THE MAGAZINE OF MUSEUMS AUSTRALIA INC.

MUSEUM NATIONAL

VOL 6 • NO 4 • MAY 1998

BEING THERE: PERFORMING ARTS MUSEUMS IN AUSTRALIA

This is the penultimate issue of *Museum National* before the ICOM conference and I encourage all members of Museums Australia to think about registering for this major event.

What a number of members of Museums Australia have suggested is that they would like more debate about the core functions of museums, more discussion about management practices. Issues discussed at the ICOM conference under the theme of Cultural Diversity — Ancient Cultures, New Worlds are designed to bring aspects of our professional lives into focus, and to provide fresh opportunities for such discussions to occur with eminent international and national speakers, as well as with our colleagues.

Museums Australia is a partner in the development of the ICOM conference so your support will also return benefit to your association.

Following the last meeting of the Council of Museums Australia, it was agreed that a Working Party should look again at our corporate plan. The Executive, together with Louise Douglas, Simeon Kronenberg (National Director) and Kay Soderland (Director NSW) — these people having been delegated the task by Council — spent a weekend in Melbourne shaping a document which, a few teleconferences later, will be put to the next meeting of the Council, in Brisbane, in June.

For the first time Museums Australia has been granted triennial funding by the Visual Arts/Craft Fund of the Australia Council. While we've benefited from an increase in administrative funding and the security of a known financial base over the next three years, we have lost the professional development funding which we've enjoyed since 1992. This changed financial base also prompted us to consider the core functions of the national and state offices, and how to support them through standing committees, special interest groups etc., (all of which are set up in accordance with our Constitution).

A review of funding in NSW by the Ministry for the Arts has resulted in discussions between the NSW Regional Galleries Association and Museums Australia (NSW). The outcomes here will likely have impact in other states, so both state and national members are engaged in the process to ensure the interests of our members — who are indeed in many cases members of both organisations — are protected.

Much has been achieved in the first few months of 1998: I've met with Museums Aotearoa to establish an exchange program for junior staff and middle managers; we're continuing to work with the Federal Department of Communications and the Arts on the program to provenance and repatriate, where appropriate, indigenous cultural materials, following the favourable consideration of this matter at the last Cultural Ministers' Council in February; the Department has also advised us of increased financial support to continue production of *Museum National* and to support the work of the Standing Committee on Regional, Specialist and Local Museums and Galleries; and we continue to discuss with the Australian Council of National Trusts and the Australian Local Government Association ways in which we might work together to enhance programs for the movable cultural heritage sector.

I shall take the opportunity in another issue of *Museum National* to report on these — and other — matters which engage us when we're not working in museums or other museological environments, so that you have an overview of the key issues occupying the National Council.

Sue-Anne Wallace
President

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CORRESPONDENCE TO:
The Editor, Museums Australia
Fitzroy Town Hall, 201 Napier Street, Fitzroy 3065
Postal: PO Box 2926, Fitzroy BC Vic 3065
Telephone: (03) 9419 2422
Facsimile: (03) 9419 0100
email: museums@vicnet.net.au

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Background image reproduced courtesy of Ponch Hawkes.

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

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THE MAGAZINE OF MUSEUMS AUSTRALIA INC.

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Raising the Curtain
The Performing Arts Special Interest Group

JANINE BARRAND

I am delighted to 'raise the curtain' on the performing arts themed edition of *Museum National*, brought to you by the Performing Arts Special Interest Group of Museums Australia (PASIG).

Our group gained impetus for establishment in 1992 following the On With the Show conference, which was organised by the Performing Arts Museum, Victorian Arts Centre, to celebrate the Museum's tenth anniversary. Since then, we have seen our membership grow to encompass museums, libraries, archives and tertiary institutions, convened meetings around Australia and held a strategic planning workshop. The first six years of our existence have been about establishing and developing our relationships with each other. Due to the nature of the performing arts — their diversity, output and complex collecting formats — this has been an essential first step. I believe this issue demonstrates how far we have come in furthering our mission to increase public access to Australia's performing arts collections.

PASIG is, of course, part of a much bigger scene: the performing arts industry. In 1996, 33,017 people indicated they were employed in performing arts-related occupations.[1] In 1991, there were 197 theatre organisations which staged 24,613 performances.[2] In 1993-94, households spent $444 million on live theatre admissions.[3] On the basis of statistics collected in Victoria, it is estimated that 7.25 million Australians over 15 years of age attended a performing arts event at least once in 1995.[4] In 1991, total revenue earned by 459 music and performing arts organisations (both subsidised and commercial) totalled $297 million.[5]

The performing arts have a huge reach as these statistics demonstrate. The performing arts also play a significant role in defining and challenging our cultural identity and understanding. As I write this introduction, a number of recent productions reinforce this perspective. *Images of Natural Life*, *Corrugation Road* and The Australian Ballet-Bangarra *Rites* collaboration stay with me as works creating new ideas about ourselves and performing arts practice. The premiere of the major musical *The Boy From Oz* is a significant production celebrating the story of Australian performer Peter Allen.[6]

In recent years, interest in performing arts within both the broader museum and education sector has increased. Museums are realising that the performing arts have high level popular appeal and therefore the potential to maximise audiences. This is demonstrated by the number of performing arts-based exhibitions being mounted by non-specialist performing arts museums. 'Real wild child', 'Circus!' (Powerhouse Museum), 'Dance People Dance' (National Library of Australia), and 'Scene Stealers' (Australian Archives) being just a few. The number of researchers in the field — ranging from publishers to family historians — has also expanded.

Interestingly, many museums are utilising performing arts expertise and structures. It is not uncommon to see theatre designers working on exhibitions, or, in the case of Museum Victoria, organisational structures that include 'producers' and physical facilities employing lighting grids and 'black box' theatre spaces. Museum Victoria has also retained Robyn Archer as a Creative Producer and she has put forward a paper which develops performative aspects for the new Melbourne Museum.[7] Other museums have used performing arts as an interpretive device and even programs using performers have been commonly staged as an adjunct to exhibitions.

The level of interest in the performing arts is certainly a great fillip for our special interest group and achievement for our future directions. We are very keen to secure a high profile for Australia's performing arts history and traditions, both nationally and internationally, and to play a role in increasing audiences for museums and participation in the performing arts.

As we work towards consolidating our collection policies at a national level, the next century will bring seamless access to Australia's performing arts collections, no matter what their original source or physical location. I would personally love to see full integration between the 'active' resources maintained by current performing arts companies and our collections. By working together, the chances of our performing arts history having an impact in the web-based world are greater.

A national approach, however, should not mean a 'take over' by large state and national institutions. The diversity, scope, and scale that exists within Australia's dynamic performing arts scene should certainly exist within the composition and activities of our collecting agencies.

Through our strategic plan, PASIG has identified a number of short to medium-term projects which will be delivered through our working group structure. For us, policy development and joint projects will be key objectives. Areas of policy development will include indigenous performing arts and links with the performing arts community.

Earlier, I spoke of the ability of the performing arts to reflect ourselves and our environment. In this context, one significant future direction for PASIG is the documentation of indigenous performing arts. Whilst specialist performing arts museums, for instance, come from the perspective of performing arts as a continuum and therefore document representations of indigenous performers over time and record performances in this context, there is clearly a need to engage with collections and expertise more often found in collections which record traditional indigenous culture. In this way, we will integrate the continuum of indigenous history and world views with contemporary expression. At the 1997 National Symposium on Research in the Performing Arts, Christine Donnelly raised some interesting issues in her paper entitled, 'Aboriginal dance research: between two cultures'. This included the importance of access to

information regarding indigenous performing arts/history to inform contemporary practice, such as dance.[8]

Recognition of the diverse nature of the performing arts community will also be an area of future exploration. Each performing arts community has its own special character and, therefore, special ways of being collected and made accessible. Circus people, for instance, are great travellers. Their gear is left either at permanent home bases or carried in caravans. The image-driven rock industry is disposable and sometimes reluctant to look back at its history. Magicians have a secret lore and the 'tricks' of their trade need to be guarded by custodians. Increasing respect for and understanding of the craft, skills and traditions of each community is a very important role of PASIG.

One of the great challenges inherent in documenting and exhibiting the performing arts is how one captures the essence of something so ephemeral, so much a part of the perceptions and memories of individual audience members. In my mind, strengthening our links with the performing arts community is one methodology. We need to play an integral role in adding to the experience and knowledge of audiences through such activities as taking our museums to performing arts venues, for example.

The content of this special edition addresses some of the issues raised above. We are clearly at the beginning of our show!

Richard Stone's article sets the scene by exploring the nature of performing arts and its relationship to collections.

Close relationships between museums and the performing arts community are essential. Frank Van Straten explores the world of specialist performing arts museums and their symbiotic, yet sometimes problematic, relationships with Australia's performing arts centres. Michael Shmith's article takes an industry perspective with some surprising insights. 'It's our museum', a case study by Carolyn Laffan, considers the nature of industry collaboration in specialist performing arts museums.

The ephemeral and highly productive nature of the performing arts as an art form, and the emergence of the information technology-based society are defining new ways of working. Helen Simondson's case study explores the utilisation of technology in the creation and dissemination of digital works using new performing arts material. Peter Cox explores the development of the *Real wild child!* CD-ROM as an extension of an exhibition-based experience. The Keep Dancing! project is a significant milestone in new ways of documenting the performing arts. A collaborative project between the National Film & Sound Archive, the National Library and Ausdance, it received funding from the Dance Fund of the Australia Council, one of the very rare heritage orientated projects to receive such funding.

I would like to thank my PASIG colleagues who embraced this project by writing articles and sending in such wonderful images. We acknowledge Museums Australia, who has given us this opportunity, and editor, Linda Richardson. Thanks also to Judy Morton (Arts Victoria), Niki Vounoridis (Victorian Arts Centre), and Ponch Hawkes.

Editing this themed edition was somewhat like preparing a new production: programming, casting, designing, rehearsal and the last minute adrenalin rush before the curtain goes up on opening night! We hope you enjoy our show!

Janine Barrand is Director of the Performing Arts Museum, Victorian Arts Centre and Chair of the Performing Arts Special Interest Group (PASIG).

The Performing Arts Special Interest Group of Museums Australia, 1997. National Library of Australia. Photo Andrew Stawowczyk. **Back row (l–r)** John Thomson, National Gallery of Australia; Gabrielle Hyslop, Australian Archives; Erica Hart, Queensland Performing Arts Trust; Richard Stone, National Library of Australia; Paul Bentley, Sydney Opera House; Jeff Brownrigg, National Film and Sound Archive. **Middle row (l–r)** Angela O'Brien, Victorian College of the Arts; Janine Barrand, Performing Arts Museum; Jo Peoples, Adelaide Festival Centre; Dermot McCall, State Library of Victoria; Christine Roberts, National Institute of Dramatic Art. **Front row (l–r)** Vasiliki Nihas, Facilitator; Tony Marshall, State Library of Tasmania; Jerelynn Brown, State Library of New South Wales; Beryl Davis, Queensland Performing Arts Trust; Louise Hyland, National Library of Australia.
Apologies: Peter Cox, Powerhouse Museum; Ivan King, His Majesty's Theatre.

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6 *Natural Life*, 1998, directed & devised by Michael Kantor, based on a script by Humphrey Bower, Playbox Theatre Centre, Melbourne; *Corrugation Road*, 1996, by Jimmy Chi, Black Swan Theatre in association with Adelaide Festival Centre, George Fairfax Studio, Victorian Arts Centre; *Rites*, 1997, Choreographer: Stephen Page, The Australian Ballet with Bangarra Dance Theatre, State Theatre, Victorian Arts Centre; *The Boy From Oz*, 1998, Directed by Gale Edwards, Her Majesty's Theatre, Sydney.
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Retaining any vigorous life: perceptions of ephemerality in performing arts resources

RICHARD STONE

The performing arts have been around for a long time in one form or another. The human need to perform, ritualise and proselytise has been a powerful force since the beginnings of recorded history. They are an immutable part of Australia's cultural life, generating an impact stretching from the everyday (encounters with radio and television) to the occasional (attending a rock concert, an opera, or busking in the street). Along the way we interact with a range of art forms from chamber music to line dancing, and from drag shows to standup comedy! All of these and many other genres of the performing arts have enormous economic impact whether their origins are amateur, professional, commercial, or a mixture of each.

We encounter performances in a diversity of venues including streets and parks, clubs and casinos, sports stadiums and arenas, restaurants and experimental spaces. Performing arts appear in traditional proscenium theatres and concert halls. Performances operate within varying time frames from a single event, season or tour, to a festival or competition. Performances can involve just one person performing, or a large number of assembled people. They can be the home-grown Australian product or international tours to Australia. An audience can be one person or, ultimately, millions of people in the case of mass media broadcasts.

The creative process in the performing arts is a complex one. However, there is a commonality across all genres and types which involves inspiration and creation, preparation and production, presentation and performance. At any one point along this spectrum a complex mix of people, technology, geography and temporality is taking place, all with a common goal — the final act of public communication — a performance before an audience. This performance, however, is ultimately transitory or ephemeral, relying as it does on a host of momentary sensual and intellectual responses by an individual member of an audience, or by an audience as a collective entity.

Designer William Constable with his model for *Terra Australis*, 1946. Geoffrey Ingram Archive of Australian Ballet. Courtesy National Library of Australia.

It is that very ephemerality which distinguishes the performing arts and certain other examples of popular culture, such as sport. It is this transitory factor which makes collection and preservation so challenging for heritage institutions.

In 1995 a collection of essays appeared entitled, *Preserving the ephemeral*. The volume paid tribute to Katherine Brisbane, founder of Currency Press, a publishing house devoted to the publication of Australian play texts and reference works in the performing arts, particularly drama and musical theatre.

The title itself is revealing in that it indicates how a segment of the performing arts profession (in this case actors, playwrights and directors) perceives its art to be ephemeral. Given that it is a volume celebrating a publisher it is not surprising that there is a warm feeling extended to the printed word. The central theme implicit in the title, and which emerges in a number of the essays, is that the act of publishing in itself is a means of preservation, of validation of the theatrical art.

Playwright Katherine Thomson sees her occupation, '...as ephemeral as the act of theatre itself'. She paints a poignant picture of a playwright gaining identity, '...until I was published, until I held a copy of my play in my hand, I was reluctant to claim the title of playwright'.[1]

Fellow playwright and actor Nick Enright extends the printed word to include the covers of the texts as published by Currency Press, '...the photos on the covers are...talismanic... [which] acknowledge the centrality of actors in our work: and they signal that the plays have had a life on the professional stage, that often brief life which publication may extend or renew'.[2]

It is left to actor and director John Bell to perhaps overstate the case when he writes, 'At the end of it all, reviews, pho-

tographs and programs moulder away in the archives. Only the scripts retain any vigorous life and stand as living testimony to what was achieved.' He goes on to claim that without Currency Press '...a significant piece of Australian cultural and social history would be forgotten...'.[3]

It is not difficult to agree with this latter sentiment. Currency Press and the dedicated work of Katherine Brisbane and Phillip Parsons have been instrumental in the emergence of a truly Australian theatre in the last 25 years. The texts of that era have been preserved by being published, distributed and collected in libraries. However, Mr Bell's assertion on the primacy of the published word in preserving theatre history cannot go unchallenged.

It strikes a discordant note in the hearts and minds of archivists, curators and librarians responsible for collecting and preserving the multiple signs of 'vigorous life', the 'living testimony' of Australia's performing arts about which he, Mr Bell, is so passionate. Put simply, there is a great deal more material to be collected and preserved both before and after the lights have dimmed and the images which have illuminated the playing space have passed on to that most fragile of receptacles, the human memory.

As well as published scripts and texts the mosaic of performing arts heritage resources include: personal papers, manuscripts, business records, scripts, video recordings, audio tapes, designs, models, costumes, properties, furniture, backdrops, set pieces, photographs, technical plots, programs, cast lists, press releases, invitations, subscription brochures, postcards and other publicity material. And reviews, the outside world's entrée into the process, the final critical judgment delivered on the exposure of performance.

No one institution can hope to collect and preserve comprehensively in the field of the performing arts. The wide range of materials cross the traditional collecting boundaries of museums, libraries, archives and galleries.

In a few rare cases a single collection can combine several genres and types of material.[4] The Jandaschewsky collection in the Powerhouse Museum is a prominent example which recently received exposure in the splendid exhibition 'Circus!'. Photographs, programs, personal papers and memorabilia, costumes and a dazzling array of properties and instruments document the life of a circus family, a field which director Terence Measham acknowledges is, '...an often neglected aspect of Australian popular culture'.[5] If only more of the performing arts (and popular culture in general) were served by collections such as the Jandaschewsky collection! However, such is not the case, and the situation is never likely to change.

Researchers, critics and students of popular culture have to rely on a national collection of performing arts resources which are distributed around Australia in archives, libraries, galleries and museums at the national, state and local level. Access to these collections and information about them is still fragmented. The development of Museums Australia's Performing Arts Special Interest Group (PASIG) is a major step towards overcoming that fragmentation and facilitating documentation and preservation, thereby revealing the full range of performing arts resources.

Richard Stone is Manager, Acquisitions & Australian Collection Development, at the National Library of Australia.

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1 Golder, J. (ed.) with Cooney, J. and Williams, M. 1995, *Preserving the ephemeral. Katherine Brisbane and Currency Press*, Friends of the National Library, Canberra, p.19.
2 ibid. p.18.
3 ibid p.9.
4 Collections containing several genres and types of material are the core business of specialist performing arts museums. The Performing Arts Museum's Barry Humphries — Dame Edna Everage Collection is one such example. (Ed.)
5 Webber, K. (ed.) 1996, *Circus!. The Jandaschewsky Story*, Powerhouse Publishing, Sydney (see Foreword).

Museums Australia's Performing Arts Special Interest Group (PASIG) has a number of working groups, which focus on specific aspects of the performing arts.

Exhibitions — convened by Beryl Davis, Manager, Queensland Performing Arts Museum.
Tel (07) 3840 7362, Fax (07) 3846 5687, email Beryl@Qpat.com.au.
The group is currently working towards a federation project and grant application details are being sought from the Federal Centenary of Federation Committee for a PASIG submission to curate and develop a touring exhibition.

Information — convened by Richard Stone, Manager, Acquisitions and Australian Collection Development, National Library of Australia.
Tel (02) 6262 1306, Fax (02) 6273 4322, email rstone@nla.gov.au.
The group is working on a PASIG website to coincide with the ICOM conference in October this year.

Collection Development — convened by Jerelynn Brown, Manager, Collection Development, State Library of New South Wales. Tel (02) 9273 1630, Fax (02) 9273 1268, email jbrown@ilanet.slnsw.gov.au.
The group is working to complete a distributed national collection policy to be available on the PASIG website.

The performing arts will be represented at ICOM 98 through both the specialist committees network (International Committee for Musical Instruments Museums — CIMCIM) and a PASIG session.

The CIMCIM meeting will mirror the main ICOM theme and will feature papers and visits to several collections prior to and during the conference. Tours will include the Powerhouse Museum's collection of musical instruments in Sydney and the collections of the Performing Arts Museum and the Grainger Museum in Melbourne.

A joint session of PASIG and CIMCIM is currently being planned.

Contact Michael Lea, Acting Curator (and co-convenor of CIMCIM meetings), Music and Musical Instruments, Powerhouse Museum.
Tel (02) 9217 0572, Fax (02) 9217 0355, email: michaell@phm.gov.au.

Special and Evocative Performing Arts Museums in Australia

FRANK VAN STRATEN

It is fifty years since the publication of the first comprehensive history of Australian theatre.[1] Very little more was published until 1971, when Viola Tait — a former actress — published *A Family of Brothers*.[2] Her research into privately-held J.C. Williamson memorabilia alerted her to the need for publicly accessible performing arts collections, and it was therefore natural that she should be one of the small, enthusiastic group who pushed for the establishment of a performing arts museum at the Victorian Arts Centre in the mid 1970s.

'Memorabilia associated with entertainment has always been special and evocative. Theatre-goers keep their programmes, their tickets and souvenirs, while objects associated with famous acts or actors have been carefully handed down. The sword used by Kean was given to Irving...' These words were written by Catherine Hall in her book on the development of the Theatre Museum at Covent Garden.[3] An offshoot of the venerable Victoria and Albert, the Theatre Museum opened in 1987 after many false starts. By then, though, performing arts museums were already a fact of life in Australia, all attached to performing arts centres rather than offshoots of museums. And, with one sad exception, our performing arts museums have escaped the disappointments and rancour that have scarred the London institution. Nevertheless, Australia's performing arts museums are facing major challenges and considerable change. This article explores their comparatively short and mostly successful history — their 'Act One'. Acts two and three are yet to come.

Sydney

Australia's first museum of the performing arts was established in 1973 at the Sydney Opera House: the Dennis Wolanski Library of the Performing Arts. Named after the Sydney businessman who initially supported it financially, its primary responsibility was to preserve material relating to the Opera House. Under the energetic stewardship of Paul Bentley its brief quickly expanded to include documentation and memorabilia relating to the broad history of the performing arts in Australia. Its secondary exhibition function was perhaps triggered by the interest created by 'All the World's a Stage', a major 'Australian-British Theatre Exhibition' staged at the Opera House as part of its opening celebrations in 1973. The exhibition drew largely on material lent by British institutions, supplemented by local memorabilia.

Funding and facilities provided for the Opera House collection failed to keep pace with its growth and the need for a dedicated exhibition space. The Library closed 'temporarily' in December 1996 pending a review of its operations, accommodation and finances. Plans for 'Theatreworks', an innovative and ambitious permanent exhibition, were abandoned under the Carr Government. Paul Bentley and his staff were retrenched or redeployed and his department was reduced to documenting activity in the Opera House. The massive collection has been split between other institutions such as the Mitchell Library, the Powerhouse Museum and the Performing Arts Museum in Melbourne.

Melbourne

The Victorian Arts Centre is situated on a site redolent with performing arts history. For many years it was the home of FitzGerald's Circus and Wirth's Circus, the Trocadero dance hall, and early silent movie shows. In 1975 a decision was made to include a museum of the performing arts in the Victorian Arts Centre. Inspired by the library and museum at the Lincoln Center in New York, the Performing Arts Museum was launched in 1978 with funding from the Arts Centre through the Victorian Ministry for the Arts and major sponsorship from Mobil Australia. In 1979 Ron Danielson commenced work as curator with Frank Van Straten as archivist. Significant early acquisitions include the Dame Nellie Melba stage wardrobe, archival material from J.C. Williamson's and St Martin's Theatre, and memorabilia from Barry Humphries and Ashton's Circus.

The Performing Arts Museum's exhibition area in the Melbourne Concert Hall opened in 1982 with 'They Call Me Melba', designed by Anne Fraser. Since then over 140 exhibitions have been staged, covering virtually all aspects of the performing arts. After Ron Danielson's death in 1984, Frank Van Straten became the Museum's director. The archival collection continued to expand but it lacked a permanent home until the end of 1988 when a dedicated storage area was established in the Melbourne Concert Hall. It is now estimated to contain some 200,000 items. Negotiations are now proceeding for the Museum to assume responsibility for the Australian Archives of the Dance, a collection established by Edward H. Pask at the Australian Ballet in the early 1970s.

In 1992, to celebrate its tenth birthday, the Museum presented On With the Show — Preserving Our Performing Arts Heritage, a national conference for individuals and organisations collecting and researching the performing arts. From this came the Performing Arts Special Interest Group of Museums Australia.

When Frank Van Straten retired in 1993, former curator Janine Barrand became director. A computer-cataloguing project was instituted, facilitated by extra funding from the Victorian Arts Centre. Further funding for cataloguing and imaging was received in the 1997-98 state budget.

Stages, a project to rework and relocate the Museum's display area, was instigated in 1996 but was later shelved. In February 1998, after fifteen years in the Melbourne Concert Hall, the Performing Arts Museum's displays were relocated to the more accessible St Kilda Road foyers of the Theatre Building, allowing free entry and extended opening hours.

Perth

Because of Western Australia's distance from the eastern states, entertainment developed more slowly. It took the 1890's gold rush to give Perth its first major theatre. The state's performing arts history is therefore markedly different. It is also uniquely colourful, often reflecting the efforts of plucky troupes covering vast distances to perform one-night stands in tiny, scattered settlements. Perth's second major live theatre, His Majesty's, opened in 1904.

The restoration of His Majesty's in 1977 provided the trigger for Perth actor, historian and raconteur Ivan King to begin gathering Western Australian performing arts material. This collection became the official archive of the Perth Theatre Trust and in 1980 found a congenial home at His Majesty's, initially in rooms off Tiptoe Alley, a euphemistically-named corridor of the former hotel section of the theatre building. In 1983 Ivan King came on staff as curator. The archive documents the performing arts in Western Australia and provides material for museum displays in the foyers of His Majesty's. It includes the records of the Perth Theatre Trust, His Majesty's, the Repertory Club from 1919 to 1956, and the National Theatre Company from 1956 to 1984. There is also a small but important costume collection.

As part of his work, Ivan mounts foyer displays, writes program notes, conducts tours of the beautifully restored 1904 theatre, and provides a constant supply of colourful, historic show business copy for the media.

The Western Australian Government has recently decided to tender management of all Perth Theatre Trust operations, including the archive. Negotiations are proceeding.

His Majesty's Theatre, Perth, 1998. Photo Eddie Resera.

Adelaide

The Performing Arts Collection of South Australia grew out of Premier Don Dunstan's concern for the state's disappearing performing arts heritage. He consulted with Colin Ballantyne, an innovative theatre director and photographer and chairman of the State Theatre Company of South Australia. Under Ballantyne's aegis the Performing Arts Collection of South Australia was born in May 1979 in offices at Kent Down. Tom Dermody was project officer with Jo Peoples as his assistant. On Tom's resignation in 1981, Jo took over as curator. In 1982 the Collection moved to a quaint but cramped suburban church hall. Three years later the Adelaide Festival Centre Trust assumed administrative responsibility for the Collection, and it moved again, this time to the Adelaide Festival Centre.

The Collection focuses on recording and preserving the state's performing arts history. It includes Ballantyne's vast photographic archive and Agnes Dobson's personal memorabilia. Computerisation was introduced in 1994 using TED (The Event Database). This has been extended so the Collection's ephemera and memorabilia can be catalogued through links to the 'events' to which they relate. Graphics and sound will be added soon. A website is now operating.

Jo Peoples has a back up staff of a photographer and a librarian, both part-time. Future plans include exhibition space in the Festival Centre. There could also be exhibition space in a building adjacent to the Festival Centre proposed by the Science Investigator Centre. Other priorities are to upgrade the physical storage of the Collection and to increase its cultural tourism potential.

The Performing Arts Collection of South Australia has helped raise awareness of the remaining fragments of Adelaide's historic Queen's Theatre. Jo Peoples produced *A Farewell Benefit for Mr Emanuel Solomon* at the Queen's for Heritage Week, 1994, and has been involved in several other presentations there.

Brisbane

The Queensland Performing Arts Complex is located on the south bank of the Brisbane River, near the site of the warmly-remembered Cremorne Theatre, once managed by John N. McCallum (father of actor John McCallum) and during the war years by vaudevillian Will Mahoney. The complex opened in 1985. Under the direction of Beryl Davis, a continuing program of performing arts foyer exhibitions grew to include a permanent performing arts collection documenting Queensland's entertainment history. A gift of memorabilia relating to Gladys Moncrieff, the beloved Bundaberg-born musical comedy star, launched the Gladys Moncrieff Library of the Performing Arts. The Library is responsible for the Trust's archives and provides a small performing arts library and research service for staff.

A Collection Development Policy was endorsed by the Queensland Performing Arts Trust in 1991. In 1995 the Trust announced the formation of a Performing Arts Museum at the complex. The campaign Bring Back the Magic increased awareness of the Collection and generated many inquiries and donations of material.

There are now over 14,000 items in the Collection, catalogued on a computer database which can be searched through Australian Museums on Line.[4] It includes original vaudeville scripts, photographs, programs and artefacts from the old Cremorne Theatre and the Theatre Royal; the Christopher Ellis collection of 34,000

negatives of Brisbane performances in the 1980s; many costume and set designs from 1975 onwards; and memorabilia relating to notable Australian soprano Molly de Gunst. Other highlights include a costume from Oscar Asche's lavish musical *Chu Chin Chow*, Will Mahoney's xylophone, and several costumes from Joan Sutherland's 1965 tour of Australia.

Collection storage remains a problem. In the short term it will remain at the Performing Arts Complex. There are plans for its eventual relocation to the recently announced Cultural Heritage Centre to be built at Southbank.

Museum-arts centre relationships

Significantly, Australia's performing arts museums are all linked to performing arts centres. As the centres themselves are comparatively new, providing a home for memorabilia gives them a sense of history, a link with show business past. This museum-arts centre relationship mirrors similar successful institutions overseas. Further, performing arts related museums that do not have this link seem often to be in a permanent state of uncertainty. The Theatre Museum in London and the San Francisco Performing Arts Library and Museum are examples. Others, like the Variety Arts Centre in Los Angeles, have virtually disappeared.

Further, well-worn costumes, early stage lighting, personal scrapbooks and all the other diverse material collected, treasured and displayed by performing arts museums would often appear out of place in more traditional archives. Yet in a performing arts museum the material lives, providing a bridge between actors and audiences past, present and future. And the performing arts profession regards these archives as their own; a precious permanent recognition of an otherwise ephemeral art.

Frank Van Straten is a writer, broadcaster and former director of the Performing Arts Museum, Victorian Arts Centre.

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The National Symposium on Research in the Performing Arts

ANGELA O'BRIEN

The National Symposium on Research in the Performing Arts was held at the School of Studies in Creative Arts, Victorian College of the Arts, (University of Melbourne) in May 1997. The Symposium, funded through an ARC Special Initiatives Grant, brought together key decision makers and researchers in higher education, government and the performing arts industry to discuss a way forward for the development, promotion and dissemination of research in the performing arts in Australia.

Symposium convenor, Associate Professor Angela O'Brien, Dean of the School of Studies in Creative Arts, applied for funding because of the special needs associated with research in the performing arts. Unlike the visual arts, literature or film, where tangible products are created, every performance is unique, ephemeral and dependent upon the relationship between performer and audience within a specified art form. To ensure that the performing arts can be researched, there needs to be a recognition of the ephemeral nature of the form and methodologies which ensure that performances can be recorded or archival evidence collected for access by current and future researchers. Academics and researchers in the field are also concerned about the need for funding bodies to recognise that research can be undertaken through experimentation with new performance modes.

Key issues discussed included:

- the problem of defining research in the performing arts;
- the need to recognise practice-based research as bona fide research activity;
- the relevance of performing arts research to industry practice;
- appropriate documentation and dissemination of such research;
- improved recognition of and funding for research.

Several members of Museums Australia's PASIG attended the Symposium. Mr Richard Stone (National Library of Australia) spoke about research resources available through performing arts museums and library collections in Australia. Dr Jeff Brownrigg (National Film and Sound Archive) offered a paper outlining a number of research projects which have been associated with the Archive, including the National Network for Research in Australian Music and 'ALFRED', a project which will provide electronic access to a vast array of education resources dedicated to the history and progress of Australian federation.

The Points of Agreement developed at the Symposium recognised the need for further national consultation on the development of new formats for the archiving and dissemination of documentation of performance, including electronic and computer assisted platforms; as well as further consultation on the establishment of a national register of researchers in the performing arts. The meeting welcomed PASIG's efforts to look at the development of national databases to assist ease of access to archival materials in the performing arts.

Dr Angela O'Brien is Associate Professor & Dean of the School of Studies in Creative Arts, Victorian College of the Arts.

Symposium proceedings are available for $17 ($15 plus p+p) from Associate Professor Angela O'Brien, School of Studies in Creative Arts, Arts Centre Building, University of Melbourne, Parkville 3052.
Tel (03) 9344 8362; fax (03) 9344 8462; email: a.obrien@vca.unimelb.edu.au

Museums and the Performing Arts

MICHAEL SHMITH

I have in my mind's eye a picture of a museum. It is, I suppose, the sort of image one would expect of someone who is orientated more towards the performing arts than the institutions in which they are sometimes preserved. What I see is this: long corridors receding into the distance and lined with towering filing cabinets and shelving, and dusty display cases through whose opaque glass you can discern gleaming shapes that might be an Etruscan helmet, a turban from some long-forgotten production of *La Bayadère*, or a choker collar worn by Melba in *Faust*. I also see a Faustian caretaker, a guardian of the threshold, hunched over a sloping writing desk who, upon gentle inquiry, looks up from under his eyeshade, adjusts his sleeve-clips and says in cobwebbed tones: 'Museums would be fine places if it wasn't for the public. Come back in several years.'

This is, of course, all wrong. Museums can't be like that (well, not any more). Perhaps it is something to do with the word itself, which is not terribly inviting and is, let's face it, often used pejoratively. Pierre Boulez once said — famously — that all opera houses were museums and should be blown-up. Monsieur Boulez, it should be added, went on to conduct in many of them without the slightest sign of Semtex under his jacket; indeed, only a few years after his volatile utterance, he started the IRCAM in Paris: an institution that has indeed become almost as venerable as Boulez himself.

The role of the museum to the performing arts is not simply archival; it is as an essential and productive part of the cultural process as the arts themselves. Without preserving the very sense of what has existed, a break can occur in the cultural evolution that can never be repaired and, worse, can lead to misinterpretation, misinformation and just plain ignorance. Fortunately we live in an age where its state leaders are brave enough to commit their governments to cultural policies in the belief that it is the culture rather than themselves that is remembered. But this commitment is only the beginning of a long continuing process, which, like the painting of the Sydney Harbour Bridge, has neither beginning nor end.

There are many performing arts museums in many places. It could be argued that arts companies are, in themselves, living, breathing archives. Certainly, what they do in the spirit of performance becomes the stuff of memories immediately the curtain comes down or the last trumpet is sounded. There are ways to preserve at least some of these memories (recordings and videos not the least of them), but these are fragmentary, reproductive and, in their own way, as illusionary as believing a travel brochure to be the real thing.

As with the performing arts themselves, a museum should reflect that very spirit of enterprise and ingenuity.

One cannot expect an arts company, however well equipped, to be its own museum. That is not its primary function — especially in a climate of limited funding in which the focus must be on performing. This is why, for example, The Australian Ballet will be donating its archive to the Performing Arts Museum of the Victorian Arts Centre. It means this collection of costumes, photographs, programs and *memories* will belong to an institution dedicated to preservation, acquisition and exhibition. It also means The Australian Ballet's archive will naturally belong amongst a larger collection, which embraces the performing arts in Melbourne, Victoria, Australia and the world.

A proper institution should not reflect a singular purpose but the myriad of disciplines and evidence that comprises any culture. The wider the range, the better. One should not look just to tutus or faded photographs of Dame Margot, but beyond: to the art, architecture and the very age that surrounded her. Only a large and capable institution is able to realise this sense of place and purpose and therefore recreate the spirit of a certain age and, in doing so, maintain the relevance to this one. This is archived only by constant referencing and cross-referencing in the never-ending task that is the building of a collection.

No museum should remain in isolation. Just as the Internet has made the world smaller, so, too, are institutions now magnificently accessible. Just before writing this article, I visited the Royal Musée de Beaux-Arts in Brussels, the Louvre and the Musée d'Orsay in Paris, the Guggenheim Museum in New York, and a few other, smaller institutions in North America, Germany and Australia. All in a morning; all via the Internet. I downloaded a couple of Magrittes, a Woody Allen screensaver and an Emile Nolde print from Lübeck; I found some references to Robert Schumann and an eighteenth century recipe for sauce to have with chicken. Such is the strength of the global supermarket.

The computer is a wonderful tool for information. But will it ever replace the flesh-and-blood, the real reality, of actuality? In London I went to the Museum of the Moving Image, a brilliant and absolutely accessible archive that makes the movies (the most accessible art form of them all, in my opinion) much more than flickering pictures on a wall. How do they do this? By using actors to bring periods, whole epochs of films, alive. You enter a dishevelled railway carriage festooned with Cyrillic graffiti and heroic posters, in which a cloth-capped Revolutionary lectures you on the importance of Sergei Eisenstein to the Soviet cinema. He shows you clips and, as you perch on a well-worn seat of impossibly hard hardwood, you feel part of the age itself.

This is easy to achieve in other institutions and other exhibitions. Sometimes it is as simple as looking around you. I think of the entrance to the State Theatre of the Victorian Arts Centre and the showcases of the various theatrical costumes. There, behind glass but still vainglorious, is a costume of Edna Everage: how *tall* she is, you exclaim. And just along the corridor is a Joan Sutherland costume: exact, opulent, *ample*. Museum pieces to be sure, but just

as interactive and as accessible as anything on your computer screen, plus the ability to allow you to think of someone's height or breadth. The human element is therefore all important; one must, after all, work to scale. Take that Dame Edna costume: the *feet* are also big, leading one to remember Edna's masculine origins and triggering other responses.

What, then, is a performing arts museum for? To remind, certainly. To inform, absolutely. To educate, of course. To entertain! The combination of all these is essential. Those dusty shelves and towering files of my mind's eye never really existed; they are just part of an unfortunate word-association game, in which 'museum' equals dry scholarship and 'institution' conjures up severity and lack of charm and appeal. I look for a place which stores and *restores* — the lost and the living, the past and the present, nostalgia and unfortunate memories (there is a place for heroic failures as well as successes). I look for a place which is itself accessible and makes the most of what it has in store. I look for a place that is, in the sense of its own heritage and renewal, inquisitive and acquisitive, being afraid of neither good nor bad, old nor new.

As with the performing arts themselves, a museum should reflect that very spirit of enterprise and ingenuity. Just as there is what you see on stage and, in the wings, a host of people responsible for getting it there; museums too have their backstage crew of researchers, managers, funders and givers. That costume in the glass box is only the end of a long and involved mechanism of searching and finding, giving and cataloguing.

While caring for the past, and making it available to all who seek its traditions and history, the institution must also look to the present and the future. Only by holding this trinity in balance is a museum able truly to fulfil its function of representing culture in all its forms and from all its ages. Without them, the performing arts would live in a vacuum, with no obvious reference points apart from yellowing cuttings and fading recollections. Audiences may never forget what they have seen, but only through institutions can these memories spread and maintain their influence.

Michael Shmith is a former arts editor of The Age, Melbourne, and was director of communications of The Australian Ballet 1995-1998. He now lives and writes in London.

Forthcoming exhibitions with a performing arts focus include:

A Very Special Experience: 25 Years of the Festival Theatre, opening at the Adelaide Festival Centre in May. Features costumes worn by the stars who have performed at the Festival Theatre, plus props and stage designs from these shows. Tel (08) 8216 8769.

Costumes for the Russian Ballet 1909–1933, opening at the National Gallery of Australia in September. The exhibition moves to the Art Gallery of Western Australia in January 1999. Features more than 200 works — original costumes, drawings, photographs, posters and theatre programs drawn from major international collections. Tel (02) 6240 6432.

It's our museum: collaboration in specialist performing arts museums

CAROLYN LAFFAN

Industry input has always been integral to the development of the Performing Arts Museum. When the idea for a museum dedicated to the history of the performing arts was first conceived as part of the Victorian Arts Centre master plan during the 1970s, prominent industry representatives were consulted for their views on what such a museum should achieve. Many in the industry felt that with the demise of the theatrical giant J.C. Williamson Ltd in 1977, a home should be found for the records of the most dominant theatrical company of the past century. This new home needed to be a place where the Williamson archive would be not just another manuscript collection, but the focus around which the story of the performing arts in Australia could be told through costumes, props, posters, programs, photographs and personal papers, with no artificial divide between objects and paper-based material.

The Performing Arts Museum's focus on documenting, exhibiting and providing access to Australia's performing arts history has enabled us to fulfil the industry criteria of maintaining the integrity of collections across material types. Unlike other institutions such as the Powerhouse in Sydney or the National Library of Australia in Canberra, who collect across many divergent subject areas, the specialised nature of the Performing Arts Museum's charter has enabled us to move beyond the documentation of 'iconic' performers and companies. Documentation of the lives of the 'journeymen' of the theatrical world, those men and women who have worked in the industry all their lives for little recognition or financial recompense, provides a depth to the collection that continues to attract increasing numbers of researchers each year.

Relationships built up with artists and companies over a period of nearly twenty years continue to grow, with members of the performing arts community advising the Museum on industry issues at a number of levels, including programming and policy development. The early co-operation and enthusiasm of the rock industry, for example, led the Performing Arts Museum to stage Australia's first retrospective rock exhibition, 'Beat! Australian Pop and Rock Culture 1958-1984'. The Museum has continued to work collaboratively with the rock music industry on a number of projects, including the 25th anniversary celebrations of Mushroom Records and the Sunbury Pop Festival last year.

The Performing Arts Museum has also enjoyed a long relationship with the Australian circus community. Named the official national archive to the circus industry at the Circus Summit held in Melbourne in 1990, the Museum preserves and celebrates Australia's circus heritage and houses a large collection of costumes, apparatus, posters, programs and photographs relating to Circus Oz, Ashton's, Wirth's, and Sole Brothers circuses.

This year, in collaboration with the Circus Fans of Australasia and the Commonwealth Department of Communications and the Arts, the Museum will celebrate the 150th year of circus in Australia. A mosaic, depicting scenes from Wirth's Circus, which once occupied the Victorian Arts Centre site, will be unveiled to provide a visual reminder of the links shared by the two organisations.

Collaboration is also an important aspect of an industry-based oral history project, Talk in the Green Room. Established in 1995 by actor Beverley Dunn in collaboration with the Performing Arts Museum, Talk in the Green Room is a unique oral history project in that practitioners are interviewed by other practitioners. Dunn believes it is particularly important that performers be interviewed by a colleague (often a contemporary) or someone who at least knows 'the shorthand'. As a result, dancers interview dancers, actors interview actors and singers interview other singers. The result is a rich double, with oral history providing both detailed historical accounts and 'gossip' as heard in the Green Room. Interviewees are chosen by a committee comprising representatives from the areas of dance, drama, opera and music theatre. At the end, a collection of tapes is given to the Museum.

Barry Humphries visits the Performing Arts Museum, 1997. Photo Norman Wodetzki.

Talk in the Green Room is one of the many ongoing collaborative projects supported by the Performing Arts Museum. Indeed, working with the industry we serve drives our daily work. Whether it be a display to tie-in with a new season produced by the Melbourne Theatre Company, Playbox, The Australian Ballet, the Melbourne Comedy Festival or a tribute to a performer who has devoted their life to the theatre, the Museum aims to provide the audience with a greater understanding of the context in which the performing arts has developed and flourished in this country.

Carolyn Laffan is Curator at the Performing Arts Museum, Melbourne.

Performing Arts Online

HELEN SIMONDSON

In 1996 the Australian Cultural Ministers Council agreed to support the development of joint Commonwealth-state/territory cultural initiatives. The Ministers made it a priority to strengthen and develop partnerships for the future that would assist in the effective delivery of cultural programs. The Performing Arts Multimedia Library (PAML) Pilot Project is one such initiative. The pilot project has been jointly funded by the Commonwealth Government and the Victorian State Government, through the Department of Communications and the Arts and Cinemedia, the body formed by last year's merger of Film Victoria and the State Film Centre of Victoria.

The main objective of the PAML Pilot Project is to explore the legal issues surrounding the production and distribution of digital products. Although the Federal Government's long-term aim is to create a digital collection of significant Australian performing arts material, this can only be achieved with an understanding and exploration of issues surrounding the digital environment.

The PAML Pilot Project is being undertaken in Victoria during 1998 through to early 1999, when the products and the pilot guidelines will be launched. The pilot project will assist in the creation of digital works using new performing arts material. These digital products will exist in a variety of formats and will be available for delivery through a variety of delivery mechanisms. This process will provide a 'testbed' for an exploration of the legal issues surrounding the production and distribution of performing arts products in the digital environment.

The form of the products to be produced during the pilot will be determined by the participating performing arts companies and the PAML Pilot Project Steering Committee. The Steering Committee is made up of representatives from the Department of Communications and the Arts, Cinemedia and Arts Victoria. A range of Victorian performing arts companies from a number of different art forms have been approached and briefed about the PAML Pilot Project and several companies are now working on proposals for involvement in the project. Between three and four companies will be selected to join the pilot program based on how innovative and marketable their proposals are.

Companies will be able to develop new audiences and extend the life of works which would be otherwise limited to a performance season and audience.

During the pilot project, Cinemedia will work in conjunction with the selected performing arts companies to identify the various legal, technical and industry practice issues associated with the production and digital delivery of their works. In the past it has been difficult for performing arts companies to record their work, as current industry practice requires that performers rights are paid upfront. Performers had to be paid whether the recording succeeded or failed and this payment could only be based on an estimated usage, making the process prohibitively expensive.

However, it is now possible, through digital technology, to monitor the usage of a particular recording and reward copyright creators accordingly. It should therefore be possible to discuss opportunities for back-end reward for performers, based upon actual usage, rather than front-end reward for estimated reach. The aim of the PAML Pilot Project is to explore all of these complex legal issues and develop guidelines for other performing arts companies wishing to work in this area.

The digital age is opening up exciting possibilities for the delivery of arts and culture. The development by Cinemedia of a digital media delivery system known as SWIFT is an important platform for distribution of PAML material. The SWIFT system will provide users with online access to digital video titles on demand via commercial broadband delivery networks. Users will pay a per-usage charge and have full VCR functionality while viewing. The SWIFT system will provide a flexible copyright management system for the online delivery of digital video. Products created by the performing arts companies during the PAML Pilot Project will be included on the SWIFT digital media delivery system.

Guidelines will be created from the pilot project's findings for the long-term benefit of all performing arts companies and individuals working in the area of new media technology. These guidelines will be made available to the performing arts industry throughout Australia.

The PAML Pilot Project will provide an exciting opportunity for the participating performing arts companies to explore the creative possibilities available through the use of digital technologies. Companies will be able to develop new audiences and extend the life of works which would be otherwise limited to a performance season and audience. It is important as culture becomes more global, that Australia's best companies can extend their audiences and their creative activities beyond Australia.

Helen Simondson is Project Manager at the Performing Arts Multimedia Library, Cinemedia.

Unfortunately, Cinemedia's announcement of the performing arts companies who will be participating in the PAML Pilot Project did not coincide with *Museum National*'s production schedule.
Contact Helen Simondson on (03) 9651 0628 for details.

Take the wild ride
Real wild child! on CD-ROM

PETER COX

When the Powerhouse Museum opened the exhibition 'Real wild child: Australian rock music then and now' in 1994, the public response demonstrated the enormous interest in our musical heritage. After attracting large attendances in Sydney, the exhibition toured Australia from May 1996 to April 1998. Its success inspired a CD-ROM.

The *Real wild child!: Australian rock music 1950s-90s* CD-ROM was produced by a consortium comprising the Powerhouse Museum, Mushroom Pictures, Pacific Advanced Media and the ABC (including Triple J). These organisations came together in response to the Federal Government's Australia on CD program, which aims to promote broad access to the nation's artistic, intellectual and cultural heritage by funding the development of ten CD-ROMs.[1]

The consortium aimed to produce a CD-ROM that provided an entertaining and informative overview of key events and personalities in Australian rock music history — not simply an interactive exhibition on a screen. Obviously, a CD-ROM can store much more information than an exhibition. And it is a medium which offers exciting possibilities for interactivity, graphics, movies, animation and cross-referencing.

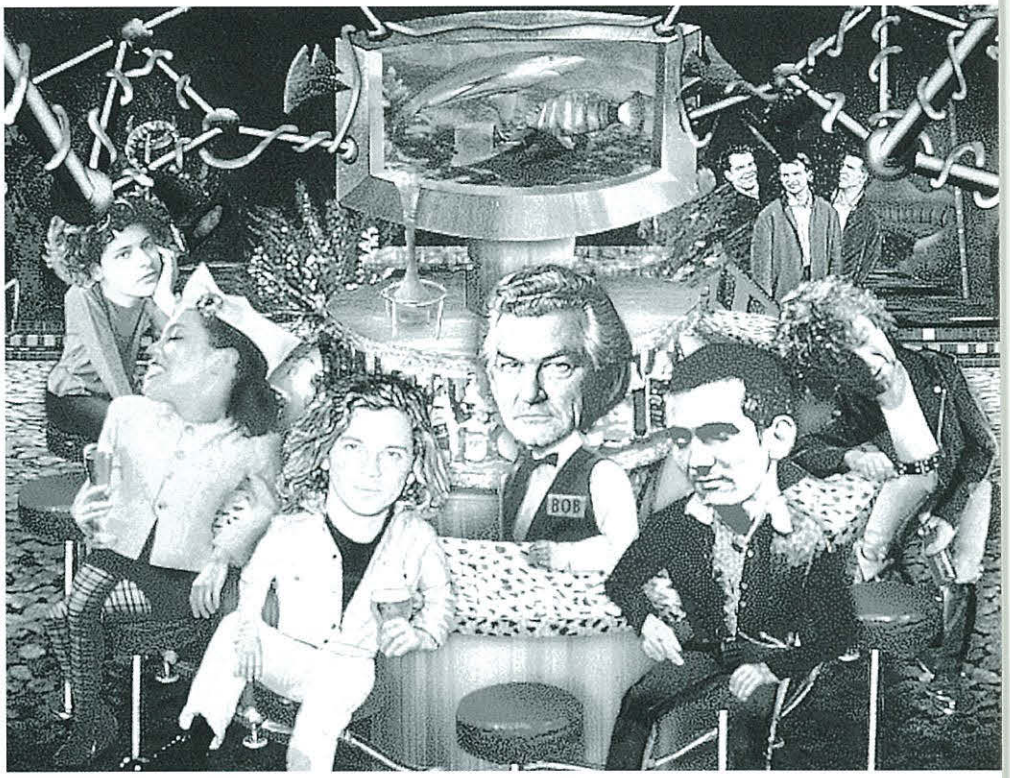
Real wild child! takes you into another world, an enormous interactive space. There are 2200 photos, 300 audio excerpts, 70 video segments and, all up, about 200,000 written words. Over 150 rock artists or bands are profiled. Musical events and personalities are placed in a context of social history — particularly fashion, politics, youth subcultures and leisure. There are stories on bodgies and widgies, surf culture, the pill, the Vietnam war, alternative lifestyles, religious cults, panel vans, the rise of the women's movement, beer barns, AIDS and the Internet. There is even a mix 'n' match fashion game.

In attempting to devise a rewarding interactive experience we considered models ranging from a task-oriented adventure game to an encyclopedic database. Several months were dedicated to developing ideas for the overall concept, testing them and discarding them. When the consortium had settled upon an agreed format and style, it was decided to develop and test one section as an 'electronic proof of concept'. In January 1997 an evaluation study was carried out to assess the design of this section with reference to navigation, graphic interface, content and pace. The findings confirmed that the graphics, pace, content, variety of information types and game-playing worked well and were popular. Feedback from the evaluation also allowed us to modify particular aspects of the navigation which needed improvement.

We ended up with a simple but anarchic format with a host of amusing features and games. Rather than telling the story of Australian rock decade by decade, we defined seven eras of Australian rock in which distinct musical and social trends can be identified. We then created environments that reflected the cultural trends and graphic styles of each era.

The main menu is a surreal landscape created by artist and musician Reg Mombassa. Navigating your way through the landscape is relatively simple. There are various sites, each representing one of the seven eras. Click on the milk bar, for example, and you will find yourself in the 1956–63 period.

Having aimed the CD-ROM at a young audience, we decided that a dry, encyclopedic approach was not appropriate. To give *Real wild child!* a bit of attitude and fun, (it's only rock 'n' roll, after all), Richard Fidler was recruited as scriptwriter. Formerly with the Doug Anthony All-Stars, Fidler hosts 'Race Around the World' on ABC-TV. Most of



Comical contexts: enter the 1980s nightclub to find performers seated at the bar, where a teetotalling P.M. serves the drinks.

the CD-ROM's gratuitous humour, inane games, irreverence, satire and all-round silliness can be attributed to him. Fidler's scripts place personalities and performers in comical contexts and include endless gags to amuse and engage the user.

Beneath the comedy and irreverence lies a great deal of historical content. Writers included Clinton Walker, Stuart Coupe, James Cockington and a host of specialist contributors. The ever-reliable Glenn A. Baker was called in as historical consultant to ensure the accuracy of the text. There is a slightly silly quiz, deadly serious Top 40 charts, select discographies, an Australian rock bibliography and information on the cost of living in each era. The CD-ROM is fully indexed. You can search for any of the 900 bands or performers that are mentioned anywhere in the text.

A talented production team was assembled for this project. Multimedia development was carried out by Pacific Advanced Media under the creative direction of Mike Fronzek. As well as having Reg Mombassa's unmistakable style on the main menu, the consortium enlisted Mambo artist David McKay to advise on artwork and graphics. The ABC took on the thankless role of project manager — keeping track of the budget; reporting to the funding body, the Department of Communications and the Arts; and finalising negotiations with record companies and music publishers were just some of the tasks.

Other team members included project managers, an editorial director, production co-ordinators, a cartoonist and graphic designers.

Real wild child! could not have been produced without the support of the Australian music industry. To include music on the CD-ROM, it was necessary to obtain the co-operation and permission of the major record companies and music publishers. The ground rules for copyright in multimedia are still being established. Production was well underway when we were disappointed to find that some songs had to be omitted for copyright reasons too complex to explain here. Suffice to say that working in new media presents particular challenges and difficulties.

The Powerhouse enjoyed a good relationship with the other consortium members, including the two non-government organisations. Members of the management team realised that we all had a common goal — to produce an outstanding, entertaining CD-ROM with quality and integrity. Being responsible for historical content and editorial direction, it was the Powerhouse Museum's responsibility to ensure that the information and writing was of the highest quality. The development and delivery of content had to meet deadlines and this always meant hard work and long hours. There was meticulous documentation of the literally thousands of items (mainly images) borrowed from various sources.

The CD-ROM was produced over a 15 month period, the team commencing full-time in May 1996 and completing the product in time for a media preview in September 1997. When the production was nearing completion the consortium began to look for a distributor. We were fortunate to join forces with Roadshow Interactive, one of Australia's leading multimedia distributors, who organised a successful media preview in September 1997, developed a promotional campaign and got the product into the shops in time for Christmas.

Working on the *Real wild child!* CD-ROM was an exhilarating, terrifying and ultimately rewarding experience. Having the opportunity to work on a multimedia project with a decent budget was a rare privilege. Best of all, the result was a CD-ROM we feel tremendously proud of.

Peter Cox is Curator of Social History at the Powerhouse Museum.

References

1 *Stage Struck*, a second performing arts-based CD-ROM was funded under the Australia on CD program. Consortium members are the National Institute of Dramatic Art (NIDA), The Australian Ballet, Sydney Opera House, Opera Australia and Wollongong University. The CD-ROM is scheduled for release in June. (Ed.)

In November 1997 at the Australian Interactive Multimedia Industry Association (AIMIA) awards *Real wild child!* won in seven categories, including the Gold Award for Best Overall Multimedia Product. At the Australian Publishers Assoc-iation awards in March 1998 the *Real wild child!* CD-ROM won the Phillip Fox Award for best designed multimedia.

Keep Dancing!

MICHELLE POTTER

Dance is a transient art form, a series of afterimages and fleeting moments. For an audience nothing, no film or video, no written or pictorial documentation can ever capture that wonderful feeling of 'being there'. But more often than not this 'fleeting and transient' idea is simply a cliche, an excuse for ignoring the responsibilities of recording history, of building a knowledge base about the past and the present for the future.

An Australia Council-funded partnership initiative between the National Film and Sound Archive, the National Library and the Australian Dance Council (Ausdance) has set out to address the issue of ensuring that Australia's dance history, especially its choreographic legacy, is adequately preserved. As a starting point the project, called Keep Dancing!, aims to locate and acquire film and video examples of the work of some of Australia's most significant choreographers, past and present, working in a variety of theatrical dance forms, and to preserve this material in the National Film and Sound Archive in Canberra.

The project has been funded initially for two years until June 1999. During these two years the project will target a small number of key Australian choreographers who will be asked to participate by donating material they feel best represents their output as creative artists. Should funds become available to continue the project past 1999, the net will be cast wider. During these first two years, ten new oral history interviews with Australian choreographers will also be added to the already extensive collection of dance interviews held in the National Library. These interviews will allow connections to be made between an artist's interpretation of his or her work, and work itself on film.

One of the most important consignments of material to have arrived at the National Film and Sound Archive since the project got under way in July 1997 is a collection of films, videos and audio material from Laurel Martyn — dancer, teacher, founder of Victorian Ballet Guild (later Ballet Victoria), and passionate defender of dance as a way of learning about life. This collection includes works choreographed by Martyn herself, works made by other Australian choreographers and produced for Martyn's dance company during the 1970s, as well as material that demonstrates the individualistic teaching method Martyn has developed during her long career in dance.

The Martyn collection is also significant because it expands on dance-related material already existing in the National Library. An important aim of the Keep Dancing! project is to build on existing collections of the partner institutions, expanding with a selection of moving images the photographic, manuscript, ephemera and oral history items of those institutions. Martyn was interviewed for the National Library's oral history program in 1989. In addition, the extensive photographic component of the Geoffrey Ingram Archive of Australian Ballet, acquired by the National Library in the 1980s, includes many photographs of Martyn and of her various choreographic works. Her film and video collection gives extraordinary breadth and context to these other materials.

For an audience nothing, no film or video, no written or pictorial documentation can ever capture that wonderful feeling of 'being there'.

As a result of the project, unexpected dance treasures have also come to light in the existing collection of the National Film and Sound Archive. A major and exciting

Edna Busse and Martin Rubinstein in Laurel Martyn's *Sigrid*, c. 1946. Photograph by Steele. Geoffrey Ingram Archive of Australian Ballet, National Library of Australia.

find has been footage of the choreography of the modern dance pioneer Gertrud Bodenwieser. Perhaps especially thrilling was the discovery of a film of three works made by Bodenwieser in the mid 1950s, *Central Australian Suite*, *Aboriginal Spear Dance* and *Blue Mountains Waltz*. This film shows Bodenwieser looking to Australia as a source of inspiration. The works are remarkable examples of an acclaimed exponent of central European expressive dance making an effort to come to grips with the culture of a new country.

The project takes as its underlying philosophy the belief that our prime responsibility as guardians of heritage material is to preserve that material for the future, and that this can be best achieved by depositing material where expert preservation treatment and controlled storage facilities are available.

Also as a result of the project, the National Film and Sound Archive has been proactive in seeking dance material that goes beyond the specific choreographic focus that currently characterises the Keep Dancing! project. Recent acquisitions include extensive footage of the Ballet Russes' tours to Australia between 1936 and 1940, shot by Sydney dermatologist Dr Ewan Murray-Will, and film of a Sydney performance of *Giselle* taken during the Australian tour by Ballet Rambert in 1940.

For the Keep Dancing! project, however, of equal importance to the location and preservation of material is the notion of accessibility. The project aims to ensure that the national dance collection is accessible to an ever-increasing community of Australians eager to find out more about Australian dance — how it got where it is and what it looks like today. New dance material arriving in the Archive is treated as preservation material and stored in temperature controlled vaults so that its long-term survival is maximised. But this preservation material is also being transferred to video and, subject to any restrictions that donors may have placed on it, will be available to researchers working on Archive premises.

Another major initiative relating to accessibility is the construction of an electronic directory, to be hosted via the National Library's world wide website. This directory, at present under construction and expected to be online by late 1998, will link the film and video material in the National Film and Sound Archive with materials in other media in the National Library. It will also give references to important holdings of unique dance material (as they apply to the present choreographic focus of the project) in other major institutions around Australia, including state libraries and the Performing Arts Museum, Melbourne.

The project is focused on an attitude to collecting that is a little different from that of many other dance collections around the world. Rather than working towards a single collection curated by subject experts located in one venue, the national dance collection that Keep Dancing! aims to develop, expand upon and make accessible is a dispersed collection. The project takes as its underlying philosophy the belief that our prime responsibility as guardians of heritage material is to preserve that material for the future, and that this can be best achieved by depositing material where expert preservation treatment and controlled storage facilities are available. If poorly stored, film becomes fragile, shrinks, develops vinegar syndrome, buckle and wave and other exotic diseases. Most early video formats are notoriously unstable and incapable of being played back on existing domestic equipment. It is logical, then, that such material be stored in an institution with the best possible facilities to ensure its long-term survival. The same applies to printed and photographic material, to costumes and to audio material.

As the project moves ahead it is becoming clear that the idea of a national dance collection distributed across a number of institutions is not just wishful thinking. Partnership is at the heart of Keep Dancing! It leads to unexpected outcomes and benefits, a sharing of resources and expertise that benefits all, and, most of all, the discovery of the richness and diversity of Australia's dance heritage.

Dr Michelle Potter is Manager of the Keep Dancing! project at the National Film and Sound Archive.

One Country, Two Systems? A Report on the 1997 Asialink Arts Management Residency at the Hong Kong Museum of Art

ALISON BENNETT

Gaining professional experience in Asia had been a long-term career objective. The opportunity offered by the Asialink Arts Management Residency was perfect: three months based at the Hong Kong Museum of Art during the colony's handover to Chinese sovereignty, no less. Such experiences can act as a mirror to our own cultural values and assumptions about the dynamics of contemporary cultural development.

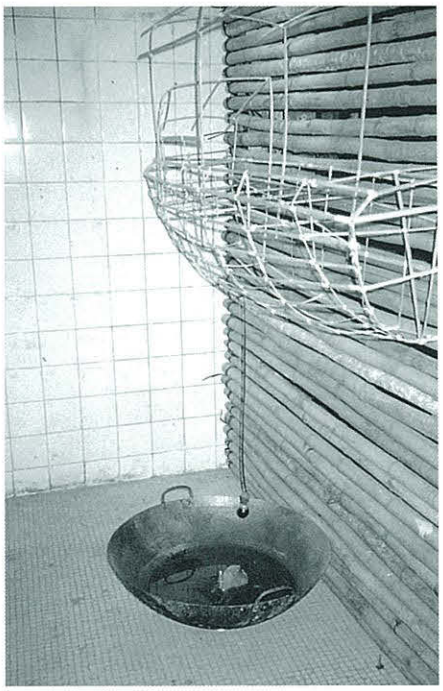
Essentially, the museum had asked me to contribute to its ephemera collection of material on Hong Kong artists. The collection, comprising articles, photographs, catalogues and associated material, contributes to the context and understanding of work in the collection and forms a primary resource for research on Hong Kong art. My time at the museum was spent carrying out interviews with artists and studying contemporary arts practice during the handover of Hong Kong sovereignty to China, particularly the conceptual and historical differences between 'traditional' and 'western' visual arts practices.

My research focused primarily on an investigation of the common use of the terms 'western' and 'Chinese' which, although commonly used to describe different aspects of visual arts practice in Hong Kong, are hotly debated and contested.

In very broad terms, 'western' might be used to refer to works in oil paint or perhaps sculpture in bronze. 'Chinese' art might be roughly used to describe traditional forms, such as landscapes in brushed ink on paper. The debate over these terms has a long history in Hong Kong and there have been a number of movements to establish and define a 'Hong Kong art'. However, from my experience, the Chinese/western paradigm continues to find a fertile ground in the language that artists, academics, curators and writers use to talk about Hong Kong visual arts practice. To steal a line from the Hong Kong-based academic David Clarke, it could appear to be, 'one art, two systems'.[1]

I gained two important insights during my residency.

Firstly, my assumptions about post colonialism and the expectations I had about attitudes to the handover, based on my Australian experience of the republic debate, were not transferable. Responses to the handover were mixed and complex. On one hand it could be characterised as a fear of returning to a political system that many residents had actually come to Hong Kong as refugees to avoid. Wucious Wong, one of the senior figures of the Hong Kong art scene, once stated that, 'Hong Kong may be the only place where Chinese culture can be freely studied, developed and promoted'.[2] Contrasting but often co-existing with this sentiment is the sense of 'return to the motherland' and resentment towards the colonial system.



Tsang Tak-Ping, *Hello! Hong Kong Part 7*, (detail) 1997. Mixed media installation. 'Para/Site', 1997.

...in a political system where individuals have no say either within the British or Chinese political systems sometimes the most effective political statement is a refusal to engage.

In much the same way that many Australian artists refused to shoulder the responsibility of forging a new 'Australian cultural identity', artists' responses to the handover were characterised by a refusal to engage with, criticise, or reflect it in their work. Oscar Ho, an artist, curator and Director of Exhibitions at the Hong Kong Arts Centre, commented that in a political system where individuals have no say either within the British or Chinese political systems sometimes the most effective political statement is a refusal to engage. 'During a period of anxiety and tension, one would expect that artists would make works that respond to the urgent and disturbing situation. The reality is, surprisingly, that very few political art works are produced.'[3]

The second important insight was that I could not simply apply Australia's complex rhetoric concerning cultural diversity in order to understand the dynamics of contemporary cultural change taking place in Hong Kong. The predominant rhetorical dialogues appeared to centre on 'being Chinese', contrasted with the parallel search for a 'Hong Kong cultural identity'.

David Clarke, curious about the ways that Hong Kong artists relate to Chinese heritage, curated the exhibition 'Engaging Tradition'. He made the observation that, 'Many Hong Kong people approach that heritage with a degree of ambivalence. Chinese traditions may be very engaging, but one also engages with an enemy as well as being engaged to a loved one.'[4]

For this exhibition he invited Oscar Ho to do an installation in the Fung Ping Shan Museum at the University of Hong Kong. Oscar Ho is of the generation born in Hong Kong. David Clarke writes that he does not, '...wish to suggest that Oscar Ho is unaware of Chinese art, but there is nevertheless a sense in which he, and other Hong Kong artists of his generation, are less deeply invested in it. Because Chinese art is, from his perspective, only one resource among many on which he can draw...'[5]

Ho called this work *Violation*. He said he felt violated by the weight of this huge

tradition that he felt great pressure to honour and identify with. 'These ancient pots and containers have little to do with me or with the history I am identified with.'[6]

This position might be contrasted with that of Kao Maychíng, Director of the Art Museum at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. She made the observation that an artist, '...working in the traditional medium is immediately branded as "conservative", "removed from reality" and "outdated". They are considered to be not responding to the issues of the modern society. These artists are discarded as outside of the contemporary art scene. So here the word "contemporary" has a value judgment in opposition to "tradition".'[7]

We often do not notice the features of our own culture until they are brought into relief by contrast with another. I was struck by a tendency amongst a number of the Hong Kong artists I spoke to to define themselves in terms of the international recognition they had received. They felt a need to seek international recognition to affirm the significance of their work. This is understandable in the context of the international traffic station that is Hong Kong. In comparison, the relative isolation of Australia's art scene means that an artist's legitimacy is often self defined, and this can in turn lead to a different kind of cultural dynamic.

Alison Bennett is Program Manager at Craft Victoria.

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1 Clarke, David 1996, *Art & Place: Essays on Art from a Hong Kong Perspective*, Hong Kong University Press.
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3 *Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art*, 1996, Queensland Art Gallery, p. 42
4 Clarke, p. 35.
5 Clarke, p. 36.
6 Ho, Oscar, 1994, *Engaging Tradition* (Exhibition Handout), Fung Ping Shang Museum, University of Hong Kong.
7 Interview with Kao Maychíng, 4 June 1997.

Alison Bennett's 1997 Asialink Arts Management Residency, a three month program hosted by the Hong Kong Museum of Art, was assisted by the Australian Commonwealth Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body, and by Arts Victoria.

The short list of successful applicants for Asialink's 1998 residencies has now been completed and these applications have been sent to the relevant host countries for final approval. At the time of going to print successful applicants in the 1998 program were: Gail Fairlamb (SA-arts executive) based in Hong Kong; Anne Farren (WA – visual/performing arts) based in Japan; Lorena Felicetti (Vic – visual arts) based in Hong Kong; Nicole Tse (Vic – conservation) based in the Philippines; Christine Clark (Qld – visual arts) based in Indonesia; Matthew Calvert (Tas – visual arts) based in Malaysia; Amanda Johnson (Vic – visual arts) based in Indonesia; and George Gittoes (NSW – visual arts) based in China. The final list will be available in May, once Asialink has had final approval from all the host countries. Closing dates for the 1999 program are: Arts Management Residencies — 11 September 1998; Visual Arts — 9 October 1998. Contact Alison Carroll, Arts Program, Asialink, 107 Barry Street, Carlton Vic 3053. Tel (03) 9349 1899, Fax (03) 9347 1768.

The National Conservation and Preservation Policy and Strategy — a document you can't afford to miss!

ROBYN SLOGGETT

The Heritage Collections Council (HCC) and the Cultural Ministers Council (CMC) have recently distributed the *National Conservation and Preservation Policy and Strategy*. The document represents the culmination of over eight years work by the CMC and Australia's cultural heritage sector. More importantly, the strategies outlined represent the best opportunity ever presented for a national approach to the conservation and preservation of this nation's movable cultural heritage.

Background

Work began in 1990 when, after consistent lobbying from the museum community, the CMC formed the Heritage Collections Working Group. Its role was to define the nature and extent of Australia's heritage collections, and to advise the CMC on ways of improving community access to national heritage.

After extensive research the Working Group published its final report, *Heritage Collections in Australia: A Plan for a New Partnership*. It noted that there were some 1900 museums in Australia, visited by around 23 million people annually, with a total operating expenditure of $254 million.[1] The report also noted that in 1991 museums in Australia were reckoned to hold around 41 million objects, with 6 million of these representing holdings of human origin. The condition and storage of many of these objects were found to be precarious.

The Heritage Collections Committee was subsequently formed in 1993. The main focus of its three year program concerned care and access.

Access became the responsibility of the On Line Working Party, which developed the National Database Program. Now known as Australian Museums On Line, it has enabled widespread Internet access to Australia's museum collections.[2]

Issues of care were managed under the Conservation Working Party's National Conservation Program, which oversaw the development of three linked programs:

- development, endorsement and implementation of the *National Conservation and Preservation Policy for Movable Cultural Heritage* and the *National Conservation and Preservation Strategy*;
- skills development;
- community education.

Policy and Strategy

The National Conservation and Preservation Policy for Movable Cultural Heritage was endorsed in 1995 by the CMC.[3] It established the intellectual framework and identified the network of stakeholders who were to provide the key input for the Strategy's development. In 1996 a range of papers were commissioned for a public forum to discuss the issues.[4] The Draft National Strategy was developed out of discussions which arose at the forum, as well as written submissions sought afterwards.

The National Policy identified a number of key issues:

- the importance of Australia's cultural collections;
- indigenous issues;
- the multicultural nature of Australian society and the nature of recent migration;

- development of management tools, ie. understanding how we determine importance and significance in order to develop priorities;
- the role of education and development of a skills base;
- issues of equity and access;
- issues of resource duplication and best practice;
- new technologies both as a source of cultural material and as a way of creating access;
- awareness raising;
- research.

These provided the five key strategic areas of focus for the Collections Management and Conservation Working Party: significance, skills development, collection management, research, and awareness raising.

Significance

'An assessment of an object's value in a context, whether historic, aesthetic, scientific, cultural or monetary. Assessment of significance provides the context for appropriate conservation and preservation. That is, conservators and others will be better able to determine priorities and levels of conservation and preservation treatments if they understand the item's significance.'

Some museum staff currently have difficulty determining the significance of items and therefore cannot effectively prioritise resources such as storage, conservation, preservation, research and exhibition needs. In addition, some nationally significant material being held by small museums, communities, families and private individuals, without the resources to look after it, is difficult to access. Criteria for significance is critical for proper management. The development and acceptance of a set of agreed national criteria for determining significance, and the adoption of those criteria by collections managers, is an important first step.

Skills development

'The skills development element encompasses activities which increase the conservation and preservation expertise of those responsible for caring for collections.'

One of the main issues relates to the needs of various groups such as volunteers, professionals, entry level vocational trainees, indigenous people, and people of non-English speaking backgrounds. Cross-cultural awareness was identified as an important component of all training strategies. In regional areas custodians of small collections suffer from lack of peer contact. Site visits and workshops were identified as a way of assisting such collections, as was the need for follow up visits from conservators. Skills development needs to be supported practically, with initiatives such as collective purchasing arrangements for materials, identifying lending or hiring schemes for environmental monitoring equipment, and facilitating special interest networks. It was also recognised that sustaining a skills base is critical and that this needs to occur at professional, para-professional and volunteer level. Support for educational institutions to produce specialist conservators in, for example, textiles, furniture and photography, was also acknowledged as important. The Strategy supports the development and use of existing professional codes of practice, codes of ethics, accreditation and standards for conservators.

Collections management

The Strategy notes that collections management 'include(s) approved conservation and preservation planning and practice'. It takes collections management to mean, 'all the processes of acquiring, looking after, accounting for, and providing access to collections'.

This recognises the need to incorporate accepted conservation and preservation procedures into collections management and access programs. One aim is to encourage the use of accepted conservation and preservation practice and digital technology as a preservation tool. The need for disaster planning at both institutional and regional level was recognised. In many institutions, travelling exhibitions are taking primary importance, diverting resources from long-term conservation and preservation planning.

Research

Defined as '"A search or investigation undertaken to discover facts and reach new conclusions by the critical study of a subject or by a course of scientific inquiry."'(I'Ons and Adams 1996 p.2.) 'Activities under this element aim to achieve a national research strategy which will encourage research projects and disseminate their results.'

A research assessment in 1998 will identify how research is currently being undertaken and where co-ordination and targeting of resources is required. Once the results are collated the Strategy will deal with the issue of a co-ordinated national research program to address critical conservation and preservation issues.

Awareness raising

'The awareness raising element proposes actions which will create a culture of caring for and treasuring Australia's movable cultural heritage.'

'Australia's heritage collections are held in many places and in both public and private hands. Cultural heritage is dynamic. Documents and objects currently owned by one individual, family or organisations may, in the future, be of great significance to Australia. This means there needs to be a general climate of valuing and treasuring movable cultural heritage wherever it is located. Raising awareness of the value of our heritage will lead to a greater priority being placed by the community, government and funding sources on its conservation and preservation.'

The Strategy needs to deliver targeted public awareness campaigns throughout the program.

Delivering the Strategy

At the CMC's December 1996 meeting it was agreed to establish the HCC, 'to ensure Australia's national heritage collections become more accessible to all Australians', and a three year plan was endorsed to 2001. The HCC established three working parties to develop this plan: The On Line Working Party, which manages AMOL developments; the Promotion and Marketing Working Party, which focuses on the promotion and marketing of the Council's products and activities; and the Collections Management and Conservation Working Party, which is responsible for implementing the National Conservation Strategy, as well as Council's collection management initiatives.

The Draft Strategy was ratified at last November's meeting of the HCC and the period 1997-2001 will see its delivery.

A Strategy for Whom?

The real value of the National Conservation Strategy is its ability to deliver to those who need it, for while the development of such a document requires the willingness of government to support it, and strong participation from the professional base, such a Strategy is not primarily about government policy or professional initiatives. The existence of a National Conservation Strategy must enable those for whom their history, identity and future are linked to items of cultural significance to properly look after their culture, to have it available for their use and to hand it on to future genera-

tions. For this reason it is important that work done as a result of the Strategy is both effective and far reaching. The Collections Management and Conservation Working Party welcomes the ongoing involvement of organisations and individuals who consider they can provide useful input into the development of valuable outcomes.

Robyn Sloggett is Chief Conservator at The University of Melbourne Ian Potter Art Conservation Centre and a member of the Collections Management and Conservation Working Party of the Heritage Collections Council.

References

1 Heritage Collections Working Group 1993: *Heritage Collections in Australia — a plan for a new partnership*, p. 21. (Figures taken from 1991 statistics)

2 http://www.nma.gov.au:80/AMOL/

3 The Policy is available at http://www.nla.gov.au/3/npo/natco/natpol.htlm.
Hard copies from the HCC Secretariat, Department of Communications and the Arts. Tel (02) 6271 1000.

4 Forum papers are available at http://www.dca.gov.as/ahnbd/cwpforum.html or from DoCA as above.
All following quotes are from the 1996 forum papers, unless otherwise stated.

For further information contact Colin Thomas, Heritage Collections Council Secretariat, Department of Communications and the Arts. Tel (02) 6271 1000, Fax (02) 6271 1800, Internet http://www.dca.gov.au/contact.html

Three new developments for the visual arts in Australia

RACHEL KENT

The forthcoming opening of The Ian Potter Museum of Art, The University of Melbourne, comes at a time when many Australian cultural institutions are undergoing profound change. Common concerns including the need for increased public access, improved storage and display for collections, and the incorporation of new technologies into museum operations have fuelled a diverse array of building construction and re-development projects across Australia. While this particular article focuses upon three concurrent developments in Melbourne, Perth and Sydney, a number of other building projects are under way in the lead up to the 2001 centenary of Australia's Federation. Such projects, while diverse in nature and funding, respond to the museum's role as a shared community resource while expanding opportunities for the presentation and interpretation of visual culture in Australia today.

The Ian Potter Museum of Art, The University of Melbourne, is undergoing a major building project scheduled for completion in August 1998. Located at The University's Carlton campus on Swanston Street, the new building will house The University's own art collections, a changing program of contemporary and historical exhibitions, a program of related events including artists talks and symposia, a public resource centre and cafe. State-of-the-art facilities will ensure maximum public access while The University's extensive collections, which comprise some 25,000 objects, will be accessible via computer terminals in the resource centre.

Artist's impression of the Ian Potter Museum of Art, The University of Melbourne, 1997.

The Ian Potter Museum of Art will also house The Ian Potter Art Conservation Centre and the offices of the newly established Melbourne International Biennial. The Melbourne International Biennial is an initiative of the City of Melbourne, working in partnership with Arts Victoria — Department of Premier and Cabinet — and the Ian Potter Museum of Art, The University of Melbourne. The inaugural Biennial will comprise a series of national pavilions at venues across Melbourne, a major exhibition of international artists entitled 'Signs of Life' in Melbourne's central business district, and a program of lectures and performances. The Biennial takes place between 7 May – 27 July 1999.

The Ian Potter Museum of Art building project is motivated by several key issues. Most importantly it is fuelled by the desire to unify the Museum of Art's operations which have, since 1989, been situated across two separate venues. The University Gallery, located at the centre of campus, housed The University's Art Collections and exhibitions related to the academic programs while the former Ian Potter Gallery, on Swanston Street, maintained a program of changing contemporary and some historical exhibitions. The unification of the two spaces and their programs responds to practical considerations while establishing a greater sense of identity for the Museum of Art as a whole. The Ian Potter Museum of Art building project also seeks to give students and the general public greater access to The University's collections and resources, while providing better storage and display facilities. The incorporation of a Classics and Antiquities wing within the new museum will provide an additional educational resource for students while the inclusion of new media within the exhibitions' program (such as computer animation, Internet and CD ROM-based art forms), alongside more established artistic media, reflects the museum's commitment to innovation and experimentation.

The newly established John Curtin Gallery at Curtin University of Technology, Perth, represents another substantial university art museum development. Opened to the public on 20 February 1998, the gallery houses Curtin University's permanent art collection of nearly 2,000 objects and a changing exhibition program of Australian and international art. John Curtin Gallery is part of a new $30 million complex (the John Curtin Centre) at The University's Bentley campus and comprises three exhibition spaces, a foyer space which is also suitable for display, and a 125-seat auditorium. Program highlights for 1998 include an inaugural exhibition of photographic works by Tracy Moffatt and Max Pam; an exhibition of photo-based art from New Zealand; an international touring exhibition of contemporary Chinese art; the National Gallery of Australia touring exhibition 'Love Hotel'; and an exhibi-

Interior view of the recently opened John Curtin Gallery, 1998. Photo Hans Versluis.

tion by the acclaimed American writer and photographer Allan Sekula. Related talks and publications programs, in addition to a community outreach scheme, will promote the gallery's operations within Western Australia and beyond. John Curtin Gallery represents a major development in the cultural life of Perth and is, to date, the largest university-based art gallery in Australia. It provides a permanent home for the University's art collection and aims to elevate the collection's visibility, as one of the largest collections in Western Australia, within and beyond the University campus.

While The Ian Potter Museum of Art and John Curtin Gallery represent two substantial new university-based initiatives, building extensions at Sydney's Museum of Contemporary Art are another important development for the visual arts in Australia. With the recent departure of Tourism New South Wales from levels 4-6 of its Circular Quay premises, the MCA is currently enlarging its exhibitions space from three storeys to four, introducing a new facility for supporters and Patrons of the museum, and developing revenue generation facilities that will capitalise on the museum's unique position on the harbour. The inclusion of a theatre for moving image (film, video, digital media) presentation is also under consideration. The Museum of Contemporary Art's expansion aims to increase floorspace in which to display exhibitions of contemporary and 20th century art; to generate additional revenue to fund its operations (it currently raises a massive 87%); and to enhance the overall experience of visitors to the museum by upgrading and expanding its facilities and resources. The MCA store will also be enlarged on ground level, the main foyer area redeveloped to make it more welcoming to visitors, and an orientation area created with information about the museum, its history and future directions for visitors.

Substantial new developments like The Ian Potter Museum of Art, The University of Melbourne, and John Curtin Gallery, Curtin University of Technology, breathe fresh life into the visual arts in Australia, as does the expansion of existing spaces like the Museum of Contemporary Art. These projects allow for new opportunities relating to the housing, care, display and interpretation of artworks while maximising access to the wider public.

Rachel Kent is Curator at The Ian Potter Museum of Art, The University of Melbourne.

Rachel Kent's article is the first in a regular series which will profile new building works and refurbishments of museums and galleries across Australia. These profiles will culminate with the November 1999 edition of Museum National, a themed issue devoted to museum architecture. (Ed.)

International Museums Conference — ICOM '98 Melbourne, 10–16 October 1998

NOELENE GALLOWAY

The International Council of Museums (ICOM) triennial conference will be a truly exciting and professionally rewarding experience. It will bring together many different languages, many perspectives on social, cultural and environmental issues as well as the common ground amongst all those different voices. The opportunity to exchange points of view, and socialise with colleagues from around the world does not come often. ICOM '98 provides an unrivalled opportunity for Australian museum professionals, and I hope the Australian contingent will be overwhelming.

ICOM's membership is organised into 25 Specialist International Committees. Listed below are the Specialist Committees which will be meeting in Melbourne, and contact details for each.

AVICOM – Audiovisual and Image and Sound and New Technologies, Matthew Nickson (03) 9651 6787

CECA – Education and Cultural Action, David Demant (03) 9291 2120

CIDOC – Documentation, Martin Hallett (03) 9669 9731

CIMAM – Collections of Modern Art, Jason Smith (03) 9208 0374

CIMCIM – Musical Instrument Collections, Michael Lea (02) 9217 0572

CIMUSET – Science and Technology, Euan McGillivray (03) 9291 2130

CIPEG – Egyptology, Piers Crocker (03) 9650 3477

COSTUME – Robyn Healy (03) 9208 0276

GLASS – Geoffrey Edwards (03) 9208 0222

ICAA – Applied Art and decorative arts, Margaret Legge (03) 9208 0225

ICAMT – Architecture and Museum Techniques, Ronnie Fookes (03) 9651 6702

ICEE – Exhibition Exchange, Ingrid Kellenbach (03) 9525v9578

ICFA – Fine Arts, Alison Inglis (03) 9344 7448

ICMAH – Archaeology and History, Kate Darian-Smith (03) 9344 7232

ICME – Ethnography, Gaye Sculthorpe (03) 9651 6799

ICMS – Museum Security, David Budeja (03) 9669 9851

ICOFOM – Museology, Paul Fox (03) 9204 7728

ICOM-CC – Conservation, Samantha Shellard (03) 9669 9024

ICOMON – Numismatics, John Sharples (03) 9291 2162

ICR – Regional Museums, Roger Trudgeon (03) 5331 1944

ICTOP – Training of Personnel, Margaret Birtley (03) 9251 7057

INTERCOM – Management, Nelson English (03) 9532 9582

MPR – Marketing and Public Relations, Graham Ryan (02) 9320 6308

I urge you to attend ICOM '98, an international meeting of museum colleagues never before held in Australia.

Noelene Galloway is Executive Officer of ICOM '98.

Tel (03) 9651 6783, Fax (03) 9651 6321, email: nagallow@mov.vic.gov.au

Changes in the Burra Charter (but what is it anyway?)

LINDA YOUNG

The *Burra Charter* is a beast more known by name than by nature among most members of Museums Australia. Its full title is the *Australia ICOMOS Charter for the Conservation of Places of Cultural Significance*. Adopted in 1979 by the professional association of place heritage specialists, Australia ICOMOS, it follows a long tradition of such charters by taking the name of the town where it was adopted — in this case, the historic copper mining town in South Australia. ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites) is a younger sibling of ICOM in being a UNESCO-recognised international organisation. By historical accident the Australian National Committee of ICOMOS has grown into the major professional grouping of heritage archaeologists, architects, historians and planners in this country. Where Museums Australia represents the profession of heritage object managers, Australia ICOMOS represents the heritage place managers.

We have much in common, including some overlap in membership, especially among site museum people. It has sometimes been suggested that The *Burra Charter* principles have applications to objects, or as the clumsy usage has it, movable cultural heritage. The current push by the Heritage Collections Council (HCC) to introduce a set of criteria for the assessment of the significance of museum acquisitions is a direct steal from the *Burra Charter*.

At this moment when museum people begin to learn about the *Burra Charter*, it is in fact under review by its parent. To understand the directions of the revision — which is still contentious and not yet decisive — it is necessary to know its present character.

The *Burra Charter* is grounded in a three-stage process for the management of heritage places.

1 Understand the significance of the site, expressed in a Statement of Cultural Significance.
2 Develop policy for the site, summarised in a Conservation Policy.
3 Manage the site in accordance with the policy, detailed in a Conservation Management Plan.

The first step is the most innovative in international heritage place management. It establishes that before any work takes place on a site, the evidence of fabric, history and memory should be gathered into an analysis that concludes with a summary of why the place is sufficiently important to conserve. All treatments and interventions should then be directed at preserving that significance — neither improving it with wishful enhancements, nor ignoring the totality of elements that make it valuable.

The Charter also contains a raft of definitions of actions such as restoration, reconstruction and compatible use. Having been deliberately written in a concise style it was found necessary over the years to add 'Guidelines', and, in 1992, *The Illustrated Burra Charter* was published with comprehensive cases and photographs. The *Burra Charter* achieved some fame. It became the Australian industry standard for place conservation works, required by government contracts at all levels and cited like an incantation as a guarantee of good heritage practice. It even inspired overseas models in Canada and New Zealand.

Meanwhile, Australian heritage management thinking continued to develop. New challenges emerged. Practice showed that some heritages are not always expressed in material forms — especially indigenous places; and that some are defined by social meanings established by people's everyday use rather than by the standards of architectural history or scientific content. The *Burra Charter* had grown and been adapted at regular conferences. In 1992, the Sydney conference Whose Cultural Heritage? raised the question of the applicability of the Charter in a multicultural nation, and in 1994 the Launceston meeting identified the need for a Charter update or further 'Guidelines'. But should change be minimal or radical? At a Canberra meeting in 1995, the majority of participants anticipated significant revision. A working group began meeting and in 1997 produced a draft which reshapes the Charter in a major way.

The problems perceived with the original Charter include: lack of an opening philosophical statement about why heritage places ought to be conserved; an emphasis on built fabric which overlooks significant uses, associations and meanings; poor dealing with social value; the need to involve and consult with people and communities associated with heritage places; recognition that some places contain conflicting heritage values; lack of recognition of the special character of indigenous heritage places; failure to deal with interpretation, or to recognise that restoration and reconstruction are acts of interpretation; implying rather than spelling out the conservation process; the fact that many key ideas and concepts developed after the initial version had been incorporated in 'Guidelines' rather than the document itself; and a suggestion of inaccessible technical language.

The draft revision has been widely circulated, both within Australia ICOMOS and the broader heritage world. At a conference held again in Burra in November 1997, a large number of members held passionate arguments about the merits and demerits of the revision. In very general terms, the minimalist change camp tends to comprise people whose work focuses on fabric, such as some architects, and the states where heritage legislation is newest and the profession is still asserting itself. The maximalist tendency is strongest among people working with communities, indigenous and every other kind — they want to share the authority of heritage professionals with the communities whose heritage is at stake.

The draft revision is a less hard-edged document than the original *Burra Charter*; it recognises more complexity and less certainty in the identification, assessment and management of heritage places. On the other hand, many heritage practitioners value the snappy concision of the original, and point to problems if the document now taken as a national standard is to be changed.

Australia ICOMOS has sent back the draft to the working group, and another round of development will take place. Museums Australia will watch with interest.

Dr Linda Young is a Senior Lecturer in Cultural Heritage Management at the University of Canberra.

Object Lessons: The Role of Museums in Education

Edited by Sue Mitchell. HMSO Scotland/ Scottish Museums Council, 1996

Object Lessons is the product of a three year project of the Museums Education Initiative (MEI). It began with a survey of museum education practice in Scotland, and continued with the development of pilot projects in which museum collections are used to meet the requirements of specific school curricula for pupils aged 5 to 18. According to its editor, *Object Lessons* 'seeks to provide inspiration, practical help and advice for all museums and teaching staff wishing to realise the potential of museum collections to underpin the Scottish school curriculum'. Its focus is therefore on museum education activity for the school audience. By its nature the project does not focus at all on other audiences for museum education programming.

The recurring theme in all the selected museum projects is the worth of partnerships, including those with local education authorities (for advice, practical support and funding); local schools (for advice, piloting, marketing); universities (for research projects, information on developments in education, access to preservice teacher training); other museums (networking, sharing resources, skills and knowledge) and industry (sponsorship and publicity).

There is plenty of practical advice illustrated by exemplary case studies. These include useful tips on thorough research into the Scottish School Curriculum, direct teaching sessions in an art gallery, artist-in-residence workshops for children in art galleries, object handling sessions, theatre in museum education, producing a teachers' information pack, producing resource packs for history, constructing a museum worksheet, artefact loan kits, and evaluation as an ongoing process in exhibition development.

As for inspirational case studies, three projects interested me most. '1891 at Dingwall Museum' researched four Victorian families, whose homes still exist, and built up a profile of each family from the museum's collection. This included reproduction costumes the children dressed in while they researched the family of their choice. 'Let Me Show You An Art Gallery: Project for Children with Special Educational Needs' involved visits to the gallery over a four month period and focused on activities planned by teachers and education staff. 'Designing the Chinese way... the importance of educational input into exhibition design', an exhibition designed specifically for the school curriculum, aimed to encourage active on-site learning in a museum context. The educational needs of school learners — rather than the curatorial viewpoint — dominated the development of content and design, which might seek, for example, to show the best objects from the collection or to make particular academic and research knowledge accessible. Compromises such as purchasing objects or designing replicas were also necessary to meet conservation requirements and the needs for an active learning style for the target audience.

Perhaps the pity of it is that this is not an Australian book. If every museum educator in Australia submitted their list of inspirational case studies of museums working to support and extend their local school curriculum, there would be more than enough for a very stimulating publication. This would have greater relevance to Australian curricula and to our educational organisational structures.

While I was reading this book, another excellent report arrived, *A COMMON WEALTH Museums and Learning in the United Kingdom*, by David Anderson. It is a report to the Department of National Heritage, dated January 1997. Like *Object Lessons*, Anderson's report is based on three years of research and is a 'contribution to the debate on the nature, extent, importance and development of museum education'. Its brief is wider, focusing on learning in museums for groups (not only school students but also families, adults, community groups, university students and teachers). I would recommend it also for its inspirational case studies and its ambitious recommendations for the educative role of museums.

Object Lessons is useful for museum educators and teachers, and for the reading lists of museum studies courses. It serves a similar purpose to those practical sessions at conferences where case studies are presented and ideas shared — those stimulating and sometimes inspirational sessions for those who work in a similar field. Not all the case studies included will excite you, but many will affirm the worth of the work you are already doing at your museum.

Both books are useful in the Australian context, but with two books on museum education based on reviews of provision, one has to wonder when we will see the Australian equivalent!

Ann Baillie
Program Coordinator, Training and Professional Development, at Museums Australia (Qld)/ Regional Galleries Association of Queensland and Adjunct Lecturer, Museum Studies, at the University of Sydney.

Meanings and Messages: Language Guidelines for Museum Exhibitions

By Linda Ferguson, Carolyn MacLulich, Louise Ravelli. Sydney, Australian Museum, 1995.

Substantial information is packed into this timely publication which focuses on the way in which text and language function in the museum environment. In particular, the focus is on how messages and meaning are constructed through the language of exhibition texts.

This is a significant topic for museum professionals because museums daily face the pressing need to communicate meaning to the average museum visitor. This means the non-expert, who is unfamiliar with much of the knowledge and information the museum is trying to convey.

In most exhibitions, the language of texts is the principal device for creating the meaning which communicates the museum's messages. Australian Museum surveys confirm that 85% of visitors will use some text to understand an exhibit.

Meanings and Messages is a clear, practical guide concerned with unpacking the structure and meaning of language, rather than discussing word length or the look of the text. Writing text for visitors — non-experts — is very different from writing for professionals or peers. Understanding the impact of the way words are structured and the text is patterned is the first step in making links between ordinary language and theoretical language.

The authors, Linda Ferguson, Carolyn MacLulich and Louise Ravelli, outline clearly the benefits of applying a functional linguistic approach to writing exhibition texts. The value of the functional linguistic perspective is that it provides an explicit technique for presenting dense concepts and unpacking complex information in a systematic and consistent manner, which ensures the meaning created is the one intended.

Ferguson, MacLulich and Ravelli utilise the principles of language theory as a basis for trialling specific text writing within the Australian Museum. By this means they have developed useful language guidelines for the benefit of other museum professionals. These guidelines, backed up by copious examples drawn from natural history, can be applied to any medium being used to convey information within the museum: written labels; information panels; audio; video and multimedia technologies.

The linguistic tools and examples provided are designed to help text writers make informed decisions. Important choices are described in detail: how to organise the text; how to decide, agree, focus on and develop a theme; how to keep track of information; how to control the text so that it is not too dense; how to distinguish and balance the features and complexities of a 'written' or 'spoken' text, and how to avoid presuming prior knowledge of the subject.

In addition to developing the information, the specifics of maintaining style and consistency in editing museum texts are detailed with thirteen checkpoints. The value and use of questions to help create patterns in text to contribute to its overall cohesion and unity is also explained.

A helpful appendix expands on the purpose and structures of the six identified genres of factual writing, which standardise informational and interpersonal meanings to achieve stated objectives. They are report, explanation, recount, procedure, exposition and discussion. A glossary and the text production procedure utilised at the Australian Museum are beneficial inclusions.

The overall design of the publication helps museum professionals to readily comprehend the guidelines and invites confident trialling immediately. Understanding and utilising these tools will ensure that museum texts can be more meaningful, accessible and appropriate for museum audiences.

All museum professionals want to ensure their museum texts achieve communication of intended meanings, in terms accessible and appropriate to museum audiences. They will find this publication an essential acquisition and an invaluable aide to communicating better within exhibitions.

Thérèse Burnett
Manager of Adult and Volunteer Programs at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney.

Making Histories in Museums

Edited by Gaynor Kavanagh, Leicester University Press, London, 1996.

This book is the most recent from Gaynor Kavenagh of the Leicester University Museums Studies Department, dealing with history and museums. Kavenagh is probably best-known to museum studies students and public historians through her publication *History Curatorship* (Leicester, 1990) as well as numerous articles in professional journals.

Making Histories in Museums is made up of 21 papers (including one by Kavenagh herself), dealing with the work of historians as curators. Apart from one American, the other contributors are a 'Commonwealth' selection, mainly from the UK but with some entries from Australia, Barbados and Canada. Predictably, there is less emphasis on issues of private sponsorship, censorship, fundraising, relationships with local historical societies, or conflict, for example, than we have come to expect from American museum history studies (although some individuals do raise these issues).

This is not so much a theoretical book as a collection in which individual authors sometimes touch upon theory. Kavenagh's approach seems to have been to solicit contributions from museum professionals or commentators who then responded with a description of the work, process or approach associated with a specific representation of history. There are, for example, articles detailing museum interpretations in such topics as war, technology, rural history, religious history, clothing, portrait galleries, minority history (African American, African Caribbean, Alberta First Nations, women, children etc.), sexuality, archaeology, folklore, education and so on. This diversity of subject matter, style and theoretical approach makes the book difficult to analyse as a whole. It is likely, therefore, that unless one was passionately interested in all aspects of public history and its representation in museums, a reader would use this book to look at specific, relevant areas. Assisting this, the book is well indexed and most articles comprehensively referenced.

Nonetheless, some common themes emerge for exploration. The book covers issues such as peopling the museum, particularly with regard to displays of work, rural or technological history. Also covered are the relationships between community memory/mythology and exhibition, relating history to existing collections, interpretations of history and their relationship to the environment, and inclusion and representation of minority or politically powerless groups.

Beyond the broad issues of historical interpretation and representation in museums there is no central, unifying theme. The scope and diversity of the articles are such that I cannot possibly do justice to them in this forum. Of particular interest to me was Lawrence Fitzgerald's contribution, which looks at the construction of museum history through the interpretation and display of technology collections. Equally, Kath Davies' article on the interpretation of work and workers in Wales is pertinent to some Australian museum display practice. Kavenagh's own opening piece about history and memory also raises relevant issues, and there are many other articles of specialist interest.

Leicester University Press will continue to maintain a share of the Australian museum publications market. The problem I have (even though I continue to buy) is that despite areas of professional commonality, there is much within this and other UK publications which is not appropriate in the Australian situation. So much is so different: the comparatively brief time period of non-Aboriginal settlement; the role of indigenous Australians in the representation and interpretation of events; the large percentage of Australians born elsewhere or as first generation. In contrast to the Australian experience, the shared cultural climate of the UK seems monolithically uniform and massive.

The editor acknowledges that 'there are some obvious gaps in the range of papers in this volume' and the book is intended as the first volume in a series, so this is not the last we will see. I did enjoy dipping into it, but despite the book's aim to reach 'a readership beyond the museums profession' (don't we all?) I think it's probably one for the cognoscenti.

Mickey Dewar
Curator of Territory History/Regional Museums at the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory.

Exhibit Labels: An Interpretive Approach

By Beverly Serrell, Walnut Creek CA, AltaMira Press, 1996

Why do we need another book about labels? It is a question that Beverly Serrell herself asks in the introduction to her 1996 book, *Exhibit Labels: An Interpretive Approach*. The answer is effectively argued

throughout the course of the book: because there are still many ways to improve labels, and thus improve the interpretive role of museums.

Serrell's 'interpretive approach' to exhibit labels is an holistic one: words aren't just 'on labels'; words are part of whole exhibitions. The book focuses on the broader picture of making exhibitions and museums more meaningful — by producing labels that are useful, relevant and significant to visitors.

Exhibit Labels: An Interpretive Approach is written in four parts. Part 1 provides an overview of museum labels. Serrell describes the purpose and uses of labels, the different types that exist, and what she means by 'interpretive labels'. She writes, 'Interpretive labels tell stories; they are narratives, not lists of facts. Any label that serves to explain, guide, question, inform, or provoke in a way that invites participation by the reader is interpretive' (p.9). Throughout this section, Serrell stresses the need for exhibitions to have 'a big idea' that defines the exhibition's focus, and for every label to be written so that it communicates this one, overarching message.

In Part 2, Serrell considers the audience that will be reading and using the exhibition's labels. This is one of the great strengths of her book. It is obvious that she respects her audiences and is sensitive to their immediate, contextual needs. Time and time again, she returns to who the audience is and what it wants. In recognising the diversity of audiences, she supports appealing to people's different learning styles, yet at the same time, she argues against designing exhibits to appeal to small portions of the audience, such as 'sophisticated' or repeat visitors. Instead, she advocates making exhibitions and exhibit labels broadly accessible by seeking to please the 'commonest common denominator'.

Serrell draws on her extensive experience to provide many useful suggestions in this section of the book. She backs up her suggestions with real case studies and examples, good and bad. She also cautions against inappropriate use of questions, humour, alliteration, quotations and other literary devices that can confuse or dishearten visitors.

I found Chapter 6, 'Levels of Information and Modalities', particularly thought-provoking. Here, Serrell recommends three ways of 'layering' text in an exhibition: by the purpose of the labels, by the labels' intrinsic complexity, and by the amount of time that visitors are likely to spend in the exhibition. In discussing how to layer text by time, she suggests considering each exhibition element as a unit of potential time, and then planning the exhibition so that an appropriate number of elements can be experienced in the amount of time that most visitors are likely to spend there. In a practical sense, this means 'chunking' label text so that each text block has the same level of information (complexity, vocabulary, and purpose).

Part 3 focuses on the tasks of writing, editing and physically producing labels. This includes practical advice on making words and images work together, customising labels for interactive exhibits, and editing so that the label content relates directly to its surroundings. While Serrell has not included a chapter on label design, her suggestions on typographic design are a useful starting point for beginners.

As an evaluator, I was delighted to see two chapters in Part 3 which are devoted to the benefits of using evaluation throughout the writing process. Serrell focuses on evaluation both during development and after opening, and provides many useful ideas for people to check whether their labels are communicating effectively.

Part 4 includes a chapter, 'Ten Deadly Sins and 14 Helpful Research Findings'. Here Serrell reminds her readers what to avoid and how to increase the likelihood that visitors will read exhibit labels. Also in this section are an extensive bibliography, a resource list, and a glossary to enable practitioners to share a common 'label' vocabulary.

Exhibit Labels: An Interpretive Approach is a welcome addition to the literature on museum text, and a substantial development to Serrell's 1979 publication, *Making Exhibit Labels: A Step-by-Step Approach*. My only reservation about the new book is the fervour Serrell displays in a small section of Chapter 2, in which she calls for museums to adopt new, envisioning narratives. This aside, I would strongly recommend *Exhibit Labels: An Interpretive Approach* to beginning, intermediate and expert label writers alike.

Linda Ferguson
Audience Advocate and Evaluator at the Australian War Memorial.

The Exhibition Handbook — A Practical Guide for Organising Exhibitions in Australian Museums, Galleries, Libraries and Community Centres

By Christopher Heathcote, Museums Australia Inc. Vic., 1997

This approachable little book aims to provide ideas and information for people organising exhibitions. It is concise enough for a quick read before starting and its checklists might be used as prompts as the project progresses.

I found it particularly interesting in a way that the author had probably not intended. It highlights some of the differences between the way things are done in art galleries and the way they are done in natural and cultural history museums. These issues aside, the question I address in this review is: how useful is the book likely to be for community museum groups with scant resources and little experience at their disposal?

The greatest value of *The Exhibition Handbook* is in the breadth of its coverage, leaving the reader in no doubt that there is far more to creating an exhibition than putting objects and labels on display. Its strengths lie in its information for conventional art exhibitions; its authority on other museum genres is less strong. The attempt at inclusiveness of all types of museums is laudable but lacks the insight born of familiarity. Indeed, there are areas of weakness to do with the use and care of objects which mean that this otherwise useful volume cannot be recommended without some qualification.

One obvious strength of the *Handbook* is its design, which makes it attractive and easy to follow. The use of grey as a second colour and the illustrative motifs for each chapter add interest and create confidence in the authority of the design information. While not all the typography choices would translate into good exhibit labels, the overall appearance is clear and approachable.

Another strength is its capacity to act as a prompt at two or three levels. Thus, the contents page could serve as an indication of components in a production schedule, although the author is careful to point out that the list should not be taken as sequential. Each of the eight chapters begins with its own contents page to further assist with easy identification of tasks; each task is explained in up to 300 words.

At the end of each chapter there is a checklist which can be used as a reminder of the most fundamental tasks.

Understandably, if breadth and brevity are strengths then detail cannot be expected. However, this does not excuse the absence of information about passive conservation and the need to support objects on display. A section on security which refers to the possibility of securing objects to plinths or wall mounts does not mention the need to employ benign methods and inert materials in order not to damage or change the object. It is also suggested that books are best presented open and that costume is best on mannequins or dummies — but does not mention potential dangers or make recommendations for safe supports. This means that the text does not contain everything that a novice needs to know and therefore the book cannot be recommended for museum purposes without additional curatorial advice.

The section on explanatory text, object labels and the sample labels are limited to art gallery conventions. These formats are not adequate for the complexities of texts which intertwine cultural narratives with objects. It does not take into account the range of locations and formats available for text in natural or cultural history exhibits. It may have been complicated to include the range of options in common use, but the application of the *Handbook* is limited without them.

The author may have rightly decided not to buy into the complexities of representation and interpretation which rage in cultural museums with respect to representation of 'the other'. It might nevertheless have been useful to allude to these issues in the section on interpretation, as well as community liaison, without needing to examine them in depth.

An important part of temporary exhibition organisation is the loan of objects. While there is some information in Chapter 6 and a sample loan form is included as an appendix, this information should also have appeared in Chapter 2, since there is no index to cross-reference the information. The sample forms are useful guides but are oriented towards artworks rather than natural or cultural specimens.

While *The Exhibition Handbook* applies best to art exhibitions (and thus does not address all exhibition scenarios), it nevertheless provides a great deal of information and a useful set of prompts. It will undoubtedly be a valuable tool in approaching the organisation of a temporary exhibition. Indeed, community museums might benefit by heeding the sections on community liaison and public programs and applying many of the recommendations to their routine operations.

Val Humphrey

Val Humphrey works in the Museum Assistance Program at the Western Australian Museum.

Building Museum and School Partnerships

Edited by Beverly Sheppard. American Association of Museums, Washington, 1995.

One of my past museum marketing colleagues, planning a visitor strategy for an important exhibition, once exclaimed, 'Oh, school groups! We don't have to worry about them, they always come'.

But the perception that schools will always provide audiences for museums, is flawed. School groups are not at the school gate, right now, waiting for your museum to announce the title of the latest exhibition. They do not visit museums automatically — it is easier for teachers to stay in the classroom than to visit your museum. The last thing the teacher wants is a scrappily organised or irrelevant museum experience, after they have gone to the trouble of sending out permission forms, collecting money and enduring the bus ride. Teachers want their children to have an experience that is educational, that offers more than they can in the classroom, and is enjoyable. Above all, school groups want their needs to be understood, and they want to feel welcomed. Museum staff who are focused on such groups will encourage return visits.

Museum educators have needs too! They need to be clear about what they expect from school audiences. Imagine this, 'Two bus loads, totalling nearly 100 students, unload at their field trip destination. The students, hoarse from shouting and gleeful from horseplay, emerge in unruly groups. They are not really sure where they are. They certainly don't know why they are there. They are hot, wrinkled and their lunches are soggy, and, worst of all, they are eighth graders! The museum staff cower in the door. One breaks out in hives. They all take a deep breath before greeting the mob.' (p.15.)

How can this situation be avoided? The answer comes through fostering communication between schools and museums.

Partnerships, the community development buzzword of the mid-1980s, suggests finding points of mutual concern, benefit and development. Partnerships as an ideal in museum practice began to take hold in the early 1990s as it became obvious that the gallery and museum brief should be bigger than to simply display the object.

The Museums Australia Education Group held one of its most successful conferences on the topic of 'Museum Partnerships' in 1993. Two speakers — Douglas Worts from Canada and Peter Jenkinson from England — spoke about how they were empowering visitors by inviting them to take control, in various ways, of the museum experience. What I did not know was that the Pennsylvania Federation of Museums and Historical Organisations had also been busy discussing partnerships around the same time.

Building Museum and School Partnerships came out of the Pennsylvania experience. Each chapter, written by different museum educationalists in Pennsylvania, evolved out of a series of meetings and workshops set up in 1991 to discuss solid, meaningful and productive partnerships. The book is a great manual for those wishing to 'get it straight' on the currency of educational transactions between schools and museums.

It encourages museums to talk to education clients, to seek their advice and evaluation comments. It suggests modes of good practice such as pre- and post-visit activities, and provides case studies of successful hands-on activities from preschool to secondary school level. As an experienced museum educator, I found the advice of the manual realistic. I marked the margins of my copy with comments such as 'all sensible tips', 'great idea', 'sound advice'. The reader is not caught up in charts and diagrams based on learning models but is offered guidelines and checklists for developing activity sheets, pre-visit data, critical thinking sessions, outreach and multicultural programs.

David Anderson's landmark report, *Museums and Learning in the United Kingdom*, was released by the British Department of National Heritage in 1997. Anderson, too, recommends school part-

nerships because they encourage museums 'to share risks, acquire resources, reach new audiences, obtain complementary skills, improve the quality of the service, achieve projects that would otherwise have been impossible, acquire validation from an external source, and win community and political support'.(p.69.) *Building Museum and School Partnerships* is a good place to begin learning about the basic museum/school partnership paradigm. But museums should go further and consider partnerships which provide access to other groups such as those who are disadvantaged or have special needs.

Building Museum and School Partnerships is a valuable publication for newcomers to museum/school education, including museum studies students. It does not lock into discussing school curricula, but provides information that is relevant to the Australian environment. The book's simplicity makes it an ideal publication for non-education staff or educators in small and large museums. Seasoned museum educators will find it a valuable primer for new staff, or an opportunity to revisit the aims of their field.

Adrian Montana
Education Officer at Geelong Art Gallery and Post Master Gallery, Melbourne.

The Articulate Surface: Dialogues on Paintings between Conservators, Curators and Art Historians

Edited by Sue-Anne Wallace with Jacqueline Macnaughten and Jodi Parvey. Humanities Research Centre, ANU, and Australian National Gallery, 1996

This publication is the consequence of many collaborations that resulted in a conference of the same name in Canberra in 1992. It was an initiative of the Paintings Conservation Group of the Australian Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Material (AICCM). Papers by conservators, curators and art historians from Britain, Canada and Australia were presented, analysing the many ways of looking at a picture. Some of the ways exemplified at the conference included: the artist's intent; the painting technique; documentation; scientific analysis; illusion; connoisseurship; formalism; biographical interpretation; sociological resonances; and the effects of surface coatings and the structure beneath the surface.

The papers are published in two parts: 'The Articulate Surface' and 'Dialogues'. Part one focuses on how the various disciplines look at and examine the surface of a picture. Leslie Carlyle's paper, 'From Dead-Colouring To Finishing: British Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Oil Paint Application as Discussed in Contemporary Oil Painting Instruction Books', traces the development of painting methods. This is important to conservators for understanding the complexities and subtleties of the surfaces they treat, and important also to historians and curators in terms of the manner in which artists responded to new developments and materials and their effect on the final image. Mary Eagle's paper, 'Sightings', takes a larger view, arguing that facts and information about the craft of a particular painting are important but so, too, are the perceptions of the viewer, the sociological context of production, and other ways of looking. Eagle regards the many ways of looking as fruitful and enlightening so long as the interpretation makes sense and fits the evidence. No one way is best: there is no single truth for any one picture.

Part two focuses on Australian content, based on many joint papers. Such 'shared looking' is accepted research practice in Europe and America, as illustrated by studies of Turner, Rembrandt and the Sistine Chapel, for example. These papers demonstrate that this concept is emerging in Australia, reminding the reader that the idea of a curator or a conservator hardly existed in Australia 30 years ago. Promising examples of this co-operative approach were illustrated in the papers presented by curators, conservators and scientists working at the National Gallery of Victoria, the National Gallery of Australia, the Queensland Art Gallery and the Art Gallery of New South Wales.

Both conference and papers support the view that a vision shared between conservators, curators and art historians enables maximum effect in establishing provenance, authorship, and placement of works within an artist's oeuvre.

The papers concentrate on European art and Australian art formed from that tradition. Indigenous art is not included, nor are the views of living artists. There is certainly much yet to be said on the former, and input from the latter would have been valuable: artists are too often left out of museum dialogue once their work is acquired.

Brief author biographies at the end of each paper would have helped to contextualise each viewpoint, to better understand each 'sighting'. Abstracts would further have assisted readers who may not have the time to read all the papers from start to finish. These minor issues aside, *The Articulate Surface* is admirable and highly recommended. The development of a 'shared vision' in Australia deserves to be nurtured.

Therese Mulford
Paintings Conservator at the Queen Victorian Museum and Art Gallery, Launceston.

Dance People Dance

National Library of Australia, now travelling courtesy of Visions of Australia: Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, Launceston April–June 1998; then Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Hobart, September–November 1998.

In 'Dance People Dance', curator Michelle Potter assembles a delightful introduction to the world of dance in Australia. The exhibition traces the development of Australian dance from early this century to the present, identifying specific tours, performers and performances as inspiring and informing the shape of the contemporary Australian scene.

The chronological approach of 'Dance People Dance' builds a strong narrative of an art form evolving and changing, reflecting and affecting its community. The key theme is that dance is an influential force whose artistic impact shapes opinion and informs debate. It is presented as an art form which has contributed much to an identity which is uniquely Australian. This idea is skilfully supported by letters, photographs, posters, programs, oral history interviews and film from the extensive collections of the National Library, as well as spectacular costumes from the Australian Ballet. Potter makes the point clearly that the exhibition 'is not the performance' and that it is based on material which is simply 'that which remains after the dance is over'. At the same time, she highlights the intrinsic worth of this material as a story-telling tool.

Potter locates the emergence of dance as a leading artistic force in Australian cultural development in the historical context of the glamour, romance and overwhelming popularity of Pavlova and the Russian Ballet's early tours in the 1920s. The exhibition explores the impact of these tours

and cites their effect on the careers of emerging Australian artists — such as Robert Helpmann and Sidney Nolan — to demonstrate the influence of dance across the art forms. This is powerfully illustrated through stunning life-size studio portraits of dancers taken by well-known photographers.

The other face of this interaction — the 'cultural cringe', which saw many young artists having to train and establish careers overseas — is also explored. So, too, is the rich contribution of immigrant dancers, who played a central role in the development of a wholly Australian-trained generation of dancers, choreographers, set and costume designers.

The aim of the exhibition is clearly stated and successfully achieved: it is to be 'a celebration of some of the people who have helped to shape Australian dance, some of the works they have created and the roles they have played in helping to define a culture and a people'. Potter introduces a fascinating array of stories and personalities, and her assertion that dance is a leading force in Australian cultural development is persuasively argued. Her thoughtful examination of issues such as the creation of identity, the ownership of cultural traditions, the creative potential of the migrant experience and perceptions of Aboriginality through dance gives a satisfying insight into the rich texture of the history of Australian dance.

'Dance People Dance' is a fine exhibition, providing a valuable introduction to the diversity and complexity of Australian dance. It is well worth seeing.

Verena Mauldon
Curator of Cultural Heritage at Parramatta Regional Park.

Ngaramang Bayumi: An Exhibition about Indigenous Australian Music and Dance

Powerhouse Museum, Sydney. Open until February 1999.

You dip your hand into this Powerhouse bag of allsorts and what do you draw out? With time to become familiar with the variety available, you can tailor your choice, designing the experience to your taste.

The bag in the case of the Powerhouse's new Aboriginal exhibition, 'Ngarmang (music) Bayumi (dance)', consists of five parts (or pods in Powerhouse parlance). Each is a cave-like tunnel of lycra and paper pulp to explore. All are connected

The Bloodline image has been painted on the dancer's body by indigenous artist, Bronwyn Bancroft, who was specially commissioned to work on *Ngaramang Bayumi: An Exhibition about Indigenous Australian Music and Dance.* The Bloodline image represents the past, present and future. Photograph by Greg Barrett. Courtesy Powerhouse Museum.

with a background soundtrack by David Page and shoulder-high capillary bloodlines by Bronwyn Bancroft. Both reinforce the importance for Aboriginal people of maintaining traditional values and relationships while managing change.

The five pods offer different experiences while maintaining the same basic format. Each has a single display case exhibiting a variety of objects and documents. There is an introductory panel and explanatory labels for the objects. Each pod also has a series of curved benches invitingly grouped around a panel of buttons with which to start a selection of five or six short videos.

The pods feature Aboriginal artists working in contemporary dance; folk, blues and country music; didgeridoo manufacture and performance; song, dance and ceremony; and music and dance of the Torres Strait Islands.

What is innovatory about this exhibition is the simple but genuine choices one is presented with at almost every step. The viewer can listen to the background song in the Yirritja language of the Yolngu people (northeast Arnhem Land) while looking at the captions; or glance past the exhibits to see how Bronwyn Bancroft's painted Bloodline image has subtly changed since the last pod; or manipulate the buttons while working out which offering will be the next choice.

The exhibition caters to a variety of interests and the offering of modern dance is as sophisticated as any first-nighter could wish. There are three dance companies now based in Sydney: Aboriginal Dance Redfern, Bangarra Dance Theatre and NAIDSA.

The reviewer spent time listening and watching the videos of country and folk music. Aboriginal performers have excelled for years in this sphere and have brought joy and hope to many. Telling songlines include Troy Cassar-Daley's 'Two things that don't go well, a Black man in a cell'; Tiddas' 'Looking back is part of who I am'; Syvana Doolan's 'Sad moon, show me where I am going'; Dougie Young's 'Land where the crow flies backwards and the pelican builds his nest'; and the Warumpi Band's 'Sixty years I been in the desert and every night I dream of the sea, for I come from the salt-water people'. Going further back in time brings uneasy feelings of patronage, for example, with the remarkable and talented Gum Leaf Band in a clip from the film, *The Squatter's Daughter* (1934) and Johnny Little singing 'The Royal Telephone', or Harold Blair's 'You'll never walk alone'.

The didgeridoo pod is a strong reminder of the popularity of this gift from Australia's indigenous people to the world. Here, one can hear the sounds and see the craft of making the instrument.

Adjacent to the ceremonial dance and song pod is a stage for live performances. Culture and law is passed from one generation to another by diverse and complex means, both in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

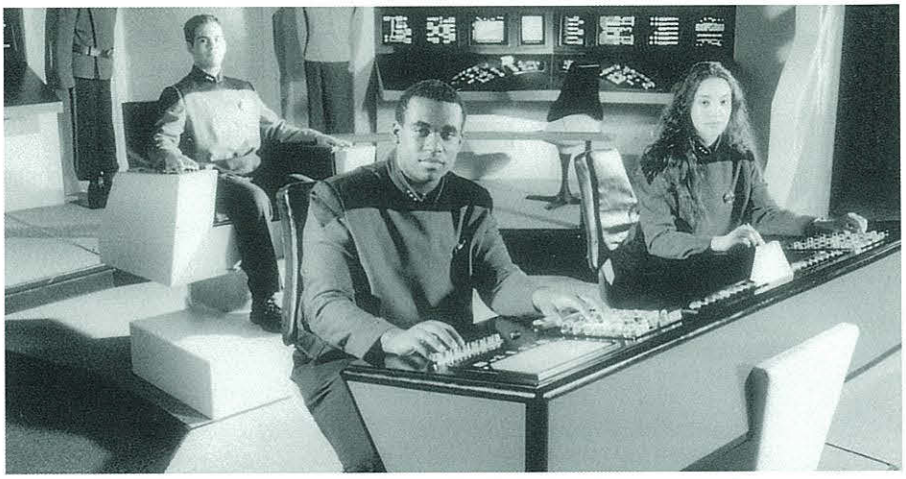
This exhibition offers experience on several levels. Much thought and consultation has gone into the design, which, while innovatory, works effectively. There is some competition between the background soundtrack and the selective audiovisuals, and the television images are much clearer than the alternative screens offered in some pods.

Whether your interest is Aboriginal culture, the performing arts, exhibition design, teaching, learning or museology, there will be a favourite allsort or two here for you.

Peter Stanbury
Peter Stanbury works in Museums, Collections & Heritage at Macquarie University.

'STAR TREK: The Exhibit'

Scienceworks, Melbourne, until 12 July; Queensland Museum from 19 September to 31 January 1999, then travelling to New Zealand. Toured by the Powerhouse Museum after display in December–January 1998.



The command bridge of the starship 'Enterprise': beyond reality. Courtesy of Paramount Pictures.

The 'Star Trek' TV series (there were four of them, beginning in 1966) and the subsequent eleven movies (the latest released in 1996) created a vast and loyal following. Trekkies are flocking to see 'STAR TREK: The Exhibit' at Scienceworks, as they did when it was on show at the Powerhouse, to see the props that gave material reality to the visuals they love.

It contains a lot of costumes, giving some sense of a universe of real people (or rather, real Vulcans, Klingons, Borgs and the rest). A couple of furnished room-sets of the 24th century look a bit dry without any action going on. Then there are display cases containing objects such as futuristic weapons and intergalactic food.

The items on display are advertised as 'exclusive and original objects' — a phrase which sums up the essential conundrum of the exhibition.

To true-believer-Trekkies, the objects express a reality drawn from the context of each adventure they know so well. They can situate each Starship Enterprise uniform, each alien creature physiognomy, every hi-tech gadget, within a meaningful story. Visitors who aren't 'Star Trek' fanatics may realise that they're observing a parallel universe, and reflect on the fantasy literatures they themselves have loved, from Tolkien's *Middle Earth* to Doris Lessing's *Canopus*. At yet another level, connoisseurs of museum exhibitions will reflect on the presentation of an entirely invented culture in one of the primary institutions of intellectual authority in our society.

This experience made me realise what a conventional form is the traditional ethnographic exhibit of an 'other' culture. It relies on material relics such as clothing, tools and ritual objects. They are displayed in typological series or dioramas, with interpretive material in labels or up-to-date electronic formats. The knowledge the visitor receives is constructed by the chance survival of certain kinds of objects, the genius or otherwise of the museum designer, and the limits of anthropological knowledge. In other words, the standard ethnographic display is highly selective.

But an argument can be made that 'STAR TREK: The Exhibit' goes a step beyond traditional museum ethnographica. In a wholly postmodern way, the exhibition is about the creation of this 'other' culture.

While inviting visitors to see the 'genuine relics' of the Klingon warrior code (an array of very peculiar knives), the exhibition also shows how the movie makeup artist creates a galaxy of aliens to be friends and foes of the crew in each episode. It says something about the anthropomorphic limits of our capacity to imagine The Other that all of them have two eyes, a nose and a mouth set in a more or less human-shaped head, differentiated chiefly by the texture and colour of the skin or hair.

The contrast between the presentation of relics and the exposé of illusion presupposes an audience who can handle what Umberto Eco named 'hyperreality'. It's the characteristic mentality of the late 20th century, where belief can be induced or suspended for the sake of sensation.

You could ask why state-funded museums are presenting such a highly commercial product (it was developed by a Canadian firmed named Star Traveller Inc.) that trademark, copyright and 'Licensed by Paramount Pictures' signs drape the opening section. The answer might be that 'STAR TREK: The Exhibit' simultaneously *is* and is *about* popular culture. Yet the Powerhouse was evidently a bit nervous about it all, for their curators tried to inject a note of scientific respectability by comparing 'Star Trek's' futuristic technology with what is actually available today. For instance, the 'Communicator' of 1966 seems to be the precursor of the flip-up mobile phone, and the 'Personal Access Display Device' appears to have been realised in the Macintosh Newton palm-top computer. In fact, such connections are about as relevant as Jules Verne's 1890's vision of a submarine — interesting, but not meaningful. Likewise, the staff at Scienceworks have added an educational component comprising Internet terminals linking the exhibition to related sites, such as the 'Search for Extra Terrestrial Intelligence' page. Scienceworks also incorporates a locally-produced film, *The Science in Science Fiction Show*.

To my mind, 'STAR TREK: The Exhibit' exists at the very limit of what museums are about. I think there is enough substance in the popular culture argument to justify its presence in a state history museum, though some explicit curatorial commentary on its manifestations would demonstrate more original input than is evident.

At the same time, the Powerhouse Museum and Scienceworks have hitched their stars to the fortunes of a product of the entirely for-profit international entertainment industry, putting at some risk their reputation for integrity. It's clearly a strategy for popular profile, but the need for museums to venture along this path should ring alarm bells among those who value the autonomy of cultural archives.

Dr Linda Young
Senior Lecturer in Cultural Heritage Management at the University of Canberra.

Linda Young is Museum National's reviews editor. Readers interested in contributing to this section of the magazine should contact Linda at the University of Canberra, Tel (02) 6201 2079, Fax (02) 6201 5419, email: young@science.canberra.edu.au

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