparent.

Until relatively recently, such surface scanning was limited in its ability to be converted back into a solid object, however with the advent and subsequent popularisation of 3D printing techniques, this is now possible.\textsuperscript{6}

This paper explores the application of high-resolution, large field-of-view computed tomography (CT) for the rapid and accurate digital capture of objects, which can be easily converted into a form suitable for 3D printing. It also investigates the use of CT technology for conservation purposes and discusses the potential of CT for compositional and research analysis of museum objects.

**CT background**

Although industrial CT scanners are used by some museums,\textsuperscript{7} medical scanners have many advantages over their industrial counterparts. The cost of medical CT scanning is comparatively less, because charges are based on the number of scans, rather than the timed use of the equipment. Scan times are also quicker. To accommodate patient needs, recent advances in the underlying technology have meant that scan times on medical CT have decreased dramatically and most are completed in seconds. By comparison industrial CT scanners often take hours to finish just one scan. With time a financial consideration, such advantages and disadvantages must be considered when selecting an appropriate scanning technique.

High-resolution, large field-of-view CT scanners are now commonplace in hospitals and medical imaging centres throughout the world, making access easier, especially as most medical scanners are usually not in use after business hours. Industrial CT scanners are designed for relatively small objects, and have a limited field-of-view, whereas medical CT scanners enable larger objects to be analysed. It is commonplace for medical CT scanners to have a transverse field-of-view of exceeding 500 mm and a longitudinal scan range often approaching 2,000 mm. This allows the simple placement of quite large objects for image acquisition without the need for dismantling.

Spatial resolution in modern multi-slice medical scanners varies from approximately 0.625 mm down to 0.075 mm and such scanners can produce volume datasets that provide equal
resolution in all axes. In contrast, industrial CT scanners can be taken as low as nanometers, however this requires a sample to be removed from the study object, thereby resulting in the partial destruction of the artefact.

3D printing background

3D printing relates to a large gamut of techniques historically most commonly used for the rapid prototyping of industrial designs prior to mass production. In contrast to most other bespoke methods of production of solid objects, instead of starting with a greater amount of material and taking away from it (for example, carving a statue out of stone - sometimes now referred to as subtractive manufacturing), this technique is based upon the serial addition of numerous layers of a material, each often very thin and randomly complex, until a whole object is obtained. These methods consequently enable the production of objects that are highly detailed, both internally and externally. Such techniques are currently referred to as additive manufacturing. The complexity of the technique and its ability to create hollow or internally detailed objects is not limited therefore by the access to remove material from the outside of a larger object.

Whilst some earlier systems only used relatively soft or sometimes fragile polymers or powders, recent advances have meant that there is now a wide range of possible printed materials ranging from wood to rubber-like compounds, a wide variety of plastic as well as metals, including stainless steel, titanium, bronze and even ceramics. 8

The Project: CT Scanning and 3D Printing in Practice

As a ‘proof of concept’ for the use of CT scanning and 3D printing for museum education programs, conservation and research purposes, several artefacts were chosen for study from the collection of the Museum of Ancient Cultures at Macquarie University.

The first object was a Roman mould-made bowl, accession number MU 3260. The vessel was manufactured in La Graufesenque in Southern Gaul, modern-day France, and dates to between AD 40 and AD 85. It is a wide shallow bowl, Dragendorff form 29, measuring 217mm in diameter and 103mm in height, with moulded decoration on the external surface covering the area from just above the foot rim to within 26mm of the rim. This vessel is completely intact apart from a small hole drilled into the foot ring of the bowl by previous destructive compositional provenance testing. The bowl is extremely well preserved, with a high gloss slip
coating. Examples of such quality are extremely rare; consequently access to the bowl is restricted even for Museum staff.

The vessel was scanned on a GE HD750 (GE Medical Systems, Milwaukee, Wisconsin) 128 slice, fast-switching, dual energy CT scanner located at Macquarie University Hospital in Sydney, Australia. The scan was performed using a conventional, single energy, polychromatic technique (MDCT). The bowl was packaged securely throughout the scan; cushioned by polystyrene foam pellets within a radiolucent transport box, which was aligned on the patient bed of the scanner. The artefact remained in the box during the entire scanning process.

The resulting volume dataset was converted into a triangulated mesh model, a stereolithography file, suitable for 3D printing manufacture. This was performed using Mimics (i.Materialise, Belgium). The bowl was subsequently 3D printed using Accura Xtreme material (3D Systems, Rock Hill, USA), a UV cured photopolymer. The replica was printed using a stereolithography process, UV cured, primed and then painted using a Pantone colour matched to Munsell 2.5YR 4/8 red, the colour of the original vessel. Students and visitors to the Museum can now handle this replica, see Figure 1, enabling them to see and feel the detail of the original object.

Fig. 1. The original bowl MU 3260 on the left and the 3D printed replica on the right.

The Museum of Ancient Cultures collection also includes ancient cuneiform clay tablets dating from the late third millennium BC. These artefacts contain some of the earliest known forms of written communication. They document the legal and commercial transactions in practice.
within the cultural society to which they belong and as such hold valuable information about everyday life in ancient times. The tablets consist of rectangular clay slabs that were inscribed with a reed stylus when wet and then usually dried in the sun. Consequently they are extremely fragile, a factor which hinders investigation and research of these artefacts.

Some cuneiform tablets were also wrapped and sealed in a sheet of clay that formed an envelope. Such tablets commonly contain legal documents or agreements and were used to safely secure a record of these official arrangements. Usually a brief summary of the enclosed document was written on the outside of the envelope and sealed with the mark of those involved. In cases of a dispute, the outer clay envelope was broken in order to check the original agreement.

Envelope cuneiform tablets create a dilemma for modern-day archaeologists however; to reveal the inner document the outer clay envelope must be broken in a process that cannot be reversed. Once the envelope is opened the integrity of the artefact is compromised, because in the process the clay envelope is fragmented. Another predicament for researchers is that not all these tablets contain inner documents and it is difficult to tell until the tablet is broken which contains an internal record. Large numbers of cuneiform tablets are found in collections throughout the world. For instance the University of Oxford’s Cuneiform Digital Library Initiative\(^9\) has more than 270,000 tablets in its catalogue. Not only is the number of sealed tablets within this assemblage difficult to estimate, but also the intact sealed cuneiform tablets, containing a wealth of information, remain unread.

To capture the fine surface detail of cuneiform tablets a different type of medical CT scanner was selected. Cone Beam Computed Tomography (CBCT) is a technique historically most commonly employed for dental imaging due to the inherently low radiation exposure and high contrast resolution of the systems. Ironically this is a situation ideally suited to the imaging of ancient pottery, which has an effective atomic number range (\(Z_{\text{eff}}\)) well within those normally encountered in clinical imaging situations.\(^{10}\)

Six of the 24 cuneiform tablets, housed in the Museum of Ancient Cultures, were selected for study. These represented tablets with a range of surface feature preservation and fragmentation. Some tablets partially revealed the presence of hidden or wrapped inner tablets, whilst for other intact tablets the internal structure was unknown.
Scans were performed on a Newtom 5G horizontal bore CBCT (QR Systems, Italy) located at Macquarie University Hospital, Sydney, Australia. Given the size of the cuneiform tablets, it was possible to use the smallest acquisition fields of view on the CBCT.

Each tablet was scanned separately by placing it onto a low density, rigid foam carrier in the isocentre of the scanner. The resulting scan data of each artefact was then used to create a high definition Quicktime VR, a type of easily manipulable 3D image, to facilitate ease of translation.

The datasets ranged from 250-350MB in size, depending upon the physical dimensions of the tablet being scanned. Of the six tablets, three specimens, MU 2092, MU 4084 and MU 4122, were shown not to contain an inner tablet. The remaining three tablets, MU 2091, MU 4083 and MU 4129, did contain an inner tablet, as demonstrated by the air gap between the inner and outer layers, as seen in MU 2091 in Figure 2.

![Fig. 2. Axial, sagittal and coronal cross sections through tablet MU2091 showing the variation in air gap present.](image)

Of the three tablets, two with the largest air gaps were chosen for further analysis. Components of the envelope were then digitally removed from the applicable tablets using a combination of manual and semi-automatic segmentation techniques on the GE Advantage Workstation and further Quicktime VR models created. Using a combination of feature extraction based upon density boundaries and also carefully digitally cutting away excess
outer envelope material, the surface of the inner tablet could be revealed in each case, revealing the text for the first time in over 2,500 years.

The scan data from the intact tablet, MU 2092, was also used to create 3D printed copies of the original. The cross-sectional data was once again converted into a format suitable for 3D printing, a stereolithography file format or STL, and sent to i.Materialise, Belgium for printing. As seen in Figure 3, two copies were produced, one at full size, using high-detail resin with a feature detail of ~0.2mm, and the other at one and a half full size, using an ABS material with a feature detail of 0.3mm. These replicas now enable students and researchers to study the tablet without damage to the original object.

Investigative research of museum objects also includes compositional analysis for provenance purposes or to verify the authenticity of the artefact. Today, museums are increasingly aware of the need to take a conservative approach to such investigation because of the high risk of damage to the artefact. Museum collections are usually irreplaceable; consequently the
removal of samples from objects using conventional analytical techniques is currently rarely permitted.

Preliminary work, using dual-energy CT scanning on ancient ceramics from Pompeii, was undertaken to test compositional results against those achieved by a previous study,\textsuperscript{11} which used traditional methods of thin section petrological analysis, Inductively Coupled Plasma Mass Spectrometry (ICP-MS) and Inductively Coupled Plasma Atomic Emission Spectrometry (ICP-AES).

The same CT equipment (GE HD750, 128 slice fast switching, dual energy CT (DECT)) used for the investigation of the Roman bowl was employed for the investigation of the Pompeian pottery. Once the total of 52 samples were scanned, areas within each sample were selected for compositional analysis. Numerous parts of the same artefact were analyzed to determine possible differences in composition. The size of the sample was controlled to give consistent relative comparisons across all samples. The resulting data was compared with the results from the previous study, which used traditional analytical techniques.

The CT study gave similar results,\textsuperscript{12} but, in sharp contrast to the original destructive procedures, is a totally non-destructive technique. In fact the pottery samples used in this study were not even removed from the plastic storage bags before scanning.

**Results**

The MDCT scan of the Roman bowl took approximately 4 seconds and the resulting data enabled full size 3D replicas to be printed. These copies precisely reproduced the complex and intricate surface features of the original artefact and even the 2mm hole, previously drilled into the foot rim to remove a sample for compositional analysis, was faithfully recreated. Two facsimiles of the bowl were printed. The first was presented to the benefactors who originally donated the vessel, in acknowledgement of their generous support, and the second reproduction is now used for educational and research purposes. Importantly the valuable original is back on display, safe in a locked glass cabinet.

The analysis of the cuneiform tablets using CBCT required minimal handling of these fragile artefacts, thereby ensuring their safety and preservation. The digital scans enabled the presence of an inner tablet to be quickly determined and allowed the text on the surface of the inner tablet to be revealed. CBCT permitted the physical construction of the envelope to
be analysed and also provided valuable information on the physical state of preservation of the artefact. Many hairline cracks were detected in tablets that to the naked eye looked robust, highlighting the extreme care needed when handling these objects.

Although scan time varied marginally, depending on the size of the artefact, each tablet took approximately 32 seconds to scan. Consequently all the tablets were processed in one session, without the need to constantly move or handle each tablet. The data was saved for current and future study. Reconstruction using CBCT and GE Advantage Workstation was also found to be time and cost effective.

The ability to create an accurate Quicktime VR of the inner tablet enabled cuneiform specialists to manipulate the scan data model of each tablet to accommodate the best light for translation, without the inherent risks associated with moving the original ancient artefacts. The writing on cuneiform tablet wraps around the curved edges of the tablet often making reading difficult. The Quicktime VR permitted scholars to read the text without the problems of warped images. The digital nature of the scans means that the cuneiform tablet data can also be stored indefinitely and copied or transferred to researchers or specialists around the world, as required.

The 3D printed copies of one of the solid cuneiform tablets, MU 2092, made for easier analysis of the text. Moreover, the text on the enlarged version was found to be clearer to read than the full size version, making the translation of the tablet more straightforward and less time consuming.13

The data capture of pottery sherds from Pompeii for compositional analysis using DECT was time efficient and 52 samples were scanned in approximately 8 seconds. Analysis of the data showed that this technique produced comparative results to conventional methods. The grouping of ceramic fabrics was found to be as accurate as the conventional destructive techniques.

The three techniques of MDCT, DECT and CBCT all provided 3D spatial information of the objects studied in this project, enabling examination of the structural integrity of the artefacts. This capacity was especially useful when examining cracked or fragmented objects. Consequently complex forms or fragile, vulnerable artefacts were identified, ensuring that in the future they are studied and handled with appropriate care.
Conclusion

The results of the project show that the use of CT scanning within the museum sector holds promising possibilities. Large numbers of objects can be recorded rapidly and economically and items can be scanned in protective packaging thus ensuring safer handling and reducing the risk of accidental damage. Indeed entire collections can now be analyzed quickly and securely, while still ensuring the structural integrity of valuable or fragile objects.

The results of the study show that medical CT technology has the potential to enrich a wide range of pedagogical experiences for students of all ages and stages of learning. CT data can be used to produce accurate 3D printed replicas for educational and research purposes. The digital data used to create 3D models for printing can also be uploaded to online teaching units, thus allowing the artefacts to be examined in 3D by students and researchers throughout the world.

The ability of CT technology to reveal the internal structure of artefacts thereby detecting defects that are not visible to the naked eye will mean that at-risk objects within collections can be identified and treated appropriately. This is an important consideration in the conservation management of museum collections.

It is evident that DECT also provides a valuable technique with which to confirm the characterization of large quantities of objects, especially ceramics. Although the analysis of non-organic material using DECT is in its infancy, such scanners are increasingly available worldwide and their employment will possibly reduce the sometimes-prohibitive cost and time of traditional compositional analyses. More importantly, DECT analysis may negate the need for the destruction of ancient material, a finite and irreplaceable resource, which is often the only surviving link to ancient cultures and civilizations. Additionally the ability to analyze the composition of objects without touching them has the potential to not only safeguard precious material for future generations, but will mean an increase in the amount of information available for researchers.

The employment of non-destructive DECT analysis also holds possibilities for international collaboration between research facilities and authorities in charge of ancient archaeological sites. Understandably such authorities seldom allow artefacts to be sampled and very rarely permit material to be removed from the location. The advantage of DECT in this scenario is
illustrated by another current project, the analysis of Roman domestic tableware with potters’ stamps from the ancient Roman site of Carsulae, Italy. Authorization from the Italian Ministry of Culture to transport 130 diagnostic fragments of pottery to Macquarie University, Australia was permitted on the stipulation that the material was returned to Italy in exactly the same condition as it left the country. This approval was granted by the Italian authorities only because of the non-destructive, no-touch nature of the analysis and without this assurance the pottery would not have been made available for research.

If required, digital data generated by CT scanning can be shared globally, facilitating other collaborative research projects. This data can also be stored indefinitely providing a valuable resource for current and future investigation. In the event of damage or destruction of the original artefact, such as the current on-going devastation of cultural heritage in the Middle East, the digital record will also guarantee the safekeeping of the object details for further study or reconstruction purposes.

The replication of museum objects using 3D printing will benefit researchers and students alike. In particular the ability to handle accurate replicas of artefacts has implications for the visually impaired or those who have spatial reasoning difficulties. Moreover the ability to produce larger scaled replicas of original objects will also be an advantage to researchers where the original artefact is small and/or contains very fine detail.

It is now evident that the use CT and 3D printing techniques at the Museum of Ancient Cultures at Macquarie University has enhanced visitor and student comprehension of ancient societies, identified at-risk fragile artefacts and assisted research investigations of objects within the collection. These results were achieved whilst maintaining the integrity, conservation and safety of valuable artefacts from antiquity.

CT scanning and 3D printing enable new ways of interacting with museum collections. The techniques offer quick and cost effective tools to digitally investigate museum collections in a totally non-destructive manner. CT scanning and 3D printing have the potential to revolutionise the way in which museums manage their collections and offer the opportunity to enhance and widen modern museum practice.
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Notes

1. International Council of Museums: ICOM Statutes adopted during the 21st General Conference in Vienna Austria in 2007
7. For instance, the Natural History Museum in London has installed an industrial computer tomography system. The American Museum of Natural History used an industrial scanner at a Ford motor company testing facility, to scan two woolly mammoths. The findings were published on-line in a special issue of the Journal of Paleontology in 2014.
8. See for example: http://i.materialise.com/materials
13. pers. com. Dr Luis Sidall

References


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This article has been independently peer reviewed
Reminiscence Cottage: A multisensory space for people living with dementia

Sara Pearce

Abstract

The Reminiscence Cottage has been designed as a multisensory space for people living with dementia. It is designed to enhance the experience of a person with dementia, through quality of life indicators like humour and personal identity, and through encouraging a person living with dementia to interact in a public space. Support materials for carers and loved ones help to enhance and support the visitor’s experience. This paper explores the process the National Wool Museum went through to design and set-up the Cottage space and to introduce it to the community. Future research will explore design and implementation of an evaluation tool.

Key Words: dementia, identity, multisensory, public space, reminiscence

Our primary aim with this project was to develop a safe, accessible, and engaging gallery space specifically designed around the needs of an audience suffering from some forms of dementia. The Reminiscence Cottage was envisioned as an immersive space that a visitor with dementia would quickly feel safe and familiar in, a multisensory space that would prompt reminiscence through sight, sound, touch and smell, and a program that would support visitors through the reminiscence journey. Many institutions in Australia and overseas offer reminiscence materials as outreach kits. Our understanding is that this space is unique within museums in Australia. We have created an entire space that evokes a particular time period and life experience. It is a space that is supported by paid and volunteer staff and facilitated programs.

This space, a replica millworker's cottage, had already been observed to engage visitors in some reminiscence activities; however, the space did not feature a coherent time period and had some access issues. Redevelopment had several phases including volunteer recruitment, working with Alzheimer’s Australia to identify access needs, and planning and development of the cottage space. We worked with community members to select and source relevant household items for the cottage. Finally, we implemented programming, again working with Alzheimer's Australia and other aged care groups, to design a relevant and accessible workshop structure and to train staff.
The National Wool Museum is currently maintained and managed by the City of Greater Geelong. As the National Wool Museum, it celebrates the story of wool from the sheep’s back to the clothes rack, with a regional focus on individuals involved in the industry. As a local government museum, it features two temporary galleries of exhibitions and programs that focus on local stories or bringing experiences to Geelong that residents might otherwise not access. Approximately half our annual visitation comes from Geelong and region - this is our target program audience. Part of our goal in supporting public engagement and lifelong learning is to identify, develop and deliver programs that work across a broad range of ages and abilities. As with many museums, a large portion of our audience are older adults and seniors. We get a number of seniors’ groups visiting, including from aged care facilities. Prior to the Cottage, we were not offering any targeted programming for this audience, particularly for the large and growing community of Victorians suffering from some form of dementia.

In 2012, dementia was identified as a public health priority by the World Health Organization (WHO). In our local government role, we have a responsibility in delivering on Council priorities in community health and well-being. The four-year City Plan for the City of Greater Geelong notes that “As the closest level of government to the community, local Government is best placed to respond to community needs, concerns and aspirations”. The local government area of Geelong has the highest estimated prevalence of dementia cases in Victoria and these numbers will continue to increase over the coming years. This project directly supported the above-noted Council aims in engaging our community in positive social interactions and health outcomes.

The Cottage has been an opportunity to publicly engage with a community living with dementia, and to acknowledge that dementia can be a long-term condition so it is important that public facilities and spaces include this growing audience in their access plans. The Reminiscence Cottage was created through the redevelopment of an existing and popular component of the Museum’s core exhibits – the replica Millworker’s Cottage. The space is specifically designed for an audience with dementia; incorporating new lighting, ramps and furnishings in a multisensory environment of objects to use within their original context, prompting participants to share stories with others and explore the space. It is envisioned that all visitors that experience our Reminiscence Cottage will experience improved mood, positive interactions and engagement with fellow visitors, opportunities to share and
communicate with each other, and an overall sense of enjoyment and well-being. Pilot programs engaged residents from a number of regional facilities that had not previously visited the Museum nor seen it as an accessible space. Feedback from participating groups has been positive. Anecdotally participants have been happier, there have been new interactions between participants, increased verbalisation from some participants, and return visits because of the positive impact. The evaluation phase of the project is currently in development which will involve the development of an ethics and interview framework to capture more robust, comparative data. This project supports the dementia community, activates engagement and interaction with existing Museum spaces, and adds a new dimension to our education programs.

As mentioned above the Cottage was an existing space within the Museum, but with some access issues and a confusing narrative. The opportunity arose to renovate the ramp and lighting in the cottage and with this came the chance to rethink how and why the cottage was being used. In considering different models for cottage redevelopment, I was drawn to two comments that were repeated again and again by visitors (of many ages and backgrounds): (1) “This reminds me of my [Abstract] house” and (2) “Look at that carpet, wow”. Our challenge was how to more actively capture ‘nan’s’ house and to think about how that experience of home could be both a really positive experience and a very relevant experience in our public museum setting. Here was a space (cottage) and an object (carpet) that were really resonating, but stopping short of a complete experience. As the officer driving the project I had a couple of previous experiences working with Alzheimer’s communities that suggested that this was a chance to rethink how we work with our objects in our public space; a chance to open our doors in a new way to this community.

Reminiscence therapy is an engagement activity that assists in evoking emotional responses and promoting communication. Many researchers have noted the importance of social sharing, positive and negative, in reminiscence; the deep-seated need that people have to want to tell their story and to re-experience particular memories or events. Woods et al (2009) highlight that the core of reminiscence therapy is its “respect for the person, as an individual, with a unique life history”. The act of reminiscing engages a sense of personal identity, creates an enjoyable social engagement, and improves mood and general well-being while stimulating memory. The act of reminiscing is familiar to us all. It is an important part
of identity-building and giving order to life experiences. In the Cottage a person with dementia engages in a facilitated activity and constructed space to stimulate their recollection of past life experiences. For this person the act of reminiscing enhances interpersonal skills and engages their attention more fully. It increases the participants’ mood, ability to interact socially, aids with depression, and is a positive creative and emotional practice. Communicating these experiences to the listener is highly beneficial for all parties, as it creates feelings of intimacy and gives special meaning to time spent with caregivers. Sharing the information discovered during the process means passing on wisdom and skills that may have been considered lost. It may also remind the person with dementia of past feelings of self-esteem and competence and reminds carers of a time when the person was flourishing. Reminiscence gives those struggling with verbal communication an opportunity to use other forms of communication. It engages the senses to enable the release of stored memories by using items of autobiographical meaning. For the caregiver or caregivers we provide a few guidelines to ensure that the experience is rewarding for everyone involved. There are many sensory stimuli within the Cottage and it is important that the participant is not overwhelmed by the experience. We encourage discretion in the number of items that may be used to evoke memory. Our carer’s guide provides suggestions on asking questions and generating engagement.

Over the years many researchers have been working in the space of reminiscence, personhood, and the relationship between memory, environment and communication. A key feature across memory and identity is the need to share: ‘personhood’ is developed in relation to others. The principle behind the Cottage project is to support communication and personal identity. John Kunz (2007), founder, International Institute of Reminiscence and Life Review, says, “Each time an individual tells part of his/her life story, those who listen are like a mirror. ... the listener’s reactions, questions, and comments then have a reciprocal impact on the storyteller...”. Hydén (2014) have shown how our activities are openly distributed, that in remembering, problem-solving, and communicating we are drawing on our physical environment - objects, people, culture - as much as our internal resources to think and respond. For example, another study saw chefs distinguish specific spoons by placing them by ingredients or specific saucepans; objects were understood by grouping and placing in an environment. The importance of context in memory-access has been powerfully explored by
Bendien et al (2010) at the Reminiscence Museum, part of the Humanitas aged care facility in Rotterdam, which is grounded on the principles of the ‘art of living’ and ‘social technology’.

The museum is a technology for transforming what can be made of the past in present circumstances...by affording a space where recollections can be articulated in conversation with others and via the mediation of the particular design of the space and the arrangement of the objects collected there.\(^{10}\)

The Cottage took this as its foundation, the importance of being able to interact with objects in a relevant context - like a wool carpet on the floor of a lounge room. Although a bit opportunistic in its evolution, there were a number of guiding principles that shaped the development of the Cottage space.

A powerful tool in articulating the project plan for the Cottage development was a document produced by the Alzheimer’s Society in the UK, *My name is not dementia*, a research project that worked directly with individuals living with dementia to capture their views on what is important in quality of life.\(^{11}\). Ten indicators came out of this study: (1) relationships or **someone to talk to**; (2) environment; (3) physical health; (4) sense of humour; (5) independence; (6) ability to **communicate**; (7) sense of **personal identity**; (8) ability or opportunity to **engage in activities**; (9) ability to practice faith or religion, and (10) experience of **stigma**. The Reminiscence Cottage particularly addresses the five indicators emphasised: someone to talk to; communication; personal identity; active engagement; and dealing with stigma. This was phase one of the project, identifying the target audience and end experience.

It was important to this project that it was delivered in a public space, that objects were not borrowed and explored in private spaces (although this is a valuable tool). Individuals with dementia could see and interact with objects like any other visitor with a feeling of security and familiarity and without being seen as someone with dementia. Everyday objects would be selected that connected to personal memories that would take a person back to a time when they were at their most vital (marriage, early work years, childhood) and help others engage with that part of their identity, and create an open, interactive space that provided many avenues to communication.

The next phase of the project was working with experts like Alzheimers Australia and local aged care workers to identify physical features of the Cottage that needed to be changed or added to ensure safe, easy access for an audience with dementia. Curtains were changed and
recessed lighting was added to remove shadows and create bright, uniform light in all corners of the rooms. The kitchen and lounge flooring could not be changed, both for safety reasons and, as noted above, because the carpet had a strong memory response already. However, it is understood that highly patterned surfaces can be difficult for a person with dementia to process and navigate. All other features in the cottage needed to be kept unpatterned, in strong contrasting colours, so that furniture, doorways, and walls could all be easily navigated. For example, as can be seen in figure 2, the lounge is a solid, strong green colour. The lounge suite is original to the 1930-1950 period identified for the cottage, but most lounge suites of the time would have been highly patterned which would not have worked for this audience. The style and shape of the lounge have been enough to generate memories in visitors. The television was replaced by a wireless, both in keeping with the era and also to create a controlled soundscape. Visitors choose to turn on the radio and choose the soundbite to listen to from advertising jingles, big band music, a radio serial, and an interview with a resident of the house. Everything in the house had to be safe to touch and be able to engage an audience in different ways.

This led to phase three of the project: dressing the Cottage. We needed to build a new collection of items specifically for the Cottage that were safe to handle and consumable.
These objects were intended to be on open display; visitors are encouraged to pick up, smell, turn, put on, and use the items as part of getting to know the object and accessing different memories and experiences. This means objects will be subject to regular wear and tear; they will not have the same life as an object in our core collection. This had to be articulated for all Cottage donations. Interestingly, rather than putting off donations, the idea that an old apron from the attic would be seen and handled by different generations, that wearing the apron might assist a person living with dementia has generated donations. A community call out for object donations was circulated through social media, word of mouth, and community newsletters. The feedback from donors and the types of objects that the community offered as examples of “everyday” life helped to shape our Cottage interior. Donations continue to come in specifically for the Cottage as a way for individuals to express their support for a community living with dementia and to celebrate their “ordinary” lives. Visitors come to see the Cottage just to see their crocheted robe or tea tin on display and in other visitors’ hands. Donors expressed their feeling that the objects continued to be useful, they were being given a new home not a display case. Conversations with donors also highlighted the vast community linked to dementia as many had personal experiences of friends and family members living with dementia.

Fig. 2. Two images of the lounge room at Reminiscence Cottage, National Wool Museum, Geelong: note wide doorway, no mirrors, sturdy furniture, radio with buttons to stop/start sound, tactile flowers, bookcase with pictures, children’s stories, etc. Image by author.
Over the course of the Cottage’s physical evolution we also engaged with expert groups in providing some training to our staff and volunteers. All training sessions were also open to interested members of the aged care community and the general public. Training sessions on understanding dementia, life story writing, and public screenings of *I Remember Better When I Paint* were offered. New volunteers, with a background in drama and stage setting and early childcare activity principles, were recruited to assist with the design and dressing of the Cottage. Existing volunteers engaged through donations and through a series of reminiscence focus groups that we ran. In the focus sessions, participants were exposed to a random assortment of potential objects for the cottage with a single question “Tell me a story…” Participants came from a range of cultural backgrounds and most were hesitant about having any knowledge to share; however, inevitably all sessions lasted several hours and everyone had stories and memories to share relating to the objects. A volunteer took notes of the stories told and organized responses in categories like work, men/women, and childhood to help identify where these objects fit into life stories for future use in the Cottage.

Pilot programs have been running in the Cottage for twelve months with a variety of groups - both residential aged care and day therapy programs. The program is very gentle and fluid in its structure. With what is known of the visiting group, the Cottage is dressed with

![Fig. 3. Two images of the kitchen at Reminiscence Cottage, National Wool Museum, Geelong: note bright lighting, open spaces to move around in, cupboards and drawers to open and explore, appliances to handle, clothing to touch and try on. Image by author.](image)
additional objects that try to evoke a particular experience (eg. afterschool, Christmas, Race Day, etc) or some that may require care or supervision in their use (for example, marbles). When participants are ready for a rest, they are encouraged to make themselves comfortable in the lounge and objects are passed around in the context of an individual’s story. As an example, “a gentleman named --- donated this dressing kit. It was a twenty-first birthday present. Inside there is a brush and a …” The story continues until a member of the group adds their own memory, often quite quickly. Questions are kept to a minimum, and subsequent objects are circulated in relation to the conversation. If other memories start to centre on ‘becoming a man’ an Akubra hat and Gladstone bag might feature next; alternatively, if birthdays become the focus conversation might shift to toys, games, and homemade items and the gentleman’s tops and marbles are circulated. The facilitator is there to encourage engagement in the manner of a person hosting visitors in their own home, rather than as an ‘expert’.

Feedback has been qualitative on the pilot programs, repeat visitation and carer comments support the ongoing development of the program. One lifestyle coordinator commented “I just wanted to touch base after ... Residents have stated they have a great time, and enjoyed handling and talking about many things, and staff have reported some great interactions from residents.”12 On another outing a carer was concerned about the potential interaction of three residents, two of whom resided in the same care facility and were well-known to each other and a third that resided in a different area and was less well-known. By the end of the session, these three participants were interacting more with each other than the facilitators in sharing stories and prompting each other. The Cottage is a long-term display and project for the Museum, so the next phase of the project will be to implement a more formal evaluation process to feed back into the Cottage’s continued evolution. Moving forward the hope is to develop an evaluation tool with some of our local partners, including Deakin University, which will help us to track and grow the program effectively.

We have created a public space that evokes an Australian household between the years 1930 and 1950. All aspects of home life from within this period are evoked through the furnishings, household implements, clothing and representation of daily, domestic activities. Memories evoked in a reminiscence program often relate to childhood experiences; therefore, the decor of the Reminiscence Cottage reflects life within a twenty year time span. Depending upon the
participant’s age, household items may stimulate memories of a parent’s or grandparent’s home, if not their own home. The Cottage has been designed for a person with dementia and their family to experience a sensory journey that encourages the process of reminiscence. Central to the project was the idea of creating a public space, outside the home, where a person with dementia could come and interact with companions and other visitors in a meaningful way. The key achievements of this project have been in creating new partnerships, engaging a new visitor audience, and developing a new style of program delivery for our program team. Through this project we have welcomed a number of visitors who would not otherwise have visited the National Wool Museum; carers have learned more about their residents and residents have learned more about each other.

Notes

4. Ibid 3.
12. Correspondence with Trudi Alldis, Lifestyle Coordinator, by the author, 15 April 2014.
References


Museums and memory: The power of story

Doreen Lyon

Abstract
This paper is an exploration of the ways in which a small, volunteer run community museum can tell distinctive stories and engage with audiences in ways larger state and national institutions can’t. This is done through using examples of projects undertaken by the Wollondilly Heritage Centre at the Oaks. These include actively reaching out to communities and partnering with local, state and national organisations where possible.

Keywords: volunteer run museums, community engagement, partnerships.

I am a volunteer with The Oaks Historical Society and help to manage a community history museum, The Wollondilly Heritage Centre, at The Oaks. I have titled this paper “The Power of Story” because I believe that local museums and historical societies have a unique ability to present the history of Australia through their collections and archives. While our State and National museums must attract large audiences to maintain their position, small museums can offer smaller, intimate glimpses in life from yesterday and today. The challenge is how to do just that and I would like to share some of the ways our museum has successfully utilised.

Community history

Our local areas hold many examples of community history which can be explored. Mary Hutchinson in her book with Anne Bolitho in 1998 offers examples from local walking groups to shops and schools. From the people’s stories grew other stories of living and working in Canberra and these in turn created small publications and displays in local libraries and museums. This is a method which works!

In 2008 our museum was documenting local businesses and wanted to know more about the local poultry industry. We discovered that there was a strong Estonian involvement in Thirlmere in the development of the supply of eggs to the Sydney market. With the assistance of the Migration Heritage Centre at the Power House Museum we were able to run group sessions with the local Estonian community who took backyard chooks in a more economical direction by using Estonian practices of co-operative purchasing. Chooks need grain and grain was in high demand after the Second World War so by combining their buying power local
farmers could buy a train load of grain. They extended this by building a supermarket, start a craft co-op and build a retirement village between 1950 and 1970 using one pound shares. The community willingly shared their experiences in words and photos and the result was an exhibition and book plus a filmed record from two local Estonian farmers.

The opening of the exhibition was by the Estonian Consul and the Northern Dancers and Estonian choir provided cultural context. Over 300 people came, many from Canberra and Adelaide. The catering was shared between our ladies and the Estonian ladies with legendary results.

The Estonian community were very gracious in sharing their stories for the exhibition and many also shared their migration stories. Most of them came to Australia in the late 1940s from DP camps in Germany. They could not return to Estonia because of the communist presence. Many had been community leaders before the war and would have suffered from communist persecution. Our second exhibition drew on their memories and their craft. Migrant stories are especially important to record because there may not have been a previous opportunity for them to engage directly with the local community.

We were fortunate to receive funding from Arts NSW for this project as well as practical assistance and training from the Migration Heritage Centre, but other projects have drawn from our extensive collections. Our popular publication “Women’s Voices” draws from family history and follows the lives of Mary Wild, the first white woman to settle in The Oaks, Granny Long an Aboriginal midwife and healer, plus nurses, teachers and new migrants and is created and published in house and locally printed to keep the prices down.

In 1990 we presented an exhibition about the local coal industry which could not have been achieved without the help of the local miners and their families. They willingly shared their stories as well as providing objects to create a small display and facsimile mine. They recorded their own stories to tape which we still use in the mine display. Many of them are now retired and have joined our volunteers to restore mining equipment, build a very impressive new mining display with a pit pony and continue to assist in caring for our grounds and gardens. They work in the “Hands-on-History” program we run for primary schools, by explaining the work of a coal miner. This involvement included sponsorship from the coal industry to construct disability access to the museum and a new entrance!
Tell them your story

These projects result in exhibitions about our local area and we find that our visitors want to know about us – so we tell them our story! Our story features the lost heritage of the Burragorang Valley and our exhibitions tell this story in various ways. We show a film of the flooding of the valley to create a water supply for Sydney by harnessing the wild rivers which created Burragorang and taming them with the mighty Warragamba Dam – the biggest dam in the southern hemisphere in 1960. The story is continued in the recordings and stories of the people who lost their heritage from the Gundungorra families to the early Irish ticket of leave convicts, then German and Italian migrants and local pastoralists. Theirs is a continuing story retold at annual reunions and in our exhibitions. Many of our volunteers have connections to the Valley and share their knowledge with children in our “Hands-on-History” programme in the kitchen and laundry of our slab built cottage and in the agricultural pavilion.

While the story of Burragorang Valley is our core message, each of the fifteen villages which make up this shire of Wollondilly can contribute new stories. The demographics are changing all the time; from farming and other agricultural pursuits to the commuter culture; from mainly Anglo-Australian societies to vegetable growers from Malta, Italy, Greece and Vietnam; now including shop keepers from, India, Pakistan and Lebanon there are so many stories to explore and record and share with the wider community.

Discover new opportunities and funding

Sometimes it is possible to attract funding by taking up a national conversation such as the recent involvement with the “Forgotten Children” – the child migrants sent from England after World War 1 to Canada, Rhodesia, New Zealand and Australia. A local Dr. Barnardo Farm Training school existed until 1959 and there were many local people who remembered them and even some who were Barnardo Boys at the time. This project created another exhibition and attracted funding for filming attracted new audiences.

However, not all projects are exclusive to the Museum; we have also reached out to the community development team at our local Council and have initiated special events during Seniors Week with their help and their funding. The first event asked for people from local retirement homes to bring in an apron and tell us the story of the apron. It was a simple idea which was picked up by the Illawarra ABC Open team who sent Sean O’Brien to record the
stories and bring in a photographer to take the photos. The result was a small book and DVD which sold very well and encouraged us to try more such projects. We now have six books of stories published and have increased our visitation as well as our shop production and increased relevance and respect from the local Council. The little books are providing a window into the lives of local people. ABC Open has assisted us in training in oral history and filming so we can produce our own short films using VIMEO.

We also try to work with the local Community Centre in their projects by installing displays and recording stories on International Women’s’ Day and also with the local Land Council. Our archives hold a growing collection of stories from local Aboriginal people and we are a recognised source for help in finding their family histories. NAIDOC week\(^2\) celebrations are also an opportunity to share stories which have resulted in closer relations with our Aboriginal communities. Harmony Week is an obvious opportunity to share stories which can attract funding.

To add to these opportunities are co-operation with the National Trust Heritage Week and NSW History Council, both organisations have themes each year which can be taken up as opportunities, which are then publicised in other places.

All these projects have helped us to be sustainable and relevant within our communities and we continue to expand and seek out local history and record the stories of today. Australia needs to hear these stories because they tell us about ourselves and our neighbours and the past. It is especially important to record the stories of local people now because they have a freshness and immediacy which will be very significant to future historians. And people like to see themselves in museums – not always stories from the past!

**Conclusion**

Our organisation has worked hard to establish itself in the local community and have received much needed help and encouragement from local businesses and families and our volunteers, however the financial support from Arts NSW and our local Council and practical support from the Migration Heritage Centre and ABC Open have been invaluable. They give us confidence to continue and opportunities for training. Without them our task would be almost impossible.
Notes

2. NAIDOC week is usually the first week in July, it empowers Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to tell their stories, take up opportunities to promote their heritage and culture and have a strong voice on issues which affect them. Engagement between indigenous Australians and local history groups is mutually beneficial.

Reference

ANDERSON, Kathleen
Kathleen Anderson BA Hon (1A) (Society and Culture - Anthropology) joined the National Archives Forced Adoptions History Project in 2013. In 2013 Kathleen was certified internationally with the Association for Public Participation. In 2016 Kathleen was appointed to the National Archives, Access Examination team. Her passion for learning sees her continue to work towards a postgraduate certificate in Public Service Management and a Masters of Law an Ethics. Kathleen plans to continue to write in her area of interest, which is storytelling and urban ethnography.

COLES, Alex
Alec Coles is CEO of the Western Australian Museum and was previously Director of Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums in North East England. He is leading the development of a major new museum project in Western Australia.

HAMMOND, Dr Gina
Gina Hammond’s work, research and publications have focused on the museum and gallery sector for the last decade, with a specific focus on university museums and collections. Dr Hammond manages the Psychology Test Library collection at Macquarie University and has taught into museum studies programs at two tertiary institutions. Her research focuses on problematic representations within collection spaces.

HARDY, Christina
Christina Hardy is a Kaitiaki Taonga Collections Manager Humanities at The Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa. Before this she worked at The Nelson Provincial Museum, working on their History collections and their WW100 project. She has an MA Museum Studies from Newcastle University and experience in collections and public programmes both in the UK and New Zealand.

HATHERLY, Janelle
Janelle Hatherly is Managing Editor of BGANZ’s professional e-magazine The Botanic Garden(er) www.bganz.org.au and creator and co-presenter of Galleries and Gardens, a fortnightly program of news and views from the world of art, museums and public gardens, on 2RPH (Radio for the Print Handicapped) http://www.2rph.org.au/
Janelle has a background in science teaching and over 30 years experience developing public programs and exhibitions in four Australian museums and botanic gardens. Passionate about lifelong learning Janelle continues to give presentations and write articles and exhibition text to facilitate public understanding of our natural world and cultural heritage.

KIRKWOOD, Sandra
Sandra Kirkwood is an occupational therapist/ethnomusicologist and Director of Music Health Australia. She has undertaken participatory action research to develop frameworks for culturally engaged community music practice in rural Ipswich, Australia. Sandra commenced her PhD research on the impact of new technologies on musical learning of Indigenous Australian children at Griffith University in 2013, and continued PhD research through a scholarship with the
University of Newcastle from 2014 to 2016. Sandra is currently exploring the role of music curatorship with small island communities in south-east Queensland.

LYON, Doreen

Doreen undertook postgraduate studies in Museum Studies at the University of Sydney; she is an experienced and valued volunteer who volunteers and assists in the management of the community museum, The Wollondilly Heritage Centre, at The Oaks.

MAGNUSSEN, Prof John

John Magnussen is the inaugural Professor of Radiology at Macquarie University and is a diagnostic and interventional radiologist with an abiding interest in applying the tools and techniques of Radiology to new and emerging areas. With Dr Jaye McKenzie-Clark he has pioneered the application of Dual Energy CT to the analysis of ancient ceramics as well as the creation of 3D models for printing and teaching. He has also scanned and analysed multiple Egyptian mummies and has applied the tools of modern medical imaging to materials analysis, both ancient and modern. He is also known to look after patients at Australia's first University owned Private Teaching Hospital, at Macquarie University where he was part of the team that designed and set up the state-of-the-art $20 million medical imaging facility.

MARES, Prof Michael

Michael A. Mares, has a rodent, a bat, and a parasite named after him. He is an expert on the natural history of desert rodents and is responsible for the discovery of many species new to science. He is professor of biology at the University Oklahoma and director of the Sam Noble Museum, one of the world’s outstanding university natural history museums. The museum was built in 2000 under Mares' leadership. In 2003, the museum won the National Heritage Award for conservation and in 2014 it won the US National Medal for Museums. No other director has led a museum to win both awards.

Mares was born in Albuquerque, New Mexico and enrolled as an undergraduate biology major at the University of New Mexico in 1963. He took his first foreign field-research trip to Mexico in 1966 and his research career would lead to work in dozens of countries, including Iran, Egypt, Brazil, Argentina, and the US. Mares received an MS degree from Fort Hays Kansas State University and a PhD from the University of Texas at Austin. He is an evolutionary ecologist, a systematist, an explorer for unknown species of mammals. Mares was a Fulbright Scholar, a Ford Foundation Fellow, and a National Chicano Fellow and has served on many national committees, as well as the Congressional Commission on the Future of the Smithsonian Institution. He has been an advisor to secretaries of the Smithsonian Institution, the National Science Foundation, and was on the board of directors for the Fulbright Commission.

He has published 12 books and more than 200 scientific papers. He is a fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, former president of the Natural Science Collections Alliance, and former president of the American Society of Mammalogists. He lives in Norman, Oklahoma with his wife Lynn. In addition to his administrative work, teaching and research, he is also a screenwriter. In April 2011, Mares won the Beverly Hills Film Festival Golden Palm Award for Best Screenplay for his screenplay, God's Architect, selected from 802 feature-length scripts. In May 2011, his script, Open Borders, won first place at the Los Angeles Movie Awards competition.
MANUIVERA, Sally

With 15 years of experience in museums and art galleries in the U.K., Sally joined Auckland War Memorial Museum in 2011, where she leads strategic master planning and is responsible for public experience. Sally completed an Executive MBA at University of Auckland and holds governance positions in tertiary and performing arts.

MCKENZIE-CLARK, Dr Jaye

Dr McKenzie-Clark is an archaeologist, Macquarie University, who, in collaboration with Professor John Magnussen, Macquarie University, has pioneered the use of Dual Energy Computed Tomography (DECT) to analyse the composition of ancient artefacts. In contrast to traditional analytical techniques, DECT is totally non-destructive, an important factor when investigating irreplaceable ancient artefacts. Dr McKenzie-Clark is the Director of Archaeology at ArcheoMatters.

MITCHELL, Dr Scott

Dr Scott Mitchell is the Head of Collections Management and Conservation at the Western Australian Museum. Some of the Museum related projects he has enjoyed recently include conservation work the WA Museum’s historic blue whale skeleton, the development of more energy efficient collection storage, and working with the fantastic artists of Yuendemu.

PEARCE, Sara

Sara has been the National Wool Museum’s Education and Public Programs Officer since 2011. Her background includes regional museums in Canada, the Smithsonian’s Museum Conservation Institute and the textile conservation unit at the Victoria & Albert Museum. She is a trained teacher and holds Masters degrees in history and archaeology.

ROSE, Rachael

Rachael Rose is the Curator of the University of Tasmania’s Fine Art Collection. She holds a BFA and Master of Fine Art and Design from the University of Tasmania, and manages a collection of approximately 3000 artworks across the University’s three campuses. Rachael also maintains a printmaking practice.

ROWE, Paul

Paul Rowe is CEO of Vernon Systems, an Auckland-based collections management software company. Vernon Systems develop software for organisations that collect, interpret and share collections. Paul is particularly interested in the use of web-based systems within museums and increasing public access to museum collection information. He is occasionally seen caving.

SIMONS, Prof John

Professor John Simons graduated with a BA in English (1st Class honours) University of Wales, Certificate in Paleography (distinction) University of Wales, and PhD. University of Exeter. He is currently Deputy Vice-Chancellor Academic at Macquarie University. He has worked at five Universities in the UK and held various visiting fellowships and professorships in the USA. He is a historian specializing in the history of animals and has written or edited some 17 books and numerous journal articles on topics ranging from Middle English romance to Andy Warhol to the history of cricket. His book Kangaroo was shortlisted for Biology Book of the Year in the UK in 2013. He is currently working on two more book projects: one on hippopotami in Victorian England and the other on the importation of English plants and animals to Australia during the colonial period. He is also a published poet. He holds fellowships of the Royal Society of Arts, the Royal Society of New South Wales, the Oxford Centre for Animal Ethics, the Higher Education Academy and the Zoological Society of London. He is currently President of the Council for the
Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences, a board member of the National Art School, an advisory board member of the International Anti-Poaching Federation, on the TEQSA expert register, the Science Advisory Panel of the Australian Science Media Centre and a member of the peer review College of the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council. He has been a QAA auditor, an advisory council member of the charities Voiceless and Veg for Life, on the executive of the Australasian Council of Deans of Social Sciences and Humanities and a board member of EM-Media. In the 1990s he worked for the British Council and the European Union on various projects to support universities in several Balkan and Baltic states in the transition from communism. He is currently working on a project to set up a branch of the Council for the Assistance of Refugee Academics in Australia.

SIMPSON, Dr Andrew

Andrew Simpson has worked with university museums and collections at two Australian universities and consulted widely with international universities about their museums and collections. He is a Board Member of UMAC (University Museums and Collections) an international committee of ICOM. He was Director of Macquarie University’s Museum Studies program until 2014. He has had a number of roles with the New South Wales Branch of Museums Galleries Australia and is currently the Executive Officer for the Branch. He was the convenor of the State Conference “Place, Space and Identity, the Future of Museums in NSW” and chaired the Organising Committee for the 2015 Museums Australia National Conference. These were the two main sources for the contributions to this volume. He has research interests in university museums and natural history.

SMEDLEY, Joanne

Joanne Smedley has worked as a curator of photographs since 1997 at the Australian War Memorial, prior to that she was the first Digital Librarian appointed to the Memorial’s Research Centre in 1993. The 900,000+ images of the Memorial’s National Collection are a constant source of challenge and research opportunity.

THOGERSEN, Jane

Jane Thogersen is the manager of the Australian History Museum at Macquarie University, having worked there for over 9 years. Her strong I.T. background informs many of the projects she has developed or been involved in. She has a Bachelor Ancient History (Hons) and a Master of Museum Studies from Macquarie University. Jane’s current research priorities focus on university museums as places for cross-disciplinary projects, as well as object-based learning and community engagement.

TONKIN, Dr Steven

Dr Steven Tonkin is Curator (Contemporary & Live Art) at Arts Centre Melbourne. He is responsible for Arts Centre Melbourne’s public art collection and has curated a number of exhibitions exploring the creative intersections between the visual and performing arts, including ‘Show Time: The Art Collection of Arts Centre Melbourne’ in 2014.

WATTERSON, Dr Sally

Dr Sally Watterson is currently Museum Advisor to Wollongong City Council and works as a consultant on a diverse range of museum and heritage sector projects. She recently completed project coordination for the move of the Olley house interiors to Tweed Regional Gallery and the Margaret Olley Art Centre. She was previously Director of Tweed Regional Museum, an innovative model of creating one museum in three unique locations. Prior to this, she was Senior Ranger for National Parks northern region, responsible for interpretation of the built and natural environment from the Tweed to Clarence Rivers and for interpretation works at Cape Byron and Arakwal National Parks. Earlier roles included Capacity
Builder at the National Museum of Mongolia and Public Programs Coordinator at the Museum of Sydney. Dr Watterson’s PhD in dissertation dealt with museums and identity in transition.

**WILLIAMS, Kim AM**

Kim Williams has had a long involvement in the arts, entertainment and media industries here and overseas and has held various executive leadership positions since the late 1970s including as Chief Executive at each of News Corp Australia, FOXTEL, Fox Studios Australia, the Australian Film Commission, Southern Star Entertainment and Musica Viva Australia and also as a senior executive at the ABC. Mr Williams was the Chief Executive of FOXTEL for the decade up until November 2011. At FOXTEL he pioneered many of the major digital broadcast innovations in Australia and received the 2012 Lifetime Achievement Award from the Australian subscription television association ASTRA for his diverse contributions.

Mr Williams has also held numerous Board positions (and Chairmanships) in commercial and public life over more than three decades including as Chairman of the Australian Film Finance Corporation (which he founded in 1988; Chairman of MCN – the subscription television industry’s major advertising sales company; Chairman of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra and of Musica Viva Australia; and most recently as the Chairman of the Sydney Opera House Trust from 2005 until 2013.

He was appointed as a Member in the Order of Australia in June 2006 for his services to the arts and public policy formulation in the film and television industries. In October 2009 he was awarded a Doctorate of Letters (Honoris Causa) by Macquarie University for his contribution to the arts and entertainment industry in Australia and internationally. He is a previous recipient of the Richard Pratt Business Arts Leadership Award from the Australian Business Arts Foundation and the Australian Writers Guild’s Dorothy Crawford Award for Outstanding Contribution to the Profession. He is a current board member in a diverse range of private and public enterprises and foundations and is also a Commissioner of the Australian Football League.

**WINKWORTH, Kylie**

Kylie Winkworth is a museum and heritage consultant, an advocate for museums and collections, and an occasional trouble maker. Her work explores the relationships between people, places and collections. She has a particular interest in museum renewal and sustainability. Some of her projects involve working with community organisations to explore the significance of their collections and ways of sustaining museums in regional communities. Her publications include Significance 2.0, co-authored with Roslyn Russell. This publication is now used by many collecting organisations in Australia and overseas.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As all of the contributions made to this volume of papers resulted from a combination of a state symposium and a national conference both under the auspices of Museums Galleries Australia (or Museums Australia), we are indebted to all of the many people and organisations responsible for producing and supporting those two events.

The 2011 State Symposium entitled “Place, Space and Identity, new directions for New South Wales museums” took place on the 18th and 19th April at Macquarie University in Sydney. It was organised by the state branch of Museums Australia; Andrew Simpson, Rebecca Pinchin, Bronwyn Alcorn, Geoff Barker, Suzanne Bravery, Marea Buist, Ally Halliwell, Maree Clutterbuck and Gay Hendriksen. They were ably assisted by Rhonda Davis, Gina Hammond, Leonard Janiszewski and Paul Meszaros from Macquarie University and Karen O’Donnell-McGrane from the Sydney Chapter of Museums Australia. The long-term New South Wales Executive Officer ably coordinated them all for Museums Australia, Paul Bentley.

The symposium was supported by Arts NSW, the Powerhouse Museum, Object Consulting, Red & Robin, Designcraft, Preservation Australia, Mental Media, Bosco Storage Solutions and Macquarie University’s student club, the Museums Appreciation Society.

The National Conference more ambitiously titled “Medium † Message: A Cultural Cacophony” from which the title of this book is partially derived, was held from May 21st to 24th 2015 at the Sydney Town Hall and a number of other major Sydney cultural institutions. The organising committee consisted of – Andrew Simpson, Jenny Horder, Steve Alderton, Neil Anderson, Geoff Barker, Sarah-Jane Brazil, Stephanie Chinneck, Chantelle Dollimore, Liz Gilroy, Gina Hammond, Gay Hendriksen, Beth Hise, Frank Howarth, Tasha Lamb, Michael Parry, Michael Rolfe and Margot Stuart-Smith. They were ably assisted by a program committee made up of Jenny Horder, Johnny Brownbill, Regan Forest, Gina Hammond, Gay Hendriksen, Beth Hise, Andrew Hiskins, Tamara Lavrencic, Lynda Kelly, Carolyn Meeham, Andrew Simpson and Margot Stuart-Smith.

The conference was supported by IAS Fine Art Logistics, the Australian Government’s Ministry for the Arts, The Gordon Darling Foundation, the Australian Museum, the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, the Australian National Maritime Museum, the Museums Appreciation
Society and Museums and Galleries NSW, PingX, Panasonic, ICOM Australia, Axiell, Showfront, Tessitura Network, the Australian Showcase and Hardware Company, Mental Media, Thylacine, Vernon Systems, Collections Mosaic, DatacomIT, the Collecting Bug, Bosco Storage Solutions, Philips Selecon and Dexion. We are also grateful to Samantha Hart and Leanne Gollasch of Conference Logistics and Alex Marsden, Lee Scott and Stephanie Hamilton from Museums Galleries Australia National Office. Richard Mulvaney as Chair of Museum Galleries Australia’s National Conference Committee also provided much helpful advice and guidance during the development of the national conference. For technical assistance, we thank SAI Design, Sydney for the design of the conference webpage, which has been adapted for the front and back covers of the book and Joanne Simpson for advice on formatting and layout.

We are most grateful, however, to the authors represented in this compilation for enthusiastically taking up the challenge of contributing to this volume. We have retained their original voice in the works as much as possible. For this publication, we offered double-blind peer review to contributors who wished to select that option (those who selected this are indicated in the text). We thank our cheerful and constructive reviewers who enthusiastically embraced the project, they were drawn from the pool of individuals listed above.